

## PRELIM 2

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# Italy: TESOL Italy with Lewis School of English

August 2022

# Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Course overview</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	TESOL Italy
	<b>UKI partner</b>	Lewis School of English
	<b>Course length</b>	8 weeks of course content, plus induction and closing ceremony
	<b>Number of groups/cohorts</b>	1
<b>Participant profile</b>	<b>Total number of CPs</b>	23
	<b>Language level(s)</b>	A2 - C1 (predominantly C1)
	<b>CPs' teaching context</b>	From primary to upper secondary, with a range of class sizes and levels
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	<b>Synchronous platforms used</b>	Zoom
	<b>Synchronous session length</b>	90 minutes
	<b>Synchronous session frequency</b>	Once a week
	<b>Asynchronous workload</b>	2-3 hours per week
<b>Course content</b>	<b>Language development focus</b>	Grammar, functional language and idioms
	<b>Methodology focus</b>	No specific methodology focus
	<b>Technology focus</b>	CPs were introduced to a different site/app each week, to broaden their knowledge of online educational tools

## Description of the partners

TESOL Italy (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is a non-profit Italian organization founded in 1975, which has approximately 260 members in Italy and abroad. It is an affiliate of TESOL International Association, an associate of IATEFL, and is accredited by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR). It offers members a wide range of activities, including an annual conference, language improvement courses (LICs), CLIL courses, and a programme of seminars and webinars.

Lewis School of English was established in 1976 and is based in Southampton, UK. As well as its adult school and junior offerings, Lewis Teacher Training Centre runs an initial teaching qualification course and has designed and delivered a range of methodology courses, both face-to-face and online.

## Key features of the context

Once identified via a pre-registration form, the CPs were sent a diagnostic and commitment form to gather more detailed information about their school context, students, materials and resources used, and their perception of their English language competence. This helped to design the course to meet their educational needs. Successful registrants had ranging levels of English (from A2 to C1). Most were secondary teachers in public schools and all of them were women. Their class sizes ranged from 16 to 30 students, and teaching experience spanned from 1 year to 35 years, with the majority having taught for 20+ years. Most registrants taught in central urban areas, with an approximate combined 30% based in remote, rural or suburban areas. One third of our CPs were new TESOL Italy members, membership of the ETA being a pre-requisite to participation in our project.


## Outline of the course and rationale

Due to the anticipated availability of our Course Participants (CPs), we designed a course which consisted of 2-3 hours of asynchronous tasks each week, followed by a 90-minute live session. The purpose was to introduce opportunities for CPs to analyse and practise new language independently in the asynchronous tasks, before coming together to use the language more freely, and hopefully confidently, in the live sessions.

Content was presented in weekly modules, covering a different language point each week and mainly contextualised within the classroom environment, although we also included modules which allowed for a cultural exchange between our UK teachers and the CPs (*Figure 1*). CPs completed a pre-course level test, and were then split into 4 classes, ranging from A2 to C1 level. All classes followed the same course outline and format, but with the Target Language (TL) graded appropriately.

Module	Context	A2 level	B1-C1 level
1	School rules and regulations	Past modals	Reporting verbs
2	Asking students questions	Indirect questions	Hypothetical questions
3	Giving instructions	Sequencers	Functional phrases
4	Giving students encouragement	Functional phrases	Idiomatic phrases
5	Giving feedback	Opinions on rewards systems	Passive structures
6	Education/Life in the UK	Idiomatic language	Idiomatic language
7	Comparing education/life in the UK with Italy	Comparative structures	Comparative structures
8	Consolidation and action plans	Language review	Language review

*Figure 1. Overview of the course content.*

PRELIM - Week 2	
Week 2 - Task 1 - Reading	Due 18 Feb
Week 2 - Task 2 - Language tasks  2	Posted 12 Feb
Week 2 - Task 3 - Pronunciation	Due 18 Feb
Week 2 - Task 4 - Collaborative task	Due 18 Feb
Week 2 - Task 5 - Reflection	Posted 18 Feb

Each module followed the same format, starting with a contextualised reading, followed by language tasks, pronunciation work, a collaborative task and weekly reflection (*Figure 2*). We felt familiarity with the format would be key in making the course accessible.

*Figure 2. Example of a weekly module.*

With many teachers recently being required to transition to online teaching as a result of the pandemic, a secondary aim of the course was to introduce CPs to strategies and online tools that would help them to do this more confidently. We felt that the delivery of the live sessions could help indirectly with online teaching strategies, but in addition to this, we decided to introduce a weekly feature called ‘Digital Tool of the Week’. The idea was that a different online tool would be integrated into each module, either in the asynchronous tasks or in the live sessions, and CPs would then receive a handout with an overview of the tool and some ideas for how it could be used with their own students (*Figure 3*).

**LEWIS SCHOOL OF ENGLISH** **TESOL italy**

**Digital Tool of the Week...**

**padlet**

This week we used Padlet for one of our tasks. This is a great online tool. If you would like to use it in your classes, here is some more information about it:

**Web link:** <https://en-gb.padlet.com/> (there is also an app)

**Overview:** It's free to sign up and you can create 3 Padiets (pages) for free! It's user-friendly and is a great virtual notice board for sharing ideas with your group in real time or asynchronously. Simply share the link or QR code and watch your students post messages, upload files and images, and embed or add links to videos and websites on a beautiful background of your choice.

**Activities:** Group brainstorming, debating, Q&A forum, gathering research, lesson summaries, icebreakers, feedback, tips and recommendations...

**Why don't you give it a go?**

In terms of the chosen platforms for delivery, we decided on Google Classrooms for the asynchronous tasks, Zoom for the live sessions and WhatsApp for more informal communication, as TESOL Italy had confirmed that there was likely to be wide familiarity with these platforms amongst the CPs.

*Figure 3. Example Digital Tool of the Week handout.*

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# Project findings

## Working in partnership

The contextual knowledge of the English Teachers Association (ETA) was instrumental in establishing some of the key contributing factors to course design at the outset. For the entire duration of the project there was a constant exchange of ideas, suggestions, feedback between the partners and a fruitful collaboration to monitor and improve the course to meet the CPs' expectations.

### *Availability of CPs and course format*

Understanding the likely availability and existing workload of potential CPs allowed us to strike what we hoped was an achievable balance of asynchronous and synchronous components. It was agreed that 2-3 hours of asynchronous tasks would be beneficial and realistic, with a 90-minute live session each week. The ETA was able to specify that Friday evenings were commonly used for training events at the end of the working week, informing our decision to opt for Fridays for our live sessions. It was also agreed that a 25-hour course would be in line with expectations, as this tends to be the norm for professional development courses in Italy.

### *IT Integration*

CPs were expected to have reasonably good access and IT skills, which led us to include a focus on a broader range of digital tools within the asynchronous tasks themselves.

### *Needs and desires*

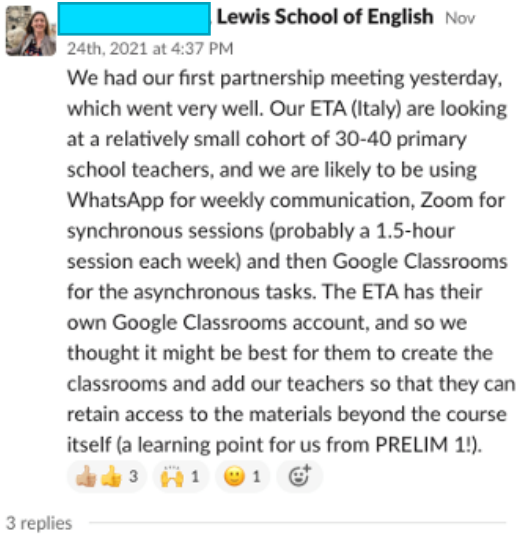
The ETA's knowledge of its members meant that we were given insights into some anticipated needs and desires of potential CPs. It was felt that methodology would be less desired, with many wanting opportunities to strengthen their knowledge of English and gain confidence in using it, as well as wanting to engage in cultural exchanges outside of Italy. This meant that we decided to focus predominantly on language development when designing our course, whilst including some cultural modules. The inclusion of a focus on digital tools was also as a result of the ETA's insights into current needs relating to online teaching.

As well as course design, many other parts of the process involved combined input from Lewis School and TESOL Italy, from the registration process and feedback forms, through to agreeing on attendance requirements in order to receive a course certificate.

### Key learning points:

- The ETA is able to provide valuable input on the likely availability of CPs and their online access, as well as expectations regarding course length.
- Current, local insights are key to understanding the appetite, needs and priorities of CPs when determining course content.
- Administrative processes – from registration to end-of-course feedback – should be discussed between the ETA and UKI, to ensure all stakeholders share an understanding of the objectives and outcomes of the project.

## Working within the CoP



The added value of working within the CoP for PRELIM 2 was the fact that a number of UKIs had taken part in the previous PRELIM project, and so were able to share their learning points with other UKIs, Lewis School of English included (Figure 4).

UKIs who were new to PRELIM were also able to offer up lots of incredibly useful and practical ideas and taking these on board certainly added value to our own project. One tip was that a WhatsApp group link could be shared by email, removing the need to add CPs manually using their phone numbers. Another suggestion within the CoP was to make a video promoting the course and encouraging participants to register, which we did, and our video was posted on the ETA's social media pages, with instructions on how to sign up (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Sharing of learning points on Slack.

The CoP is a space for positive interactions, support and the exchange of ideas, and although the contexts for the partnerships are varied, there is common ground in many of the shared challenges and solutions.



Figure 5. A promotional video for potential CPs.

## Working with the CPs

Three Lewis School teachers were assigned to create the asynchronous content and deliver the live sessions. CPs' test scores and registration responses were used as a guideline when designing the first module before a whole group induction took place to launch the course. The quantity and level of material was adapted going into Module 2, as teachers learnt more about their group's needs. It became apparent that the live sessions were highly valued, along with the pronunciation tasks, as opportunities to practise speaking were generally lacking in the CPs' day-to-day. For two of the classes in particular, this focus on pronunciation became integral to their course, as it was this aspect of the language that they most lacked confidence with. For all groups, there was a keen focus on helping CPs feel less intimidated when speaking in English. Vocabulary, grammar and 'think pieces' were introduced in the preparatory asynchronous components, to give CPs the best chance to effectively share their ideas in the live sessions. Teachers observed CPs' marked increase in confidence as the course progressed, as well as a growing amount of support for and interest in each other, with more frequent non-course related exchanges taking place in English over WhatsApp (Figure 6).

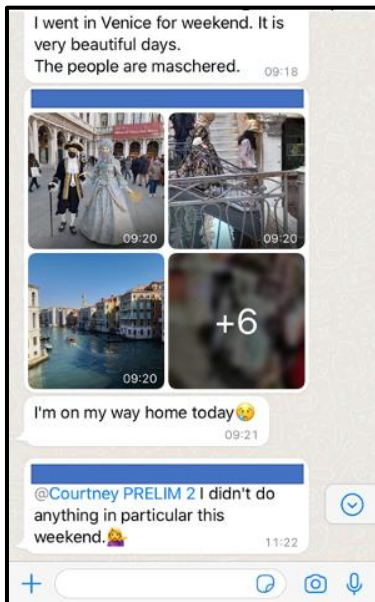


Figure 6. A WhatsApp exchange.

Engagement was high, with evidence of some CPs reviewing material prior to the live sessions, and some doing more than was required and demonstrating great creativity with the language.

Gaining an in-depth understanding of the CPs' needs and contexts was essential for creating content that they would be enthusiastic about engaging with, and this required ongoing adaptability as the teachers learnt more about their classes. Although the registration information was a very useful starting point, the induction session gave teachers much more insight into existing levels of confidence, context and practical ability. A learning point from this is that it would be beneficial for the induction to take place before preparing any content.



## Designing/delivering the course



PRELIM 2 saw us ensuring that we included a live induction session to launch the course. Although the data gathered from pre-course level tests and course registration forms was incredibly useful, this live induction session gave Lewis teachers far more information about the level and needs of their classes (by which point, module 1 had already been created). It may then be advised to introduce a small break between induction and the launch of the course to give teachers time to reflect on information that came about during induction and make any necessary changes to course design.

With a modular approach, we wanted to factor in regular opportunities for CPs to reflect on what they had learnt, as well as using this as a means of receiving ongoing feedback on course content. To achieve this, we included a weekly reflection task, with questions focusing on areas such as the usefulness of the content, the CPs' levels of confidence with the language learnt and any feedback or suggestions they might want to volunteer. While the responses proved useful in shaping the live

sessions and future modules, the completion rate dropped as the course progressed, which may be due to the repetitive nature and high frequency of the task. It is also possible that the distinction between reflective learning and course feedback was unclear. What we can take from this is that reflection tasks may benefit from including more variety and being more specific to course content, with these being completed every two or three modules, rather than every week. Additionally, there should be a marked separation between course feedback and self-reflection.

For this task, I would like each of you to write at least one rule that you would like to see implemented at your school. Try to include vocabulary from the previous tasks!  
Once you have done so, you are expected to read posts made by others and comment on whether you think they are good suggestions, or if you disagree with a particular idea. You are also encouraged to 'like' the post that you most agree with. You are strictly FORBIDDEN FROM 'liking' more than one post! (Well that might be a bit strong but, you know, I'd greatly appreciate it if you only clicked like on one post!)  
-Jonathon

  2mo  
I would love to work as a teacher with your rules. I believe that rule number 5, it is crucial for the students in developing their character. Stepping out of their 'world' and see different realities.

  2mo  
I totally agree with your rules, especially rule n. 1.

Collaboration was something we felt was important to promote, and each module included a collaborative task where CPs were required to work together whilst using the TL. It became apparent that putting CPs in pairs to work together had its drawbacks, as sometimes, neither one assumed the lead to get started on the task, or they were working to different time schedules. Our solution was to include more 'open collaborative' tasks. For example, all CPs create a piece of work which is posted on a communal page, before they then respond and interact with each other's work (*Figure 7*).

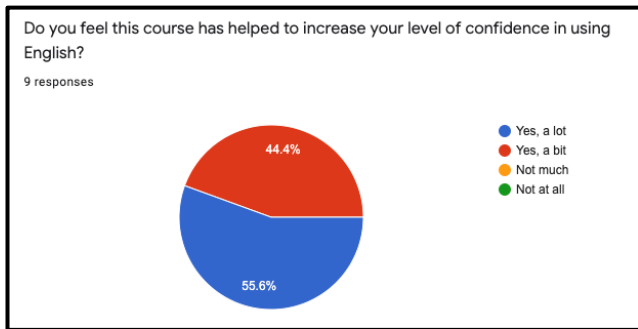
In terms of the pronunciation tasks, although audio notes on WhatsApp proved largely successful for this, a minority of CPs did not want to use WhatsApp for privacy reasons. This led to us presenting CPs with a choice of tools whilst achieving the same outcome. For example, Vocaroo was offered as an alternative, with links to audio recordings being posted in Google Classrooms.

*Figure 7. An example open collaboration task and responses.*

## Course outcomes

Teachers reported seeing an increase in CPs' confidence as the course progressed, which was evidenced through fewer exchanges in their L1 and CPs maximising opportunities to recycle the TL from earlier modules in their weekly tasks.





In end-of-course feedback, CPs were directly asked if they felt their confidence levels had increased, with 56% responding 'Yes, a lot', and 44% responding 'Yes, a bit', albeit only a small sample of participants completed this feedback (Figure 8).

Figure 8. End-of-course feedback responses regarding confidence.

To establish whether the secondary aim of introducing CPs to a wider range of online tools had been achieved, the end-of-course feedback asked if they had come across any new tools that they would like to use with their own students. The responses showed that CPs planned to experiment with a variety of these tools beyond the course (Figure 9).

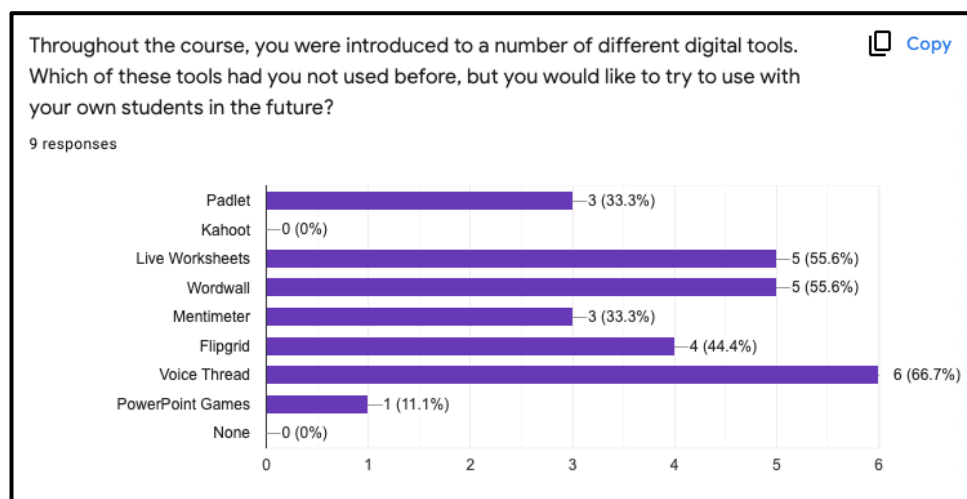


Figure 9. End-of-course feedback responses regarding digital tools.

When asked what they had most enjoyed about the course, responses included the live sessions, the balance of activities, having time to speak, pronunciation practice, and the reading and language tasks.

The Lewis School teachers also found the experience to be a great learning opportunity, as they discovered new online tools themselves, and adapted the course content to meet the needs of their learners as the project progressed and they learnt more about their contexts.

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## Emergent learning

During the end-of-course closing ceremony, the TESOL Italy representative remarked the “*every step of this project was shared*”, and we believe that this frequent interaction, communication of ideas and equal distribution of roles helped us to create a relevant and engaging course for CPs. There are also some key learning points from this course.

The primary aim of PRELIM is to increase levels of confidence, and there may be a misconception that higher levels of English result in higher levels of confidence. However, when working with CPs who were C1 level, it became clear that there are all sorts of reasons for teachers not to feel confident in their language ability. For example, pronunciation issues, a lack of practice opportunities, or having no More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) to help them progress. On future projects it would be useful to ask CPs ‘what confidence looks like’ to them as part of the pre-registration process. This will give further insights into how, specifically, they can be helped to improve their confidence levels.

This collaboration has been an entirely positive experience, and one that we hope will help to shape future projects.