

PRELIM 2

Thailand: ThaiTESOL (Thailand TESOL Association) with **Edinburgh College**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	Thailand TESOL Association (ThaiTESOL)
	UKI partner	Edinburgh College
	Course length	11 weeks (including 1-week mid-course break)
	Number of groups/cohorts	2 groups
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	51
	Language level(s)	A2 / B1
	CPs' teaching context	Primary / Secondary school teachers
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom
	Synchronous session length	2 hours
	Synchronous session frequency	1 per week
	Asynchronous workload	1+ hours per week
Course content	Language development focus	General English and functional classroom language
	Methodology focus	For primary group (A2): self-reflective and peer-discussion activities post-session. For secondary group (B1): direct input during synchronous sessions; self-reflective and peer-discussion activities post-session.
	Technology focus	Zoom, LINE

Description of the partners

ThaiTESOL is a non-profit organisation established to support and strengthen English language education in Thailand. They also promote networking with other ELT organisations both nationally and internationally. ThaiTESOL members share the common goals of the association in enhancing the teaching and learning of English throughout Thailand and disseminate academic information useful for ELT development. ThaiTESOL is chaired by Kenny Nomnian, our primary contact on the PRELIM 2 project.

Edinburgh College is one of the largest colleges in the UK with around 1200 staff and 26,000 students across four campuses in Edinburgh and the Lothians. The College's four faculties offers more than 700 vocational and academic courses, from access to degree-level. Internationally, Edinburgh College specialises in ESOL, Teacher Training and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training)

consultancy, with a large team delivering courses and training in Edinburgh, overseas and online for a range of partners across the world.

Key features of the context

No. of applicants: 271		
No. of selected course participants (CPs): 51		
No. of groups: 2	Group A (26 Primary school teachers) A2 level	Group B (25 Secondary school teachers) B1 level
Gender:	Female: 42* Male: 8 In Another Way: 1 *The ETA confirmed that female English teachers vastly outnumber male counterparts in Thailand	
Locations:	Broad mix of urban and rural, from diverse regions across Thailand	
Education background:	Bachelor's degree: 21 Master's degree: 21 Doctoral degree: 1 Unreported: 8	
No. of years' teaching experience:	0-5 years: 11 5-10 years: 21 10-15 years: 6 15-20 years: 2 More than 20 years: 1 Unreported: 10	
Access to internet / IT equipment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported by the ETA to be no issue in Thailand, largely confirmed in pre-course questionnaire and induction session • 43 CPs reported having a laptop, PC, smartphone or tablet they could use for online classes, 41 of which had a laptop or PC with camera • 35 CPs reported having internet access or Wi-Fi • Remaining CPs confirmed by ETA as having sufficient IT access for both synchronous and asynchronous participation. 	

Outline of the course and rationale

Platform choice

Our partners indicated from the beginning of the project that Zoom and LINE would be good platforms for course delivery. CPs were already familiar with both platforms, with Zoom already used widely to deliver

classes during pandemic lockdowns, and LINE as the most popular platform in Thailand for group chats in personal and professional lives. Additionally, our partners indicated that access to suitable IT equipment and good internet connections to attend live online classes would not be an issue in any part of Thailand, which was largely confirmed in the pre-course questionnaire and induction session. As such, it was decided that a series of weekly online live classes (via Zoom) would form the central structure of the course, with CPs encouraged to use LINE group chats to discuss, reflect and support each other between classes. A voluntary 'IT Guru' was selected during the induction session to support CPs in L1 with any IT issues during the course.

Balancing Language Development and Teaching Methodology

Discussions with our partners and British Council Thailand determined that key outcomes for the course should be as follows:

- Support CPs language development to increase levels to standards prescribed by the Thai government in recent changes to legislation - Many English teachers do not currently meet the required standards for desired career progression. As such, language levels were set at A2 and B1 level in advance of recruitment, reflecting the language levels of primary and secondary school teachers in most need of improvement across Thailand.
- Instil in CPs an enthusiasm for seeking out and participating in opportunities for continuing professional development.
- Effectively integrate aspects of teaching methodology within the course. Lower-language levels, and a limited course duration presented a challenge here. As such, the core course for both groups focused primarily on language development. Group representatives were then tasked with sharing follow-up questions in the LINE group chats to encourage CPs to reflect and discuss (in English or L1) teaching approaches used in class, and how they may be adapted for use in their own classrooms.

At the end of the course, our ETA partners reflected that “*Tri-party collaboration enabled the course design and materials development to meet the needs of teachers.*”

Project findings

Working in partnership

Communication

Strong lines of communication between the UKI, ETA, British Council Thailand and CPs were key during PRELIM 2, as well as a flexible approach to platforms used to communicate. To quote our partner ETA, “*continual communication throughout the project updated all parties with progress, problems, and solutions. Problems were solved immediately and appropriately in a timely manner.*”

Managing attendance

Early, open discussions with the ETA, plus early and sustained engagement from British Council Thailand helped us better understand the local context and potential needs of CPs. As a result, low attendance from the CPs was identified early on as a possible risk that may negatively affect the potential impact of the project. Our partners worked closely with us to agree on measures to mitigate this risk and to deliver clear communications to CPs on expectations for their participation and engagement

during the course. ThaiTESOL and British Council Thailand maintained strong lines of communication with the CPs and their schools to support attendance monitoring and follow-up with CPs who missed sessions throughout the course.

Utilising local networks

ThaiTESOL and British Council Thailand were proactive to engage extensive local networks for a fair and far-reaching recruitment process, promoting the course to teachers across all regions of Thailand, including those with fewer professional development opportunities due to being in remote or lower-income areas. This was reflected in the data as only nine CPs were existing members of Thailand TESOL, 34 were not members. Through British Council Thailand, networks of teachers connected to BCTET (Boot Camp Thailand for English Teachers) and those involved in the Equity Education Fund (EEF) programme were reached, a programme which serves to reduce educational inequality and connects with teachers and schools who work with children from very low-income families.

Early discussions in the CoP highlighted the importance of mitigating access issues (e.g. promoting widely used local networks; accepting self-reported language levels to avoid undermining confidence of potential applicants through use of testing). Based on experience from previous projects, Edinburgh College initially had some concerns about its lack of involvement in the CP selection process, however these were soon allayed through consultation with our partners, and discussion within the CoP about the desired profile of prospective CPs, the local networks engaged to recruit, and the ETA informing our understanding of the local context. With the support of British Council Thailand, Edinburgh College and ThaiTESOL were able to draw on a mutual understanding of the PRELIM project aims to ensure a fair and far-reaching recruitment process.

Celebrating Achievement

The ETA and UKI were united in their desire to support CPs to make the most of their time on the course. The induction session and course-end celebration events were co-hosted by ThaiTESOL and Edinburgh College, and our partner's ability to connect with and enthuse CPs during both events was contagious.

As expressed by our partner ETA, "*building connection and networking with all parties can be strengthened for the promotion of professional development*". ThaiTESOL expressed that they gained "reciprocal understanding and learning from working with international partnership that is expected to sustain in the long run" through this project.

Working within the CoP

Shared Experience

The PRELIM CoP was an excellent platform for UKIs to share ideas, experiences, resources, challenges and potential solutions. Through engagement with the CoP, Edinburgh College was able to learn from other UKIs' previous experiences to resolve specific issues encountered during PRELIM 2 (e.g. attendance issues in Thailand during PRELIM 1 and approaches to monitoring and evaluation of both CP progress and wider project impact), as well as gain broader understanding of different contexts, approaches and specific tools that might be applied to future projects (e.g. pros and cons of various tech/software for use in online courses).

The CoP served to create a strong collaborative mindset, with partners who might be framed as competitors in other contexts encouraged to share insights and experiences for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

Working with the CPs

Community Building & L1 Support

Drawing on discussions from within the CoP, CPs were invited to volunteer to be 'Group Representatives' or 'IT Gurus' during the induction session, primarily to act as the front line of support and encouragement (in L1) for other CPs during the course. CPs were enthusiastic to take on these additional roles, perhaps encouraged by the prospect of additional certification. Throughout the project, it was clear that there was an excellent community spirit amongst the CPs and friendly relationships were apparent between the CPs and ETA, and enjoyed by course tutors with CPs. Our partner ETA expressed that *"this experience has helped ThaiTESOL to make new friends and partners that can collaborate with new opportunities for the future."*

Only one CP volunteered to be an IT Guru – to support others with any IT issues during the course - which was perhaps indicative of the level of confidence many CPs have in their own use of IT. Fortunately, it was clear from the induction session onwards that participants had few issues connecting and engaging with classes so there were few demands on the IT Guru's time. Both the Group Representative and IT Guru roles may have better served the needs of CPs if more time were committed from the beginning to 'train' the volunteers and get them to identify themselves how they might support their groups during and after the course.

Designing/delivering the course

Attendance, participation and engagement

From the PRELIM 1 report, as well as insight from the partner ETA, it was determined early that low CP attendance rates may affect the potential impact of the course. Busy work and personal lives, lower prioritisation of 'free' (to user) courses and the relative value/enjoyment expected from online vs. face-to-face learning were identified as possible root causes. A range of measures were agreed (and successfully implemented) to mitigate against the risk of low attendance:

- A focus on synchronous activity
- 80% attendance required for certification – monitored by course tutors
- Clear communications to CPs from the beginning on the importance of good attendance and proactive participation in all aspects of the course (from both the UKI and ETA sides)
- Strict monitoring of attendance and follow up procedure
- Small group sizes (max. 25) to allow adequate time and space for all CPs to participate during synchronous sessions, and build a sense of community with their peers and the course tutor.
- LINE group chats setup for CPs to use between sessions and after the course ends, to reinforce the sense of community on the course, enhance and sustain this new professional learning community.

Needs analysis and course design

The pre-course questionnaire, though effective in gathering data from CPs had limited impact on the initial course design. Time constraints, compounded by the Christmas holidays, reduced the capacity for in-depth discussion with our partners on the findings. However, course tutors adopted a flexible approach throughout the course, allowing for adaptations to both content and approach, based on their growing understanding of CPs' needs.

Engaging CPs in course design

Course-end feedback revealed that the CPs might have appreciated earlier involvement in the course design process (e.g. to understand course delivery preferences, including scheduling and demand for delivering the course intensively over a shorter period). Similarly, the Group Representatives might have been engaged more effectively throughout the course to gather feedback from CPs at regular intervals and share key insights. Comments made in the course-end feedback suggested the CPs had many thoughtful suggestions that might have contributed to the smooth running of the course.

At the end of the course, our partner ETA reflected that “*designing and delivering the course through discussion with involved parties could meet the needs of target learners.*”

Course outcomes

Outcomes for CPs

A total of 47 (of total 51) CPs responded to course-end feedback form. Only one CP withdrew from the course early for personal reasons, and all other CPs met the requirements for certification (including attendance rates).

In the course-end feedback, CPs were asked to rate how much they felt their English language and teaching skills had improved through participation on this course. Categories listed were: reading; writing; listening; speaking; grammar; confidence in my own English language skills; classroom management; developing ELT tasks for use in the classroom; using English in the classroom; confidence in my own teaching skills. In almost every area listed, more than 90% of CPs responded that they felt they had ‘improved a lot’ or ‘improved’. The majority of remaining CPs responded that they had ‘improved a little’. Just one or two CPs responded they were ‘not sure / not applicable’ in the last four categories listed above. No CPs responded that they had ‘not improved at all’ in any category.

Comments made by CPs in both the feedback form and course-end celebration Zoom event were overwhelmingly positive. Common themes mentioned by CPs included more self-confidence and enjoyment speaking English; strong learning friendships, collaborative learning experiences and new friends; good advice from course tutors and peers; changed attitudes; good learning strategies and techniques for teaching English and making learning fun in their classrooms. One CP said “*Personally, beyond the experiences and knowledge, the relationship between friends is the uttermost reward I have received from this splendid seminar. I won't forget the moment we share and discuss to each other.*”

Outcomes for the ETA

“Thailand TESOL has accomplished the mission regarding English teachers’ professional development nationwide and created international partnerships with British Council and Edinburgh College.” In terms of emergent learning, the ETA reflected that *“Thai teachers have not only improved their proficiency level, but also raised positive attitudes towards language learning and professional development.”*

Outcomes for the UKI

Participation in the PRELIM 2 project has helped to expand and enhance Edinburgh College’s approaches to course delivery and working with international partners. PRELIM has elucidated the benefits of working in an open, transparent partnership, both with overseas partners, but also engaging in a CoP with other UKIs. Edinburgh College’s internal processes for needs analysis, monitoring and evaluation, inductions, and report writing have benefited from the insight derived from participation in the PRELIM project. Edinburgh College has also gained further insight into the professional development needs of teachers in Thailand, and looks forward to extending its partnership with the ETA for future cooperation.

A clear area of focus for Edinburgh College following on from participation in PRELIM concerns sustainability within its international projects, particularly in relation to the bespoke courses it delivers internationally working with a range of partners. Edinburgh College’s international team are actively exploring ways to create supportive networks for teachers it has worked with internationally and to explore new ways to extend and expand the impact its courses have on the communities and networks CPs are part of.