

Humanising Language Teaching

Telegram as a Tool for Remote Teacher Training

- Juana Sagaray, Venezuela
- Maria Teresa Fernandez, Venezuela
- Wendy Arnold, United Kingdom

Dr. Juana Sagaray was the Project Manager at the British Council, Venezuela during this project. She was a teacher trainer for 25 years. She has been a researcher and a materials designer. She holds a PhD in Education with a speciality in the teaching of English.

Email: saga1404@hotmail.com

Dr. Maria Teresa Fernandez is a teacher trainer and monitoring and evaluation of learning (M&EL) researcher. As an ELT-Consultant Associate she has worked in different design and M&EL projects. She holds a PhD in Education with a speciality in the teaching of English.

Email: mariateresaf@elt-consultants.com

Wendy Arnold is the co-founder of ELT Consultants, founded in 2009, with 55 global Associate consultants. She has 30 years' experience in ELT as a primary teacher, trainer, materials writer, and Consultant. Her special interest is early literacy and learning language through projectwork. She has published on both these interests. She holds an MA in Teaching English to Young Learners (5 to 17 years).

Email: wendy@elt-consultants.com Website: <https://www.elt-consultants.com/>

Introduction

Background

Covid-19 impacted many aspects of human lives between 2021-2022, including the way we teach and learn. Schools around the world were forced to close to avoid transmission of the virus. Many schools were caught unprepared to continue in a way different from face-to-face teaching. This includes education in Venezuela, with teachers, students, principals, and parents left wondering how to move forward despite the closure of schools. During this time, the British Council commissioned the design and implementation of a teacher training programme for public secondary school teachers in Venezuela.

There were many challenges that needed to be considered when designing and implementing a training programme in which participants had limited access to resources and digital services. The country has been through a deep economic crisis in recent times, having the world's highest rate of hyperinflation for several years. Teachers' salaries are very low compared to the consumer price index. Because of the economic contraction, little or no investment has been done in improving services, which is why in many states of the country there are frequent blackouts. Likewise, the internet connection is very slow with a monthly average of 5.76 Mbps in mobile internet connection and 6.51 Mbps in fixed internet (Kemp, 2022)

Telegram app

All these conditions were considered when designing a remote teacher trainer programme. A research phase was necessary to determine which digital platform was going to be used to establish communication between trainers and trainees. As a result of the research, the Telegram app was chosen for its multiple features. Research studies carried

out in 2017 (SOSTariffe) and a more recent one carried out in 2022 (AndroidAyuda) found that Telegram had the lightest data consumption compared to other apps such as WhatsApp and Google Hangout, with 30-40% lower consumption.

Telegram synchronizes across desktop computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones. This was favourable for the context as most of the trainees use a mobile phone for communication and accessing the internet. The Telegram app is free and can be downloaded on Android, iOS or Windows mobiles, as well as macOS, Windows and Linux (32 & 64-bit). Messages, photos, videos, documents and files of different types and sizes can be sent. The app is cloud-based so it does not occupy the device's internal memory and files can be retrieved from any device. Telegram allows instant text, voice or video messages for communication among the members of a group and live video calls with no limits on the number of participants or time duration restrictions. The video calls can be recorded as audio or video and audio.

Training approach

The teacher training programme was designed using a 'flipped approach'. Twelve modules were designed, each with 20 hours of content delivered in 10 workshops. Each workshop comprises of 60 minutes of asynchronous content delivered through Telegram using a Powerpoint, followed by 60 minutes of a synchronous session to discuss the content with other participants. Participants must complete marked tasks in the asynchronous component as well as submit two pieces of assessed work per module.

Participants and implementation

The participants are 400 pre-service and in-service Secondary English teachers from the public sector selected from both urban and rural contexts in different states of the country.

As building national capacity is important for sustainability of the teacher training, Module 10 which was Teacher Educator was brought forward so that the Tutors and Facilitators in Venezuela could be trained, coached and mentored to deliver Cohort 2 of the programme. See Table 1 below for the present and future implementation.

Table 1: present and future implementation

Teacher Training programme delivery schedule for Cohort 1	Teacher Educator programme delivery schedule for build capacity to deliver Cohort 2
Module 1 October to December 2021	Module 10 January to March 2022
Module 2 January to March 2022	Coaching to deliver Module 1 Cohort 2 April to June 2022
Module 3 April to June 2022	Mentoring during delivery of Module 1 Cohort 2 Septeml to December 2022
Module 4 September to December 2022	Mentoring during delivery of Module 2 Cohort 2 January March 2023
Module 5 January to March 2023	
Modules 6 to 8 – April 2023 to March 2024	
Modules 9 to 11 – April 2024 to March 2025	

Monitoring and evaluation (M&S) and modifications to the training implementation

The feedback from participants and trainers was very positive. They highlighted the benefits of the programme, and all agreed that the main obstacles were the issues with internet connection or electricity. In view of this, some measures were adopted. The video calls are recorded so that when a participant is not able to attend the live session, he/she can

watch the recording later. The other measure taken was scripting the language the trainer would use in the lesson plan and making screenshots of the slides used during the live session. Both, screenshots and scripted language are put together in a document so during the live session, if participants have weak connections and cannot see the screen, the trainer shares the screenshots in the chat. If the participants' connection is weak so they cannot listen to what the trainer says properly, the trainer copies and pastes the scripted language in the chat so everyone is able to get all the information of the workshop.

Conclusion

The use of Telegram app has been successful in order to deliver a teacher training programme in a low-resourced, digitally fragile context. Measures have been put in place to ensure that the programme has a legacy and is sustainable.

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