

## PRELIM 2

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# Mali: MATE (Malian Association of Teachers of English) with Eurospeak Language Schools Ltd

August 2022

# Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Course overview</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	Malian Association of Teachers of English (MATE)
	<b>UKI partner</b>	Eurospeak Language Schools Ltd.
	<b>Course length</b>	10 weeks
	<b>Number of groups/cohorts</b>	8 groups
<b>Participant profile</b>	<b>Total number of CPs</b>	56
	<b>Language level(s)</b>	B1-B2
	<b>CPs' teaching context</b>	Mostly secondary
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	<b>Synchronous platforms used</b>	Zoom and WhatsApp
	<b>Synchronous session length</b>	90 minutes
	<b>Synchronous session frequency</b>	One per week
	<b>Asynchronous workload</b>	2 hours per week
<b>Course content</b>	<b>Language development focus</b>	Classroom functional language, diagnosing and working on common errors, fluency development and accent reduction
	<b>Methodology focus</b>	Demonstration and analysis of own teaching strategies
	<b>Technology focus</b>	N/A

## Description of the partners

MATE (Malian Association of Teachers of English) is a non-profit organisation with 18 members on national board and local chapters in the regions of Mali. Their main objective is the promotion of the English language in Mali. Their network comprises a number of teachers of English as a foreign language who are committed to their training and continual professional development. They also seek opportunities to continue to improve their own English proficiency as this has an impact on their professional competences.

Eurospeak is a UK language school with branches in Reading and Southampton which is accredited by the British Council and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Their most popular courses are General English and Exam Preparation courses for adults. They also run online lessons, English for Specific Purposes courses, and teacher training programmes upon demand. They are an authorised Cambridge English exam centre and run the First Certificate (FCE) and Advanced Certificate (CAE) exams. In 2021, Eurospeak established an educational technology-focused spin-off, Eurospeak Ireland.

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Eurospeak Ireland is an edu-tech company dedicated to delivering educational products and training. They participate in a range of projects under the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme.

## Key features of the context

The course participants (CPs) were based in different regions across Mali. Most CPs were primary or secondary school teachers of English as a foreign language. Their language proficiency generally ranged from CEFR B1 to CEFR B2, with a few exceptions. Internet connection was often unreliable, and some of the CPs also had a low-to-moderate level of IT literacy. Nevertheless, the CPs were highly passionate and motivated, and this really helped the course run smoothly. There were some technology issues throughout the course, but the CPs' positive and relaxed attitude always helped overcome these.

## Outline of the course and rationale

The Eurospeak-MATE course aimed to increase CPs language proficiency and professional confidence through:

- Classroom functional language
- Diagnosing and working on common errors
- Fluency development
- Accent reduction
- Some work on teaching methodology (e.g. via demonstration and analysis of own teaching strategies)

As the time for the delivery of synchronous sessions was very limited, we approached the design of the course with an open mind. Course content was based on CPs needs as identified via a needs analysis survey conducted prior to the beginning of the course, and on responses and feedback gathered from CPs on a weekly basis during course delivery. Our flexible approach allowed us to focus on issues that were highly relevant to the Malian context, which ultimately led to very positive feedback from the majority of our CPs.

Our approach included a limited selection of new target language given the time constraints, but we ensured that language items presented in class were complemented with sufficient opportunities for practice and revision. As time was limited, we decided not to hold separate sessions for language development and teacher training (both identified as priorities for the CPs during the needs analysis). Instead, we decided to integrate the teacher training component of the course into language development sessions. This involved starting sessions with language development activities, and then moving on to discussion and reflection on the techniques the tutors used during these activities. For example, one of the sessions started with a vocabulary activity which involved eliciting from the CPs during language development stage of the lesson. After the vocabulary slot of this session was finished, the tutor moved on to introducing and labelling the concept of eliciting in language teaching, providing opportunities for discussion and reflection. Homework assignments also included work on both language development and teacher training, encouraging further manipulation of the teaching techniques presented on the course (e.g. by encouraging CPs to try them out in their own teaching contexts).

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# Project findings

## Working with the CPs

Managing CPs expectations was essential to the success of the programme. Participation guidelines relating to regular attendance, completion of homework assignments, and active participation throughout the course were established early on. Early guidance for classroom interaction with CPs also helped with classroom management. CPs were asked to arrive in class on time, have cameras on during lessons, and keep microphones muted when not speaking. To ensure that CPs would be able to participate successfully, we also allocated some time to familiarising CPs with the platforms selected for the course – WhatsApp and Zoom.

Communication with the CPs was a little challenging during the early stages of the course. However, we soon created small WhatsApp groups for each class, and this enabled us to reach CPs more easily. To avoid overwhelming CPs with information, the course coordinator communicated with them once at the end of each week, providing a summary of achievements, updates, and information regarding next steps. Key messages were highlighted in bold, and links to external resources were provided in a clear manner. Recurring themes in these end-of-week messages included feedback from the tutors and course coordinator, as well as attendance and homework assignment reminders.

As technology was often unreliable, live teaching sometimes experienced considerable disruption. Occasionally, this meant that sessions could not be delivered as initially planned and, in some instances, could not be delivered at all. Rescheduling live sessions was a challenge for CPs because of their limited availability outside the times allocated to the course. To address this, a back-up plan was put in place. It was decided that all lessons would start on Zoom, but if technological issues became very disruptive, the lesson would move on to the WhatsApp text chat. This would allow tutor and CPs to carry out the lesson synchronously albeit via a simpler delivery mode. This solution proved very useful over the first two weeks, when it was most needed. As CPs became more used to the technology, these issues started to become more infrequent, allowing for successful delivery on Zoom for most of the course.

Some CPs experienced occasional issues during the course. These varied from connectivity problems to difficulties joining Zoom. For this reason, the tutors and CPs agreed on recording the synchronous sessions and a OneDrive folder was created to share the resulting videos. It also became clear that Eurospeak would need to provide ongoing individual support to minimise absences. This required frequent monitoring of the WhatsApp groups, especially before and during class time. Our work had a visible impact on the delivery of the course and was much appreciated by the ETA coordinator and CPs. In the words of the ETA's coordinator: *"The course coordinator and the [tutors] were always ready to help the participants by replying to their questions and finding solutions to their challenges during the course"*.

## Designing/delivering the course

Clear communication and a shared understanding of course objectives and expectations helped ensure smooth delivery of the course. This was achieved via a thorough process of participant selection, regular meetings and interviews with our partner ETA coordinator, a needs analysis survey at the outset of the

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course, a welcome talk/course induction, and the collection of feedback from the CPs at different points during the course.

Having two tutors involved in the project was also highly beneficial. This enabled the tutors to brainstorm together, share tailor-made resources for the course, address challenges they encountered collaboratively, and generally support each other as issues arose. Delivering this course required us to select and create course materials that aligned well with the needs of the CPs, rather than using published materials. With two tutors working on this together, this was a less demanding task than it would have otherwise been.

The tutors did not have previous experience in delivering a course in Mali, and so designing and delivering this course also presented opportunities for professional development. Teaching on this course allowed them to learn the best ways to deliver lessons, respond to CPs' needs, and use teaching materials in this unfamiliar teaching context. As a result, they felt that their participation in PRELIM 2 helped them develop their expertise in language teaching. As one of the tutors put it: *"The context and profile of the students were new to me. I had to learn how to teach them and improved my adaptability in course delivery as a result"*.

## Course outcomes

Our tutors and CPs identified a marked improvement in the CPs' communication skills and all-round confidence in English during their PRELIM 2 course. Notable areas where improvements were made were in the areas of grammar and vocabulary. Much of the course focused on these areas because they were perceived as a high priority by CPs. A two-week focus on pronunciation was also well received, with CPs reporting that their own learning and teaching contains minimal pronunciation elements. This is well captured in the feedback we received from many CPs. For example, one CP commented: *"I learnt a lot from pronunciation skill, vocabulary teaching, sentence and word stress."* Another stated that: *"I've learnt about pronunciation, grammar, teaching methods, authentic text, writing and listening"*.

The CPs also reported feeling more confident as teachers by the end of the course. For example, one CP commented that: *"This course helped me to become a better teacher in pronunciation, grammar, listening and vocabulary because we discovered new things which can help us to be better teachers in English."* Many CPs successfully implemented new teaching techniques in their classes as part of their homework assignments and through their own initiative. Work on lesson and course design allowed CPs to adapt their own lessons to their professional needs and the personal preferences of their students, as the following comment from one of our CPs illustrates: *"This showed me how to prepare a lesson. How to organise students in class and what a good teacher must do to make his students perfect at learning English."*

Overall, the CPs feedback on this course was highly positive, and it touched on a range of themes: from language learning outcomes to their sense of personal progress as teachers and their views on the implementation of new teaching techniques in their respective classes. Tutors' and the ETA coordinator's feedback mirrored this, and so we feel that the course was a success. It became clear that the course boosted the CPs' confidence as teachers, and that this ultimately had an impact on their own learners. As this CP put it: *"[The course] taught me a lot about English, but the best thing about the course was the teaching of teaching. Now my students learn better. We don't even want the course to finish."*

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The tutors themselves also commented on their own professional development during the course. PRELIM 2 posed unique challenges and opportunities, mainly in relation to the needs of learners from an unfamiliar background. As one of the tutors put it: “*While in the past I usually taught... using a set textbook, this course allowed me to adapt more to the participants based on both frequent errors and feedback*”. As stated above, this was partly due to the fact that the tutors had no previous experience of working with learners from Mali. Teaching fellow language teachers further contributed to this, as the tutors had only had limited opportunities to engage in teacher training in the past. This was a challenge which the tutors responded to with enthusiasm, and which, in their own words, allowed them to gain: “*some insight into new teaching approaches, and how to adapt them to our particular context.*”