

July 5, 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation for Ms Elizabeth Cobacho. I have known Elizabeth since 2008, when we met as teaching colleagues at AMIDEAST Tunisia, and I have watched her grow her teaching career with study and care. Though Elizabeth has all the qualities you are looking for in a graduate candidate, I would like to focus on three that stand out for me in my experience working with her in ESL instruction: *intellectual curiosity, commitment and creativity and innovation.*

From 2008 to 2010, Elizabeth and I worked together as ESL instructors at AMIDEAST, an American non-profit organization engaged in international education, and training and development activities in the Middle East and North Africa. Because of the integrity of her pedagogy, her ability to adapt quickly to the educational culture and needs of the institution, as well as her genuine fondness for teaching, she was considered one of the strongest instructors in the English Language Department. At AMIDEAST, Elizabeth was someone we could all turn to for lesson ideas and ways of improving our approach to instruction. Because of her work ethic and reputation for ingenuity in lesson planning, Elizabeth was chosen to form part of a small team of instructors to train for and eventually teach the new field of Aviation English, which took off in 2009 after the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) announced new English proficiency standards for all pilots and air traffic controllers worldwide. This Aviation English program required teachers to learn how to use new educational software, DynEd, for our blended learning approach, as well as rethink our pedagogical approach to this new English for Special Purposes. Elizabeth excelled in this program and that is one reason I recruited her for the ESL teaching job in United Arab Emirates a few years later.

Indeed, because of her ability to learn and rapidly be creative with new fields of ESP and different teaching systems, she was one of the few instructors I considered for the building of a military English Language Training (ELT) program in the UAE in 2010. I had just started as lead instructor teaching pilot cadets in the UAE Armed Forces in Al Ain. In Phase 1, I was in charge of building an ELT program from scratch as the established one lacked any design and was failing to meet benchmarks. For the first 6 months, Elizabeth and I worked alone under our direct supervisor developing and planning the launch of the new program, all while continuing to teach within the broken system. The small teaching staff at that time were jaded and hostile towards students, and in turn the students mistrusted us all and resisted being in the program. Military textbooks offering an outmoded intuitive-imitative approach to language learning and the absence of any established curriculum resulted in little progress among students and fueled increasing disapproval of the program among Emirati military supervisors. As female teachers entering this toxic work environment, we faced intimidation from students and local military personnel, as well as resistance from dysfunctional teaching staff resistant to change.

By the end of 6 months, however, we had turned things around. Elizabeth was instrumental during that time in transforming the environment in three key ways. First, she conducted valuable research to find the ideal ESL teaching materials for the unique cultural and vocational needs of our student body as well as their learning style. Her *intellectual curiosity* pushes her into meticulous and indefatigable research, which she is able to translate into practical applications in the classroom. This is how she excelled in the Aviation English program at AMIDEAST, and this is also how she helped twice revamp the ELT program in UAE. Informed by her research, we slowly phased out the military textbooks and replaced them with a popular series that espoused a more communicative approach, and which included both explicit and implicit instruction. Second, Elizabeth's *creativity and innovation* manifested particularly fruitfully in her development of creative ways of exploiting the limited content of the military textbooks, spinning a dynamic communicative curriculum out of the material which included classroom activities that actually created a fun learning environment and lead to quantifiable learning outcomes. And last but not less important, because of her sincere curiosity about the local culture and lives of the young cadets, and her genuine love of being in the classroom, Elizabeth helped *detoxify* the ambience and the students began to trust us and take more pleasure in the ELT program. We could often find her behind her desk in her giant unairconditioned hangar classroom surrounded by students who had stayed after class to teach her Arabic words and tell her funny stories about their lives and misadventures as cadets.

Phase 2 brought new and different challenges. We moved to a new location, our student body tripled and the benchmarks multiplied and required us to again revamp and now expand the curriculum. Cadets had to master certain levels of English to be able to train at flight schools abroad, which much higher language standards than were required locally. Their mastery of certain ICAO levels of English was critical to their graduation and the survival of our program. Thus we had to recruit and train teachers who were skilled but also who had grit; teachers who could weather the heat, the sexism of the military machine, the constantly changing directives and the constant obstacles thrown in our path due to a complete lack of understanding of the needs of ESL pedagogy by the military. In Phase 2 we were working 60 to 70 hours a week teaching, undergoing training with the new DynEd software in the labs, babysitting cadets on weekends who had broken rules and were denied leave, developing a new curriculum and lesson plans, and finally developing ICAO-standard assessments.

Recruiting and keeping new teachers was a challenge and given our workload we could not afford high turnover. Because of the success of Elizabeth's teaching approach, it was established as the ELT program's model to follow and she was also put in charge of teacher training. She developed a rigorous three-month probationary training path, in which she mentored candidates via classroom observations and workshopping lesson plans. In the end she helped grow our team with quality teaching staff working under a common and highly effective pedagogy that ultimately strengthened the program and led to its expansion into other wings of the military.

Another of Elizabeth's achievements in the ELT program was devising a standardized speaking exam. In order to determine that our cadets were ready to undergo the ICAO examinations and thrive in rigorous flight training in English-speaking Australia or the US, we had to assess their language level against the ICAO descriptors. Initial attempts with existing assessments such as Versant, were insufficient. Elizabeth took the initiative to undergo ICAO examiner training in the UK at Mayflower College, and she ultimately developed a speaking exam that became our gold standard and inspired other team members to follow in her footsteps.

The only quality I have yet to elaborate on is Elizabeth's *commitment*. I think all the experiences I have described above speak to the incredible level of commitment she has as a human being towards her craft, her colleagues, and teaching culture as whole.

On a personal note, Elizabeth is a warm, socially conscious citizen of the world with a desire to live a rich full life. And it is this desire which motivates her in her vocation and has made her a beloved teacher among students and staff alike. I have no doubt she will excel in your Masters program and contribute to the creative juices in her cohort.

Sincerely,

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