



Longman English Interactive Review*

Longman English Interactive (LEI) is a comprehensive software program that covers all skill areas while utilizing every possible computer-learning feature. Many ESL products like to call themselves interactive, however, LEI truly is interactive in that it offers students video watching and listening, the opportunity to record their voices in role-plays and record specific sounds, and also constant comprehension and vocabulary checks through a variety of computer exercises, including drop-down multiple choice, drag and drop, etc. There are four levels to the program, each of which, according to Longman, offers the student a minimum of 100 hours of instruction. In Levels 3 & 4, all exercises and activities revolve around the storyline: a drama about a newspaper reporter and a soccer star. The story is modern, interesting, and not overdone, the actors are real and realistic, and transcripts are available for each video clip. If you feel like you've just gotten information overload, I apologize; the software is as comprehensive and extensive as it is exciting.

LEI is presented to the students in seven well-organized sections, each of which has objectives listed within the program. There is also an online Scope and Sequence. In the Video Listening section, students are given a pre-listening question, and then watch a video clip, for which a transcript is available. After they watch it, they receive a set of comprehension questions and a set of main idea questions, which they can check at the end of each page. If the student answers a question incorrectly, he can click on the symbol at the end of the sentence and listen directly to the part that is relevant to the question. If the student answers incorrectly the second time, he is given the correct answer. The student then moves to the Vocabulary Section, where he is presented with words related to the video clip content. The words could be synonyms and/or antonyms of one key word in the clip, collocations, or other related words; for example, authentic, bogus, sincere, dishonest. The student never receives a list of unrelated words. The third section is the Speaking Section, where the student can perform two role-plays with characters from the story. The student can decide if he wants a controlled or free role-play, from reading the transcript to speaking on his own. In the Grammar Section, a structure appropriate to the level and extracted from the video is presented by the Grammar Coach and followed by two exercises (-- ____ types). In the Task Listening Section, the student hears a short recording, such as instructions, an advertisement, or an interview, which is followed by some questions. The Pronunciation Section incorporates sounds, but mostly emphasizes aspects such as stress and intonation. Finally, the Reading Section includes a reading on a current topic that is loosely related to the content of the video clip, and is followed by a comprehension activity that checks their understanding of the main idea and details.

Considering the overall level of the language, the nature of the activities, and the main storyline, Levels 3 & 4 are most appropriate for adults. The language in the upper levels goes well beyond basic English and deals with more sophisticated vocabulary, work or business-related vocabulary, synonyms and antonyms, and idiomatic expressions. In addition, the loads of activities, while interactive and appropriate for adults, do not seem to be designed to keep a child's attention. Also, the topics themselves are clearly of adult interest, as some Reading Headlines from Level 4 indicate: "Perfect Pitches for International Marketing Success," "Cell Phone Phenomenon," and "IQ vs. EQ: Emotions at Work."

The most innovative feature of this software is in the Speaking and Pronunciation sections. The students have the ability to have a role-play with one of the characters from the story. The students can choose from free, semi-controlled, or controlled role-plays. After they record their part, they can play back the entire conversation, with their part and the character's, and they can compare their part to the model. They can also record and play back sounds, words, and phrases in the Pronunciation sections. This is particularly innovative for the ESL Lab because so much of the independent work students do is receptive, while in this program they are afforded the chance to be productive. While there is no doubt that the presence of an instructor is ideal, LEI is constructive as a class accompaniment.

LEI is easy to use. The software is easy for students to navigate. They can see the Table of Contents and choose where they want to go, and they can see their quiz and test scores in their Progress Report. When they open up the program, they come to the page they left off on, so they don't have to remember what they did last, even though we hope they do. From an instructor's perspective, it is easy to see what students have done because they can ask the student for a printout of their progress report. Finally, from a technical viewpoint, the software was easy to install on the server and the management program is easy to operate.

We use LEI in the ESL Academic Lab at the Kendall Campus of Miami-Dade College. We use LEI Level 3 with our Levels 3 & 4, and LEI Level 4 with our Levels 5 & 6. Our lab is a walk-in lab (open lab) where students are required to attend one hour per week outside of their instructor-led Speech Lab course. In other words, students use this program on their own. Considering our use of LEI, the following recommendations have been determined.

One way the software could be improved is by expanding the management system to allow instructors to see which exercises the students have completed, and when they did them. This would make it possible for instructors to assign specific skill areas or tasks related more directly to what they are doing in the classroom. In addition, the instructors should be able to see the students' quiz and test scores on the computer, without printing in order to save paper and ink. Finally, now students have only one opportunity to take the quizzes and tests, but they should be given at least two opportunities. Some students find it very frustrating when they do poorly and it is the only grade they can hand in to the teacher.

Longman English Interactive is clearly technologically and pedagogically sound. However, the biggest marker of LEI's success in our lab is that the students enjoy using the program.

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