



JESUIT WORLDWIDE LEARNING
HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE MARGINS

The Global English Language Programme during COVID-19: Capacity Building of Teachers

February 2021

This short document reports the main findings which emerged from a debriefing session with a group of GEL teachers who took the Teaching English Online course, offered by FutureLearn. The aim of the focus group was to unpack how the teachers benefited from the course and how it supported their teaching practices.

Introduction

20 GEL teachers took the certificate version of the Teaching English Online course in November-December 2020. This was in response to the need to train GEL teachers, who had been accustomed to teaching English face to face, to help them deliver the GEL course online during to the COVID-19 pandemic. The course was designed to help teachers make this transition successfully. This was a 4-week course (5 hours per week) on FutureLearn, facilitated by Cambridge Assessment English. It helped developed key skills that teachers need to engage learners in online English lessons, such as looking at the features of different online platforms, helping learners with receptive skills (listening and reading), helping learners with productive skills (speaking and writing), teaching language (grammar and vocabulary), as well as looking at ways for online teachers to continue their professional development after completing the course.

20 GEL teachers from Afghanistan (Bamyan and Herat), India (Anjengo), CAR (Bangui), Iraq (Domiz), Myanmar (Taunggyi), Sri Lanka (Batticaloa, Hatton and Mullaithivu) and Togo (Lomé) participated in and completed the online course. The teachers offer GEL courses from beginners to advanced level to students who are refugees or from other marginalised communities. This group of teachers was invited to take part to an online debriefing session in February 2021 to reflect together about: (1) the most useful aspects of the Teaching English Online course; (2) any changes in their teaching practice; (3) any changes in their students due to their changed practices.

Findings

Teachers reported that the online course helped them in mastering **TECHNOLOGY** and knowing about the potential of different tools, such as screen sharing, break-out rooms, whiteboard; this better understanding of the technologies opened teaching possibilities and increased teachers' **CONFIDENCE** in their teaching skills.

An area of improvement mentioned by several teachers is related to how to organise speaking lessons (tackled in week 2 of the Teaching English Online course). Teachers feel more confident in using tools, such as break out rooms, to increase students' engagement and **PARTICIPATION**, allowing students to talk in pairs and to boost their **CONFIDENCE** in their speaking skills. The course helped the teachers to untap their creativity and to design more interactive classes.

Another key area of improvement is related to **PREPARATION**. Most of the teachers reported the need to carefully prepare before delivery an online class, to think about the age and the level of their students and reported about the importance of sharing material in advance.

In terms of changes in the teaching practice, participants reported a more **STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH**: they are now able to **differentiate activities** depending on the level of their students, and to focus more on **group work and collaboration**. A clear and shared example is related again to teach speaking skills: they are now confident enough that let students do more; they suggest a topic and let the students talk to each other and practise, while they facilitate the process. Overall, teachers reported that **students' MOTIVATION and ENGAGEMENT** increased, thanks to the change in teaching style.

Another change reported is the integration of the digital into F2F teaching practice, towards a **hybrid (blended learning) model**, especially in two areas: **PREPARATION and EVALUATION**: teachers are now sharing materials in advance and they are changing their evaluation techniques, introducing digital quizzes and multiple-choice questions also in the F2F classes.

Teachers reported an increase in **student PARTICIPATION** both in online and F2F classes, and they observed an **improvement in the atmosphere** of the class, and a **better relationship with them and among them**. Students also got more and more **CONFIDENT with the technology and online learning**, and this could open possibilities in terms of life-long learning opportunities, as they can now access courses offered in this format.

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