

PRELIM 2

Montenegro: ELTAM (English Language Teachers' Association of Montenegro) with **Speak Up London**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	English Language Teachers Association of Montenegro (ELTAM)
	UKI partner	Speak Up London
	Course length	10 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	4
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	45
	Language level(s)	C1+
	CPs' teaching context	Pre-school, primary, secondary, FE
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Microsoft Teams
	Synchronous session length	120 mins
	Synchronous session frequency	1 x week
	Asynchronous workload	60 mins per week
Course content	Language development focus	Speaking fluency, pronunciation, British culture
	Methodology focus	Teaching pronunciation
	Technology focus	Practical classroom tasks involving technology

Description of the partners

[ELTAM Montenegro](#) is an English teachers association consisting of 155 members. It gathers teachers from 163 primary, 48 secondary, and 21 pre-schools. The board members run the ETA on a voluntary basis. Methodology training sessions are organised both in person and online, with a paid annual conference. Most CPD sessions involve passive or written participation and many teachers get few opportunities to actively use their English beyond B1/B2 level.

[Speak Up London](#) is an English language school based in London and online. With around 17 in-school and 7 online teachers, Speak Up London delivers a variety of General English, exam and ESP courses year-round. PRELIM 2 course management was assigned to Kat Jeffries, Director of Studies Online, who collaborated with five experienced online tutors to deliver the course.

Key features of the context

All English language teachers in Montenegro (MNE) need to have a degree in English Philology and reach CEFR C1 in English. The course was open and advertised to all English language teachers residing in Montenegro - 162 teachers were emailed directly; all Montenegrin schools received an email notification, and a Facebook post was shared. Just under 80% of applicants teach at primary schools, with roughly 18% teaching at secondary level and many combining work in both settings and/or teaching at pre-school or higher education levels.

It was deemed fair to open the course to all MNE teachers as, according to our partner ETA, development opportunities are generally available to all types of teachers in Montenegro and there was no clear group of teachers that particularly needed training.

Teachers in Montenegro are asked to renew their teaching licence every 5 years, for which they need to complete 24 hours of accredited professional development. Although the PRELIM certificate is not considered accredited training, it can help the CPs achieve higher ranking within their settings.

It is estimated that around 90% of the teachers are female. General accessibility to the internet is very high across the country, meaning Speak Up London was able to contact CPs directly and minimal involvement from ELTAM Montenegro was required to schedule sessions. The majority of the applicants have ten years of experience or more.

Outline of the course and rationale

A two-step needs analysis, where a questionnaire was sent out to all schools in Montenegro asking them to define their linguistic and methodology needs, helped Speak Up London establish key principles for the course. We received 79 responses, based on which we worked with our partners at ELTAM Montenegro to suggest a course that would cover most areas mentioned by the respondents. A second questionnaire/confirmation form was then sent out, presenting the format of the course, course dates and the expectations from the course participants. This time, we received 46 confirmations and these CPs were divided into four groups.

It was decided that the CPs needed to activate their skills and feel challenged. Our focus therefore became developing fluency and confidence in spoken English and encouraging the CPs to refresh their C1 level language skills.

Main aim:

Improving speaking fluency at C1/C2 level; providing the CPs with an opportunity to use spoken English with native speakers and other CPs

Sub-aims were decided based on individual comments and the most popular areas selected by the CPs in the questionnaire sent out.

Sub-aims:

- Accent reduction; teaching pronunciation; practical activities

- Paperless lessons; digital resources
- Authentic materials - adjusting them to primary vs secondary level
- British culture
- Classroom management; student-centredness
- ESP focus to encourage further development in these areas (law, business, art/music, SEN)

What areas of English language teaching would you like to develop?

79 responses

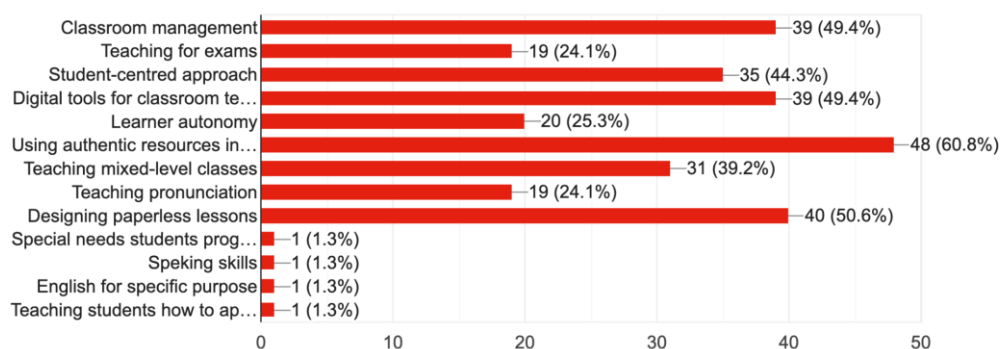


Fig 1.: As part of the needs analysis, the applicants were asked which areas of teaching methodology they would like to focus on.

Project findings

Working in partnership

The ELTAM – Speak Up London PRELIM 2 partnership was highly collaborative in nature. Good internet connection and high levels of computer literacy among the CPs certainly worked in our favour. We communicated with our partners via email, WhatsApp and Zoom and both sides were responsive, despite clashing national holidays. Some out-of-hours calls were required depending on ETA board members' availability.

Speak Up London decided to run the live sessions on Microsoft Teams, which all CPs were already familiar with. This minimised the risk of potential IT problems on the Montenegrin side but required training for Speak Up London tutors who had not used Teams much before. ELTAM Montenegro delivered Teams training to support us with this and oversaw setting up the Teams sessions. ELTAM Montenegro also shared access to four of their Teams accounts to help with scheduling and troubleshooting. Similarly, at least one ELTAM board member was part of each WhatsApp group acting as a facilitator in the process.

Following a request from the Speak Up London tutors, a cultural awareness Q&A session was delivered by ELTAM Montenegro, helping us understand the diverse Montenegrin groups better and avoid potential faux pas during the course. Our partners' input into the structure and contents of the syllabus

were invaluable, especially regarding general teacher availability and the choice of some potentially controversial topics. We believe this to be a crucial part of syllabus development in future PRELIM work.

Regular WhatsApp communication helped us address any queries from the CPs, confirm deadlines or troubleshoot. We recommend it as a means of communication to future PRELIM partners.

Speak Up London and ELTAM plan to continue collaborating in the future by organising on-site courses in the UK and encouraging Speak Up London tutors to present at the ELTAM annual conference.

Working within the CoP

Speak Up London found the experience of being part of the PRELIM 2 Community of Practice very enriching. The course director found the daily exchanges on the Slack platform, individual check-ins with NILE project management, as well as group Zoom sessions reassuring, especially as this was our first PRELIM experience. The Slack platform has been an excellent springboard for ideas and has allowed Speak Up London to develop those already established in PRELIM 1, as well as add new ones of our own, such as our PRELIM 2 course Special Interests Weeks.

Working with the CPs

Speak Up London tutors found the collaboration among each other beneficial in regards to idea sharing and working together to create bespoke materials for the CPs. Despite being experienced tutors, they felt challenged to deliver an engaging course for near-proficient CPs on topics they may not have covered in their own classes before.

CPs enjoyed the interaction with the tutors and other CPs, especially as they came from varied settings in already multicultural Montenegro. One participant commented that their PRELIM course was: *“A great opportunity to practice speaking, as well as to improve speaking skills, meet fellow teachers and exchange ideas and examples of good practice.”*

In the end-of-course feedback 86% of CPs told us they felt they had benefited from being part of their WhatsApp groups saying it was a *“Great way to exchange experiences and support each other.”*

However, a minority felt indifferent about daily communication or would have liked some CPs to have interacted more within the groups.

Designing/delivering the course

Guidance from Speak Up London, paired with a thorough needs analysis, helped manage CPs' expectations at the beginning of the course, and maintain high levels of engagement over the ten weeks. While our core workshops focused on the main course aim, the Special Interest Weeks addressed most of the individual CP requests.

A 120-minute live session each week, on weekdays or at the weekend, was paired with 60-minutes' worth of asynchronous preparation completed in the run up to each class. The workload was mostly manageable, although around 30% of CPs struggled to complete all the asynchronous work due to other commitments. We noticed that engagement was lower on Friday afternoons and on future projects would recommend running an extra weekend session instead.

Topics for the first half of the course were suggested by the course manager, while the latter half of the course was informed by CP feedback. The tutors found that the initial topics were thought-provoking and challenging (accentism, gender stereotyping, technology & changes in language). CP feedback involved comments on how *“interesting”*, *“engaging”* and *“thoughtfully chosen”* the topics were.

Speak Up London tutors felt that the focus on British Culture was a little less engaging for the CPs and that 25% of the participants did not enjoy the gender stereotyping lesson. We believe that future high-level courses should consist of more unconventional topics, putting the CPs outside of their comfort zones, provided regular feedback is collected, and materials adjusted should the topics not resonate well with a group.

CPs attended scheduled tutorials in pairs and reflected on their progress. An additional task was also set for that week providing the CPs with a range of lesson ideas for primary and secondary school students, encouraging them to try something new in class that week and report back in their WhatsApp groups. The CPs appreciated the suggested activities and commented they were *“applicable”* or *“adaptable”* to their settings. The tutorial week was a welcome break for the CPs and tutors as the course was generally considered intensive.

WhatsApp as a learning platform

Thanks to PRELIM, Speak Up London has developed a [range of tasks](#) for asynchronous teaching and is going to use a similar approach with some of their corporate clients from now on to increase engagement.

Microsoft Teams for live sessions

Speak Up London tutors felt that another platform could have been used for the live sessions, as Microsoft Teams did not allow them to fully engage with the CPs, e.g. not being able to see the students when presenting or not having the whiteboard option. Additional plug-ins could be used in the future to facilitate the teaching process.

LearnDash (Wordpress) for asynchronous learning

The PRELIM 2 course was the first time Speak Up London used this platform so extensively, with over 60 minutes' worth of content uploaded to it weekly. At times, a few CPs expressed frustration when they weren't granted full scores for the activities they completed. One CP commented: *“Even though [the asynchronous materials] were interesting, I had problems with trying to complete them, some technical issues, so sometimes I was really frustrated by preparation materials.”* Considering this feedback, on future courses Speak Up London would build in additional training to address potential glitches on the platform. Data processing was time-consuming so considerable resources should also be allocated to it if used in the future.

The advantages of LearnDash generally outweigh the drawbacks, with clear reports available regarding who accessed the platform and when and what their success rate was. Speak Up London was also able to proactively contact the CPs who had failed to complete their asynchronous components to ensure they benefited from the course fully. LearnDash allowed the UKI to add a more sustainable element to the course, with the platform open to ELTAM Montenegro users and other Speak Up London students in the future.

Certificates of completion for CPs

We would suggest exploring conditions required for PRELIM courses to be accredited by local ministries to count towards the CPs' licence renewals.

Course outcomes

93% of CPs completed the course with an engagement rate between 70-100%. It is believed that the following reasons played a vital role in this:

1. Needs analysis and selection process

It was found that a two-step process helped narrow down the number of participants and manage their expectations. Of the 46 who confirmed their participation, the UKI accepted 45, as one was not an MNE resident. 93% of CPs completed the course successfully, with the rest unable to attend for various personal reasons. 36 CPs replied to our end-of-course questionnaire.

2. Tutor collaboration on the UKI side

The tutors found this experience highly enriching and enjoyable. That said, we would recommend that during the internal budgeting process the UKI sets aside a larger sum in the future, especially when working with CPs with such a high level of English and teaching experience.

3. Special Interests Weeks

Giving the CPs the freedom to attend the sessions they wanted (minimum one session) gave them a sense of autonomy. Sharing links to recordings from these sessions and/or lesson materials meant that busy CPs were able to catch up on what they missed at a later date.

4. Increased classroom confidence

The majority of the CPs have become more confident using their spoken English thanks to the course. 75% of the respondents said their speaking confidence had increased, with 25% remaining undecided. The results for their confidence in teaching were more varied (69% felt more or much more confident; 22% remained undecided and around 8% believe they didn't improve), however, this was not a main course aim.