British Council Romania

English for the Community

Independent Evaluation Report

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Contents

Executive Summary

English for the Community (EfC) was a three-year language teacher development programme delivered in Romania by the British Council in partnership with the Romanian-American Foundation (RAF). Working with state school teachers of English in rural areas of nine counties, the programme's main aim was to promote more communicative, student-centred and interactive classroom practices. Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs) were formed in each county and met on a monthly basis to learn about and share experiences of teaching and learning. TAGs were co-ordinated by appropriately trained Local Facilitators. The programme was voluntary, organised outside school hours and not officially accredited by the Ministry of National Education (MNE).

The analysis of a wide range of evidence collected from different stakeholders suggests that the programme was effectively delivered, highly appreciated by participants, and, above all, transformative in its effect on teachers' understandings, dispositions, and classroom practices. Some key specific findings were the following:

- participants valued very highly the sense of community and positive relationships created in TAGs and the opportunities they provided for teachers to learn collaboratively;

- the interactive, collaborative, practical and less formal nature of TAGs was seen to be very different to and more enjoyable and relevant than other forms of professional development participants had experienced;

- almost 58% of teachers said programme impact was 'high' (significant changes in their work) while just under 39% described the impact as 'medium' (a number of changes);

- over 93% of the teachers surveyed agreed that the quality of their lessons had improved as a result of the programme;

- over 94% of the teachers surveyed also said that due to EfC they were more enthusiastic about their professional development;

- teachers frequently reported and provided examples of increased interactivity in lessons, use of a wider range of resources and a more relaxed and positive teaching style;

- greater attention to and awareness of students' needs was a programme impact many teachers noted;

- the programme was also seen to have promoted changes in teachers' dispositions – their confidence as teachers, willingness to innovate and open-mindedness;

- positive impacts on students, who became more engaged, motivated, and confident in learning and using English were frequently highlighted.

- County Inspectors were supportive of the programme, though the extent of their involvement varied. School Directors' awareness of and support for the programme also varied.

Stakeholders were consistent in the view that the programme should continue.

The report makes a number of recommendations which can enhance the design and evaluation of future versions of EfC. An issue of particular importance for its sustainability is its integration into the Romanian education system and its accreditation by the MNE.

1   Introduction

This report presents an independent evaluation of English for the Community (henceforth *EfC*), a three-year language teacher development programme delivered in Romania by the British Council in partnership with the Romanian-American Foundation (RAF). The context for the programme and its objectives and key features are first described, followed by a summary of the internal evaluation conducted by the British Council. The methodology for this external evaluation is then presented, followed by a detailed analysis of the evaluation results. The report concludes with a summary of key findings and recommendations for future versions of the programme.

2   Programme Context

The educational and economic background to EfC is explained in detail in the Baseline Study Report[2] and a summary here will suffice. Romania is divided into 41 counties and education is regulated by the Ministry of National Education (MNE) and managed at county level by School Inspectorates. Compulsory education lasts 11 eleven years (Grade 0-4 is primary, 5-8 lower secondary, and 9-10 upper secondary)[3] and English is taught as a foreign language from Grade 1. Until Grade 4 students receive one lesson (50 minutes) of English a week and beyond that the number of weekly lessons is two.

Economically, there are clear contrasts in the opportunities available in Romania in cities and rural localities. EfC took place in areas in nine rural counties where ecotourism is important and where there are many villages and small towns. English was seen to have an important role to play in such communities:

> English is a key skill for ecotourism: it helps communities reach international audiences and share ideas with other agencies abroad. Effective skills in English are a gateway for young people to employment in the ecotourism sector and reduce the need to migrate to find work elsewhere. English school teachers are crucial to developing these skills[4].

As noted here, and in line with contemporary international educational perspectives[5], the view was taken that improving teacher competence was a central element in improving learning outcomes; the primary target population for the programme, therefore, were teachers of English in the nine participating rural areas. As a secondary activity, EfC also included a library development component aiming to provide rural communities with access to resources in English.

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[2] English for the Community: Baseline study report, February 2018.
[3] For students who opt to continue. Upper Secondary goes on until Grade 12.
[4] Baseline study, p. 7.
[5] For example, *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. Retrieved from Washington, DC: http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018

3   Programme Overview

3.1   Participants

Table 1 lists the nine participating counties and the localities where the TAG meetings took place.

Table 1: Counties and localities

County	Locality
Bihor	Various locations
Braşov	Făgaraş
Harghita	Miercurea Ciuc
Hunedoara	Haţeg
Maramureş	Sighetu Marmatiei
Mureş	Sighişoara
Neamţ	Tărgu Neamţ
Sibiu	Sibiu
Suceava	Vatra Dornei

Key participants on the programme are described in Table 2. In addition to these key groups, the involvement in the programme of School Directors, students[6] and (for one component), librarians (in 13 rural areas) must also be acknowledged. As will be explained in Section 5, though, direct data collection from these groups for the purpose of this evaluation was limited. It is important to note that this was a voluntary programme – it was not monitored or accredited by the MNE and LFs and teachers took part voluntarily and in their own time and without any instrumental incentives such as pay or a reduced teaching workload.

Table 2: EfC Participants

Group	Description	Number
Teachers	Teachers (primary but not exclusively of English) who engaged with the programme.	Over 300 teachers with some level of engagement, with 100 attending consistently and forming the core group.
Local Facilitators (LFs)	The co-ordinators for each of the groups of teachers that were formed in the nine participating counties.	18 – two per county, recruited from teachers attending an initial 5-day training course.
Country Trainers (CTs)	Trainers who conducted baseline study school visits, delivered training to teachers and LFs and observed and supported LFs.	9 – one per county, recruited from a pool of over 35 applicants.
County Inspectors (CIs)	MNE representatives responsible for language teachers in the participating counties.	9 – one per county (partnership agreements with the Inspectorates were signed).

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[6] According to EfC Intermediate Report 3, the reach of the programme in terms of learners was over 20,000.

3.2 Activities

Table 3 summarizes the main programme activities[7]. The core activity consisted of the teacher meetings that took place between May 2018 and June 2020; these were supported by various forms of preparatory training and orientation sessions for the various stakeholders, in addition to parallel activities for the library component of EfC.

Table 3: EfC Activities

Date	Activity
Sep-Dec 2016	Needs Assessment
Jan 2018	Baseline study
Jan 2018	Training for Country Trainers
Feb-Mar 2018	Five-day training course for teachers
Mar 2018	Selection of LFs
Mar 2018	Production of programme materials
Apr 2018	Training for LFs
Apr 2018	Orientation for Inspectors
May 2018 – Jun 2020	17[8] meetings by teachers in each of the nine counties
Oct 2018	Selection of libraries for 'My English Library' component of EfC.
Jun 2018-Dec 2019	Donation of resources to libraries.
Nov 2019	Training for librarians and English teachers
Nov 2019 – Mar 2020	Implementation of 'My English Library' activities
Jul-Aug 2020	External evaluation

3.3 Baseline Study

The baseline study was carried out by the British Council in January 2016 and drew on the data sources listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Baseline study data sources

Group	Tools	Sample
Teachers	Teacher self-assessment	151
Teachers	Focus groups	9 focus groups
Teachers	Teacher interviews	28 teachers
Teachers and learners	Classroom observations	28 classroom observations
Learners	Focus groups	23 focus groups
Head teachers	Interviews and questionnaire	23 head teacher interviews
		12 head teacher questionnaires
County inspectors	Discussions during workshop	10 CIs
	Questionnaire	7 CIs

Baseline lessons observations highlighted various strengths in the teaching of English (Box 1).

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[7] The list of activities was extracted from a series of intermediate progress reports submitted by the British Council to the RAF over the course of the programme.

[8] Teachers also attended an online session about teaching online delivered by a CT in March 2020. This counted as a further TAG, meaning there were 18 in total, as per the programme proposal.

Box 1: Baseline study – observed lesson strengths (Baseline Study Summary, p. 8)

> - strong relationships between teachers and learners
> - effective use of praise and encouragement by teachers
> - lessons with clearly planned stages
> - teachers using supplementary materials (often found online)
> - teachers adapting textbook content.

A number of areas for development were also identified (see Box 2). Along with teachers' self-assessments and the responses to the various questionnaires and interviews, the insights from the observations provided reassurance[9] that the content chosen for the programme was closely aligned to the needs of the target situation.

Box 2: Areas for development (Baseline Study, p. 8)

> - in the majority of lessons observed and lesson plans examined, an undue focus on one specific grammatical structure which was practised throughout the lesson through a series of over-mechanical exercises to the detriment of practice of functional English or speaking skills
> - no or very limited student-to-student interaction in over 50 per cent of lessons observed
> - a general pattern of whole-class frontal eliciting, although levels of learner involvement were reasonably high partly as a consequence of comparatively small class size
> - limited opportunities for learners to speak due to a lack of learner-to-learner interaction and the over-use of closed questions.
> - consistent over-use of the learners' first language, in particular to give instructions and to introduce new vocabulary
> - particularly direct error-correction and a lack of opportunities for learners to self-correct or peer-correct
> - little support for learners' pronunciation skills.

3.4 Aims and Objectives

The overall aims of EfC were[10]:

- 155 English Teachers working in public schools in 113 predominantly rural localities are able to organise, form and implement local communities of practice, both digitally and face-to-face, to improve their quality of teaching and build on their continuing professional development.

- Ensure local libraries have the capacity and resources to provide English learning opportunities for learners in the locality.

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[9] "Whereas it would be more usual for the findings of the baseline study to inform project design directly, in the case of *English for the Community*, time constraints meant that a considerable element of project design had to be completed before baseline study findings could be analysed. Project design was informed by the 2016 needs analysis. However, the findings substantially confirm that appropriate choices had been made of modes of delivery and CPD content". (Baseline Study, p. 72)
[10] English for the Community programme proposal, p.2

- English teachers and librarians have the skills and knowledge to promote community engagement activities designed to promote English learning and ecotourism.

Although two of the aims refer to the library component of EfC, it was the first aim that was most central to the programme and which is the primary focus of this evaluation.

Six programme outcomes were also defined (see Box 3). Again, half of these refer to the library work even though the predominant focus of the programme was on developing English teachers' competences.

Box 3: EfC target outcomes

1.	150 teachers in state schools in nine counties have more developed skills for effective classroom teaching, reaching at least 6,000 students.
2.	Teachers are able to organise, form and implement local communities of practice, both digitally and face-to-face, to improve their quality of teaching, access resources for teaching and learning, and build on their continuing professional development.
3.	Teachers are more aware of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and know how to access CPD opportunities according to their learning needs.
4.	Librarians will develop the ability to support clients in accessing additional online and offline English language resources, reaching out to at least 750 users
5.	Librarians will learn to develop new library initiatives to promote language development.
6.	At least 60 teachers and librarians have the ability to design and implement small community projects for promotion of English and ecotourism, involving at least 600 students and library customers[11].

From the above aims and outcomes, a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the programme were defined. These are reviewed in Section 4.

3.5 Programme Model

Contemporary international discussions of educational effectiveness repeatedly stress the central role that teacher competence plays in improving student outcomes[12]. Additionally, though, there has been much attention[13] to the most effective mechanisms for developing such competence and two principles that have been highlighted are that (a) professional development can be more effective when it occurs over time and allows for follow-up in the classroom (in contrast to short-term intensive training with no links to actual practice) and (b) enabling teachers to learn together and from one another can have powerful positive consequences for both

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[11] This was an important outcome given RAFs' broader interest in connecting teaching in schools to broader community learning in ecotourism areas.

[12] For example, Opper, I. M. (2019). *Teachers matter: Understanding teachers' impact on student achievement*. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4312.html

[13] See, Darling-Hammond, L & Lieberman, A. (2012). *Teacher education around the world: changing policies and practices*. Routledge, London; Weston, D., & Hindly, B. (2019). Professional development: Evidence of what works. In C. Scutt & S. Harrison (Eds.), *Teacher CPD: International trends, opportunities and challenges* (pp. 60-67). London, UK: Chartered College of Teaching.

teachers and students. In recognition of such trends, EfC adopted a Teacher Activity Group (TAG) model of continuing professional development. The British Council[14] describes TAGs as

> semi-formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions that take place on a regular basis throughout the academic year. In these sessions, teachers from the same area meet to practise their English, share and learn about different teaching ideas and techniques on a variety of topics based on their needs and interests, and then make action plans to try out ideas from the TAGs in their lessons.

Borg (2019)[15] expands on this definition as follows:

> TAGs, then, are sustained groups in which teachers learn with each other and from one another. There is a role for a facilitator, co-ordinator or teacher educator, but the focus is on teacher-driven sharing, collaboration, interaction and reflection. Another important feature of TAGs is that they take place over time (for example, once a month over a school year), thus fostering positive group dynamics and allowing for ongoing teacher development. One further quality of TAGs is that they are grounded in what teachers do, and thus teachers' experiences in the classroom are a key focus both during the TAGs as well as in between TAGs; in fact, what happens between TAGs is arguably as important as the TAG meetings themselves as it is in schools that teachers have the chance to experiment with new ideas in their teaching, to reflect on the process and to take these reflections back to the subsequent TAG to share with their colleagues.

On EfC, TAGs were formed in each of the nine participating counties and these TAGs met monthly, typically in the afternoons (outside school hours) for around three hours. The original idea was that 158 teachers who attended the earlier five-day training course would attend the TAGs, but TAG members were eventually a mixture of teachers from that course and new ones who had not attended it.

There were 18 meetings in total over two years (15 physical meetings[16], two online TAGs as a result of the Covid lockdown, and a further online training session delivered by a CT). The size of each TAG varied both across counties and, from one meeting to the next, within individual TAGs. According to the British Council, though, a core group of 100 teachers attended at least 50% of all meetings.

Two LFs were appointed to co-ordinate the work of each TAG and they received training to prepare them for this role and ongoing support from a CT.

Each TAG was also supported by social media groups (on Facebook and WhatsApp). These groups allowed teachers and LFs to maintain contact in between meetings.

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[14] https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/consultancy-opportunities/current-consultancy-opportunities/teacher-development-consultants
[15] Borg, S. (2019). A guide to teacher activity groups, p. 3.
[16] Programme funding allowed teachers to meet in a hotel or other local venue that could provide a suitably equipped room.

3.6   Programme Content

A TAG teacher workbook and LF handbook were prepared and these contained materials for 12 sessions. The topics for these sessions (Box 4) were informed by the 2016 Needs Analysis and also aligned with the results of the baseline study.

Box 4: Topics for 12 TAGs

Topic
1. You and your Teacher Activity Group
2. Lesson planning: engaging learners
3. Helping learners with vocabulary
4. Developing learners' reading skills
5. Developing learners' listening skills
6. Developing learners' pronunciation skills
7. Managing the class
8. Peer observation
9. Developing learners' writing skills
10. Developing learners' 21st century skills
11. Understanding learners
12. Assessing learners

Once these sessions had been completed, LFs, with the support of further training, designed materials for several further sessions. These covered a range of topics:

- Disruptive behaviour
- Special educational needs
- Thinking skills
- Motivation
- Using drama
- Storytelling

All TAGs followed a structure recommended in the LF handbook:

- Introduce session aims
- Warming up
- Share
- Discuss
- Read
- Watch
- Think
- Design and Apply

The first two stages were introductory in nature while the next two focused on discussing teachers' classroom experiences since the last meeting. 'Read' and 'Watch' activities provide texts and videos for teachers to engage with and analyse, while the final two stages focused on the planned application of new ideas from the TAG to teachers' own classrooms.

4   Internal Evaluation

The focus of this report is on the independent external evaluation of EfC but it is important to note that the British Council conducted its own internal evaluation and I will summarise this here.

There were three main forms of internal evaluation during EfC:

- LF reports written after each TAG
- CT reports written after they observed TAGs (three visits, every fourth meeting)
- A mid-point teacher survey.

The British Council also submitted five intermediate progress reports to the RAF and these summarised the results of internal evaluations of the programme. These results were largely positive, as these examples indicate:

- after the five-day training event for teachers in Feb-Mar 2018, 97.1% of participants evaluated the training as 'excellent'
- after attending their initial training course in April 2018, all LFs said they understood the advantages and aims of TAGs and 95% rated the course as 'excellent'
- informal participant feedback on an event held in October 2018 where the project was presented to 60 stakeholders active in education, from public sector and NGOs was positive[17]
- after the first four TAGs, 91.5% of LFs and 77% of CTs agreed strongly that TAG members were fully involved in sessions
- after the five TAGs held between November 2018 and April 2019, all LFs agreed strongly that TAG content was appropriate for the participating teachers
- after their observations in April 2019, CTs reported that levels of rapport and positive atmosphere in TAGs were very high
- in their responses to a questionnaire completed in March 2019, 80% of 91 teachers rated TAGs as 'excellent', 76% felt they had developed new skills 'a lot', and 84% felt the organisation of TAGs was excellent
- in November 2019, the first TAGs designed by the LFs were successfully organised.

Box 5 also summarises aspects of TAGs which, according to LFs' monthly reports, worked well.

Some areas for ongoing development were regularly noted in the internal evaluations, particularly related to the uptake by teachers of further online professional development opportunities (for example, through MOOCs) and teachers' use of structured action planning (in March 2019 only some 25% of teachers said they used the planning template provided in the TAG workbook). Other challenges were that it was difficult (because of data protection issues) for teachers to share videos and photos from their classrooms while, by October 2019, some

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[17] EfC Intermediate Report 2, pp. 27-28 cites Facebook posts where the programme was described by attendees at this meeting as "intelligently designed" and "innovative and rigorous".

teachers reported decreasing levels of motivation due to the lack of formal recognition for EfC by the MNE. This meant that teachers did not receive any professional credits for attending.

Box 5: Aspects of TAGs working well according to LFs[18]

- High level of interaction, active participation
- High quality content of TAG curriculum, relevance and usefulness of the tools provided
- Good level of transfer to the classroom of what they learn during TAGs
- Increased level of peer learning
- LFs are increasingly better at adapting TAG content to the group's needs
- Increased use of online content
- TAGs became communities in the true sense of belonging
- TAGs as contexts for sharing of other info relevant for teachers
- Feeling mentored/supported if needed
- Enjoyable and fun
- Teachers' perception of TAG as a safe space to exchange ideas
- Teachers' appetite for CPD increased

Internal evaluation reports also summarised attendance levels at TAGs from May 2018 until April 2020 and these appear in Figure 1 below. Attendance thus ranged from a low of 74 in May 2019 (8.2 teachers per TAG on average) to a high of 126 in February 2019 (14 teachers per TAG on average). As already noted, though, not only did attendance rates vary each month but the teachers attending did too and the programme team estimated that there were 100 participants who attended regularly (i.e. more than 50% of the 18 TAGs).

Overall, the British Council's own internal evaluation results provided evidence that the programme was being implemented according to plan, was well-received and well-delivered and seen to be of value to teachers. Table 5 presents, based on their internal evaluation results, the British Council's analysis of the programme's key performance indicators (KPIs). These do not include the KPIs that involved classroom observations as it was not possible to complete these due to the Covid situation. There are nine individual KPIs in Table 5, and based on the figures reported here, five of them (1a, 1b, 5a, 5b and 6) were met. Three were not met (2 - use of action planning and 4a and 4b - engagement in online learning). KPI3, regarding teacher participation in digital networks, was partially met; all teachers were members of Facebook (FB) and/or WhatsApp groups, but fewer than 50% reported contributing actively.

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[18] EfC Intermediate Report 3, pp. 12-16 and Intermediate Report 4, pp. 9-14.
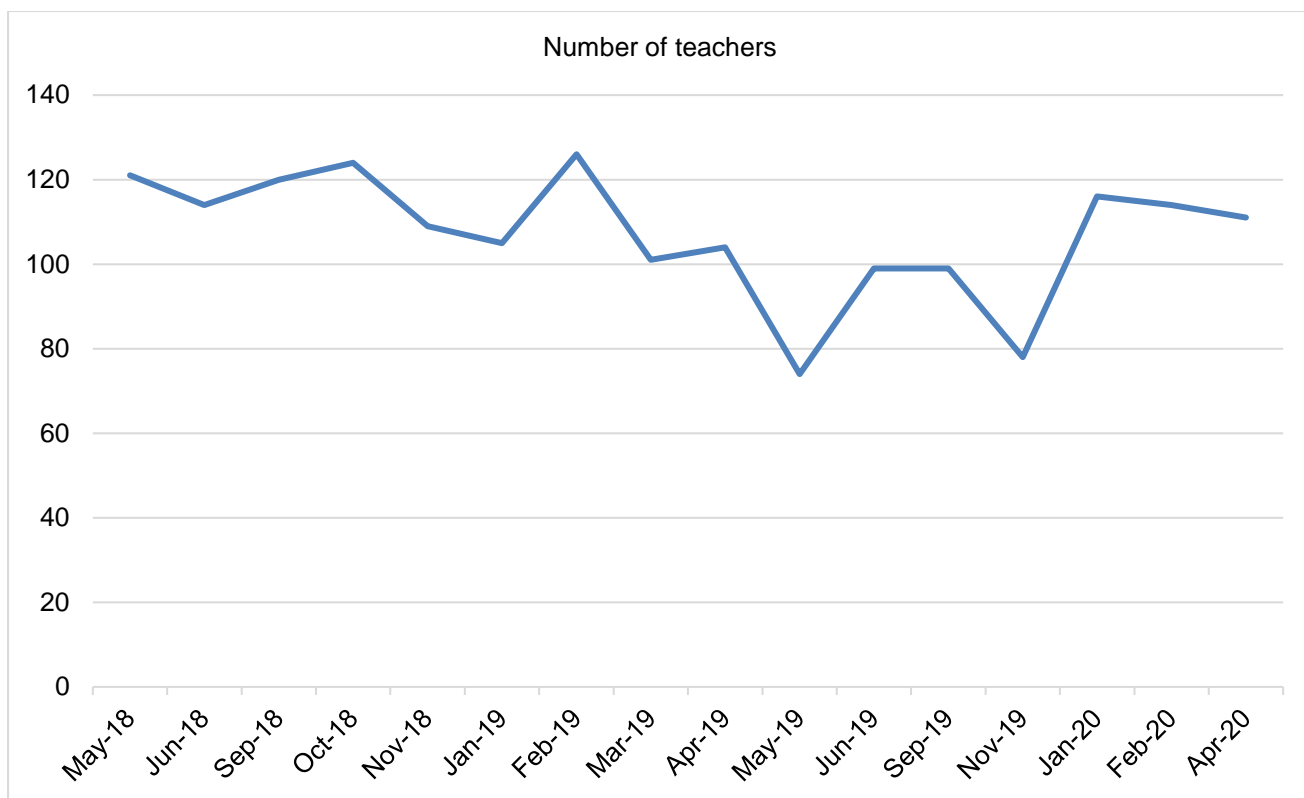
Figure 1: TAG attendance

4.1 Library Component

In addition to its main focus on teacher development, EfC also had a library component. The following summary of the library work is based on information provided by the British Council:

- 13 rural libraries (based in the community not in schools) were equipped with English language corners (the resources donated included books and DVDs in English).
- One day of training in the use of these resources (by students and the wider community) was provided for 13 librarians and for 13 teachers of English (all of whom were already TAG members).
- Each library received funding of US$500 to enable them to organise six activities (under the heading 'My English Library') through which students or members of the community would use the new English resources.
- As most librarians do not speak English, the activities were organised by the English teachers with logistical support from the librarians.
- 21 events were organised in January and February.
- Schools closed in March due to Covid and a further 21 activities were organised online.
- Against the plan, a further 36 activities still need to be conducted.

Table 5: Review of KPIs[19]

Indicators	Target	What was achieved
1. % of teachers who participate in initial training and TAGs	a. 75% of teachers participate in at least 5 TAGs b. 80% of teachers positive satisfaction/ recommendation of TAGs	106 teachers (70.6% of 150) attended at least 5 TAGs 80 teachers rate TAGs as "excellent" and 10 teachers as "good", out of 91 teachers who provided feed-back If we add the perception of the 18 teachers who are LFs, who rate the TAG as excellent', 109 teachers (73%) express positive satisfaction/recommendation of TAGs.[20]
2. % of TAG teachers who complete and implement action plans during TAGs	75% of participating teachers complete action plan	Only 23 of the 91 teachers who provided feedback said that they use a formal action plan template, provided in the TAG manual.
3. % TAG teachers who are active on digital networks	50% of participating teachers active/contribute to digital network	100% of the teachers are enrolled on the FB closed groups of TAGs/WhatsApp groups 28 teachers of the 91 who provided feedback (30%) say they actively contribute by posting resources, announcements, videos and photos of them testing methods in the classroom (GDPR constraints/child protection rules limited this). If we add the 18 LFs, we have 46 teachers contributing actively on the online networks. This is about 30% of the target group of 150 teachers.
4. % TAG teachers who participate in on-line learning programme	a. 50% of teachers complete one on-line learning module per semester b. 10% of teachers sign up for MOOC	20 teachers + 10 LFs did an additional online learning programme. 30 teachers represent only 20% of the target group of 150.
5. Number of LFs facilitators who facilitate TAG meetings t to agreed standards	a. 18 facilitators lead a minimum of three TAGs b. 50% facilitate TAG meetings to agreed standards	18 facilitators led 9 TAGs 100% LFs facilitate TAG meetings at agreed standards, 86 of the 91 teachers who provided feedback rated the LFs' performance as "excellent"; CT evaluations of LFs rated them at Levels 2 (good) and 3 (excellent).
6. Number of local libraries	10 local libraries open an English language corner used by 50 learners per year	13 libraries opened an English corner. Information about number of learners using this is not available (affected by Covid situation).

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[19] Adapted from EfC Intermediate Report 4, pp. 32-33.
[20] The results were actually more positive than these figures suggest as they assume a population of 150 but only 91 teachers and 18 LFs (109 in total) provided feedback, with all but one rating the TAGs as 'excellent' or 'good'.

In Section 6.2.8. feedback from some of the teachers involved in the library component of EfC is reported, but it was beyond the scope of the external evaluation to assess the library work in detail.

5 External Evaluation

5.1 Evaluation Questions

While the KPIs assessed through the British Council's internal evaluation were quantitative in nature, the external evaluation of the programme assessed its impact more qualitatively through an investigation of the following questions.

1. What overall perceptions of the programme did stakeholders have?
2. What were local facilitators' perceptions of the benefits of TAGs for them?
3. What benefits – including changes in the classroom - did the programme have for teachers?
4. How involved in EfC were the County Inspectors and what were their views about the programme?
5. To what extent were School Directors aware of and supportive of the programme?
6. What contribution to the programme did the TAG social groups make?
7. What challenges did the programme create for teachers and LFs?
8. To what extent did the library component of the programme function as planned?
9. What changes to a second phase of the programme would make it more attractive for teachers and improve its impact on teachers' professional development?
10. What factors contributed to or hindered programme effectiveness?

In addressing these questions the focus will be on the teaching of English, though some TAG participants taught other languages or, in very few cases, other subjects altogether.

5.2 Evaluation Methods

Table 6 summarises the plan for the external evaluation of EfC. which took place over six weeks in July and August 2020. For each source of data, 'population' refers to the whole group (for example, 100 core TAG teachers) and 'sample' refers to the number of cases that were chosen for analysis or invited to participate. Online surveys were administered using SurveyMonkey while online interviews were conducted on WhatsApp or Zoom.

It was not possible to observe TAGs directly, but some video recordings of sessions were made available to me for review. In any case, an assessment of the TAGs themselves was not central to this work and had been covered in the British Council's internal evaluation. It was also not possible to observe teachers in their classrooms given that schools were closed when the evaluation took place. Finally, the possibility of involving students in the evaluation was also considered. Again, though, as the school year had ended, it was anticipated that recruiting students to participate in interviews or other forms of data collection would have been

problematic; data protection issues (including obtaining parental consent) would have also been hard to resolve in the time available. Despite these limitations, the evaluation plan allowed for the collection of a wide range of data relevant to the impact of the programme.

Table 6: External evaluation plan

Source	Population	Method	Sample
Teachers	100	Online survey	All
Teachers	100	Individual online interviews	Two teachers from each TAG = 18
Teachers	100	Change stories	50% of core teachers
Teachers	100	Materials that illustrate change in teaching and learning.	The other 50% of core teachers
Local Facilitators	18	Online survey	All
Local Facilitators	18	Individual online interviews	9 (one per TAG)
Social media groups	9	Review of content of FB and WhatsApp groups	Two TAG FB and two WhatsApp groups; one LF FB group.
Country Trainers	9	Individual online interviews	4
County Inspectors	9	Individual online interviews	All
School Directors	100	Online survey	All

Where samples were selected, these were (apart from the social media groups – see 5.2.7) always chosen randomly. For example, for the teacher interviews, I received the list of teachers for each TAG and, using tools provided at www.random.org, these lists were randomly sorted and the first two from each TAG selected and invited by the British Council to speak to me. Where teachers were unavailable, the next teacher on the list was approached. Random selection of this kind minimises sampling bias[21] and contributes to the robustness of the evaluation.

Each form of data collection is now described. All data collection occurred in English, except for the School Director's survey which was in Romanian.

5.2.1 Teacher survey

All 100 core TAG teachers were invited to complete an online survey (according to the results, this took on average around 7-8 minutes to complete). The survey link was distributed to teachers via their LFs and the survey was available between 10 and 24 July. The teachers were asked background questions (such as which TAG they attended and which classes they taught), about the impact of TAGs on their work and about the role of the TAG social media groups. The survey was completed by 91 teachers.

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[21] For example, if teachers are simply asked to volunteer for interviews it is often the case that the sample will consist of those who are most positive, confident and fluent in English. Random sampling counters such trends.

5.2.2 Teacher interviews

Eighteen teachers (two per TAGs) were randomly selected and invited by the British Council to speak with me. The days of 23 and 24 July were reserved for the teacher interviews and the British Council communicated with the teachers and set up the interview schedule. Teachers chose between Zoom and WhatsApp (in both cases audio only). Those who chose Zoom were sent a link to the online meeting; those who preferred WhatsApp provided their phone number and were contacted by me in advance to confirm our appointment. For unknown reasons, two teachers did not keep their appointments and 16 interviews were completed (11 on WhatsApp and five on Zoom). With teachers' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded.

During the interviews, which lasted on average 20 minutes, teachers were asked about their background (experience and teaching), reasons for joining the programme, and the benefits of TAGs for them, particularly any impacts in the classroom. They were also asked about their involvement in the social media groups, support from their School Director and any challenges they faced during TAGs. Four teachers were involved in 'My English Library' and were additionally asked about that.

5.2.3 Teacher change stories

A random selection of half of the core group of 100 teachers were invited to write change stories (see Appendix 1 for the instructions). In these, teachers were asked to describe (in about 250 words) one or two significant changes in their work that took place as a result of the TAGs. Once teachers had been selected, they were sent the instructions by the British Council. Teachers then submitted their stories by e-mail, either directly to me or via the British Council. Stories were received from 27 teachers.

5.2.4 Teacher materials

The other randomly-chosen half of the 100 core teachers were invited to submit materials (such as lesson plans, activities, photos or videos) that illustrated changes in their work as a result of TAGs (see Appendix 2 for the instructions). Once teachers had been selected, they were sent the instructions by the British Council. Teachers then submitted their materials by e-mail, either directly to me or via the British Council. Materials were received from 19 teachers.

5.2.5 Local Facilitator survey

All 18 LFs were invited (through a link shared by the British Council) to complete an online survey (according to the survey website, respondents typically spent about 18 minutes answering the questions). The survey asked LFs which TAG they facilitated and about the impact they felt TAGs had had on teachers. Where impact was felt to be limited, LFs were asked to suggest reasons for this, while where it was positive they were further asked about specific kinds of impact and to give examples of concrete changes in teachers' classrooms as a result of TAGs. LFs were also asked

about the TAG social media groups and about any changes to the programme which might make it more effective. The survey was available from 13 to 20 July. All 18 LFs started the survey but one respondent skipped most of the questions and was omitted from the analysis.

5.2.6 Local Facilitator interviews

One LF from each of the nine TAGs was randomly selected for interview. During the interviews, which lasted on average 28 minutes, LFs were asked about their experience of the programme and the benefits of TAGs both for them and their teachers. LFs were also asked about any challenges they had faced and about changes to the programme which might improve it. The role of the social media groups and the support of County Inspectors and School Directors were also discussed. All nine LF interviews were conducted on Zoom between 15 and 25 July and, with permission, audio recorded.

5.2.7 Social Media groups

Each TAG had a FB group and/or a WhatsApp group. Four groups were chosen for analysis – the two which used only FB and the two which used only WhatsApp. Additionally, the FB group for LFs was also reviewed. For the FB I was simply added as a member; for WhatsApp, the content of the groups was shared via Google Drive. The analysis focused on the kinds of content that were being posted to the groups.

5.2.8 Country Trainer interviews

The four CT interviews (which lasted on average 28 minutes) were conducted on Zoom between 17 and 22 July and were also, with permission, audio recorded. CTs were asked for their perceptions of the quality of the TAGs, the impact of the programme on teachers, and any challenges they felt LFs had faced. Suggestions for improving the programme were also elicited.

5.2.9 County Inspector interviews

As part of the programme, the British Council established a partnership with Inspectorates in the nine participating counties. County Inspectors (CIs) also participated in an orientation session early in the programme. It was thus considered important to ascertain CIs' perspectives on the programme and all nine CIs were invited to speak to me as part of this evaluation. Eight interviews were conducted and CIs were asked about their involvement with EfC and their views about its value for teachers. The interviews, which lasted on average 18 minutes, were completed between 14 and 17 July (five on Zoom and three on WhatsApp) and, with permission, audio recorded.

5.2.10 School Director survey

Given the time of the year (with schools being closed) and the non-official and voluntary nature of the programme, it was not anticipated that School Directors would contribute significantly to this evaluation. Nonetheless, School Directors of the 100 core teachers were invited to respond to a very short online survey about their awareness of the programme and of any benefits they felt it had had for their teachers. The survey was prepared in English, translated into Romanian by the British Council, and placed online; the link was e-mailed by the British Council to the official e-mail addresses of the 100 School Directors. The survey was available from 21 to 31 July and 11 responses were received.

Table 7 summarises the data collected for the external evaluation of EfC.

Table 7: External evaluation data

Source	Target	Reponses	Response rate
Teacher survey	100	91	91.0%
Teacher interviews	100	16	16.0%
Teacher stories	50	27	54.0%
Teacher materials	50	19	38.0%
Local Facilitator survey	18	17	94.4%
Local Facilitators interviews	9	9	100.0%
Online Groups	10	5	50.0%
Country Trainers interviews	4	4	100.0%
County Inspector interviews	9	8	88.9%
School Director survey	100	11	11.0%

6   Results

The results of each set of data will now be presented in turn.

6.1   Teacher Survey

6.1.1   Profile

Figure 2 shows there were on average 10.1 teacher survey responses per county, with a range of 3 (Bihor) to 14 (Braşov).
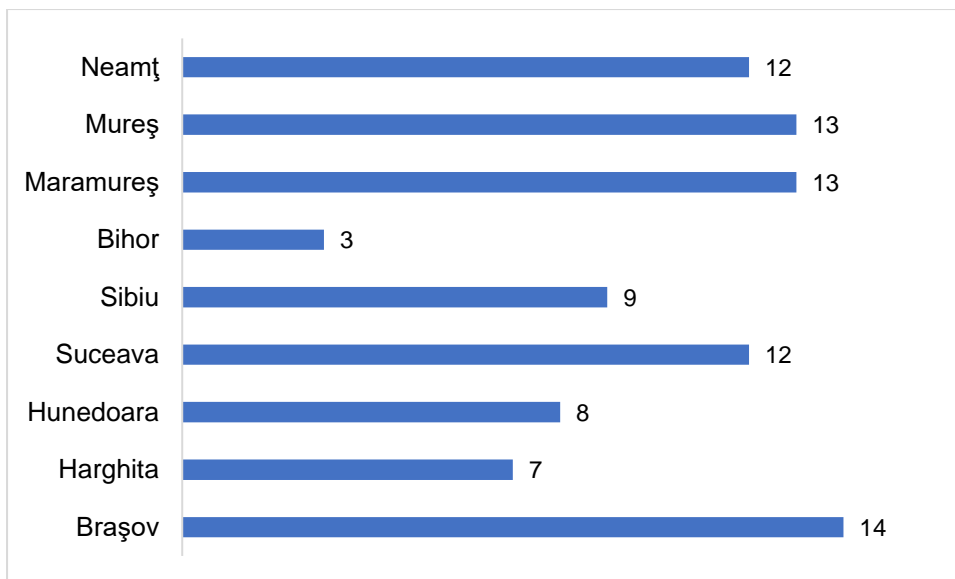
Figure 2: Teacher survey respondents by County

Figure 3 shows that the majority of the respondents taught mostly in secondary schools (with almost 55% in lower secondary) while just over 13% taught mainly primary classes[22].
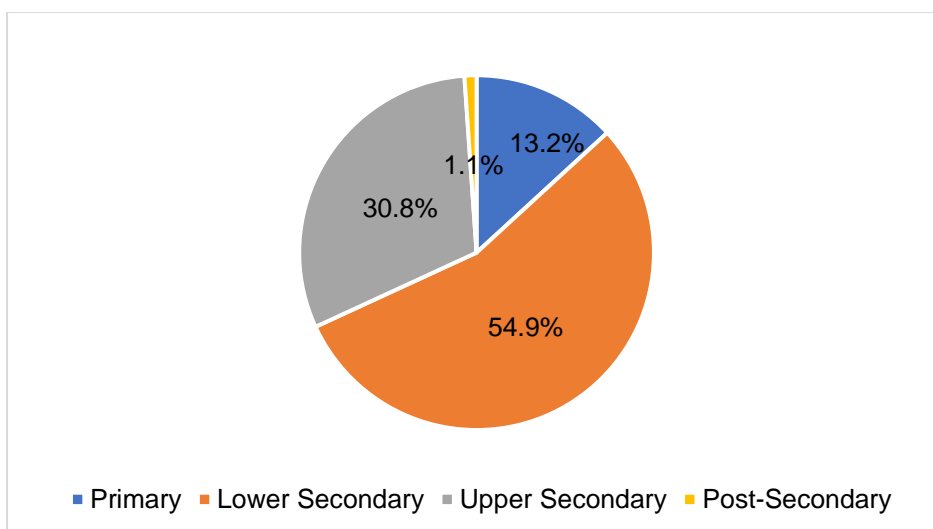

Figure 3: Main level taught by teacher

Table 8 shows the teacher respondents' profile according to their teaching experience. The group consisted of both less and more experienced teachers, with the majority having been teachers for 10-19 years.

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[22] Many teachers taught both primary and secondary but the survey asked them to identify the level they taught most often.

Table 8: Respondents' teaching experience

Years	N	%
Under 5	11	12.1
5-9	13	14.3
10-14	25	27.5
15-19	25	27.5
20-24	12	13.2
25 or more	5	5.5
Total	91	100.0

Teachers were also asked about their workloads for 2019-20 (high workloads can hinder efforts to promote change in teachers' work). The majority of teachers had either 15-19 (45.0%) or over 20 (33.0%) English lessons a week, while 15.4% had 14 of fewer. A small number (6.6%) said they were not teaching English.

The final background question asked teachers how much freedom they felt they had in deciding how to teach (again, teachers are less likely to change when they feel they have limited autonomy). As Figure 4 shows, the majority of teachers felt they had either a great deal (24.2%) or a lot (44%) of freedom in making decisions about their teaching methods.
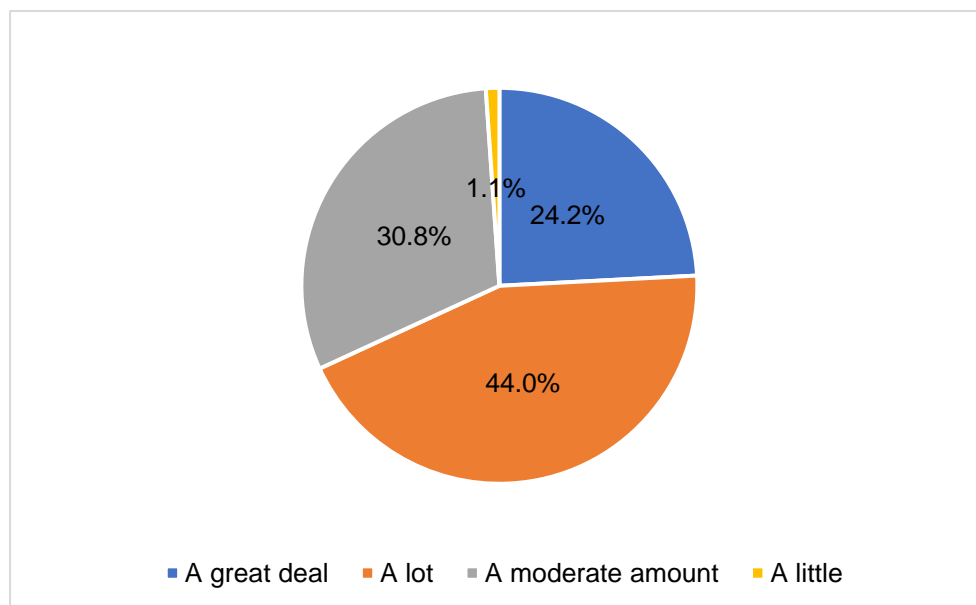

- A great deal - A lot - A moderate amount - A little

Figure 4: Teacher autonomy in choosing teaching methods

In summary, then, the profile of teachers responding to the online evaluation survey can be described as follows:

- representing 91% of the core group of 100 TAG teachers
- from all nine participating counties
- mostly teaching secondary English
- with a wide spectrum of teaching experience

- teaching at least (but often more than) 15 lessons a week
- feeling fairly autonomous in deciding how to teach.

6.1.2 Impact of EfC

Figure 5 summarises teachers' assessment of the overall impact of the programme on them. Only just over 3% of teachers described the programme's impact as 'low' (leading to only small changes in their teaching); almost 58% said it was 'high' (significant changes) and just under 39% described it as 'medium' (a number of changes).
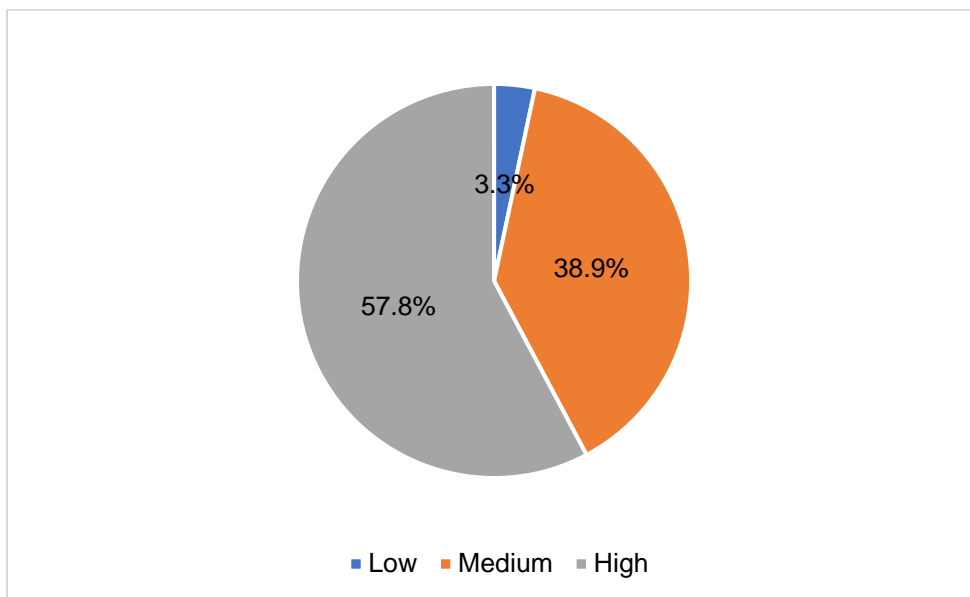

Figure 5: Overall impact of EfC on teachers (N=90)

The teachers who said the impact was 'low' were asked to explain why they felt that was the case. Their comments were:

'I found out only a few new things'.

'I had the opportunity to share ideas with my colleagues but I didn't change my ways of doing things in the classroom'.

'For me TAG was a reassurance of my vision about teaching. I found colleagues with similar thinking, approach and issues in our teaching process'.

The reference to 'reassurance' in the final comment is important; professional development initiatives do not always necessarily have to lead to substantial change in what teachers do and sometimes the benefit for teachers will be the realisation – for example, as a result of discussions with colleagues – that their existing approach to teaching is sound. This is an issue that arose in the teacher interviews too.

Teachers were asked to comment more specifically on 10 impact statements and Figure 6 shows that teachers overwhelmingly agreed with these. When the 'strongly
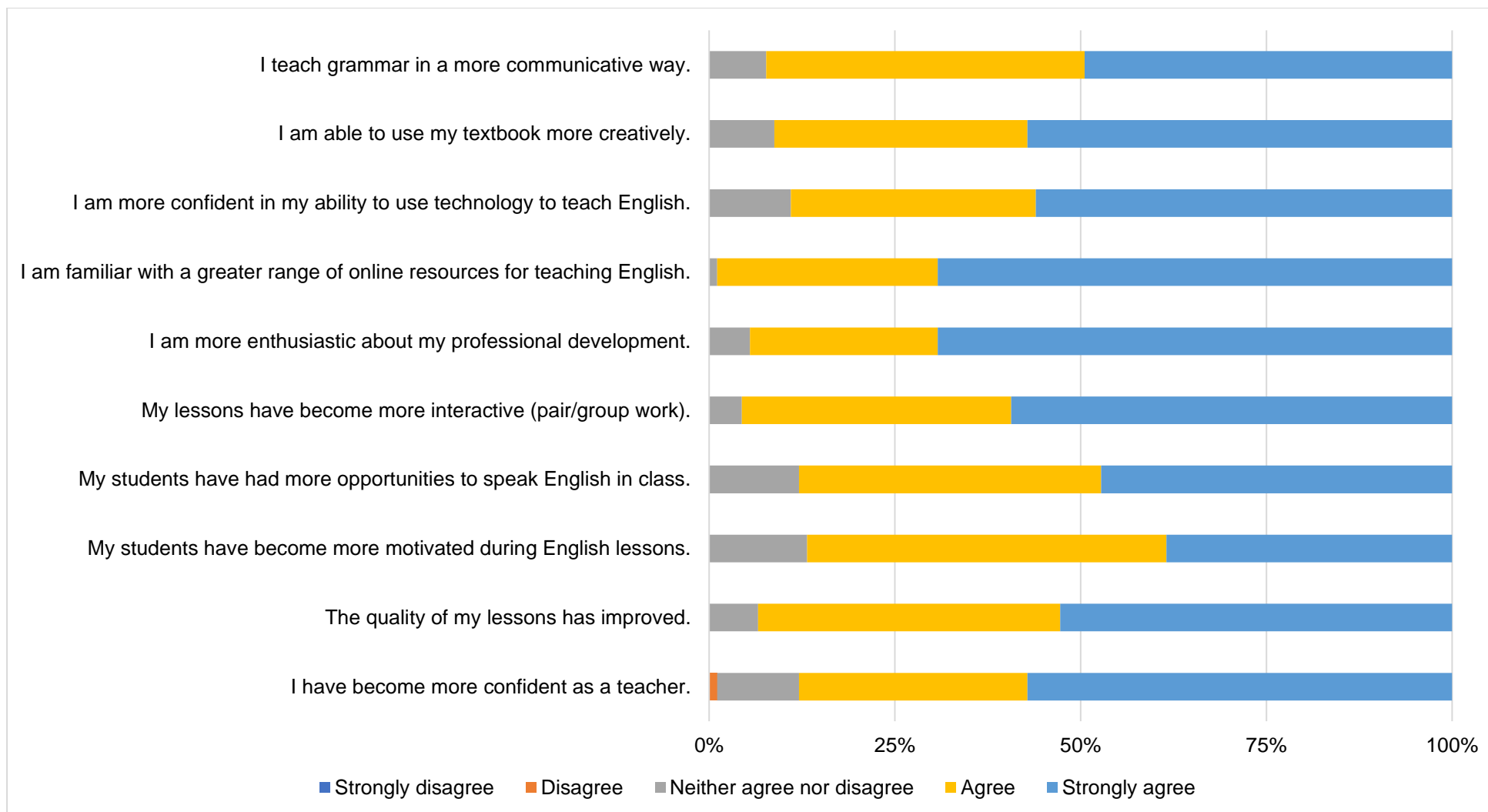
Figure 6: Impact of EfC reported by teachers

agree' and 'agree' responses are combined, agreement levels on all statements exceed 86%, with the top three being 'I am familiar with a greater range of online resources for teaching English' (98.9%), 'My lessons have become more interactive (pair/group work)' (95.6%) and 'I am more enthusiastic about my professional development' (94.5%). Additionally, 93.4% of respondents agreed that the quality of their lessons had improved as a result of the programme.

Teachers who had earlier said that the impact of TAGs on their work had been medium or high (i.e. all respondents except three) were also invited to give at least one concrete example of a change in their classrooms that was brought about by the programme. In total, 182 examples were given and Box 6 lists 19 examples where teachers explained changes in their work with the phrase 'use more'. This gives a sense of the wide range of changes reported by teachers.

Box 6: Examples of changes reported by teachers

- I use more technology than before.
- I use more communicative activities.
- I use more internet resources for teaching.
- I use more group work and pair work than before.
- I use more pair/group work.
- I use more applications and the internet for teaching.
- I use more technology during my classes.
- I use more creative methods of teaching.
- I use more interactive activities.
- I use more videos and games.
- I use more creatively the coursebooks.
- I use more activities to practice pronunciation.
- I use more games to test vocabulary or grammar.
- I use more communicative activities.
- I use more group work during my classes.
- I use more warmers and games.
- I use more pair or group activities with my students.
- I use more resources.
- I use more language teaching games.

Increased interactivity in lessons was a specific change that was frequently mentioned, as shown in Box 7.

Box 7: Increased interactivity in lessons

- I try to make my lessons more interactive and attractive.
- I gained more interactive teaching methods.
- I have focused on working with interactive groups rather than the entire class.
- More interactive and funny ways to teach a lesson.
- More interactive and fun activities.
- Approaching more interactive methods.
- More interactive.
- I got familiar with a great number of interactive activities and games.
- More interactive games.
- More interaction.

- Interactive lessons.
- I use more interactive activities.
- More interactive and engaging resources for teaching.
- Interactive lessons.
- Using interactive games which motivate my students.
- I use more language teaching games, making the teaching process more interactive.
- Students have a more interactive environment for the study of the English language.

Teachers said that the programme also affected their use of resources, as shown in Box 8.

Box 8: Changes in use of resources

- I use more internet resources for teaching.
- I use online resources more.
- Use of on-line resources.
- I use online resources now.
- The materials, the ideas, the online resources … were a real gold mine for me.
- We are using more online resources.
- More interactive and engaging resources for teaching.
- I got more resources regarding how to teach students with special needs.
- I use better teaching resources.
- I use online teaching resources more often.
- I use more resources.
- I use on-line resources more frequently
- I have learnt how to better select resources and materials and make the most of what my textbook has to offer.

Increased confidence was another change noted by several teachers, as shown in Box 9.

Box 9: Improved teacher confidence

- I have become more confident in my teaching skills.
- I am more confident when teaching.
- I have more knowledge of activities that I can use to teach different levels in the same class and more confidence.
- TAG project helped me to be more confident in my ability to use technology to teach English.
- I am more confident In using online materials.
- I am more confident.
- Now I feel more confident when assessing them at speaking.
- I am more confident when teaching grammar.
- I have become a more confident teacher.
- Being more confident that teaching is not only about taking notes and writing.
- I feel more confident as a teacher.

Collectively, it can be concluded from the examples teachers gave that the programme had led them to make teaching more interactive through group work, more enjoyable through activities such as games and warmers and more varied through the use of a wider range of teaching and learning resources. They also felt

more professionally confident. This final quote captures very nicely the deep change promoted by the programme:

> TAG meetings changed my perspective regarding my profession. I used to think I was powerless and dare not change the traditional way of teaching. After a year or so, I started to play more, using puzzles, play roles, I asked children to work on projects. I became more creative, flexible and relaxed overall.

6.1.3 Social media groups

The final question on the teachers' survey asked them about the contribution of the TAG social media groups to their professional development. Figure 7 shows that over 83% of the teachers felt their group had supported them 'a great deal' or 'a lot'.
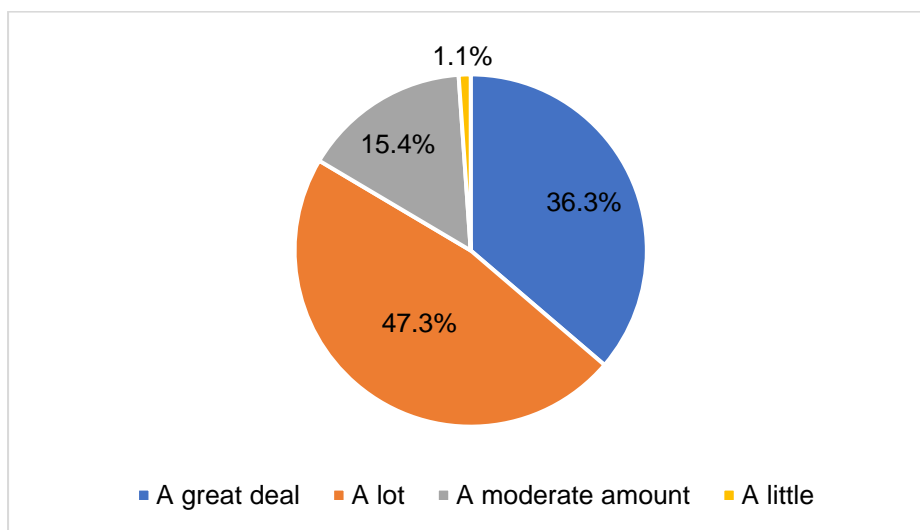

Figure 7: Support from TAG social media groups

6.2 Teacher Interviews

The sixteen teachers interviewed varied in their teaching experience from five to 22 years, with an average of just over 14 years. In most cases they taught primary and secondary students (ages 6-14). The schools they worked in varied from small (100 students) to large (1000 students), with an average of some 400. Fourteen of them attended all or most of the 18 TAG sessions; one attended only seven while another had only completed the first year of the programme[23].

6.2.1 Reasons for Enrolling

Teachers mentioned two main reasons for joining the programme. One was that professional development opportunities were rare in their area, for example:

[My town] is a small town where nothing ever happens". (T7)

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[23] This does raise questions about attendance records as core teachers were meant to have attended at least 50% of TAG sessions.

"We don't really have many trainings for English". (T2)

A second, more common reason, was that the course offered them the opportunity to meet other teachers. This was particularly important in the many cases where the teacher was the only one teaching English in their school:

"Being together with other teachers … since I am the only teacher in my school". (T5)

"I had a chance to meet my colleagues more often". (T13)

"We don't see each other and don't talk about things we have to face and share our opinion". (T16)

"I like meeting other teachers. Because I am the only teacher of English in my school I felt the need to communicate to other colleagues and sharing ideas and sharing our experience in the classroom". (T9)

"It was a great opportunity because being the only teacher in my school I don't have the chance to ask questions or to share from colleagues of the same subject and this is something very important for a beginner". (T6)

6.2.2 Overall Impressions

Teachers' overall impressions of the programme were extremely positive, as the comments in Box 10 illustrate. Teachers repeatedly emphasised the positive relationships created within TAGs and the opportunities that participants had to share, discuss and learn together.

Box 10: Teacher overall impressions of EfC

"The atmosphere was so relaxing". (T2)
"It was a nice experience. I liked the fact that the atmosphere was very informal and I got to know other colleagues from our area". (T3)
"It was a wonderful experience because it was a really practical course … it was interactive and entertaining … no one was judging anyone".(T7)
"The EfC project was an amazing experience for me because it gave me a lot of support for my professional development". (T9)
"We could have deeper discussions about issues concerning our teaching and it was a very friendly, informative kind of session. We really felt like in a family … and that made me participate". (T10)
"I really liked them … we talked a lot, we talked about our problems, we helped out each other … I learned a lot. What was really important for me is I got feedback from my colleagues". (T12)
"The experience was an enjoyable one because the atmosphere was always pleasant. I liked the fact that we discussed the teaching issues and I had the chance to get some useful advice". (T13)
"It was a lifetime experience … a great opportunity to meet my colleagues in an informal meeting … We formed a real team". (T14)
"I enjoyed meeting the teachers from [my area], working in groups with my colleagues and I learned a lot of things". (T15)
"I like the fact that I got to know them better and they shared their experiences and I think I learned from what they told us". (T16)

6.2.3 Prior Training

TAGs also appealed to teachers because they contrasted significantly (in both content and organisation) with the kinds of training opportunities they had experienced in the past. One teacher explained that "we usually attend once or twice a year methodological courses but we just go over there and sit there and do paperwork and that's all" (T11); in contrast, EfC was described as "the only course I attended in which we actually talked about our needs, the teachers' needs and the students' needs … it was amazing" (T2) and TAGs were seen to be "really different from any other type of courses I went on …They were more active, engaged, not passive, all engaged, speaking, we moved around" (T5).

6.2.4 Benefits of TAGs

The teachers felt the programme had improved the quality of their work; as one explained, "it really improved my teaching abilities because it was realistic and useful" (T7) while another noted that "it had a great impact on my teaching practice and helped me to become a better teacher" (T6). More specifically, teachers identified a wide range of benefits they had experienced as a result of the programme and these are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9: Benefits of TAGs, according to teachers interviewed

Benefit	Examples
More communicative approach to teaching	• "Before I used to teach more from the book and especially when teaching grammar I used to teach in more traditional way … I tried to teach English during this project in a more communicative way … I tried to teach grammar in context and not so much the theoretical side of it". (T1)
Improved teacher English	• "We all speak in English [during TAGs] which is very nice and very good because we can improve our English". (T4)
More confidence and reassurance	• "First and foremost I have more confidence in myself as a teacher". (T5) • "in discussing we were really understanding each other and supporting each other and reassuring ourselves that we are on a good path". (T10) • "It was great to see that other teachers have the same problems – you are not alone". (T11)
More interactive and enjoyable activities in class	• "Games, we do a lot of games at the TAGs and I used some of those games in my teaching". (T5) • "I've changed some of the starting points of my lesson such as warm-up activities". (T6) • "I use more games and songs and lot of new techniques". (T11) • "Before TAGs I didn't really use ice-breakers and I started using them". (T12)
More confident, engaged and motivated learners	• "The children do like it and they are very eager for their English classes". (T5)

	• "The children are more motivated now, more enthusiastic about English classes". (T7)
	• "I feel that my students are more confident during the English lessons". (T9)
	• "Learners were more engaged and more motivated to learn". (T11)
	• "I've tried some examples of warm-up activities, for example, running dictation. I tried this with 8th graders and they were really happy". (T16)
More careful planning	• "My teaching changed a lot … I plan my activities more carefully than before". (T9)
More attention to students	• "I try to pay more attention to my students' needs and interests". (T16)
Greater willingness to use new techniques	• "I became not so afraid of trying out new things". (T12)
	• "I wasn't prepared to use them but since I took part in these sessions I remembered them and then next day I went to school and tried a new activity that students enjoyed a lot". (T13)

Through TAGs, therefore, teachers acquired both the knowledge (new techniques) to make lessons more engaging and interactive and the dispositions (confidence and willingness to innovate) required for change to be implemented in the classroom. An ongoing cycle of positive feedback from students and support from colleagues allowed teachers to sustain this process of transforming their practices.

6.2.5 Social Media Groups

All the teachers interviewed confirmed that their TAG was supported by a social media group. In line with evidence presented elsewhere in this report, the teachers also noted that the primary purpose of these groups was related to information-sharing such as announcements about TAG meetings, teaching resources, training opportunities and photos and materials from TAG sessions. The groups were also used as source of support for teachers who, for example, were about to have a formal lesson observation or who were preparing for an examination. Only a few teachers noted that photos and videos from the classroom were sometimes uploaded. The social media groups were not used for further detailed discussions of teaching. All teachers interviewed, though, said they felt that the online groups were a useful source of support for the programme and an effective way of keeping the teachers connected in between meetings.

6.2.6 School Directors

In the majority of cases teachers said that their School Directors were aware of the programme, for example:

"Yes … he was aware of everything". (T1)

"Yes, he is very open-minded, he's helpful, he's supportive". (T8)

"Yes, he was aware. He is also an English teacher … He always supports us"[24]. (T11)

"She did know about it and she's very open to this kind of idea". (T13)

Awareness on the part of School Directors, though, was not necessarily accompanied by active interest. As one teacher explained, "Quite aware. Actually he was the one who saw the ad and said 'you should go to this meeting' … [after that] He never really asked about it" (T5).

In other cases, teachers felt that their directors may not have been aware of the programme:

"I don't think so … he's a maths teacher so I don't think he cares about this course". (T2)

"We did not really talk with him about that … I don't know how much he knew". (T3)

"I didn't tell him". (T4)

Overall, then, based on the teacher interviews, it would seem that levels of awareness of and active support for the programme varied significantly across School Directors. It must of course be remembered that EfC was not an official programme and took place outside school hours.

6.2.7 Suggested Changes

Teachers were asked if any changes could be made to the programme to improve it further. In terms of content, one suggestion by several teachers was that there could (in anticipation of continuing school closures) be more focus on online teaching. Some teachers also said they would welcome the chance to visit the classrooms of other teachers on the programme. One specific change that was discussed in more detail, though, was that of accreditation. While some teachers did not feel that for them personally this was an important issue, it was generally recognised that obtaining professional credits was an important part of teachers' lives in Romania and that it would be good if EfC were an officially recognised programme. The teachers, said, for example:

"I think more teachers would participate because we need credits". (T1)

"These TAGs are so fun and you'd be killing two birds with one stone, you go to the courses, it's super fun, you also get the credits". (T5)

"I think it would be very good … we need the credits but we don't really find proper courses". (T10)

"Credits are useful for us in our teaching career". (T13)

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[24] While it might be assumed that School Directors who were teachers of English would show more interest in the programme, an example was also given where this was not the case.

6.2.8 My English Library

Four of the teachers interviewed were also involved in the library component of EfC. They provided a consistent account of the manner in which the community libraries had been equipped with English resources such as books and DVDs and also described the manner in which they had collaborated with the librarians in carrying out activities in the library with their classes. One noted that "I really like working together with the librarian because she is very active and very open … so it's really easy to work together" (T12). Another described an activity she had conducted:

> because we had the lesson about clothes in the 3rd grade workbook, I thought of an activity about clothes … in the library they watched [on DVD] the story the King's Clothes and after that we had a short dramatization [of the story] and the children liked it very much. (T9)

A teacher also said she had organised library activities based on the story 'The Stone Soup'.

The target for teachers had been to complete six 'My English Library' activities but school closures because of Covid meant that in most cases this target had not been met; one teacher had completed all six, two had completed four and the fourth teacher had only done one.

Overall, the teachers were positive about the library project. They described it "a very nice experience" (T12) and valued the fact that "these resources can be used by all the people in our village, even the adults if they want to learn English" (T9). Teachers were, though, not able to comment on how far the wider community had started making use of the new English resources in the library.

6.3 Teacher Change Stories

Stories were submitted by 27 of the 50 teachers who were invited to do so. This should be a considered a positive response rate given both that teachers were on holiday and, also, the added effort required to write an extended text in English (as opposed, for example, to completing a short survey or even taking part in an online interview). In their stories, teachers were asked to describe a significant change they had experienced as a result of the programme. Teachers were asked to write about 250 words, though many went beyond this. Two sample stories are included as Appendix 3.

The stories provide important qualitative insight into teachers' experiences on the programme and in particular into the many changes it brought about in their attitudes and practices. Key themes from the stories are summarised in Table 10. Changes in instructional strategies and activities were the most salient theme but the stories did also highlight a wider range of ways in which they felt that the programme had had a significant impact on them.

Table 10: Themes in teacher change stories

Theme	Changes in	N[25]
Teaching methods	the kinds of instructional strategies and activities teachers were using in lessons	29
Teacher confidence	how confident teachers felt in the ability to teach and speak English	8
Teaching style	teaching style aimed at creating a more positive learning environment	7
Students' needs	the attention paid to relationships with students and to their needs when designing and conducting lessons	6
Resources	the kinds of resources teachers used	5
Perspectives	the way teachers thought about the purposes of learning a foreign language and about their role.	4
Community	the value teachers attached to collaborative professional development	4
Reflection	teachers' ability to reflect	2
Assessment	how teachers assessed students	2
Planning	teachers' approach to lesson planning	1

Examples of teachers' comments on these changes are presented in Box 11. These corroborate conclusions from the teacher survey and provide further evidence of the powerful impact of the programme on participants. Additional quotes from the stories which do not refer to specific changes but reflect the very positive experience the programme provided for many teachers are presented in Appendix 4.

Box 11: Teacher change story extracts

"It became clear to me that my students were not some robots that had to acquire knowledge and answer all of my questions, but they were individuals whose needs, abilities and feelings should always be taken into consideration". (Students' needs, T1)

"I discovered that I was not the only one dealing with these issues and the support I got from the group helped me regain my self-confidence as a teacher". (Confidence, T19)

"I think the role of a teacher has changed dramatically … I rather see myself as a content facilitator, an advisor, a resources provider, a co-learner or a designer and less as an assessor". (Perspective, T24)

"The major change is that I learned that what matters in teaching is…inspiring and building relationships with my students". (Relationships with students, T15)

"TAG experience has changed (and I dare say has improved) my teaching style. I have become more relaxed and more open-minded. I have shifted from a theoretical approach to a more practical one". (Teaching style, T11)

"The major change that TAGs brought in my life is my approach when it comes to speaking activities, if, before, I was petrified of the chaos it involves, now I have absolute confidence how to run them and how important it is to have a learner-centred environment in your class". (Instruction/Confidence, T17)

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[25] This is the number of individual examples of changes given by teachers across the 27 stories.

"I started to engage my students in more activities that required interaction with other students (in pairs and groups) and I saw that the good students could very well work with the less skilled students, helping and supporting each other". (Instruction, T1)

"I understood that I didn't have to regard the course book as a so-called 'bible' and that I shouldn't be afraid to try new things in the classroom, to change or to adapt, if necessary … So I started bringing something new to every class and I noticed that the unexpected element was something that my students seemed to look forward to". (Use of resources, T1)

"I think the most important thing I learned during TAGs and that changed my way of teaching and improved results of my students is that having fun in class is the best way to learn. I realized that the right materials and a positive attitude in class help the students stay engaged and enjoy English classes". (Instruction/Teaching style, T7)

"The second aspect that I really enjoyed and found extremely helpful was the use of video materials … My students have become more interested and motivated and learnt much easier and quicker when they saw a short video related to the topic. I have used almost all the video materials from the video zone of the British Council web pages and adapted them to my lessons". (Resources, T23)

"Another change was the boost in my confidence and motivation. I realized that I wasn't alone in my struggles with the difficulties every teacher has to go through during these times and career". (Teacher confidence, T20)

"I have changed my way of assessing students to a great extent … If before TAGs I used to test students mainly formally and the tests usually tested their grammar competences, while taking part in this meetings I started thinking that testing their ability to use the language is more important than testing their knowledge of language". (Assessment, T27)

Some stories commented explicitly on the progress made by students[26]. In Box 11 above, T7 noted that TAGs " improved the results of my students". A more extended extract is presented here:

> I have stressed creativity, I have encouraged them more, I have corrected them rarely, smiling, in soft voice as natural as I could speak. They've got confident, they started speaking more, they started correcting themselves naturally, and finally the results came. I had a very creative young boy, in 8th Grade, who obtained a Honorable Mention at English County Olympics. Last school year a six grader student obtained 2 third prizes at a Speak Out competition (creative writing and dramatic monologue), I had some participants at a Public Speaking competition (a local one). Last year one of my shyest students obtained 8,70 at an English evaluation for bilingual classes. (T6)

6.4 Teacher Materials

Examples of materials that illustrate the impact of the programme were submitted by 19 teachers and these are summarised in Table 11. Teachers were invited to include a short commentary on their materials which explained how these were influenced by the programme; just over half the teachers did so. The absence of a commentary limits the extent to which links between TAGs and the materials can be made, but overall, there is further evidence here that ideas learned during TAGs were being transferred into classrooms. A few examples will illustrate this point.

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[26] In 6.6.4, an LF also talks about the benefits of EfC for their students' results.

Table 11: Materials submitted by TAG teachers

Type	N
Lesson plans	13
Handouts/worksheets	24
Photos	39
Videos	4
Links to online resources	3
Commentary on materials	11

Two teachers shared their experiences (including through a video of a lesson) of an activity called 'running dictation' which was introduced during TAGs. In this activity, students work in groups; a text is attached to the wall and students run to it, read the text, and run back and dictate it to their group, who write it down. Teams compete to transfer the whole text as quickly (and accurately) as possible. One teacher commented on this activity as follows:

> Among other numerous ideas I implemented in my classes from the TAG sessions, I particularly enjoyed "Running Dictation". My students have always enjoyed Running Dictation activities, although they are in high school; while having fun, they learn new vocabulary, practice their spelling and sometimes grammar. it is spelling they are mostly aware of during this activity. I used Running dictation as a warm-up activity, but also as follow-up activity, when I wanted to consolidate the notions I previously taught. Students were highly motivated, as they enjoy competition and movement. (M6)

Another teacher illustrated, through a lesson plan and handout, her use of mini projects in class. The title of the project was 'Promoting the local tourism in [name of county]' and students worked in groups to design a leaflet. In her commentary, the teacher wrote that:

> I learnt new, interesting and useful things, such as being able to develop complex projects. I have to admit I used mini projects in the past, because I didn`t know how to conceive and structure a project in order to make it attractive for students. So, among other things, TAG sessions taught me how to make a catchy project for my students and I am very pleased with this. (M15)

The teachers' materials also illustrated their attempts to make lessons creative and fun for students. For example, there were activities based on poems, limericks and songs where students were challenged to listen and fill in lyrics and or complete missing lines, as in this example:

> Now dogs pretend they like to fight,
> They often bark, more seldom bite
> But yet a dog is, on the whole
> _____ (M14)

One teacher explained how she had used songs in her work:

> I really enjoyed all the TAGs and I have chosen one activity I have designed for my students in my school that I want to describe it to you. During these sessions I have understood once again how fun and useful is to develop my students' listening and

writing skills. This is the reason why I have designed the activity WORKING ON FAMOUS SONGS both for 5th to 8th graders and 9th to 12th graders especially to celebrate The European Day of Foreign Languages. The students listened to some famous songs and were asked to fill in the lyrics of those songs with the words or the expressions which were missing. They worked in pairs and then in groups and tried to guess as many words as possible. All the students got diplomas according to the number of points they had received. The students enjoyed the activity and found it really engaging. (M7)

The materials and commentaries submitted by two teachers illustrated new ways in which they were teaching vocabulary. In one case the teacher described her use of activities learned during TAGs, such as 'Hot seat' and 'Taboo', which she used with her children to review vocabulary and/or as warmers to start lessons. The teacher reflected on 'Hot seat' as follows:

> After the last TAG session in which we discussed about teaching vocabulary, I tried to use one of the vocabulary techniques in my classes: "Hot Seat" is a vocabulary game but also a speaking activity in which students work in groups and help their peer on the hot seat to find and say the words written on the cards (the student on the hot seat cannot see the cards). Students in class 6B were very excited about the game and they proved to be highly competitive and asked me to repeat the activity next time and to bring new cards. (M13).

Teachers' materials and/or commentaries pointed to other aspects of TAGs that they had incorporated into their lessons. One was new classroom management strategies:

> This is a simple, but very effective way of maintaining discipline in the classroom. I applied it during my classes with the primary children and it really worked. I raised my hand whenever students weren't paying attention or they were noisy. This gesture meant that I wasn't happy with the situation in the classroom and I was asking them to be quiet and pay attention. All those who agreed would raise their hands. Thus, in a few seconds, all children had their hands raised and there was silence in the classroom. (M12)

Another theme was the use of online teaching resources and some teachers included in their materials links to YouTube and other websites (such as those provided by the British Council). One teacher also provided an example of a video she made for her students to use when English lessons were moved online due to Covid. There was also one example (illustrated through a video) of a mingling activity (where students move around in class and speak to other students in order to complete a task), while another teacher commented on her use of 'new ice breakers I didn't use before and I found out about them in TAG meetings' (M17).

Overall, the photos, videos and handouts, particularly when accompanied by teachers' commentary, were most useful here in illustrating ways in which ideas from the TAGs were being used in classrooms. Lesson plans did also provide some insight into the activities teachers were using and how lessons were organised, but without some explanatory commentary it was harder to make direct links between these materials and the TAGs. Overall, though, the materials were a useful additional source of evidence of the varied ways in which TAGs encouraged teachers to make lessons more interactive, creative and enjoyable for their students.

6.5 Local Facilitator Survey

6.5.1 Perceived impact of EfC on teachers

The LF survey focused on their perceptions of the impact of the programme on teachers. Overall, six LFs described this impact as 'medium' (a number of changes in teachers and their work) while 11 described it as 'high' (significant changes in teachers and their work). LFs were also asked to express their views on how much impact the programme had on specific aspects of teachers' work and their responses are summarised in Table 12 ('No impact' was not chosen by any respondents and has been omitted from the table). Overall, it is clear from these responses that LFs felt that the impact of TAGs on teachers had been substantial.

Table 12: Impact of EfC on teachers, according to LFs

	Low impact		Moderate impact		High impact		Very high impact	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers' confidence in their ability to teach English effectively	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	11	64.7%	6	35.3%
Teachers' ability to design effective English lessons	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	10	58.8%	6	35.3%
Teachers' ability to deliver effective English lessons	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	8	47.1%	8	47.1%
Teachers' background (theoretical) knowledge of English language teaching	0	0.0%	4	23.5%	10	58.8%	3	17.6%
Teachers' motivation to develop professionally	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	7	41.2%	9	52.9%
Teachers' ability to use technology in teaching English	0	0.0%	2	11.8%	12	70.6%	3	17.6%
Teachers' willingness to participate in an online professional community	1	5.9%	5	29.4%	8	47.1%	3	17.6%
Teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	8	47.1%	8	47.1%
Teachers' ability to use online resources to support their CPD	0	0.0%	3	17.6%	8	47.1%	6	35.3%

Trends in these figures are more easily discerned in Figure 8, which groups responses into 'lower' (low/moderate) and 'high' (high/very high) assessments of impact. From this it is clear that the areas where impact on teachers was most commonly rated by LFs to be high or very high were:

- teachers' confidence in their ability to teach English effectively (100%)
- teachers' motivation to develop professionally (94.1%)
- teachers' ability to design effective English lessons (94.1%)
- teachers' ability to deliver effective English lessons (94.1%)
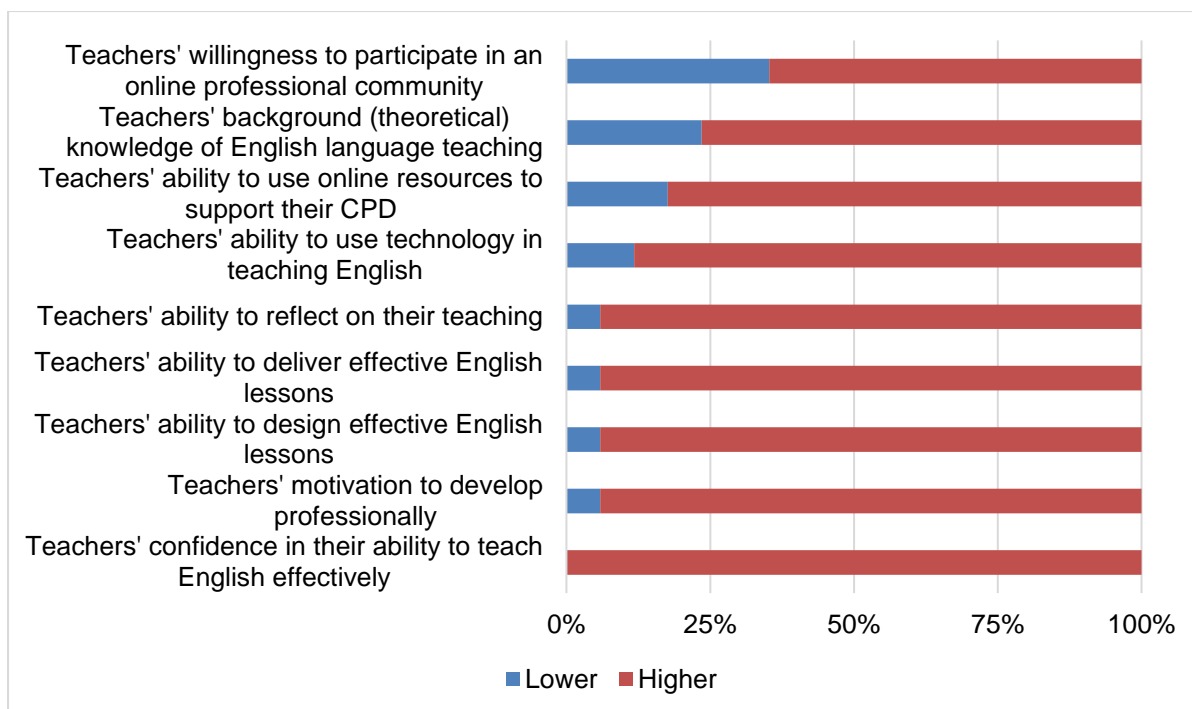- teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching (94.1%).

Figure 8: Impacts of TAGs on teachers according to LFs

In contrast, the areas where LFs' assessments of impact were most commonly low or moderate were:

- Teachers' willingness to participate in an online professional community (35.3%)
- Teachers' background (theoretical) knowledge of English language teaching (23.5%)[27]
- Teachers' ability to use online resources to support their CPD (17.6%)
- Teachers' ability to use technology in teaching English (11.8%).

It must be stressed, though, that for all areas of teachers' work in these questions, LFs' assessments of impact were consistently positive.

Another measure of impact LFs were asked about was the proportion of their teachers who used new ideas from the TAGs in their classrooms. Figure 9 shows that the most common response here (by 9 LFs, just under 53%) was that between 50% and 74%of their teachers regularly implemented content from the TAGs in their lessons.

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[27] Developing teachers' theoretical knowledge was not an explicit goal of the programme and its more practical focus was a feature teachers appreciated.
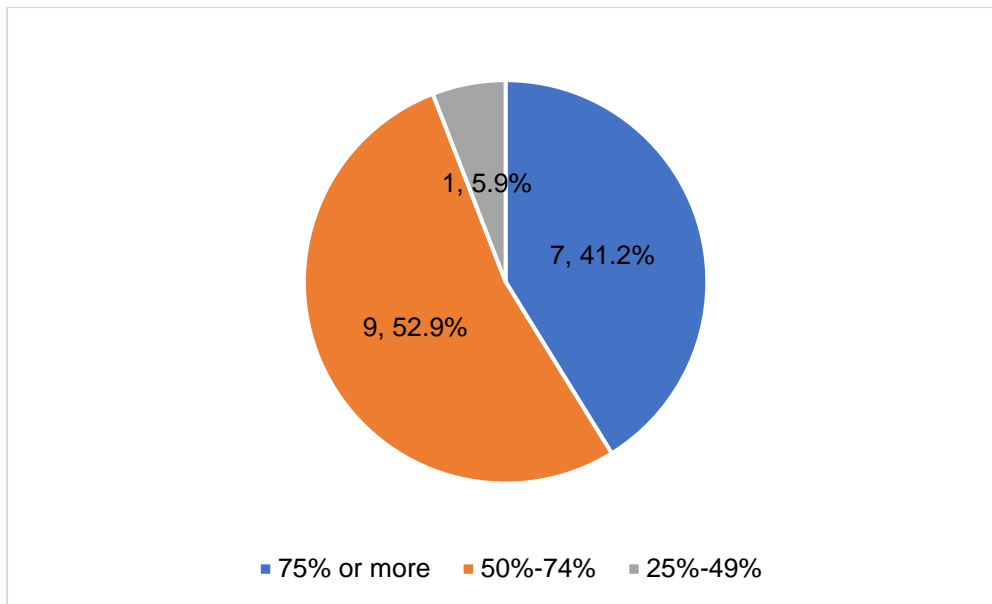
Figure 9: Proportion of teachers transferring TAG ideas to the classroom

LFs were also asked to give one concrete example of a change in the classroom practices of their teachers that occurred as a result of the TAGs. Fourteen LFs answered this question and their responses are presented in full in Appendix 5. Box 12 presents a selection of comments which highlight several different ways in which teachers were seen to change – not only in their teaching but also in their attitudes (for example, to peer observation).

Box 12: Changes in teachers, according to LFs

"They have started to allocate more time for games and give more attention to their students' needs".

"I think they have learnt how to design an EFL lesson more consciously by using materials creatively, and introducing more interactive teaching methods in the teaching process".

"I think one way in which TAGs were helpful is that they highlighted the importance of icebreakers and warmers in the unfolding of a successful lesson".

"The teachers became more willing to use technology during classes and lots of short videos".

"Students have been given the opportunity to move more during the lesson and to express themselves in a creative way".

"I think that an example of concrete change is the TAG members' perspective on teacher observation - which used to be either a taboo thing … A number of teachers in our TAGs actually tried out this".

6.5.2 Social media groups

LFs were asked about the extent to which the TAG social media groups supported teachers' professional development during the programme. Figure 10 summarises their responses, which were largely positive. Seven LFs said the online groups contributed 'a great deal' while the same number said they contributed 'a lot'.
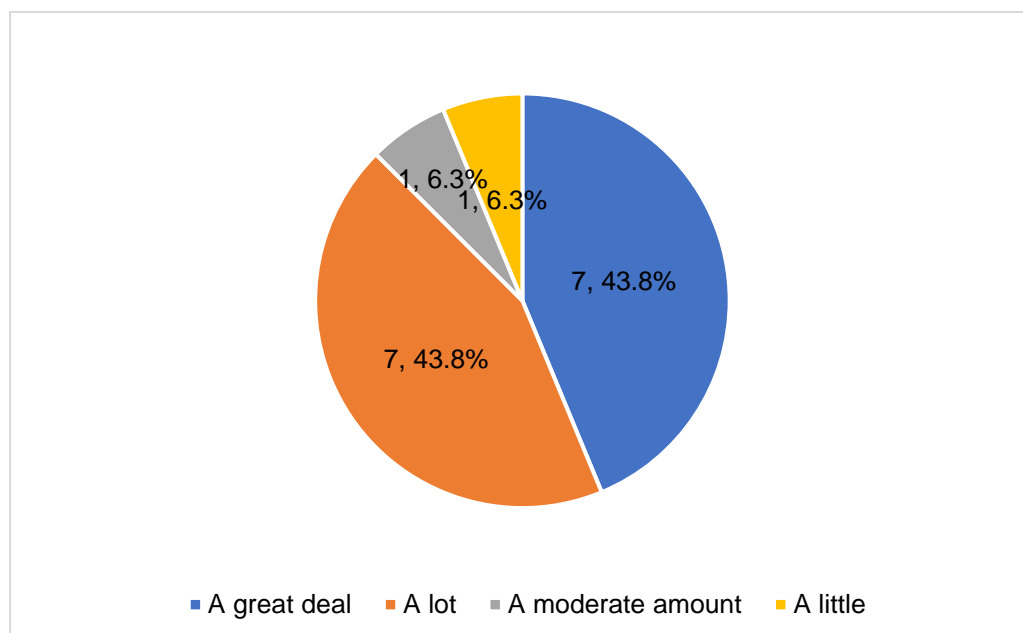

Figure 10: How much TAG social media groups supported teacher development, according to LFs

6.5.3 Suggested changes

The final question on their survey asked LFs for any suggestions to improve further versions of the programme. There were 15 responses in which 21 suggestions were made. These are summarised with examples in Table 13.

There were also individual comments suggesting TAGs might be shorter than three hours, and that an online platform might be set up where teachers could share resources. In two cases, LFs did not have any suggestions to make but simply said they felt the existing arrangements had worked very well:

> Our TAG meetings have been greatly enjoyed by the participants if one is to judge by the feedback we received after each meeting, which makes me conclude that the project has offered them exactly what they needed to enhance their teaching skills.

> And:

> I have to say, that the way the sessions were organised was extraordinary, so every teacher could enjoy the time spent together, improve their teaching abilities, and enlarge their horizon as an English teacher.

Table 13: Suggested changes for future programmes, according to LFs

Theme	N	Examples
Recognition by the MNE	7	'Our biggest issue was the fact that this project was not recognized by our Ministry of Education'.
		'I think that, in order for future TAGs to be successful, the participants should get credits for attending the meetings'.
Localised content, flexibly used	4	'I think it would be important to have a certain number of TAGs on discussing concrete local problems signalled by our colleagues'.
		'Working on topics specifically required by the members of the TAG and the flexibility to change the topic, if necessary'.
Teachers assuming more responsibility for TAGs	4	'Maybe in the future TAG members could be asked to be more active in organising TAG meetings'.
		'I think it might help that Local Facilitators could give some stages to the participants in order to facilitate them, changing the roles'.
More British Council TAG materials	2	'another set of [British Council] materials could enhance the impact of TAGs on what happens in classrooms'.
		'We would appreciate it if we had Local Facilitators' handbooks and participants' workbooks (unfortunately, creating the materials by yourself is very time-consuming work)'.
Opportunities for LF peer observation	2	'Having meetings with the other local facilitators during their TAGs'.
		'Meeting our colleague facilitators … while performing their TAGs'.

As shown above, recognition by the MNE was the most salient theme in LF's suggestions for improving the programme further. Two further quotes reinforce this point:

> getting credits for our participation in this project (I must confess that this project gave us more confidence and knowledge than any other course with credits I've have ever attended and it is a cruel reality the fact that in a way or other we have to waste time to take part in courses we are not interested in just to have ....credits).

> In my opinion, more collaboration with the Ministry of Education is most likely what it takes to further support a future TAG project. For many, official credit for teacher development seems to work better in a country like ours. It seems that education involves more than personal choice. Teachers must be encouraged to come and discuss what happens in the classroom and by doing so they can learn so much ... but, from my experience, it is not enough, they must be given official credit by the Ministry of Education. Headteachers will understand better if that happens.

This is an issue that surfaces elsewhere in the results presented here and which will also be discussed in the recommendations section.

6.6   Local Facilitator Interviews

6.6.1 Overall Views

The nine LFs who were interviewed were all very satisfied with their experience on the programme. For example, they described it as "an extremely positive experience" (LF3), "very rewarding" (LF2) and "a wonderful experience" (LF7). LF4 felt it was "very useful … and something which was very much needed in the community of teachers in Romania", while LF5 said that "it was such a great opportunity for me to develop myself personally and professionally". They all expressed the hope that the programme would continue.

6.6.2 Community

One overall feature of EfC that LFs valued was its focus on building a community of teachers. It was felt that "teachers are left a bit alone when it comes to new teaching methods or problems that they face in the classroom" (LF4) and the programme countered this because "… it was first and foremost about forming relationships with the other teachers" (LF5). For one LF, "meeting new people, meeting colleagues from [my county], people I haven't met before, is the most amazing thing about this project" (LF3) while for another a key result was "a sense of belonging" (LF2). LF12 noted that "I really think this project achieved its main goals which is to create a community for English teachers". EfC thus reduced feelings of isolation among teachers and helped them realise that they were not alone in experiencing particular challenges in the classroom:

> The TAGs were informal meetings, we all had the opportunity to talk, to share our ideas, just to share experiences and I think it was very important for us as teachers to see that other teachers struggle with the same issues that we do, we are not alone. (LF1)

LF4 also noted that the programme established "a functioning network of teachers in several counties which is absolutely useful not just for the teachers but obviously for the students as well".

6.6.3 Novel Approach to CPD

As Box 13 shows, EfC was seen to be very different (in a positive way) to the kinds of training or professional development opportunities that teachers of English in Romania had access to and which were described as "compulsory methodological meetings … very formal" (LF4). Overall, then, TAGs were seen to be different to existing forms of CPD for teachers because they were voluntary, regular, involved smaller groups, were less formal, addressed teachers' needs, were practical, and allowed teachers to interact, discuss and collaborate in a relaxed manner. The more formal meetings organised by the Inspectorates do play an important role in ensuring

teachers are kept informed about educational policies and activities at national and County level; the feedback here, though, suggests that more regular opportunities for professional development of the kind that TAGs provided would be appreciated by teachers.

Box 13: EfC and previous CPD

> "Before this project we only met twice a year for those official meetings. Somebody would give a presentation, we would watch it and that was it … We never had the chance to discuss, to share ideas and I think the main goal of the project was to share ideas, to improve our teaching and I really think it achieved its goals.". (LF1)
>
> "People come because they are told to come not because it is a pleasure for them to join the meetings and some people came to out TAGs because they wanted to come and they came interested and full of enthusiasm … We participate in these official meetings in great numbers and we are all together in a very big room … and maybe we are more than 100 and we cannot talk, we cannot collaborate". (LF2)
>
> "Our meetings were totally different from anything that they have experienced before. We were really able to be ourselves and to work with what we needed". (LF7)
>
> "It was different, it was not like I was there and I was presenting something to the others. It was very interactive and it was not the kind of activity 'I will tell you to do this and you have to do it'. It was like 'what is your opinion about it? How do you do this when you had to teach something?'". (LF8)
>
> "Very different to what I have attended and studied before, and something that I truly learned out of it". (LF9)

6.6.4 Benefits for LFs

LFs highlighted a range of ways in which they had benefited from the programme, not just in their co-ordinating role but also as language teachers. These are illustrated in Table 14. Of course, many of these benefits for LFs were linked, as this comment illustrates:

> I improved a lot because I became a better teacher, more confident, I used more English during the classes, I could use parts of what I have learned, I use them in the classrooms and I saw the results in the outcome in my relationship with the students then in their results and their confidence in speaking English. (LF9)

Table 14: Benefits of TAGs for LFs.

Benefit	Example
Relationships with students	"I got to know my students better … and created a stronger relationship with them and the students responded in an amazing way. They kept telling me 'Wow, teacher, you are almost the only one who wants to know about me". (LF3)
Awareness of teaching	"I have become much more conscious of my teaching, I have become much more conscious of the methods I use". (LF4)
Teaching style	"I've changed radically … I changed my teaching style. Because of this project I was forced, in a good way, I was pushed to change constantly … I changed all my teaching style and my students felt this". (LF4)
Teacher confidence	I had my fears about English, about my teaching, about me as a teacher but this project made me feel more comfortable and more confident in my job, in my teaching style. I think this was the best thing about this project". (LF4)
Student confidence	"They've become more confident in themselves because they were feeling involved in the lesson. They started enjoying English lessons even if they don't have high knowledge". (LF4)
Self-esteem	"I improved my self-esteem, I was a shy person". (LF5)
Local reputation	"I think honestly through this project I have made a name for myself in our area". (LF1)
Reflective skills	"Reflecting on my own lessons …. we have a lot of work to do … and we sometimes forget about reflection … TAGs offered me the opportunity to remember that I have to reflect on my lessons". (LF2)
Classroom strategies	"I applied quite a lot of the activities in terms of the warmers or other activities that my colleagues told us about". (LF5) "Since I attend this TAG I use more groups … which I was reluctant to use before because I thought they would create chaos in the classroom but the students enjoy them and their talking time is more". (LF9)

6.6.5 Impact on Teachers

LFs were also positive about the impact of the programme on the work of the teachers in their TAGs, as the examples in Box 14 illustrate. At the start of each meeting, teachers were asked to talk about their experiences of using new ideas in their classrooms, and LFs' views about the impact of the programme on teachers were based largely on those discussions. In some cases, too, LFs said that teachers "sometimes also brought us pictures or videos or projects that they have made with their students" (LF1). While LFs referred mostly to changes in what teachers were doing (such as using games, making teacher more interactive, and reducing the use of the mother tongue), there were references to changes in teachers' underlying

beliefs too; for example, one noted that "there were teachers who came with very rigid beliefs and they started to become more relaxed" (LF4). This change in mentality was also seen in more openness among teachers:

> be open-minded, not to be afraid of admitting that in certain situations you might be wrong … admitting failure, not being ashamed of it ... this is what we have all gone through. (LF4)

TAGs were also seen to boost teacher confidence:

> All the teachers finally felt more confident … they were leaving the session with the idea that they can do it. This was the most powerful thing about the project. (LF5)

Box 14: Changes in teachers' work, according to LFs

"The impression of the TAGs on me and on some teachers was a permanent one. TAGs reminded everyone that we should do some things to make students interact more and that was actually the essential change". (LF2)

"Participants shared the fact that their classes became more alive. So they changed their way of teaching, they asked students to move more during lessons, not just sitting in their well-established positions". (LF2)

"The warmers we tried during the TAGs … were then applied during the classrooms. Then the next TAG we started with the sharing and lots of them mentioned the fact that the students were so impressed by the fact that the teachers involved games in the lesson". (LF2)

"We have three hours of sessions speaking English and this was the first thing that helped us to improve our English … this was the chance for them to speak English". (LF5)

"They were applying all the things that we studied there and the feedback from their part was positive". (LF5)

"When they shared their experiences in the TAGs it was clear that they were using much more interactive and activity-based classes". (LF7)

"They became very comfortable with pair work and group work". (LF7)

"Teachers tend to use native language to translate … that stopped I think in most classes". (LF7)

6.6.6 Challenges

LFs were asked about any challenges that they or their teachers faced during the programme. For the teachers, it was noted that personal circumstances (such as family commitments) often limited their ability to attend TAGs regularly. Transportation (i.e. being able to travel to TAG meetings) was in some cases also seen to be an issue, particularly for teachers in the more remote areas. Overall, though, LFs did not feel that TAGs created many challenges for teachers (though the lack of accreditation for the programme may have affected teacher participation –

see 6.6.8 below). For LFs themselves, the main challenge noted was the personal time they invested in preparing for and leading TAGs (as one put it, "It was a little bit of work" - LF1). This was particularly the case in the second part of the programme where LFs "had to design our own materials and it has been quite a challenge for us … quite time-consuming" (LF3). While LFs generally felt that the benefits of the TAGs made up for the work involved, one felt "burned-out" (LF9) and did not feel they would be able to continue as a LF unless there was a change in the conditions.

6.6.7 Social Media Groups

All LFs confirmed that their TAG had at least one FB or WhatsApp group which allowed participants to keep in touch in between the physical meetings. These groups were not limited to the core TAG members and included a wider range of teachers not regularly involved in the programme. LFs said that the social media groups were used largely for sharing information such as announcements about TAG meetings, photos and materials from TAGs, and links to training opportunities or teaching resources. There was only one case where the LF explained that their group was used by teachers to share photos and videos from their classrooms. In addition to their professional function, the online groups were also seen by LFs to play an important social function too in sustaining relationships among teachers and LFs.

6.6.8 Accreditation

LFs valued the fact the EfC was a voluntary programme. As one explained, "this project wasn't about certificates, it wasn't about diplomas, it was only about improving, improving as a teacher" (LF5). There was a view that "we always said quantity before quality … there's no need in having lots of people who only come for the credit points but do not actively participate" (LF4). For another LF, the optional nature of TAGs was "the way I can find the true seekers of professional development" (LF3).

Nonetheless, it was also generally recognised that obtaining professional credits was an important issue for teachers in Romania and that it would be a positive development if future versions of the programme were accredited:

"They have to find a way to give official credits to teachers". (LF2)

"We feel overwhelmed by this necessity to have a thick portfolio". (LF3)

"It will be more attractive for some of them". (LF5)

"If we received professional credits it would be a really good idea". (LF8)

"We have been asking [about] this problem because there has been a lot of activity and it would be a pity not to be rewarded". (LF9)

LFs were clear that it would be undesirable, as a result of accreditation, to increase the number of teachers participating if many were there just to obtain credits.

However, it was also felt that even where credits were the initial motivation, teachers might in time appreciate the deeper benefits of the programme:

> there is also this aspect that when you come to a TAG meeting and you see what is going on there slowly you start not to be interested in the credit points because you realise this is actually different to all the other things you've participated in before so it becomes attractive. (LF4)

6.6.9 Inspector Support

LFs were asked about the involvement in the programme of their inspectors. In some cases they said that inspectors had limited involvement, though in one area this was the LFs' choice:

> We didn't really want to involve the Inspectorate and the Inspector in these meetings because we were afraid that it would take the meetings to a different direction. So, no help whatsoever, but we didn't ask and this was a very conscious decision. (LF4)

In other cases, it was reported that the inspector was aware of the programme and asked LFs to provide information about their activities:

> Our inspector knew about the project and we informed her whenever she asked us for information about how many teachers came to the meeting and the topics. (LF8)

Higher levels of inspector involvement were also reported. One LF noted that "we had the help of our Inspector, who really appreciated what we were doing and she made sure that people knew about it" (LF7) while another explained that the inspector was on their social media group and kept up-to-date with the TAG's work.

Inspectors have a central role to play in future versions of the programme and the importance of involving them more closely is discussed in the recommendations below.

6.6.10 School Director Support

LFs were also asked about the extent to which their School Directors were aware of and supportive of the programme. Again, responses here varied, as shown in Box 15 below.

Box 15: School Director awareness of programme, according to LFs

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"To be honest I have absolutely no idea because I told her several times but head teachers have so many things to do that I don't know if she keeps these things in mind". (LF4)
"I couldn't make my school director aware of what I am doing". (LF5)
"I think they were … they must have been [aware]". (LF6)
"He knew everything about it … and he was very supportive". (LF7)
"I informed the head master about this project and the fact that I was a LF and they knew about it". (LF8)
"Yes, she is aware and she encourages me all the time …She likes projects, she likes British Council, she likes when I improve because when I improve my students improve too". (LF9)

6.6.11 Suggested Changes

LFs were generally very satisfied with the content and organisation of the programme and felt they had received excellent support for their role throughout. Apart from the issue of accreditation discussed earlier, they did not, therefore, suggest significant changes to future versions of the programme, but did note the following two issues to consider:

- Inviting guests to TAGs to discuss specialist subjects – "we need some specialists in some problems like disruptive students or with medical problems". (LF9)

- Giving teachers more responsibility to lead parts of the TAG - "We tried to ask other people from the group to play the part of facilitators in areas that they felt they had some expertise and that worked very well". (LF8)

It was also suggested that teachers be given financial support to obtain certificates for MOOCs, though it was recognised that such support would not be possible for all teachers.

6.7 Social Media Groups

This section focuses on the content of the five social media groups that were analysed as part of this evaluation. All of these groups were regularly active during the programme and a summary of their features is presented in Table 15. It is clear from the analysis of their content[28] that the primary function of the groups was information sharing – especially information about forthcoming TAGs and links to resources for teaching (including online teaching) and professional development. Examples of photos and videos from teachers' classrooms were infrequent (found in only two groups) and responses to these by other group members were of the congratulatory kind (i.e. there was no critical discussion of classroom practices). After TAGs, too, teachers often posted messages with positive feedback. Overall, then, social media groups played largely group-maintenance and information-sharing functions, but did not, on the basis of the groups analysed here, provide a forum for

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[28] In one case most of the posts were in Romanian and these were analysed using Google Translate.

sharing evidence of change[29] in the classroom or for the critical discussion of teaching and learning in between TAG meetings.

Table 15: Features of five TAG social media groups

Group	Content	Media
1	Announcements and reminders about forthcoming TAGs; feedback on TAGs; links to resources for teaching and professional development	Many photos (and some videos) from TAG sessions; some photos from classrooms that show students working in groups.
2	Announcements and reminders about forthcoming TAGs; links to resources for teaching and professional development (such as webinars and MOOCs)	Some materials for classroom use (e.g. cards for Taboo vocabulary game); many photos (and one video) from TAG sessions.
3	As above – mainly TAG-related announcements and links to resources for teachers. Additionally, positive comments about photos and videos from classrooms.	Many photos from TAGs; several photos and from classrooms too showing students working in groups and work students produced (e.g. posters); several videos too – children singing songs (and dancing), listening and repeating, writing and performing.
4	As above content related mainly to TAGs – announcements about dates of meetings and responses to these and congratulatory comments following the meetings. Several posts related to transition to online teaching when that was happening.	Media uploaded entirely about TAGs.
5	As above. In addition, several posts related to transition to online teaching when that was happening.	Media uploaded were related to TAGs (e.g. photos), materials to support online teaching, and official MNE communications.

6.8   Country Trainer Interviews

CTs were consistent in the view that the programme had been successful and that the quality of the TAG sessions they observed was good. For example, one noted that "I was really impressed with the quality of the TAGs" (CT2). CTs identified various ways in which TAGs had been beneficial for teachers, as shown in Table 16.

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[29] Concerns related to GDPR may have limited how much photo and video material teachers were able to share online.

Table 16: Benefits for TAGs, according to CTs

Benefit	Quotes
Supportive community of teachers	"the best thing these TAGs managed to do was to build a sense of community and of belonging". (CT1)
	"before this project we did not have an active network of support and advice between co-workers. This is the first time when teachers managed to come together as a network and offer each other support … Before the TAG they would have worked in isolation, whenever they needed help or support, they wouldn't have had anyone to turn to … but now they work as a group". (CT4)
Practical forum for solving local problems	"They had this kind of forum where everyone could talk, everyone voiced their concerns, they asked their questions, they received advice from colleagues". (CT2)
	"They were offering support and solving problems locally". (CT4)
Support for novice teachers	"Even beginner teachers were coming to the TAGs and learning avidly from the more experienced colleagues". (CT2)
	"TAGs … integrating young teachers, you know beginners, and offering them support". (CT4)
Transfer to the classroom	"Most of the activities they discussed they tried them in class because I could hear them, they had like a feedback period at the beginning of the TAG when they discussed what they applied in class and how it worked". (CT1)
	The fact that they have to share at the beginning of each session made them responsible for trying new things … The most beneficial thing … they actually applied". (CT3)

Although one CT did say that evidence of change in the classroom was shared by teachers on their TAG social media group, another felt that in her area that the group "was used just to announce the next TAG – just for communication" (CT1) and that there was not much ongoing online interaction among teachers in between TAGs.

One way in which TAGs were seen by CTs to be distinctive was that, for the first time, teachers were able to meet regularly and to discuss and seek solutions to practical, local problems in a non-judgemental setting. CTs contrasted this with other forms of official training:

"they're quite formal and official and they can't talk about their problems". (CT1)

"most of the teachers attending the trainings were stressed because of the formal contexts where they had to meet". (CT2)

[compared to official training] "in this project they could speak freely … they could talk about their problems without judgement". (CT2)

[Existing courses] "are not designed to meet the needs of these teachers". (CT4)

TAGs were thus seen to create a less stressful environment in which teachers were not under pressure to hide their problems but in which they could discuss these without the fear of being judged.

In terms of improving the programme further next year, CTs made various suggestions. One noted that not many teachers had taken up forms of additional online CPD, such as MOOCs and that this could be emphasised more in future. It was also suggested that "the project could go even further to make them work together … like peer observation" (CT1). Official accreditation for the programme so that teachers would receive professional credits for participating was also seen to be "an excellent idea" (CT4) that "would absolutely encourage teachers" (CT2) and "attract more teachers" (CT3). Another suggestion was that the content of the programme could focus more specifically on the local concerns of teachers in rural schools, such as teaching mixed-ability and multi-level classes.

6.9   County Inspector Interviews

The interviews with CIs suggested that they varied in how involved they were with the programme, but generally they supported it by sharing information about TAG meetings on the Inspectorate website, assisting the British Council in recruiting teachers, attending TAGs occasionally, and generally encouraging teachers to participate. In one case the CI did not specialise in English and a teacher of English who assisted the inspector as a mentor and teacher evaluator was given responsibility for the programme (including speaking to me). She admitted, though, that her involvement was minimal. Another CI explained that she "didn't want to interfere too much if we weren't supposed to" (CI7). CIs' general perceptions of the programme were consistently positive, as shown in Box 16.

Box 16: CIs' general perceptions of the programme

"There were no projects like this in this area". (CI2)

LFs "have worked a lot to train and support teachers in their locations". (CI2)

"Everything that is organised by British Council or British specialists is very professional, very efficient, very productive". (CI3)

"Very rarely we have the chance to meet with the other teachers and have a talk and get real feedback … "It was a very good way to share experience". (CI4)

"I was very pleased by the activities. The LFs were very well trained. The activities, materials, the resources … everything was very well organised" (CI5)

"They really enjoyed the project. It was something special … They liked the idea of having very capable trainers". (CI8)

CIs also varied in how concretely they were able to talk about the impact of the programme but, once again, they were unanimous in the view that it had been a positive influence on teachers, teaching and learning. Box 17 illustrates the range of specific benefits that they mentioned.

Box 17: Benefits of EfC, according to CIs

"Those meetings were a real opportunity for them to share in a less conventional, less official environment and they were really at ease expressing themselves and finding solutions to their everyday classroom problems". (CI1)

"I've seen some lessons where students were more motivated to participate, where anticipated classroom problems were very well managed and also they were using resources with more ease … Students were more motivated and they were at ease with English. They had the courage to speak English". (CI1)

""I have seen some of the teachers that were enrolled in the project and their strategies have changed. They involved the students more and there were some different things if I compare to other teachers". (CI2)

"They said they learned a lot about new strategies and how to increase opportunities for English students to interact … I've noticed this when monitoring classrooms in my area". (CI3)

"I really think that the project had a positive and important affect among teachers". (CI3)

"TAGs were good because teachers found out they are not alone in their problems". (CI4)

"It fostered their independence in choosing materials because our teachers are very connected to the textbooks so they rarely dare to look for other materials so the TAGs had this role to offer other type of materials". (CI4)

"They became more independent, they gained self-confidence". (CI4)

""I'm sure teachers have improved their ways of teaching during this period of the project". (CI5)

"They became more efficient, more practical, they don't stay on the book, they don't stay on the chair, they work a lot on groups, they do more projects, like drama projects, they get the children out of the classrooms". (Ci6)

"Working together, sharing ideas, finding solutions together … They learned how to motivate students". (CI8)

The CIs were responsible for organising teacher meetings ('pedagogic circles') in their areas. These played an important role in keeping teachers informed about national educational policy and county-level activities, but CIs felt they were very different to TAGs. One noted that "the trainings that we organise here are not so motivating for the teachers" (CI3), while another explained that because TAGs were smaller, teachers participated more freely and "could develop better relationships" (CI5). TAGs also provided more space for teachers to share and discuss their experiences. In one case, in recognition of the value of TAGs, the CI had decided

that those enrolled in the programme would not additionally have to attend the more official teacher meetings which were normally compulsory.

While travelling to the monthly TAGs meetings was, according to a few CIs, sometimes difficult for participants without transport and/or who lived in particularly rural communities, CIs did not feel that the programme had created many serious challenges for the teachers. One drawback of the programme noted by most CIs, though, was that teachers did not receive any professional credits for attending. The CIs were of the view that, while motivated teachers would attend even without credits, accreditation would be a positive step in the development of the programme (see Box 18).

Box 18: CIs' views about accrediting EfC

"It would be very motivating" to have credits". (CI4)

[Lack of accreditation] "is a problem because they really need credits for everything they want to do in the Romanian system". (CI3)

"That would be a great idea because in our system of education there are specific teacher movements when and where we need credits … so that would be a good idea … Probably this would motivate more teachers to attend". (CI2)

"I would have preferred that this course, being part of a very very good project, be also accredited and offer teachers the credits they need, because they had very serious meetings". (CI5)

CIs were also consistent in the view that the programme should continue. One, for example, said "I would like this project to continue" (CI1) while another added "it's worth continuing" (CI8). One CI explained at more length that

> It should go on … because teachers involved took charge of their own CPD … I totally agree with this project, this design and implementation, in order to have a positive and sustainable change. (CI2)

6.10 School Director Survey

As previously indicated, it was not expected that many School Directors (SDs) would respond to the online survey and thus it was not wholly surprising that only 11 responses were received. These represented five counties: Braşov (1), Mureş (2), Neamţ (2), Sibiu (4) and Suceava (2).

SDs were asked about the size of their school. Three schools were small (under 300 students), six medium (300-699 students) and two very large (1100-1499 students).

In terms of awareness of the programme, seven SDs said they had previously heard about it while four said they had not (there was no relationship between school size and reported SD awareness). The seven who were aware were also asked if any of their teachers had participated in the programme: four said 'Yes, I know some did',

one said 'No, I am sure none of them did' while two replied 'I'm not sure – maybe they did without telling me about it'.

The four SDs who said their teachers had taken part in EfC were further asked if these teachers had given them any information about the programme and/or its benefits. Three answered positively and they were invited to explain briefly what information they had received. Here are there answers:

> It was a professional development project for English language teachers organized by the British Council in partnership with the Romanian-American Foundation (RAF). I mention that our school collaborates with RAF through the organization World Vision, which supports us for the promotion, organization of student practice and funding by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of technological high schools with a predominantly agricultural profile.

> There were lessons with the students from the classes within the project. The main objective was to train students from rural areas to provide them with new professional development opportunities. English language skills are very important in this regard.

> I found out that it is a beneficial project for the community and especially for the children of our locality, they are attracted to various educational and fun activities, which take place in the commune library, but also inside the school outside school hours. I know that the teacher involved in the project she is a responsible and dedicated person, and the students of our school respond with pleasure to her invitation.

It is not possible to reach any general conclusions about School Directors' awareness and perceptions of and support for the programme from this limited number of responses. It is interesting, though, that of the 11 respondents, only seven had previously heard of EfC and only four were certain their teachers had taken part (it is my understanding that the SDs approached for this survey all had teachers participating in the programme). Also, from the original 11, only three were able to provide some further information about the programme (and one of them was aware of the library component too). It must be noted that EfC was not an official MNE programme and took place outside school hours and aware from school premises. This will have influenced how much attention SDs gave to the programme and indeed how far teachers felt the need to tell SDs about their involvement. Nonetheless, these results suggest that further work could be undertaken to raise SDs' awareness of a future version of the programme.

7   Summary of Findings

This independent evaluation of EfC drew on a substantial volume of data obtained using diverse methods (surveys, interviews, change stories and analyses of instructional materials and social media content) and from a range of stakeholders (teacher, LFs, CTs, CIs and SDs) with various degrees of involvement on the programme. Overall, despite the absence of direct feedback from students and the lack of classroom observations, the range, quantity and quality of evidence collected has contributed to a robust evaluation that allows for trustworthy conclusions to be reached about programme impact.

The key findings of the evaluation will now be reviewed with reference to the 10 evaluation questions defined earlier.

1. What overall perceptions of the programme did stakeholders have?

Overall impressions of the programme held by teachers, LFs and CTs were extremely positive. They valued very highly the positive relationships created in TAGs and the opportunities they provided for teachers to share, discuss and learn together. The interactive, collaborative, informal and practical nature of TAGs was seen to be very different to and more enjoyable and relevant than other forms of professional development they had experienced. The focus in TAGs on building a supportive community of teachers and the manner in which TAGs reduced teacher isolation were also features of the programme that were seen very positively. Stakeholders (including CIs) were consistent in the view that the programme should continue.

2. What were local facilitators' perceptions of the benefits of TAGs for them?

LFs benefited both as co-ordinators and teachers. As co-ordinators, they learned to lead a group of teachers (face to face and online) and enhanced their skills at designing professional development materials. As teachers, they experienced many benefits as a result of TAGs; they developed close relationships with colleagues, adopted new classroom strategies and changed their teaching style. This in turn enhanced their confidence and relationship with their students, who also became more involved in lessons. LFs also improved their reflective skills and became more aware of their teaching. Their success as LFs was also beneficial for their reputation in their local communities and for their self-esteem.

3. What benefits – including changes in the classroom - did the programme have for teachers?

The positive impacts of the programme on teachers were widely acknowledged, not just by teachers themselves but also by LFs, CTs and CIs.

Through their surveys, interviews, change stories and instructional materials, teachers indicated that:

- the programme had led to many changes in their classroom practices (only some 3% of the teachers described the impact of the programme as 'low')
- over 93% of teachers surveyed agreed that the quality of their lessons had improved as a result of the programme
- a wide range of changes in teachers' classrooms practices as well as their dispositions (beliefs, confidence, willingness to innovate) were identified
- in relation to changes in their teaching, teachers frequently reported and provided examples of increased interactivity in lessons, use of a wider range of resources and a more relaxed and positive teaching style
- over 94% of the teachers surveyed also said that due to EfC they were more enthusiastic about their professional development
- greater attention to and awareness of students' needs was also a programme impact many teachers noted

- positive impacts on students, who became more engaged, motivated, and confident as a result of changes in teachers work, were also frequently highlighted by teachers
- many teachers described the manner in which – through discussions with colleagues – they were comforted to find that other teachers experienced similar challenges and were reassured that their own approach to teaching was appropriate.

While it was not possible to provide any direct measures of the impact of the programme on student achievement in English, the evidence available highlights several factors that collectively suggest that EfC did enhance students' learning outcomes. These included teachers' use of instructional strategies which gave students more opportunities to speak English in class, which focused on functional language use, and which were generally more engaging and enjoyable. As a result, students' motivation during and active participation in lessons improved, as did their confidence to use English. In a few cases, teacher feedback referred explicitly to improvements in their students' English, but this is likely to be have been a more widespread phenomenon given the range of programme benefits identified here.

LFs also felt the programme's impact on teachers had been substantial:

- they felt that at least 50% of their teachers were regularly applying ideas from TAGs in their classrooms
- over 94% of LFs (16 out of 17) felt that the programme had increased teachers' ability to design and deliver effective lessons
- over 94% of LFs also agreed that the impact of the programme on teachers' motivation to develop professionally had been high
- an increase in teachers' attention to students' needs was also noted by LFs
- LFs also highlighted changes in teachers' mentality, as they became less rigid in their beliefs, more open-minded, and more confident.

CTs and CIs also acknowledged the positive impacts of the programme on teachers. Some CIs had observed TAG teachers and noted positive changes in their teaching strategies and in student motivation and participation.

Limited evidence emerged of the impact of the programme on teachers' engagement in further forms of online professional development such as MOOCs.

4. How involved in EfC were the County Inspectors and what were their views about the programme?

Feedback from CIs and LFs indicated that CIs were generally supportive of the programme but the extent to which they were directly involved varied. Some actively promoted the programme on the Inspectorate's webpages, maintained regular contact with LFs, were members of the social media groups, and even accepted attendance at TAGs in lieu of teachers' participation at the mandatory 'pedagogic circle' meetings organised by the County Inspectorate. Others were less involved, sometimes consciously to avoid interfering. In one case, LFs, also consciously, did not encourage too much inspector involvement. Even though CIs were not always able to talk about the programme in concrete detail, their perceptions of its quality

and value were consistently positive. It must be acknowledged that CIs were not formally responsible for TAGs.

5. To what extent were School Directors aware of and supportive of the programme?

Limited evidence regarding this issue was obtained. Based on 11 survey responses from SDs of TAG teachers, only seven said they knew of the programme and, of these, only four were certain that their teachers had participated. Three SDs were able to provide some general information about the programme. LFs and teachers were also asked during interviews about how aware of the programme their SDs were. Most teachers said their SD was aware of the programme, though this was not necessarily accompanied by active interest. In other cases, teachers felt their SDs were not aware of their involvement on EfC. Responses from LFs followed a similar pattern – in some cases they said their SD was not particularly aware of the programme while in others they were and encouraged the LF to take part. It must be acknowledged that EfC was not an official MNE programme, TAGs were not held in schools and they took place outside schools hours.

6. What contribution to the programme did the TAG social groups make?

An analysis of five social media groups on the programme together with feedback from teachers and LFs indicated that these groups were a valued component of the programme. They fulfilled administrative (for example, scheduling TAG meetings), professional (for example, sharing resources for teaching or professional development) and social (for example, congratulating LFs or teachers on successful sessions) purposes. There was, though, limited sharing on the groups of photos and videos from teachers' classrooms, and data protection issues may have influenced that. The groups were not a forum for discussions of teaching and learning.

7. What challenges did the programme create for teachers and LFs?

Teachers and LFs did not feel that the programme created significant challenges for them. Transportation to and from TAGs was an issue in some cases, while added demands were made on LFs when they were required to design the materials for the final TAG sessions. The lack of accreditation for the programme was an issue that may have affected teacher enrolment in the programme and this is discussed under Question 9 below. Overall, participants felt that the benefits of the programme outweighed any challenges.

8. To what extent did the library component of the programme function as planned?

Information about 'My English Library' was provided by the British Council and through interviews with four teachers of English who were involved. The library component of the programme was established in 13 schools. Assuming one teacher and one librarian per school, that equates to 26 people involved, which falls short of the 60 mentioned in the target programme outcomes (presented earlier in Box 3). Evidence is not available to ascertain the extent to which the other target outcomes related to the library component were met, but the teacher interviews suggested that

progress had been hindered by the closure of schools in March 2020; thus, a number of the planned 78 library activities planned (six per school) were not completed. There was also limited evidence about the extent to which teachers and librarians were organising English activities for the wider community. Teachers, though, did provide examples of enjoyable and engaging activities which they had organised for their students in the library.

9. **What changes to a second phase of the programme would make it more attractive for teachers and improve its impact on teachers' professional development?**

Teachers and LFs were generally very satisfied with the quality, content and organisation of the TAGs but did (especially LFs) suggest a few possible changes. These included giving teachers more responsibility to lead parts of TAGs, greater focus on issues of local relevance to rural schools and inviting specialists (such as psychologists) to discuss themes of interest with teachers (for example, special educational needs). Establishing mechanisms that would allow LFs to observe one another during TAGs and for TAG teachers to visit each others' classrooms was also suggested. Another point that was raised was support for teachers so that they could obtain certificates from MOOCs.

The major change that teachers and LFs generally supported, though, was that the programme be accredited by the MNE so that participants would receive some professional credits. It was felt that this would make the programme more attractive to teachers. Teachers must obtain the credits in some way and it was seen to be good if they could obtain them whilst also participating in a programme that was of general value.

10. **What factors contributed to or hindered programme effectiveness?**

No major obstacles to programme effectiveness emerged from this evaluation (some suggestions for further improvement, though, are made below). Several factors that contributed to its effectiveness were identified. In no particular order, they are:

- voluntary participation by teachers and LFs
- content that was relevant to participants' needs
- practical techniques and activities that teachers could apply
- effective programme administration
- good quality professional development materials
- well-prepared and motivated LFs
- ongoing support for LFs
- a positive, open, supportive and non-judgemental TAG learning environment
- active, engaging and enjoyable TAG sessions
- opportunities for teachers to learn from one another
- the extended nature of the programme
- a powerful sense of community and belonging within TAGs
- teachers' motivation to develop
- a feasible level of demand on participants' time
- some local support from inspectors

- ongoing online contact among teachers between meetings.

Overall, the programme was grounded in sound principles about teacher development, addressed core language teacher knowledge, skills and dispositions, and promoted instructional practices which are widely acknowledged to be beneficial for language learning.

8   Recommendations

The results presented above provide consistently strong evidence that EfC was a successful programme. It led to many positive changes in participants' knowledge, dispositions and classroom practices and these developments will have enhanced many students' experiences of and progress in learning English. If sustained over time, the changes in the teaching and learning of English stimulated by the programme can contribute to improved attitudes towards and proficiency in English among students in the participating rural communities. This programme also provides convincing support for the value of models of professional development that are collaborative, collegial, teacher-led, practical and learning-oriented. Below are some recommendations that can be considered to enhance the programme and its impact even further.

8.1   Systemic Integration

1. The voluntary and non-official nature of EfC contributed to its success. Teachers felt free of the pressures they associated with officially mandated forms of professional development and this freedom encouraged them to take responsibility for their own growth and for that of their colleagues. The downside of this arrangement was that the programme took place outside school hours, away from schools, and without any official recognition. Also, School Directors in some cases may have not even been aware that their teachers were engaged in the programme. It is tempting to think that the future versions of the programme could continue to operate in the same way and with the same level of success. However, external funding and organisational support will at some point be withdrawn and I would therefore recommend careful consideration of how TAGs might become a more systemic component of teacher professional development in Romania.

   A detailed analysis of this issue is beyond my scope here, but a key question is the following: How can the Inspectorate (at county and even national level) be given more responsibility for the programme in a way that supports MNE policy but does not lead to the loss of TAGs' most prized features (such as their less formal nature, pedagogical focus and strong sense of community)? Who are the key individuals, then, who need to be persuaded of the value of TAGs and who are in a position to facilitate their integration into the educational system? If this can be achieved, additional benefits may follow, such as increased awareness and engagement by School Directors and accreditation for the programme. Illustrating how TAGs can help the MNE address its existing policies and goals for teacher professional development and student learning would be a productive starting point in discussions with the Ministry.

2. Regarding accreditation, while some benefits of a non-official programme were acknowledged, it was generally felt that official recognition would be a positive step in raising the profile of EfC, attracting more teachers to attend, and integrating TAGs into the educational system. I would therefore recommend that the British Council initiate (or accelerate) discussions with the relevant MNE authorities to explore this issue. Accreditation would not change the voluntary nature of the programme and there is no suggestion here that teachers be obliged to attend. However, the availability of credits would reward teachers' commitment to their professional development and attract additional teachers who might otherwise not avail themselves of the opportunities provided by the programme.

3. It is also important to note here that, while EfC focused on teachers of English, some teachers of other languages and of other non-language subjects altogether also participated. TAGs do in fact provide a model of professional development that is relevant to teachers of all subjects and it is recommended that this be acknowledged in any discussions with the MNE about the integration of TAGs into the Romanian educational system. Working across the curriculum would, of course, raise a range of issues to address, such as how teachers might be grouped, the preparation of LFs, the nature of TAG materials and the working language of the groups.

8.2   Initial Training

4. The programme started with a five-day 'Teaching for Success' training course. I appreciate the role of this course in attracting teachers who it was hoped would then join TAGs. I would recommend, though, that the place of this course on the programme be reviewed in any future versions. Its intensive training model is at odds with some of the basic principles behind TAGs and, if it is felt that some kind of preliminary activity is needed to attract potential TAG teachers, perhaps something more in the spirit of TAGs themselves could be used.

8.3   Action Planning & Reflection

5. While there was ample evidence in this evaluation that teachers were applying ideas from TAGs to their classrooms, a structured approach to action planning and reflection (using a template provided in the TAG workbook) seemed less common. This is not an unusual challenge in programmes of this kind and I would recommend that some consideration be given to ways of addressing it. This may involve revisions to the template (if teachers find it cumbersome to use) or a more targeted approach through which, for example, each month two or three teachers in the group are given specific responsibility for completing and sharing (before or at the next meeting) their action plan and reflections. The goal should not be to over-burden teachers with more demands but to encourage them to plan and reflect more systematically. If teachers do not enjoy writing out their plans and reflections, other technology-based options can be considered – for example, audio-recorded reflections or short before-and-after videos in which teachers talk about their plans and subsequently reflect on these. Enabling teachers to submit

action plans and reflections regularly would also mean a further source of ongoing data for programme evaluation is available.

8.4 Social Media Groups

6. One conclusion from this evaluation is that the TAG social media groups were not a forum for ongoing reflection and critical discussion of teaching and learning. I would recommend that ways of utilising the social media groups for such a purpose be explored. I would suggest a measured approached; for example, giving one teacher each month the responsibility to share a classroom experience (possibly supported with media) linked to the latest TAG theme and some discussion questions which the other members will have a week to comment on. The goal is not to significantly disrupt the social media groups as they are currently used but to extract more professional value from them in a way that complements the TAG meetings.

8.5 MOOCs

7. It was noted in the internal evaluation of the programme that the uptake of MOOCs and other forms of further online professional development courses by teachers was limited. None of the teachers interviewed for this evaluation mentioned such activity either. Time may have been a factor, while the cost of certificates may have deterred others. There is no evidence to suggest that this lack of engagement with additional forms of CPD in any way hindered the effectiveness of EfC. I am inclined to recommend that less emphasis be placed on this issue in future versions of the programme; teachers can be pointed in the right direction of course and encouraged to engage. There is no need, though, for this to be a target outcome and a measure of the programme's success. The teachers have already committed their personal time to the TAGs and clearly benefited from the experience.

8.6 My English Library

8. This evaluation was not able to focus sufficiently on the library component of EfC. Given the prospect of continued school closures it is unlikely that much progress with the library activities will be made in the near future; however, I would recommend that

a. the English teachers involved be given some additional support so that they can conduct the remaining library activities online when education resumes;

b. the librarians involved be given further support in organising English activities for the local community once the library re-opens.

8.7 Future Programmes

9. A number of key decisions need to be made about the shape of any future version of EfC. One central decision relates to whether the programme will seek

to consolidate the benefits achieved among participating teachers or to engage with a new group. Elements of both may also be possible. If the same group of teachers (and LFs) is involved, decisions will need to be made about programme content. Some input from the British Council will almost certainly be needed here as LFs cannot be asked to develop the materials for a two-year programme. For a new group of teachers, the materials already developed could be re-used. While involving new teachers in the programme is desirable, I would recommend that consideration be given to ways of sustaining the involvement in TAGs of those who participated this year. Evidence from this evaluation suggests they are keen to continue meeting and in some cases feel they would be able to do so independent of any formal programme. More realistically, though, any sudden withdrawal by the British Council will inevitably impact on the continued functioning of the existing TAG groups. How then, can the twin goals of programme expansion (to new teachers) and programme consolidation (with the existing group) be achieved? It is also critical that the expertise developed among LFs be exploited in future versions of the programme. These are complex but critical issues and I would recommend that they be carefully considered as part of any future programme proposal.

10. Another important decision – which will be shaped by other considerations such as how 'official' any future programme becomes – relates to how fluid the membership of TAGs should be. At one extreme, enrolment is only possible at the start of the programme; at the other, new teachers are allowed to join throughout. There are merits in both approaches (and in something in between). Given that so much of the value of TAGs lies in the strong sense of trust and community that they foster, though, I would recommend that opportunities to join groups be limited to strategic points, such as the start of each school year or semester.

8.8   Online TAGs

11. The final TAGs of the programme were conducted online and any planning for a repeat of the programme should allow for the possibility that it will not be possible, at least initially, to resume physical meetings. I would recommend that a short targeted evaluation of the online TAGs delivered in 2020 be conducted and which can inform plans for any new phase of the programme. This evaluation could focus on the perspectives of teachers and LFs and include the analysis of recordings that were made of the online TAGs delivered. These issues were addressed only incidentally in this evaluation and merit closer attention.

8.9   Benefits for non-TAG Teachers

12. Limited evidence emerged in this report about the extent to which teachers on the programme were sharing their experiences with colleagues and subsequently increasing these teachers' interest in CPD. Teachers did in some cases say they shared materials from TAGs with colleagues, but there was no strong sense that these colleagues were benefiting from the programme. Structural factors within schools, such as limited time for teachers to meet and talk about teaching will have been an issue here. TAG teachers were also often the only English teacher

in their school. In future versions of the programme, if the colleagues of TAG teachers are target beneficiaries, then I would recommend that structured mechanisms for reaching out to these colleagues be built in. It would be important that these mechanisms do not impose unrealistic further demands on TAG teachers; ideally, existing structures within schools (such as periodic teacher meetings) might be used as an opportunity for TAG teachers to share with colleagues.

8.10 Communications Plan

13. EfC is an exciting example of a teacher professional development initiative and I would recommend that some resource be allocated to raising the programme's profile, locally, regionally and internationally. This can occur in several ways:

- ensuring that the programme webpages are regularly updated with material, for example, related to the delivery of TAGs, LF training and the monitoring and evaluation (including possibly video material, with participants talking about the programme)

- a glossy and accessible 'highlights' summary of this report written for educational leaders (School Directors, Inspectors) and policy makers in Romania and which could also support further applications for programme funding (for example, from the EU)

- an infographic which summarises the programme's key features and achievements

- presentations by programme staff at regional and international conferences

- opportunities for teachers to share their experiences both more formally (for example, at conferences) and less so (for example, through short stories on the British Council website);

- written articles about the programme, including for local teachers' magazines but also regional journals and websites (including the British Council global website[30]);

- for wider international recognition, an academic journal paper[31].

Such activities (which have budget implications) could be formulated into a programme communications plan. The aim of the plan would be to raise the profile of EfC by bringing it to the attention of a wider audience locally and more widely. Without a communications plan, awareness of the programme and its achievements will remain limited.

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[30] See https://tinyurl.com/vu4dlz9 for an example of a British Council website project article.
[31] An example from another British Council project is available at
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X17310454

Additionally, if there is a second phase of the programme I would also recommend that a short periodic online/digital newsletter be produced with updates on progress and success stories which can be shared with the educational community in Romania.

8.11 Monitoring and Evaluation

14. It is common on programmes of this kind for lessons to be observed at baseline and again at end programme, with before and after comparisons used to make judgements about impact. That was the intention on EfC, although exit observations were not possible due to school closures. In any future programmes I would recommend caution against over-reliance on this model. The teachers observed are typically volunteers and only those who feel self-efficacious put themselves forward. One-off observations also always have a performative element to them. Additionally, the instruments used often reduce teaching to a series of a numbers on a narrow scale. This combination of relatively good teachers, pressure to perform and limited rating scale often means that observations of the same teachers at end-programme do not highlight significant change. Unannounced observations with randomly chosen teachers would be an improvement, methodologically, but in most contexts is not acceptable. Thus, while pre- and post-observations may have a role to play in programme evaluation, additional methods of capturing information about what happens in classrooms should be considered. Ideally, these will be ongoing throughout a programme and provide qualitative and quantitative insight into teachers' work. For example, TAG meetings could be used to compile concrete evidence of teachers' work. Teacher portfolios – already a feature of the system in Romania – could also be kept by participating teachers (for example, one classroom artefact and a short commentary on it could be added each month). Technology can also contribute here; it may be possible to observe lessons more regularly remotely and to have short online conversations each time with teachers too.

15. Questionnaires are a standard tool in programme evaluation but here, too, I would recommend that these always be supplemented by more qualitative alternatives. The use of change stories in this evaluation, for example, was effective in providing a more detailed understanding of ways in which teachers were affected by the programme. The disadvantage of qualitative data, of course, is that it takes longer to analyse and has implications for the allocation of programme budgets. This issue, though, can be managed through a feasible evaluation plan (in this case, for example, only half the teachers were asked to submit stories).

16. It was not possible to involve students in this evaluation of EfC. Again, I would recommend that in future a more formative approach be adopted through which input is obtained from students over time rather than just at the end of the programme. The quality of the data obtained in this manner is likely to be better as students will be able to reflect on immediate classroom experiences. In contrast, asking them for their thoughts on the past year or two is less likely to be productive. Careful consideration should be given to the methods used to collect data from students; age-appropriate, interactive and task-based approaches (in

the mother tongue) are known to be more effective that the formal tools commonly used with adults[32]. A collection of student stories would also be both interesting and powerful evidence of programme impact.

17. I would also recommend for future programmes that KPIs be framed to allow for both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. The KPIs used on EfC were wholly quantitative (with targets expressed as numbers or percentages). There is value, though, in also considering impact more qualitatively, as illustrated here, for example, through the teacher change stories. The evaluation questions addressed in this report show the deeper insights that a qualitative perspective can add to programme evaluation.

18. One KPI that was particularly important on EfC was that related to participation – the number of teachers engaged on the programme. Such indicators rely on systematic attendance records and this is perhaps one aspect of the administration of the programme that could be strengthened. For future programmes I would recommend that the British Council obtain full attendance lists soon after each TAG and compile these (for example, in an Excel spreadsheet) so that at any point during the programme levels of participation can be accurately gauged. This is likely to provide more reliable data than an approach where LFs are being asked to look through their records and to provide a list of teachers who met certain attendance criteria. Systematic evidence of attendance also facilitates the work of the evaluator, who may want to target specific groups depending on their engagement. For this evaluation, I would have liked to have access to full attendance records to assess, for example, the total numbers of teachers who attended at least one TAG and the proportions who attended 50%, 75% and 100%.

19. Also related to KPIs, one success indicator for EfC was attendance at 50% of TAGs. This seems somewhat low (it means that teachers could miss half the programme and still meet the attendance requirement). I appreciate that for a new programme of this kind there is a tendency to set cautious targets. However, I would recommend that this threshold be reviewed upwards for future programmes – perhaps to 80%.This would mean attending 15 TAGs out of a total of 18. If the programme is accredited, the threshold may need to be even higher.

20. KPIs that refer to percentages of teachers can also be problematic when the size of the teacher group being assessed in ambiguous. For example, a KPI which states that 80% of teachers will express satisfaction with the programme needs to be clear about whether this refers to all teachers with any engagement with the programme, those who met a certain attendance level, or those who actually provided feedback (for example, by completing a survey). KPIs which refer to 'active' contributions (or similar) also need to state how this is being defined (i.e. what does 'active' mean?) otherwise the KPI cannot be assessed. It should also be clear whether a KPI is a reported measure (i.e. for example, '50% of teachers *say* they are active on social media') or whether it is being measured directly (for

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[32] Various online resources provide advice on involving children and young people in programme evaluation – for example,
https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/overview/children_participation

example, through the analysis of actual online contributions). I would recommend that for future programmes the KPIs be more tightly specified.

21. For any future versions of the programme it is recommended that external monitoring and evaluation be built in from the outset; this will allow any proposed KPIs and internal evaluation procedures and instruments to be reviewed and for a robust evaluation plan to be set up early on. For a multi-year programmes, annual external evaluations are recommended. An appropriate budget would need to be allocated to this task.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate everyone associated with EfC for its success. The effective management of the programme by the small British Council EfC team in Romania deserves a particular mention here. I am grateful to the team for their support during this evaluation and to all those who contributed.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Change stories

Dear Teachers

To help us evaluate the 'English for the Community' TAG project, we are inviting teachers to write a short text which describes how the project has affected their work. We hope you can assist us with this.

Here are some guidelines:

- Title: 'The most important change(s) in my work as a result of TAGs'.
- Please write in a personal style – we want you to tell your story and the text does not need to be too formal.
- Length - about 250 words.
- Language – English
- Please focus on one major change or perhaps two and tell us about this/them in more detail (for example, what was the situation before TAGs? What changed in your work? What led to that change? What were the benefits of the change?).
- You can focus on changes that have affected you and/or your students. We are interested in what you feel the most significant impacts of TAGs have been.

Please send your stories to the external evaluator, Simon Borg. His e-mail is s.borg@simon-borg.co.uk.

Simon will read all the stories he receives and a summary will be included in his evaluation report. Some examples may be quoted but no teachers will be referred to by name.

We would appreciate it if you could share your stories by **Wednesday 22 July**.

Thank you for your assistance. If you have any queries please contact Simon on s.borg@simon-borg.co.uk or Alina on Alina.Constantinescu@britishcouncil.ro.

Appendix 2: Teacher materials

Dear Teachers

To help us evaluate the 'English for the Community, we are inviting teachers to share materials that illustrate changes in their work as a result of TAGs. We only require **ONE** example from you and this may include:

- Lesson plans
- Handouts or copies of classroom materials
- Videos of new classroom activities (if these are already on FB just send a link)
- Photos from your lessons
- Written work students produced
- Feedback from students (if they were asked to comment)
- Written reflections on your lessons you wrote during the TAG project.

It is important that the material shows something new that took place as a result of your participation in TAGs. To help us understand this, please also include a short paragraph with the material that explains what change it shows.

Any videos or photos that include students should only be shared if appropriate permissions have been obtained. Examples of student work should not include their names.

The external evaluator is Simon Borg and his e-mail is s.borg@simon-borg.co.uk.
You can share your materials with him as follows:

- Directly by e-mail

- Using a cloud service such as Google Drive, Dropbox or OneDrive - upload the files to your space and share a link

- Using a free service such as wetransfer.com

Simon will analyse the materials he receives as part of the project evaluation and a summary will be included in his report. No teachers will be referred to by name and your materials will not be reproduced without your permission.

We would appreciate it if you could share your materials by **Wednesday 22 July**.

Thank you for your assistance. If you have any queries please contact Simon on s.borg@simon-borg.co.uk or Alina on Alina.Constantinescu@britishcouncil.ro.

Appendix 3: Sample teacher change stories

<u>Sample 1</u>

Before starting this course I realised that I had gotten somewhat stuck in my teaching. I was lacking imagination while preparing my lessons and once I got bored during an activity in class I realised that it wasn't a good sign and that I needed to do something immediately. This course really came as a breath of fresh air.

The format of the course was a plus and the facilitators were great. I got to experience every lesson "hands on", we worked with and around every topic from the course. We got involved in every technique and participated with pleasure in every activity which made me realize the importance of empathy, which I sometimes forgot to include in my teaching due to different factors. The real change happened during my lessons and not outside of it. It helped me to better shape the activities on my students and it was critical for my on the spot decisions during activities. It was easier for me to adapt the activities according to my students' needs and mood of the class.

Another change was the boost in my confidence and motivation. I realized that I wasn't alone in my struggles with the difficulties every teacher has to go through during these times and career. I loved the fact that we formed a community and shared our experience with each other and often found solutions to problems we didn't realize we had. This also helped me give my best to bring every class together and help them connect with each other.

All in all it was a great and beneficial experience and I would love to have the chance to continue because of the connection I got to experience with my fellow teachers. I believe that there are still things we can learn and share with each other during face-to-face meetings and we can still grow as a community which is better prepared to teach new and changing generations of young thinkers. (T20)

<u>Sample 2</u>

Before attending the TAG meetings, I had some difficulties in motivating, engaging learners. Children, here in our village, have to help their parents in farming, so their time for learning is reduced … At one of these meetings … encouraged us to organize a British Day. I found it a very good idea as a way to motivate my students. With the help of the other English teacher at school, and the Care 2 Travel organization, which provided some volunteers, we organized the British Day in our school on 14th of February 2019. The volunteers were from America, India, Britain, Canada and we even had a former student from our school to help. The children had to speak in English all day. They decorated the corridors of the school with English symbols, we made some English cakes, that were served after the competition.

We involved 90 students from the 5th grade up to the 8th grade, and we had 9 teams with mixed groups, with different English knowledge. All the games that I selected for the competition I learned at the TAG meetings … In the end, the teams got a diploma and the first three winners got some presents provided by the school and the volunteers. We ended the British Day with a party. The children were very enthusiastic, their English improved a lot, they are very motivated, so the British Day was a great success. The learners are keeping in touch with the volunteers, writing in English, improving their knowledge. I also encouraged the other teachers to organize a British Day in their school because children like it and it will be a great success. In our school considering the success of the British Day we would like to organize a German and Romanian day as well. I am very grateful, because I learned a lot as a teacher and my students are more interested in learning English.

Appendix 4: Further extracts from teacher stories

"It was an amazing experience for me … it is essential for any teacher of English to keep up to date, to develop professionally, and the project „English for the Community" did that for me: it gave me the opportunity to become a better teacher". (T1)

"The support of the Local Facilitators, the Participant Workbook, the teaching tips, the web resources, the joy of working together, were all of utmost importance. They helped me reconnect with my original goals of becoming a teacher and rediscover myself as a valuable, resourceful person, willing to do everything to help my students acquire the right level of English" (T2)

"coming to TAGs was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life and in my career". (T3)

"Meeting my colleagues … was a "breath of fresh air" for me. I learned a lot from them … awesome experiences that made me realize that even good teachers can improve their weak points". (T6)

"English for the Community is the course that brings new perspectives related to the profession of an ESL teacher and also helps gathering teachers interested in their ongoing development". (T8)

"Before TAGs we hardly had the opportunity to meet our colleagues more than once a year". (T9)

"TAG sessions created a warm atmosphere which reminded us every time that we are a strong small community … TAG was a successful project in our area, with benefits not only for teachers, but mostly for students". (T11)

"I am very grateful, because I learned a lot as a teacher and my students are more interested in learning English". (T13)

"What is more, no matter how difficult and tiring my week had been, the TAG session was always refreshing and gave me energy for the work to come". (T14)

"This journey had a great impact on my teaching practice, has consolidated a number of theoretical concepts and helped me to become a better TEACHER … Working with this TAG has been a revelation. Teaching English is now fun for me and my children". (T15)

"The TAGs for me meant a lot, apart for having a community of teachers where I could express my doubts, my questions, my failures, it was also a community where I have learnt a lot what means to be a teacher, what are the ways of becoming an inspiration for your students and working in their behalf ... TAGs were the most significant teacher development group I have ever attend to". (T17)

"I strongly believe that my entire teaching activity was influenced by our TAG meetings because it is there where I have learned to respect the students first, to make them understand the necessity of learning a foreign language and then demand knowledge". (T19)

"It was a pleasure to be part of these meetings, as we had great, interesting topics to talk about, we actively shared our experiences while teaching different topics in our activity, and we learned from our own experiences". (T21)

"I strongly believe that attending TAG meetings has made me a better teacher, it has made my job easier and my classes more interesting and fun for my students, because I believe that it is very important to have fun while you learn". (T22)

"I can say that TAGs were a great opportunity for me to discover many secrets in teaching". (T25)

"I prefer TAG session over other ways of training because of the focused discussion on relevant topics, sharing of experience and collaborative learning connected directly to the issues I face in the classroom". (T26)

Appendix 5: Changes in teachers, according to LFs

- There are many examples of activities we discussed and presented during out TAG meetings which were subsequently used by the participants in their class. One that comes to mind was inspired by the meeting whose topic was "Using Video Projects in the Classroom" which inspired teachers to integrate video projects in their classes by having their students use their cell phones to record footage relevant for the topic assigned and present it in class.
- They have used more warm-up activities in their classroom. They have started to allocate more time for games and give more attention to their students needs.
- I think they have learnt how to design an EFL lesson more consciously by using materials creatively, and introducing more interactive teaching methods in the teaching process.
- They used materials and techniques presented and practised during TAGs, and learned how to better structure their lessons using pre-, while and after reading/listening/watching activities.
- I think one way in which TAGs were helpful is that they highlighted the importance of icebreakers and warmers in the upfolding of a successful lesson.
- Teachers wanted to create more organised lessons plans, including all the stages of a lesson. They used more often new warmers, more entertaining ones than before, more energising and they wanted to record them and share with other colleagues. Also the teachers became more willing to use technology during classes and lots of short videos.
- One interesting example is the case of a teacher who used the knowledge gained at TAGs in her Romanian classes. Her students are native speakers of Hungarian learning Romanian as their second language, although the Romanian educational system considers them native speakers of Romanian. SO, she uses the approaches, methods and techniques specific for ELT, as well as warmers and practical tips used in our TAGs to teach Romanian which is a huge change under the given circumstances.
- I believe the teachers used our warm up and classroom management activities (grouping students).
- In one TAG, we discussed about how repeating new words with young learners can be boring for the Ss, so we suggested changing your pitch or volume when asking them to repeat words (whisper, sing in a high note, say the words in the low note, etc). Some participants tried this in class and they said it really worked.
- The lessons have become more interactive and more dynamic. Many participants have shared the fact that there is more collaboration between students and more motivation to participate in the activities. Students have been given the opportunity to move more during the lesson and to express themselves in a creative way.
- During our SHARE stage teachers shared with the entire group the activities or strategies they tried/applied in close relation to what we had talked a month before. Teachers mentioned games or online resources they used, what it was like and what they learned from the experience.
- One example would be represented by the frequent use of warm up activities. They even used some of the activities we applied during the TAGs. This resulted in more engaging and attractive lessons.
- They use more often warm ups and can use more easily reading, listening and communication combined in a lesson
- I think that an example of concrete change is the TAG members' perspective on teacher observation - which used to be either a taboo thing (and probably not only in our community) or just some other paper work; in Romania this is "ora deschisa" for the sake of impressing someone with your teaching abilities. It is like cramming before exams. You can pass with flying colours here, too, but then you can fail every big time. Unfortunately this is not what it should be, that is, teacher observation as time for reflection and revival. A number of teachers in our TAGs actually tried out this old but also "new" (because it was somehow forgotten) method of learning by observing. While another colleague is teaching you can learn yourself, but, at the same time, the teacher being observed can also learn from your observations.