

PRELIM 2

Honduras: HELTA (Honduran English Language Teachers' Association) with **Glasgow School of English**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	HELTA TESOL
	UKI partner	Glasgow School of English
	Course length	10 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	Initially 7, ultimately 4
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	80, of which 17 completed the course
	Language level(s)	A1 - B2
	CPs' teaching context	Pre-school, primary and secondary school; rural and urban.
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom and Telegram
	Synchronous session length	90 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	Weekly
	Asynchronous workload	Average 2 hours per week as homework
Course content	Language development focus	Authentic classroom discourse and functional language
	Methodology focus	Based on the flipped classroom, with students doing tasks asynchronously and the output they produced being used as the basis of the subsequent synchronous session
	Technology focus	Zoom, Telegram, Padlet and MS Office Suite

Description of the partners

Since 2014, HELTA TESOL has worked to promote the professional development of teachers principally in the public education sector in Honduras. Based in the capital city, Tegucigalpa, it is an English teacher association whose mission is to raise awareness of the latest teaching methods and materials for its member teachers, and to facilitate access for them.

Glasgow School of English was established in 1997 in the city centre of Glasgow. It is an adult school teaching students from 16 years old in open General English classes and exam preparation classes, as well as a range of ESP classes for closed groups. Delivery is by face-to-face teaching, as well as blended and online classes.

Key features of the context

There were 275 teachers who applied to take part in the project. 150 took the placement test and this was reduced to a final list of 80 CPs of which 17 completed the course. Using a commercial placement test administered by HELTA TESOL, the proficiency levels of the CPs were assessed from CEFR A1 to B2 with about half at A1/A2 and half at B1/B2. The ETA then organised the CPs in groups of 10-13 by proficiency level and by the grades they taught (pre-school – 13 CPs, primary – 36 CPs and secondary – 31 CPs). One group was mixed and consisted of teachers who had participated in PRELIM 1 in 2021.

15% of the CPs were male and 85% female. They work in a variety of local contexts. In the pre-school and primary school contexts, they were mostly not solely English teachers but taught other subjects as well and therefore had little or no training in the subject. In the secondary school context, CPs were trained English teachers but many also taught other subjects. The majority of CPs work in the public sector but there were some who work in the private sector. Many work in rural schools in the mountainous north of Honduras where there they had to work with an erratic electrical supply and poor connectivity. The damage to the infrastructure caused by two hurricanes experienced in 2020 has not yet been fully repaired and this had an impact on the ability of the CPs to participate fully. PRELIM 2 also coincided with the country going through a transition period, with a new government having been elected in December. In this period, teachers' contracts were to be renewed and there was uncertainty as to who would be reemployed and who would not. The CPs were also on holiday in January and having been teaching online before the holiday, they were uncertain if they would be back face to face with their students in the new term. In the end they were, but with COVID protocols in place that required some of them to teach on Saturdays. Saturday was the preferred day for the synchronous sessions so this had an impact on attendance. The ETA gathered information on the devices that the CPs had access to, mostly PCs, laptops and mobile phones. The time difference between the UK and Honduras meant that the CPs were attending synchronous sessions in the morning for them when it was mid to late afternoon in the UK.

Outline of the course and rationale

The main objective of PRELIM is to increase the confidence of the CPs in using English in the classroom as a medium of instruction. To that end the focus of the course was on spoken English, encouraging the CPs to use the language that they already know and to help them identify the language that they needed to learn to use in their work. After discussion with the ETA it was agreed that after the initial introductory session the pattern of the course would be for the CPs to be set two or three tasks to be completed in the following week as asynchronous homework on a particular topic. The homework was to be submitted to the tutor by Thursday for assessment. Then on the Saturday there would be a synchronous session where the output produced as homework was used as the material for the lesson. Each group of CPs was in a Telegram group with their tutor and this was how they communicated with each other, how CPs received materials from the tutor and how they submitted material to the tutor. Telegram was a new app to many of the CPs but they quickly became adept at using it on the range of devices that they had access to.

Each week one of the tasks required the CPs to make a short recording of up to 3 minutes, video or audio or a presentation on PowerPoint on a given topic. CPs were encouraged to post comments on the group Padlet and also to make suggestions for topics or language that they would like to work with each week. The aim throughout was to encourage the CPs to use the skills they already have in using English and to practice using new ones. By asking them to perform the tasks before the classes it was easier to identify strengths and weaknesses and to prepare the synchronous session to meet the CPs real needs.

The primary context was the use of English inside the classroom, but this was extended into the lives of the CPs outside the classroom and to explore the cultural differences between Honduras and the UK.

Project findings

Working in partnership

First and foremost, Glasgow School of English learned that the close involvement of the ETA was invaluable throughout the project. HELTA TESOL were able to communicate with the CPs in real time which, when there was a problem or question that couldn't easily or quickly be resolved by the tutor given the time difference between Honduras and the UK, was the only way to sort it out. The local conditions that delayed the start of the live sessions and the initial communication difficulties with the CPs were quickly and satisfactorily resolved by some intense local work by the ETA. As the course progressed, HELTA TESOL were in regular contact, getting feedback on the CPs and keeping us informed of any local issues which impacted on the course.

From HELTA TESOL: *"We at HELTA TESOL are very satisfied with the process of PRELIM 2022. It was once more an unforgettable experience for our teachers. The dedication shown by the teachers supporting each of the groups built true trust and confidence in the participants skills development and progress in their proficiency. Participation in the PRELIM projects has benefited teachers all over Honduras and impacted the lives of hundreds of students under the supervision of our CPs."*

Working within the CoP

This was the first time that we have worked as members of a community of practice. The library of materials made available was of great help in designing our course materials and the experience of those who had participated in PRELIM 1 helped us prepare ourselves for what was to come. The webinars were also very helpful in a practical way with questions answered freely. With the late start of our project, we became out of sync with the majority of other UKIs and we became less involved in the CoP. The value of the CoP became less for us as the course progressed because appropriate support for the issues we were dealing with was supplied by our partner ETA.

Working with the CPs

The CPs had to deal with and overcome a number of local issues to be able to participate in the project. This was reflected in the difference between the large number of teachers who applied to join the project and the smaller number who became regular CPs. Geography, connectivity, infrastructure, existing and emerging commitments to work and family all played a part in shaping the experience of the CPs. What was remarkable was the persistence of those who became the regular CPs. As noted by the tutors:

"Working with the Honduran teachers during PRELIM 2 left a strong impression on me. The CPs showed a lot of perseverance in attending class despite a range of issues, including illness, difficulties in accessing the internet, needing to work on the days we studied together."

“I think it has just highlighted how important commitment and investment on the CPs’ part was to creating a fruitful learning environment. Although we were limited by time and connectivity issues among other things.”

The CPs were eager to learn, devoting a lot of preparation time to their assignments between synchronous sessions. In these sessions they collaborated with each other, eager to learn and share personal experiences with each other. However as became apparent in the early sessions not all of them wanted the same kind of course. Some wanted a pedagogy course while others wanted conversation.

“What ended up working best were classes getting them speaking about their cultures and experiences”.

Designing/delivering the course

The course was designed with the intention of increasing the confidence of the CPs in using English in the classroom, which for most of the CPs is the only environment in which they need to use English. The starting point of each synchronous session was the language produced by the CPs in their asynchronous homework. The CPs have been working online throughout the COVID pandemic so were used to this way of course delivery and connectivity issues notwithstanding had few difficulties with the platform and tools we had chosen to use. Throughout the course we were responsive to the CPs needs and wants. Each week the CPs were asked for feedback and for requests or suggestions on what they would like to be covered in subsequent sessions. Apart from the materials generated by the CPs themselves other materials were sourced from a range of published sources or were generated by the tutors.

Flexibility and a willingness to deal with emergence were key aspects for CPs and tutors alike during the course. As the tutors noted:

“In designing these lessons, the biggest thing I learned was how to let go of my plans and let the students’ needs dictate what and how I teach.”

“I sometimes needed to change my activities based on how many students showed up and what they were interested in.”

Course outcomes

The tutors and the CPs all benefited from participation in this project, which despite the small number of CPs who completed the course, we consider to have been a success. HELTA TESOL summarised the experience from their perspective:

“We saw week after week new ideas, new strategies and new topics which were learnt that contributed to the development of the CPs and laid the foundation of improvement and motivation to continue learning. Not only were CPs able to improve their level of English, but in addition, they were able to attain tools and techniques that were useful to implement in the classroom.”

The CPs themselves ended the course saying:

“My level of English has improved significantly”

“PRELIM course will make me a better professional. ”

“It was a wonderful experience for me.”

The tutors were also positive about the project:

“It gave me the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and design a course from scratch. Exchanging ideas on the content of the lessons and the materials that we would use gave me ideas that will inform my lesson planning in the future.”

“I learned to be adaptable.”

“I learned that everything takes longer when you are teaching online compared to when you are teaching in the classroom.”

As a final part of the project the UKI is providing the ETA with an instructor’s pack developed during PRELIM 2 for them to use in their own local confidence building teacher training programme.