



Technical Report

Implementation of Top Notch with MyEnglishLab (MEL) and perceptions of impact on student outcomes: Examining three institutions in Colombia Study

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Efficacy & Research

Impact & Evaluation



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Introduction

In this section, we provide a brief background to the initiative behind this study and a description of Top Notch with MEL and its components, before outlining the study's research questions, its sample and the methods used to collect and analyze data.

Background

This report is part of Pearson's commitment to efficacy, launched in 2013. In the drive to improve student outcomes, we committed to reporting publicly on the impact of our products on student outcomes. Part of this commitment was, by 2018, to publish research audited by a third party – PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP.

In 2017, the Global Impact Evaluation team, part of the Global Efficacy and Research team at Pearson, designed and embarked on a series of studies on Top Notch and its counterpart, Speakout, both of which are used by tertiary institutions and private language schools (PLSs) worldwide. The studies aimed to examine the implementation, perceived impact and relationship between each product and its intended student outcomes, across different countries and multiple sites.



Description of Top Notch with MyEnglishLab (MEL)

Top Notch is an English language course for adults (in American English). It is used in private language schools, universities and other tertiary institutions across the world. It is currently in its third edition (2015), although the second edition (2012) is still in use in some countries. This six-level course includes: 1. Top Notch Fundamentals (Starter); 2. Top Notch Level 1 (Elementary); 3. Top Notch Level 2 (Pre-intermediate); 4. Top Notch Level 3 (Intermediate); 5. Summit Level 1 (Upper Intermediate), and 6. Summit Level 2 (Advanced).

The course components are:

- Students' Book – 90 to 120 hours of learning material available in split or full editions (the split editions come with a split workbook or a split MEL access code)
- Classroom audio CDs – audio materials to use in class
- Workbook – additional exercises to consolidate learning in print
- MyEnglishLab (student and teacher versions) – a platform with an array of exercises to consolidate learning. It includes meaningful feedback on wrong answers, remedial grammar exercises, grammar and pronunciation coach videos and auto-graded achievement tests
- Teachers' Book – detailed interleaved lesson plans, language culture notes, answer keys and more
- ActiveTeach – a disc for front-of-class use, which includes a digital version of the Students' Book, digital grammar exercises, videos, photocopiable activities for every unit, plus unit, mid-course and end-of-course tests
- Audio and extra activities on English.com – online grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening practice activities, plus downloadable classroom audio files
- Full-course placement tests – printable or online versions

MEL is an optional component and is designed to support Top Notch by:

- providing students with the opportunity to work whenever they want, using the resources most likely to enhance their learning of course material
- helping students develop the skills to become responsible and autonomous students
- allowing students work at their own pace and to track their progress

MEL content can be assigned for the whole class, groups or individuals (Vymetalkova, 2016; Vasbieva and Klimova, 2015; Pearson, 2014a; 2014b). The use of MEL allows for the blending of classroom learning with synchronous and/or asynchronous outside-the-class learning. It has the potential to build a bridge, whereby teaching and technology support learning and inform each other.

Overall, Top Notch aims to support students to:

- engage with the materials and have a positive learning experience
- develop positive learning behaviours when using the materials
- progress in learning English
- be ready for the next stage of their learning in English
- achieve their goal(s)



The present study

The present study is an exploratory study that set out to answer the following questions:

- What are students' attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL when compared to other instructional experiences?
- What are teachers' attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL and of its use?
- How are courses implemented when using Top Notch with MEL and why do institutions engage with it in the first place?
- Why and how do students and teachers use MEL?
- What can we learn about teaching and learning from the MEL data?
- What is the perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL on students, teachers and institutions?

The present study is not an evaluation of practice. Pearson aims to keep Top Notch flexible so that teachers are able to make their own choices on how to implement it. The flexibility in implementation, together with the fact that Top Notch with MEL is less widely used across countries and institutions, made it imperative, as a first step, to explore institutions' approach to implementing Top Notch with MEL, and teachers' and students' experiences and perceived impact when using the materials.

Implementation studies have the potential to improve learner outcomes by allowing us to know what works where, when and why. They are key to informing teaching and learning by providing evidence on which products and services are likely to 'work' within a particular context, institution and classroom. Implementation research is rooted in capturing the real-life experiences and insights of students and teachers to develop an evidence-informed understanding of the factors that can enable or impede intended and unintended outcomes. Variability across settings, cultures, institutional preferences or priorities, professional development, and infrastructure can all affect the implementation of, and outcomes associated with, products and services.

This study examines the implementation of Top Notch in three institutions in Colombia: British College, Corporación Universitaria del Meta (Unimeta) and Centro Colombo Americano (CCA).

The structure of the report

For ease of navigation and readability, the next section outlines the study methods, including details on data collection and analysis, and then moves directly to the discussion of the findings. Before presenting the full results in the appendices, we make recommendations and explain the limitations and the references included in this study.



Sample

Given resources and timelines, just three institutions were sampled for this study. Stratified sampling was used to account for potential variation in practice. To derive a potential sample, a number of criteria were developed, as seen in Table 1. In hierarchical order, the non-negotiable criteria for selection were as follows:

- Institutions used the most up-to-date version of Top Notch.
- They used the full Top Notch package (Students' Book, MEL and ActiveTeach).
- At least two of the institutions were using the full package for more than one year.

To ensure triangulation of the data collected for the sampling, and to make sure that the data were accurate and current, four approaches were used:

1. Using the non-negotiable criteria, targeted searches were conducted in the sales databases that hold institutions' information related to Top Notch with MEL.
2. Searches identified institutions using the MEL platform. This information was corroborated with the sales data to point us to institutions with higher student activity using MEL.
3. Direct conversations were held between our Colombia efficacy lead and sales representatives, who have an in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of institutional practices and issues.
4. Institutions were identified by the Colombia efficacy lead, who also has in-depth knowledge of the institutions through research and the marketing activities that she leads.

The information was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet for each institution and for each of the criteria. About 10 institutions were using Top Notch at the time of the research, of which only three were using the latest Top Notch version with MEL. The other seven institutions were using the previous version of Top Notch and/or were not using MEL. Table 1 summarises the initial criteria drawn, the final criteria used and the reasons behind the decisions leading to the final sample.

Table 1: Original and final sampling criteria

	Original inclusion criteria	Inclusions and criteria met
		Institutional criteria per country
Type of adoption¹ and experience in using Top Notch (non-negotiable criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most recent edition is used by the institution. The full package is used, including the Students' Book, Teachers' Book (whether using the print version or PDFs in ActiveTeach), MEL and ActiveTeach. Institutions using the workbook will be included in the study, but the workbook is not an essential component for selection. At least two institutions with more than one year's experience of using the Top Notch package. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three institutions met these criteria. All were included in the research.
Size of adoption by institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions with the highest number of students (that is, serving university students and not in-service company courses, which have small numbers of students and are also hard to access). At least one institution with one of the highest numbers of students using Top Notch, one medium and one small. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These criteria were abandoned given the very small number of institutions to select from.
Levels taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideally, focus should be placed on courses that have the largest number of students. If possible, one institution whose program includes all Top Notch levels (preferable criterion). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the institutions selected, the large majority of students were concentrated in basic levels.
Type of institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional variation is preferable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions had more than one year's experience in using Top Notch with MEL.

¹ Adoption is defined as the number of books sold by an institution.



	Original inclusion criteria	Inclusions and criteria met
Institutional effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rating of effectiveness by an external regulatory body. If the above criterion cannot be applied, we should consider the following: two institutions that are perceived to have influence on others; their reputation in the country; institutions' success in national exams; their support of government initiatives and associations; the number of accreditations they are awarded; the number of students that complete their courses; the level students reach when they complete their courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One institution was a private learning school, one a binational and one a university
Geographical spread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions are located in different regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These criteria were abandoned given the very small number of institutions to select from.
Length of courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one or two institutions teach full-length and short courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The institutions offered mainly short courses.
Teacher		
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New and experienced teachers. (Experienced teachers should have more than one year working with Top Notch.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All teacher criteria were abandoned to reduce institutional burden.
Comfort with technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one teacher who the institution believes is comfortable with technology and has used MEL effectively to deliver Top Notch lessons. 	
Course experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one teacher by institution who has experience of how the course was taught before Top Notch. 	
Courses taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers who teach long and short courses. 	



Methods

We used a multiple case-study design to conduct the study. To conceptualize the study design and manage the development of the research instruments, we were guided by the Consolidated Framework of Implementation Research (CFIR) devised in 2009. The CFIR appeared relatively exhaustive. We undertook an exercise to reduce the number of areas to be examined, to better fit with the study's aims and to allow themes to be explored in depth.

A brief outline of the three overarching categories of investigation and of a small sample of the sub-categories is provided below. The first two categories were part of the CFIR framework, details of which can be found in the appendices. We added a third category, which referred to perceptions of impact, as it was an important part of our research questions:

- The 'what' of the intervention: components used to teach English, structures and processes, and their organization.
- The 'why' and 'how' of the intervention: the intervention characteristics; inner settings, such as the priority placed on the use of Top Notch with MEL; institutional goals and whether and how they are enacted, and the usefulness of the 'intervention', etc.
- The perceived impact of the intervention: on the department/institution as a whole; on students' and teachers' access and engagement, and on student achievement, etc.

Methods used to collect the data included a student questionnaire, a teacher questionnaire, a pre-questionnaire filled in by the English co-ordinators, staff interviews, observations and student MEL data analysis.

Student and teacher questionnaires

Development of the questionnaires

The student and teacher questionnaires were developed with two aims:

- They could be used in different countries (Mexico, Peru, and Colombia for Top Notch and Turkey and Poland for a previous study on a similar product).
- They would elicit robust evidence to address the aims of the study.

To achieve these aims we were guided by the conceptual framework used for the study. We:

- Acknowledged, evaluated and, where appropriate, adapted or revised questions already used in questionnaires developed within Pearson for similar research purposes.
- Were guided by questionnaires used in other research studies (e.g., Dornyei with Taguchi 2010; national student questionnaires used by universities, etc.).
- Consulted the Pearson product development teams and local Pearson efficacy leads, who have a deep understanding of both the products and the local context in which the products operate.
- Took advice from other researchers in our Impact Evaluation team in terms of the design.



- Elicited feedback from co-ordinators or teachers and students through a pilot.

The development of the student and teacher questionnaires was supported by a group of key stakeholders who had the knowledge and experience to support the robustness of the instruments. Table 2 outlines the individuals involved in the process, their knowledge and expertise and the tasks they performed.

After feedback was sought and contextual information was adapted, the student questionnaire was translated into Polish and Spanish by the Poland, Mexico and Colombia efficacy leads and was piloted. Pilots involved one round in Poland and two rounds in Colombia, including three institutions and 18 students in total.² Following the pilots, relevant adjustments were made. Draft and final student questionnaires were completed by the Impact & Evaluation team in English and were then transferred to the final student questionnaire for Colombia in Spanish. The teacher questionnaire was in English and, due to time constraints, was not piloted.

² Pilots included 15 students from Colombia (five in the first round of piloting and ten in the second round) and three students from Poland.



Table 2: Stakeholders involved in the development of the questionnaire, experience and task performed

Stakeholder	Experience	Task performed
English, Global Impact & Evaluation team: Elpida Ahtaridou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise in methodological and quantitative and qualitative instrument design • Expertise in product research for different purposes and for the different stages of product development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed the questionnaire • Reviewed previously developed instruments used in internal and external Pearson research and their related reports • Decided which questions might be appropriate for reuse • Drafted new questions
Top Notch with MEL Portfolio Manager: Sherri Pemberton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth knowledge of Top Notch with MEL and of the different country needs and issues in relation to its use and delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided feedback on previously used questions from internal Pearson questionnaires • Reviewed questionnaire items and drafted new items, when appropriate
Efficacy geography leads: Monica Rodriguez and Monica Celis Aries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in developing and conducting research • Deep understanding of the study aims and of individual institutions' needs, and issues related to the delivery of Top Notch with MEL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided feedback on previously used questions from internal Pearson questionnaires • Reviewed questionnaire items • Translated, culturally adapted and piloted the student questionnaire • Created the questionnaire online • Piloted the student questionnaire • Led all the data collection in the institutions, from distributing the questionnaire to conducting the interviews and the observations
Co-ordinators, teachers and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth knowledge of Top Notch with MEL • Understanding of terminology used at the institution and by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piloted the student questionnaire • Advised on issues with questions and wording



Questionnaire structure and content

The first page of the questionnaires explained informed consent, gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and use of data, confidentiality, data-protection procedures and the voluntary nature of participation. In brief, the student questionnaire aimed to draw out information about:

- the course students were attending
- their motivation related to learning English
- their comfort with the use of technology
- the use and frequency of different Top Notch with MEL components in class
- the usefulness of different components and features
- perceptions of the impact of Top Notch with MEL and of its components on access, student learning behaviors and attitudes, performance, preparation for the next stage in their learning and ultimate goal
- the likelihood of recommending Top Notch with MEL and MEL to other students

The teacher questionnaire aimed to gain similar data to the student questionnaire, as well as further information on teaching practices in the classroom and the training available to teachers.

The student questionnaire comprised 25 questions and the teacher questionnaire 42 questions. The majority of the questions were closed, using a four-point Likert scale that included a number of sub-questions. Open-ended questions were also used to gather responses related to students' views on the most useful features, benefits, challenges and areas for improvement.

Administration, collection and analysis of the student and teacher questionnaires

An online student questionnaire designed in Google Forms was administered in one institution and print copies in the other, at the requests of the institutions themselves. Questionnaires were distributed by teachers in July 2017. Students were informed of the research and its purpose in advance, and their participation was voluntary. After the completed print questionnaires were collected by teachers, they were handed back to the researcher on the day of the visit. Spanish native speakers, who also spoke English at a proficient level, then inputted the questionnaire responses into Google Forms in English. All teacher questionnaires were constructed and completed using Google Forms.



All datasets were received in Microsoft Excel or csv files. Different datasets were received for student questionnaire data. The data were imported in the R platform (R Core Team, 2017) using standard input/output commands of the readxl package (Wickham and Bryan, 2017).

The following processes for data-cleaning were applied:

1. The number of columns, the number of rows and the type of each of the variables were confirmed for each dataset.
2. The data were scanned for suspiciously large numbers of missing information, unexpected values and other possible irregularities.
3. For each dataset, the online questionnaires were checked to confirm that there were no missing questions.
4. The value labels for each of the variables were confirmed.

A total of 1,668 student questionnaires were returned: 36 from British College, 818 from Unimeta, and 814 from CCA. Four students submitted a blank questionnaire and were excluded from the analysis. The majority of students who responded to the questionnaire were from Unimeta and CCA, with an even number of student respondents between the two institutions. This means that Unimeta and CCA represent the large majority of student views in the survey. They also represent the large majority of the students in their institutions in June 2017. Of approximately 1,000 students at Unimeta at the time of the research, 818 students filled in the questionnaire, a response rate of 82%. Of the 1,073 CCA students who were studying with Top Notch with MEL at the time of the research, 814 filled in the questionnaire, a response rate of 76%. Student views from British College are the least represented and are not necessarily representative of the student population the institution served in June 2017. Of approximately 400 students, 36 filled in the questionnaire – a response rate of just 9% of the student population.

Most respondents were at an intermediate level of English competency. The majority of respondents were studying on one- or four-month courses, and were at the end of their course at the time of filling in the questionnaire. However, the results are skewed by the larger number of respondents from Institutions 2 and 3 (only 2% of respondents attended British College.) Respondents came mainly from three different levels, with almost half of respondents from Level 2 (47%, 767/1603). There were differences between the institutions, as most from British College were studying at basic levels (91%, 31/34). All of those studying Fundamentals were at British College.

The greatest proportion of students (45%, 739/1644) were attending one-month courses, although the percentage is skewed by CCA, which accounts for all but one of the students attending one-month courses. Conversely, almost all of the 34% (563/1644) of students studying four-month courses were at Unimeta (556/563). At British College, most students (44%, 15/34) were studying on six-month courses. Most students (80%, 1318/1638) were at the end of their course and 14% (230/1638) were mid-way through their course. 6% (90/1638) of students were at the beginning of their course. Arguably, given the short duration of their courses, we would not expect a wide difference in their perceptions based on the length of time they were studying.

Table 3 summarizes student questionnaire respondents by institution and level.

Table 3: Number of student responses analyzed by institution and level, student questionnaire

	British College	Unimeta	CCA	Total
Course attended				
Fundamentals	14	0	0	14 (1%)
Top Notch Level 1	17	269	0	286 (18%)
Top Notch Level 2	1	255	511	767 (47%)
Top Notch Level 3	2	137	303	442 (28%)
Summit 1	0	94	0	94 (6%)
Total (with %)	34	755	814	1603
Course duration				
1 month	0	1	738	739 (45%)
2 months	2	1	0	3 (0.2%)
3 months	1	15	23	39 (2%)
4 months	6	556	1	563 (34%)
6 months	15	226	30	271 (17%)
1 year	10	12	7	29 (1.8%)
Total	34	811	799	1644 (100%)
Length of time on course				
Beginning of the course	8	52	30	90 (6%)
Middle of the course	17	45	168	230 (14%)
End of the course	9	706	603	1318 (80%)
Total	34	803	801	1638



We received a total of 60 responses from the teacher questionnaire: 10 from British College, eight from Unimeta, and 42 from CCA. While most responses are from CCA, the views of the overall teacher population in each institution are well represented.

- Of the 11 teachers using Top Notch with MEL in British College, 10 teachers completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 91%.
- Of the 15 teachers using Top Notch with MEL in Unimeta, 11 teachers completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 73%. However, the 11 teachers represent all Unimeta's full-time staff (the four teachers who did not complete the questionnaire were part-time).
- Of the 63 teachers using Top Notch with MEL in CCA at the time of the research, 42 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 67%.

For both questionnaires and for each question with discrete answers, responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages).³

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire taught across levels, with the majority of those who answered this question teaching at Level 2 (47%, 25/53) and Level 3 (28%, 15/53). 40% (21/53) of teachers had taught for more than six years. In terms of experience with Top Notch with MEL, teachers from two institutions reported having used it for one to two years, while the majority in the third institution had used it for more than three years. Table 4 gives relevant details.

³ Frequency tables, cross-tabulations, visualizations and descriptive statistics were produced using standard commands of the sjPlot package (Lüdtke, 2017) and of the tidyverse package (Wickham, 2017). Inferential statistics (e.g. t-tests, correlations) were produced using standard R base functions, but more advanced analyses, e.g. reliability analysis for Cronbach's alpha and Rasch analysis, were run using the psych package (Revelle, 2017) and the TAM package (Robitzsch et al., 2017).

Table 4: Teachers' years of experience in teaching and years of experience in teaching with Top Notch with MEL, teacher questionnaire

Institution	Teaching experience in years					Teaching experience using Top Notch with MEL in years			
	Up to 2	3 - 5	6 – 10	Above 10	Total	1	2	3 or more	Total
British College	0 0 %	2 40 %	2 40 %	1 20 %	5 100 %	3 75 %	1 25 %	0 0 %	10 100 %
Unimeta	1 17 %	1 17 %	3 50 %	1 17 %	6 100 %	6 100%	0 0%	0 0%	6 100%
CCA	3 7 %	7 17 %	16 38 %	16 38 %	42 100 %	6 15 %	4 9 %	31 76%	32 100 %
Total	4 8%	10 19%	21 40%	18 34%	53 100 %	15 29%	5 10%	31 61%	51 100% ⁴

Teachers were asked to rate their confidence in teaching English and comfort with technology on a scale from 1 to 10. The large majority of teachers felt relatively confident in teaching English and reported relatively high levels of comfort with using technology. The following tables outlines teacher responses to these two questions.

⁴ Percentages have been rounded. In cases where the total was 101% after more than one of the percentages were rounded, one of the percentages was rounded down. This made no difference to the results.



Table 5: Teacher self-reported confidence in teaching English and their comfort with technology, teacher questionnaire

Institution		Confidence in teaching English								Comfort with technology					
		Rating								Rating					
		6	7	8	9	10	Total	2	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
British College		1	0	1	2	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	6
Unimeta		0	1	2	2	1	6	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	6
CCA		0	0	4	5	33	42	1	1	1	2	12	7	18	42
Total		1 2%	1 2%	7 13%	9 17%	36 66%	54 100%	1 2%	1 2%	1 2%	2 4%	14 26%	13 24%	22 40%	54 100%

Due to time constraints, responses to the open-ended questions for both the student and teacher questionnaires were not analyzed.

Co-ordinator's pre-questionnaire

The co-ordinator's pre-questionnaire aimed to gain an understanding of the context, course structure and implementation model used in the different institutions before the day of the visit. It also supported the development of more targeted questions to be asked during the visit. In more detail, data collected through the pre-questionnaire focused on:

- Context: factual information on the student and teacher numbers studying using Top Notch, the number of classes offered and the length of the courses offered.
- Classroom time: details on how classroom time is structured, including the number of face-to-face lessons weekly, the length of class time, the structure of the lessons, preparation required by teachers and students before the lesson, etc.
- Assessment: how assessment, both formal and informal, is structured, including an understanding of what type of tests students take and the conditions under which they complete them.
- Homework: whether or not students are required to complete homework, the place and suggested time for completing homework, whether homework is obligatory, if students are allowed one or more attempts in MEL and other details on how MEL is used.



- Tracking student usage of MEL: how teachers track student usage of MEL and what they do with the data they collect.
- Tracking student performance: how student performance is tracked, who is responsible for tracking it and the use of the performance data collected.
- The co-ordinators' pre-questionnaire followed the design processes and quality-control mechanisms outlined in the student and teacher questionnaire section. The pre-questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. Co-ordinators were sent the pre-questionnaire at least a month before the day of the visit and were asked to return it two weeks before the visit. To reduce the burden on co-ordinators, they were advised to leave the open-ended questions blank if they felt that they had no time to fill them in.
- Pre-questionnaires for two out of the three institutions were collected.

Staff interviews

The design and quality assurance mechanisms for the staff interviews followed the same process as the student questionnaires. One-to-one interviews were held on the institutions' premises in June 2017 and were conducted by two of our Pearson efficacy researchers located in Colombia. No teacher was excluded from taking part.

The institution explained the purpose of the study and the procedure to all potential participants, and teachers had the opportunity to decline. No incentives for participating in the study were offered. The institutions and participants could withdraw from the study at any point during the lifespan of the research project. Those who agreed to take part were asked to sign a consent form and agreed to have the interviews recorded.

A total of 11 staff interviews were conducted, lasting 45 minutes to one hour each. Some of the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, while others included groups of three to five teachers. All interviews were conducted in English. The table below gives a summary.



Table 6: Summary of staff interviews conducted by institution and role

Institution	Staff role		
	Director	Co-ordinators	Teachers
British College	0	1	2
CCA	0	1	4
Unimeta	0	1	2
Total per role	0	3	8
Total interviews	11		

To further support the reliability of the teacher interviews, only slight differences between the interview schedules for each role (director, coordinator and teacher) were made, with the interviewer asking follow-up questions for clarification when necessary.

Analysis of interview data

Audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed in full and transferred into the NVivo qualitative analysis software. Two researchers supported the data coding. The first provided the initial coding based on the CFRI framework used to guide the study deductively (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). The second researcher completed the coding across all transcripts.

The initial coding included 12 primary codes and 42 secondary codes. After the coding structure was created in NVivo, the two researchers separately coded the same three transcripts. The three transcripts were selected at random by the first researcher. They represented 10% of the total interview transcripts available (Hodson, 1999) and were each between 10 and 20 pages long (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The aim of the exercise was twofold: 1. to derive a final coding structure and assess the degree of agreement, and 2. to support the consistency of the approach to coding between the two researchers.

The deductive coding structure was treated as an overall structure rather than a strict outline within which the researchers needed to fit the data. Thus, as the researchers read the transcripts, they adapted the structure to better suit the research questions and to include first and second order codes that had risen inductively from the data. Discussion between the two researchers adjudicated any coding disagreements. This entailed codes being moved, deleted, merged, split or renamed within the



hierarchy. This process resulted in a final coding structure with seven first codes and 30 secondary and third order codes.

At the outset, the researchers agreed to pursue a unitization strategy focused on meaning units. That meant that codable units of text varied in length from a few lines to a whole paragraph. Key to the coding was that contextual information was included to further support researchers in reaching common ground in their coding decisions. Thus, paragraphs before and after the coded text were included most times for context. At times, the data within the code related to more than one first and/or secondary codes. In this way, a balance was sought between condensing data for analysis and retaining the uniqueness of meaning.

The proportion agreement method was used to understand the agreement between the two researchers. Although this method comes with limitations – for example, it does not take into account that researchers might agree occasionally by chance (Bernard 2000) – more complex methods were not deemed appropriate given that:

- Not all of our codes had equal probability of being used.
- Multiple codings on a text unit, which we followed, creates problems for calculating agreement between researchers with some statistics because they require that only one code is applied to a unit of text (Burla et al, 2008).
- Our aim, from the outset, was not to generate variables for use in statistical analysis, but to systematically classify and retrieve text using clear, distinct definitions.
- This was an exploratory study, for which other researchers have argued that the simple proportion agreement method is an acceptable approach (Kurasaki 2000).

Overall, the two researchers were relatively aligned in their assigning of codes and in the process followed to derive codes. This meant that they were satisfied in proceeding with the coding of the full set of transcripts without replicating the activity. The relative agreement between the researchers could have been due to:

1. the knowledge and experience they built through using the same coding system in three similar research projects
2. their good knowledge of the research and of its aims and objectives from the outset
3. the fitness of purposes of the CFRI framework sections used
4. the clear structure of the product components and features examined
5. the simplicity of the coding system and the clear and explicit definitions given to the secondary codes so that meaning was not sacrificed in favour of simplicity – despite the relatively large number of codes, they were relatively distinct in their definition

Patterns were identified not only by looking at repeated occurrences but also by similarity, 'declaration' and confirmation, missing patterns expected to be present and co-occurrences. Data collected from the other sources used in this study and their findings also supported the development of patterns.



In addition, findings from four similar studies conducted at the same time as this research on Top Notch with MEL and its English counterpart, Speakout, supported the development and our understanding of different patterns. These studies sought to answer the same research questions as this research project and, overall, used the same research instruments to collect their data. Finally, there was consideration about whether emerging patterns appeared to be congruent with prior hypotheses and relevant literature (Hopkins and Ahtaridou, 2009; Quartaroli, 2009).

Classroom observations and post-observation debriefs

A structured classroom observation schedule was used to understand how Top Notch materials were implemented in practice. Classroom observation did not aim to evaluate practice. Observations focused on the following areas of exploration:

- Lesson preparation: what that entailed and why the lessons were set in a particular way.
- Exposure to materials: which materials were used during the lessons by students and teachers.
- How materials were used: for instance, if materials were used to support individual activities or pair activities.
- Implementation: whether the teacher guidance was implemented; if teachers differentiated well for students' different needs and levels and how they did it in practice; whether guidance was given to students on how to use the materials; the pace of the lesson, and the types of activities used in the classroom based on the topic learnt.
- Navigation of materials: whether they were easy or hard to navigate and whether support was requested by students during the lesson.
- Feedback: from teachers to students or from peer to peer.
- Technology integration: whether teachers and students had access to technology in the classroom and how it was used.
- Engagement: whether students were on task during the lessons, and how they demonstrated this, for example by gesturing or asking questions.

The observations also included three sections that required researchers to describe what students and teachers did at the beginning, middle and end of the lesson, and to record whether the lesson followed the Teachers' Book and whether anything was done differently.

Detailed descriptors were used for each category of exploration outlined in the observation schedule. Descriptors aimed to support researchers in recording observations systematically and consistently. The observation schedule and associated descriptors were used in a previous Pearson study published by [What Works Clearinghouse](#) and were slightly modified to better meet the needs of this study.

After the observation, debriefs with teachers took place, each lasting 20 to 30 minutes. The debriefs aimed to understand teacher perceptions on how the session went, the use of materials and how useful they were to the specific lesson, barriers and suggestions for improvement.

A total of 11 classroom observations were conducted: three at British College, four at Unimeta, and four at CCA. Due to teacher time constraints, a total of six debriefs were completed.

MEL student data

A framework was developed to extract and report on the MEL student data. The framework aimed to collect usage and performance data as outlined in Table 7. Based on the data received, it was not always possible or appropriate to follow all the analyses outlined below, so adaptations were made.



Table 7: Summary of the framework that guided MEL data extraction

Item	Data collection, analysis and presentation
Assignments and practices ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of assignments/practices and tests assigned• Percentage of completions by institution, level and class• Average number of completions by institution, level, class and individual student from the total number assigned
Time on task ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average of students' time on task on assignments/practices and tests per institution, level, class and student
Attempts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of attempts on assignments/practices per institution and level
Assignments/practices scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average percentage achieved in first, last and highest attempt per institution, level and class• Percentage of students achieving within different grade boundaries per institution
Test scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average percentage achieved on test scores per institution, level and class• Percentage of students achieving within different score boundaries
Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvement between scores on first and highest attempts at assignments/practices• Relationship between individuals' average assignment/practice scores and percentage of assignments/practices completed• Relationship between individuals' average test scores and number of assignments/practices completed
Reliability/validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Correlation between average student score on assignment/practices• Correlation between average student practice scores per unit. (In cases where many correlations were computed, the results were presented in the form of quartiles to avoid the presentation of too long tables.)

Data were extracted in July 2017. Due to the manual extraction of the MEL data and the short timeframe in which to extract it, a total of 20 classes per institution was agreed for analysis. The sampling strategy involved two steps:

1. stratified sampling to include all levels of courses offered at the institutions, most recently completed courses and courses with more than five students
2. randomly selected classes from the remaining sample.

A total of 32 classes were extracted into .csv files: 16 classes from CCA and 16 from Unimeta. Classes extracted ranged from 2014 to 2017. In some cases, it was not possible to sample a total of 20 classes

⁵ MEL records student scores on assignments and practices. Exercises available in the system can be assigned by teachers. These exercises automatically show as assignments. Exercises not assigned show as practices. Although some exercises might show as practices, they might have assigned to students verbally by their teachers in class, something that seems to happen often. It is not possible to know which practices have been assigned by teachers and which might have been undertaken by students on their own accord.

⁶ Time on task is purely the time spent on assignments/practices and tests, not log-in time.



because of the small number of classes or students. Table 8 summarizes the number of classes extracted per institution and level.

Table 8: Summary of the number of classes extracted per institution and level.

	No. of classes		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
CCA	-	9	7
Unimeta	13	1	2
Total	13	10	9

The 32 classes included valid data for a total of 660 students, 318 from CCA and 342 from Unimeta. However, some of the students did not complete any practices or assignments, so the individual datasets for assignments and practices are much smaller (described below).

Analysis of assignments/practices and tests

We conducted an analysis of student performance on practice/assignments and tests. Statistical means and other descriptive statistics were calculated for each analysis.

Student performance was analysed using the score boundaries set by the platform: 90–100% (A); 80–89% (B); 70–79% (C); 60–69% (D); 50–59% (E), and 0–49% (F).

All scores of 0% were excluded from the analysis. The reasons for this exclusion were as follows:

- Students were given multiple attempts to answer assignment questions. Thus, it is highly unlikely that a 0% score represents a student who had tried to complete an assignment multiple times and had failed each time.
- A student who received a 0% score because they had not submitted an assignment/practice or had not submitted it on time, had made no attempt to complete an assignment/practice.
- A teacher might not have marked a student's response to open-ended questions.

In all of the above cases, we are confident that 0% does not correspond to the real ability of students. Therefore, including 0% scores in the overall analysis would have artificially skewed the distribution of the scores. For transparency, analysis including the 0% scores is included in the appendices. For each practice/assignment, the database reported one overall score per student. There was no information in the data regarding individual items.



Assignments/practices

Assignment scores are reported based on the highest attempt (MEL captures the first, last and highest attempts.) We decided to use the highest attempt because we wanted to understand the progress students had made by the end of the course, instead of recording their average performance from the beginning to the end. In addition, a comparison of the highest and last attempt scores showed there was no difference between them in terms of student performance.

A total of 13,494 assignments were originally included in the dataset. 61% of assignments (8,271) were excluded because they recorded a 0% score. Data were collected from 43 CCA students and 391 Unimeta students. However, two CCA students and 68 Unimeta students had only zero scores, so they were removed from the analysis.

Table 9: Summary of MEL assignments data collected and analyzed and of assignments completed and excluded

Level	Total number of students		Total number of practices	
	Collected	Analyzed	Completed	Excluded having a 0% score
CCA	43	41	1,629	391 (24%)
Unimeta	391	323	11,947	7,880 (66%)
Total	434	364	13,576	8,271 (61%)

A total of 14,779 practices were originally included in the dataset. 4% of practices (629) were excluded because they recorded a 0% score. Data were collected from 307 CCA students and 190 Unimeta students. However, two Unimeta students had only zero scores, so they were removed from the analysis.



Table 10: Practice analysis: number of students whose data were collected and analysed and number of practices completed and excluded, MEL data

Level	Total number of students		Total number of practices	
	Collected	Analyzed	Completed	Excluded having a 0% score
CCA	307	307	11,599	2% (228)
Unimeta	190	188	3,180	13% (401)
Total	497	495	14,779	4% (629)

Results on assignments are presented separately from practices in the report, wherever meaningful. Overall, there is little data on assignments, so this is less reliable than practice data. However, analysis on assignments is included in the report for completeness.

Analysis of student progress on assignments/practices

To gain an insight on student progress on assignments/practices, we analysed data for 561 students in total. For the progress analysis, we removed all practices or assignments that were not attempted at least twice or had a zero or 100% score. Tasks with a 100% score on the first attempt cannot show any improvement if attempted again. Exclusions included one CCA and 12 Unimeta students who had only 0% or 100% scores in all assignments/practices. A total of 2,169 assignments/practices which had a 0% or 100% score were excluded. Table 11 summarizes the exclusions per institution.



Table 11: Student data for progress on assignments/practices collected and analysed, and assignments/practices completed and excluded

Level	Total number of students		Total number of practices and assignments	
	MEL data collected	MEL data analyzed	Completed	Excluded having a 0% or 100% score
CCA	312	311	7,333	15% (1,091) (1,008 zero scores and 83 100% scores)
Unimeta	249	237	3,482	31% (1,078) (940 zero scores and 138 100% score)
Total	561	548	10,815	20% (2,169)

After exclusions were applied, a total of 8,646 assignments and practices (6,242 from CCA and 2,404 from Unimeta) were analyzed.

Analysis of student test scores

Completed tests were limited, with only CCA students completing a few tests.

- Students of one out of nine Level 2 CCA classes were assigned tests (one to three tests) and of these, very few were completed.
- Students of just one out of seven level 3 CCA classes were assigned tests (one or two tests). Again, very few were completed.

Therefore, data on tests is not analyzed.

Reliability and validity of MEL assignments/practices

To investigate the reliability and validity of student scores from assignments/practices, we estimated the correlation between students' average practice/assignment scores and the percentage of practice/assignments completed, and the correlation between the average unit practice/assignment.

To gauge the internal consistency of unit scores as a measurement of student performance, we computed the correlations between the students' average practice/assignment scores on different units. The first step was to compute, for each student, the average practice/assignment score for all of the exercises/assignments within each unit. Then, these average practice/assignment scores for each student and for each unit were correlated between them across all students.



When appropriate, both Spearman and Pearson correlations were computed and presented, to accommodate for skewed distributions of the data. The effect of outliers was also investigated wherever appropriate. Removing a limited number of outliers did not change the values of the correlations significantly.

Method for deriving findings on perceptions of impact from all data

To derive findings on the perceptual impact statements the following method was used:

- Student questionnaire results took prominence. This was because we believe that students are the most important voice in the learning process and because the student questionnaire data had the largest samples. Everything above 50% was seen as the majority. If most of the questionnaire questions on the same outcome, such as access, showed above 50% of respondents to have a positive view, then the outcome was also considered to be positive. 70% and above was seen as a 'very positive' outcome. When results were between 50% and 70%, the outcome or the component(s) assessed were seen to need some level of improvement. When the results of two out of the three main Top Notch with MEL components (the Students' Book, ActiveTeach or MEL) or the majority of features and/or skills for each of the components were positive, then the overall finding about the outcome category was also seen to be positive. Similarly, if less than half of the areas under investigation relating to the components' features and/or skills were below 50% in the student questionnaire, the outcome was considered not positive. When questionnaire results were skewed by one institution, this is mentioned in the report and is considered when deriving overall findings.
- The approach to the teacher data was the same as that used for the student data. When students and teacher data agreed, the outcome was seen as positive. There was never a disagreement between teacher and student data, because at no point were any two or more of the Top Notch with MEL components or half of the components' features/skills negative. In cases where individual components, features or skills had negative results, this was clearly stated in the relevant section(s) of the report.
- When data from the teacher interviews agreed with the student and teacher questionnaire results, the outcome was considered positive. When there was disagreement between the two, if the finding from the teacher interviews did not derive from a strong pattern, then the outcome was still considered positive. If the finding from the teacher interviews derived from a strong pattern, then results were considered mixed or the outcome negative.
- If teacher interviews pointed to what one would consider a 'deal breaker' (the organization switching to another product or students not using the product and able to provide a number of reasons for their dissatisfaction), even if the questionnaire results were positive, the outcome or the feature/skill was seen to not have had a positive impact, and this is mentioned clearly in the findings.



- When observational data disagreed with the teacher interviews and quantitative data, it was thought that a judgement would need to be made on which would take precedence, based on the strength of the evidence collected. This was not necessary, however, as no disagreement was found between observational and interview data. In all cases, they were either in agreement or complemented each other.
- Finally, four researchers who worked on the Top Notch with MEL and Speakout research studies conducted in 2017 (which had the same research questions and used the same research instruments) read the results multiple times and independently applied the method outlined above. When there were disagreements, the method was reapplied by each of the researchers. Subsequent meetings took place to reach a consensus.



Discussion of findings

In this section, we discuss the study results. The discussion is based on the data outlined in the results section in Appendix B and includes data from the student and teacher questionnaires, the co-ordinator pre-questionnaires, the student focus groups, the teacher interviews and the MEL student data analysis.

The majority of students who responded to the questionnaire were at Unimeta and CCA, with an even number of student respondents between the two institutions. These respondents, therefore, represent the large majority of student views in the survey and also the large majority of the students in their institutions at the time of the questionnaire. 82% (818/approximately 1,000) of students in Unimeta at the time of the research completed the questionnaire. Of the 1,073 CCA students who were studying with Top Notch with MEL at the time of the research, 814 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 76%. Student views from British College are the least represented and are not necessarily representative of the institution's student population in June 2017. Of the approximately 400 students, 36 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of just 9%.

Results in the teacher questionnaire are mainly from teachers at CCA, but are representative of the view of the teacher population across all the institutions. A response rate of 91% (10/11) was achieved among teachers using Top Notch with MEL in British College, 73% (11/15) of teachers using Top Notch with MEL in Unimeta, and 67% (42/63) of teachers using Top Notch with MEL at CCA. A good balance was struck in the teacher interviews, with three teachers each from Institutions 1 and 2 respectively, and five teachers from CCA.

MEL data were obtained and analyzed for Unimeta and CCA. We were unable to collect the relevant information to access MEL student data from British College. Due to the need to extract MEL data manually within a short timeframe, it was agreed to analyze a maximum 20 classes per institution. However, in some cases, it was not possible to sample this total because of the small number of classes or students, so a total of 16 classes per institution were included for analysis. This provided a snapshot of students' MEL use and performance. When findings are not presented by institution, this is because no noteworthy differences were identified between them.

Findings are grouped under the relevant research question in this order:

- Students attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL
- Teachers attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL
- Implementation of Top Notch with MEL
- Learnings for teaching and learning from the MEL data
- Perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL on students; and
- Perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL on teachers, teaching and the institution.



Student attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL

Finding 1: The majority of students report that they like to learn using Top Notch with MEL, prefer to complete practices in MEL rather than in print, and enjoy the use of technology in their learning. Some students however, need convincing of the benefits of Top Notch with MEL.

In the student survey, 93% (1484/1600) of students liked the combination of teacher instruction and independent practice using MEL, and 66% (1014/1535) said they preferred completing practices in MEL to doing them in print Top Notch with MEL. 80% (1243/1550) of students reported that they were more engaged, 73% (1128/1536) that they were more motivated and 68% (1054/1539) that they enjoyed learning more in classes that used MEL compared to classes that did not.

Students are 'digital natives', and in interviews, teachers noted how the use of technology was second nature to them. At British College, it was noted that students were technologically oriented these days and that the College was (and needed to be) aware of their preferences. It was also noted that, given the option, students always opted in to MEL as they saw how useful a tool it was.

Although the data shows the majority of students report positive attitudes to Top Notch with MEL, there are some students who need to be further convinced of its benefits. These students reported they preferred more traditional course delivery. For example, one third of students disagreed that their teacher should ask them to use MEL more (28%, 431/1110); 34% (521/1535) still preferred the print workbook to using MEL, and 30% (467/1546) disagreed that their English would improve further if they used MEL more in the classroom. This indicates that there is room for the value of Top Notch with MEL to be demonstrated to students, and a concerted effort by Pearson and by institutions to create materials, raise awareness and tailor support to students who need it the most (such as those who are not as comfortable using technology, or do not have access to the relevant equipment outside their institution).



Teacher attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL

Finding 2: Teachers are in favour of using MEL, and the majority make it an integral part of their students' learning experience. However, challenges such as the availability of infrastructure and training mean that some teachers are unable to harness the full benefit of these resources.

Across the three institutions, the majority of students report that their teachers are in favour of MEL (72%, 1110/1541). An even larger majority of students (86%, 1378/1596) indicate that their teacher has made it an integral part of their learning. Questionnaires from teachers show that approximately half of teachers (53%, 28/53) across the institutions indicated that MEL is an integral part of their course. Overall, teachers recognize the importance of MEL, which they see as encouraging more innovative teaching practices. However, challenges such as infrastructure and training inhibit some teachers from taking full advantage of MEL. As a result, there is relative variation between teachers who report that MEL is integral to their teaching, so the habitual use of MEL has yet to become universal.

Implementation of Top Notch with MEL

Finding 3: Top Notch with MEL's communicative focus is key to an institution's decision to adopt it. The data suggests that Top Notch with MEL is also selected because of the innovative use of technology in the platform, and because it provides an opportunity for students to apply their language skills to real life.

The three institutions in Colombia reported three key reasons for choosing Top Notch with MEL and blended instruction:

- **Focus on communication:** The focus on spoken English above other areas of competence with the language stood out for all three institutions as a priority in the decision to use Top Notch with MEL. It supports speaking fluency and allows students to fully immerse themselves in the language, which leads to improvement in other skills, such as reading and writing.
- **Innovative use of technology:** The technology of the platform offered a range of benefits, including the opportunity to build technology skills for the future, the data provided by the technology to show what students have mastered, and the level of immersion in English afforded by the technology.
- **Applying skills in real-life scenarios:** Top Notch with MEL was seen to meet the need for students to apply the language to real-life contexts, particularly where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.



Other reasons mentioned by some, but not all, institutions included the opportunity to individualize instruction for students, and the ability to standardize content and lessons between instructors. At one institution, the package was used to provide proof that students had reached the required level of English to be awarded their degree.

Top Notch with MEL and blended instruction

Finding 4: Infrastructure, standardization with autonomy, and training for both teachers and students are key to the successful delivery of Top Notch with MEL and blended instruction for the three institutions in Colombia. Important factors mediating these inputs include senior leadership commitment; institutional processes, and teacher and student buy-in.

Infrastructure investment is important given that the key components of Top Notch with MEL rely on being connected to the internet or projecting visual or audio material. Leadership in all three institutions in Colombia selected Top Notch with MEL because they saw the benefit in using technology and MEL to support learning English, as well as the innovation of offering students a blended learning option. However, teachers and students at the three institutions have different levels of access to classroom technology that can be used with Top Notch with MEL. In particular, while teachers and students at CCA and British College had the necessary technology in classrooms to take advantage of Top Notch with MEL components, Unimeta had fewer classroom resources available (internet access, interactive whiteboards and audio-visual projection equipment). All three institutions had invested in computer labs where classes could use various components. At British College, the computer lab staff were responsible for administering MEL assignments, while classroom teachers focused on other learning activities.

Standardization of materials and practice was an important element of the decision made by Unimeta to select Top Notch with MEL, because their curriculum had previously been more ad hoc, and relied on materials found on the internet by the teaching faculty. At all three institutions, teachers have autonomy in selecting which Top Notch materials to use with students and in their assessments. Teachers' decisions to use components in the computer lab, classroom or home are dependent on infrastructure and resources at the institution (including staffing). Based on responses to the questionnaire, teachers at all three institutions indicated that Top Notch with MEL is the main material used in their class – British College 83% (5/6), Unimeta 83% (5/6) and CCA 86% (36/42). At British College, staff explained that time constraints on the course made it difficult to cover all the content, so teachers had to make decisions about what to teach.

A third input that seemed to be related to implementation was **training for teachers and students on Top Notch with MEL**, covering pedagogical issues as well as the technical aspect of using the tools. Teachers in Colombia rated their comfort with technology as high. Among teachers who responded to the questionnaire at British College and Unimeta, 100% rated their comfort level with



technology between 8 and 10 on a scale of 10. Among teachers at CCA, it was 90%. At British College (75%, 3/4) and Unimeta (100%, 6/6), the majority of teachers had only one year of experience teaching Top Notch with MEL, while at CCA (where Top Notch with MEL was introduced in 2012), the majority had three or more years (76%, 31/32).

Pearson offers training as part of the adoption package for Top Notch. After Pearson's initial training, the cascade model is used in most cases, where trained teachers train other teachers. Overall, the training reported by teachers varied across institutions. They reported that it was provided primarily by representatives from Pearson and colleagues, but some teachers also taught themselves.

Teachers at British College who responded to the questionnaire were trained by colleagues (50%, 2/4) or were self-taught (50%, 2/4). Teachers felt training had been effective (67%, 4/6), prompt (80%, 4/5), and that it focused on pedagogy (50%, 3/6) as well as technical matters. Pearson provides training at British College once a semester, but teachers indicated more frequent training was needed because of high staff turnover.

At Unimeta, Pearson trained the majority of teachers who answered the survey (67%, 4/6). Teachers reported that the training was prompt (2/2) and provided information about how Top Notch with MEL supports teaching as well as technical information. A teacher who did not receive training described feeling that they were not able to use Top Notch with MEL to its full potential.

At CCA, the majority of teachers received some training from Pearson and a colleague (36%, 13/36) or a colleague only (39%, 14/36), and only 22% (8/36) had taught themselves. Training addressed both pedagogical and technical topics. In interviews, teachers described an institutional expectation that teachers should be self-directed in their learning and use their own time to train themselves to become more familiar with various components. Teachers share learning strategies with colleagues through presentations as part of ongoing professional learning. Another teacher described how the main lesson of their initial training appeared to be that the package had many resources for teachers to use flexibly and, therefore, the implicit message was that they should take responsibility for their own ongoing learning and planning for use in class.

Students' introduction to MEL may also influence their level of engagement with the course. Training for students was provided either by their instructor in an in-class orientation or by a staff member such as computer lab staff, or students were left to learn it themselves. Training for students in Colombia was similar across institutions. Based on questionnaire results, the majority of teachers reported that students at all three institutions (75%, 3/4 at British College; 100%, 6/6 at Unimeta; and 83%, 33/40 at CCA) received an orientation from their teacher or another staff member, and few (between 15% and 25% at two institutions) learned on their own or through handouts.



Finding 5: The main components used across the three institutions in Colombia were the Students' Book, ActiveTeach and MEL. There is variability across institutions in the degree to which MEL is integrated with courses, is required for students, is used in assessments, and in the degree of monitoring through the gradebook.

At all three institutions, we found most teachers followed a similar approach to using MEL as part of assessments, monitoring the gradebook and providing feedback to students. Other approaches varied, such as the numbers of practices to be completed and the timeframe for their completion. Teacher assessment seemed to focus on the quantity of practices completed – that is, the effort and (for a few teachers) the resilience students show, rather than their scores.

Components used

Students and teachers across the three institutions reported using a range of Top Notch with MEL components, with some variability between institutions. Based on teacher and student responses to questionnaires and teacher interviews, the Students' Book is a main component in use across all three institutions alongside ActiveTeach and MEL.

- The Students' Book was the core component used for the delivery of Top Notch with MEL across the three institutions. At British College, 94% of students (34/36) reported that they used the Students' Book in their course. A similarly high proportion of students do so at CCA (93%, 758/814). At Unimeta, the Students' Book was used by 82% (669/818) of students. Although use of the Students' Book was quite high, there was variability in the frequency of its use across the three institutions. These range from 100% (4/4) at British College, who reported using it three or more times a week to 17% (1/6) at Unimeta. This is likely due to institutional issues concerning the timing of distribution of the texts to all classes.
- ActiveTeach is a second core component across institutions. At British College, Active Teach was used by most teachers interviewed. Among teachers who answered the questionnaire, all (5/5) indicated that they used ActiveTeach throughout their lessons, and three out of five teachers suggested that they used it to prepare for classes. Two of those interviewed described regularly using ActiveTeach for the pronunciation and conversation models, games and extra activities. Unimeta had similar patterns of use, where all (5/5) agreed that it was used throughout the lesson. Interviewees described using ActiveTeach particularly for its multimedia resources – Top Notch TV, audio and dialogues – but noted that they did not have the necessary technology infrastructure to display and interact with it on a more regular basis. At CCA, 87% of teachers (33/38) indicated that they used Active Teach throughout their lessons and 73% (29/40) used it to plan lessons. CCA teachers reported that due to the widespread use of ActiveTeach, the Teachers' Book was hardly used.
- MEL is used by the majority of students at each institution, according to questionnaires and interviews. At British College, 72% (26/36) of students indicated that they used MEL in their courses. MEL was required by four of the six teachers surveyed, and three out of five teachers



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saw it as integral to their course. At Unimeta, 82% (672/818) of students used MEL. All the teachers who completed the questionnaire (100%, 6/6) required its use, while slightly fewer (5/6) viewed MEL as an integral part of their course. CCA had the highest proportion of students who indicated using MEL (93%, 759/814), and it was required by 90% (38/42) of teachers. However, only 48% (20/42) of CCA teachers viewed it as an integral part of the course.

A summary of the core and non-core components at the three institutions in Colombia is given in Table 12.



Table 12: Top Notch core and non-core components at three institutions in Colombia, student questionnaire and teacher interviews

Core components ⁷	Non-essential components	
	Mostly used ⁸	Less used ⁹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' Book: Across all institutions, student questionnaire data indicates that 88% (1461/1668) use the book. This ranged between 82% (669/818) at Unimeta and 94% (34/36) at British College who report using the Students' Book in their course. All teachers surveyed used this at least weekly: 88% (45/51) use it at least three times a week and 90% (45/50) for at least three hours a week. • ActiveTeach: This is used at least weekly by 88% (45/51) of teacher questionnaire respondents, with 74% (37/50) suggesting they used it for at least three hours a week. • MEL: Nearly all students surveyed (87%, 1457/1668) report that they use MEL. Between institutions use varied from 72% (26/36) at British College to 93% at CCA (59/914). It is used at least weekly by 86% of teachers (43/50) but for short periods of time (71%, 32/45 of teachers suggest for one hour or less a week). 89% of teachers say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra practice activities on english.com in one institution only: 50% (18/36) of students at British College report using it in their learning. Extra practice was compulsory for only 17% (8/46) of teachers, with another 59% encouraging it. • Classroom audio programme on english.com/topnotch3e at two institutions: 57% (462/814) of students in CCA reported using it and 53% (19/36) in British College. The programme was compulsory for only 16% (7/43) of teachers, with another 53% encouraging it. • Some MEL components are required by most, but less than 75%, of teachers: • grammar exercises (required by 69% of teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top Notch Go app: 22% of students (378/1668) indicated that they used it. 32% (262/818) at CCA, and 14% at both Unimeta (111/793) and British College (5/36) reported that they used the app. Only 5% of teachers suggested it was required, but a further 35% suggested they encouraged students to use it. • Extra practice activities on english.com at two institutions: 47% (388/818) of students at CCA and 41% (336/818) at Unimeta indicated that they used this resource. • Classroom audio on english.com at one institution only: 28% (226/807) of students at Unimeta used it. • Print workbook: 33% (547/1668) of students indicated that they used it. Use was highest at CCA (39%, 317/813), and lower at Unimeta (27%, 223/818) and British College (19%, 7/36). 36% of teachers surveyed indicated that they still used the print workbook at least once a week, but the

⁷ Core component here means >75% of students use it (for student-oriented tools) or >75% teachers (for teacher-oriented tools)

⁸ Mostly used means 50%-75% of students use it

⁹ Less used means <50% of students use it



Core components ⁷	Non-essential components	
	Mostly used ⁸	Less used ⁹
it is a requirement, although only just over half (53%) suggest that it is an integral part of their course. No MEL component in particular appears to be a core essential component, according to the teacher questionnaire data (see right).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tracking progress (58%)vocabulary exercises (57%)writing exercises (50%).	<p>majority who did (81%, 25/31) suggested they spent just half an hour a week on it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Many MEL components are required by less than half of teachers surveyed: unit tests (required by 49% of teachers surveyed); vocabulary flashcards (38%); pronunciation and grammar coach videos (35%); repeating activities (22%); games (20%); mid-course (26%) and end-of-course tests (18%). No teacher surveyed required the use of MEL email.



Teaching and learning

Across all three institutions, pair work (92%, 46/50) and whole-class discussions (88%, 44/50) are used in half or more of classes at each institution. Of the teachers who use MEL, almost three-quarters (74%, 34/46) indicate that they use it in class in half of the lessons or more. Vocabulary exercises (100%, 52/52); grammar exercises (98%, 51/52); grammar coach videos (94%, 47/50), and writing exercises (74%, 37/50) were found useful/very useful by teachers across all three institutions. Using MEL for communication is another way to engage students and teachers with the platform as well as raising its visibility. Almost half of teachers (44%, 21/48) indicated that they found it useful/very useful to communicate with students online.

Assessment

Across the three institutions, teachers make their own decisions about assessment, so practices varied within and across institutions.

At British College, teachers described using a combination of assessments such as progress tests and written tests from the Top Notch materials or, based on these, unit, mid- and end-of-course tests on MEL and practice scores; teacher observations using a checklist; writing exercises; records of oral practice in conversation tasks or extra-curricular clubs, and records of attendance. The teachers who responded to the questionnaire made it clear that testing was central to their courses, and all (3/3) indicated that the unit, mid-year and end-of-year tests on MEL were requirements.

Among courses at Unimeta, there seems to be a similar variety of approaches to assessment used by teachers. For example, one indicated that the contribution of MEL performance to the overall grade was up to individual teachers. Two teachers also suggested that spoken assessments, including the use of drama and reading aloud or even spoken communication in class, may also form considerable parts of the overall grade. The institution is in the process of changing its approach to instruction and assessment to focus on a competency-based framework.

CCA uses a different approach to assessment. There, the main form of formal assessment is through a student portfolio of work, which comprises students' project work, presentations and evidence from teacher observations. Peer, group and self-assessments conducted during class may also be included in the portfolio. Teachers report that written tests are rarely used. Teachers use rubrics with descriptors related to key indicators of achievement at each level. They rely on these to share regular feedback on achievements as well as areas for growth. MEL data may be integrated into these conversations as part of the development of a student action plan.



Monitoring and feedback

An important feature of Top Notch with MEL is that students and teachers are able to use the gradebook's monitoring function. Do teachers regularly check performance on MEL and talk to students about it? Are students required to track their own progress? The use of the gradebook was common across all three institutions, but at different frequencies.

Teachers and students at British College used the gradebook the least, with 66% (2/3) teachers and 53% (18/34) of students checking at least once a week. The computer lab teachers who administer MEL assignments at British College also check student performance on tests and help determine whether students are ready to progress to the next level, based on completed practices and assignments. Students are encouraged to check their progress, but it is not required. Teachers report trying to use this data to change their teaching strategies if it seems that a student is not understanding. The rotating teaching schedule at British College presents some challenges in terms of tracking individual student progress.

Unimeta and CCA had similar rates of use among teachers and students with 84% (5/6) and 91% (38/42) of teachers checking at least once per week, respectively. Students from these institutions also had similar, albeit lower, rates of checking the gradebook; 44% (350/802) at Unimeta and 48% (370/779) at CCA. At Unimeta, as with British College, students are encouraged but not required to check the gradebook. Teachers may use the data from the gradebook to assign extra practices if needed or offer students tutorials based on areas of weakness.

At CCA, teachers and staff indicated that they regularly gave feedback to students about MEL achievement as part of discussing progress with students and setting action plans. One teacher scheduled short one-to-one conferences with students every five or so days to discuss their progress, while other students continue leading their own learning in class. Also at CCA, as part of these reviews, additional MEL assignments may be recommended to improve performance. For example, one teacher links the grammar activities on ActiveTeach/the Students' Book to relevant MEL activities as a form of action plan, so students can tackle areas they find difficult.

Student performance on MEL

Finding 6: There are indications that teachers can confidently use students' scores from assignments and practices in MEL for formative assessment purposes. Further investigation into this would be helpful, however.

Teachers could consider students' scores as reflective of their actual performance, given that the majority of MEL practices were attempted once (43%, 6061/14150), and 30% (4295/14150) were completed in two attempts. Only between 8% and 20% of practices were attempted more than three



times.¹⁰ Similarly, for assignments, the majority were completed in one attempt (56%, 2978/5292), except for one level, and in the remainder of cases, two attempts were made (30%, 1589/5292). Moreover, assignments and practices are relatively reliable indicators of student performance, as there are indications that the average performance of students on assignments/practices in one unit could be used as an indication of their performance in another unit. The correlations for Unimeta mainly ranged between -0.02 (1st quartile) and 0.67 (3rd quartile), with a mean of 0.33 (6/12 correlations, 50%), were statistically significant at the 0.05 level). For CCA, only three correlations were estimated, with values of 0.27, 0.30 and 0.33, of which only the latter was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Finding 7: The more assignments and practices students complete, the better their scores, data suggests. Students also benefit from attempting the same task more than once, as practice helps them improve. Understanding the factors influencing the variability between the average improvement of classes would be helpful.

There is evidence that students should be encouraged to complete MEL assignments/practices for learning purposes. Overall, data indicates that higher completion of assignments/ practices is associated with higher scores. In seven out of eleven cases, a positive and statistically significant correlation was found between the percentage practice/assignments completed and the average score. For both institutions, coefficients for assignments ranged from 0.30 to 0.71 and four of the five assignments were statistically significant at the 0.01 level; coefficients for practices ranged between 0.34 to 0.39 and three of the six practices were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.^{11,12}

Progress from students' first to highest attempt is noteworthy.¹³ In Unimeta, improvements on assignments ranged from 23 to 35 percentage points and for practices between 29 to 41 percentage points. In CCA, the average improvement for Level 2 was 26 percentage points for assignments and improvements on practices ranged from 33 to 35 percentage points for the two levels.

There was variability between the average improvement of classes. At Unimeta, for assignments, variation ranged between 15 to 33 percentage points per class (five classes) for Level 1 Split A, and between 22 to 35 percentage points for Level 1 Split B. For practices, variation ranged between 28 to 58 percentage points per class (five classes) for Level 1 Split A, and between 32 to 47 percentage points per class (eight classes) for Level 1 Split B. At CCA, for the two classes that did practices, variation ranged between 29 to 35 percentage points (nine classes) for Level 2 and between 30 to 40 percentage points (seven classes) for Level 3. This suggests that the effect of attempting the same task again does not benefit students from different classes in the same way. There was only one class that completed assignments at CCA.

¹⁰ Students have the opportunity to see the answer to a question after their third attempt.

¹¹ For both Unimeta and CCA, overall the correlations presented here are probably conservative and illustrate a worst-case scenario. Due to the small sample sizes involved, it is more difficult for some correlations to reach statistical significance. In other cases, where the correlation is not statistically significant, there were significantly different correlations between classes within levels.

¹² Completions did not include repeated attempts on the same practice/assignments.

¹³ As noted earlier in this report, progress of students from the first to the highest attempt is nearly indistinguishable from the first to last attempt.



Perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL on students

Finding 8: Overall, Top Notch with MEL is accessible and engaging, data suggests. More than 86% of students and 70% of teachers in most of the access-related questions suggest that the Students' Book, and MEL are accessible. ActiveTeach is seen as accessible by slightly fewer teachers. 83% of students also find Top Notch with MEL engaging, with teacher interview data pointing to up-to-date and well-organised materials, Active Teach's interactivity and MEL's usefulness. Further adapting materials to more closely match young adults' interests and the Colombian culture, as well as allowing users to interact in the MEL platform, could promote engagement, data suggests.

Student and teacher questionnaire responses and teacher interviews indicated Top Notch with MEL was accessible and engaging. Between 86% (1378/1607) and 97% (1580/1633) of students and 70% and 82% of teachers suggested that the book was up-to-date, interesting, at the appropriate level, culturally relevant and relevant to real life. 87% (1339/1542) of students who responded to the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that the english.com website and 68% (925/1367) Top Notch Go app were easy to access.

As regards engagement, the majority of students (77%, 1235/1598) agreed/strongly agreed that MEL was engaging and 83% (1290/1558) suggested that Top Notch with MEL had significantly/very significantly helped them engage with learning English.

Similarly, the majority of teachers (56%, 27/48) thought that Top Notch with MEL had helped them to engage students with interesting content. Students' NPS score agreed, with the large majority of students rating their likeliness to recommend Top Notch as 7/10 or higher (71% and an NPS score of +8), with the overall mean likeliness to recommend Top Notch of 7.2.

Interviews uncovered several aspects that highlighted the Students' Book's accessibility and engaging features. Teachers reported the package to be very well structured with materials that were up-to-date and a variety of well-sequenced activities and lessons. They also thought that topics were interesting and relevant to all students, although they suggested that additional materials more relevant to young adults as well as more embedded in the Colombian culture could further support engagement. Moreover, they viewed the videos and their pace to be appropriate, and they regarded the Students' Book and teacher materials as corresponding well with each other. Teachers also expressed the desire for more up-to-date pop songs (in the questionnaire, 71% (34/48) of teachers found them somewhat or not all useful). The flashcard player and the games also seem to need reviewing, given that 33% (16/48) and 34% (16/47) of teachers respectively suggested they were somewhat/not at all useful.

ActiveTeach is also accessible, data suggests. 66% (30/44) of teachers find ActiveTeach easy to access and 73% (32/44) find it easy to download its content. However, 61% (26/43) reported not using ActiveTeach because they had problems with the software. This finding contrasts with the previous two responses and with the teacher interview data. Based on this, we assume that this discrepancy is due to the questionnaire design and might be a result of teachers at one institution having limited infrastructure to display and interact with ActiveTeach. Another reason may be that interviewees who



did not use ActiveTeach for various reasons chose the answer 'I do not use ActiveTeach because I had too many problems with the software' because no standalone 'I do not use ActiveTeach' or alternative options were available. Further interviews with teachers suggested that ActiveTeach was highly engaging to students, especially due to its interactivity.

MEL is accessible and engaging to students too, data across sources suggests. 91% (1474/1623) of students were able to access MEL easily on their computer or laptop and 71% (1118/1570) on their smartphones, 88% (1431/ 1623) found it easy to access assignments and 85% (1385/1625) indicated MEL was easy to navigate. Furthermore, the majority of students (77%, 1235/1598) agreed/strongly agreed that MEL is engaging, and 95% (1511/1597) found it useful/very useful to access MEL whenever and wherever they wanted. Students' NPS score also suggests that students are relatively satisfied with MEL (their overall NPS score is +5). Teacher data also agrees. All teachers interviewed and surveyed found MEL easy to access, with many noting that it was easy to do so on their computer (96%, 48/50) and smartphone (76%, 32/42). 90% (44/49) and 90% (44/49) of teachers also indicated that it was easy to navigate the content and to assign tasks, respectively. Teacher interviews agreed with questionnaire results, noting that MEL was easy and intuitive for students to use and did not have the glitches or problems they had experienced using other platforms previously.

In terms of further improving MEL access, guidance on the best web browsers to use for MEL as well as video tutorials on its different functions would be appreciated. There is more also to be done about engagement. Overall, teachers thought that MEL could become repetitive over time and wanted more interesting ways to complete homework on the platform.

Interactivity seemed to be the key element missing according to teachers, such as the ability for faculty to post announcements to further engage students, as well as making MEL activities less repetitive and using more visuals so the platform didn't feel as text-heavy.

In more detail, teacher interviews suggest that improving the learning experience through an online community model (as opposed to email alone) would allow students to create study groups and to support each other. One teacher suggested that students already used other platforms to upload their work, interact with one another and provide feedback, but providing such functionality through MEL had the potential to increase its use and further support student learning using the Top Notch materials. Lastly, in some cases, implementation of the institutional guidance about student use of MEL – such as hours spent on task per week and assignment completion rates – seemed to need further reinforcement.



Finding 9: Top Notch with MEL supports the development of positive learning behaviours. The majority of students (76% and above) suggest that their confidence, enjoyment and motivation around learning English has increased since using Top Notch with MEL. Students also point to increased confidence in their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. The use of MEL, in particular, also encourages the development of students' self-monitoring skills and responsibility for their own learning. However, support on how to best teach and assess speaking is needed, as well as a review of MEL's autoscoring system.

Both teachers and students largely saw Top Notch with MEL as contributing to positive learning behaviours. The majority of students (86%, 1345/1556) and teachers (73%, 37/51) report that, since using Top Notch with MEL, student confidence has increased in learning English. Between 76% and 87% of students reported that it had done so in each of the skill areas, namely reading, listening, writing and speaking. The majority of students also agreed/strongly agreed that their confidence had increased in reading (87%, 1361/1558), listening (84%, 1303 /1555), writing (85%, 1316/1553) and speaking (76%, 1192/1559) since using Top Notch with MEL. Although the majority of teachers reported that Top Notch with MEL had very significantly/significantly supported their goal to increase student confidence across these skills, for reading and writing we found more than half of teachers suggesting this, in contrast to 74% for reading (37/50) and 72% for listening (36/50).

According to teachers, Top Notch materials contribute to student confidence in different ways. For example, the layout of the Students' Book makes studying for tests straightforward, with the effect of building confidence as students feel supported by the material. Another teacher commented that MEL enabled students to record their voices, and that practising on their own, away from peer judgment, was especially useful to building speaking confidence.

As regards students' motivation and enjoyment, most students suggested that Top Notch with MEL had significantly/very significantly helped them improve their motivation to learn English (79%, 1214/1540) and enjoyment of learning English (81%, 1268/1559). The majority of teachers agree with students. They suggest that Top Notch with MEL significantly/very significantly helps them support student motivation and enjoyment (56%, 27/48 and 50%, 25/50 respectively). The access and engagement section suggests some of the reasons that could explain this result.

In interviews, teachers also expressed the belief that students showed more responsibility for their own learning because they had to make decisions about which resources to access in support of their learning, and because Top Notch with MEL focused on monitoring one's own progress. MEL, in particular, was seen to foster skills such self-monitoring, with two two-thirds of students reporting they used the MEL gradebook at least monthly (and 46% at least weekly). In addition, between 78% and 93% of students found the ability to check answers immediately, see grade summaries, track progress and see assignment completion dates very useful/useful to their learning.

Nevertheless, interview data show that there is room for improvement. According to teacher interviews, MEL's autoscoring system and its focus on punctuation, capitalization and spelling can reduce confidence and cause students stress.



Finding 10: The large majority of students (77% and above) suggest that Top Notch with MEL helps them improve their English and English language skills, including speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar and writing. Top Notch with MEL received praise for its completeness as a package as well as for the close alignment of its materials. MEL exercises and many of its features are also helpful to learning, according to more than 82% of students surveyed.

Both questionnaire and teacher interview results underline the positive role of Top Notch with MEL in developing different English skills among students. A majority of students (79%, 1231/1557) responding to the questionnaire credited Top Notch with MEL with significantly or very significantly supporting them in improving their English, particularly in grammar (88%, 1364/1553), vocabulary (88%, 1364/1554), writing (84%, 1312/1556), listening (84%, 1312/1558) and speaking (77%, 1200/1555).

The package received praise for its completeness, with Top Notch materials and MEL reinforcing each other, and for its ability to help students develop their vocabulary. Other features of the Students' Book that support learning, according to teachers, include blending the practice of different skills, the application of speaking skills through communicative activities, and rich grammar and vocabulary content. Interviews also suggested that the Students' Book helped with differentiation through the grammar booster, which allowed students to extend their learning.

Suggestions for improving the Students' Book were to increase the focus on 'chunks of language' to help students with conversation strategies, and to have the same listening exercises in both Teachers' and Students' Books. Further, the oral progress charts seem to need reviewing, as 43% of teachers suggested they were somewhat or not at all useful, much out of trend with the large majority of teacher answers on other Top Notch materials.

As regards MEL in particular, students and teachers agree that MEL supports the development of all English language skills by reinforcing what is learnt in class. Students questionnaire results also show:

- 93% (1485/1600) of students strongly agree/agree that MEL helps them understand content learned in class in MEL.
- 85% (1374/1625) think that there is a good variety of exercises.
- Between 82% and 97% of students suggest that the grammar exercises, games, writing exercises, vocabulary exercises and vocabulary flashcards, and the grammar and pronunciation coach videos are very useful/useful in supporting their learning.
- 93% (1486/1605) find the ability to check answers immediately very useful/useful to their learning.
- 90% (1429/1592) find repeating exercises very useful/useful.
- 86% (1363/1582) think that seeing summaries of their scores and tracking their progress is useful.



- Overall student performance in MEL was high for assignments/practices, as shown by their average scores. It would be useful, however, to have further data on student performance. This is because, amongst other reasons, MEL assignments/practices comprise one piece of a wider assessment system; students also take other formative and summative assessments, but we only had access to their MEL scores. It is important that we cross-reference student scores from MEL with more standardized assessments as well as having a more detailed insight into the conditions under which students complete these MEL exercises.

To further improve MEL, teachers suggested that randomizing different versions of the same exercises to increase the validity of the results would be helpful.

Finding 11: Top Notch with MEL prepares students well for their next stage in their English studies and to achieve their goal, data suggests. Consideration could be given on how best Top Notch with MEL could support students in passing external exams.

85% (1313/1549) of students in the questionnaire report that Top Notch with MEL prepares them well for the next level of their English studies and 84% (1306/1549) that it prepares them well to achieve their goal. In the interviews, teachers suggested that Top Notch with MEL prepared students for the next stage in learning and to achieve their own goals. One teacher interviewee responded that the package's clear structure of objectives, paired with suitable content and emphasis on conversations, helped prepare students for the next level of their studies. Another interviewee pointed out the apparent progression in difficulty between the Fundamentals level and the Top Notch 1 level.

In addition, the majority of teachers in the questionnaire suggest that Top Notch with MEL is useful/very useful in helping them support student progress according to their age and level (64%) and aptitude (70%). Only a third of teachers, however, suggested that Top Notch with MEL helped them achieve the goal for their student to pass high stakes external exams. Thus, consideration could be given to providing further materials to support students who are taking external exams. The relatively negative response by teachers in this case is not as worrying. Top Notch with MEL is not designed for this purpose, though it aims to support it as much as possible.

Perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL on teachers and institutions

Finding 12: The majority of teachers report that Top Notch with MEL supports teaching in many ways, increases confidence in teaching English, helps with effective lesson planning and assessment and reduces lesson preparation time and assessment workload. However, teachers need help in understanding the pedagogy related to Top Notch with MEL.



Teachers suggested that Top Notch with MEL:

- Increased their confidence in teaching English: significantly/very significantly (52% of teachers in the questionnaire).
- Increased confidence in teaching English for teachers new to the teaching profession: (62%).
- Supported effective lesson planning (66%) and reduced lesson preparation time (51%). Interview data mirrors the questionnaire findings, with several interviewees commenting on the ability to access multiple resources with ActiveTeach as well as commenting on its speed. Teacher interviews suggest that ActiveTeach eases some of the burdens of teaching by reducing how much teachers need to write on the board, how many resources they have to locate, and how much equipment they need to carry around with them.
- Improved lesson quality: 91% agreed or strongly agreed that displaying audio, video, and other activities in ActiveTeach improved the quality of their lessons.
- Improved the interactivity of lessons: A majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that interactive whiteboard tools (67%), audio and video scripts (94%), Top Notch TV (76%), interactive games (67%), and the flashcard player app (66%) available in ActiveTeach are useful or very useful, and teachers praised the ability to zoom in and out, highlight text, use masking tools and use post-its.
- Provided a variety of resources for teachers: 84% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that ActiveTeach provided variety in teacher support materials.
- Supported teaching in different ways: Results reveal that Top Notch with MEL appeared to support teaching strategies. 81% of teachers completing the questionnaire reported that Top Notch with MEL helped them fill classroom hours with work-related activities (86%) and assess student performance effectively. One factor that emerged as useful in a teacher interview was the considerable range of resources available for each part of the syllabus, enabling teachers to construct critical thinking lessons. There was evidence from the interviews that Top Notch with MEL enabled differentiation through the flexibility and range of its available resources (such as grammar boosters and audios), allowing teachers to select what is best aligned for groups of learners. Teachers in the questionnaire agreed. 51% suggested that Top Notch with MEL helped them differentiate teaching in mixed ability classes.
- Supported assessment and reduced assessment workload: Both interview and questionnaire data show that MEL is beneficial for monitoring and assessing students. Specifically, many of MEL's features are reported to help with assessment. A clear majority of teachers point to the usefulness of tracking progress (92%), unit tests (84%), mid-/end-of-course tests (75%), telling students to repeat activities (73%), and autograding within MEL (86%). They rated these features as useful/very useful or as significantly/very significantly supporting their needs.



Interview responses echo these questionnaire results and additionally underscore the benefits of the detailed feedback, the flexibility in assigning activities, emailing for easy student contact, and tracking student performance across several skill areas provided by MEL. Teachers also found assessments in ActiveTeach to be useful, and ActiveTeach simplified the task of revisiting past learning as it incorporated language from earlier units. Interviewees also said some of these capabilities resulted in lightening teachers' workloads and adapting assignments for individual students.

However, there were areas for improvement. Roughly half of teachers who responded to the questionnaire rated the package as helping them only a little or not at all in understanding the required pedagogy (62%). This indicates a strong need for providing support for teachers in how to teach Top Notch with MEL, focusing on pedagogy through training and on-going support. For MEL, support with the interoperability of MEL and different systems used in institutions would support teaching and workload. Lastly, teachers' NPS score of -14 for both Top Notch as a whole and for MEL separately also needs investigation, especially in one institution which has heavily skewed the data. The majority of teachers (42/50) in the questionnaire taught at this institution, and rated their likelihood of recommending MEL to a colleague on average as 6.5/10. Despite small sample sizes in comparison, the mean scores of the other two institutions were higher (8.5 and 8.4).

Finding 13: Top Notch with MEL's impact on the institution is positive, according to teachers. The majority report that it supports improvements and consistency in teaching across the department, has increased conversations about teaching and has encouraged further collaboration between teachers.

Top Notch with MEL supports improvements in teaching across the institutions, data suggests. According to interviews and the teacher questionnaire, Top Notch with MEL significantly/very significantly impacted on the following across their English departments:

- **encouraged consistency in teaching:** 73% of teachers suggested
- **supported improvements in teaching:** 66% of teachers reported
- **increased conversations about teaching English:** 58% of teachers agreed
- **encouraged further collaboration between teachers:** 60% of teachers suggested.



Pearson

Recommendations

Recommendations will be provided to the relevant Pearson teams and to the institutions directly.



Generalizability of findings, limitations and future research

This section sets out the key limitations of the research and suggests potential areas for future research.

- Findings are based on specific implementation models carried out with specific samples of students and teachers in specific cultural contexts and settings. Further research should aim to replicate findings in similar contexts and with a similar sample, to identify whether findings are consistent with the findings of this study. Further research should also aim to expand our understanding of the repertoire of implementation models so that using Top Notch with MEL is better understood in different contexts, settings and countries. A better representation of students and teachers from the institutions to be studied should be also considered.
- Findings are based on triangulating inferences across different evidence sources. Rather than provide precise answers, the aim is to allow Pearson to use the data to screen major occurrences and major trends across institutions for decision-making and to develop an understanding of the different implementation models (Ewell, 2009; McCormick and McClenney, 2012; Pike, 2013).
- Self-report methods are known to be vulnerable to both unreliability and bias. Self-reported perceptions of impact on achievement and progression do not provide objective evidence of impact. This is more of a limitation for evidencing student achievement and progression than for student access and experience, where self-reported perceptions are extremely valuable. Further research should seek to incorporate objective external measures of achievement and progress, to compare outcomes for users and non-users and to control for potentially confounding factors such as prior achievement. Additionally, individual student level analysis would allow us to understand the relationship between student use and performance. Moreover, we were unable to control for prior achievement for all samples in the study.
- Addition of an indicator for socioeconomic status as a covariate would strengthen the study.
- At times, data from the teacher interviews are corroborated by the student and/or teacher questionnaires. When findings from the teacher interviews are not corroborated with either the student questionnaire or the teacher questionnaire data, they should be treated with caution and become items for follow-up questioning in future research.
- Due to time constraints, no analysis was performed to allow the bundling of answers referring to the same category (such as usefulness of MEL or student confidence) to derive a standardised index. This type of analysis would provide us with a more reliable estimate of the construct and allow for comparisons across different institutions and countries. Future research could carry out further analysis by looking at different variables in the student and teacher questionnaires, such as student motivation to learn or teacher confidence in teaching English and usage of materials. Lastly, responses to open-ended questions in the student

questionnaires were not analysed. Analysing these would further enrich our understanding of the themes explored in this study.

- Variation between and within classrooms needs further investigation.
- A more rigorous design would compare the performance of students using Top Notch with MEL to students not using Top Notch with MEL, and students would either be randomly assigned to treatment conditions or would be matched to students in the other group on important background characteristics, such as prior achievement and demographic factors.
- Future research should aim to either control for implementation or understand implementation first, before analyzing MEL data.



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Appendix A: Consolidated Framework of Implementation Research (CFIR)

Table A1: Consolidated Framework of Implementation Research (CFIR)

Construct		Short description
I. Intervention characteristics		
A	Intervention source	Perception of key stakeholders about whether the intervention is externally or internally developed
B	Evidence strength and quality	Stakeholder perceptions of the quality and validity of evidence supporting the belief that the intervention will have desired outcomes
C	Relative advantage	Stakeholder perception of the advantage of implementing the intervention versus an alternative solution
D	Adaptability	The degree to which an intervention can be adapted, tailored, refined or reinvented to meet local needs
E	Trialability	The ability to test the intervention on a small scale in the organisation and to be able to reverse course (undo implementation) if warranted
F	Complexity	Perceived difficulty of implementation, reflected by duration, scope, radicalness, disruptiveness, centrality and intricacy and number of steps required to implement
G	Design quality and packaging	Perceived excellence in how the intervention is bundled, presented and assembled
H	Cost	Costs of the intervention and costs associated with implementing the intervention including investment, supply and opportunity costs
II. Outer setting		
A	Individual needs and resources	The extent to which individual needs, as well as barriers and facilitators to meet those needs, are accurately known and prioritised by the organisation
B	Cosmopolitanism	The degree to which an organisation is networked with other external organisations
C	Peer pressure	Mimetic or competitive pressure to implement an intervention, typically because the majority of or other key peer or competing organisations have already implemented or are in a bid for a competitive edge
D	External policy and incentives	A broad construct that includes external strategies to spread interventions, including policy and regulations (governmental or other central entity), external mandates, recommendations and guidelines, pay-for-performance, collaboratives and public or benchmark reporting
III. Inner setting		
A	Structural characteristics	The social architecture, age, maturity and size of an organisation
B	Networks and communications	The nature and quality of webs of social networks and the nature and quality of formal and informal communications within an organisation
C	Culture	Norms, values and basic assumptions of a given organisation



Construct		Short description
D	Implementation climate	The absorptive capacity for change, shared receptivity of involved individuals to an intervention and the extent to which use of that intervention will be rewarded, supported and expected within their organisation
1	Tension for change	The degree to which stakeholders perceive the current situation as intolerable or needing change
2	Compatibility	The degree of tangible fit between meaning and values attached to the intervention by involved individuals, how those align with individuals' own norms, values and perceived risks and needs, and how the intervention fits with existing workflows and systems
3	Relative priority	Individuals' shared perception of the importance of the implementation within the organisation
4	Organisational incentives and rewards	Extrinsic incentives such as goal-sharing awards, performance reviews, promotions and rises in salary and less tangible incentives such as increased stature or respect
5	Goals and feedback	The degree to which goals are clearly communicated, acted upon and fed back to staff, and alignment of that feedback with goals
6	Learning climate	A climate in which (a) leaders express their own fallibility and need for team members' assistance and input; (b) team members feel that they are essential, valued and knowledgeable partners in the change process; (c) individuals feel psychologically safe to try new methods, and (d) there is sufficient time and space for reflective thinking and evaluation
E	Readiness for implementation	Tangible and immediate indicators of organisational commitment to its decision to implement an intervention
1	Leadership engagement	Commitment, involvement and accountability of leaders and managers with the implementation
2	Available resources	The level of resources dedicated for implementation and ongoing operations, including money, training, education, physical space and time
3	Access to knowledge and information	Ease of access to digestible information and knowledge about the intervention and how to incorporate it into work tasks
IV. Characteristics of individuals		
A	Knowledge and beliefs about the intervention	Individual attitudes toward and value placed on the intervention as well as familiarity with facts, truths and principles related to the intervention
B	Self-efficacy	Individual belief in their own capabilities to execute courses of action to achieve implementation goals
C	Individual stage of change	Characterisation of the phase an individual is in as they progress toward skilled, enthusiastic and sustained use of the intervention
D	Individual identification with organisation	A broad construct related to how individuals perceive the organisation and their relationship and degree of commitment with that organisation
E	Other personal attributes	A broad construct to include other personal traits such as tolerance of ambiguity, intellectual ability, motivation, values, competence, capacity and learning style
V. Process		
A	Planning	The degree to which a scheme or method of behaviour and tasks for implementing an intervention are developed in advance, and the quality of those schemes or methods
B	Engaging	Attracting and involving appropriate individuals in the implementation and use of the intervention through a combined strategy of social marketing, education, role modelling, training and other similar activities



Construct		Short description
1	Opinion leaders	Individuals in an organisation who have formal or informal influence on the attitudes and beliefs of their colleagues with respect to implementing the intervention
2	Formally appointed internal implementation leaders	Individuals from within the organisation who have been formally appointed with responsibility for implementing an intervention as co-ordinator, project manager, team leader or other similar role
3	Champions	Individuals who dedicate themselves to supporting, marketing, overcoming indifference or resistance that the intervention may provoke in an organisation
4	External change agents	Individuals who are affiliated with an outside entity who formally influence or facilitate intervention decisions in a desirable direction
C	Executing	Carrying out or accomplishing the implementation according to plan
D	Reflecting and evaluating	Quantitative and qualitative feedback about the progress and quality of implementation accompanied with regular personal and team debriefing about progress and experience



Appendix B: Full results

This section sets out the results from the analysis of the data collected for this study, including student and teacher questionnaires, co-ordinator pre-questionnaires, student focus groups, teacher interviews and MEL student data.

The majority of students who responded to the questionnaire were from Unimeta and CCA, with an even number of student respondents between the two institutions. These respondents represent the large majority of student views in the survey and also the large majority of the students at their institutions at the time of the questionnaire. 82% (818/approximately 1000) of students at Unimeta at the time of the research completed the questionnaire. Of the 1,073 CCA students who were studying with Top Notch with MEL at the time of the research, 814 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 76%. Student views from British College are the least represented and are not necessarily representative of the whole student population the institution served in June 2017. Of approximately 400 students, 36 filled in the questionnaire, a response rate of just 9%.

Results in the teacher questionnaire are mainly from teachers at CCA, but overall, they offer a good representation of teachers' views across the institutions. A response rate of 91% (10/11) was achieved among teachers using Top Notch with MEL at British College, 73% (11/15) of teachers using Top Notch with MEL at Unimeta, and 67% (42/63) of teachers using Top Notch with MEL at CCA. A good balance was struck in the teacher interviews, with three teachers each from Institutions 1 and 2, and five teachers from CCA. Common findings concerning the impact of the Top Notch with MEL package are presented for the institutions as a whole group, although care is taken to specify where any finding is true for only one of the institutions.

Findings are presented thematically, and refer to:

- Students attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL;
- Teachers attitudes towards Top Notch with MEL;
- Implementation of Top Notch with MEL, including the reasons for engaging with Top Notch with MEL, institutions' readiness for implementation, the teaching and learning and assessment approach implemented, especially relating to MEL and the training and support for teachers and students;
- Student and teacher usage of MEL
- Learnings for teaching and learning from the MEL data
- Student and teacher perceptions of the impact of Top Notch with MEL on students, teachers, teaching and the institution.



Student attitudes to Top Notch and MEL

Students in the questionnaire indicated that they preferred and enjoyed blended instruction compared to other instructional approaches they had experienced previously and preferred learning using MEL rather than the print workbook. Questionnaire data suggests:

- 93% (1484/1600) of students said they liked the combination of teacher instruction and independent MEL practice to learn English
- 80% (1243/1550) were more engaged in classes using Top Notch with MEL than in other classes without the package
- 73% (1128/1536) indicated they were more motivated by the classes using the package than by other classes
- 68% (1054/1539) appeared to enjoy the classes using the package more than others
- 66% (1014/1535) agreed/strongly agreed that they would rather complete exercises in MEL than in the print workbook

According to teacher interviewees, the students in the Colombian institutions are 'digital natives'. Teachers noted that it was important to be aware that the use of technology was second nature to students. They also noted that students, given the choice, always opted into MEL, as they saw how useful a tool it was.

The majority of students surveyed strongly agreed/agreed that their English would improve if they were to use MEL in class (66%, 1043/1592) or to use it more in class (70%, 1079/1546). 86% (1367/1594) strongly agreed/agreed that there would be improvements if they used it more at home too, which indicates that access may be an issue for many. However, the data on classroom use is skewed downwards by British College and, especially, CCA. At these institutions, between 38% and 53% of those surveyed disagreed/strongly disagreed that they should use MEL in class or use it more in class. This may be, in part, because of British College's practice of MEL being assigned by 'lab' teachers, which means it has far less to do with other Top Notch with MEL teaching in class. At CCA, MEL appears to be used in class more, but given the emphasis on portfolios for assessment, students may see less need to spend class time on using MEL.



Teacher attitudes towards Top Notch and MEL

Approximately half of teachers (28/53, 53%) across the institutions indicated that MEL was an integral part of their course. However, this is skewed by CCA, where only 48% viewed it as integral, compared with 3/5 British College teachers and 5/6 at Unimeta. This may be related to the fact that CCA prioritizes the use of portfolios for assessment (for more detail, see the implementation case studies below).

In interviews, teachers recognized the importance of technology in general in supporting student learning. Student questionnaire respondents (72%, 1110/1541) also reported that, overall, their teachers were in favor of MEL, with 86% (1378/1596) agreeing/strongly agreeing that their teacher had made MEL an integral part of their learning. Teacher questionnaire data also shows that self-reported use of digital tools by teachers is high: ActiveTeach is used almost every day by teachers and MEL is used at least once a week by 89% of teachers. 64% of teachers also indicated that they used MEL in class for at least an hour a week.



Implementation of Top Notch with MEL

British College

British College is a private language school whose main site is located in the north-west side of Medellín. Medellín is the second largest city in Colombia with approximately 3.5 million people. A second campus has recently opened in Bogotá. British College serves approximately 400 students and specializes in teaching English. The majority of its students are young adults studying for a degree, and adults taking courses after work. Some courses for children are also offered.

British College has been using Top Notch with MEL since July 2016 and employed 20 teachers at the time of the research, of whom 11 used Top Notch with MEL in their teaching. Top Notch with MEL is used at all levels, from Fundamentals to Top Notch 3. Courses last four months, although students can complete two months and decide to complete the remaining two months at a later stage.

Classes are mixed in British College, with students at different levels studying within the same class and teachers often allocated different classes to teach. Although some teachers find changing classes frequently and teaching mixed level classes stimulating, others find it a challenge, especially when it comes to tracking individual student progress.

Reasons for implementing Top Notch with MEL

Top Notch with MEL was chosen due to its focus on speaking. Teachers suggest that other skills, such as writing, listening and reading, tend to follow naturally as a result of students' willingness and ability to speak fluently. To support speaking and the development of other skills, the use of technology and MEL are seen as key in supporting learning, by providing further opportunities for students to immerse themselves in English and in the English culture, using real-life contexts.

Teaching and learning

Interviewees suggested that lessons followed the structure set out in the Students' Book. Due to time constraints, it was not always possible to cover all the content, so teachers had to make decisions about which parts to teach and which to miss out.

Top Notch materials seem to be the main resources used in classrooms, according to teachers. According to the student questionnaire, the Students' Book is mostly used (94% of students, 34/36). MEL is also used, according to 72% of students (26/36). It is required by four of the six teachers surveyed, and three out of five teachers see it as an integral part of their course.



Table B1: Students' report of materials used at British College, student survey

British College (36 students)		
	N	%
Top Notch Students' Book	34	94
Classroom audio program on english.com/topnotch3e	19	53
MEL	26	72
Workbook	7	19
Extra practice activities on english.com/topnotch3e	18	50
Top Notch Go app	5	14

ActiveTeach is used by most teachers interviewed. Four out of five teachers who responded to the questionnaire also indicated that they used ActiveTeach; all five indicated that they used it throughout the lesson. Three out of five teachers suggested they used it to prepare for classes. Two interviewees described regularly using ActiveTeach for the pronunciation and conversation models, games and extra activities.

The classroom audio program and extra practice activities on english.com are used by half or more of the student respondents to the questionnaire (53%, 19/36 and 50%, 18/36, respectively). The Top Notch Go app and the print workbook are used by the minority of students (14%, 5/36 and 19%, 7/36, respectively). Teacher responses to the survey suggest that the following are used in teaching in British College:

- Review of previous learning: In three-quarters of lessons, teachers seem to review homework from the Students' Book (75%, 3/4), the print workbook (67%, 2/3) or MEL activities (50%, 1/2).
- Introduction of new content: According to interviewees, the focus of learning content is mainly on new vocabulary, pronunciation, listening and grammar. In terms of the method of learning, all teachers reported using teacher demonstrations in three-quarters of lessons or more.
- Speaking practice: Spoken communication also appears to be prioritized: four out of five teachers reported that students spoke in English in almost every lesson, and the remaining teacher reported that students did so in roughly three-quarters of lessons.
- Practice using materials: All teachers have students use the Students' Book for practice in three-quarters or more of lessons. Fewer teachers answered about using MEL and the



workbook. MEL was used by one teacher in about three-quarters of lessons (but never by the other respondent). Two teachers used the print workbook in almost every lesson, but one never did. One interviewee also mentioned supplementing the Top Notch materials with activities (such as songs with missing lyrics for students to fill in) or quickly searching for videos on the internet that model what was being taught to use in demonstrations.

- Study skills: The majority of teachers (80%, 4/5) responded that they had students use language resources such as a dictionary in half of lessons or more.
- Application: Learning from the lesson may also be checked with tests or quizzes. All teachers responding to this questionnaire question used the Active Teach and their own developed tests or quizzes (both 4/4) and MEL (3/3) in half or more lessons. In some lessons, one teacher interviewed used the Students' Book instead as a check that all necessary material had been covered. Another used debates to assess mastery of concepts within the lessons, such as new grammar or pronunciation.
- In addition, the following were used by all or the majority of teachers in half of lessons or more: whole class discussion and guided writing (both 5/5); small group-work (4/4); pair-work (75%, 3/4) and individual work (60%, 3/5).

Assessment and MEL

Teachers decide on the assessment approach to be followed in their classes, so assessment practices vary. Most commonly, teachers seem to use a combination of assessments. Two teachers who answered this question used progress tests and written tests from the Top Notch materials, or based on unit, mid- and end-of-course tests on MEL and practice scores. Others used teacher observations using a checklist; writing exercises; records of oral practice in conversation tasks or extra-curricular clubs, and records of attendance.

One significant constraint on having a consistent approach to assessment appears to be that teachers and classes are often rotated, and so some teachers prefer to focus on in-lesson informal assessments, namely teachers' own quizzes. Another reason for the variety appears to be that students become familiar with the same format of tests available in Top Notch with MEL, according to one interviewee.

Table 13 gives an overview of the way MEL is used at British College.



Table B2: Assessment practices at British College

MEL use
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use: MEL is the main form of homework at British College, but this is administered by two 'lab teachers', not class teachers, which may in part be due to the fact that class teachers often rotate between groups. The result is somewhat reflected in the data: 72% of students surveyed use MEL and one lab teacher indicated that many students didn't currently take full advantage of the different MEL components, despite training. Nonetheless, four of the six teachers required its use and three out of five teachers surveyed also viewed MEL as an integral part of their course.• Type of assignments assigned: Teachers use MEL to support the development of all English skills, with a variety of activities encouraged, albeit not required. These include: games and pronunciation coach videos (both encouraged by 2/2), grammar exercises (required by two, encouraged by two); vocabulary exercises (required by one, encouraged by three); and vocabulary flashcards and grammar coach videos (both required by one and encouraged by two). It is worth noting that all teachers who responded to the questions encouraged students to use any of the named MEL functions, although not all answered the questions.• Number of assignments assigned: No clear indication of the number of assignments assigned was given.• Assignment completion timeframe: According to interviewees, students are assigned MEL activities in bulk, to give them flexibility over when they complete the activities. However, two teachers indicate that this practice may have a mixed impact on students, since those who use this opportunity to review lessons and tackle difficulties benefit more than those who 'cram' in the activities just before the end of the level. It was suggested that assigning one unit at a time may be more productive for students.• Number of attempts: No definitive answer emerged to the question of the number of attempts allowed. Only two teachers surveyed responded to this questionnaire question and both only encouraged, rather than required, students to make multiple attempts. On a related topic, as mentioned above, British College teachers want students to feel comfortable enough to make mistakes so that these can be corrected as part of the learning process.• Tests: The teachers who responded to the questionnaire made clear that testing was central to their courses. All teachers who responded to the questionnaire (3/3) indicated that the unit, mid-year and end-of-year tests on MEL were requirements.• Scoring/grading MEL practices: None of the available data made clear exactly how MEL grades were calculated.• Monitoring student progress: The two lab teachers who administer MEL assignments also check students' progress on tests and help to make decisions about whether students are ready to progress to the next level, based on whether they have completed sufficient practices and assignments. Completing the tests is not sufficient. Other teachers do not appear to use MEL themselves, either in class or to check progress. Additionally, the lab teacher is used to help administer progress reviews or tests at the end of a Top Notch with MEL unit. Students are encouraged to check their progress, but it is not required.• Feedback on MEL assignments: Ideally, students will sit with their teacher and review their progress routinely, focusing on areas to practise more. This is recorded on paper to refer too later, according to one instructor who was interviewed. However, this is limited by the constantly changing classes. Nonetheless, they try to do this and change their teaching style where they see students are struggling to grasp something.



Training and ongoing support for teachers

Of the four questionnaire respondents who mentioned training in interviews, two indicated that they had received training from a colleague and two that they had received no training but had learnt how to use MEL themselves. However, training seems to have been largely effective, as four out of the six respondents in the questionnaire indicated that the training has allowed them to use MEL effectively, four out of five that it was prompt and five out of six that they didn't need any further support following the training. Half of teachers (3/6) indicated that training included how MEL could support teaching and learning as well as technical issues, but all teachers agreed that training focused on the latter aspect.

Table B3: Teacher training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of training	N	%
A colleague from my institution trained me (only)	2	50%
I was not trained – I learned by myself	2	50%
TOTAL	4	100%

In terms of ongoing support, 2/5 had the support they needed from Pearson, and 4/6 received help from colleagues. The lab teacher interviewed was trained by their counterpart lab teacher (they work different shifts). After a basic introduction, most of the training was self-taught by exploring the platform. It appears that general training was offered by Pearson once a semester, but the teachers felt they needed it more often due to the high turnover of staff.

Training and ongoing support for students

Of the teachers surveyed, there appeared to be a variety of approaches to student training on MEL, with two of the four teachers suggesting they conducted an orientation or gave out handouts themselves and the other two suggesting that other teachers did so.

In their first sessions, one instructor gives students an overview of the British College system. The lab teacher also runs inductions, which include different types of exercises and how they are related to the book. This also covers how to find suitable activities to meet students' particular needs and how to answer correctly to meet the strict auto-marking criteria.



In addition to support by teachers in class, British College have lab teachers who are responsible for students taking exams. They also provide advice on various aspects of learning, both in terms of whether they should continue the course and also technical aspects of working with MEL.

Table B4: Student training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of student training on MEL	N	%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class (only)	1	25%
I give my students instructions through handouts (only)	1	25%
Another member of staff trains students on how to use MEL (only)	2	50%
TOTAL	4	100%

Corporación Universitaria del Meta (Unimeta)

Unimeta is a university located in Villavicencio, the capital of Meta Department. Villavicencio is a medium-sized city, two hours from the capital, Bogotá. The university has branches all over the country. The Languages Center (Centro de Idiomas) at Unimeta is responsible for offering English courses to students. There are 11 teachers, most of whom have a teaching degree. They have been using Top Notch with MEL since the second semester of 2016.

Courses at Unimeta currently last four months and students attend for four hours a week (two two-hour sessions), covering four topics. This equates to, in the 12 months to May 2017, 128 hours of contact time for students at each level. Students are mostly taking Top Notch with MEL courses to meet the university-wide requirement in terms of English ability. Without this, they are unable to graduate.

There are currently 346 students working on Level 1 Top Notch with MEL and 213 at Level 2. Four teachers currently deliver the courses at each level. Of the teachers surveyed, four out of six have at least six years' teaching experience, although all have less than a year's experience using Top Notch with MEL.

When students start, they have a supervised mock test devised by the department. Depending on the result, they either enter the Top Notch with MEL classes at A1 level, or are given tutorials until they are ready to join the classes.



Reasons for implementing Top Notch with MEL

Interviewees identified three key reasons for using Top Notch with MEL:

- **Alignment with national certification requirements:** The main reason for implementing Top Notch with MEL was to provide 'proof' that students were at the right level of English to be awarded a degree, particularly in speaking. Top Notch with MEL appeared to meet these requirements and MEL platform data provides the required evidence for this.
- **Standardization:** Choosing the package also meant a more didactic, dynamic focus to the classes. Previously, it appears that Unimeta was not using any particular scheme of work, and teachers relied on resources they could find on the internet. Top Notch with MEL provides more resources and support.
- **Innovation through the use of technology:** Top Notch's use of MEL is important in order to integrate technology with English teaching. This maximizes opportunities for learning and also prepares students for the future by familiarizing them with working online.

Readiness for implementation

As noted above, Unimeta has started using Top Notch with MEL only recently and a number of issues have limited the institution's ability to fully engage with the package. Internet access is limited, affecting use of the MEL platform. Not all classrooms have interactive facilities, and more interactive whiteboards or computers with speakers are also needed in classrooms to use ActiveTeach. Students at Unimeta were not originally assigned individual copies of the Students' Book. According to one teacher, receiving the book did not notably raise student satisfaction.

Teaching and learning

The Students' Book and MEL appear to be two core components used in Unimeta, according to the student questionnaire findings. While the teacher questionnaire data should be viewed with caution because of the small sample size, it confirms the student data in this respect: five out of six teachers consider Top Notch materials to be the main materials used in class and one teacher indicated that they were the only materials that they used.



Table B5: Students' report of materials used at Unimeta, student survey

Unimeta		
	N	%
Top Notch Students' Book	669	82
Classroom Audio Programme on english.com/topnotch3e	226	28
MEL	672	82
Workbook	223	27
Extra practice activities on english.com/topnotch3e	336	41
Top Notch Go app	111	14

The Students' Book forms the main syllabus for learning at Unimeta. The Students' Book is used by 82% (669/818) of students, although only one teacher out of five surveyed indicated that they used it at least weekly. This is likely due to institutional issues affecting the timing of distribution of the texts to all classes. MEL is also used by 82% (672/818) of students and required by 100% (6/6) teachers, of whom five viewed it as an integral part of their course.

ActiveTeach is still used by many teachers to prepare for classes (four out of five teachers surveyed agreed/strongly agreed) and is used throughout the lesson by all teachers surveyed. However, four out of five disagreed/strongly disagreed that they were using it with an interactive whiteboard.

Interviewees described using it particularly for its multimedia resources: Top Notch TV, audios and dialogues. The only limitation they noted was having the necessary infrastructure to display and interact with it.

All other components are less commonly used, evidence suggests. They include:

- extra practice activities on english.com (used by 41% of students, 336/818; required by 1/5 teachers surveyed)
- classroom audio program on english.com (28% of students, 226/818; required by 1/5 teachers)
- print workbook (27%, 223/818, of students use this)
- Top Notch Go app (14%, 111/818, and required by no teachers)



Data suggests that a typical lesson at Unimeta involves:

- Opening/review: This may include welcome questions/greetings, sharing the lesson objectives, a warm-up discussion on a topic of students' choice such as current affairs, reviewing previous lesson content and/or following a suggested starter from the Teachers' Book. Questionnaire data indicates that, in at least half of lessons, teachers also review homework from the Students' Book or workbook (3/6), or, less frequently, from MEL (2/6). Teacher interview data supports this.
- Introduction and practice/production of new content: Teacher demonstrations and explanations were used with some frequency. Four out of five teachers surveyed reported using them in at least half of lessons, in broad agreement with interviewees. Practice activities vary and often follow those presented in the Students' Book, including vocabulary, conversation, grammar and pronunciation. In terms of the approach used, five out of six teachers surveyed use individual work in half the lessons or more. Four out of six use pair-work, two out of six small group-work and one out of five whole-class discussion in roughly half of the lessons or more. Three out of six teachers get the students to work with the teacher in guided writing lessons in half the lessons or more, but only two out of six teachers surveyed have students speak in English this frequently.
- Materials used for practice work: The majority of teachers surveyed indicated that learning may be applied via the exercises in the Students' Book, with all teachers using it in at least half of lessons. MEL or the print workbook may also be used to practice, with four out of six using each in at least half of lessons. Grammar may be particularly supported by working closely as a whole class on the explanation 'boxes' and grammar booster activities.
- Study skills: For the majority of teachers, most lessons do not include teaching students to use language resources provided by Top Notch with MEL; four out of five teachers surveyed did so in roughly a quarter of lessons or fewer.
- Review of learning: Reviews may use MEL quizzes (three out of six using these in half of lessons or more, although interviewees use them less frequently), or ActiveTeach or teacher-devised quizzes (both 2/6 in half of lessons or more). Reviews may be even more informal: interviewees described simply giving a conclusion, using Top Notch TV or using a few questions to check knowledge. However, three out of six teachers surveyed suggest that they never use ActiveTeach to review learning with students.

Additionally, a percentage of class time has to be given over to studying other strategies, including 'meum', which may cover general culture and Colombian history and can take the forms of discussion and debates, according to one teacher.



Assessment and MEL

The main goal of all students at Unimeta is to complete their national university test in English. This is set locally in Colombia. It consists mainly of grammar and has reading and writing elements, but no listening or speaking. However, Unimeta is moving towards its own competency-based assessment, including listening and speaking, and MEL will be key in providing evidence of student achievement in a variety of skill areas in support of this internal assessment.

Formal assessment

According to the co-ordinator, a student's final grade is comprised of:

- Term one
 - Written test (20%)
 - Speaking assessment (5%)
 - MEL assignments (5%)
- Term two
 - Written test (20%)
 - Speaking assessment (4%)
 - MEL assignments (3%)
 - Classroom assignments (3%)
- Final test (40%)

Written assessments draw on those in the Top Notch with MEL package, but tests are formatted in a way that reflects the priorities and style of questions in the national test, according to the co-ordinator. For example, the tests give more practice of inference questions with multiple choice options.

Currently, the department at Unimeta appears to be overhauling its language center's approach, with the aim of being able to certify students better through a competency-based framework. Tutorials will become compulsory in coming months and individual student profiles will be created, with ongoing notes made about student performance, rather than relying only on exams. Meanwhile, teachers continue to take a variety of approaches to assessment, according to interview data, which may be due to the early stage of implementation. For instance, one indicated that the contribution of MEL performance to the overall grade was up to individual teachers. Two teachers also suggested that spoken assessments, including the use of drama and reading aloud or even spoken communication in class, may also form considerable parts of the overall grade.

Informal assessment

In addition, one interviewee highlighted that teachers may use their own informal assessments, which may be diagnostic in nature (to inform future teaching) or as revision of content in a unit. MEL tests may be used to review a topic, and this performance is then compared with students' starting points, according to this teacher. However, it is unclear how widespread this practice is across the institution. Table B6 highlights the way MEL is used for assessment and other purposes.



Table B6: Assessment practices at Unimeta

MEL use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MEL currently forms a small part of students' formal overall grade, as well as providing opportunities for consolidation of learning through homework. It also appears that MEL is sometimes used in a form of blended learning, by asking students to complete one exercise on a subject in the preceding week, according to a teacher. MEL is rarely used in class due to limited internet access, although one teacher described taking students to a lab to complete tasks. Use: All teachers surveyed indicated that they required students to use MEL, and 83% (five out of six) suggested it was an integral part of their course. The official guidelines stipulate students should spend eight hours weekly on MEL, but four hours is the more realistic working expectation, with two hours a week on MEL in the computer lab and two hours at home. Type of MEL assignments assigned: Teachers are free to assign their choice of material from MEL. Material is usually closely related to the topics they are teaching that day/week. One teacher reported assigning the listening, writing, reading and grammar parts of MEL most often. Questionnaire results from teachers indicate that the majority of teachers (at least 3/5) require students to use pronunciation and grammar coach videos, vocabulary using the flashcards, vocabulary exercises, grammar exercises, and games such as Concentration or Quiz Show. Assignment completion timeframe: The completion timeframe wasn't made clear, although one teacher assigns tasks in a two-topic 'block' at the end of each week, with students given a week to complete exercises. Another assigns tasks as students come near to finishing a unit. Number of attempts: Interviewees suggested students were allowed three attempts on practice activities. However, only one out of five respondents indicated that they required students to repeat activities until they got the correct answer; the remaining teachers responded that they encouraged students to do so. Tests: Questionnaire results suggest that, though many teachers rely on tests, they are not consistently an integral part of the course. No teachers require unit tests, though four out of five encourage students to take them. Mid-course tests are required by three out of five, and end-of-course tests by two out of five, with another teacher encouraging their use. Student collaboration and validity of MEL performance: The data suggests that MEL data printouts from the gradebook are somewhat unreliable due to some students collaborating by sharing answers with peers. This was a common concern among teachers. As a result, teachers also use students' contributions in class as evidence of progress using MEL, according to the co-ordinator; if they are unable to answer questions about a new topic, it is clear that they have not actually grasped a concept and may not have completed the MEL activity themselves. Scoring/grading MEL practices: How MEL activities are graded is not made clear by the interviews. Furthermore, it is unclear how fixed a percentage MEL contributes to the overall grade: the co-ordinator gave one figure, but also suggested that this was flexible and up to teachers to decide. Monitoring of student use and progress: Monitoring whether students have used MEL happens at least weekly, with printing and checking of reports happening termly. Worth noting is that no teachers in the questionnaire reported requiring students to track their own progress, though four out of five encouraged students to do so. However, one teacher interviewed mainly uses MEL to calculate students' final grade or to gain an idea of what incoming students have achieved in the past, rather than regularly reviewing progress. Feedback on MEL assignments and remedial work: General feedback to students is based on the common error reports generated by MEL, according to one teacher, and whether students have used MEL that week, according to the co-ordinator. Another teacher is beginning to assign extra MEL tasks for those who are behind on their performance on the platform. More formally, a third teacher notes that students of concern are discussed with other staff members and these students may be offered optional tutorials where weaker topics are revised.

Training and ongoing support for teachers

Of the six teacher respondents to the questionnaire, four were trained by Pearson, sometimes in combination with help from colleagues or personal exploration. One suggested they had only had



training from a colleague, and another that they had just learned it themselves. Interviewees note that Pearson is supportive in initial training and is a source of ongoing support if necessary, but for the most part teachers learn by trying things out on MEL. One interviewee who missed out on this initial training was assisted by a co-ordinator, who showed them how to create classes, assign tasks and modify marks.

Table B7: Teacher training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of training	N	%
A Pearson representative trained me (only)	2	33%
A colleague responsible for MEL trained me (only)	1	17%
A colleague responsible for MEL AND a Pearson rep trained me	1	17%
I was given handouts AND a Pearson representative trained me	1	17%
I was not trained – I learned by myself	1	17%
TOTAL	6	100%

Only two questionnaire respondents answered further questions about their training. They were very positive about it, indicating that it was prompt and had been effective, which interview data confirms. The two questionnaire respondents indicated that training included aspects of teaching and learning as well as technical issues, although one interviewee suggested that it was more weighted to practical matters and that more pedagogical support would be desirable.

Regarding other aspects of the package, one interviewee did not receive any training in how to use Top Notch with MEL, so they felt frustrated that they were not using the package to its full potential.

More training by Pearson on practical issues, how Top Notch with MEL aligns with the Global Scale of English, and how it can be used to align to the university's curriculum would be appreciated, according to the co-ordinator.

Training and ongoing support for students

All teachers surveyed indicated that they conducted MEL orientations in class for their students, with one teacher also using handouts. Two of the six also suggest that other teachers are involved in training students.



Table B8: Student training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of student training on MEL	N	%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class (only)	4	66%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND other teachers from my institution train students	1	17%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND other teachers from my institution train students AND I give my students instructions through handouts	1	17%
TOTAL	6	100%

Centro Colombo Americano

Centro Colombo Americano (CCA) is a binational center dedicated to the teaching of English and located in Colombia's capital, Bogotá. It belongs to a network of nine binational centers around Colombia. It has been using Top Notch since 2006 and MEL since 2012.

CCA has 10,000 students and around 300 teaching and administrative employees. Student ages vary, from teenagers to young and older adults. The majority of students, however, are aged between 16 and 25.

In June 2017, there were 1,073 students, of whom 642 students were enrolled in Top Notch 2 and 431 in Top Notch 3. In terms of teachers, 63 delivered Top Notch with MEL, of whom 40 taught Top Notch 2 and 23 Top Notch 3. According to questionnaire data, teachers were experienced, with 32 out of 42 having at least six years' teaching experience and 31 out of 41 having at least three years' experience using MEL.

Students study at CCA for various reasons, including to achieve B2+ level in English so they can graduate from university; to find a job or seek a promotion, or to communicate with others overseas. A very small group of students, usually older adults, learn English as a hobby.

CCA runs monthly courses. Students attend five days a week for about two hours a day, a total of about 35 hours during their one-month course. Classes are held throughout the day, as early as 6am and as late as 9pm. Class sizes vary between 10 and 21 students.



Reasons for implementing Top Notch with MEL

Interviewees identified three key reasons for using Top Notch with MEL.

- Focus on communication and Top Notch with MEL's real-life scenarios: Students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. To support speaking fluency, students have to apply the language in real-life scenarios, a need that Top Notch with MEL is seen to meet. The Students' Book in particular supports this, presenting the activities leading up to the main 'communicative event' (role play, debate and so on.) in a logical sequence.
- Innovation through the use of technology: Being innovative in its approach to teaching by harnessing technology is important to CCA.
- A range of materials with the potential to support different teachers' and students' needs: A key advantage of Top Notch with MEL is its range of materials, which offers teachers the flexibility to meet students' differing needs.

Readiness for implementation

An analysis of Top Notch with MEL's materials, especially relating to the learning objectives and the quantity and quality of activities, took place before the decision to purchase it. ActiveTeach is a key tool, as the required infrastructure was already installed in the classrooms.

Teaching and learning

Top Notch with MEL components are key parts of lessons at CCA. The syllabus follows the Students' Book, with mainly Top Notch materials used for the delivery of lessons (86%, 36/42, of teachers chose this option, with the remaining six teachers, 14%, indicating that it was a supplement).



Table B9: Students' report of materials used at CCA, student survey

CCA (814 students)		
	N	%
Top Notch Students' Book	758	93
Classroom audio program on english.com/topnotch3e	462	57
MEL	759	93
Workbook	317	39
Extra practice activities on english.com/topnotch3e	388	48
Top Notch Go app	262	32

93% (758/814) of students reported that they used the Students' Book. MEL is required by 90% (38/42) of teachers surveyed, with 93% of students surveyed (759/814) indicating that they used it. However, only 48% (20/42) of teachers view it as an integral part of the course.

87% of teachers (33/38) indicated that they used ActiveTeach throughout their lessons and 73% (29/40) to plan lessons. Data indicates variation in the use of ActiveTeach tools. One teacher indicated they used it mostly to display conversation transcripts only, while another used an array, including the grammar and pronunciation boosters and videos, the learning strategies, the extra activities file and the audio scripts. Due to the widespread use of ActiveTeach, the Teachers' Book is hardly used.

The classroom audio program on english.com is used by over half of students (57%, 462/814) but is only required by 17%, (6/35) of teachers.



The other components are less regularly used:

- extra practice activities on english.com (used by 48%, 388/814, of students and only required by 19%, 7/37, of teachers)
- print workbook (used by 39%, 317/814, of students surveyed)
- Top Notch Go app (used by 32%, 262/814, of students and required by only 6%, 2/35, of teachers surveyed).

Project-based learning is an important part of CCA's curriculum. Project outputs alternate between written tasks, such as an article, and videos or audio files produced by students, and are linked to the topics in the book.

In addition to project-based learning and assessment, three more features characterise teaching and learning at CCA. According to the co-ordinator, a lot of emphasis is on language learning strategy training, whereby skills are drawn out and applied from the materials, rather than just the content of the lessons. Emphasis is also placed on supporting students' communicative skills, particularly in class – 39/40 teachers in the questionnaire indicate that students speak in English in about three-quarters of lessons or more. This is linked to the last emphasis, which is on students becoming 'the main actor' in their learning, whereby teachers take a less prominent role and expectation is placed on students to prepare for lessons, including doing preparatory tasks, some of them on MEL. The co-ordinator explains that this is how CCA is beginning to move towards a 'flipped' classroom model.

A typical lesson at CCA, evidence suggests, involves:

- Opening/review: Going over preparatory tasks that students have been asked to complete in advance, such as the meaning of new vocabulary, in a form of flipped learning. In at least half of lessons, the majority of teachers also review homework from the Students' Book (24/37), or, less frequently, from MEL or the printed workbook (both 9/37).
- Introduction and practice of new content: The main content of the lesson then follows the order of activities in the Students' Book, with some activities skipped or replaced at times. This involves a combination of teacher demonstration (66%, 25/38 teachers do so in half or more of lessons), whole class discussion (93%, 37/40), small group-work (92%, 36/39), guided writing (72%, 28/39), pair work and individual work (both 70%, 28/40).
- Materials used for practice work: Learning may be applied in the exercises in the Students' Book, with 87% of teachers (33/38) using it in at least half of lessons. MEL may be used also to practise (76%, 29/38 using it in at least half of lessons). The print workbook was used to practise by 50% (18/36) in at least half of lessons.



- Study skills: CCA emphasizes reflection on language learning strategies, and 59% (23/39) of teachers indicate that students use language resources, such as a dictionary, in at least half of lessons.
- Review of learning: Learning may or may not be reviewed during a lesson, with a minority of teachers in half or more lessons using their own developed tests or quizzes (43%, 17/40), MEL (33%, 13/40) or ActiveTeach (16%, 6/37).
- Production/application: Lessons finish with a 'communicative event'. These are tasks which may involve role plays or debates, for example, which aim to apply all the aspects studied in that lesson.

It is worth noting that around 50% of lessons may be spent on project work in parallel to the Top Notch materials, with the content from Top Notch with MEL stimulating the next phase of a project, before returning to new learning in the package. This project work forms the core of students' portfolios, which evidence their learning during their course. It is these portfolios which ultimately form the basis for assessment and decisions about students' readiness to progress to the next level, in discussion with the students themselves.

Assessment and MEL

Formal assessment

As noted above, the main form of formal assessment at CCA is a student portfolio of work, which comprises students' project work, presentations and evidence from teacher observations. However, peer, group and self-assessments conducted during class may also be included. Written tests are rarely used.

At CCA, there are no percentages attached to each individual aspect of the portfolio. Instead, rubrics with descriptors related to key indicators of achievement at each level are used. The areas covered in the rubrics are:

- language – covering pronunciation and grammar accuracy (teacher observations)
- attitude – towards learning and aspects such as cooperation, participation, punctuality, attendance (teacher observations; eight hours' total absence is allowed during the course)
- project work – outcomes and processes used to complete them
- learning – how students are able to apply strategies to master new content (observations)

These rubrics are then used to highlight what students can do, creating an 'exit profile'. This is regularly used to share feedback with students and highlight what they need to improve on, in a form of action plan. Students may contest final decisions about whether they can progress to the next level, if they can point to evidence in their portfolio which suggests otherwise. However, it is a struggle for some students to accept these decisions, especially when they complete all the mandatory tasks. What usually lets these students down is understanding that their ability to communicate, particularly in



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speaking, is not yet sufficient for them to master the level they are in. Teacher trainers are also involved in moderating this process. Decisions about who passes or fails are not usually made by an individual teacher, but in discussion with colleagues and the trainers.

Informal assessment

Assessment which does not contribute to the portfolio includes:

- an array of assessments based on the Top Notch materials during lessons, such as ActiveTeach quizzes or teachers' own quizzes
- MEL performance – assignment completion and performance and tests may be used by around 50% of teachers as an indication of how students are progressing

Table B10 gives a summary of the assessment model used in CCA as well as details on how MEL is used.



Table B10: Assessment practices at CCA

MEL use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although MEL is mandatory, it appears that it isn't a deciding factor in judging how students are progressing. It is viewed as the main form of homework for students, rather than assessment, although around half of teachers may use it for informal assessment purposes. Use: 93% (759/814) of students use MEL and 90% (38/42) of teachers suggest that students are required to use MEL. However, fewer than half (48%, 20/42) say it is an integral part of their course, unsurprising given the emphasis on portfolios. MEL is used in class at least in a quarter of lessons by a majority of those surveyed. Type of assignments: Teachers mainly encourage, but do not require, students to use the assignments in MEL, according to the questionnaire results. The most prominent types of assignments in MEL required for the course were grammar exercises (67%, or 26/39) and vocabulary exercises (57%, or 24/42). For both of these exercises, all the remaining teachers reported encouraging students to do them. Only about a third of teachers reported requiring pronunciation coach videos (33%, or 13/39), grammar coach videos (32%, or 13/40), and vocabulary using the flashcards (32%, or 13/40), with over half of teachers encouraging students to use them. Playing a game was used relatively rarely as only 8% of teachers (3/37) required it, though a sizeable portion, 54% (20/37), encouraged it. Writing and speaking components in MEL are not as often used: one teacher notes that students practise these skills a lot in class. Number of assignments: MEL is the main form of homework at CCA, and students are expected to spend five to six hours weekly using the platform. Assignment completion timeframe: Teachers are free to assign different activities from all or none of the units. In practice, many units are left open-ended, according to the co-ordinator, in order to give students flexibility, given that many have jobs or other study commitments. Number of assignment attempts: Attempts on assignments are unlimited. Scoring/grading MEL practices: Students must complete MEL activities as their performance counts towards their assessment, with the co-ordinator specifying that 70% of tasks assigned should be covered with scores of 70%. Tests: These are used by around half of teachers, according to the co-ordinator. Questionnaire results confirm this and reveal that their use varies notably according to the type. 55% (21/38) of teachers indicate that unit tests are required for the course. However, only 16% (6/38) and 8% (3/37) of teachers require mid-course tests and end-of-course tests respectively, although they are encouraged by 68% (26/38) and 57% (21/37) respectively. Monitoring student and teacher use: Teachers are not mandated to check MEL, and some admit they haven't done so yet. However, the co-ordinator does conduct spot checks on individual students and feeds back to teachers if some are not completing their tasks. Nonetheless, a majority of teachers (63%, 26/41) indicate that they require students to track their own progress on MEL. Feedback on MEL assignments: Interviewees indicate that they regularly give feedback about MEL achievement when discussing progress with students and setting action plans. One teacher schedules feedback slots about every five days, when students are free to talk one-to-one with them about their progress while other students continue learning in class. Remedial work and individualization: As part of the review of students' portfolios, MEL assignments may be recommended to improve performance. For example, one teacher links the grammar activities on ActiveTeach/the Students' Book to relevant MEL activities as a form of action plan, so students can tackle grammar aspects they are having difficulty with.



Training and ongoing support for teachers

When MEL was first introduced in 2012, Pearson conducted some highly structured training in-house, which was recorded and used to train teachers later. This was followed by updated training for a newer version, according to one teacher.

Of the teachers surveyed, more than a third (36%, 13/36) indicated they had been trained by a Pearson rep, but the main way in which teachers appeared to be trained was by another, non-specialist colleague (50% 18/36). A minority were trained by a specialist computer lab teacher (11%, 4/36). Many teachers had a combination of training from different people.

22% (8/36) indicated that they had not received any training and had learned to use MEL by themselves or by using links provided. This fits with the teacher interview evidence, where interviewees described directing their own training. For example, one teacher spoke of the expectation that teachers should use their own time to train themselves and described doing just that to become familiar with ActiveTeach. This teacher highlights that they prepared presentations on learning strategies training, which is a particular emphasis at CCA, focusing on how to encourage students to use different language learning strategies. ActiveTeach materials are particularly useful for running this training. Another teacher recalled how the main lesson of their initial training appeared to be that the package had many resources for teachers to use flexibly and, therefore, the implicit message was they should take responsibility for their own ongoing learning and planning for use in class.

65% (26/40) of respondents indicated that the training had allowed them to use MEL effectively but 53% (20/38) indicated that they still needed further support after their training. However, just over half (56%, 22/39) suggested that it was conducted in time before they had to use MEL in their courses. 53% of teachers (20/38) indicated that training included how MEL could support teaching and learning as well as technical issues and 61% (23/38) that the training focused more on the latter.

When it comes to familiarizing new teachers with the platforms, the training seems to be systematic. New teachers appear to be taught about all the different platforms (including MEL and ActiveTeach) by a supervisor.



Table B11: Teacher training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of training	N	%
A Pearson representative trained me (only)	4	11%
A colleague responsible for MEL trained me (only)	1	3%
A colleague responsible for MEL AND a Pearson rep trained me	1	3%
Another colleague trained me (only)	12	33%
Another colleague AND a Pearson rep trained me	4	11%
A colleague responsible for MEL AND another colleague trained me	1	3%
A colleague responsible for MEL AND another colleague AND a Pearson rep trained me	1	3%
I was given handouts AND a Pearson representative trained me	1	3%
I was given handouts AND a colleague AND a Pearson representative trained me	2	6%
I don't remember	1	3%
I was not trained – I learned by myself	8	22%
TOTAL	36	100%

** NB Six responses were invalid and removed as the teachers indicated they were both trained AND the option that they were not trained, which is contradictory.*

After initial training, ongoing support may be obtained from other teaching colleagues, particularly while in the school's computer lab. Even though only 21% (8/38) of those surveyed suggested that, when they needed support, a Pearson representative helped them and less than half (49%, 19/39) that a colleague helped them, interviews indicated that they got the attention they needed to deal with ongoing issues. According to the co-ordinator, ongoing issues with MEL are dealt with through emails sent to Pearson to ask for support. These are usually turned around extremely quickly and, during one problematic phase of slow connectivity, the school was sent paper workbooks to use for a while.



Training and ongoing support for students

63% (25/40) of CCA teachers surveyed indicated that they conducted MEL orientations for students in class, which interviews confirmed. 18% (7/40) suggest that other members of staff run training instead of, or in addition to, class orientation, but 15% (6/40) suggested that their students only learnt to use MEL by themselves.

One teacher outlined how the training focuses particularly on:

- how to complete activities and navigate the platform
- how to read instructions carefully
- how to obtain vocabulary from the reading exercises
- how to get the best out of the listening tools



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Table B12: Student training on MEL, teacher questionnaire

Type of student training on MEL	N	%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class (only)	25	62.5%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND a dedicated MEL person trains students	1	2.5%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND a dedicated MEL person trains students AND I send them to a lab for further explanation	1	2.5%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND I send them to a lab for further explanation	1	2.5%
I conduct a MEL orientation in class AND other teachers train them	3	7.5%
Other teachers train students (only)	1	2.5%
I give my students instructions through handouts	1	2.5%
I ask Pearson to train my students	1	2.5%
I do not introduce students to MEL - they learn it themselves (only)	6	15%
TOTAL	40	100%

**NB Two responses were removed as they were contradictory (for example, conducting orientation AND not training)*



Student and teacher use of MEL

The use of MEL by teachers and students can be used to make inferences about instructor and student access, experience and engagement. In addition, patterns of use and the reasons given for using MEL provide a more nuanced portrait of how learners and instructors are enacting blended instruction. The following section gives a descriptive analysis of usage data collected through a questionnaire and extracted from the MEL platform for 727 students.

Analysis of usage data focuses on the reasons for using MEL; students' time spent on assignments/practices; student and teacher frequency of using the gradebook; the number of practices/assignments assigned and completed, and the number of attempts on assignments/practices.

Reasons for using MEL

The main reason for using MEL is to complete assigned work (90%, 1463/1637, rows 1–3 in Table B13). Just above a third (33%, 543/1637) of students reported also using MEL to prepare for class or to do additional practice.

Table B13: Students' main reason for using MEL, student questionnaire

Reason for using MEL	N	%
Complete work that has been assigned by my teacher (exercises, assessments, etc.)	920	56%
Complete work that has been assigned by my teacher, plus extra practice (from the same lesson) my teacher didn't assign	155	10%
Complete work that has been assigned by my teacher, plus extra practice (in a future lesson) my teacher didn't assign	388	24%
Do additional practice to develop my skills in listening	71	4%
Do additional practice to develop my skills in reading	18	1%
Do additional practice to develop my skills in speaking	20	1%
Do additional practice to develop my skills in writing	39	2%
I have not used MEL	6	1%
Other (answer not provided)	20	1%
Total	1637	100%



Student weekly use of MEL

71% of the student questionnaire respondents indicated that they used MEL once or twice a week; 22% used it between three and five times a week, and 5% used it more than five times a week. 2% indicated that they did not use it at all.

Table B14: Students' self-reported weekly frequency of using MEL

	Never	1–2 times a week	3–5 times a week	More than 5 times a week	Total student number
% of questionnaire respondents	35 2%	1153 71%	370 22%	77 5%	1670 100%

The largest proportion of the students (28%, 456/1635) report spending one to two hours a week on MEL and 35% (576/1635) report spending at least two hours a week on MEL. There are, however, some differences between the three institutions. At Unimeta, 29 students suggested that they did not use MEL, whereas no student from British College and only three from CCA indicated this. More students at CCA (9%, 76/805) reported using MEL for more than four hours weekly compared to 2% of students at Unimeta (14/802) and one student at British College.

Table B15: Students' self-reported time spent on MEL weekly, survey data

Hours spent on MEL weekly by students	30 minutes	1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4+ hours	Never	Total student number
British College	18% 6	3% 1	39% 13	21% 7	18% 6	3% 1	0% 0	34
Unimeta	24% 193	30% 239	26% 210	11% 85	4% 35	2% 14	3% 29	802
CCA	6% 44	12% 94	29% 233	25% 201	19% 151	9% 76	0% 3	805
Total % of questionnaire respondents	15% 243	20% 334	28% 456	18% 293	12% 192	5% 91	2% 32	1641



On average, students at the different institutions appear to spend less than six hours using the platform on assignments/practices for the duration of the course (see Table B16).

Table B16: Average time in hours spent on assignments and practices per level, per institution, MEL data

Unimeta	
Fundamentals	4.53
Level 1	4.65
CCA	
Fundamentals	1.83 for Split A and 3.42 for Split B
Top Notch 2	3.88
Top Notch 3	5.18

However, there is a substantial variation in the average number of hours spent by students per class within the same institution. At Unimeta, the average time spent per class for the Fundamentals level (both Split A and Split B) was between 1.6 hours and 6.4 hours (13 classes). At CCA, for Level 2, the average time spent per class ranged between 2.1 and 6.8 hours (nine classes), and for Level 3, between 4.8 and 7.7 hours (seven classes). When separating students into quartiles, we observe substantial differences in time-on-task between institutions during their one-month courses (see Tables B17 and B18).

Table B17: Time-on-task by students per quartile, MEL data

Least engaged	Less engaged	Engaged	Most engaged
1st quartile	2nd quartile	3rd quartile	4th quartile
Less than 0.8	0.8 to 2.0	2.0 to 4.4	More than 4.4



Table B18: CCA: Time-on-task by students per quartile, MEL data

Least engaged	Less engaged	Engaged	Most engaged
1st quartile	2nd quartile	3rd quartile	4th quartile
Less than 2.8	2.8 to 4.0	4.0 to 6.0	More than 6

How often students and teachers check the gradebook

The gradebook feature is designed to help students self-assess, an important practice for improving one's learning and one that, for some learners, can also be motivating. The gradebook also allows teachers to track student progress and personalize learning, which can lead to better learner outcomes. Both the above are known in the literature and are also stated in the qualitative data by students and teachers.

Students' use of the gradebook was variable. Around one-third of students (35%, 568/1615) reported that they checked the gradebook once or twice a week and a further 11% (170/1615) reported that they checked it more frequently. However, more than a quarter of students reported that they didn't check their progress in the gradebook. It is worth noting that roughly a quarter of students (27%, 436/1615) across all institutions indicated that they didn't use the gradebook: nearly a third of CCA students (31%, 239/779) and 24% (193/802) of Unimeta students said that they didn't check their gradebooks at all, in contrast to 12% from British College.

Teachers appear to use the gradebook more consistently, with 71% (36/51) checking it once or twice a week, and 18% (9/51) checking it more frequently. Only one teacher indicated that they didn't use the gradebook at all.



Table B19: Student and teacher weekly frequency of checking progress using MEL's gradebook per institution, student and teacher survey data

Weekly frequency of checking progress using MEL's gradebook*								
	Every day	1–2 times a week	3–5 times a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	3+ times during the course	Never	Total student number
Student questionnaire respondents								
British College	2 (6%)	11 (32%)	5 (15%)	6 (18%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	4 (12%)	34 (100%)
Unimeta	21 (3%)	278 (35%)	51 (6%)	92 (11%)	102 (13%)	65 (8%)	193 (24%)	802 (100%)
CCA	23 (3%)	279 (36%)	68 (9%)	87 (11%)	63 (8%)	20 (3%)	239 (31%)	779 (100%)
Total	46 (3%)	568 (35%)	124 (8%)	185 (11%)	168 (10%)	88 (5%)	436 (27%)	1615 (100%)
Teacher questionnaire respondents								
Total	2 (4%)	36 (71%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	51 (100%)

Number of assignments/practices assigned

Assignments and practice completions varied substantially between institutions and levels. For example, assignments at Unimeta ranged between 17 and 75 (per level) and at CCA between 0 and 15 (per level).

There was a large variation between the number of assignments per class; for example, at Unimeta, some classes were assigned fewer than 10 assignments and other classes were set up to 100 assignments.



Table B20: Average number of assignments and practices per course level and class at Institutions 2 and 3, MEL data

	Average number of assignments set	Number of classes
Unimeta*		
Level 1, Split A	17	5
Level 1, Split B	47	6
Level 2, Split A	70	***
Level 3, Split A	75	2
CCA		
Level 2	15**	9
Level 3	0	7

*At Unimeta there was a large variability between the number of tasks assigned per class (some teachers had assigned no tasks per class whereas others had assigned up to 100 tasks).

** This is the mean number of assignments over all students. The students of seven of the nine classes were assigned none or only one or two assignments. The students of the remaining two classes were, on average, assigned 60 tasks each.

***No information available for the number of classes at this level.

Number of assignments/practices completed

Overall assignment completion rates are relatively low across levels: between 0% and 46% of the total number of assignments assigned across all levels. The completion rate at Unimeta ranged between 16% and 37% for different levels, whereas, at CCA, it ranged between 0% and 46% for different levels.

There was some small variability in practices assigned to students within institutions. Practices available to students ranged between 129 and 153 at Unimeta and between 266 and 283 at CCA. Practice completions rates are very low: between 1% and 15% of the total practices assigned across all levels. The completion rate at Unimeta was between 1% and 7%, and slightly higher at CCA, where it ranged from 11% to 15%. Data from tests assigned have not been included since, generally, the teachers avoided assigning any tests to students. In the rare cases where tests were assigned (up to three tests), the students often completed only some of them. Overall, there is too little information from tests, and it is not useful for further analysis.



Table B21: Assignments/practices and tests assigned and average number completed, MEL data

Class	Assignments		Practices		Tests	
	Assigned	Completed	Assigned	Completed	Assigned	Completed
Unimeta						
Level 1 (split A)	17	6 (35%)	153	3 (2%)	-	-
Level 1 (Split B)	47	10 (21%)	146*	10 (7%)	-	-
Level 2 (Split A)	70	11 (16%)	162	7 (5%)	-	-
Level 3 (Split A)	75	28 (37%)	129	2 (1%)	-	-
Institution 3						
Level 2	15**	7 (46%)	283	31 (11%)	Note +	-
Level 3	0	0	266	39 (15%)	Note ++	-

Note:

+ Only the students of one out of nine classes were assigned tests (1-3 tests) and of these, very few tests were completed.

++ Only the students of one out of seven classes were assigned tests (1-2 tests) and of these, very few tests were completed.

At Unimeta, teachers did not assign tests (in two classes, there was one test assigned per student, but this may have been done by accident).

* This is the mean number of assignments (there were different numbers of assignments per student ranging from 2 to 104).

** This is the mean number of assignments over all students. The students of seven of the nine classes were assigned none or only one or two assignments. The students of the remaining two classes were, on average, assigned 60 tasks each.

*** At Unimeta, there was a large variability between the number of tasks assigned per class (some teachers had assigned no tasks, whereas others teacher had assigned up to 100 tasks).

Number of attempts on assignments/practices

Although students have an unlimited number of attempts to complete assignments/practices, on average, for the whole sample of students irrespective of institution or level, the majority of assignments are attempted once (56%, 2978/5292), especially at Unimeta Level 1 (Split A) (81%, 543/669). Most of the remaining assignments were attempted twice (30%, 1589/5292). The remainder were attempted more than twice.

Table B22: Percentage of number of attempts on assignments per level per institution, MEL data

Level	Number of attempts				
	1	2	3	4	5+
Unimeta					
Level 1 (split A)	81% (543)	19% (126)	-	-	-
Level 1 (Split B)	55% (1156)	30% (630)	13% (269)	1% (27)	2% (40)
Level 2 (Split A)	38% (103)	39% (107)	18% (50)	5% (13)	-
Level 3 (Split A)	52% (521)	27% (275)	16% (160)	3% (30)	2% (17)
CCA					
Level 2	53% (655)	36% (451)	7% (84)	3% (34)	1% (1)

For the whole sample of students, irrespective of institute or level, the largest proportion of practices are attempted once (43%, 6061/14150), and 30% (4295/14150) are completed in two attempts. 27% (3794/14150) are attempted more than twice.

Table B23: Percentage of number of attempts on practices per level per institution, MEL data

Level	Number of attempts				
	1	2	3	4	5+
Unimeta					
Level 1 (split A)	57% (220)	27% (104)	9% (33)	4% (17)	4% (14)
Level 1 (Split B)	47% (1014)	31% (673)	10% (222)	5% (111)	6% (127)
Level 2 (Split A)	27% (49)	33% (59)	20% (35)	7% (13)	13% (23)
Level 3 (Split A)	29% (19)	28% (18)	28% (18)	12% (8)	2% (2)
CCA					
Level 2	45% (2619)	32% (1828)	13% (751)	5% (279)	5% (291)
Level 3	38% (2140)	29% (1613)	20% (1099)	7% (385)	7% (366)

Note: For some student groups, such as Level 2 and 3 at Unimeta, the available data are limited and thus less reliable. The percentages presented in the table above have been rounded.



Student performance on MEL

Student progress on assignments provides an indicator of student learning and achievement over time. Performance on MEL assignments is the only source of student performance data that we have from these institutions. In this section, we describe average student performance by institution and assignment type. We are also able to investigate the relationship between completion of assignments and performance (i.e. scores) on those assignments. Finally, we offer evidence that individual assignment scores are relatively reliable indicators of student learning that can be confidently used by instructors to monitor progress over time.

Overall student performance on MEL assignments/practices

Overall, students achieved a high performance on assignments/practices, as is shown by the average scores. Everything above 70% in this report is considered a pass.

- Unimeta: There was a substantial variability between levels in average assignment scores, which ranged from 68% to 87%. There was also substantial variability between classes within levels in terms of practices. For example, for 13 Level 1 classes (both Split A and Split B), the average score ranged between 68% and 97% per class. There was less variability between classes for Level 2, which had only three classes, where the average score ranged between 76% and 85%. For practices, there was small variability between levels in students' average scores – which ranged from 77% to 85% – but substantial variability between classes within levels. For example, for eight Level 1 Split B classes, the average per class assignment score ranged from 54% to 85%. For Level 1 Split A, there was a smaller variability: for five classes, the average performance on assignments ranged from 61%-72%.
- CCA: There was almost no variability between levels in average practice scores, which were 94% at Level 2 and 95% at Level 3. Small variability between classes was noted. For nine CCA Level 2 classes, the average practice score ranged between 87% and 97% per class, whereas the average practice score ranged between 92% and 98% for seven Level 3 classes.

Table B24: Average assignment/practice score per level, MEL data

Average performance on tasks		
	Average assignment score	Average practice score
Unimeta		
Level 1 (split A)	68%	80%
Level 1 (Split B)	76%	85%
Level 2 (Split A)	78%	85%
Level 3 (Split A)	87%	77%
CCA		
Level 2	91%	94%
Level 3	-	95%

Reporting the learners' performance by score band is important in order to inspect the number of learners who fail (below 50%) or get the top grade (above 90%).

- Unimeta: Around one third (27%, 86/323) of students received a mean score of 90% or more for assignments and 36% (69/190) for practices. Overall, there is a relatively sizeable number of students who receive an average score less than 50: 11% (35/323) for assignments and 16% (31/190) for practices.
- CCA: 66% (27/41) of students received an average assignment grade higher than 90%, and the corresponding percentage for practices was 77% (235/307). Only 3 out of 307 (1%) students received an average practice score below 50%, and none received an average score below 70% for assignments.



Table B25: Percentage of students achieving within different score bands in MEL assignments/practices, MEL data

Performance band	% of students (zeros were removed from scores)			
	Assignments		Practices	
	Unimeta	CCA	Unimeta	CCA
Below 50%	11% (35)	-	16% (31)	1% (3)
50% - 59%	7% (24)	-	10% (18)	2% (5)
60% - 69%	14% (46)	-	13% (25)	3% (9)
70% - 79%	20% (63)	10% (4)	11% (21)	3% (8)
80% - 89%	21% (69)	24% (10)	14% (26)	15% (47)
90% - 100%	27% (86)	66% (27)	36% (69)	77% (235)
Total	323	41	190	307

Note: See the appendices for scores if zeros remained in the analysis. The percentages presented in the table above have been rounded.

Student progress on assignments/practices

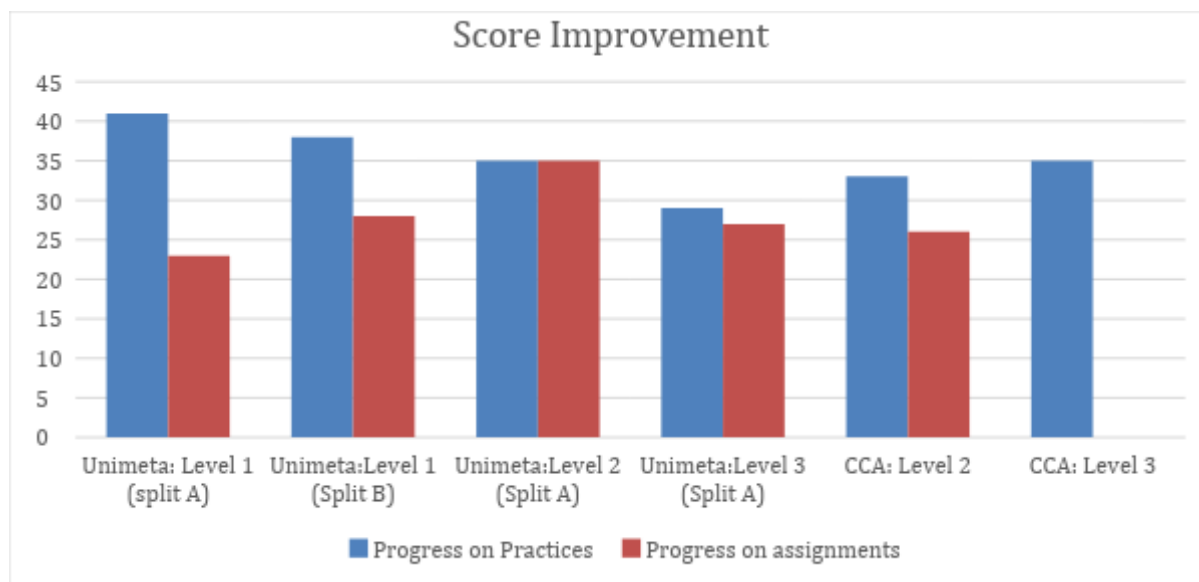
Progress from students' first to highest attempt shows substantial improvements in performance:

- Unimeta: Improvement on practices was 33 percentage points for Level 2 and 35 percentage points for Level 3. For assignments, the average improvement for Level 2 was 26 percentage points. For practices, the average improvement ranged between 29 to 35 percentage points (nine classes) for Level 2 and between 30 to 40 percentage points (seven classes) for Level 3. For assignments, one class had an average improvement of 24 and one had an average improvement of 27 (Level 2).



- CCA: Improvement on practices ranges from 29 to 41 percentage points for different levels. Improvement on assignments ranges from 23 to 35 percentage points.¹⁴ There was some variability (and in some cases substantial) between the average improvement for different classes within levels. For practices, the average improvement ranged between 28 to 58 percentage points (five classes) for Level 1 Split A and between 32 to 47 percentage points (eight classes) for Level 1 Split B. For assignments, the average improvement ranged between 15 and 33 percentage points (five classes) for Level 1 Split A and between 22 and 35 percentage points (seven classes) for Level 1, Split B.

Figure B1: Average student progress between first and highest attempts by level, MEL data



Correlation between students' average assignment/practice scores and percentage of assignments/practices completed

Overall, data indicate that, with some exceptions, completing a higher number of assignments is associated with higher scores. In seven out of eleven cases (see Table B26), there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the average assignment score and the percentage of assignments completed.

¹⁴ Improvements on assignments were calculated for Level 2 only. It was not possible to estimate progress on assignments for Level 3 due to the small numbers, as the average number of assignments given was less than one.



- Unimeta: Four out of eight correlations were statistically significant. The significant correlations ranged from 0.34 to 0.71 (Pearson correlations). Three out of four correlations for assignments were statistically significant, but only one out of four for practices was statistically significant.¹⁵
- CCA: All correlations were statistically significant. They ranged from 0.36 to 0.55 (Pearson correlations).¹⁶

Table B26: Correlations between the percentage of assignments completed and average assignment score, MEL data

	Assignments		Practices	
	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho	Pearson's r	Spearman's rho
Unimeta				
Level 1 (split A)	r=0.43, p<0.001	rho=0.40, p<0.001	r=0.25, p=0.112	rho=0.22, p=0.167
Level 1 (Split B)	r=0.37, p<0.001	rho=0.28, p<0.001	r=0.34, p<0.001	rho=0.29, p=0.001
Level 2 (Split A)	r=0.30, p=0.227	rho=0.06, p=0.812	r=-0.06, p=0.863	rho=0.02, p=0.942
Level 3 (Split A)	r=0.71, p<0.001	rho=0.70, p<0.001	r=0.32, p=0.243	rho=0.43, p=0.108
CCA				
Level 2	r=0.55, p<0.001	rho=0.57, p<0.001	r=0.36, p<0.001	rho=0.38, p<0.001
Level 3	-	-	r=0.39, p<0.001	rho=0.47, p<0.001

¹⁵ Some of the correlations that were not statistically significant were based on a very small number of cases (for example, the correlation for Unimeta Level 2 Split A for assignments was based on only 16 cases; the correlation for Unimeta Level 3 for practices was based on only 15 cases). The small number of cases may have made it more difficult for some correlations to reach statistical significance. In other cases, where the correlation is not statistically significant, there were significantly different correlations between classes within level. For example, for practices, for Level 1 Split A, one class had a very high and statistically significant correlation (r=0.76) and four classes had non-significant correlations.

¹⁶ Both Pearson's and Spearman's correlations were computed to accommodate for the skewed distributions of the data. Removing a limited number of outliers does not change the values of the correlations significantly.



Correlation between the average assignment score per unit

Assignments are relatively reliable indicators of students' performance. For each student, the average assignment/practice score was computed for all the exercises of each unit. These average practice/assignment scores for each student and for each unit were then correlated between them, in the same way one may correlate the items of a test. So, the average performance of learners on assignments of one unit could be used as an indicator of their future performance in another unit.¹⁷ Results show:

- Unimeta: The correlations for assignments mainly range between -0.02 (1st quartile) and 0.67 (3rd quartile), with a mean of 0.33 (6 out of 12 correlations, a percentage of 50%, were statistically significant at the 0.05 level).
- CCA: For assignments, only three correlations were estimated, and had values between 0.27 and 0.33 (only the latter was statistically significant at the 0.05 level).

Table B27: Correlations between the average scores per unit for assignments, MEL data

	Assignments	
	Unimeta	CCA
Average correlation	0.33	
1 st quartile	-0.02*	r= 0.27, 0.30, 0.33
3 rd quartile	0.67	

¹⁷ For Unimeta, when assignments attempted more than once were allowed in the analysis (to increase the sample size), the number of estimated correlations increases to 21 and the 1st quartile increases to 0.16, the mean remains 0.33 and the 3rd quartile 0.51. This is an indication that the correlations presented here are probably conservative and illustrate a worst-case scenario, due to the small sample sizes involved.



Student and teacher perceptions of Top Notch with MEL

This section presents evidence from student and teacher questionnaires and staff interviews on the perceived impact of Top Notch with MEL that maps directly to the learner outcomes of Top Notch with MEL — namely access, engagement, positive learning behaviours, achievement, preparation for the next level in learning and achieving one's goal.

The section considers Top Notch as a whole package and each of its major components individually, outlining their perceived impact on students first and then on teachers, where relevant. Tables B28 to B33 set out student and teacher perceptions of the impact of the Top Notch package and of the Students' Book, ActiveTeach and MEL.

Before presenting Tables B28 to B33, we summarize some institutional factors noted in the data that have affected implementation. These factors relate to infrastructure, training, and teaching and learning.

Infrastructure

Lack of availability in one institution in particular, such as lack of equipment to display multimedia resources and project material or internet connection in classrooms, means that teachers and students cannot take full advantage of all the materials offered through Top Notch with MEL. Some teachers use their institution's computer lab for lessons so that students complete MEL activities there.

Training

Some teachers would welcome further training to increase their familiarity with and use of MEL.

Student training could be further enhanced to raise awareness of the variety of tools available and explain their value and how they could be used, given that many students do not currently take full advantage of the different MEL components.

Teaching and learning

Teachers suggested that students' tendency to rely on the direction of their teacher was a barrier to learning using MEL. Having to complete homework requires students to learn more independently.



Table B28: Top Notch with MEL — perceived impact on student outcomes, across data sources

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Access and experiences	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top Notch is highly accessible for students: 86% to 97% of students find the Students' Book up-to-date, relatable, relevant, interesting and at the right level of difficulty. 85% (1385/1625) to 88% (1431/1623) said they could access and navigate MEL and individual assignments easily on a computer. 87% (1339/1542) of student respondents surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that it was easy to access the english.com/tonotch3e website and 68% (925/1367) the Top Notch Go app. The large majority of students surveyed rated their likeliness to recommend Top Notch as 7/10 or higher (71%) and the NPS score is +8, with the overall mean likelihood of recommending Top Notch of 7.2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Positive learning behaviors/engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in the questionnaire agree/strongly agree that, since using Top Notch with MEL, their confidence has increased in learning English 86% (1345/1556) of students and 73% (37/51) of teachers; reading (87%, 1361/1558); listening (84%, 1303/1555); writing (85%, 1316/1553), and speaking (77%, 1192/1559). Students also believe that it helps them very significantly/significantly to enjoy learning English (81%, 1268/1559); improve their confidence in learning English (83%, 1293/1558); improve their motivation to learn English (79%, 1214/1540), and engage with learning English (83%, 1290/1558). Teachers surveyed reported that Top Notch with MEL very significantly/significantly helped them to achieve their goals for their students to enjoy learning English (50%, 25/50); engage them with interesting content (56%, 27/48); improve their motivation to learn English (57%, 28/49), and increase their confidence in reading (74%, 37/50), listening (72%, 36/50) and speaking and writing (both 51%, 26/51). Students appear to be more responsible for their learning, which teachers attribute to making decisions about which resources to use out of the range of materials available, and being able to track their progress and take appropriate next steps for their learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further customizing materials for young adults would be useful, data suggests. The addition of professional and technical language related to particular areas of study would be useful for university students. A wider range of tests (in terms of format) would be beneficial in reducing students' familiarity with the tests currently available, one teacher suggested.
Achievement	



Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers across the institutions praised the alignment of the different components for learning, which support reinforcing the learning from one to another. This also supports progression. The emphasis on conversations in Top Notch with MEL supports students' communicative skills. Data from the student questionnaire suggest 79% of students (1231/1557) report that Top Notch with MEL very significantly/ significantly supports them to improve their English; 88% their grammar (1364/1553) and vocabulary skills (1364/1554); 84% their writing (1312/1556) and listening skills (1312/1558), and 77% (1200/1555) their speaking skills. The majority of teachers suggested that Top Notch with MEL very significantly/significantly helped students to progress according to their aptitude (70%, 35/50) and as appropriate for their age and/or level (64%, 32/50). Students surveyed also find the following supporting materials useful or very useful to their learning: extra practice activities on english.com (82%, 1221/1498); classroom audio programme on english.com (85%, 1277/1511); and Top Notch Go app (71%, 962/1356). Vocabulary development is particularly well supported, according to British College teachers. Students have been noticeably improving their spoken English as they apply the vocabulary and sentence structure learnt in conversations in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials to support institutions with student training could enhance students' use of Top Notch, as well as further support the communication of consistent messages to all students across institutions, e.g. students were not uniformly aware of the english.com and Top Notch Go app.
Progression	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85% (1313/1549) of students agreed or strongly agreed that Top Notch with MEL prepared them for the next level of English study. 84% (1306/1549) also agreed or strongly agreed that Top Notch with MEL prepared them to achieve their goal (e.g. get a job, complete a university course, study abroad). Top Notch with MEL's appropriate progression is attributed to its well-set progressive structure of objectives, which is accompanied with content aligned to progression. Top Notch with MEL allows teachers to track progress across levels more easily, according to one institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing more exam practice and more exam-like questions could be considered – a third of teachers surveyed (16/48) appear to find the package useful/very useful in this regard. Explaining the reasons for, or eliminating the overlapping content between, the end of Fundamentals and the beginning of Top Notch 1 could be considered, as some teachers suggested that learning the same content could be demotivating for some students.



Table B29: Top Notch with MEL: perceived impact on teachers and the institution, across data sources

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Teachers' access and experience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers interviewed found the package easy to access. This is because it was well structured, making it easy to use; materials were up-to-date; videos were at an appropriate level with a pace that was easy to access, and there was a good correspondence between the teaching materials and the Students' Book. Teacher feedback in interviews about using the package was largely positive, for example, about how it was enjoyable to use and included a variety of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the questionnaire, most teachers (62%, 31/50) rated their likelihood of recommending the package as 7/10 or above, with a mean score of 6.8 out of 10. The mean score at two of the three institutions was 8 and 8.4, however their sample sizes were smaller in comparison to one institution, where the majority of teachers scored it on average as 6.5/10. Therefore, the NPS of -14 is skewed heavily by one institution, as 24% (12/50) chose options 9 or 10/10, 38% (19/50) 7 or 8/10 but 34% (17/50) gave a score of 6 or below.
Teachers' positive learning behaviors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers report that Top Notch with MEL significantly/very significantly supports their confidence in teaching English (56%, 27/48). 62% (28/45) of teachers suggested that Top Notch with MEL significantly/very significantly increased the confidence of teachers new to the profession. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing further training on how to teach with Top Notch and MEL has the potential to support the 44% of teachers (21/48) who suggested that the package increased their confidence to teach English little/not at all. Further investigation on teaching with Top Notch with MEL for teachers new to the profession, as well as a focus on how best to support training for new teachers, seems to be needed. 38% (17/45) of teachers in the survey believe that Top Notch helps little/not at all to increase confidence in teaching English for teachers new to the profession.
Teaching	



Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top Notch with MEL appears to significantly/very significantly support teachers to fill classroom hours with work-related activities (86%, 31/36); motivate students with meaningful activities (57%, 28/49); assess student performance effectively (81%, 38/47); plan effectively (66%, 33/50), and save on preparation time (51%, 24/47). • The longer dialogues included in the new Students' Book better support teachers in building activities and tasks around them. The optional activities are also popular, according to the CCA co-ordinator. • Interviewees from one institution highlight that the huge range of flexible resources supports each part of the syllabus, which teachers can pick and choose from and adapt according to student needs. • Teachers interviewed at two of the institutions indicated that they assigned extra tasks or created action plans using MEL for students who were falling behind in class or needed to revise weaker areas. • Teachers at one institution used the Top Notch package to develop written assessments that incorporated the style and priorities of the national English test that students are required to take at the end of their courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training could focus further on providing a more holistic and deeper understanding of how implementation of Top Notch with MEL could be achieved for better outcomes. This is supported by evidence that 63% of teachers (30/48) indicated that Top Notch with MEL helped them only a little/not at all to understand the pedagogy required. • Further materials provided by Top Notch to support differentiation was something that teachers would appreciate. Data showed that 51% (23/45) of teachers indicated that the package helped them differentiate teaching little/not at all. • Additional guidance and training on how implementation and use of Top Notch with MEL could be optimized to save time for teachers would be welcomed, data suggests. 49% (23/47) of teachers indicated that it helped them only little/not at all to save on preparation time. • Further customization of the materials for young adults in Colombia could be reviewed to reduce teacher workload even more. • Including materials or topics to support the delivery of student projects would be welcomed, one institution suggested. • Guidance and training could include how MEL could be used consistently to assess individual students' progress where classes are frequently rotated, teachers at one of the institutions suggested. Such guidance has the potential to increase the use of MEL and reduce in-lesson informal assessments, which are currently more prominent, these teachers told us.
Impact across the institution/English department	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers indicated that Top Notch with MEL had the following impact across their institution. It very significantly/significantly encouraged consistency in teaching across the department (73%; 32/44); supported improvements in teaching English across the department (66%; 29/44); encouraged more collaboration between teachers (61%; 26/43), and increased conversations about teaching English (58%; 25/43). • Top Notch with MEL allows teachers to track progress across levels more easily, according to one institution, which in turn encourages further 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A



Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
standardization in the way that tracking is conducted by different teachers.	



The Students' Book

Table B30: Students' Book perceived impact on students, across data sources

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Access and experience/engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The large majority of students and teachers agreed/strongly agreed that the Students' Book is:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ up-to-date (students 97%, 1580/1633)◦ at the right level of difficulty (students 95%, 1555/1634; teachers 75%, 40/53)◦ interesting (students 90%, 1467/1631; teachers 70%, 38/54)◦ relevant to students' culture despite not having originated from Colombia (students 89%, 1442/1623; teachers 70%, 37/53)◦ relevant to real life (students 86%, 1378/1607; teachers 83%, 43/52)• Interview data also confirm and expand on the above survey data, that students felt they could relate to the up-to-date content in the Students' Book. Other features contributing to its accessibility include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ clear structure and simple-to-access content◦ activities and lessons well sequenced◦ a good variety of activities◦ culturally relevant, up-to-date topics for older learners, with plenty of real-life scenarios◦ the book helps students immerse themselves in American culture through real-life images and idiomatic expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further customized materials could help students to access content more easily, particularly young adults who might not have direct experience of topics such as professional careers, hotels or car types.• The currency of the Top Notch songs could be reviewed, teachers suggested.
Achievement	



Evidence of impact and enablers

- According to teachers, a number of features support the development of students' English skills, including:
 - the effective blending of practice of different skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking)
 - content to support students' speaking skills and related activities that helps them apply these appropriately
 - rich grammar and vocabulary content, presented clearly and challenges students well
 - critical thinking is covered, especially in the reading exercises
- Differentiation is supported by the grammar booster, which offers opportunities for extension, according to teachers at two institutions. In one institution, some students also use the model conversations in the book to create their own dialogues.

Suggested improvements

- The type and variety of activities in Top Notch and MEL could be enriched to reduce repetition, according to several interviewees.

ActiveTeach

As the usage section demonstrates, ActiveTeach appears to be used in all three institutions to some degree. ActiveTeach's impact on students is positive. ActiveTeach supports student motivation, engages them and makes lessons enjoyable. Teachers say this is because of its interactive nature and the alternative it offers to using a book for learning. Students like the interactive activities and the use of pens and erase tools. They find it attractive that the book is projected. Also, its conversation activator videos seem to be effective, given that 83% (35/42) of teachers agree/strongly agree that they have improved their students' speaking skills.

The table here outlines the perceived impact of ActiveTeach on teachers.

Table B31: ActiveTeach: perceived impact on teachers, teachers survey and interview

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Access and experience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 66% of teachers (29/44) indicated that ActiveTeach is easy to access; 73% (32/44) that it is easy to download the content on it, and 85% (41/48) that it includes a good variety of support materials. In interviews, teachers noted that ActiveTeach was easy to navigate and provided instant access to a diverse array of content. Several interviewees noted that accessing a wide range of resources held in one place was helpful and reduced workload, as teachers no longer had to search for materials online or elsewhere and carry around TVs and video recorders, nor write as much on the board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Improving teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 91% (42/46) of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that using Active Teach in class had improved the quality of their lessons. The variety of materials has helped to diversify teaching approaches and support differentiation. Previously, colleagues tended to focus on planning grammar, but ActiveTeach has encouraged the planning of speaking, reading and listening more too, one teacher suggests. British College teachers praised the ability to zoom in and out and highlight texts. Answer keys (94%, 47/50); teacher resources (82%, 41/50); printable extension activities (78%, 36/46); unit tests (67%, 33/49), mid-term and final review tests (60%, 29/48); the lesson planner (50%, 24/48); learning objectives (63%, 31/49), and oral progress chart and methodology sections (both 57%, 27/47) were all considered to be useful/very useful. The last three are all skewed heavily by one institution, as at British College and Unimeta, all teachers surveyed found these very useful or useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further investigation into the use of the lesson planner, ensuring awareness of and emphasizing its usefulness for teaching and learning in training and teacher materials would be useful. 50% (24/48) of teachers find the lesson planner somewhat useful or not at all useful. Teacher training and materials could further focus on deepening understanding of the methodology section and highlighting its usefulness, given that 43% (20/47) of teachers found the methodology section to be only somewhat useful or not at all useful. Further investigation of the use of the methodology is needed. The currency and relevance of the Top Notch songs could be reviewed, according to 29% (14/48) of teachers who reported that the Top Notch pop songs as little/not at all useful.

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67% (29/43) of teachers strongly agree/agree that all the interactive whiteboard tools on ActiveTeach are useful. Very useful/useful materials identified by teachers include: audio and video scripts (94%, 46/49); Top Notch TV (76%, 38/50); interactive games (67%, 32/48), and the flashcard player app (66%, 31/47). 	

MyEnglishLab (MEL)

Table B32: MEL: perceived impact on students, across data sources

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Access and experiences	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students strongly agreed/agreed that they could access MEL easily on a computer (91%, 1474/1623) and smartphone/tablet (71%, 1118/1570); that it was easy to navigate (85%, 1385/1625) and easy to access assignments (88%, 1431/1623). 95% of students (1511/1597) find accessing MEL whenever/wherever they want useful/very useful. The large majority of students surveyed rated their likelihood of recommending Top Notch as 7/10 or higher (92%) with an overall NPS score of +5. 33% (274/838) of students rate their likelihood as 9 or 10/10 and a further 40% (332/838) as 7 or 8/10. Only 28% (232/838) gave a score of 6/10 or below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing the depth of the training content provided by Pearson would be beneficial to ensure students are familiar with all the different MEL components. One teacher indicated that many students didn't take full advantage of the different MEL components. Video tutorials on different functions of MEL for student use, and recommendations on which web browser is best to optimize MEL functionality, could further support institutions with training their students.
Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students strongly agreed/agreed that: MEL was engaging (77%, 1235/1598); they enjoyed learning by completing assignments (82%, 1296/1590), and there was a good variety of exercises and tests in MEL (85%, 1374/1625; 84%, 1365/1617) Switching to MEL motivated students to complete homework more frequently, as well as doing a greater amount than required, because they liked working online, according to one institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional activities to support critical thinking skills would further motivate students to learn English, teachers suggested.
Positive learning behaviours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MEL encourages students' independence and self-improvement according to teachers at two institutions. At one, co-ordinators point to the way in which students direct their own time and effort. At the other, this is particularly because students are involved in setting their own targets, for which they can identify MEL activities to meet their goals. Being able to record their voice on the MEL platform, rather than speaking to a person, builds student confidence, according to a teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student and teacher views on MEL's autoscoring system are relatively mixed. The autoscoring system could be reviewed based on customer concerns of its unnecessary strictness regarding punctuation and spelling. However, any review should also take into account that, for some teachers and students, having these strict rules is seen as helpful to learning English.

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Achievement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% (1485/1600) of students strongly agreed/agreed that using MEL helped them to understand content from class and 81% (1280/1579) that they used MEL to extend practice time until they completely understood class content. Teacher interview data also confirms how important this is, given the limited contact time with students. According to teachers, features supporting student achievement include: the close match of activities on MEL with those in the book; students controlling the pace, time and place of their learning, and the range and amount of material available. The large majority of students surveyed suggested that MEL supported all skills well, and found all the tools very useful or useful to their learning, including grammar exercises (97%, 1543/1597, of students); vocabulary exercises (95%, 1514/1596, students); grammar coach videos (94%, 1444/1542); pronunciation coach videos (93%, 1477/1592); writing exercises (92%, 1476/1597); unit tests (88%, 1385/1568); vocabulary flashcards (86%, 1357/1576); mid- and end-of-course tests (83%, 1304/1563), and concentration games or quizzes (82%, 1294/1571). The following are also found very useful/useful to learning by students: the ability to check answers immediately (93%, 1486/1605); repeating activities to improve grades (90%, 1429/1592); seeing grade summaries and being able to track progress (86%, 1363/1582); the feedback they get from MEL helps them understand how to improve their English (82%, (1315/1595); seeing assignment completion dates (78%, 1235/1584), and the ability to email teachers (60%, 932/1552). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following would be welcomed, data suggests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of an online community model where students can interact and support each other. One institution has already set this up outside MEL. Explicit preparatory exercises in MEL for each lesson to further support flipped learning. Randomizing different versions of the same exercises to further reduce the possibility of students collaborating on answers, according to two teachers.

Table B33: MEL: perceived impact on teachers, teacher survey and interviews

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
Access	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MEL is accessible for teachers, with the large majority strongly agreeing/agreeing that it is easy to access MEL from their computer (96%, 48/50) and their smartphone or tablet (76%, 32/42), and it is easy to navigate the content (90%, 44/49) and assign tasks (81%, 39/48). Teacher interview data also points to several interviewees finding the platform intuitive and easy to navigate. 84% (41/49) of teachers find accessing MEL whenever or wherever they want useful/very useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the questionnaire, most teachers (62%, 31/50) rated their likelihood of recommending the package as 7/10 or above, with a mean score of 6.8 out of 10. The mean score at two of the three institutions was 8 and 8.4, however their sample sizes were smaller in comparison to one institution where the majority of teachers scored it on average as 6.5/10. Therefore, the NPS of -14 is skewed heavily by one institution, as 24% (12/50) chose options 9 or 10/10, 38% (19/50) 7 or 8/10 but 34% (17/50) gave a score of 6 or below.
Teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just over half (51%, 24/47) of teachers find MEL very useful/useful in saving preparation time. They attributed this to the autoscoring system saving on marking and the easy assigning of practices due to their close links with class activities. There is evidence that MEL has enriched teaching practices and encourages innovative practices, such as the completion of assignments on a subject in the preceding week. One teacher reports using videos more often through MEL, as those on the CDs were more unreliable and took longer to load. MEL is used as remedial work in two institutions, with students assigned different tasks based on their performance. Teachers find the following very useful/useful: vocabulary exercises and flashcards (100%, 52/52); grammar exercises (98%, 51/52); grammar coach (94%, 47/50) and pronunciation coach (88%, 42/48) videos; writing exercises (74%, 37/50), and the concentration or quiz show games (73%, 33/45). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further support with the interoperability of MEL and different systems used in institutions would support teachers' teaching and workload.

Evidence of impact and enablers	Suggested improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview and questionnaire data reports many MEL features which support assessment, including: the ability to track progress – 92% (46/50) of teachers surveyed indicated that this was useful/ very useful; unit tests (84%, 41/49) and mid-/end-of course tests (75%, 36/48); asking students to repeat activities (73%, 36/49); setting completion dates (64%, 32/50); the variety of exercises (59%, 27/46) and tests (77%, 36/47). • 86% of teachers surveyed (42/49) suggested that the autograding feature significantly or very significantly supported their needs as teachers and, on interview, that it could lead to giving students more precise feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The benefits of using the email function in MEL to communicate with students online could be further highlighted in terms of supporting teaching and learning; 57% of teachers (27/48) find the ability to communicate with students online to be only somewhat or not at all useful, although one teacher noted how it helps to support struggling students more quickly. • Allowing administrators to have a view of teacher and student use across classes would help with monitoring and encouraging further use. Currently co-ordinators access each teacher class individually to extract this information, which adds to their workload, they suggested.
Impact across the institution/English department	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Unimeta, being able to show evidence of students' performance on MEL allows the department to provide external national moderators with tangible objective evidence of student achievement. • Unimeta is developing its own competency-based assessments for students. MEL will be used to provide evidence from a variety of skill areas of student achievement in support of this internal assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A

Appendix C: Additional data tables

Table C1: Percentage of students achieving within different score bands in MEL assignments/practices

Performance band	Assignments		Practices	
	Unimeta	CCA	Unimeta	CCA
Below 50%	72% (283)	21% (9)	16% (31)	1% (3)
50% - 59%	6% (23)	9% (4)	10% (18)	2% (5)
60% - 69%	6% (24)	12% (5)	13% (25)	3% (9)
70% - 79%	5% (21)	12% (5)	11% (21)	3% (8)
80% - 89%	5% (21)	12% (5)	14% (26)	15% (47)
90% - 100%	5% (19)	35% (15)	36% (69)	77% (235)
Total	391	43	190	307

Table C2: Progress on practices and assignments

	Progress on practices	Progress on assignments
Unimeta		
Level 1 (split A)	41 (46 → 87)	23 (58 → 81)
Level 1 (Split B)	38 (52 → 90)	28 (54 → 82)
Level 2 (Split A)	35 (51 → 86)	35 (50 → 85)
Level 3 (Split A)	29 (53 → 82)	27 (87 → 60)
CCA		
Level 2	33 (62 → 95)	26 (66 → 92)
Level 3	35 (59 → 94)	-