THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
of
YEUNGNAM UNIVERSITY

THE ENGLISH HELP DESK
WHITE PAPER:
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Student Survey

English
Help
Desk

Faculty Survey

Recommendations

Student Usage

The English Help Desk is the "public face of the FLI" and should maintain a "welcoming and helpful atmosphere." Foreign Language Institute Employee Manual, (2016)

The English Help Desk (EHD) is a program offered by the Foreign Language Institute (FLI) at Yeungnam University (YU) in South Korea. The FLI spends a significant amount of money on it every year in an effort to help the university community with their English and allow FLI faculty to meet with students. Both are stated program outcomes in the FLI Employee Manual. Services are available in six one-hour blocks each day from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM with two FLI faculty members staffing each slot totaling 40 faculty hours per week.

In the fall of 2018, student usage of the EHD fell 48% from the spring semester. Discussions amongst FLI suggested contrasting perspectives on the role of EHD and a team of volunteer faculty assembled to create surveys for both students and faculty to examine the state of the EHD.

Data included responses from 42 non-Korean faculty members and 642 students. Research and results provided recommendations for increased awareness and after adopting recommendations, the EHD saw 137% usage increase in one semester.

Student Usage of the EHD

Students were expected to "sign-in" each visit to the EHD but there were a small number of students who did not. Even with these under-reported student exclusions, there was a significant decrease in student usage of the EHD from spring 2018 to fall 2018.

Semester	Number of student visits (% decrease)	Average student visits per week	Average student visits per day
Spring 2018 (underreported)	804	67	13.4
Fall 2018	422 (<48%)	35	7

We were confident that student visitations to the EHD had decreased significantly (by 48%) between spring and fall semesters of 2018. The finding warranted a recommendation and additionally, begged the question, "Is the EHD worth keeping?" If these rough estimates of student usage can be trusted, what factors may have contributed to the significant decline in the number of student visitations to the EHD?

Student Survey

A student survey was created for students in early December 2018 using two vehicles. QR code embedded posters encouraging students to complete the survey were placed throughout the FLI. Secondly, FLI staff was asked to have their students take the survey at the beginning of their classes. In either case, students took the survey by scanning a QR Code on their smartphones with results automatically recorded in our online database.

According to attendance statistics, there were approximately 5,670 students enrolled in FLI classes during the Fall 2018 semester. The survey was completed by 642 students, (11.3%) of those enrolled. The survey contained 12 questions with students directed to complete different subsets based on their responses. Some students had visited the EHD, while others had not. The "Yes" group and "No" groups were thereby directed to different follow-up questions.

Table 1. Demographics of Students Completing Survey (N=642)

| Year	N	%
1st year undergraduate students	607	94%
2nd, 3rd, and 4th year undergraduates	34	5%
Graduate students and faculty members	4	<1%

The overwhelming majority of students completing the survey were first year students (94%). Of the 642 students taking the survey, 320 (50%) indicated "Yes," they knew about the EHD, while 322 (50%) said "No," they did not know about the EHD—remarkably similar statistics.

Table 2. What services should the EHD provide? (N=485)

Skill	N	%
Free speaking practice	267	55%
Homework help	114	23%
Resumes or cover letters	64	13%
Writing	36	7%

The highest student responses regarding requested EHD services were: free speaking practice (55%), help with writing skills (23%), and help with homework (21%). Students also indicated that they would like help with their resumes and cover letters (13%). If we assume these needs are reasonable, and that they reflect (to some extent) the needs of the wider YU community, FLI faculty should be willing and able to respond to these needs.

Figure 1. Do you plan visit the EHD in the future?

Students Aware of EHD

Students Unaware of EHD
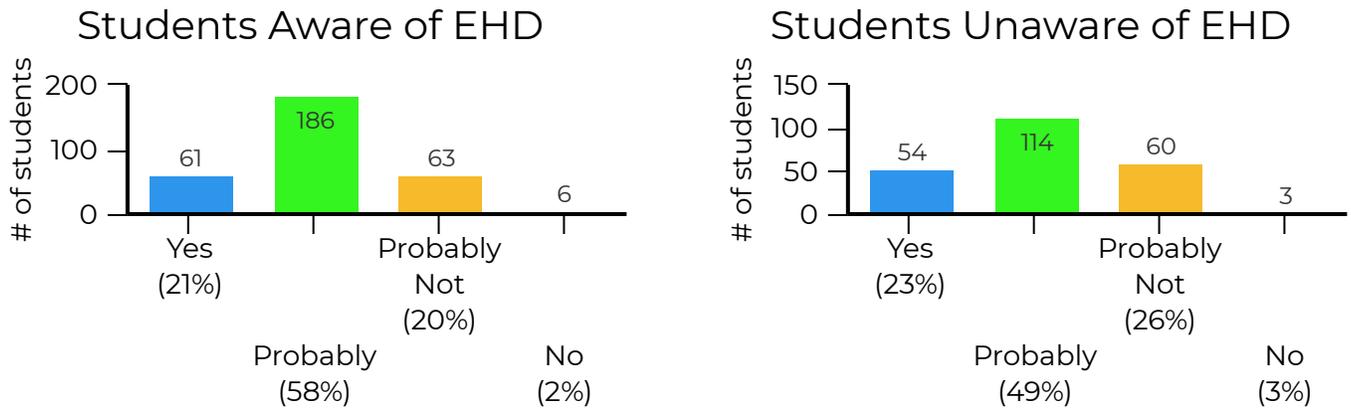
These numbers suggest that under the "right circumstances," a clear majority of students are willing to use the services of the EHD. This hints at a significant opportunity for the FLI and the EHD service it provides the YU community. For students aware of the EHD when asked if they had ever visited the EHD, 87 (27%) answered Yes while a much larger number, 233 (73%) answered No. We then asked why.

Table 3. For students aware, why haven't you visited the EHD? (N=315)

Reason	Number	Percentage
It doesn't look like a friendly place.	102	32%
I've never needed it.	90	29%
I am too nervous.	43	14%
I don't know when it's open.	42	13%
I am too busy.	22	7%
The location and/or hours are inconvenient.	9	3%
Other	7	2%

Based on these responses, three primary areas were identified that may increase student use of the EHD.
1. Logistics - the physical setting could be warm and welcoming
2. Messaging - how the EHD is advertised and marketed to the students, and
3. Experience oriented - ensure that the faculty does their best to ensure each student visit is a positive experience.

The data also suggests that students would benefit from receiving more information about the EHD, for example, its hours of operation, and students' respective professors' EHD schedule. We inferred that seeing a "friendly face" at the EHD, would increase the appeal and help make students feel less nervous about using the service.

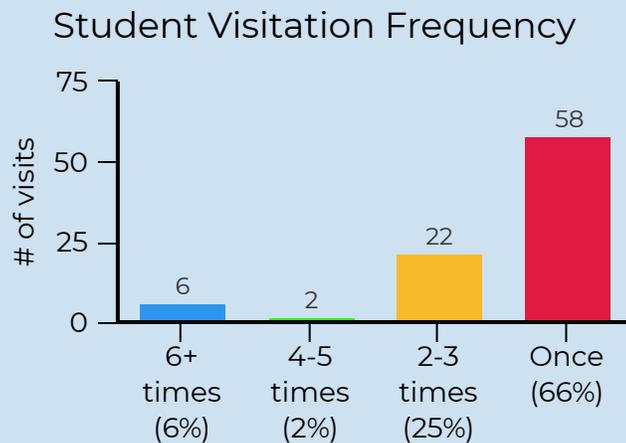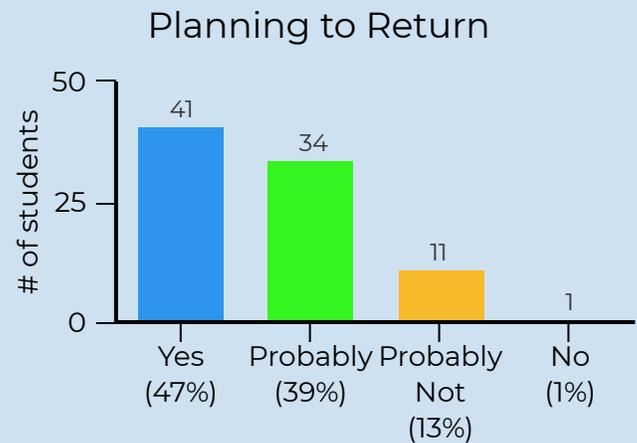Figure 2. How many times have you visited the EHD? (N=88)   Figure 3. Will you visit the EHD again? (N=87)

Student Visitation Frequency

Planning to Return

Of those students who have visited the EHD, 33% have used it multiple times, with 8% indicating they have used it 4 times or more. Also, when asked if they would visit the EHD again, a full 86% indicated "Yes," or "Probably." However, 14% said "Probably not," or "No." This means students are more willing to return to the EHD if they view the service as welcoming, friendly, and helpful.

When asked "Please tell us about your EHD experience," students offered the following responses:

- Good! It is a very good service.

- It should be more comfortable to enter the help desk.

- I think the Help Desk is the best-made program in YU. Professors are kind and always willing to help students. Please continue this program for students like me.

- It was a little frustrating that the professor showed me unpleasant feeling when I asked for further help. I can understand he has other tasks to do but the limited time is too short and I think students cannot use it helpfully. (sic)

- I think the Help Desk seems a little burden to get in. Probably looks too narrow that looks tight. (sic)

Faculty Survey

The faculty survey was administered during the same time period as the student survey. The survey consisted of nine questions and the results were tabulated online. 42 of the 55-member FLI teaching faculty responded (76.4%). The first questions asked was how frequently faculty mentioned or suggested the EHD.

Figure 4. How often have you recommended your students to use the EHD? (N=40)
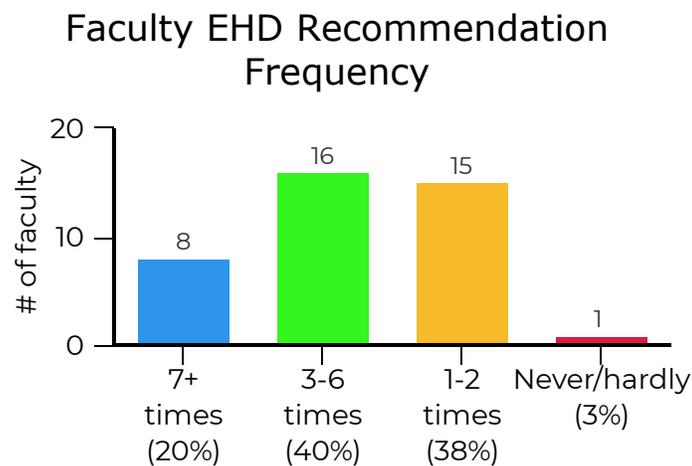
60% of the faculty recommend the EHD to their students more than twice per semester. However, more than 4 out of 10 faculty members (41%) recommended students to use the EHD twice or fewer times. This presents a significant opportunity for faculty to encourage students to use EHD more often.

Faculty members were then asked two questions about the range of EHD services: What services do you think the EHD currently provides? and What services do you think the EHD should provide? The results were quite similar with a few exceptions.

More than 2 out of 3 faculty members said they believed speaking practice, interviewing practice, spoken error correction, writing skills, and general advice should be offered. 62% said listening services should be provided, while only one third believed editing, proofreading, or correction services should be. (See table 9 on page 8)

Table 4. What services are currently provided by the EHD? What services should be provided by the EHD?

Type of Service	Currently Provided	Should be Provided	Difference (+/-%)
Speaking Practice	38 (91%)	37 (88%)	-1 (-3%)
Interviewing Practice	34 (81%)	32 (76%)	-2 (-6%)
Advice	32 (76%)	28 (67%)	-4 (-13%)
Spoken Error Correction/ Recasting	30 (71%)	31 (74%)	+1 (+3%)
Writing Skills	28 (67%)	28 (67%)	0
Listening	23 (55%)	26 (62%)	+3 (+13%)
Homework Help	21 (50%)	18 (43%)	-3 (-14%)
Editing/Proofreading/ Corrections	19 (50%)	14 (33%)	-5 (-26%)
Other	4 (10%)	7 (17%)	+3 (+75%)

With only two exceptions, faculty members showed general alignment between the services seen as currently offered and should be provided.

Figure 5. How would you evaluate your time spent in the EHD? (n=37)
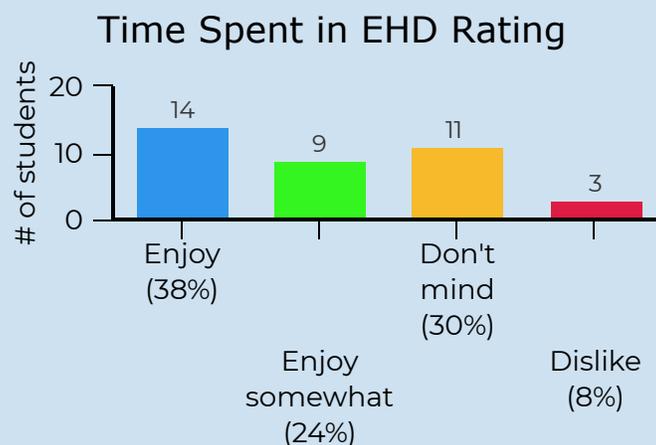
62% of the responding faculty members indicate that they either enjoy or somewhat enjoy their time at the EHD. Another 30% indicate they "don't have a problem with it," but "would not say they enjoyed it." Three of the thirty-seven faculty members answering this question (8%), say they "didn't enjoy it at all."

One question on the faculty survey, in particular, focused on the EHD-related development needs as perceived by faculty members themselves. The question was intended to ask faculty what additional information/knowledge or skills they thought would be helpful for improving their effectiveness at providing EHD services.

Responses can be seen in table 8 and have been listed in order of developmental priorities as identified by the faculty. For example, the most significant self-identified development need was to learn more about how to prepare students for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL 26%).

Table 5. Which areas would you like to know more about to enhance your effectiveness?

Skill	N	%
TOEFL	11	26%
IELTS	9	21%
TOEIC	9	21%
Independent study information	8	19%
Interviewing/Resume/Cover Letters	8	19%
Other	6	14%
Writing	5	12%
Conversational Skills	1	2%

The indications are that FLI faculty members have EHD-related development needs including how to prepare students for success in the TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS exams. Information about independent study, "other" and writing coaching skills were the next highest self-identified development needs. These areas represent development opportunities the FLI management team should consider to both enhance the effectiveness of faculty and to improve service outcomes for FLI students.

The survey concluded with two open-ended questions, the first of which asked faculty for their suggestions for improving the EHD, specifically: "What suggestions, if any, would you make for improving the effectiveness of the EHD?"

Here is an edited summary of some responses:

- Endorsement from FLI management, one person coordinates the EHD.
- Ensure that all faculty participate-no exceptions.
- The EHD should be in a larger room and part of an actual café with an online reservation system, both more casual and conducive to conversation.
- Ensure that the EHD guidelines are made available to all teachers. Change them consensually, if necessary. Do not assign visiting the EHD as homework.
- Never refuse to help a student in one way or another.
- More consistency in the kind of help we do and do not provide
- It needs to be more visible, even as students walk in the front door.
- Staff the EHD from 9-6 with only one teacher.
- Stick to a 20-minute limit, even if no one is waiting.
- Students should bring in conversation topics if they want free talk.
- Writing feedback should be limited to 2-pages.

The second open-ended question asked faculty about turning students away. Perhaps because of varying interpretations of what services faculty should and should not be providing students, some members of the FLI community had been refused help at the EHD. When asked if faculty had turned students away, 10 (48%) said No, while 11 (52%) said they had.

The reasons given for turning students away from the EHD included:

- Never for academic reasons. I have had students come at the end of the day, but have always managed to encourage them to return earlier the next day."
- I have turned away "students who come to the EHD with a written homework assignment that wanted to have corrected perfectly before handing it in to their teacher.
- I have also turned away many professors: the EHD is for students.
- I explain that we don't edit work
- I tried. It was too long. She became angry and walked out.

It appears then, that the reasons some FLI faculty members turn students away are varied. In some cases, they had come outside of EHD hours, or faculty members believed that editing students' work was not appropriate. Several FLI staff members believe that if students come from departments other than the FLI, they should not be served. Still others refused help to students when specifically requested/referred by another colleague or department. Some students were turned away if the format was deemed inappropriate by the professor at the EHD at the time i.e. their work was not double-spaced.

Faculty Data Takeaways

71%
Spoken Error
Correction should
be provided

52%
Faculty who
have turned
students away

26%
Faculty want TOEIC
training to improve
student EHD services

Student Data Takeaways

48%
drop in student
usage from spring
to fall 2018

73%
Students who knew
about EHD but still
didn't visit

50%
Students who
were unaware
of the EHD

Recommendations

Who is eligible for services and what services and support are available must be clarified by the upper management to ensure program consistency and effectiveness. The FLI Employee Manual policy states the EHD is intended to help the whole university community.

Our own personal experiences at the EHD reflect the 48% decrease in use. With this decline, a number of faculty members extended the stated limit of 15-minutes per visit. If no students were waiting, or if no students had visited the EHD over a period of time, some faculty would help students beyond the 15-minute window.

With fewer students however, other faculty might justify use of extra time to do other work. Faculty expect fewer student visits and may view visits as disruptions. If an FLI faculty member were engaged in prep work, wearing headphones, and/or using the computer, they may have been giving messages of unavailability or disinterest. Students pick up on these signals and the cycle of reduced usage continues.

Most faculty still strive to be welcoming, respectful and helpful, and to find a way to meet students' varying needs. With this in mind, the aim of our recommendations would be to break the unproductive cycle and ask for a commitment from faculty. Working to change the current trend is a worthy goal that gets closer to the overall mission of the EHD: "to help the university community with their English while maintaining a welcoming and helpful atmosphere."

1. Implement a basic service policy that says: "All Yeungnam University students and faculty are welcome and we will not turn any visitor away without providing some sort of assistance." Program policy, procedures and practices should support this.
2. We encourage the FLI faculty to regularly recommend the EHD to their students throughout the semester. Additionally, we recommend that all faculty give a brief presentation with information on the English Help Desk during the first or second class meetings of the semester. PPT presentations will be provided.
3. We believe that the EHD should be more welcoming to visitors. This includes both the physical arrangement of the EHD and how faculty members welcome and treat students.
4. We encourage FLI faculty staffing the EHD to adapt the spirit of "Helping visitors with skills, not product"
5. We ask faculty to identify at least one area in which to develop expertise regarding EHD service skills and abilities.
6. We suggest the EHD have an automatic card-swipe system (already available campus-wide) to make usage easier and record keeping more effective.
7. We recommend one faculty member be designated each semester as a coordinator or "point-person" to ensure that the EHD is running effectively, and that EHD-related communication amongst all FLI staff is timely and effective.
8. We believe there are opportunities for better marketing, communication, and integration of the EHD with other FLI programs and services

References

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