As part of the workshop, PLIs demonstrate a language lesson to their peers. PLI Workshop Frankfurt, June 2015 *Photo by Eva Szabo*

Improving the Post Language Experience: FSI Invests in Workshops for Instructors

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Those who have taken a language class at post know that success depends on the competence and skills of post language instructors (PLIs), who can be a bridge to the local language and culture for newly arrived employees and their families. For this reason, FSI recently organized a series of regional instructor workshops to better support language learning in the field.

PLIs are charged with instilling or helping maintain the language skills necessary for our diplomats and family members during their overseas tours. Yet, PLIs face many challenges. They must support learners of all levels, from those in need of basic skills with little language background to those developing or maintaining proficiency beyond Level-3fluency. PLIs must juggle class time with employees' hectic schedules and respond to employees' needs to master a particular aspect of their portfolios. Since launching regional post language workshops in 2014, FSI has helped PLIs balance all of these moving pieces. The workshops combine team presentations on FSI's approach to language instruction with discussions of participants' own best practices.

Workshops have been held in Panama City, Frankfurt, Muscat, São Paulo and Bangkok. At each, instructors from various posts often arrived feeling they'd been professionally isolated in their jobs. They departed more confident, knowing their professional skills were tweaked, and with a sense of community. Indeed, an unplanned result of the workshops was PLIs' spontaneous collaboration; for instance, they created their own social media forums to maintain contact and continue to engage in peer-to-peer advising and exchange of best practices.

"With 20 years' experience as a PLI," noted an instructor who attended one of the Frankfurt sessions, "I was thrilled to take part in this workshop, organized especially for post-language instructors—the first of [its] kind! This workshop was a unique opportunity for me to network with colleagues [and] gain new insights and personal motivation to take my teaching career to a new level."

A language officer who oversees the program at post said of the workshop, "We already noticed a change in classes before our instructor's participation, based solely on some of FSI's pre-workshop activities. FSI's efforts are leading towards a greater understanding of our needs."

A key workshop topic that makes language learning at post unique is the instructors' and students' ability to integrate a wider variety of materials and visual aids into a class or one-on-one situation, more than they can at FSI. Very often students at post will bring to PLIs' attention a film or magazine headline they saw, fragments of overheard conversations, a document or letter from a host-country contact. Local field trip opportunities provided by the program—from popular tourist sites to cultural events—give students additional opportunities to absorb vocabulary and build fluency. Also, at some posts, instruction is available in local dialects or languages not taught on the FSI campus.

Recognizing the need to invest in our post language instruction to support employees' and family members' language skills at post, FSI continues to host regional workshops for PLIs. For additional information, contact FSISLSInquiries@state.gov.