

# Evaluating Print and Digital Speaking Materials For Arab Learners of English as a Foreign Language: Teacher Perspectives From an Omani Foundation Programme

Othman Saleh Abdallah Alghafri

Preparatory Studies Centre, University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Al Mussanah

\*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800847>

Received: 05 September 2026; Accepted: 10 September 2026; Published: 18 September 2026

## ABSTRACT

This study evaluates how print and digital speaking materials support Arab learners of English as a foreign language in an Omani foundation programme. It focuses on Pathways 2: Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking and its former digital supplementary platform, MyELT. Although MyELT has since been retired and replaced by Spark, the findings remain relevant to wider discussions of digital English language teaching platforms, especially accessibility, feedback, interactivity, and teacher customisation. The study adopted a mixed-methods design combining criteria-based materials evaluation with questionnaire data from 50 English language teachers. The findings indicate that Pathways 2 provides varied communicative activities, including discussions, presentations, role-plays, and collaborative tasks. However, some activities were only partially aligned with learners' proficiency levels, local needs, and assessment expectations. MyELT provided useful multimedia support, but its value for speaking development was limited by technical problems, restricted customisation, weak feedback mechanisms, and limited collaborative speaking practice. The article argues that effective speaking materials require stronger localisation, clearer alignment with learning outcomes, accessible digital design, and more opportunities for meaningful interaction.

**Keywords:** Arab learners of English; coursebook evaluation; digital learning platforms; English as a foreign language; materials evaluation; Oman; speaking skills

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a central skill in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, participate in academic and professional contexts, and interact meaningfully with others. It is also one of the most demanding language skills because it requires learners to use grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, interactional competence, and pragmatic awareness simultaneously (Bygate, 1987; Goh, 2017; Thornbury, 2005). For Arab EFL learners, speaking can be particularly challenging due to linguistic differences between Arabic and English, limited opportunities for English use outside the classroom, and difficulties related to pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence (Abugohar & Yunus, 2018; Al-Seghayer, 2021). These challenges are especially important in foundation programmes, where students are expected to develop sufficient English proficiency before progressing to credit-bearing courses in fields such as Engineering, Business, and Information Technology.

In the Omani higher education context, English foundation programmes play a key role in preparing students for academic study. In one Omani foundation programme, students use commercial ELT materials to develop listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills. One such coursebook is Pathways 2: Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking, which is supported by digital supplementary materials (Chase & Johannsen, 2012). At the time of this study, the digital component was MyELT, National Geographic Learning's web-based learning management system. MyELT has since been retired, and many programmes have moved to Spark, which National Geographic Learning describes as an all-in-one platform for English language teaching and learning (National Geographic Learning, n.d.-a; National Geographic Learning, n.d.-b; National Geographic Learning/Cengage Asia, n.d.).

This change does not make the present study irrelevant. On the contrary, the retirement of MyELT highlights the importance of evaluating not only print coursebooks but also the digital platforms that accompany them. Digital supplements are often promoted as tools for extending learning beyond the classroom, supporting learner autonomy, and providing additional practice. However, if such platforms are technically unreliable, inaccessible, or pedagogically limited, they may fail to support speaking development effectively.

This study therefore evaluates the speaking activities in Pathways 2 and its former digital supplement, MyELT, in an Omani foundation programme. It examines the materials from two perspectives: first, through a criteria-based evaluation of the print and digital speaking activities; and second, through questionnaire data collected from 50 English language teachers who had experience using the materials.

The study is guided by three research objectives. First, it examines how effective the speaking activities in Pathways 2 are for Arab learners of English as a foreign language in an Omani foundation programme. Second, it investigates the extent to which MyELT complemented and reinforced the speaking activities in the coursebook at the time of use. Third, it considers how appropriate and challenging the print and digital speaking activities were for the target learner population.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to discussions of ELT materials evaluation, speaking-skill development, and the role of digital supplementary platforms in EFL contexts. It also offers practical implications for teachers, coursebook designers, and educational technology developers.

The study is relevant to TESOL practitioners because it examines how published materials function in actual programme conditions rather than only as designed products. In many English language programmes, teachers are expected to work with institutionally selected coursebooks and digital supplements, yet they still need to make decisions about adaptation, scaffolding, task selection, and learner support. By focusing on teacher perspectives alongside criteria-based materials evaluation, the study offers insight into the gap between intended material design and classroom usability. This is particularly important in foundation programme settings, where learners often need to develop academic English, confidence, fluency, and communicative competence within a limited period of study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Materials evaluation is an important process in English language teaching because coursebooks and supplementary resources often shape what happens in the classroom. ELT materials influence the topics learners discuss, the skills they practise, the kinds of interaction they experience, and the forms of language they are encouraged to use. Littlejohn (2022) argues that materials function as an interface between classroom participants and can influence classroom roles, learning opportunities, and pedagogical interaction. For this reason, materials should be evaluated not only in terms of their content but also in relation to learners' needs, proficiency levels, local context, and learning outcomes.

Materials evaluation is also important because the same coursebook can function differently across teaching contexts. A task that appears communicative in design may not necessarily generate meaningful communication in practice if learners lack the vocabulary, confidence, background knowledge, or interactional routines needed to complete it successfully. Similarly, an activity that appears suitable for one group of learners may require adaptation for another group because of differences in proficiency, class size, assessment expectations, or institutional time constraints. For this reason, materials evaluation should not be limited to a checklist of textbook features. It should also consider how teachers and learners experience the materials in use. This is particularly relevant in foundation programme contexts, where teachers often need to balance institutional syllabi, commercial coursebooks, assessment requirements, and learners' immediate academic needs.

In speaking instruction, effective materials should provide opportunities for meaningful communication, interaction, fluency development, accuracy practice, pronunciation support, and vocabulary expansion. Speaking activities such as discussions, role-plays, interviews, presentations, debates, and problem-solving tasks can help learners use language for communicative purposes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Thornbury, 2005).

However, such activities need to be appropriate to learners' proficiency levels and sufficiently supported through clear instructions, models, scaffolding, and feedback (Goh, 2017; Ur, 2012).

The quality of speaking activities therefore depends on more than the presence of oral tasks in a unit. Effective speaking materials should encourage learners to produce language for a meaningful purpose, listen and respond to others, and use language beyond controlled repetition. They should also provide different kinds of speaking opportunities, including short pair exchanges, group discussions, information-sharing tasks, prepared presentations, and problem-solving activities. This range matters because speaking development involves both interactional communication and more extended spoken production. In addition, learners need preparation before speaking and feedback after speaking. Without pre-task support, learners may struggle to participate; without feedback, they may repeat the same pronunciation, fluency, or accuracy problems without noticing them.

For Arab learners of English, speaking activities should also respond to specific linguistic and contextual needs. Learners may experience difficulty with pronunciation features that differ between Arabic and English, such as phonemes that do not exist in Arabic (Abugohar & Yunus, 2018). They may also have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which can affect fluency and confidence, and related research in Arab EFL contexts has identified anxiety, limited vocabulary, fear of mistakes, and scarce opportunities for practice as factors affecting speaking performance (Al-Seghayer, 2021; Alrasheedi, 2020). Therefore, speaking materials for Arab EFL learners should offer repeated opportunities for interaction, pronunciation development, and meaningful language use in contexts that learners find relevant and accessible.

In foundation programme settings, speaking activities need to prepare students for both general communication and academic tasks such as explaining ideas, presenting information, asking for clarification, expressing opinions, and participating in discussions. A balanced approach is needed: tasks should be challenging enough to develop communicative competence but not so demanding that learners avoid speaking or become dependent on teacher explanation.

The evaluation of speaking materials should consider several criteria. These include communicativeness, task authenticity, learner engagement, interaction and collaboration, alignment with learning objectives, cultural appropriateness, integration with other language skills, scaffolding, and clarity of instructions. Speaking materials should also support learners' development of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative confidence (Bygate, 1987; Nation & Newton, 2009; Thornbury, 2005). When digital supplementary materials are involved, additional criteria become important, including accessibility, technical reliability, learner autonomy, feedback mechanisms, interactivity, and teacher customisation.

Digital platforms can support speaking development by providing multimedia input, pronunciation practice, self-study opportunities, and out-of-class exposure to English. They may also reduce speaking anxiety by allowing learners to practise asynchronously, and research on mobile-supported speaking practice has shown potential benefits for EFL learners' motivation, attitudes, and oral performance (Albogami & Algethami, 2022). However, digital tools can only support learning effectively when they are technically reliable and pedagogically aligned with course objectives. A platform that lacks communicative tasks, peer interaction, recording functions, or useful feedback may offer limited support for speaking development. Feedback and self-assessment are particularly important because they help learners monitor their own speaking performance and identify areas for improvement (Babaii et al., 2015).

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

This study adopted a mixed-methods design combining criteria-based materials evaluation with teacher questionnaire data. The purpose of using both methods was to examine the speaking materials from more than one perspective. The criteria-based evaluation allowed the researcher to analyse the print and digital materials systematically, while the questionnaire gathered teacher perceptions based on classroom experience. This combination was appropriate because the study aimed not only to describe the materials but also to understand how teachers perceived their usefulness in an actual foundation programme context.

### **Participants and context**

The study was conducted in the English Language Centre of an Omani higher education institution. The target learners were foundation programme students enrolled in an English language course using Pathways 2:

Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking. The coursebook was supported at the time by MyELT, a digital platform that provided online activities and supplementary practice. Although MyELT has since been retired and replaced by Spark, it was the relevant platform during the period investigated in this study (National Geographic Learning, n.d.-a; National Geographic Learning, n.d.-b; National Geographic Learning/Cengage Asia, n.d.).

The participants were 50 English language teachers who had experience using Pathways 2 and MyELT with foundation programme learners. Their perspectives were considered valuable because they had direct experience implementing the materials in classroom conditions. Many participants had formal English language teaching qualifications and experience teaching large foundation programme classes. This context is important because speaking activities that appear communicative on the page may not work equally well with all learners. Teachers therefore provided insight into issues such as topic relevance, task difficulty, student engagement, assessment alignment, and the need for additional scaffolding.

## Materials evaluation

The first source of data was a criteria-based evaluation of the speaking activities in the coursebook and MyELT. The criteria were developed from literature on speaking instruction, materials evaluation, and digital language learning. The coursebook was evaluated in relation to communicative value, task effectiveness, authenticity, interaction and collaboration, variety and engagement, alignment with learning outcomes, cultural appropriateness, integration with other skills, scaffolding, and clarity of instructions. MyELT was evaluated in relation to technological integration, learner autonomy, feedback, accessibility, interactivity, customisation, and technical reliability.

The evaluation examined the distribution, nature, and pedagogical purpose of the speaking-related tasks. Activities were considered communicative when they required learners to exchange meaning, express opinions, negotiate ideas, ask and answer questions, present information, or interact with peers beyond controlled repetition. Activities were also examined in relation to local course learning outcomes, particularly outcomes connected to fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, presentation skills, small-group interaction, and the ability to communicate in social, academic, and work-related settings. This allowed the analysis to move beyond counting activities and instead consider whether the tasks were suitable for the learners and the institutional context.

## Questionnaire

The second source of data was a questionnaire completed by 50 English language teachers who had experience using Pathways 2 and MyELT. The questionnaire included demographic items, Likert-scale statements about the coursebook, Likert-scale statements about MyELT, and open-ended questions. The Likert-scale items asked teachers to evaluate issues such as relevance, alignment, challenge level, clarity of instructions, engagement, learner interaction, accessibility, feedback, and technical features. The open-ended questions invited teachers to comment on strengths, concerns, and the level of challenge in the materials.

The questionnaire was useful because teachers had direct experience implementing the materials with foundation programme learners. Their responses therefore provided insight into how the materials functioned in practice, not only how they appeared in the coursebook or platform. This distinction is important in materials evaluation because an activity may appear communicative or well designed on the page but may not work effectively in the classroom if the topic is unfamiliar, the instructions require too much explanation, the language demand is too high, or the task does not match assessment requirements.

## Data analysis

The quantitative questionnaire data were analysed descriptively through frequencies and mean scores. These descriptive statistics were used to identify general patterns in teacher perceptions of the coursebook and MyELT. The open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in teachers' comments. The criteria-based evaluation and teacher questionnaire data were then compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence. For example, the materials evaluation identified the number and type of speaking activities, while the questionnaire data showed whether teachers perceived those activities as relevant, appropriately challenging, clear, and useful for learners.

The analysis focused on identifying patterns rather than testing statistical relationships. This was appropriate because the purpose of the study was evaluative and exploratory. The mean scores helped indicate areas where teachers were generally positive, neutral, or critical, while the open-ended responses helped explain why teachers held particular views. For example, a moderate mean score for relevance or alignment was interpreted alongside teachers' written comments about topic familiarity, examination requirements, and learner proficiency. This combination allowed the findings to move beyond numerical description and provide a more context-sensitive account of how the materials functioned in practice.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's university. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Responses were treated anonymously and used only for research purposes.

## **RESULTS**

### **Evaluation of the Pathways 2 Speaking Activities**

The criteria-based evaluation showed that speaking practice in Pathways 2 is integrated across the units rather than limited to one isolated speaking page. Speaking tasks appear in opening discussions, vocabulary sections, listening and viewing tasks, and critical-thinking activities. Overall, 214 speaking-related activities were identified, of which 145, or 67.7%, were classified as communicative. These activities required learners to discuss ideas, exchange information, present opinions, ask and answer questions, collaborate with peers, and participate in interviews, presentations, role-plays, problem-solving activities, and debates.

Several strengths were identified. Many activities addressed academic and social topics such as health, culture, food, music, water, technology, and entrepreneurship. Speaking was also integrated with listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and viewing tasks. In addition, the coursebook provided scaffolding through sentence starters, models, visual prompts, staged activities, and teacher guidance. However, some topics appeared too academic, abstract, or distant from learners' everyday experiences. The coursebook also did not sufficiently address one local learning outcome: mastery of phonemes that are particularly problematic for Arabic speakers. Some tasks, such as debates and research-based presentations, were useful but demanding for learners with limited fluency, vocabulary, confidence, or background knowledge.

The evaluation also showed that the coursebook's treatment of speaking was strongest when tasks were connected to input that learners had already encountered. For example, speaking activities that followed listening, vocabulary, or viewing tasks gave learners some content and language resources to draw on. These tasks were more likely to support participation because learners were not expected to speak without preparation. In contrast, tasks that required learners to debate, research, or discuss unfamiliar concepts placed heavier demands on background knowledge and linguistic resources. This does not mean that such tasks were unsuitable, but it suggests that they required careful teacher mediation. Teachers needed to decide whether to simplify the task, provide additional input, pre-teach vocabulary, or adapt the speaking outcome to suit the learners' proficiency level.

### **Teacher perceptions of the coursebook**

Teacher responses generally supported the criteria-based evaluation. The mean score for meaningfulness and relevance was 3.02, while alignment with learning objectives scored 2.90 and alignment with learners' proficiency level scored 2.86. These results suggest that teachers saw value in the coursebook but also perceived a need for stronger alignment. Clarity of instructions received a higher mean score of 3.34, indicating that teachers generally found task directions understandable.

Teachers also raised concerns. Variety for different learning styles received a mean score of 2.88, and open-ended responses indicated that some topics were too academic, unrealistic, or outdated. Some teachers also felt that certain activities required considerable teacher explanation, increasing teacher talking time and reducing

student talking time. Views on challenge level differed: some teachers saw the activities as appropriately challenging, while others considered them too difficult or insufficiently engaging. A practical concern was that second-hand coursebooks sometimes contained previous students' answers, reducing the usefulness of some tasks.

These responses suggest that teachers viewed the coursebook as a useful but incomplete resource. The relatively positive score for clarity of instructions indicates that the problem was not simply that teachers could not understand the tasks. Rather, teachers appeared to be concerned with how well the tasks matched the realities of their learners and teaching conditions. In large classes, for example, tasks that require extended discussion or individual presentations may become difficult to manage without additional structure. Similarly, activities that assume high levels of background knowledge may need more preparation time than the syllabus allows. The teacher comments therefore point to the importance of adaptation, not rejection. The coursebook provided a foundation for speaking instruction, but teachers needed to modify tasks to improve relevance, accessibility, and participation.

### Evaluation of Myelt

At the time of the study, MyELT functioned as the digital supplement to Pathways 2. It provided multimedia input, online practice, recorded scripts, videos, and activities linked to the coursebook. In principle, these features could extend practice beyond the classroom. However, the evaluation showed that MyELT provided limited support for speaking as a communicative skill. Its activities were often individual and form-focused, with little opportunity for peer interaction, collaborative speaking, role-play, discussion, or presentation practice.

The most serious weaknesses were technical and pedagogical. The platform relied partly on Adobe Flash Player, which later became unsupported, making some activities inaccessible or obsolete. The recording function, which could have supported pronunciation practice and spoken feedback, often malfunctioned. MyELT also offered limited customisation for teachers, making it difficult to adapt activities to local needs, proficiency levels, or assessment requirements.

### Teacher Perceptions of Myelt

Teachers' responses towards MyELT were more critical than their responses towards the coursebook. Teacher customisation received the lowest mean score, 2.52. The absence of technical glitches scored 2.54, while accessibility scored 2.66. These results suggest that teachers did not view the platform as fully reliable or accessible. Teachers were somewhat more positive about clarity of instructions, which scored 3.10, and authentic language input, which scored 2.96.

**Table 1**

Selected teacher questionnaire findings

| Area              | Questionnaire item                                  | Mean score |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Meaningfulness and relevance of speaking activities | 3.02       |
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Alignment with learning objectives                  | 2.90       |
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Alignment with learners' proficiency level          | 2.86       |
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Variety for different learning styles               | 2.88       |
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Clarity of instructions                             | 3.34       |
| <b>Coursebook</b> | Challenge level                                     | 3.20       |
| <b>MyELT</b>      | Alignment with learners' proficiency level          | 2.84       |
| <b>MyELT</b>      | Engagement and language learning promotion          | 2.80       |

|              |                               |      |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------|
| <b>MyELT</b> | Accessibility to all learners | 2.66 |
| <b>MyELT</b> | Teacher customisation         | 2.52 |
| <b>MyELT</b> | Clarity of instructions       | 3.10 |
| <b>MyELT</b> | Authentic language input      | 2.96 |
| <b>MyELT</b> | Absence of technical glitches | 2.54 |

Open-ended responses confirmed these concerns. Nineteen teachers referred to technical problems or accessibility issues. Some described activities as unresponsive or barely functional, while others noted that the platform did not provide enough meaningful speaking practice. Overall, MyELT had some value as a multimedia supplement but did not function effectively as a speaking-development platform because its limitations were both technical and pedagogical.

The teacher responses indicate that digital materials should not be evaluated only by the presence of online content. MyELT contained audio, video, and practice activities, but teachers questioned whether these features translated into meaningful speaking development. The platform appeared more useful for exposure and individual practice than for interaction, collaboration, or spoken feedback. This distinction is important because a digital supplement may support listening, vocabulary, or comprehension practice while still offering limited support for oral communication. For speaking development, teachers appeared to expect tools that allow learners to record speech, receive feedback, interact with peers, and complete tasks that connect clearly with classroom speaking objectives.

## DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that Pathways 2 offers a stronger basis for speaking development than its digital supplement. The print coursebook contains a wide range of communicative speaking tasks, many of which encourage learners to exchange ideas, collaborate, and present information. This is important because speaking development requires repeated opportunities for meaningful interaction and purposeful use of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Thornbury, 2005). The coursebook's integration of speaking with listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and viewing also reflects a useful skills-integration approach.

However, the study also shows that the presence of many speaking activities does not automatically guarantee suitability for a particular learner group. In this context, some speaking tasks were perceived as insufficiently aligned with learners' proficiency levels, local needs, or assessment expectations. This finding highlights the importance of localisation in ELT materials. Commercial coursebooks may provide rich content, but teachers often need to adapt topics, instructions, and task demands to make them suitable for specific learners.

This finding is particularly important in programmes where teachers use the same textbook across multiple classes. Standardised materials can support consistency, but teachers' professional judgement remains essential in deciding which speaking tasks to use as written, modify, supplement, or replace.

The findings are especially relevant for Arab EFL learners in foundation programmes, who may need repeated support with pronunciation features that are difficult for Arabic speakers (Abugohar & Yunus, 2018). Although the coursebook supported fluency, interaction, and vocabulary development, teachers should supplement it with targeted pronunciation activities.

The findings also raise important questions about digital supplementary materials. MyELT was intended to support the coursebook, but it did not fully reinforce the communicative nature of the print materials because it offered fewer opportunities for interaction and spoken communication.

The retirement of MyELT and its replacement by Spark makes this issue even more significant. Since MyELT is no longer the current platform, the findings should not be interpreted simply as a judgement of one discontinued product. Rather, they point to broader principles for evaluating digital ELT platforms. A digital

platform that accompanies a speaking course should be accessible, technically reliable, interactive, customisable, and capable of supporting spoken feedback. National Geographic Learning now describes Spark as an all-in-one platform that includes tools for planning lessons, assigning practice and tests, tracking progress, and supporting teaching and learning (National Geographic Learning, n.d.-a). Future research should examine whether Spark addresses the limitations identified in relation to MyELT.

This point is relevant beyond the specific platform evaluated in the present study. Digital supplements are often adopted because they appear to offer flexibility, additional practice, and learner autonomy. However, for speaking instruction, flexibility alone is insufficient. Learners need opportunities to produce spoken language, compare their performance with models, receive feedback, and interact with others. Teachers also need the ability to adapt digital tasks to local course outcomes and learner needs. If a platform is technically available but pedagogically limited, it may add workload without substantially improving learning. Therefore, institutions should evaluate digital supplements not only before adoption but also during implementation, using teacher and learner feedback to identify whether the platform is supporting the intended skill outcomes.

The study has practical implications for teachers. Teachers should not rely on commercial materials without adaptation. Instead, they should select, modify, and supplement speaking activities according to learners' proficiency levels, interests, and local learning outcomes. In this study, teachers needed to compensate for gaps in pronunciation practice, mismatch with exam requirements, and the limited interactivity of the digital platform.

For TESOL practitioners, the findings suggest that materials evaluation should be understood as part of everyday teaching practice. Teachers do not simply deliver coursebook activities; they interpret, modify, sequence, and supplement them according to learner needs. In the present study, this included simplifying abstract topics, pre-teaching vocabulary, clarifying instructions, providing additional pronunciation support, and linking speaking tasks more explicitly to assessment requirements. Such work is particularly important in large foundation programme classes where learners may vary considerably in confidence, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and readiness to participate orally.

A further implication is that speaking materials should be evaluated as part of a wider ecology of teaching rather than as isolated textbook activities. In foundation programmes, speaking development is shaped by the interaction of coursebook tasks, teacher mediation, assessment expectations, digital tools, class size, learner confidence, and available classroom time. When one part of this ecology is weak, teachers often compensate through additional explanation, supplementary practice, or task redesign. This compensation is valuable, but it can also increase teacher workload if institutional support is limited. For this reason, programme-level materials review should not focus only on whether a coursebook is generally suitable. It should also ask what support teachers need in order to make the materials work effectively. This may include shared banks of adapted speaking tasks, pronunciation-focused supplements, clearer links between coursebook activities and assessment criteria, and guidance on how digital resources can be integrated into classroom practice.

The findings also suggest that institutions should provide teachers with space and support to adapt commercial materials. If teachers are expected to follow a coursebook closely, they may need supplementary resources, shared adaptation banks, pronunciation activities, speaking rubrics, and locally relevant speaking tasks. Professional development can also support teachers in deciding when to use coursebook tasks as written, when to simplify them, and when to replace them with more appropriate alternatives. In this sense, materials evaluation should not be treated only as a pre-use administrative decision, but as an ongoing professional process.

Finally, digital platforms should not simply transfer workbook-style activities into an online format. If they are intended to support speaking, they should include recording tools, feedback options, peer interaction, collaborative tasks, teacher customisation, and reliable technical design.

For TESOL programmes, the study also highlights the value of locally informed materials review. Commercial coursebooks and platforms can offer high-quality content, but they are not automatically aligned with every programme's learners, assessment system, or teaching conditions. Regular materials review can help programmes identify which activities work well, which require adaptation, and which need replacement. Such review should involve teachers because teachers observe how learners respond to tasks, where instructions break

down, and which topics generate meaningful communication. A collaborative review process can therefore support more principled materials use and reduce the gap between published materials and classroom needs.

## CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the speaking activities in Pathways 2 and its former digital supplement, MyELT, in an Omani foundation programme. Using criteria-based materials evaluation and questionnaire data from 50 English language teachers, the study found that the print coursebook offered useful opportunities for interaction, presentation, discussion, and skills integration. However, some activities required adaptation because they were not always fully aligned with learners' proficiency levels, local needs, or assessment expectations.

The digital supplement was less successful. Although MyELT provided multimedia input and some practice opportunities, its value for speaking development was limited by technical problems, weak interactivity, limited customisation, and insufficient feedback mechanisms. Since MyELT has now been retired and replaced by Spark, the findings should be understood as evidence of broader issues in digital ELT materials rather than as an evaluation of a current platform only.

The current study has some limitations. It relied on teacher perceptions and criteria-based materials evaluation rather than student perspectives or direct classroom observation. Including learners' views would provide a fuller understanding of how the speaking activities are experienced by the target population. Classroom observation would also help show how teachers and students interact with the materials during lessons. Future research should therefore include student perspectives, classroom observation, and comparison across different institutions or foundation programme contexts. The future research should incorporate student perspectives and classroom observations to provide a more holistic understanding of how speaking materials function in practice. Comparative studies involving multiple institutions or educational contexts would also help determine the broader applicability of the findings. In addition, future evaluations of digital language-learning platforms should investigate specific features such as feedback mechanisms, peer interaction tools, and pronunciation support. Longitudinal studies examining how newer platforms such as Spark address the limitations identified in MyELT would offer valuable insights for digital materials development and implementation.

The findings also indicate that digital supplements should be evaluated not only for the amount of content they provide but for the quality of interaction they enable. A platform may contain audio, video, and online exercises, but if it does not support recording, feedback, peer interaction, teacher adaptation, and reliable access, its value for speaking development remains limited. Future research should therefore examine whether newer platforms such as Spark address these issues in ways that are pedagogically meaningful for learners and teachers.

The study contributes to ELT materials evaluation by showing that speaking materials need to be judged in relation to local learner needs, not only general communicative principles. For Arab learners of English in foundation programmes, effective speaking materials should provide meaningful interaction, targeted pronunciation support, accessible digital practice, and flexible opportunities for teachers to adapt tasks to their students' needs.

## Declaration on the Use of AI-assisted Technologies

The author used Microsoft Copilot to support language editing, organisation, and readability during manuscript preparation. The author reviewed, revised, and approved all content and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

## REFERENCES

1. Abugohar, M. A., & Yunus, K. (2018). Difficulties encountered by Arab students in pronouncing English correctly. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 6(4), 93. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.6n.4p.93>

2. Albogami, A., & Algethami, G. (2022). Exploring the use of WhatsApp for teaching speaking to English language learners: A case study. *Arab World English Journal*, 2nd Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenges, 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.12>
3. Alrasheedi, S. (2020). Investigation of factors influencing speaking performance of Saudi EFL learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4), 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.5>
4. Al-Seghayer, K. (2021). Factors underlying current Saudi EFL teachers' approaches to teaching the four macro and micro language skills. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 11(5), 44. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v11n5p44>
5. Babaii, E., Taghaddomi, S., & Pashmforoosh, R. (2015). Speaking self-assessment: Mismatches between learners' and teachers' criteria. *Language Testing*, 33(3), 411–437. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532215590847>
6. Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking*. Oxford University Press.
7. Chase, B. T., & Johanssen, K. L. (2012). *Pathways 2: Listening, speaking, and critical thinking*. Heinle Cengage Learning.
8. Goh, C. C. (2017). Research into practice: Scaffolding learning processes to improve speaking performance. *Language Teaching*, 50(2), 247–260. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000483>
9. Littlejohn, A. (2022). The analysis and evaluation of language teaching materials. In J. Norton & H. Buchanan (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teaching* (pp. 263–276). Routledge.
10. National Geographic Learning. (n.d.-a). Spark: English language platform. <https://www.eltngl.com/spark>
11. National Geographic Learning. (n.d.-b). MyELT is retired. <https://myelt-ui.cengage.com/>
12. National Geographic Learning/Cengage Asia. (n.d.). Get Spark codes: Change from MyELT to Spark. <https://ngl.cengageasia.com/SparkCode/home/article?code=myelt>
13. Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. Routledge.
14. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
15. Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Longman.
16. Ur, P. (2012). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.