

## PRELIM 2

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# Cameroon: CAMELTA (Cameroon English Language and Literature Association) with **Best in Bath**

August 2022

# Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Course overview</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	Cameroon English Language and Literature Association (CAMELTA)
	<b>UKI partner</b>	BEST in Bath
	<b>Course length</b>	10 weeks
	<b>Number of groups/cohorts</b>	2
<b>Participant profile</b>	<b>Total number of CPs</b>	25
	<b>Language level(s)</b>	C2
	<b>CPs' teaching context</b>	Mostly secondary (ages 11-20)
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	<b>Synchronous platforms used</b>	Zoom
	<b>Synchronous session length</b>	75 minutes
	<b>Synchronous session frequency</b>	Twice weekly
	<b>Asynchronous workload</b>	30-60 minutes
<b>Course content</b>	<b>Language development focus</b>	N/A
	<b>Methodology focus</b>	Adapting ideas and materials for CPs context. Rationales for choosing the above. Presentations from the Cameroon context.
	<b>Technology focus</b>	N/A

## Description of the partners

The Cameroon English Language and Literature Association (CAMELTA), is a 750+ -membership association in Cameroon, comprised mostly of anglophone teachers. CAMELTA is an associate member of IATEFL.

BEST in Bath is a language school based in Bath with extensive experience of working with teenagers and teachers of teenagers.

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## Key features of the context

The course participants (CPs) were from all over Cameroon, based in either or both urban and rural teaching contexts, teaching to a wide range of ages both language and literature, in a wide and varying range of teaching contexts to varying class sizes, in a variety of school types. The course comprised 18 female and 7 male CPs.

Opportunities for CPD at workplaces are limited in Cameroon, so the provision of a course that can be attended at home was welcomed. Internet connectivity is an issue, and the unreliability and quality of connection had an impact on the delivery of the course.

## Outline of the course and rationale

The course was delivered on two weekday evenings per week via Zoom, in two five-week blocks. CAMELTA suggested that this was an appropriate workload and asked for the two sessions to run at different times, to facilitate attendance. Sessions were given by BEST in Bath trainers once a week to each group, so CPs had ten sessions with each trainer. As CAMELTA was keen to have one session per week targeted more at theory and aims, and the rationales behind the choosing and implementation of activities, and the other one focused on a wide variety of activities to use across the four skills and the teaching of grammar, we agreed that it would be better for CPs to have two different trainers. One trainer led the lessons aimed at theory/aims/rationales, and the other on activities for classroom use.

Zoom was used as the primary synchronous course platform as it was thought to be the best for easy access. Most CPs were using phones to attend the course, and BEST in Bath knew that Zoom functions well on phones, and was determined to use a synchronous platform if possible.

Having seen the contributions and learnt of the varied contexts of the CPs, BEST in Bath suggested to CAMELTA that during the second block of lessons, CPs should be asked to deliver a short presentation on an area of their pedagogical interest, as it seemed that there was plenty of expertise to be shared. It was thought that collating these presentations may be helpful to the wider CAMELTA membership. CPs took up the challenge with relish.

WhatsApp groups were established by CAMELTA in class groups, and also a group for communication between CAMELTA and BEST in Bath trainers and administration. CAMELTA was aware that this was the best medium for delivery of information, asking questions, clarifying homework tasks, sending reminders and links to lessons etc.

BEST in Bath trainers felt during the experience of the first five-week block that WhatsApp was very limited in its usefulness for uploading and sharing materials, and that using Padlet as an asynchronous shared resource would be more beneficial. Padlet was popular with the CPs and we would definitely make it available for the whole course in future. This resource will be available to all CAMELTA members, not just the CPs, for three months after the course, giving them the chance to access all the materials that have been uploaded, which include CP presentations, as well as materials/suggestions/lesson ideas/links etc. provided during the course. WhatsApp was also used for the sharing of texts/pictures etc. for teaching ideas. The preference and/or need for the CPs to use phones rather than laptops/desktops meant WhatsApp was very convenient, and effective for quick communication, but Padlet is a better tool for collecting, collating and accessing materials over an extended period of time.

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# Project findings

## Working in partnership

The working relationship between CAMELTA and BEST in Bath was open, effective, responsive in a timely manner and co-operative. The ease of communication by WhatsApp is a bonus, and establishing that instant responses are not expected (or necessarily required) also a help. The thread is easy to pick up when various groups have been formed e.g. for CPs in their class groups; for co-ordinators on both sides; for the teaching team. This medium also allows for simple communication to take place out-of-hours, which can lead to more timely and effective action to be taken. It was good that both CAMELTA and BEST in Bath both had a designated representative able to react at virtually any time to messages.

This project had unexpected difficulties accessing the Connectivity Fund in a timely manner. The fund was sent to CAMELTA's bank on 20<sup>th</sup> December, but funds were only able to be disbursed to CPs in Week 4 of the course (w/b 7<sup>th</sup> February). This was due to national governmental restrictions placed on funds from overseas, and complicated requirements for withdrawal of the funds. To ensure that the fund is available to CPs from the start, on future projects it would be wise to discuss any potential national or bank restrictions, or particular requirements in accessing international payments, with partners right at the start.

The initial selection of CPs was handled very efficiently by our partners, and details of the CPs were available before Christmas. BEST in Bath were able to send out a needs analysis before the holiday to the two groups that CAMELTA had formed. It is a good idea to stress to CPs how important it is to complete the needs analysis, however briefly, as even with the guarantee that all information is anonymised, and only for the use of course planning by the BEST in Bath, in our case only a third of potential course participants replied. It may also be a good idea not to send this out just before Christmas.

## Working within the CoP

The CoP was very useful as a source of information for the UKI, especially before the course and in the early stages of delivery. It's always helpful to know that others are dealing with difficulties and to learn of their solutions. Simply seeing another's processes to a conclusion can inform your own strategies for overcoming obstacles even in a different scenario, or lead you to realise that an entirely different route needs to be taken. There is comfort in knowing it is there, even when not required. The sharing of thoughts and practices in Zoom sessions is also useful – it is still nice to see people 'face-to-face'.

## Working with the CPs

BEST in Bath teachers learnt a lot about the school system in Cameroon, the challenges faced in various teaching contexts, and the demands placed upon teachers and students. This led to research into solutions in similar contexts around the world to help overcome difficulties. There was considerable reflection on learning processes and teaching strategies in order to guide discussion and stimulate re-evaluation of classroom practices. The experience reinforced the importance of linguistic knowledge, learning theory and evidence-based practice.

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## Designing / delivering the course

Planning a remote course needs to bear in mind that things are less in your control than in a face-to-face class, especially if there are issues with the internet and technology. We learnt that it is definitely better to have a loose initial structure which allows for changes (and not to be surprised if changes and changes in expectations are necessary), and that a built-in review after the first two weeks would inform the structure from then on. If the number of CPs is relatively small, as in our case, this allows for more washback from CPs to inform the development and direction of the course. CAMELTA CPs made it clear that they were interested in and expecting a methodology course, and as mostly C2 speakers, there was little need for any focus on language development. Expecting copious information on needs and expectations is not always realistic or helpful. It became obvious to BEST in Bath that CPs were most interested in fresh ideas for classroom activities and practical solutions to the problems they face.

Our experience showed that there can be serious difficulties with internet connections (even with data bundles to assist) and failure of electricity supply, which impact on synchronous delivery. Zoom was used as our primary platform, and although many phone cameras were turned off to ensure continued connection, the CPs handled this very well. Use of breakout rooms needed to be carefully managed by tutors, as sometimes activating them could inadvertently remove CPs with poor connectivity from the meeting.

After the first week the decision was taken to persevere with Zoom due to the benefits of real-time aural and visual communication (CPs could see the teacher even if the teacher could not see the CPs). WhatsApp groups that had been set up by CAMELTA supported this delivery, and they helped the course run smoothly by allowing for timely reminders, interventions and follow-up comment, as well as for sharing ideas and materials. We learnt that it was helpful (and maybe essential in some cases) to post the Zoom link on WhatsApp prior to each lesson. As WhatsApp is the preferred means of communication within the CP body, CAMELTA was right in its assessment that this would be a better way to interact than through email, which had been BEST in Bath's assumed starting point for communication. CPs were very active on WhatsApp.

CPs enjoyed giving their presentations, which comprised a wide variety of topics, were appreciative of others', and welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences. We hope that the presentations will be shared widely across CAMELTA, thus extending the reach of PRELIM 2.

## Course outcomes

CPs were unfailingly polite and genuinely enthusiastic about what they were learning, and many commented that attending the sessions had increased their understanding, boosted their confidence, and equipped them with extra tools and ideas for teaching, some of which were utilised immediately.

It was evident that CPs became more connected, opening up increased opportunities for mutual support and collaboration, not just among their PRELIM classmates but also with other colleagues outside the programme. Unbidden comments from CPs on the WhatsApp group immediately after the last lessons included comments among many others on the refreshing nature of PRELIM: "*The interesting and funny part of you will remain part of my lessons – 'joy in the classroom'. It was so great. Thank you for bringing newness to my lessons*"; the impact on their students: "*My learners now stay enthusiastic for every English lesson because they know I'll bring in something interesting*" and how they have developed as

teachers: *“Thanks everyone and especially the organisers of this training. It’s actually a stitch in time. I learned a lot and my teaching has taken another dimension.”*

For BEST in Bath tutors it was great to see so much support within the community of their classes, and especially reactions to sharing or presentations. This community would not have existed in this way without the push from PRELIM 2. Seeing a comment such as *“I used last night’s idea today in class and the students loved it!”* is uplifting.

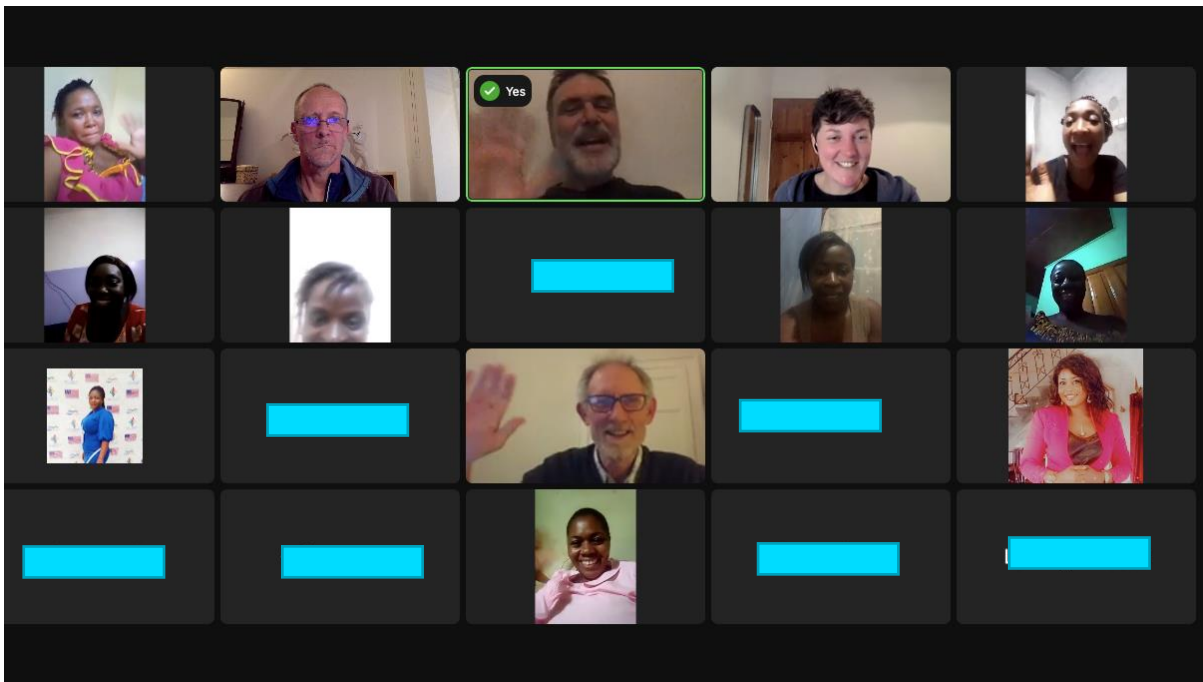


Fig. 1: Screenshot from farewell meeting.