

PRELIM 2

South Africa: NAETSA (National Association of English Teachers of South Africa) with **The University of Sheffield**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	National Association of English Teachers of South Africa (NAETSA)
	UKI partner	The University of Sheffield (ELTC)
	Course length	7 weeks
	Number of groups/cohorts	1
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	40
	Language level(s)	B1-C2
	CPs' teaching context	Schools (grades 6-9)
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom
	Synchronous session length	60 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	Weekly
	Asynchronous workload	Wordpress and Discord 4-5 hours
Course content	Language development focus	Increase confidence when using English that supports classroom teaching.
	Methodology focus	Improve teacher skills through loop input of tasks in the materials and group sessions - in particular language awareness tasks.
	Technology focus	Experience Discord, Zoom and Wordpress for learning and teaching purposes.

Description of the partners

South Africa

The National Association of English Teachers of South Africa (NAETSA) is a government backed and non-profit teachers' association 'which aims to be the coordinating structure for all teachers of English language at all levels of the South African Education system'. It was launched in March 2019 as a result of a 7-year collaboration between the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and British Council in South Africa. NAETSA has around 175 members and has already run one national conference, in March 2021, and is planning a second in 2022. They produce newsletters, and are now setting up special interest and regional groups to engage teachers across the country's 9 provinces and are planning several webinars and training sessions. NAETSA was not part of PRELIM 1. [facebook.com/naetsouthafrica](https://www.facebook.com/naetsouthafrica)

United Kingdom

The University of Sheffield is in South Yorkshire and its English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) is a long-established and large department. The ELTC was part of PRELIM 1 (partnered with Afghanistan and Indonesia). The Centre delivers teacher methodology and training courses, including for ministries, teacher associations and individuals, for English teachers globally. In the last 18 months, onsite and online courses have been delivered for 500+ English teachers at many levels of teaching experience and English , including schools and higher education. sheffield.ac.uk/eltc

Key features of the context

NAETSA is a new teaching association with the aim of bringing together English teachers from the 9 provinces across South Africa, but many of their recent plans were affected by Covid, and face to face teaching activities were only just restarting when the course began. According to the NAETSA application for the project, *'many of our teachers, especially those in rural areas, need help to develop their English....[and] often do not get any opportunities to interact in English or engage in fruitful online activities'*. The project hoped to include teachers who are not members of NAETSA, as NAETSA expressed a need to grow the association, so their participation in the project may help this. A total of 110 teachers (NAETSA members and non-members) expressed an interest in the project initially and 57 completed the needs analysis form needed before registration. After discussions with the two representatives from NAETSA, Kelly Mckenzie and Rajes Moodley, a focus was decided, for this first type of project for South Africa, on specific English teachers, as there are around 10,000 in the country in total. First Additional Language and Second Additional Language English teachers (FAL/SAL) in grades 6-7 of primary schools and 8-9 of secondary schools were to be prioritised, as these are areas of the national curriculum that needed more support at this time, according to initial discussions. It was also later decided that this project would act as a pilot for future cohorts and would include some local facilitator training as well. From the 57 that completed the needs analysis, 40 registered on the online course website. You can see from figure 1 that the majority had good internet speeds but a significant number had average or below that would not allow for video communications. They 40 CPs represented a range of provinces of South Africa, and were in the target curriculum groups.

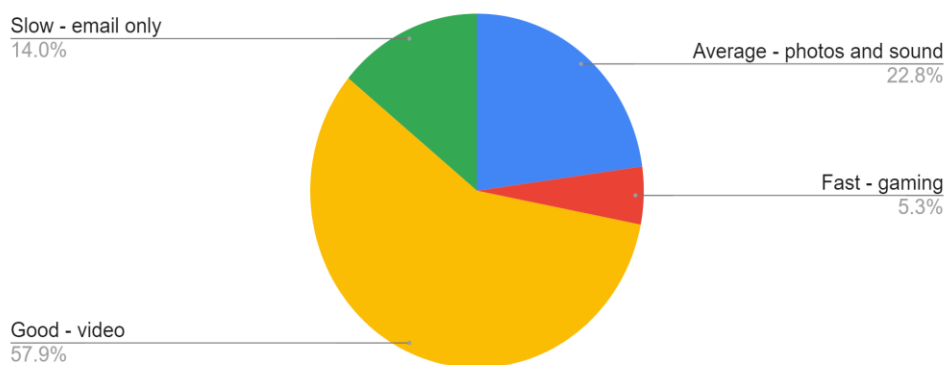


Figure 1: What internet data speed do you have?

Outline of the course and rationale

- 7 weeks from 31 January to 18 March 2022
- Part-time (4-5 hours)
- Remotely Delivered via Wordpress website and mobile communication on Discord
- 40 participant teachers at B1-C2 levels from
- Teachers from grades 6-9 that teach and support ESL learners (FAL and SAL) - 11-15 year olds (First and Second Additional Language)
- Teachers at Primary (grades 6-7) and Secondary (grades 8-9) schools

Main course aims

- to increase confidence when using English that supports classroom teaching

Subsidiary course aims

- to improve the language awareness of teachers with highlighting of linguistic areas/features in the course materials
- to develop professional learning networks and techniques for dissemination that support the provincial and local teacher networks and schools

Each of the seven weeks had a different topic based on the ones that would be expected to be covered at different levels in the South African English education system. The topics, language and skills focus and teaching approaches were informed from the 'Ministry of Basic Education - National Curriculum Statements' and from the focus group discussions with CPs and NAETSA reps. The rationale for this was to link the existing national expectations to local and personal needs and help bring together ideas that work in their own practice but led by a national approach.

Course Topics

Unit 1: Talking about yourself and others

Unit 2: Education and work

Unit 3: Places and travel

Unit 4: Food and healthy living

Unit 5: Language

Unit 6: Telling stories

Unit 7: Future plans

Each of the 7 weeks had online units delivered on a bespoke-designed WordPress mobile website (with a progress tracking function) and expected CPs to complete 4-5 hours of self-study a week to fit in with their existing work/life commitments. The project teams decided on Discord as the platform for the communities of practice (CoP) element to the project, as it offered enhanced mobile communication experience and possible interaction patterns than the previously used WhatsApp and Telegram platforms. Examples of Discord uses suggested to tutors and CPs:

-
- Video, Audio and Written messages
 - Links to the Course Materials documents
 - Themed discussion threads
 - Links to other online BC materials and websites
 - Preparation and Follow-up Tasks
 - Reflections questions
 - Group Tasks

The overarching principles to the CoPs via Discord was flexibility and being needs-driven by individual participants and these were embedded into reflective tasks and external signposting. Each week Zoom group sessions were offered that consolidated and extended the topics, language and approaches covered in the online mobile units and were led live and recorded by ELTC tutors, 2 different days and times were offered. Oral communication was prioritised in these sessions with smaller break out tasks allowing for more detailed discussions to practice live speaking and listening and sharing of local approaches and techniques in teaching and learning.

Project findings

Working in partnership

From the outset, it was clear that NAETSA had high expectations of the project and how this would develop the concept of 'partnership' embedded at its inception by the Department of Basic Education. This was summarised by comments at its launch from Mrs Angie Motshekga (Minister) who said, *'...seizing these opportunities presented by our partners to work together as a team, and to open the doors and horizons for our teachers to network [are key]. Only when you bring a bundle of sticks together, you are able to ignite a fire.'* So teamwork in this project was demonstrated with regular, purposeful initial communication via three main channels - email, Zoom and WhatsApp - the latter ending up being the preferred method for both written and video/audio. This was due to the convenience and instantaneous nature of the application and it suited the main project leads. It would be useful in future to explore these less formal channels of communication, not only for the course participants, but also for the project teams, perhaps supplying them with bespoke telephone numbers and data for this purpose as well. There was some initial concern from the NAETSA project team that the time and skills needed from them would be challenging, as they also had their own work and personal lives, and the expected ambitions for the project (as something new and tangible for this developing association) were also high. Some of these concerns were allayed early on as, in partnership, we were able to set clear roles, manageable workloads and an agreed project scale. It may be useful to establish these (in particular for a first project with a relatively small timeframe and resource) during the promotion and application process from the British Council and local teachers' associations. We were able to agree that one of the key aims of PRELIM was to learn from the process, as much as the outcomes, and that both should help inform future NAETSA and ELTC developments. One of the most positive outcomes of the partnership between the project leaders was just how flexible, warm and friendly the working relationship became and how much we learnt from each other, both professionally and personally. *'I really looked forward to seeing and hearing Kelly and Rajes on WhatsApp and the really collaboration we had doing the project together'*, Sheffield Project Team Feedback

Working within the CoP

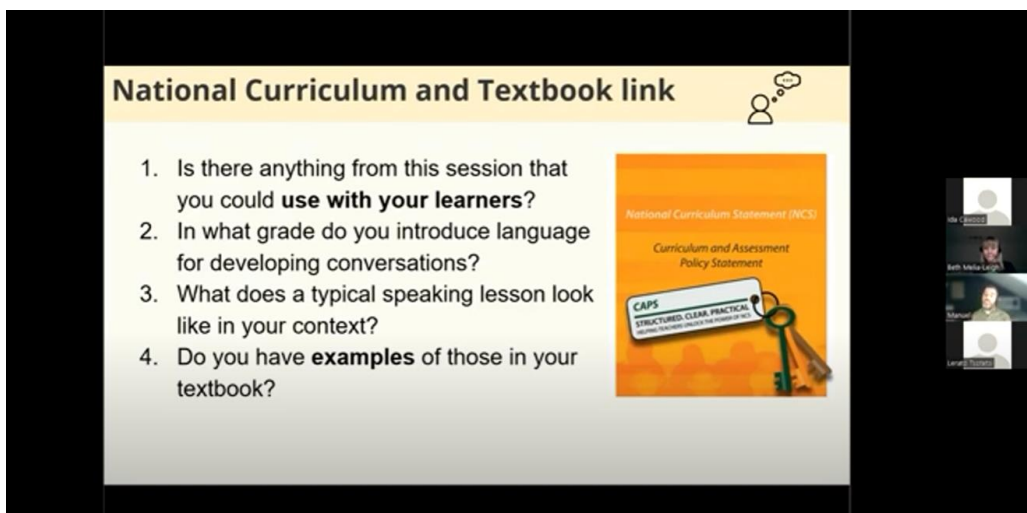
The use of a CoP for the UK partner was again positive and the use of 'Slack' as the platform allowed for the organisation of themes and communication was effective. With 35 UK partners, the regular group meetings and online breakout rooms allowed space and time for smaller themed groups to discuss and share. The range of experiences and previous involvement in PRELIM 1 may have impacted on engagement and contributions to the Slack discussions, but the amount of official communication and document sharing was timely and the CoP allowed for follow-up questions and suggestions. It might be useful to create sub-groups for the CoP based on some shared context themes (region, number of CPs, course approach, tech platform, for example) after the needs analysis phase of the project.

Working with the CPs

The initial planning to focus on specific groups of English teachers - as discussed in the background section - was partly due to the assumption that if we wanted to include interactive and synchronous elements to the course, we would have to limit numbers. However, we could have managed up to around 200 CPs in total. In the end, it was noticeable that at each stage of the project, numbers reduced. Promotion and communication were carried out locally and 110 expressed an interest in the course - lower than expected, and from this the final 40 then signed-up for the online course. We believe that in future, this pre-course aspect is made an earlier priority and as much support from key local, regional and national stakeholders are included. This is to make sure as many, of whatever the agreed target audience for the project, know about it as early as possible and there is a longer lead in time for promotion and registration and to overcome some challenges such as rurality and technology that can act as barriers. Work with the CPs was varied for the tutors in the UK and with and between the CPs. Variation was expected, as we knew the challenges with time, data and technical skill would impact in different ways. Some CPs felt it easier to engage in the online asynchronous materials, while others attended every Zoom session and contributed extensively to the Discord communities of practice that were set up. This was evidenced in the wide ranging feedback on the different strands in the course (online units, live sessions and CoPs). *'The one challenge I experienced was time allocated for the different activities that were done, especially those that we had to do online. Some of the activities prepared could have been brought to live sessions and could have spent more time doing them.'* CP Feedback. This kind of adaptable, multimodal approach can make a project like this more inclusive, as it allows for CPs to progress and interact with some level of differentiation and individuality. However, this was challenging to monitor and assess the learning impact and more consideration on how best to do this would be useful. It was noticeable how 'national' the project was, facilitated through the use of mobile technology, and the project teams and CPs noted regularly how positive it was to meet and communicate with others - from many provinces in South Africa they had never been to or met anyone from before - reflecting on and sharing the differences and similarities that bind together English language teachers following the same national curriculum. *'The live sessions were exciting and I will treasure the interaction with the facilitators as well as my fellow South African teachers.'* CP Feedback

Designing/delivering the course

Much of this has been reflected on the previous sections in relation to those themes. However, two areas that are worth considering further are the design and delivery of the asynchronous materials and how links to the national curriculum and language awareness were embedded into the course. One of the strengths from the Sheffield UK partner was the Technology-Enhanced Learning team working in the project, which allowed course designers and tutors to use the expertise of language teachers trained in instructional design and mobile friendly technologies. The bank of units that were produced and delivered were well-regarded in the feedback and it may be useful to pool this kind of expertise more widely across several projects so that sharing materials and platforms can allow for more resources to be allocated for direct tutor support and interactions, which seem to be important to CPs. *'The course was well organized and easy to follow. I'm extremely happy about this amazing amount of resources that one can use to improve learning and teaching.'* CP Feedback. It was felt that highlighting language awareness and knowledge was something that might be lacking in the CPs skills. An emphasis in the materials and tasks was to make the language improvement explicitly linked to the terminology and language analysis skills that can help on-going development after the course. It may be useful to assess this more explicitly through the use of an international or national benchmark assessment for teachers, like Aptis or TKT. A final course design feature was to link the project to the national curriculum used across South Africa for FAL and SAL teachers. Content from this was included in the course and referred to in the live sessions. It was assumed that it would help the 'national' nature of the project, help to see the links to the Department of Basic Education involvement and help support future planning and training for the teachers. You can see an example task from this below. It seems to add a level of relevance and context-specificity to the course if some attempts are made to link it to local materials, curricula and assessments, so this could be considered for any future projects. *'Having to go through our Policy Documents and coming up with the different activities we did was really an ENORMOUS work to be done within a short space of time. I learnt a lot and will definitely still go back and refer [to them].'* Feedback from NAETSA Project Team.



National Curriculum and Textbook link

1. Is there anything from this session that you could **use with your learners**?
2. In what grade do you introduce language for developing conversations?
3. What does a typical speaking lesson look like in your context?
4. Do you have **examples** of those in your textbook?

National Curriculum Statement (NCS)
Curriculum and Assessment
Policy Statement
CAPS
STRUCTURED, CLEAR, PRACTICAL

Figure 2: Example of national curriculum and local materials linked activity in the live Zoom session breakout rooms

Course outcomes

This section will look at the project outcomes from 2 perspectives, firstly on the objective (more quantitative) data and secondly from more subjective (qualitative) feedback. Both make for useful insights into how the course worked and what to learn from this project. As you can see from figure 3 below just over half of the CPs completed the required 80% of the asynchronous online units (as agreed and communicated in advance). This was less than expected (70%+ in previous similar projects), and in particular given the level of support offered to the CPs in terms of tutor interactions and tech support (unlike some self-study MOOCs for example with a lower completion rate expected). The tracking for the CPs (those fully and partially completing the course) on the Wordpress site, allowed the team to see the exact percentages. Feedback was obtained from both groups who completed and for those that did not. Some areas mentioned for non-completion were (in order of frequency); lack of time, technology and data issues and personal reasons. What was not fully captured in terms of quantitative data was details on who and how much CPs contributed to the live Zoom sessions and on the Discord communities of practice and this would be useful to gauge whether or not some CPs engage differently with different aspects of the courses. It would be useful to consider in future how best to manage the time workload expectations sooner and how to distribute and support any data issues to avoid these if possible.

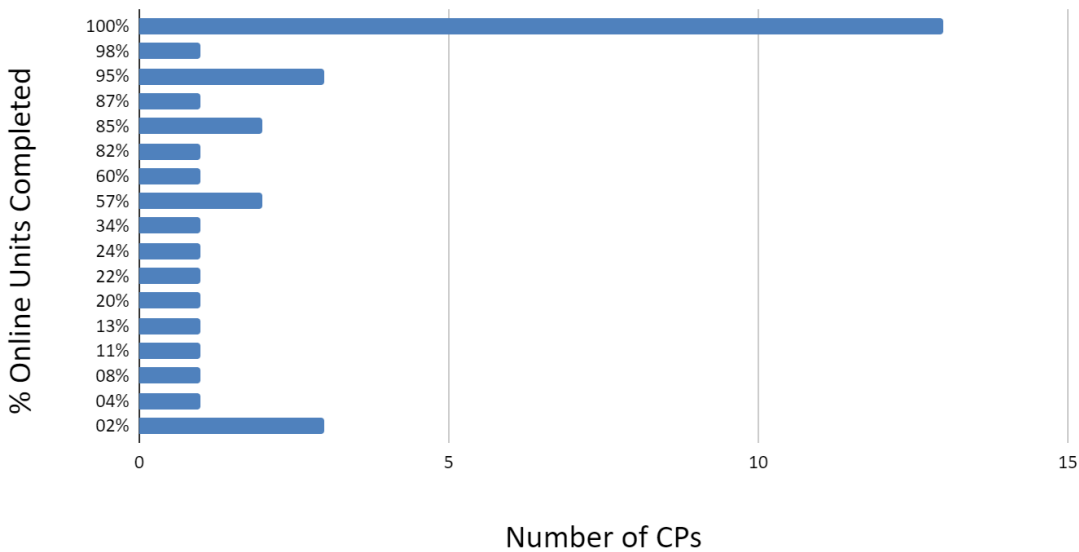


Figure 3: Numbers of CPs completing the online asynchronous units

However, from the 30 CPs that gave feedback, 100% said that they had increased confidence when using English in the classroom - the main aim of the course - and suggested that more was taken from the course than only the completion of the online units. We have already seen some of the variety in the CP comments from the feedback in sections above, and this we believe is due to the range of approaches and platforms used for the course. One of the most cited themes was that of interaction and communication, from both the CPs and the course tutors. Another was the range and amount of links and resources referred to in the materials, live sessions and communities of practice. Both are key areas to include in any future courses as they provide CPs with channels to share and reflect with each other and to discover a wealth of external materials and training they can follow-up later at their own

pace. *'I enjoyed the interaction and sharing of ideas with colleagues. Most of all I appreciate the extra websites shared for resources and more ideas', and 'The links with more information on the components being addressed [was the best part of the course]', and 'the interaction with all participants enriched not only my learning experience but also on a personal level'.', and 'Learning different ways of teaching English from colleagues all over SA [was the best part of the course]'. CP Feedback. A third common area in the feedback was a positive reaction to the language awareness subsidiary aim of the course. 'I was able to learn more about language structures and conventions, especially the tenses.'* and *'The activities especially the Language activities.'* CP Feedback. Overall, the CPs appreciated the tutor support and interactions and this was reciprocated in the course tutor feedback as well. *'What a privilege to meet so many knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers from all over South Africa. The project, at this time in the world, was a positive and memorable experience.'* and *'Engagement and motivation during our weekly zoom sessions was incredibly high with teachers sharing their ideas about learning and teaching - indeed, I stole one or two ideas myself...'* Course Tutor Feedback.

Emergent learning

As the course planning and delivery progressed, it was clearer that the cohort was smaller than anticipated and those engaged most were motivated to continue furthering development later. An additional optional session on how to facilitate local teacher development was added to allow these CPs a possible outlet for this enthusiasm, share what they had learned on the course and provide possible new collaborators for future NAETSA activities and provincial networks. These kinds of post-course focussed sessions may be useful to include in all future projects or even have a more bespoke course that provides remote train-the-trainer and materials (via mobile technology), but can be disseminated locally in low-tech ways without project time and technical barriers to reach more teachers.