

## PRELIM 3

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# Cuba: APC-ELI (English language teaching section of the Cuban Association of Pedagogues) with LILA College

August 2024

## Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Partners</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	English Language Teaching section of the Cuban Association of Pedagogues (APC-ELI)
	<b>UKI partner</b>	LILA College
<b>User Profile</b>	<b>Context overview</b>	First time learners at 3rd grade in state primary schools
	<b>Learner age group(s)</b>	7-8 years old
	<b>Curriculum overview</b>	Functional language and skills.
<b>Teacher support resource package</b>	<b>Resource format and organisation</b>	8 units: 6 input and 2 reviews
	<b>Resource content</b>	4 sections in each lesson: input, practice, pronunciation, and play (number of lessons varies)
	<b>Resource sustainability</b>	Teacher's notes and answer key
<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>Methods</b>	Workshops for use training to 50 teachers, and dissemination of digital and hard copy of materials
	<b>Timeframe</b>	On-going dissemination to schools by returning teachers
	<b>Number of teachers reached</b>	Piloting: September - November 2023

### Description of the partners

Founded in 2013, **APC-ELI** develops educational materials used nationwide in Cuba. They also offer professional development opportunities for teachers, with a recent focus on using online resources and catering to diverse learning styles, including learners with ADHD and autism.

Established in 2004, **LILA College** provides English language courses alongside A-Level and University Foundation Programmes.

### Key features of the context and resource design rationale

LILA College (UKI) partnered with APC-ELI (Cuba) to create an engaging e-book specifically designed for 3rd graders in Cuba, many of whom are encountering English for the first time. The curriculum targets primary school learners at the A0-A1 level.

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One significant feature of our working context is that most teachers do not have access to online materials, due to a lack of computers and digital resources in the classroom. Because of this, we provided MP3 files for offline downloading, as well as audio scripts if teachers need to read them aloud. Our resource is also formatted to allow printing, as printed copies will be necessary in some schools due to a lack of digital technology. The resource caters to various learning environments by offering both digital and physical formats. The digital format is a PDF file suitable for displaying on screens or projectors.

Another feature to consider is that the English level (as per the CEFR) of English teachers in Cuba varies in different schools, with some teachers having a level of B1 or below, according to advice given by the ETA. Our resource utilises Spanish translation that can benefit both learner and teacher and provides tips in the teacher's book on how the teachers may best exploit the materials in the classroom. The bilingual instructions ensure clear understanding, especially for teachers with limited English proficiency or students with special educational needs (SEND).

Working within the SEND context, we recognised that many students have difficulties with literacy and understanding, and as such, visuals are a key consideration to make materials as accessible as possible. Our resource uses primarily bright colours to help students retain images, but also uses muted tones (such as blue/green hues, beige/cream elements, and black text) throughout to avoid being jarring to students with learning differences and visual processing difficulties.

## Project findings

### Working in partnership

Although video calling using Telegram was possible on occasion, restricted internet connectivity in Cuba meant that text messaging was far more appropriate for most of the process. The advantage of low data usage, however, also brought about a reduction in the speed of communications, and also, on occasion the clarity of understanding between the stakeholders.

This was overcome by setting deadlines for responses. For instance, if the UKI required feedback on an aspect of the material, we would establish a deadline for the response with the ETA. This had more success and enabled both groups to prioritise tasks more efficiently.

For future endeavours, a project-spanning timeline could be created, which would include all other activities impacting the process (e.g. holidays, exams, etc.) to ensure planning can be made in a timely fashion.

### Working within the CoP

It wasn't always relevant to meet up with the other UKI centres during this project due to having different work agreements. This differed from PRELIM 1 and 2 substantially and was something that was definitely missed. When the CoP met up, it was beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, it enabled us to know where everyone was in their 'timeline' - in other words, to understand the progress everyone was making which we found particularly inspiring and motivating. Secondly, meetings were particularly useful for inspirational and motivational purposes, as it was a good indicator of our own progress compared to the wider community. This helped us to think about time management

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more carefully as we approached the dissemination stage. Lastly, having the chance to discuss project challenges and share tips on best practice was insightful and inspiring, and effectively boosted our morale in the final stages of the project. Across the project, working the NILE project management allowed us to focus our attention on the key aspects of the project, especially when there were obstacles in its progression. This support was invaluable and was essential to shaping the outcome of the project.

## **Designing the teacher support resources**

We sampled a range of existing coursebooks, and resources aimed at A0-A1 young learners before the creation of our resource began. We were inspired by materials which used colour, images, and instructions in creative ways, which were both eye-catching and appropriate. After this, we organised the existing syllabus into different units, and proceeded with those as the core units of the book. Viewing existing material with an eye for both formatting and content was vital to undertake a project of this size.

The PRELIM 3 project created a learning cycle that had a great impact on our knowledge and confidence as teachers and teacher trainers. Designing the teacher support resource helped us to carefully consider the resources that we use in our school, and decide which of them are beneficial, rewarding, and inclusive. We are now more mindful of inclusivity, considering learner differences, and we cast a critical eye over our own materials to avoid falling into common pitfalls, such as not accounting for SEN(d) students' needs (i.e. colour combinations, font/font size, visual imagery, etc.).

Creating the resource forced us to work with both physical and digital interfaces. We have learned how to design resources that are suitable for various media and have selected tools (such as Canva) that can be used to create both online and offline resources.

At LILA, we can use the coursebook on our junior programme with lower-level learners, as it serves as a bespoke resource that is familiar and accessible to our in-house staff.

Finally, an important aspect of this resource was colour use. We used colour to signpost various activities and to aid brain processing for ADHD learners; for instance, using more neutral colours that are less abrasive to the eye can drastically improve a SEN(d) learner's engagement with the material.

All of these considerations were channelled into the creation of the resource and will also inform the creation of future materials.

## **Disseminating the teacher support resources**

A specific challenge of the dissemination was to ensure the resource was available in a range of contexts with greatly differing technological availability. We needed to ensure the material was available in digital and physical format, with audio being sent either digitally or on flash drives; to both teachers and students, for work in-class and at home (where possible); and that teachers could understand the methodology and, importantly, the instructions in the resource.

Ensuring teachers could utilise the material in the best way was part of the dissemination process in Cuba, during which time, a series of training workshops were delivered by the ETA. This showed that developing and disseminating a resource package was not as simple as sending materials to the

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relevant teachers but ensuring that they understood how to access the material and how to exploit it was vital to maximise the potential of the book.

Going forward with potential future projects, PRELIM would benefit from a teacher training aspect of the course as part of the resource development. In our context, the UKI delivering training was not practical due to the limitations of technology; however, to aid dissemination further, training should be considered a vital part of the resource creation process, particularly in our context for the reasons outlined above.

## Monitoring and Evaluation resource use

To collect teacher's feedback on the adequacy and effectiveness of the materials, a questionnaire was given to teachers. However, this comprised solely quantitative data, which made assumptions about the teachers' time, comfort with the activity, analytical competence, and didn't expand on the details of what we could do to improve the resource. Next time we would consider establishing a focus group and taking time to meet online with the teachers to get more detailed and personal feedback, which is highly regarded.

Seeing the students on the piloting programme using the book was vital to ensure that our aims were being met, and it motivated us to include more activities that the children liked and found relevant. We noted that the learners really engaged with the 'fun' aspects of the resource, i.e. the 'Let's play!' sections, and this allowed us to adjust some activities to make them more engaging.

Another useful feedback strategy was using Google Docs to write comments on the material directly. The ETA could then respond to these comments directly. This had feedback centralised on one document and gave clarity as to who had made suggestions. This meant feedback was direct and reliable, and removed any uncertainty about providing criticism "face-to-face", as the element of instant messaging was completely removed, and we felt that putting comments directly on the resource helped everyone to make professional and relevant comments.

After feedback from the ETA, we made changes and set up a focus group with teachers at the UKI. Their feedback on the changes was part of an editing process that allowed us to have more quality control over the resource and check for consistency and relevance throughout the resource. When we sent the changes to the ETA, they approved of the vast majority. We feel engaging this focus group at the UKI helped to avoid "tunnel vision" on the part of the authors and encouraged us to make various helpful changes.

## Project outcomes

Schools in Cuba have received a resource package, the first e-book of its kind, which is specifically designed for their context, making it relevant, engaging, and inclusive. This resource allows them to learn a second language in a practical, communicative, and meaningful way. Over the course of the project, it emerged that one of the more useful elements of the resource package would be the teacher's book, as support (e.g. translations, teaching tips, explanations) in the language classroom is vital in the Cuban context. They receive guides and access to workshops that help them develop

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their own language skills and teaching expertise. This ensures that instructors are confident and well-equipped to deliver the curriculum effectively.

LILA was also provided with the opportunity to review and adapt existing materials. This includes potentially revising our summer junior syllabus to better cater to students of different nationalities and learning preferences. Furthermore, LILA recognises the importance of inclusivity, and this has been at the forefront of the PRELIM 3 project. Working alongside a different context has enabled us to think more globally and consider the different contexts of our global network of students, which has encouraged us to reconsider what best practice is with regards to teaching students from different backgrounds. Teachers are encouraged to explore new methods that address individual student needs within classrooms – a departure from the traditional, level-based approach.