



Investigating English Language Teachers' Opinions on the Implementation of the EAN Program

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Abstract: The introduction of the English language in the Greek preschool education through the EAN program represents an innovative educational initiative aimed at enhancing both the methodological and thematic aspects of the Preschool Curriculum. This initiative focuses on the linguistic, cognitive, and communicative development of students of this age group, while also promoting multiculturalism, multilingualism, awareness and acceptance of diversity. Additionally, the program encourages interdisciplinary approaches and differentiated pedagogy. The current study examines English language teachers' opinions on the implementation of the EAN program during the 2023-2024 school year, two years after its nationwide rollout in all preschools. It gathers feedback from English teachers in preschools across the B and D Primary Education Directorates of Athens, exploring their perspectives on specific methodological areas and teaching parameters of the EAN program, particularly the educational material. The research is original and highlights the strengths of the EAN program and its educational material, and areas that need improvement.

Keywords: EAN program, EFL in preschool education, educational material, teacher perception, evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Globally, and particularly in many European countries, the integration of a foreign language into preschool education has been a well-established practice (Alexiou, 2020; European Commission, 2014). Grounded in the principles of fostering communication and intercultural competence, early exposure to an additional language provides children with essential skills for navigating the multicultural and multilingual landscape of the 21st century (Baidak et al., 2017; European Commission, 2014). In this context, an innovative educational reform has taken place in Greece with the introduction of English into preschools. Initially piloted in 58 preschools during the 2020-2021 school year, it was officially implemented in September 2021 through the EAN Project in all state preschools nationwide.

The EAN program (Introducing English as a Foreign Language in Preschool education) focuses on the introduction of the English Language in the preschool educational field through innovative and specially designed educational scenarios and creative activities so that students at this age can familiarize with the foreign language as part of the educational framework underlying this level of education. The term '*educational framework*' enriches, in a sense, the use of the term 'teaching,' as it refers to the systematic process of designing, implementing and evaluating developmentally appropriate activities for preschool students, which are based on exploration and play, promote collaboration and take into account the social and cultural background of the students, as well as their differentiated and specific educational needs (Πεντέρη, 2022). The specific goals of the EAN program aim at the

methodological and thematic enrichment of the existing curriculum for preschool education and the pedagogical philosophy that governs it as well as the exploration and playful nature of the learning process, interdisciplinary approaches to education through creative activities, that promote active participation of students in the learning experience. Through the EAN program, the communicative nature of language and speech is facilitated and developed. Young students are exposed to various linguistic stimuli as they interact with students of different nationalities. The socio-pedagogical role of preschool education, the human-centered view and the holistic approach and dimension of education and learning are enhanced through EAN (Alexiou, 2020).

The program facilitates the student-centered and interactive learning environment, with an emphasis on active participation, action, experiential learning, cooperation, familiarization with every day and real, playful experiences, exploration, discovery and the activation of imagination. Recognizing the fundamental importance of working in groups, understanding group dynamics, assuming roles and sharing responsibilities, respecting group rules, interdependence, managing common goals and fostering collective and individual responsibility are also supported through the EAN program. It is important to emphasize the fact that there is a common starting point for learning the English language, thus equalizing all preschool students and enhancing cooperation among individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as well as individuals with special educational needs or other learning difficulties. It is important to note that the cornerstone of the EAN program is the spontaneous collaboration and interaction between teachers of English as a foreign language and preschool teachers, focusing on the CLIL approach (Content Language Integrated Learning) to teaching, which ensures the continuity of everyday routines and activities of preschool curriculum in the acquisition of the English language.

EAN EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL AND RESOURCES

There is no doubt that educational materials play a crucial role in Early Second Language Acquisition (ESLA), particularly in preschool settings where language learning is integrated into daily activities rather than explicitly taught. Well-designed materials support language development by providing meaningful, engaging, and age-appropriate learning experiences. The EAN program relies on a variety of engaging activities—such as games, improvisation, role-playing, puppetry, multi-sensory techniques, realia, songs, rhymes, and teamwork—to foster experiential learning in a natural and effective way (Αλεξίου & Πεντέρη, 2022). These activities support the methodological approaches that form the foundation of the EAN program, including the Lexical Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), Task-Based Language Teaching, and the CLIL method already mentioned. Within the framework of the EAN program, 34 CLIL training scenarios comprising more than 150 activities were developed, creating a comprehensive repository of recommended educational resources to provide teachers with developmentally and methodologically appropriate material for implementing English in preschools (Alexiou, 2022).

These rich educational materials reflect the philosophy of the EAN program and are consistent with the new Curriculum for Preschool Education (Αλεξίου et al., 2023). More specifically, the EAN educational scenarios are categorized into five themes: *Myself and Others*, *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*, in line with the thematic units of the Preschool Curriculum. These scenarios and activities are supported by multimodal materials

such as flashcards, songs, and games—specifically 15 songs, 19 digital games, and 185 flashcards. The materials can be used either in their original form or adapted to meet the specific needs of learners, as they serve as reference material rather than ready-made recipes (Alexiou, 2023). Additional learning tools include poems, stories, crafts, board games, and puzzles. Alongside the scenarios and materials, there is a “EAN Treasure Chest” containing activity ideas, relevant stories, and songs for each theme. Teachers also have access to a collection of digital resources, online tools, and TPR activities. All these educational materials are available on the EAN website (<https://ean.auth.gr/en/ean-educational-material/>).

Given that the quality of educational materials directly impacts on student learning outcomes, rigorous testing and evaluation are necessary to ensure their suitability. To this end, during the 2021-2022 academic year, the EAN AUTH team visited 19 preschools in Greece to observe English-language activities, assess teaching materials, and make improvements to better support teachers (Alexiou, 2022). According to the evaluations collected, the supportive materials, such as songs, flashcards, and digital games, proved suitable for the targeted age group (91%), with the scenarios being regarded as highly informative by all respondents (100%). The scenarios received praise for their innovation (73%), cooperative teaching model (77%), and clear objectives (95%). Teachers also agreed on the appropriateness of the methodology (95%) and its alignment with the new Preschool Curriculum (100%). The primary feedback was the demand for more scenarios, which was addressed by the project's conclusion.

THE PRESENT STUDY

While the EAN program's educational material provides a structured foundation for early language learning, it is crucial to continuously assess its effectiveness in real classroom settings. Teachers' feedback and classroom observations can help identify areas for improvement and adaptation, ensuring that the material remains engaging, developmentally appropriate and aligned with both its pedagogical and linguistic goals. Considering the lack of sufficient research in this area and the novelty of the program, the present study aims to address this gap. This study examines English language teachers' opinions on the implementation of the EAN program during the 2023-2024 school year, two years after its nationwide rollout. It explores the views of English language teachers from selected Primary Education Directorates in Athens (B and D) regarding specific methodological and teaching aspects of the EAN program, particularly its educational material, aiming to identify its strengths and areas that may need improvement.

Participants

A total of 52 English language teachers participated in the study, with 32 from the D Primary Education Directorate of Athens and 20 from the B Directorate. While the number of EFL teachers may appear limited, it is important to note that one EFL teacher typically serves multiple preschools, covering 3 to 4 institutions. Participants comprised 49 females and 3 males, clustered into four age groups of 25-34 (n=12) 35-44 years (n= 24), 45-54 (n= 12), and 55-60+ (n=4). Most of the participants did not hold a permanent position, with 67% working as part-time substitute teachers, 12% as full-time substitutes, and only 21% as permanent

teachers. The participants had diverse levels of teaching experience: 48% had up to 3 years, 27% had between 4 and 10 years, 12% had between 11 and 20 years, and 20% had 21 to 30 years of experience. With reference to educational qualifications, more than half of the participants (62%) held at least one master's degree. Additionally, 10% had earned a second master's degree, and 2% held a second bachelor's degree, reflecting a highly qualified group of educators. Finally, in terms of competences in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), most of the participants have finished an A Level (56%) training, with smaller groups having completed a B1 Level (15.4%) and a B2 Level (17.2%). Additionally, 5% held an ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) certification or equivalent, and 2% reported having no ICT competences.

Data Collection and Analysis

To explore teachers' opinions on the implementation of the EAN program and its educational material, a questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and distributed online to the participants who were contacted via emails. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included demographic questions to form the teacher's profile and had seven question items. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of ten close-ended Likert-scale statements and three open-ended questions designed to capture teachers' perceptions of various aspects of the EAN educational material and methods. The Likert-scale questions were designed to measure the respondents' agreement or disagreement with specific statements, using a 5-point scale ranging from 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neither agree nor disagree, 4) agree to 5) strongly agree. These statements were crafted to explore the practical usability of the EAN educational material, its alignment with classroom needs, its effectiveness in fostering linguistic, cognitive and communicative skills, and its inclusiveness. By addressing diverse aspects, the questionnaire provided a comprehensive insight into how teachers perceive and engage with the EAN educational material. The use of both close-ended and open-ended questions allowed for a thorough analysis, combining quantitative data from the Likert-scale responses with qualitative insights from the open-ended answers, enabling an evaluation of the material's strengths and identification of areas requiring enrichment (see Appendix A). The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

The data from the online survey collected was imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS 25.0, for analysis. The responses to the open-ended questions, once collected, were carefully reviewed and organized to identify patterns and key themes. The results of this analysis are presented in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section highlights teachers' perceptions of the EAN educational material based on their questionnaire responses, including findings from both close-ended and open-ended questions. To provide a clearer understanding, the responses to close-ended Likert-scale statements have been grouped into thematic categories based on the key aspects they address: clarity, usability and relevance of the material (Statements 1-3), the effectiveness of the material on language development and communication skills (Statements 4,9), its impact on student engagement and attitudes toward learning (Statements 5, 10), the impact

of the teaching methods on language acquisition (Statements 6-7), and its support for learners with Specific Education Needs (SEN) (Statement 8). The results for each category are presented below, followed by a discussion of their implications.

Clarity, Usability and Relevance of the EAN Educational Material

The first question examined whether English teachers found the EAN educational material easy to understand. The majority of participants responded positively, with 32.7% strongly agreeing and 51.9% agreeing, indicating that they perceive the material as clear and comprehensible. A smaller percentage (11.5%) remained neutral, while only 1.9% strongly disagreed, suggesting that the material is generally well-received in terms of clarity (see Table 1).

The second question assessed the ease of use of the EAN educational material. Most teachers found it user-friendly, with 42.3% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing (see Table 1). However, 17.3% of respondents were neutral, while 13.5% disagreed, and a small minority (1.9%) strongly disagreed. These results suggest that while the material is generally considered easy to use, some teachers may experience difficulties or require additional support.

The third question explored whether English teachers perceived the EAN educational material as realistic in addressing their classes' needs (see Table 1). While 19.2% of participants strongly agreed and 26.9% agreed, an equal percentage (26.9%) remained neutral. A considerable proportion disagreed (23.1%), and 3.8% strongly disagreed. This indicates that while some teachers find the material relevant to their classroom needs, a significant portion may view it as less practical or suitable for their specific needs.

Table 1: The participants' level of agreement with Statements 1-3

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The EAN educational material is easy to understand	1.9%	0%	11.5%	51.9%	32.7%
2. The EAN educational material is easy to use	1.9%	13.5%	17.3%	42.3%	25%
3. The EAN educational material is realistic based on your classes' needs	3.8%	23.1%	26.9%	26.9%	19.2%

The Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed significant differences in responses based on educational qualifications and employment status (see Tables 2 & 3).

Table 2: Comparison of mean ranking values in relation to respondents' educational level

Educational level	N	Mean Rank
BA	14	31,21
1 st MA	32	23,50
2 nd BA	1	1,50
2 nd MA	5	37,50

Teachers with two master's degrees were most likely to view the material as realistic, followed by those with a bachelor's degree, and then those with one master's degree ($H(3) = 8.456, p = 0.037$). This suggests that higher academic qualifications correlate with a more positive perception of the material's relevance to classroom needs.

The analysis also revealed significant differences based on employment status ($H(2) = 10.041, p = 0.007$) (see Table 3). Full-time substitutes showed the highest agreement on the material's relevance, followed by permanent teachers and part-time substitutes. This suggests that full-time substitutes may find the material more suitable, possibly due to differences in their teaching contexts or workloads.

Table 3: Comparison of mean ranking values in relation to respondents' employment status

Statement	Employment status	N	Mean Rank
Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements [3. The EAN educational material is realistic based on your classes' needs.]	Part-time substitute teacher	35	22,44
	Full-time substitute teacher	6	41,5
	Permanent teacher	11	31,23

These findings highlight the variation in how the EAN educational material is perceived by different groups of teachers, emphasizing the influence of both academic background and employment status on the evaluation of the material's relevance.

Language Development and Communication Skills Through the EAN Educational Material

The fourth statement assessed whether the EAN educational material enhances students' communication skills (see Figure 4.1). Most teachers agreed (44.2%) or strongly agreed (28.8%), indicating a positive perception. However, 17.3% remained neutral, while smaller percentages disagreed (7.7%) or strongly disagreed (1.9%). Overall, the material is largely seen as effective in fostering communication skills.

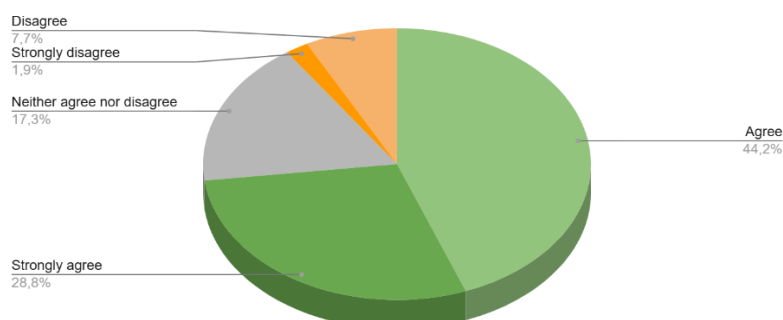


Figure 4.1: Respondents' perception of the EAN educational material in terms of developing students' communication skills

The statistical analysis, using the Kruskal-Wallis H test, revealed statistically significant differences in the responses ($p = 0.007$), indicating that the employment status influences teachers' perceptions of how well the material supports communication skills (see Table 4). According to the mean ranking values, full-time substitutes reported the highest

level of agreement, followed by permanent teachers, and then part-time substitutes. This suggests that full-time substitutes are more likely to perceive the activities as effectively promoting students' communication skills compared to their permanent and part-time counterparts.

The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed significant differences in responses based on employment status ($p = 0.007$), indicating that employment status affects teachers' views on the material's support for communication skills (see Table 4). Full-time substitutes showed the highest agreement, followed by permanent teachers, and then part-time substitutes. This suggests that full-time substitutes are more likely to perceive the material as effective in promoting communication skills.

Table 4: Comparison of mean ranking values in relation to respondents' employment status

Statement	Employment status	N	Mean Rank
Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements [3. The EAN educational material is realistic based on your classes' needs.]	Part-time substitute teacher	35	23,59
	Full-time substitute teacher	6	38,67
	Permanent teacher	11	29,14

The ninth statement assessed whether the EAN educational material helps develop students' receptive vocabulary (see Figure 4.2). Most respondents agreed (44.2%) or strongly agreed (34.6%), indicating broad recognition of its effectiveness. A smaller percentage (19.2%) were neutral, while only 1.9% strongly disagreed. These results suggest the material is generally effective in fostering receptive vocabulary.

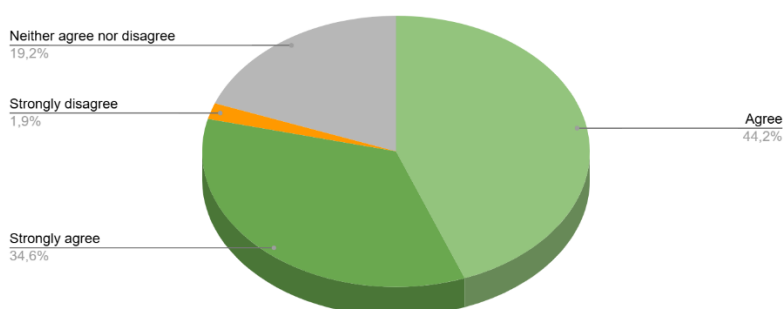


Figure 4.2: Respondents' perception of the EAN educational material in terms of cultivating students' receptive vocabulary

Student Engagement and Attitude Toward Learning English using the EAN Educational Material

A particularly strong level of agreement is observed in the participants' responses to the statement "The EAN educational material helps students develop a positive attitude toward learning English" with a significant majority either strongly agreeing (55.8%) or agreeing (32.7%) (see Table 5). Only a small percentage remained neutral (7.7%), and 1.9% disagreed.

These findings suggest that the program is effective in fostering a positive outlook toward English learning.

Similarly, the responses to the statement "The EAN educational material helps students discover the world around them" demonstrate a largely positive perception among participants. Most respondents either agreed (44.2%) or strongly agreed (34.6%) with the statement, indicating a consensus about the material's value in broadening students' understanding of the world (see Table 5). A smaller percentage (17.3%) were neutral and only 1.9% disagreed. These findings suggest that the material is largely viewed as effective in encouraging exploration and broadening students' understanding of the world, though some variability in teachers' perceptions may exist.

Table 5: The participants' level of agreement with Statements 5 & 10

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. The EAN educational material helps students discover the world around them	1.9%	1.9%	17.3%	44.2%	34.6%
10. The EAN educational material helps students develop a positive attitude toward learning English	1.9%	1.9%	7.7%	32.7%	55.8%

EAN Teaching Methods and English Language Acquisition

Regarding the role of cooperative learning in facilitating students' familiarization with the English language, most respondents were positive, with 32.7% agreeing and 28.8% strongly agreeing, however, 34.6% were neutral, indicating uncertainty about its effectiveness (see Table 6). Only a small percentage disagreed (1.9%) or strongly disagreed (1.9%). These findings suggest that while cooperative learning is generally seen as beneficial, there may be variability in its implementation or perceived efficacy, possibly linked to differing levels of familiarity or experience with the method among teachers.

In contrast, the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) to enhance students' familiarization with the English language received a highly positive response, with 50% of respondents strongly agreeing and 38.5% agreeing on its effectiveness. Only 9.6% were neutral, and 1.9% strongly disagreed, with no outright disagreement. These results suggest that TPR is widely seen as an effective strategy for engaging students and promoting language learning.

Table 6: The participants' level of agreement with Statements 6 & 7

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. The use of the cooperative learning method facilitates students' familiarization with the English language.	1.9%	1.9%	34.6%	32.7%	28.8%
7. The use of the TPR (Total Physical Response) method enhances students' familiarization with the English language.	1.9%	0%	9.6%	38.5%	50%

Inclusivity and Support for Learners with Specific Education Needs through the EAN Educational Material

When teachers were asked whether the EAN educational material contains topics or activities that support the learning of students with special needs, the teachers seemed divided. About 36.5% agreed, with 19.2% agreeing and 17.3% strongly agreeing. However, 23.1% disagreed, and 1.9% strongly disagreed, suggesting some skepticism about its inclusivity or relevance of the topics for these students. A notable 38.5% were neutral, possibly due to uncertainty or lack of theoretical background and expertise to evaluate the material's effectiveness in this area. Overall, while there is recognition of the EAN material's potential to support students with special needs, the significant proportion of neutral and negative responses suggest that further investigation is needed.

Insights from Open-ended Questions on the EAN Educational Material

As already mentioned, to gain deeper insights into teachers' perceptions and experiences with the EAN educational material, the questionnaire also included three open-ended questions. These questions allowed teachers to elaborate on their views, share specific challenges, and suggest improvements. The qualitative data collected were thematically analyzed, revealing recurring patterns and diverse perspectives that complement the quantitative findings.

The first open-ended question (Q1) posed to participants was: "*Are there any scenarios and/or activities that you have found less helpful?*". The responses to this question were systematically analyzed and grouped into six categories based on their frequency and thematic focus.

While most teachers found the material useful, common challenges included issues with sourcing materials, high costs, and logistical difficulties. Some teachers also struggled with practical implementation, such as managing large groups and coordinating with preschool teachers. There were moderate concerns about the scenarios, with some described as outdated, overly simple, or excessively complex, and some activities were reported as failing to engage students. Less frequently mentioned concerns were about activities requiring parental involvement, which were considered unrealistic in many cases, or about time constraints, the need for differentiation, and challenges in assessing outcomes. The responses reflect a range of teacher experiences and highlight areas where improvements could enhance the applicability and effectiveness of the scenarios and activities in varied educational settings.

With regard to the second open-ended question, "*Do you think that some topics need enrichment? If so, please state briefly,*" teachers' responses appeared divided. Half felt no enrichment was necessary, while the other half suggested specific areas for enrichment pinpointing the need for additional worksheets, songs, videos, and interactive games to boost engagement. Teachers also called for contemporary content, such as modern songs and dance videos, and expanded thematic topics like celebrations, transport, Greek mythology, and professions. Other suggestions included incorporating STEM lessons, skill-development labs, storytelling, and materials reflecting different cultures, particularly British and American traditions. Finally, they stressed the need for classroom adaptability,

advocating for alternative activities and emergency-use materials tailored to varying student needs.

Regarding the third open-ended question, *"In the context of enriching the existing educational material, have you created your own material? If so, please briefly state the activities and the thematic categories to which they belong,"* it is interesting to note that, although teachers appeared divided on whether certain topics in the EAN educational material require enrichment, the vast majority acknowledged creating their own material. Common thematic categories for these materials included language, mathematics, the natural world, social studies, and the arts. The materials created were varied, including worksheets, flashcards, games, interactive storytelling cards, crafts, customized stories, digital presentations, and tailored songs. These efforts demonstrate teachers' commitment to adapting the program to meet their students' diverse needs and interests.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study reveal that the EAN educational material is largely perceived as clear, user-friendly, and effective in enhancing students' communication skills, receptive vocabulary, and motivation to learn English. However, the findings also reveal a degree of variability in teachers' perceptions, particularly in relation to the material's relevance to their specific teaching contexts. Teachers' perceptions vary based on factors such as academic background and employment status. Teachers with higher academic qualifications and full-time substitutes report higher satisfaction with the material's relevance and applicability.

The teaching methods behind the EAN program are largely supported by teachers. Total Physical Response (TPR) is widely regarded as an effective strategy for engaging students and enhancing language learning. In contrast, while cooperative learning is acknowledged for its potential benefits in language acquisition, some uncertainty remains about its effectiveness, possibly due to varying levels of experience and familiarity with the approach. Teachers also express concerns about the material's support for students with special needs. The significant percentage of neutral and negative responses indicates that many teachers may not have a clear understanding of how the material supports them or may lack the necessary theoretical background and expertise to fully evaluate the material's effectiveness in this area.

The study highlights both the strengths and areas for improvement in the EAN educational material. While teachers find it useful, challenges such as resource availability, practical implementation, and content engagement were noted. Opinions on enrichment were divided, with half of the teachers suggesting improvements. Notably, most teachers have created supplementary materials, demonstrating their commitment to enhancing student learning. The feedback suggests that further enrichment and adaptation are needed to ensure the material effectively caters to diverse educational contexts, aligning with the authoring team's assertion that the material should be used as reference material rather than as ready-made recipes.

There are, however, limitations to this study that should be considered, such as the small sample size and the subjective nature of qualitative data, which may not be universally applicable. Thus, future research could build upon the present study.

Longitudinal studies examining how the EAN educational material influences student learning over an extended period could offer a deeper understanding of the material's effectiveness.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic and Background Information

Please put a "✓" in the box it corresponds to your answer.

1. Gender Male Female
2. Age 25 - 34 35-44 45-54 55-60+

3. Employment status

Permanent teacher Full-time substitute Part-time substitute Hourly-paid teacher

4. School district

B Directorate of Primary Education of Athens D Directorate of Primary Education of Athens

5. Teaching experience

Number of years teaching in state schools (primary & secondary)

up to 3 4-10 11-20 21-30 >30

6. Highest Educational level completed

Bachelor's Degree 1st Master's Degree 2nd Master's Degree Doctorate Degree
 Post Doc 2nd Bachelor's Degree Other

7. ICT Training completed

A Level B1 Level B2 Level Other

Now please tick the appropriate box on the next page indicating the degree you *agree* or *disagree* with the following statements

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The EAN educational material is easy to understand					
2. The EAN educational material is easy to use					
3. The EAN educational material is realistic based on your classes' needs					
4. The existing scenarios and activities cultivate students' communication skills.					
5. The EAN educational material helps students discover the world around them.					
6. The use of the cooperative learning method facilitates students' familiarization with the English language.					
7. The use of the TPR (Total Physical Response) method enhances students' familiarization with the English language.					
8. In the EAN educational material there are topics and/or activities that help the learning of children with special educational needs.					
9. The EAN educational materials cultivate students' receptive vocabulary.					
10. The EAN program helps students acquire a positive attitude toward the English language.					

Q1. Are there any scenarios and/or activities that you have found less helpful? Please cite briefly.

Q2. Do you think that some topics need enrichment? If so, please state briefly.

Q3. In the context of enriching the existing educational material, have you created your own material? If so, please briefly state the activities and the thematic categories to which they belong.