BRITISH COUNCIL

PRELIM 2

Nigeria: ELTAN (English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria) with **International House London**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	**ETA partner**	English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria (ELTAN)
	UKI partner	International House London (IH London)
	Course length	10 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	4
Participant profile	**Total number of CPs**	Target: 120. Actual: 60
	Language level(s)	B1 - C1
	CPs' teaching context	From primary to tertiary
Mode of delivery	**Synchronous platforms used**	WhatsApp
	Synchronous session length	90 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	Weekly
	Asynchronous workload	90 minutes per week
Course content	**Language development focus**	e.g.: - Past simple and past continuous (live listening) - Quantifiers with count and uncount nouns (grammar focus lesson) - Adverbs of manner (miming and story upgrading activity) - Phrasal verbs musical chairs - Functional language – suggestions (in focus on dialogues – reorder jumbled dialogues) - Functional language overview (common functions) - Functional language for shopping (Elicited dialogue) - Past simple questions (notes about the weekend warmer)
	Methodology focus	Communicative language teaching and pair/groupwork
	Technology focus	Padlet, Google Docs

Description of the partners

ELTAN is a network of over 2000 English language teachers in Nigeria, supporting teachers in primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education institutions. It organises regular training, both internally and externally.

International House London is a private language school delivering general English and exam-focused teaching, as well as a vast array of teacher training courses, both qualifications (CELTA, DELTA, CertPT) and bespoke individualised specialised training.

Key features of the context

Nigeria is a low-resource country with limited and expensive access to internet data. Teacher have access to coursebooks, the majority of which are not written by L1-speaker of English. Class sizes are large (50-100 learners) and the students share coursebooks in large groups, if they are used.

Nigeria is a large country and the aim was to reach far and wide: indeed, participants were selected from 26 areas of the country, the majority remote. Another priority was gender balance: in this, 79 were female and 41 male. We also wanted to target those who had received little CPD previously, regardless of whether they were primary, secondary or tertiary teachers: 24 had received none, 36 of those selected had attended 1-2 training sessions previously, 24-5 sessions, and 19 more than 5.

Outline of the course and rationale

Rationale

As Nigeria has extremely expensive data and the participants an unfamiliarity with Zoom, the decision was taken to deliver the course 50/50 synchronously/asynchronously, following a flipped model. The synchronous sessions were delivered via WhatsApp and the asynchronous work was managed via Padlet. WhatsApp is a platform that all participants were very familiar with; Padlet would be new, but was considered a more effective option than Google Classroom. Only a small percentage of participants were familiar with Google Classroom, so we thought that Padlet could be the technology upgrade on the course, and that everyone would therefore start off on a level playing field. We also felt that Padlet is more intuitive and user-friendly than Google Classroom.

How the course worked

At the start of each week, trainers would post a unit of language development work (a lesson with language tasks) with accompanying analytical or reflective questions. Participants were asked to complete some/all of the tasks and then to post their answers or their comments. Trainers would monitor this to find threads, themes or areas of difficulty. Click here for an example of one of the Padlets.

Then, in the mid-week synchronous session, trainers would pick up these threads and explore further, or encourage discussion of how to adapt the week's materials to further engage learners, or to challenge them, or to explore the methodology behind the material.
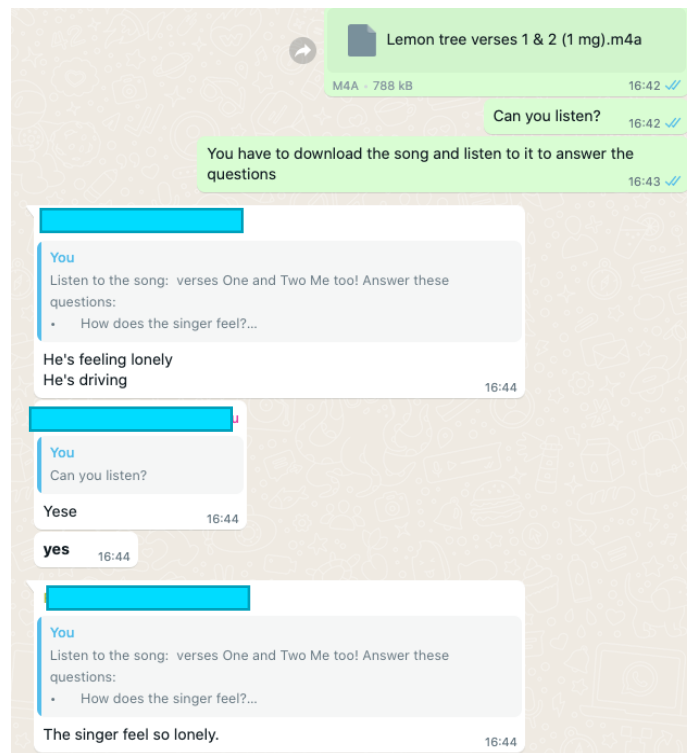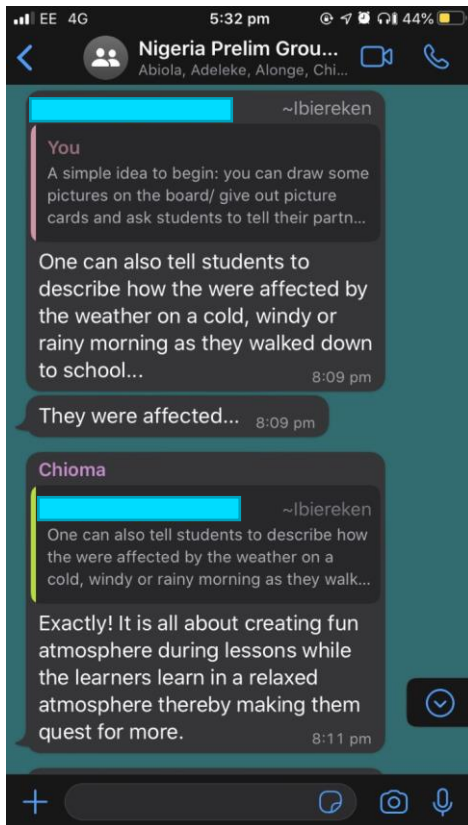
Figure 1. (Above left) Participants discuss ways of adapting the lesson material posted on the Padlet.

Figure 2. (Above right) Participants take part in a live lesson delivered by the trainer via WhatsApp, commenting on a song that has been posted in the chat, and processing it for meaning.

Project findings

Working in partnership

The partnership was managed via WhatsApp and occasionally, Zoom. Communication via WhatsApp with our partners ELTAN was swift and efficient and great for immediate problem-solving. Zoom meetings were held twice: first, to meet and introduce each other; second, mid-course to discuss low participation. This combination was very effective and at point of need, and there was no expectation or burden of too much - or too little - communication at any stage. Both partners were very aware that the partnership was functional and the goal the same.

Working within the CoP

The live meetings that took place within the CoP were always beneficial and were a great source of mutual support, particularly mid-way through the programme, when we were struggling with participation and numbers: to find out from some other members that their WhatsApp training had only worked with very small groups, e.g. 6-8 participants, was reassuring.

It was always useful to check in on Slack and access the various threads but the pressures of a post-pandemic world (managing face-to-face and online day-work, as well as staff absence and fragile mental health) meant less engagement with the wider CoP. Having had the experience of PRELIM 1, it also felt less immediately necessary.

Working with the CPs

The course design and delivery, plus the resourcefulness of the IH trainers and the determination of the participants enabled the project to overcome obstacles:

- CPs were often multi-tasking, trying to cook dinner or drive home while following the synchronous sessions. Trainers adapted the synchronous approach to expect fewer contributions and provide more of a deductive session, presenting ideas rather than demanding answers of participants;
- CPs often missed sessions, due to school meetings or religious occasions e.g. Ash Wednesday. Similarly, switching to a more presentation-style of delivery ensured that even if sessions were missed information could be read and absorbed at a later date;
- Several CPs did not join initially despite signing up and then receiving invites. Trainers made a note of the non-attenders and in week 3/4 sent individual invites to these teachers, with a friendly message reminding them of the course and gently wondering why they were unable to attend. This increased turnout in the following weeks;
- Several CPs struggled with the asynchronous material, either not able to access the Padlet at all, or not understanding how to post;
- The use of WhatsApp for delivery was difficult on both sides initially, and the trainers felt the impact of a perceived lack of rapport. One trainer (Ed) reflected: "*The teacher-trainee context took some time to establish. I believe the trainees had an expectation of a largely one-way input session and were not sure of some of the questions I initially posed to them.*" However, this was overcome through perseverance and investigation of CPs' contexts and the realities of their classrooms.

Designing/delivering the course

These were the main findings from the course design and delivery:

- Participants were unused to the idea of participatory training. The majority expected to be lectured. Trainers repeatedly needed to remind participants of this. For example, this extract from a WhatsApp synchronous session: "*19/01/2022, 16:51 - alikemp75: This is a fully participatory course. I will not be lecturing you. The learning comes from each other*."

  As the course progressed and there was a feeling from trainers that the inductive approach was not producing much response, we decided to change tack and put less onus on a question-response learner-centred approach to become more of a presentation mode. Here is mid-course feedback from one trainer to this effect: "*Participants were noticeably uncomfortable with the inductive nature of the course and [...] it was difficult to elicit ideas from them during the session. [...] A more deductive, lecture style approach might work better, both in terms of participants' expectations and their availability.*"

Subsequent to this, the trainers focused on sharing and presenting ideas from their own classrooms, as well as samples of language that had been produced. Although this didn't increase participation per se, trainers felt less frustrated (as their expectations had changed, so contributions were now seen as a bonus rather than a requirement); and participants who were unable to attend 'live' felt less guilty about having missed the session, and were still able to fully access the information. There was a continuous discussion among the team of trainers about the context they were working with, not just in terms of it being low-resource but also in terms of methodology - as one of our trainers noted: "*Through a continuous dialogue over the weeks, I ascertained that the way that we have come to deliver our language courses differed to that in Nigeria.*" All trainers suggested that pre-course needs analyses should investigate the current teaching methodology in the partner country.

- The use of the Padlet was unpredictable and inconsistent. Even with repeated instructions on what to do and how to manage it, with links shared every week accompanied by demonstrations, the majority of participants still struggled to access or post on this platform. However, when they did, they made very helpful contributions and demonstrated excellent control of their own written English.
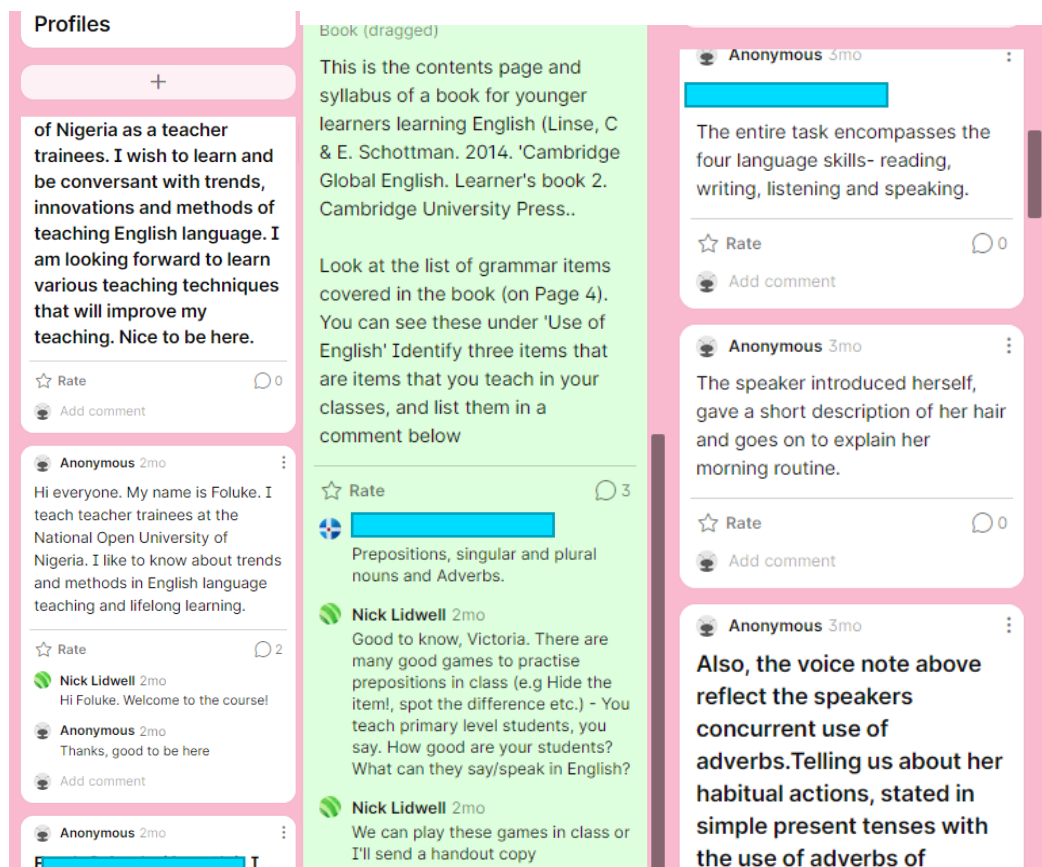

Figure 3. (Above) This group - with Nick Lidwell as the trainer - coped well and enjoyed commenting, analysing and suggesting different ideas of lesson activities. They found the materials stimulating and had a lot to say. The trainer made use of voice notes on the Padlet to show how WhatsApp and Padlet could interact, as well as how to produce low-tech resources for learners.

Figure 4. (Below) This group - with Ali Kemp as the trainer - responded to the different linguistic areas being explored, either suggesting how they would use the language focus in their own classes, providing answers to grammar exercises or describing how they have used the given materials in their own classes.
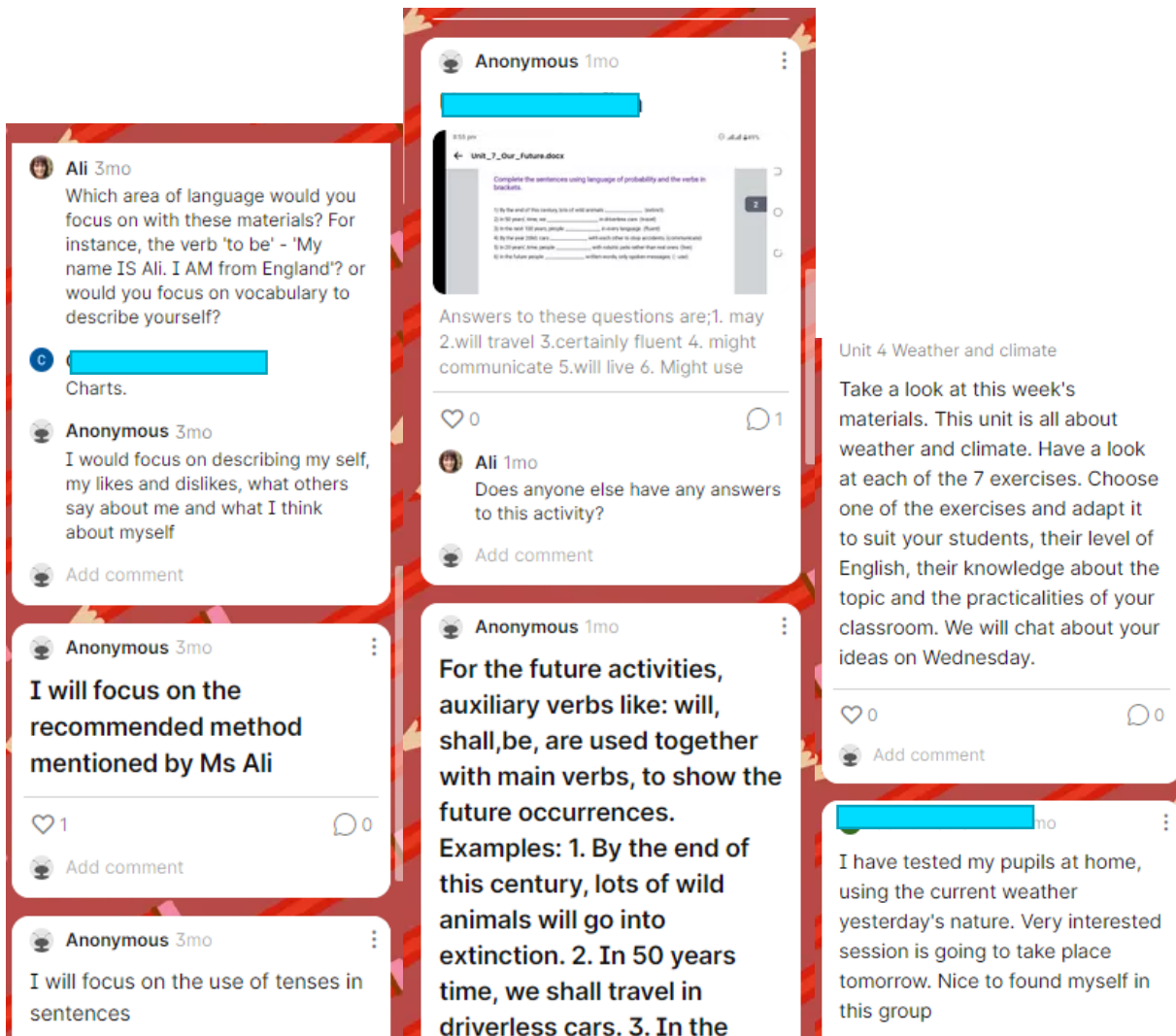
The CPs and ELTAN appreciated the patience and support given by trainers to help CPs get to grips with this new technology and learning tool, with ELTAN commenting: "*The trainers from IH London were wonderful and helpful in trying to make sure the teachers follow up on the synchronous and asynchronous activities.*" As the course progressed, so did the CPs' confidence in using the tool and integrating it into both 'live' and 'homework' sessions.

- With both of the above in mind, trainers realised that the course syllabus necessarily needed to be organic and ever-evolving. From one of our trainers: "*The advice I would give [if delivering the course again] is to 'play by ear' – to plan materials for a few sessions and then see what can be achieved on the day.*"

- Needs analysis and information-sharing was a key theme of mid-course and end-course trainer feedback and there was a sense that the CPs were not always aware of what they had signed up

for, and what the expected commitment was. The first session of the course was an induction and introduction to the structure and methodology, but this can be incorporated into a pre-week next time, or even a Zoom session before the course starts to ensure that all participants understand what will take place.

Course outcomes

It was highly noticeable that by the end of the course, the concept of sharing, supporting each other and working within a community had been fully transferred to the participants. They seemed to be more on-board with inductive training and about learning from each other or 'robbing minds together':

23/03/2022, 17:20 - Ok[████████████] : It's wonderful and educative. I learned my things especially from my colleagues here. In fact it is awesome

23/03/2022, 17:[████████████] : It's been an incredible experience robbing minds together; and I learnt about Padlet 😊

23/03/2022, 17:21 - [████████████] : My experience is on having a guide to every topic that will help the Learners to have a direction of what the teacher wants from them.

23/03/2022, 17:21 - [████████████] Yeeeesss! I came to know about Padlet here.

23/03/2022, 17:23 - [████████████] : Yes I now know what padlet is and also using pictures to teach every aspect of English language

23/03/2022, 17:25 - [████████]It's been such a wonderful experience, this course has made me think outside the box especially in problem solving. Proffering possible solutions to the problems we encounter here each week is a new phase in my career as a teacher. Also, I have also learnt to teach in compartments. Bulky teaching and notes are not a part of me. I keep everything concise and idealized. My students enjoy my lessons more now.

Figure 5. (Above). An extract from trainer Ali Kemp's WhatsApp group, with an exchange that highlights the learning they have received from each other, the way they have all contributed to 'thinking outside the box [and] problem solving' and the confidence they now have in using Padlet, a learning technology previously unfamiliar to them.

Discussion of their short-term goals also incorporated this aspect of community and sharing, with one course participant (CP) stating on WhatsApp: "*I want to create a community of teachers with the hope of sharing ideas and more with the dream that it will go worldwide.*"

By the end of the course CPs' reliance on the trainer as controller/commander/lecturer and were now helping each other with real practical ideas:

Figure 6. (Above) The' community feeling' is again in evidence here as the CPs make suggestions to each other, with the trainer merely congratulating them, rather than controlling the interaction.

CPs were now able to see the value of having a group approach and classmates, who could fill in gaps for them if they misunderstood or if they had missed a session.
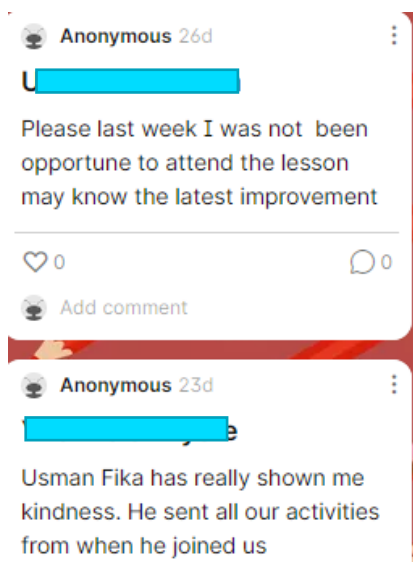

Figure 7. (Above) Screenshot from Padlet.

CPs recognised the importance of learner-centred activities and groupwork, with several commenting directly on the way the course has helped them to see this: "[*The course] has helped me to have more insightful teaching resources, interactive lessons thereby making me a more confident teacher*" (CP #10); "*when working together with the students, it makes you get feedback from peers*" (CP #5); "[*it] is useful because students centred method*" (CP #1).

It is clear that the course was memorable and allowed participants access to development that had been hitherto absent, with the weekly sessions providing structure, opportunity for discussion and a feeling of growth and possibility. Feedback was extremely positive.
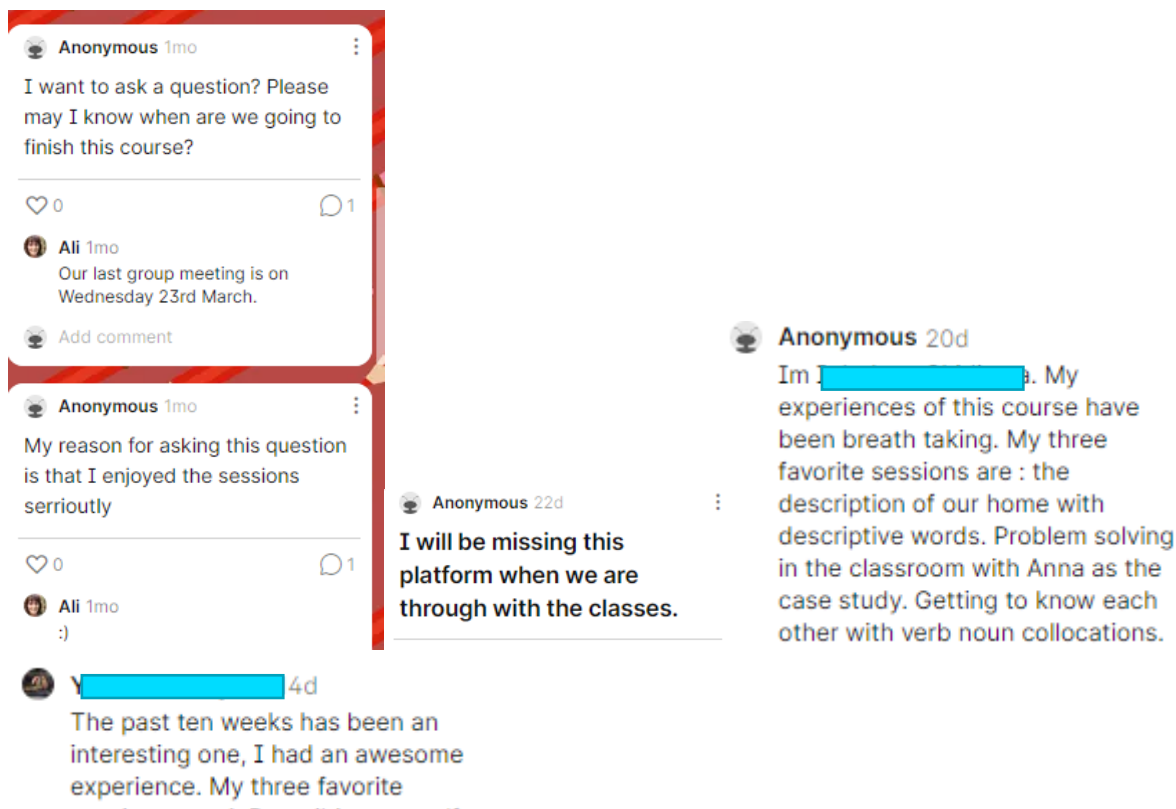
Figure 8. (Above) Examples taken from Padlets, where CPs were asked to comment on what they felt about the course.

It is also apparent that the course reached beyond the participants, and its influence filtered into staff rooms, collegial discussions, problem-solving and even family life! Here is how one CP has passed on the information about the course to her network: "*I've talked to my husband, my colleague and my friend about the course. I shared the link with my colleague [...] With each passing week, my husband came to realise how I'd put everything aside [...] just so I could attend the sessions*" (CP #13). In a professional capacity, ideas from the course were handed on and handed down and empowered the CPs to help others, for example "*when a colleague came with a problem of how to teach comprehension at the junior secondary school class*" (CP #2). Gratifyingly, this spread of discussion, ideas and problem-solving has led to an appetite for more development and more courses, with one CP directly stating: "*I have talked about the course to colleagues. We agreed it is impactful and it goes a long way in helping me to improve on my teaching career. They are going to join if there would be another PRELIM course*" (CP #8).

In terms of language development and language confidence, the IH London trainers did an expert job of reassuring the CPs that they were of a good level of English and had every right to feel good about their own teaching and English. The Nigerian teachers were very concerned about accuracy, particularly with regards to pronunciation. They were worried that their students would pick up poor pronunciation from themselves and found the responses of our trainers very reassuring. On one occasion the trainer wrote "*so if people understand each other, why force them to change [...] My conclusion is that there's no right way to pronounce SOME things but if it becomes unintelligible, then that's different.*" The CPs responded "*noted, and thanks a lot for making me realise I don't have to pressure them on the pron issue*" and "*well said.*" It was a relief to them to understand that intelligibility is the key thing, that an idea of perfection is limiting and ultimately flawed and that they can be more flexible with correction.

Finally, ELTAN as an organisation recognised the value of the course, the project and the partnership: "*It was really wonderful considering the fact that it opened up the opportunity for the teachers to understand how to teach using different techniques in different language contexts.*" Considering – and perhaps because of - the challenges of the local context, the distance involved and the experimental nature of the delivery mode, it is clear that the outcomes are long-lasting and inspiring.