

PRELIM 2

Benin: BNTEA (Benin National Teachers of English Association) with **LSI UK**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	Benin National Teachers of English Association (BNTEA)
	UKI partner	LSI UK
	Course length	4 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	2
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	100 (70 attended all sessions)
	Language level(s)	B1 - C1
	CPs' teaching context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% male • 80% secondary school teachers • 20% primary school teachers • Large classes (40-60) • Minimal resources, no classroom technology • French speaking • Centralised education system - prescribed textbooks and materials produced by the Ministry of Education Low pay
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom, WhatsApp
	Synchronous session length	4 hours
	Synchronous session frequency	Every week for a month
	Asynchronous workload	1-2 hours per week
Course content	Language development focus	Speaking confidence and fluency
	Methodology focus	Communicative language teaching
	Technology focus	N/A

Description of the partners

The Benin National Teachers of English Association (BNTEA) is a not for profit organisation established in 2011. With over two thousand members, BNTEA's aim is to build the capacity of English teachers of Benin. BNTEA's work includes organising CPD and promoting the English language through the creation and management of English clubs in secondary schools. Those most closely involved with the LSI-BNTEA PRELIM 2 collaboration were BNTEA President Gafoudou Sakpoho, Treasurer Dorothee Tchada, and Joseph Nours Oussou.

LSI is an international education provider operating 16 language schools in seven countries and employing over 300 people. Having provided English language tuition to students from around the world for over 55 years, LSI also has long-standing experience delivering teacher training courses such as CELTA and TKT Preparation and, more recently, in developing and delivering large-scale online courses. LSI's PRELIM 2 partnership has been overseen by Principle Anthony Drury, with Siân Sandry as the programme coordinator. The course materials were created by academic managers, CELTA trainers, and senior teachers: Siân Sandry, Gavin Taylor, Elaine Langstaff, Anna Neil and Ronnie Blake. The LSI tutors who delivered the program were Melissa Thompson, Ronnie Blake, Charlie Bradshaw, Paul Garraway.

Key features of the context

The planning and delivery of the course was determined by the features of the Beninese context. A key local factor related to access to technology. While 60% of BNTEA members reported having a smart phone, delivering the course remotely via Zoom presented challenges because of prohibitively high data charges. Unreliable and intermittent phone signal and even electricity supply were also issues to be taken into consideration. A further local factor was bureaucratic red-tape which meant that teachers were not authorised to attend CPD sessions during the week. For this reason, BNTEA's activities usually take place on weekends.

BNTEA selected participants for the course based on greater need; they were from rural areas and hadn't been able to access previous CPD due to location and for economic reasons. Past professional development sessions organised by BNTEA tended to involve large numbers of teachers meeting at one location rather than in smaller groups or online. For PRELIM 2 we decided that the best way to reach the largest number of CPs would be to organise large meetings in central locations in each state and for the LSI tutors to conduct the sessions live via one Zoom connection for each location. We initially hoped to deliver to six different locations (with two LSI tutors allocated to each location), but the limiting factor was economic, and this was scaled down to just two.

Outline of the course and rationale

The primary aim of the course was to increase CPs' confidence, both as teachers and English speakers. Consultation with BNTEA and CP needs analyses revealed an interest in more than just language improvement. It was decided to create a course that was part language improvement and part teacher training - teaching methodology, techniques, and strategies. Moreover, the chosen method of delivery was better suited to such an approach, as the technical setup allowed for fewer opportunities for interaction compared to a course entirely delivered online or in person.

A further factor was CP expectations; previous CPD organised by BNTEA tended to resemble lectures. The challenge for the LSI team was to create a course that initially resembled the direct transmission approach CPs were accustomed to, but that incorporated sufficient opportunities for interaction and language practise. Communicative language teaching (CLT) was a central part of the course both in terms of content and method and the initial phase of the course involved introducing the principles of CLT and training CPs to be communicative learners themselves. Collaborative communicative activities, extensive discussion, feedback and reflection were key aspects of the course. While the core structure and themes were decided prior to the course commencing, flexibility was also built in and modifications to content and delivery were incorporated as the course progressed, in light of feedback.

Project findings

Working in partnership

Good communication is key to a successful partnership and considerable efforts were made in the initial stages to build rapport and establish the parameters of a working relationship between the core members of the LSI PRELIM 2 team and BNTEA management. One of the challenges stemmed from the fact that BNTEA's members were volunteers who also worked as teachers and in other professions, and thus were restricted in terms of available time. This meant that every stage of the project took longer than initially anticipated and this was particularly the case in the early stages, which involved the need for considerable input from BNTEA and lots of back and forth discussion. The approach that LSI is accustomed to taking concerning projects of this size involves extensive meetings, email correspondence, and use of project management tools such as Slack, Basecamp and collaborative Google documents to name a few. We quickly had to adjust to a different approach which took into consideration the contextual features and working practices of the BNTEA. Recognising and understanding cultural differences was very important, and adjustments were made accordingly in the way that meetings and data gathering were conducted. Zoom meetings and WhatsApp chat emerged as the main communication channels and there was a clear preference for spoken rather than written communication. This was an important factor which also informed course design.

Working with a partner ETA in a project such as PRELIM has highlighted and reinforced the centrality of understanding context. BNTEA's contribution to the project was invaluable and essential in enabling LSI to understand the circumstances of Benin's ETA and the needs of its members. Contextual factors, such as access to technology and cultural norms, determined the nature of the collaboration itself as well as the content and delivery of the course. LSI's ideas about how to deliver a language course were very different to BNTEA/CPs' expectations and in order to deliver a course of value to the English teachers of Benin, it was essential that we listened to BNTEA, challenged our own assumptions, and compromised where necessary.

Working within the CoP

The community of practice which existed on the ever buzzing Slack was a fascinating feature of PRELIM 2. In the initial stages of the LSI-BNTEA collaboration the CoP channels were really useful as a research tool to learn about other UKI's projects and experiences. As LSI was new to PRELIM, it was especially informative to learn from those UKIs who had been involved in PRELIM 1, particularly those working in a similar context. The wealth of information and discussion generated by the CoP was invaluable to the LSI team, particularly regarding building relationships with ETAs, managing CPs and, most usefully, the various delivery methods available. Given the high cost of internet data in Benin, LSI was initially keen to create a course delivered predominantly using WhatsApp, and the experiences of UKIs who took this approach were informative when researching this method. Specific contextual factors in LSI's collaboration with BNTEA resulted in a decision to deliver the course primarily using Zoom, but to a room of CPs at one location through one connection, rather than to each individually, as on many other PRELIM 2 projects. Once this method of delivery had been agreed upon, the CoP was of less value because LSI's course was very different from other UKI's projects and a lot of the discussions on Slack were not relevant. Another reason for LSI's reduced interaction on the CoP Slack channels was time. In addition to delays experienced at the start of the project, staff absences due to Covid meant that the LSI team had to prioritise their time spent on PRELIM 2 and course design took precedence over monitoring the CoP. Nonetheless, LSI has learned a lot about the values of cross-institutional, collaborative modes of working and it is clear that this approach has many benefits and would be useful for future projects of this sort.

Working with the CPs

Working with the CPs was one of the most rewarding aspects of the LSI-BNTEA collaboration. Working with colleagues from another context has informed the professional and personal understandings of both LSI tutors and the course participants. Tutors and CPs alike have commented on how valuable and insightful the experience has been and how much they have learned from each other. LSI tutor Paul Garraway commented: *“This has been a fascinating experience for us [...] I really enjoyed talking to the CPs and finding out about their ideas and teaching context. Their enthusiasm both during individual feedback and groupwork was infectious.”*

Designing/delivering the course

The initial phase of the collaboration took longer than anticipated and some of the delays related to the connectivity grant. Because of the low resource context, the amount of money available determined decisions about course design and delivery as well as the numbers of potential CPs who could be involved. A lot of time was spent discussing the connectivity grant and writing the application because of stakeholders approaching the issue from different angles: in the application we needed to request a certain amount of money based on CP numbers and costs of a (decided) course, whereas the shape of the course and the numbers of CPs who could be involved depended on how much money was available.

The main reason for this difficulty was the high cost of data in Benin. If we were to deliver a course over Zoom with individual teachers connecting via their phones, each CP would need their own data allowance, so the money available would determine how many CPs could participate. If, on the other hand, the course was delivered (as it was in the end) via one Zoom connection per location, then the costs were not dependent on the number of CPs, and were fixed i.e. room hire and one data connection per location. This second option was chosen partly because it was the established way that BNTEA conducted CPD sessions, but also because it meant that more CPs could participate in the course, including those who might not have access to smart phones or the internet.

The entire LSI team learned a great deal from designing and delivering the course, not least the importance of understanding contextual factors and adapting appropriately. One such example concerned the synchronous communication channels. Although large number of CPs were active users of WhatsApp it was interesting that while there was a lot of social chat on the channels we had set up, there was a general reluctance to fully take advantage of the technology during sessions, either to ask and answer questions or to give feedback. Unfortunately, this meant that the majority of interaction was limited to the one available Zoom connection. It was suggested that this might have been due to WhatsApp being associated with informal chat rather than used as an educational tool.

Course outcomes

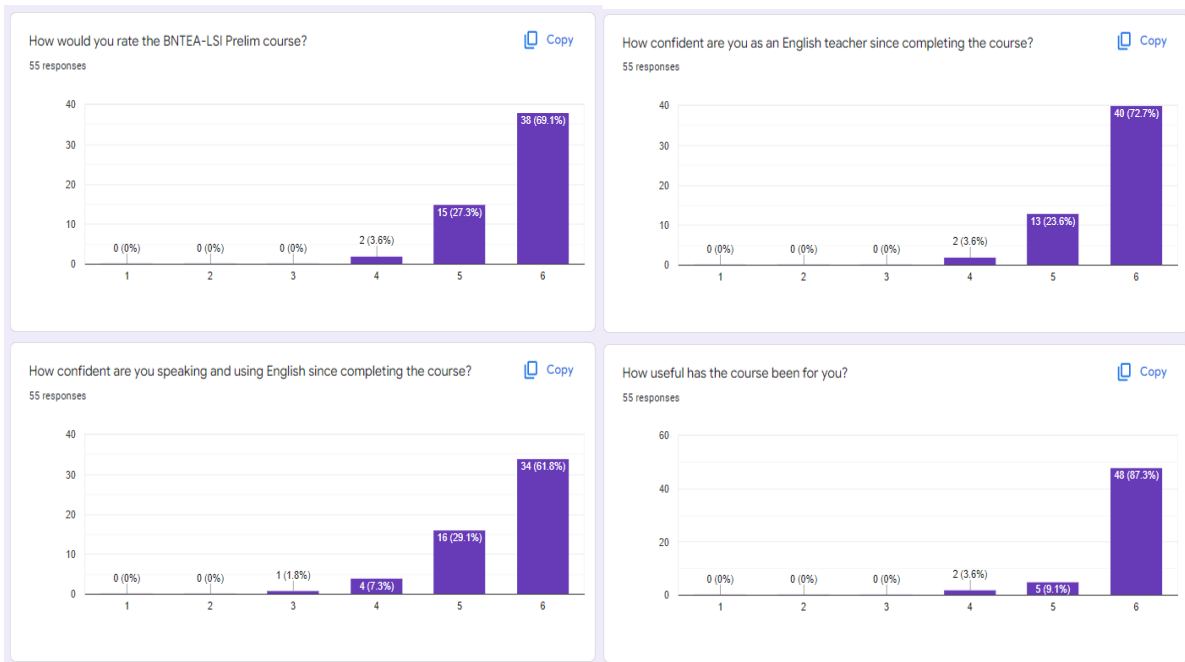


Fig. 1. A

sample of results from the Google forms end of course questionnaire.

All the evidence suggests that the course outcomes were achieved. CPs reported increased confidence as English teachers and as users of the English language. Feedback in the WhatsApp channels and given verbally to tutors was also overwhelmingly positive. It was clear that the CPs valued and appreciated the content and delivery of the course, particularly the collaborative communicative elements which gave them the opportunity to interact and learn from each other. Of particular value to CPs were the sessions about lesson planning, using existing or no resources, and activities and techniques appropriate to their context. Tutors were impressed by the enthusiasm CPs brought to the sessions and their keenness to incorporate what they had learnt and to develop as teachers. The project was hugely rewarding for all involved and many expressed interest in participating in future projects of this nature.

'I appreciate the course very well and I'm already using [what I've learned] in my lessons preparation'
– Anonymous CP

'The courses are very relevant. We need these as often as possible to enable teachers [to] adapt their teaching to the evolution of the language and so update their teachings.' – Anonymous CP

'Through this sessions, I've gained more new things to better my experience as a teacher.' – Anonymous CP

'I think one of the biggest takeaways from the course for the participants will be how to structure lessons so that they are more learner-oriented – with tasks aimed at getting students involved' – Charlie (LSI tutor)

‘At the end of the final session of the course, a CP mentioned that they were feeling more confident with regards to being able to plan a lesson within a set amount of time. They also mentioned that it was an opportunity to learn from other teachers, which I gathered is not a usual occurrence.’ – Ronnie (LSI tutor)



Fig 2. Discussions and collaborative activities were a central feature of the course.

Do you have any other comments about the course?

55 responses

- Clear pronunciation of words .
- We simply need more training
- great tutors
- You are real professional of the teaching job. Thanks!
- Not yet
- I would be very kind of you if you could plan soon another training session for us.

Fig 3. Google forms was used to collect feedback from CPs.

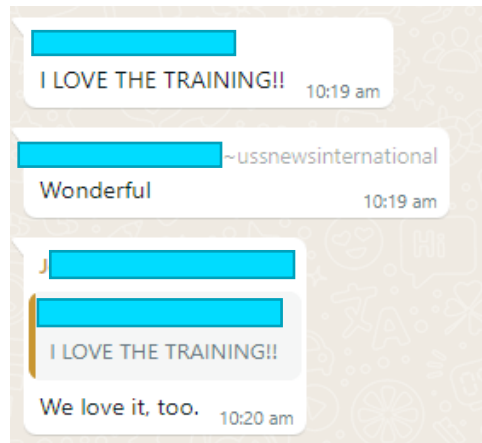


Fig 4. Dedicated WhatsApp channels were used for asynchronous and synchronous features of the course and were an important method of communication between tutors, CPs and facilitators as well as a constant source of positive unsolicited feedback.