

## PRELIM 2

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# Laos: LaoTESOL with Oxford International Education Group

August 2022

# Project background

Partnership overview		
<b>Course overview</b>	<b>ETA partner</b>	LaoTESOL
	<b>UKI partner</b>	Oxford International Education Group
	<b>Course length</b>	8 weeks
	<b>Number of groups/cohorts</b>	1
<b>Participant profile</b>	<b>Total number of CPs</b>	49 on enrolment / 34 on completion
	<b>Language level(s)</b>	A2-B2
	<b>CPs' teaching context</b>	University
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	<b>Synchronous platforms used</b>	Google Meet
	<b>Synchronous session length</b>	90 minutes
	<b>Synchronous session frequency</b>	1 per week
	<b>Asynchronous workload</b>	90 - 120 minutes per week
<b>Course content</b>	<b>Language development focus</b>	Functional online classroom language
	<b>Methodology focus</b>	Engaging students and maximising interaction in online delivery
	<b>Technology focus</b>	Google Classroom / Google Meet

## Description of the partners

LaoTESOL, the teaching association of Laos, is the principal body driving professional development in Laos. The series of Annual LaoTESOL Conferences have been highly considered as significant events for the majority of teachers of English nationwide. Since 2009, the conferences have been organized by the National University of Laos, Faculty of Letters (Faculty of Arts), Department of English.

The National University of Laos (NUOL) is a university located in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. It was established in 1996, with departments brought in from other existing colleges. It is the biggest and only national university in the country. The NUOL accepts students from all over the country, along with international students. The university consists of thirteen faculties on eight campuses with over twenty thousand students, nearly two thousand academic staff, and over three hundred administrative staff members.

Oxford International Education Group (OIEG) has provided educational services to international and UK-based students for the last 30 years. While its headquarters are in Greenwich, it has a substantial global

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presence, with language schools and International Colleges in the USA, Canada, Germany, and across the UK.

The language division of the company usually sees over 30,000 students study a variety of courses every year. The Junior Programmes department is one of the largest young learner providers in the UK, and includes the BEO World programmes, a unique and innovative international schools' programme that takes place each spring with over 4000 students taking part. In 2013 the company began negotiations with a number of internationally-minded UK universities to establish and manage teaching colleges for international students on their campuses. OIEG has also recently launched the OI Digital Institute, which focuses on delivering high-quality academic courses online.

## Key features of the context

The PRELIM 2 participants were all English teachers at the NUOL. The majority of them were teachers from the Faculty of Letters (Arts), but Faculty of Natural Sciences, Economics and Business Management, Social Sciences, and the Faculty of Education were also represented.

LaoTESOL requested that along with language development, the course should train participants in the use of Google Classroom & Google Meet. The university transitioned to online delivery during the pandemic and they felt a lot of teachers were struggling with digital skills and technology, and had limited access to training.

## Outline of the course and rationale

The key course objectives centred around Google Classroom and Google Meet were defined as follows:

- Improve English for the (Google) classroom
- Become a more confident teacher
- Learn how to teach online more effectively
- Share experience with colleagues

The course content was designed to be delivered asynchronously, via Google Classroom, as well as synchronously via Google Meet.

# Project findings

## Working in partnership

Lao TESOL representatives were lovely to work with and very cooperative. Their clarity of focus on Google Classroom gave the project a clear direction from the very beginning.

While LaoTESOL focused on recruitment, we explored Google Classroom and Meet tools from the perspective of a complete novice and selected those tools and functions that we believed were essential for a delivery of successful online lessons. We brought these to the ETA representatives and mapped

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them against what they believed the teachers needed most in their day-to-day teaching. In hindsight, we believe it would have been beneficial to direct the course content more specifically to the needs and uses of the participants; however, that would have required more lead time.

Regular online meetings with Lao TESOL partners were also essential in the day-to-day management of the course as they were able to suggest some strategies to promote the completion of asynchronous tasks and regular attendance. As a result, it was agreed that participants would be awarded two types of certificates:

- *Certificate of Completion* - awarded to those who had attended minimum of 50% of the synchronous sessions and completed at least 50% of the asynchronous tasks
- *Certificate of Attendance* - awarded to those who met the attendance requirement but did not meet the asynchronous task submission requirement.

## Working within the CoP

While in principle the Slack platform was an incredible source of inspiration and professional development, navigating between so many channels and posts was often very time-consuming and as a result not always productive. The *#signpost* channel, where key ideas and topics were summarised on a weekly basis, was certainly very helpful and became the default way to ensure that no key information was missed. In terms of overall structure, perhaps some form of grouping of the UK-based institutions would have led to more sharing and more personalised experience. On the other hand, the Zoom calls were incredibly relevant, supportive, and inspiring, and the individual sessions with NILE management invaluable.

## Working with the CPs

There was a total of 49 participants, all teachers from faculties of the NUOL listed above. Most of them were teaching classes of 25-30 students. According to the needs analysis, the majority of teachers tend to use fairly teacher-fronted style of instruction, and more than half of the participants indicated that 50% or more of their class time was taught in Lao.

There were 27 female and 22 male participants. 37 participants completed the course; 32 received a certificate of completion and 5 received certificate of attendance.

The OIEG teaching staff described the participants as rather timid, with very mixed abilities in terms of language (A2 – B2) as well as digital skills. It appears that providing a course focused on multiple outcomes helped to bridge some of these gaps.

PRELIM 1 taught us that it is important not to overwhelm CPs with a high number of contact hours and so we limited the synchronous sessions to 90 minutes per week. In spite of this, during the course there were frequent absences, some tardiness, and under-participation (cameras and mics were often off) due to competing demands on CPs' time.

An additional challenge was the irregular submission rate of the asynchronous tasks. There was one group of participants which was doing better than others. When questioned about how they were approaching their work, it transpired that they were working on the tasks in groups. We promoted this idea among the other participants and encouraged them to create mini-communities of practice and complete the tasks in pairs or groups. The submission rate then improved.

## Designing/delivering the course

At Oxford International, we have never used Google Suite Teaching Apps. However, not being familiar with these tools worked to our advantage as it allowed us to focus on essential tools which we believed were to be relevant to most participants.

The asynchronous content was released weekly. Each week consisted of an introduction task (typically a question inviting the participants to think critically about the concept(s) to be introduced); a presentation introducing the key concept(s) and/or tools for the week. These included images, text, and video tutorials. Key terms and vocabulary were highlighted in the presentations and the participants could also download a glossary of these terms to use during the synchronous sessions and to lighten the cognitive load. There were typically two, sometimes three tasks the participants needed to complete via the Google Classroom assignments to demonstrate they had interacted with the presentation.

Synchronous sessions were an opportunity to discuss how to use some of the concepts/tools introduced in the asynchronous content. It was also a chance to practise some of them in a safe environment, that is without the pressure of teaching a class to students at the same time.

The scheme of work below outlines the areas covered during the course:

Week	Tech Focus	Language Focus	Reflection task
1	Digital skills - what are they & how they impact teaching?	Comparing synchronous and asynchronous teaching (comparative / superlative / as...as / similar to / different from)	Word of the week
2	Digital content - online content & types of files	Discussing file types (questions in present tense & adverbs of frequency)	Share an online resource you have found; explain how you use it in your teaching
3	Google Meet - key tools for synchronous teaching	Dos and don'ts of Google Meet (modal verbs of possibility & permission)	Create a checklist of your top five tools / functions in Google Meet
4	Google Classroom - key tools for asynchronous teaching	Lexis - verbs and nouns (assign - assignment) & multi-word expressions (to turn off, to mute someone)	Name one new thing the course has given you so far and explain how it impacted your teaching
5	Assignments - types and how to set them up	Relative pronouns for coping with unknown vocabulary (e.g., it's a tool	Name the most useful language point from this course

		which helps you mute people)	
6	Feedback - how to give feedback with Google Classroom tools	Functional language for giving feedback online (e.g. well written; good try but add/change...)	What feedback strategies have you noticed during the course?
7	Collaborative apps - how to teach online and maintain interaction	Functional language for giving feedback online revisions & error correction	What have you gained from the course overall?
8	Online engagement - how to stay connected to your students	Review and revision	N/A

## Course outcomes

Reflecting on teachers' observations, as well as the end-of-course feedback, it appears that participants benefited from the course in a number of ways. While many commented on the usefulness of language input, others appreciated the input on Google tools. Focusing solely on language could have potentially led to the dissatisfaction of some CPs. Furthermore, OIEG teachers reported that some of the online tools, such as the chat and Google Jamboard, were exploited very naturally as they served as a good coping mechanism for those with lower confidence.

In the end-of-course feedback, participants were invited to comment on the overall benefits of the course. The most frequently mentioned benefits of the course were:

- the use of online tools in Google Classroom and Google Meet
- the experience of combining asynchronous and synchronous content
- the practicality and relevance of the content to immediate classroom use.

*"I think my online teaching skills are improved. I can say that because I can observe my students are enjoying my class and they are enthusiastic to study and do homework on Google classroom"* (PRELIM 2 participant).

All participants were asked to rate their level of confidence in language, basic teaching methods, and the use of Google tools. They did so at the beginning of the course and at the end again. They rated their confidence on the scale of 6, with 1 indicating a complete lack of confidence and 6 indicating high degree of confidence. The table on the next page shows the percentage of those who rated their confidence 5 or 6.

	Pre-course	End of the course
	49 respondents total	32 respondents total
	% of responses 5/6	% of responses 5/6
<b>Language use</b>		
Speaking	26.9	78.2
Pronunciation	25	65.7
Listening	13.5	90.6
Reading	38.4	84.4
Writing	21.2	65.7
Grammar and vocabulary	23.1	81.3
<b>Teaching skills</b>		
Giving instructions	38.5	87.6
Teaching grammar and vocabulary	25	81.3
Checking understanding	26.9	90.7
Error correction & feedback	19.2	75.1
<b>Use of technology</b>		
Using Google Classroom (overall)	13.4	93.7
Assignments in Google Classroom	7.7	87.5
Using Google Meet (overall)	59.6	93.7
Google Jamboard	7.7	90.6
Sharing presentations in my lessons	46.1	90.6
Maximising student interaction online	23.1	84.4

## Emergent learning

OIEG staff has seen the content of the PRELIM 2 project as a valuable CPD opportunity in respect to their own digital skills. One trainer commented: *“I am now confident about teaching via Google Meet/Classroom. It has given me a more well-rounded skillset and knowledge when it comes to online teaching platforms. I am also better able to deliver lessons which combine language teaching, teacher training and technology training.”*

It has been a rewarding experience to see that the communities of practice which formed among the OIEG staff, but also among the participants Lao participants, have had a positive impact: *“I am really grateful for this experience as it was really fulfilling to see how the course empowered a bunch of fellow teachers from disadvantaged areas. In my opinion this initiative is the quintessential of what education should stand for; caring and sharing for others!”* (OIEG trainer).