

PRELIM 2

India: ELTAI (English Language Teachers' Association India) with The English Language Centre Brighton

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	English Language Teacher Association of India (ELTAI)
	UKI partner	The English Language Centre (ELC) Brighton
	Course length	11 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	1 cohort 2 groups
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	40 selected – 17 completed
	Language level(s)	A1 - C1
	CPs' teaching context	Rural / remote; primary and secondary
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom
	Synchronous session length	75 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	2.5 days/ week
	Asynchronous workload	30 minutes / week
Course content	Language development focus	Classroom Language
	Methodology focus	General communicative language teaching – looped input
	Technology focus	Engagement in synchronous classes

Description of the partners

The English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI) is the largest network of teachers of English in India, and is an associate of IATEFL. Founded in 1969, ELTAI is a not for profit organisation, with currently around 4000 members and 60 chapters across India.

ELC Brighton is a not for profit school and one of the oldest English schools in the UK. It is a well-regarded school offering a wide range of English language courses with English lessons taught by professional, qualified teachers. These include specialist courses for teachers. It is ranked in the top three schools in the country, according to recent British Council inspections.

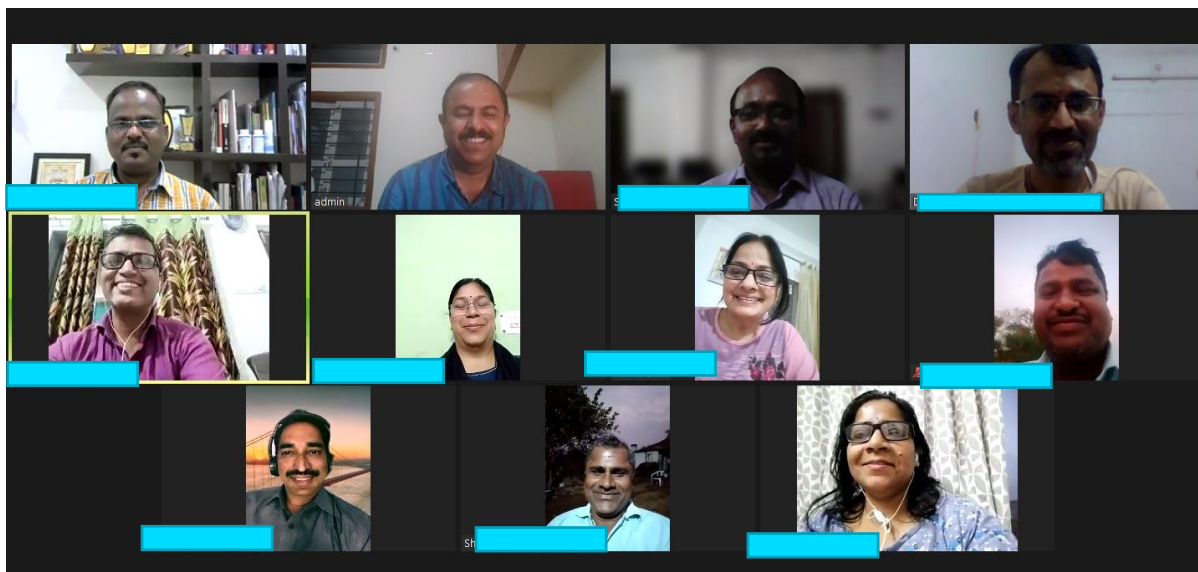


Fig. 1 Some participants in their Zoom class

Key features of the context

The PRELIM 2 project caught the end of the second wave of COVID 19 in India. This meant that there was still considerable disruption to schools. Additionally, elections were taking place, therefore some course participants had election duties. This meant their teaching duties were changed. The course was scheduled to begin 3rd January and there was a time pressure to complete the course before the main secondary school exams commenced in India in mid-March.

The 40 course participants (two groups of 20) selected were spread across the country. They were selected due to their location. Those who were working in rural, tribal areas were prioritised as being the hardest to reach and the ones to target. Group one was mainly primary teachers, and group two, secondary teachers. The gender split was 50:50 of the 40 selected. However, only seven participants were active in group one and ten in group two. Approximately one third of the active participants held responsibilities as a teacher educator, resource person or school manager.

Of the 17 active participants, the language mix was rich and included Telegu, Kanata, Gujarati, Hindi Tamil and 'tribal language' speakers. In terms of their English language competence, this was self-assessed and teachers rated themselves (accurately) from A2-C1 in the pre-course questionnaires. There was also some cultural and religious diversity and likely some diversity of *caste*. Translingual practices were the norm with some participant teachers working in an area of the country where they did not share the local language. Therefore, the teaching of English was often done using a variety of languages, some which were learnt languages by the teachers. Also, there are currently reforms to introduce EMI (English Medium Instruction) in some provinces.

In terms of connectivity, the participants all had access to smart phones and the internet and most joined Zoom classes on mobile phones. A few had access to laptops. The signal was strong enough for them to participate in live classes, but often this was without their video on to minimise bandwidth issues. We used Zoom as our synchronous platform, Google Classroom as our VLE, Google Jamboard as our whiteboard and WhatsApp for wrap-around communications. This selection of tools was chosen for their availability and familiarity from ELC's side, but also due to the participants' access and experience with WhatsApp and Zoom during the pandemic.

Outline of the course and rationale

The course focused on classroom language. This was decided by the ELTAI prior to the selection of the participants. ELC felt it was sensible. The rationale being that this was a rich area for improvement and that even more experienced and competent language users would also benefit from input and feedback on their language. There was a sense that where the teachers' model was improved, this would 'by osmosis' improve learner competence. Additionally, there was a sense of peril around pedagogy, particularly coming from a non-Indian tutor, unfamiliar with the reality of teachers' local context. Needs analysis and a pre-course agreement were undertaken to inform the design. Course participants were asked to rate their CEFR level and confidence with classroom language at the start of the course.

ELC did research using a number of published titles on classroom language. Including titles like: Slattery, M Willis, J (2001) English for Primary Teachers: A Handbook of activities & Classroom language. OUP; Huges, G. Moae, J. Raatikainen, T. (2007) Practical Classroom English. OUP; and Spratt, M (1994) English for the Teacher: A language development courses. OUP.

The course outcomes were based around a functional syllabus and there were a number of threads, including: starting the class, classroom management, giving a clear model, giving presentations and asking questions. Additionally, the course aimed to develop confidence with working online and was seen as a good opportunity to develop participants learning networks.

The times chosen for the twice weekly classes were done by polling the selected participants. Initially the classes were scheduled with the intention that teachers would connect live from their places of work, but it became clear from the start of the course that they would prefer to travel home first and the timings were shifted to meet this need. The ETA felt that two to three times a week would be more than enough of a commitment, and this would then allow two parallel groups. Group one would attend a live class Monday and Wednesday and initially, every other Friday. Group two were scheduled Tuesday & Thursday and alternate Fridays. The Friday sessions would focus on the project and covered transcription of language, identifying a puzzle, and forming a research question. The assessment for the course was an action research project presented in the final week of the course. Participants were encouraged to follow a framework and to present their experience using an exploratory classroom research framing structure.

Project findings

Working in partnership

The rapport established between the partners quickly developed into a productive working relationship. There was a sense of trust and respect from the outset which fostered this relationship. This positive relationship meant that both parties were at ease with the situation and that the orientation and culture for the course were in place. When the ETA colleague became unwell, it meant that the course could proceed in a way that both partners' voices were represented and the participants' experience was unaffected.

When our ETA contact was taken ill, having 'deputies' and alternative points of contact was helpful. Retrospectively, perhaps this also illustrated the success of the connection between ELC and the CPs. There was no perceptible change. This was a strength of this course, the shared clarity of vision and course outline meant that even without an official ELTAI presence, the course ran smoothly. This report is written with the full support of the ETA and support for the future use of the course materials.

Working within the CoP

There was a sense of this being 'our' course, the independence to problem solve, while supported by the PRELIM organisers, and the infrastructure of the CoP was a real positive. Additionally, it may have been useful for the ETAs to have also had their own CoP to use.

The CoP was a useful opportunity for learning and sharing, but Slack felt like a large, and daunting space and the ELC representative preferred to lurk. The Zoom meetings which occurred once a month were useful check ins, but on the whole the resource was under-used. I wonder if having smaller groups, or region-specific subgroups could have made it feel like a less daunting a space. The distributed nature of the PRELIM course led perhaps to a sense of being part of something bigger, which I think helped it make sense.

Working with the CPs

It was a pleasant experience for the ELC teacher trainer and the feedback from CPs reflects that this was mutual. The novelty of working with a UK-based teacher educator was clearly motivating, and for many was the first time they had attended any course with someone from the UK. There was a very convivial atmosphere, and a strong sense of rapport and that *something* had been created.

The CPs enjoyed communicating in breakout rooms on Zoom, and sharing ideas. In the WhatsApp group it is a positive that ending the relationship has proved difficult, and the sense of dependence on ELC (rather than moving towards something more self-sufficient / sustaining) is something to work on for the future – perhaps an outcome for the next course. Future projects should end with action planning for how the participant learning will continue, or become self-maintained without the UKI's involvement.

It was also very useful having a memorandum of understanding in place at the start of the course. This included a list of expectations: *I will attend 80%, I will be on time, etc.* The pre-course information included specifics about what the course included and what needed doing to get certification. This was a useful document to refer participants to when attendance / participation wasn't as required.

However, the participants who were reached benefited. Some directly, and for some it was an opportunity to reflect on their own classroom language and their teacher education practice around teaching classroom language was supported. One participant was involved in training teachers in his district, supporting the move to EMI, while participating in the course. There was also a sense that the participants and ELTAI could make use of the materials to deliver their own classroom language courses and resources in the future.

Designing/delivering the course

It was a challenge for ELTAI to reach teachers in rural areas. Perhaps also gender should have been the next filter, with female teachers given priority access. Using these two filters could have afforded more underrepresented groups to attend. A large number of those who expressed interest in the course included large numbers of teachers from urban areas who were excluded. Perhaps on future courses accessing a larger cohort of teachers should be prioritised, and perhaps more time allowed to do this.

Looking back, the pre-course phase was rushed. After the pre-course questionnaire, the course design would have been improved with a focus group with potential participants before the official start of the course. This may have given a sense of their spoken English, the focus of the course. It also would have enabled unmediated contact between ELC and the CPs, which may have led to some changes, needs as yet unexpressed.

It was important to be flexible. There was definitely a predictable challenge working with multilingual, heterogeneous classes. Soon after the start it became clear that numbers were quite low, so we should have joined the groups together earlier to cover more content *en masse*. Being able to respond quickly may have improved the quantity of taught hours for each participant.

The course needed to encourage more opportunities for participants to bring their reality at home and at school and their teaching experience and pedagogical 'know how' to the PRELIM classes. Future courses should make more use of out of photographs and videos of teachers' schools and classes.

Additionally, next time the participants should receive much more feedback on their language. Partly there was an issue with Zoom and not being able to share the screen while moving between breakout rooms, and partly because of a wish to improve confidence, and a concern about the impact of feedback on the less linguistically competent. Indeed, it felt like there was little time available for it, but its absence was noted in the mid-course feedback and in the second half of the course this was responded to, but more feedback would benefit participants in the future. Possibly tutorials during the course would have been one way to do this without losing face.

Engaging with Jamboard was reliant on CPs having a computer, not a phone, as it became difficult to interact on a small display. So, in future the use of Jamboard on smart phone needs to be reviewed and the course designed on a 'mobile first' basis.

There was some success with voice recording activities for homework, and there probably should have been more. One useful assignment was a reading aloud and giving feedback to their peers using WhatsApp audio, and this activity, or similar, could have been repeated. It's recommended that audio, video and photo assignments are more common.

The pre-course agreement was useful where participant behaviour didn't match to the expectations of the course. For example, one participant would often attend while riding a motorbike, though after prompting he pulled over on his journey home to try and participate more actively. There was danger and significant background noise. In this case the agreement was referred to, but also it's possible that this hadn't been fully understood, as the participant had A2 language proficiency, so perhaps another point of learning is to have these pre-course questionnaires and agreements in L1.

The handouts/additional resources were under signposted. Although some CPs reported using Google Classroom to catch up there were opportunities to set reading tasks from the additional material. This was a missed opportunity. However, the resource remains for the ETA and the participants to access at their own pace in the future.

Course outcomes

Ten of the fifteen respondents cited the course as having 'an excellent impact on their confidence' with classroom English. Additionally, four comments from different participants in the glowing end of course questionnaire suggest the impact of this on participants:

1. *"Previously I lacked confidence in my spoken English but now I am excited and eager to speak English with anyone"*
2. *"It improves my confidence. I'm more confident to talk to anyone"*
3. *"It has developed my confidence that i can use English everywhere and everytime"*
4. *"The course has impacted my confidence to a great level. Now I can speak publicly in English without any hesitation."*

One aim for a future version of this course could be to include a statement of outcome for teacher educators. The teacher trainers who participated have indicated in passing that they will be able to repurpose course material for their work with teachers and this quote suggests the impact of the course on their own practice: *"My confident level increased. I am very happy to got this kind of the platform to myself. When I took this course my teaching method also improved."* It's not clear if the respondents are discussing their teaching or training, but there is another similar comment: *"The course has impacted me lot. I have learned so many good things. My confident level increased. My teaching method to students changed a lot."*

A second point for future recommendation would be to have an assessed written English component as part of the course. The focus on spoken language could have been supplemented with written work too – feedback comments, reports etc. I felt this would be an opportunity for further challenge and variety.

Another recommendation for a future course objective would be to include a focus on sustainable teacher education practices, so another thread of work, or block of work at the end of the course focused on teacher learning and how to work with a PLN WhatsApp group in the future. When I attempted to leave the WhatsApp group, there was some protest, and one participant's plea about knowledge sharing suggests a lack of confidence in their own (see Fig. 2). The assessment activity on the course involved doing an exploratory classroom research project where the focus is on participants creating their own knowledge, but perhaps this needs to be further elaborated.

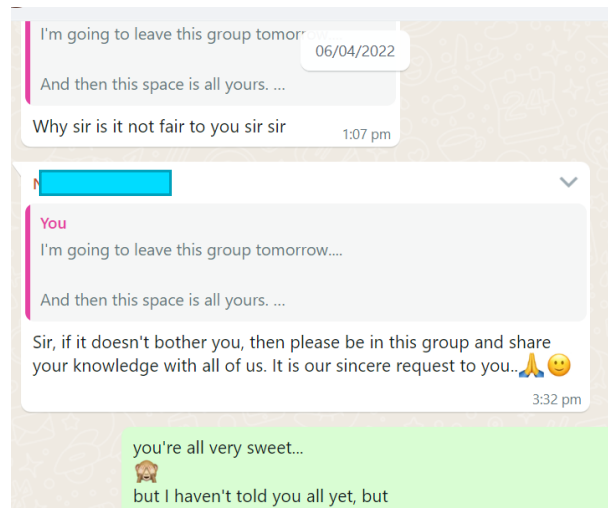


Fig. 2. WhatsApp chat

One participant said in the end of course tutorial that the experience had encouraged him to start a local ELTAI chapter which is an excellent result in terms of developing the awareness of ELTAIs activities and network development. Another participant looked forward to giving, or attending a similar course with the ETA: *It was a wonderful journey. Please make sure to give the class offline also (if possible) through the network ELTAI*".