

## PRELIM 2

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# **Cuba: APC-ELI (English language teaching section of the Cuban Association of Pedagogues) with The University of Sheffield**

August 2022

# Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Course overview</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	English Language Teaching section of the Cuban Association of Pedagogues (APC-ELI)
	<b>UKI partner</b>	The University of Sheffield (ELTC)
	<b>Course length</b>	5 weeks
	<b>Number of groups/cohorts</b>	1
<b>Participant profile</b>	<b>Total number of CPs</b>	36
	<b>Language level(s)</b>	A2-C1
	<b>CPs' teaching context</b>	Primary, Secondary and Pedagogy School
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	<b>Synchronous platforms used</b>	Telegram
	<b>Synchronous session length</b>	30 mins (tutorial groups of 3)
	<b>Synchronous session frequency</b>	Weekly
	<b>Asynchronous workload</b>	Wordpress 4-6 hours
<b>Course content</b>	<b>Language development focus</b>	Increase confidence when using English that supports classroom teaching.
	<b>Methodology focus</b>	Improve teacher skills in reflective practice for ongoing development and develop awareness of teaching approaches and technique.
	<b>Technology focus</b>	Experience 'Telegram' and 'Wordpress' for learning and teaching purposes.

## Description of the partners

### Cuba

The English Language Teaching section of the long-established Cuban Association of Pedagogues (APC-ELI) is a public and not-for-profit Cuban teachers' association which 'works hard for providing professional opportunities to all Cuban EFL'. It was established in March 2013 and organises 'professional development activities [that] are open to all teachers'. APC-ELI has around 650 members, part of the Cuban Association of Pedagogues (based in Havana), and is led by a long-standing committee and national chairperson. APC-ELI was part of PRELIM 1 with IH Bristol.

[facebook.com/apceli](https://facebook.com/apceli)

## United Kingdom

The University of Sheffield is in South Yorkshire and its English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) is a long-established and large department. The ELTC was part of PRELIM 1 (partnered with Afghanistan and Indonesia). The Centre delivers teacher methodology and training courses, including for ministries, teacher associations and individuals, for English teachers globally. In the last 18 months, onsite and online courses have been delivered for 500+ English teachers at many levels of teaching experience and English, including schools and higher education. [sheffield.ac.uk/eltc](http://sheffield.ac.uk/eltc)

## Key features of the context

A total of 39 course participants (CPs) were selected by APC-ELI for the project and course participant details sent to the ELTC. 26 of the selected CPs were women and 13 were men and they worked in a range of educational settings; 12 in primary schools, 16 in secondary and 10 in pedagogical schools (training to be primary and secondary teachers). Most of the teachers had teaching qualifications or were in the process of getting one (37 from 39) with around half at undergraduate level and the others with a teaching 'licence'. Around half of the teachers were based in Havana (the capital and largest city) and some of those were from other locations, including rural ones, but were training in Havana. The others were either from other smaller urban areas or from more rural areas across all regions of Cuba. There was a diversity of self-reported language levels (from A2 to C1) and confidence levels in the four skills varies and this was confirmed in the initial spoken and written pre-course analysis. 30 of the CPs had access to 4G mobile data signals, 6 with 3G and 3 with both. Data was to be paid for via the PRELIM Project 'Connectivity Fund', distributed via the British Council Cuba and delivered by the national telecommunications carrier. This use of the fund was due to the relatively high costs of data in Cuba with significantly higher % of wages needed for 4G bandwidth connections than other countries. Communication and delivery platforms were selected due to Cuban access to certain global services and negotiation with APC-ELI and from the needs analysis with CPs.

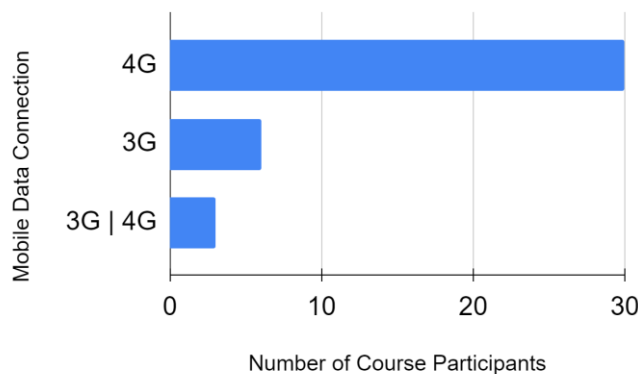


Figure 1: CP Data Access

## Outline of the course and rationale

- 6 weeks from 14 February to 25 March 2022
- Part-time (4-6 hours)
- Remotely Delivered via Wordpress mobile website and mobile communication on Telegram
- 42 participant teachers at A2-C1 levels from all 3 regions of Cuba - including a focus from APC-ELU on more teachers from rural and disadvantaged urban areas

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- Teachers from all levels of Primary and Secondary Education
  - Asynchronous and synchronous work with ELTC tutor support
  - Group tutorials via Telegram weekly

#### Main course aim

- to increase confidence when using English that supports classroom teaching

#### Subsidiary course aims

- to improve teacher skills in reflective practice for ongoing development
- to develop awareness of teaching approaches and techniques

Each of the six weeks had online units delivered on a bespoke-designed WordPress website (with a progress tracking function) and expected CPs to complete 4-6 hours of self-study a week to fit in with their existing work/life commitments. Each of the six weeks had a different topic based on the ones that would be expected to be covered at different levels in the Cuban English education system (informed from discussions with APC-ELI and CP focus group). Each unit was broken down into a series of strands and tasks that covered the 4 skills, grammar, vocabulary and/or phonology. The main rationale of the course content and approach was to help teachers improve language skills and increase confidence when using English, particularly classroom language in lessons with learners. The overarching principles of the project was flexibility and being needs-driven by individual CPs and these were embedded into reflective task design, small group tutorials and personalised signposting. We also wanted to highlight that the language improvement programme for teachers incorporated general confidence building in the use of technology and reflective practice, with a focus on communication and oral work. Another rationale for the course design and approach, and use of committees of practice and self-study tasks, was that CPs be able to reflect on teaching skills as part of professional development and also develop awareness of teaching approaches and techniques and use tools such as Telegram to help with this. Via Telegram, together with communities of practice of around 10-12 teachers and a tutor, there were topics to discuss based on that week's content. This meant that each week CPs practised and thought about the language used in normal classes with learners and shared ideas and progress with each other and the tutors. As well as this, groups of 3 CPs had a 30 minute spoken tutorial through Telegram with one of the course tutors. The rationale for this was to allow CPs a chance to discuss some of the topics from the course, practise oral communication and get individualised support, signposting and needs-based suggestions from colleagues in Cuba and from the UK-based tutors.

## Project findings

### Working in partnership

The mutual learning relationship was evident from both UK and Cuban partner team feedback, with communication and collaboration key principles that worked well to design and deliver the course, work with the CPs and ultimately help maximise the course outcomes.

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*'The main areas are related to communication between our two organizations, the opportunity for collaboration. (APC-ELI)*

It was good that this PRELIM 2 partnership also had the support of the national Cuban Association of Pedagogues (APC) and it met the principles and goals of the British Council Cuba which is developing its #Inglesparaeldesarrollo project in Cuba (and they were also involved with the administration and data dissemination). It would have been a good idea to bring together these third-party stakeholders in early communications and project planning to help see the future links between them and the PRELIM project teams and establish any project roles and timelines (e.g. data distribution or CP selection).

APC-ELI was open to collaborate and participate in the ELTC course design from the outset, suggesting a reflective practice and facilitative approach was needed. This openness from all partners is again an important factor in this type of development project when the context and approaches are new for some (Cuba for the ELTC for example and Telegram for the CPs). APC-ELI appointed experienced Cuban teacher trainers as local facilitators and this helped closely monitor and progress the delivery of the course, not only in the outskirts of Havana but also in the more remote areas of some provinces. The use of local facilitators should be considered for any future projects and working with the ETA to help select and support this is key.

*'The Cuban facilitators did a good work by supporting and encouraging the teachers to complete the tasks and helping them at times.'* (APC-ELI)

## **Working within the CoP**

The use of a CoP for the UK partner was again positive and the use of 'Slack' as the platform allowed for the organisation of themes and communication was effective. With 35 UK partners, the regular group meetings and online breakout rooms allowed space and time for smaller themed groups to discuss and share. The range of experiences and previous involvement in PRELIM 1 may have impacted on engagement and contributions to the Slack discussions, but the amount of official communication and document sharing was timely and the CoP allowed for follow-up questions and suggestions. It might be useful to create sub-groups for the CoP based on some shared context themes (region, number of CPs, course approach, tech platform, for example) after the needs analysis phase of the project.

## **Working with the CPs**

Across all the stakeholders, working with each other in different interactions, (EPC-ELI<>CPs<>ELTC) was a key part of the project and course. Not only between these three project stakeholders but also within them too. There were many individual developments on personal levels (some not formally identified in feedback but discussed in meetings and tutorials) and on professional levels as well, and there was some consensus in the feedback. The key areas were; interaction and communication, online communities of practice and approaches to development.

*'In my opinion the best moment is when teachers from BC make a connection with cubans profesor and students' (CP Feedback)*

Both UK and Cuban partners noted that the interaction of two or more people discussing and chatting in the tutorials toward a common goal was a good sign which showed CPs willingness to share, to have a

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feeling of being in this project together and wanting to help their partner solve their problems. The importance that on-line culture played in the CPs' life was key too, as there were many of them who had never had the opportunity to use their mobiles or laptops for online exchange in English, with each other and the UK tutors, but this also became an opportunity which helped increased their motivation to learn and to participate. So this collaborative approach to development facilitated by online communication and smaller communities of practice is key for this type of remote transnational project.

*'I really love and enjoy each part of the course and share with some other teachers this new experience'*  
(CP Feedback)

## Designing/delivering the course

Expectations were high from both partners about the design and delivery for the project as both had been part of PRELIM 1 and brought the learning from that in terms of course design and delivery. Reading the previous reports also helped this.

*'First, our APC-ELI team expected the participants, Cuban learners and facilitators would have all the time, tools, and support they needed to get the project done and we worked hard to provide a positive work environment in which everyone could contribute.'* (APC-ELI)

Having an early timeline and division of the project responsibilities in terms of the course design and delivery helped and working within the time and scheduling constraints for the CPs (informed via a needs analysis and focus group) was also key early on. The design was informed from the previous project and some previous asynchronous materials adapted. This helped to allocate more resources for synchronous and direct tutor interaction in the tutorials and discussions on Telegram. Increased use of audio-visual CP content on the platform was an adaptation later in the course to try to encourage more participation as this waned somewhat in the last few weeks. See figure 2 for examples of CP voice and photos that linked to the topics and reflection tasks - these were responsive and adapted as the course went to meet the emerging needs of the CPS. This flexibility is useful to plan for in advance within the design and delivery teams from the beginning of any future projects.

*'We wanted to increase the chances of the participants to be successful in achieving the goals which were set for them, that they learned working in the social media, to participate fully and ask questions to the UK tutors and develop a positive learning environment.'* (APC-ELI)



Figure 2: Example of multimedia CP contribution via Discord.

## Course outcomes

From the objective data collected from the Wordpress mobile course, 42 CPs registered initially (3 more than the CPs selected in the planning stages and for whom information was supplied). However, from the 42, 6 failed to start the course and indications later were that delays in data allocation was a factor. It would be best for operational barriers to remote projects to be prioritised as soon as possible and any third party involvement with these is established quickly.

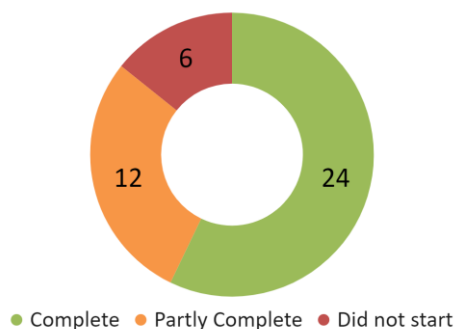


Figure 3: CP course completion numbers

Figure 3 shows that of those who started the course, and although all contributed to the interactive parts (on Telegram) in some way, two thirds completed the online units. Another third completed some, but not enough (of the agreed level of 80%) to be awarded a certificate of completion. Better feedback and insights into those not starting a course and those not finishing completely would be good to include in future projects as feedback from these potential CPs or those not finishing is lacking or hard to get

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remotely. Some insight from APC-ELI in their project feedback (and from 2 CPs) indicated that technical issues may have played a part in those 12 CP who did not fully complete. We also heard from tutors that time and workloads did also impact of those taking the course, even those that finished.

*'The main challenged assumptions /expectations were the technical constraints (unstable connectivity at times), and the management (lack of use of the social media) to follow a language enhancement training which resulted in affecting the completion of the tasks for some participants.'* (APC-ELI)

The project had 26 people respond to the final feedback and of those 100% said they now feel more confident in using English in the classroom - which was the main aim for the project. However, they were mostly those who had fully completed the course. Follow-up feedback at a later date should form part of future projects to help establish the sustainability of this confidence and how this is manifested in the classroom. The ELTC is planning to do some follow-up directly with APC-ELI in the near future.

*'I learned a lot about English community, I could increase confidence when using English in the classroom, how to reflect on the teaching skills as part of my professional development and teaching approaches and techniques.'* (CP Feedback)

The most commonly cited reasons for the positive feedback was on the interaction between CPs and more with the UK tutors.

*'For me, the best thing about the course was the opportunity to exchange knowledge with highly experienced professors who, in one way or another, through video conferences, have advised us and recommended aspects of the teaching and learning process in which we must improve so that so our English classes are of greater interest to our students'* (CP Feedback)

From the 26 who gave feedback, 12 suggested areas for improvement which fell into several categories, but more interaction with tutors and an increase in certain individual language development areas (grammar, listening, speaking for examples) were mentioned,

## **Emergent learning**

It is worth mentioning that according to APC-ELI, in Cuba English is taught as a foreign language and most of the practising teachers and teacher trainees have been trained only by Cuban teachers. Therefore, some CPs and APC-ELI gave feedback about the impact for the teachers, having a weekly meeting for language improvement led by English 'native speakers'. This direct contact with the UK and to 'experienced' and 'native' speakers of English, even though some of the UK tutors were 2nd language speakers themselves, should be considered further to refine why this is important to CPs and how best to include this in future projects.