BRITISH COUNCIL

PRELIM 2

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Moldova: META Moldova with **Elac Study Vacations**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	META Moldova
	UKI partner	Elac Study Vacations
	Course length	10 weeks (& further 1 week for 1:1 sessions and focus groups/certificate ceremony)
	Number of groups/cohorts	2 groups
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	10
	Language level(s)	B2/C1
	CPs' teaching context	State school –primary and secondary
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom
	Synchronous session length	90 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	Weekly
	Asynchronous workload	90 minutes per week
Course content	Language development focus	Telling anecdotes; British regional accents; Varieties of world English; New words; Vocabulary variation.
	Methodology focus	Classroom language; Lesson planning; Vocabulary; Differentiation; Integrated Skills.
	Technology focus	Variety of websites and apps which can be used for language learning, as sources for language teaching, and for creating classroom and online materials.

Description of the partners

Elac Study Vacations

Elac, established in 1991, offers English and activity holidays to international teenagers. This includes a Study Centre in Bath offering tailor made face-to-face and online courses for closed groups throughout the year, and 7 multi-national residential and homestay centres across the UK in the summer months. They work with partners from 32 different countries, but this is the first collaboration with Moldova. www.elac.co.uk

META Moldova

META is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation established in 2013 to support the professional development of English teachers. There are over 500 members for whom they organise and promote

conferences, training webinars and scholarships, and 1,500 non-member teachers. They are governed by an elected body of volunteers who are also teachers. https://meta-moldova.md/

Key features of the context

Course Participants (CPs):

- 10 female teachers working in primary and secondary state schools.
- All with minimum B2 English proficiency level.
- Varied years teaching experience, from 5 months to 22 years.
- Half of participants had other careers before becoming English teachers: Accountant; Child Psychologist; Psychology Teachers; French Teacher.
- Based across Moldova: Chișinău, Drochia, and more rural locations in the South, South-West, and North.

Other considerations:

- Unstable internet connections with low bandwidth and speed, and CPs using mobile phones.
- Evening sessions preferred as many Moldovan teachers teach privately after school.

Outline of the course and rationale

Teacher confidence was initially discussed with META to understand what this meant for Moldovan teachers. Subsequently, 4 focus groups were held to speak directly with potential participants to elicit their thoughts on course content and understand how to help them become more confident language teachers and users.

META reported that Moldovan teachers appreciated opportunities to interact with other English teachers and to speak English outside their classrooms, and that CPD was not common; this was particularly true for those in rural areas and working in smaller schools.

30 Moldovan teachers attended the focus groups and common themes and sub-themes emerged:

1) Development of own English

Improve pronunciation

Develop speaking and listening skills

Learn about language changes

2) Professional development

Classroom management

Student Motivation

Differentiation

Teaching the 4 skills confidently

Speaking activities

Practical tasks

Assessment ideas

New technology and applications

3) Personal connections and interaction

Attend interactive course with lots of participation

Make new friends

Converse with British teachers of English

These findings formed the basis of the course design and content. A 10-week programme was organised focussing on teaching themes for the first half of the programme, and language development for the second half; all materials were created specifically for the PRELIM course. We believed CPs would initially feel more confident discussing teaching, and then when rapport and confidence increased, they would feel more comfortable discussing language and more challenging topics. Following each lesson, PowerPoints were shared with CPs in Google Classroom; this remains active after the course so CPs can continue accessing the materials.

Feedback revealed all CPs had a minimum B2 level but varied teaching experience. We therefore decided not to do placement tests nor to organise groups based on teaching experience; this was to ensure CPs of all levels and experiences could form friendships and learn from one another. Instead, we offered session times which suited the Moldovan teaching day and CPs attended the most suitable session.

Needs analysis clearly indicated that CPs preferred weekly synchronous classes of no more than 90 minutes, plus accompanying asynchronous activities to be completed in own time. Zoom and Google Classroom were chosen as simpler platforms for CPs to access.

Examples of sessions from second half of course:

Project findings

Working in partnership

Elac and META communicated successfully during the run-up to the PRELIM course; meetings proved extremely useful not only to agree upon platforms, course dates and session times, but also to help understand about Moldovan culture and the educational system.

Recruitment proved challenging in the new year due to factors outside the partnership's control; however, CPs who attended the course, were committed, and benefited from smaller groups.

Once the course was in progress, META recommended direct communication with CPs and this helped with the smooth running of the programme, allowed the ETA to focus on other work commitments, and gave course tutors and CPs more autonomy. META received regular updates throughout the programme.

Working with the CPs

Confidence

Small friendly classes helped increase CP confidence when speaking; something they had requested in initial focus groups. There was an expectation that CPs might not switch on video cameras or participate, but this was not the case, again possibly due to the small classes.

The second part of the course focussed on CP language development and challenged them to use new vocabulary and raise awareness about different kinds of English. CPs were extremely motivated to share this knowledge with their students and these were the topics which helped them feel more confident when teaching.

Enthusiasm

It was evident that CPs had busy days, juggling PRELIM classes with work and family commitments, with one CP even starting class on the phone in the school playground then running home to log back in. In any other class, this might have been seen as disruptive, but instead, tutors found CPs' commitment heart-warming, and it helped form stronger bonds.

The tutors' enthusiasm and commitment had a positive effect on CPs but interestingly, this was also true in reverse. Tutors remarked that CPs joining class after busy days and being upbeat when clearly tired, was inspirational and their enthusiasm was contagious, T1: *"You're all so enthusiastic; it also rubs off on me. You've inspired me too."*

Course outcomes

Course outcomes are based on quantitative data and comments from anonymous questionnaires, plus qualitative data from final focus groups (recorded and transcribed.)

Final questionnaires demonstrated that all CPs were positive about the course and tutors and felt more confident teaching English. They had already started using the resources in their lessons, and had experienced positive changes to their English, citing improvements in pronunciation, speaking, and vocabulary knowledge.

> This course is of great help to teachers, it offered me a great experience, and it was interesting and relevant for my professional growth. I am very thankful for your guidance, teaching, and organizing of resourceful activities which will help me in my teaching process. Thanks for sharing and hopefully I will be accepted in other training and seminars which will be organized by you.

> I will definitely use the resources to develop my own English, I mean the online resources you presented I have discovered a lot of websites to use for drilling my English: skell , english central, british accents...I am going to present these resources to my colleagues because sharing is caring

> Lydia is a great teacher, she offered a great experience of learning and teaching. She is a very creative and positive person. It was a pleasure to attend her lessons because she helped us, guided us when it was necessary, and made us confident. I appreciate her for the work she has done, her understanding, and her professionalism.

> The teacher is excelent, kind and very wise.

> Oh, Lydia is a great teacher and it was a pleasure to attend all the courses.

> I have learned so much in our classes with Alison. She is good at keeping lessons engaging, passionate for teaching, calm and supportive. Thanks!!!

We felt that focus groups would help us glean a more in-depth understanding and encouraged discussion on the three original themes (from initial focus groups.) Again, comments were all positive, but we obtained concrete examples of the direct impact on CPs and their students.

Development of own English

Despite CPs not always completing asynchronous tasks, it became evident they were revisiting tasks and lesson resources in their own time to develop their English. CP1: *"Every evening, I open the sites you have shared, work on them, try something, and they are great...I discover a lot of words, synonyms, expressions, link expressions, this is really powerful."* CP2: *"The same, I reread this information, even if I didn't complete all the tasks, be sure I read all of them, and I use them and will use them in the future."*

Initially, CPs said they were confident in their language abilities, but as the course progressed, they recognised their areas of weakness and welcomed opportunities to improve, CP3: *"It's a real pleasure...to see how you progress, you see your misunderstandings, you see your weak points and how to empower yourself and how to continue and progress...it is strong motivation for a teacher and if you want to be a good teacher."*

All CPs mentioned an improvement in pronunciation and increased confidence after discussing regional British accents and World English; 3 CPs specifically mentioned how their new-found confidence had a direct effect on their students' confidence. CP4 explained that despite knowing this was her *"weakest area,"* she now felt more assured, and this helped her students become confident, *"now they are not afraid of speaking and talking in English."* CP3 agreed, *"...after our course with you, I began to not be shy of pronunciation, and to encourage students to speak English. Some of them are very shy. I personally became more confident after listening to all the different accents and I understood that we are speaking English pretty well here in Moldova!"* CP1 mentioned a specific student who rarely spoke in class because they were embarrassed of their accent, but after being exposed to different accents in the same way she had been and understanding there was not one 'correct' English accent, they started participating in class.

Professional Development

CPs were keen to explain how they had already started applying their learning. Half described teaching new language, and all mentioned using or aiming to use new technology and applications. CP4 explained how her students were surprised when she introduced *"new modern words"* and that this empowered her; she was pleased to be seen as a teacher knowledgeable about new language trends. CP2 used tongue twisters to *"change the atmosphere of the lesson"* and had noticed an *"elevation in mood"* and an improved rapport with her students. CP5, who had 20+ years teaching experience, explained that each week she would *"take 3 things from the PowerPoint"* and use them in her lessons, *"I feel that my lessons changed by being aware of, and including things, from the sessions...I include new materials, activities, websites, and videos...I observed new things about my teaching."*

Personal Connections and Interaction

As the course progressed, CPs became more comfortable in class, forming bonds and nominating one another without the tutor's encouragement. This was the first CPD course for two participants and both mentioned feeling more assured at work as a result, CP4: *"...if someone was telling me I was wrong, I could say no, this time I am right, so I am more confident about my knowledge."*

CPs raised this third theme themselves, saying how they would like to keep in touch with one another and how the collaborative and friendly environment had helped increase confidence, CP1: *"I really feel more confident speaking English now due to the fact that we had a supportive atmosphere here in this course and I would like to say thanks to the girls for this atmosphere."* Contact is still ongoing between CPs in Google Classroom and CPs have asked to be contacted about free CPD sessions by ELAC, which they hope to attend together.

Emergent learning

Confidence isn't quantitative

Asking CPs about their confidence via Mentimeter at start of lessons was not useful because CPs always rated their teaching and language ability as high. We learnt it was better to discuss different contexts and scenarios instead; this is when CPs discussed struggles and lack of confidence. Through

discussion, we learnt that Moldovan teachers could feel intimidated by higher level students who gain more speaking practice than their teachers, with after school private lessons and exposure to English L1 speakers. We found that effective needs analysis combines qualitative and quantitative information, and a variety of investigative tools, such as questionnaires and focus groups.

Cultural sharing is key

Tutors followed set lessons, but extra cultural exchanges occurred because tutors chose to do further research to learn more about Moldova and find British links. T1 talked with CPs about a Moldovan rugby player based in Wales, and T2 often talked about food and drink. We understood that giving tutors freedom within a prescriptive curriculum to discuss cultural aspects of interest to them, helps build rapport and increases tutor motivation.

Learning can be mutual

Course tutors also learnt from CPs; this was not something we had considered, but at the end of each session when everyone shared good practice, tutors also gained knowledge of new apps, classroom activities, and ways to practise L2. We learnt that including a knowledge-sharing stage benefits all involved; it empowers CPs and creates an environment of mutual respect and teacher collaboration between tutors and CPs.

Final feedback: Focus groups