

The Effect of CELTA Course on English Teacher`s Professional Development

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Abstract

Within education there has been remarkable research into the process of professional development. This has often taken the form of investigations of trainee teachers' knowledge and beliefs. However, within ELT, empirical research into the development of trainees' thinking while taking a formal training courses and programs are limited. This research reports on a case study of a pre-service (CELTA) course and takes as its focus an in-depth look at the development of 7 Celta trainees. The course was done at English Training International Center (ETI) in Tbilisi, Georgia. The research was a qualitative approach to data collection. The data were gathered via interviews and observations of trainees. While some of pre-course beliefs showed elaboration and a deepening understanding, others were remarkably resistant to change.

Keywords: Celta, training, professional, trainee.

Introduction and Aim of the Research

In terms of professional development there are not so many training courses for English teachers, particularly in Georgia. CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is an initial teacher training qualification for teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL and EFL). It is provided by Cambridge English Language Assessment through authorized Cambridge English Teaching Qualification centers and can be taken either full-time or part-time. CELTA was developed to be suitable both for those interested in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and for Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL). The CELTA is a teacher training course intended to introduce candidates with little or no language teaching experience to ELT and "prepare them for their entry into process of teaching English.

CELTA is also widely regarded as a teacher training course that enables its graduates to teach English overseas in private language centers. The short teaching practice component (six hours) has resulted in this qualification not being recognized for ELT employment in government schools. It seems surprising then that CELTA has prospered in so many countries, including Georgia.

This paper indicates the importance of Celta course in terms of professional development.

Over the years there have been concerns about the brevity of the course ((Fischer, 2004, Nixon 1985). Cambridge ESOL guidelines stipulate that the course must offer 120 hours contact time. CELTA courses generally take place over a four-week period, but are also run as part-time courses over several months. Many researchers would probably agree with concerns about the brevity of the course compared to the teacher

education courses offered in the universities. However, a counter argument to this criticism is that the intensity of the CELTA course over such a short period, contributes to a rapid mastery of basic teaching skills.

While the CELTA syllabus does not endorse the adoption of any one particular teaching methodology, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains a popular theoretical framework that underlies the 'practical' teaching techniques on most CELTA courses. (O'Connor, 2011)

Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA)

According to official Celta syllabus (CELTA, 2015);

Target candidature

The Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) is an introductory course for candidates who have little or no previous English language teaching experience. It may also be suitable for candidates with some experience but little previous training.

Course aims

The course enables candidates to:

- acquire essential subject knowledge and familiarity with the principles of effective teaching
- acquire a range of practical skills for teaching English to adult learners
- demonstrate their ability to apply their learning in a real teaching context.

Candidates who complete the course successfully can begin working in a variety of ESOL teaching contexts around the world.

Syllabus overview

This document outlines the syllabus and assessment criteria for CELTA. The following syllabus is a reflection of the pre-service entry point of prospective candidates and outlines both the subject knowledge and the pedagogic knowledge and skills required for beginner ESOL teachers.

The syllabus consists of five specific topic areas:

- Topic 1 Learners and teachers, and the teaching and learning context
- Topic 2 Language analysis and awareness
- Topic 3 Language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing
- Topic 4 Planning and resources for different teaching contexts
- Topic 5 Developing teaching skills and professionalism.

Assessment overview

CELTA is awarded to candidates who have completed the course and who have met the assessment criteria for all written and practical assignments.

The overall assessment aims for each topic are that candidates should be able to:

1. assess learner needs, and plan and teach lessons which take account of learners' backgrounds, learning preferences and current needs
2. demonstrate language knowledge and awareness and appropriate teaching strategies
3. demonstrate knowledge about language skills and how they may be acquired
4. plan and prepare lessons designed to develop their learners' overall language competence
5. demonstrate an appropriate range of teaching skills at this level and show professional awareness and responsibility.

CELTA courses in Georgia

In Georgia, there are several centers which run CELTA courses. One of the oldest one is International house (<http://ihtbilisi.ge>, 2017) which is established in 1989 and became the first International House World Organization affiliated school in the former Soviet Union. It is now the largest English language school in Georgia for General English/Intensive and ESP teaching, preparation for Cambridge Examinations IELTS and TOEFL and Teacher Training. Another one is ETI (English Training International) "ETI is an internationally recognized Cambridge English teacher training center for CELTA in Georgia. We've successfully trained many students and teachers since we first began running courses in Tbilisi in 1995" (<http://celtadelta.com>, 2017). There is also third one which has just started running the course is English Books in Georgia. The Preparatory Certificate was becoming popular for two reasons: it served as a likely employment ticket in overseas language schools affiliated to these centers and the training gave prospective teachers some basic techniques for teaching beginner classes English. The fact that the private language schools affiliated to centers were staffed by teachers who had graduated from the Preparatory Certificate teacher training program.

Research

This study focused on the effect of CELTA course on English Teachers' professional development. The course was done at English Training International Center (ETI) in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The research was a qualitative approach to data collection. The data were gathered via interviews and observations of trainees.

Research Context

The context of this study is a CELTA training classroom at ETI center in Tbilisi, Georgia. The group comprised trainees from different countries, and of native and non-native speakers of English. Three compulsory components of CELTA training program were:

- a) Input session, tutorials, and tutor's feedback on teaching practice;
- b) Eight hours' minimum of observation of qualified and experienced teachers;
- c) Eight minimum hours of supervised teaching practice.

During input session, the instructor staged an unknown language (Maori) in the class, and attempted to teach it to the trainees—as at every CELTA training program there is often an input session on an entirely unfamiliar language so that the trainees can consider the importance of learning style and teaching techniques. Any language for an input session is likely to be selected as an unknown language depending upon which language a group of trainees do not know and the trainees' unknown language is confirmed when enrolment at the program is ended. With regard to this study, Maori, as an unknown language, was chosen to be used in the input session because the trainees had no prior knowledge about it. Subsequently, the instructor engaged the trainees in another lesson in English, and everybody knew English in that lesson. The content of subsequent lesson was just about preceding lesson: teaching Maori as a new language.

Participants

There were 7 participants in this research, 1 female and 6 male English teachers. They were from various nationalities, 5 of them from Iran 1 from America and 1 from Turkey. To maintain the ethics of research, the real names of the participants are not revealed.

After they had taken one month of intensive CELTA courses, some questions were asked them about their thoughts of course.

Interview Questions and Teachers' Answers

A set of interview questions related to CELTA course was prepared in order to find out students' opinions and to understand whether doing CELTA was beneficial for them.

Q.1. What you expected to learn coming on to the CELTA?

I always felt confident about what I knew theoretically, but I didn't think my teaching practice was really wonderful. The four-week course made a big difference to what I did in the English Language classroom.

(Respondent 1)

I have been an English teacher for about 16 years now and during these years, I have passed many different TTCs. But I was never satisfied with those courses since I never found somebody who was more experienced and more qualified than I was and at the end of the day I always felt cheated. Since the CELTA was accredited by Cambridge, I was kind of hopeful that it was going to be something totally different. I had expected to be tutored and harshly criticized by people more knowledgeable and experienced than I was and fortunately the course lived up to my expectations. **(Respondent 2)**

During my years of working in the teaching profession, I occasionally had classes that didn't go well. When such cases showed up, I always had a dual approach. Besides being self-criticizing, I also yielded to the misconception that there must have been something wrong with the students as well. The most important thing that the CELTA taught me was that I always need to reflect on my own performance. Only through this critical

introspection will I be able to find out where I have faltered, and take full-responsibility for a class failure and stop blaming anyone else. **(Respondent 3)**

I guess one of my most valuable learning experiences after being through the CELTA was the learner-centeredness approach. The first time I saw the quote ascribed to Benjamin Franklin “Involve me and I learn” it was in one of the exercises of Understanding and Using English Grammar by Betty S. Azar and Stacy S. Hagen. The sentence seemed appealing to me but never did I realize how it could be put to practice until the end of this CELTA course. **(Respondent 4)**

I learned that class revolves around learners and not the teacher and the most important thing that I learned was the fact that teachers have to plan everything and anticipate every problem but at the same time teacher and his or her plans should be flexible. I should expect anything to happen during the class and be ready for any situation but I also have to have the ability to adapt my class to learners' needs. **(Respondent 6)**

Q.2 What is your action plan and specific suggestions for how you can continue to develop professionally in the long term, e.g. any further qualifications, conferences, further reading/study, workshops, observation?

Before anything else, I will keep reflecting on myself and my teaching performance. Apart from that, I strongly intend to apply for a Delta (M1, M2, M3), and afterwards I need to plan to get a PhD in Education. I already have an MA in General Linguistics and I think I can start a course in PhD after Delta. **(Respondent 5)**

After CELTA I want to gain more experience and to use my knowledge in my classes. I want to experiment with different systems and methods in actual classes and to keep record of my work as a teacher. My goal is to start DELTA as soon as possible but I need more experience before I feel confident enough to do so. I'm going to research new methods, read articles and books to improve my knowledge of English teaching and hopefully I can achieve DELTA and stick to my path as an English teacher. **(Respondent 3)**

My own observations

Initially, I would like to emphasize that I wanted to do CELTA course since I started to work as an English teacher. My observations were written in 4 different segments, week by week.

First of all, there are many things that I learnt in the first week of the course. I have learnt how to think analytically about receptive skills, I also learnt preparing effective and detailed lesson plan. I noticed the difference between lecturing and teaching language. I hope I will manage to differentiate teaching and lecturing till the end of the first week with the help of effective lesson planning and task settings.

Observing my colleagues is also beneficial in terms of sharing experience. One of my colleagues was good at gesturing giving instruction clearly and another one is really confident and relaxed during the lesson. One of my friends also has set up very good rapport with students with his communicative skills.

For the next week, I will be mostly focusing on task settings and reducing of TTT. I will try to use CCQ (concept checking questions). Balancing the TTT (teacher talking time) another specific priority that needs to be improved. I also have to improve my style of giving instruction by using specific, imperative verbs.

I plan to develop prioritized areas with scripting the instructions in lesson plan in detail.

In the end of second week of the course, one of the specific things that I learnt about teaching is how to apply effective staging for different lesson types as Test Teach Test and Guided Discovery. Another particular thing is monitoring effectively in different ways. So far, I had just known monitoring from a distance. During this week, I learnt how to monitor closely in different skills.

My colleagues were good at some points:

The first one did really great on lesson planning. She has written her lesson plan profoundly with all details. She also was good during the class while implementing her plan. The second one was also good on establishing good manner with his students.

In the following week, firstly, I will be working on my lesson plan specifically in skills and language analysis segments. Secondly, I will focus on maximizing engagement in order to engage all learners all of the time through the lesson.

I want to develop prioritized areas with analyzing language correctly for teaching purposes on stating meaning and context. In order to engage all learners, I will try to clarify my instructions.

In the end of 3rd week of course, one of the particular things that I learnt about teaching is how to write lesson plan with all details including all different stages. I also learnt how to react to the learner's responses, and adjusting my own use of language according to the learner group.

I observed two lessons on this week. One of them our tutor's lesson. She was really good at various points. She didn't not leave any stages without feedback; she also reacted to the learners' responses and adjusted her own use of language according to the learner group. Second lesson that I observed was video lesson. She was really good at lead-in section; she explained everything with all details in order to draw learners' attention. I observed that her speaking lesson showed strong awareness to learners. She also just focused on the fluency rather than accuracy.

Next week I will be focusing on task settings and managing the class. In order to develop task settings area, I need to fully set and check tasks before giving handout materials in order not to lose the attention of the learners. Another area will be managing the class that will be my focus area

Especially when regrouping, I will use different techniques. As giving numbers, colorful papers, giving letters to each learner etc. in order to regroup quickly.

Before I came on to the CELTA, I would like to learn not only the different approaches to teaching, but also to improve my language awareness. I am very glad I did a full-time certification program. I'm convinced programs like the CELTA, with lots of real observed teaching are effective and beneficial in terms of professional development. I have really learnt invaluable theoretical and practical things in the course. One of the most important things is that lesson planning. Beforehand, I haven't known the importance of lesson planning profoundly. I just knew that, warm up, practice and production, however, there are many stages in lesson planning in different productive and receptive skills as, lead in, prediction task, pre-teaching vocabulary, teaching, feedback etc.

Input sections are also beneficial for me in terms of recalling current knowledge and adding more on it.

After CELTA, first of all I will share my Celta experience with my colleagues as much as possible. Then, I have plan to write an article about the importance of CELTA course in English Language Teaching in Georgia. I think this paper will be beneficial for all ELT teachers, particularly for the new teachers and candidates of teachers. I really want to emphasize that, tutors really helped me get through the program. It's also really important to say that the full-time CELTA is a really stressful experience. But It is really worth taking it. I'm really glad I did this course. There are a lot of other Teaching Training courses and certifications out there, and some of them are probably pretty good, but I was very satisfied by the content of the CELTA. I really think it will help me become a better English teacher and even if I decide to move outside of the ESL world.

Conclusions

Overall, the CELTA course was really beneficial and effective in terms of professional development for English Teachers. CELTA is great for recent graduates, people who are changing career, or teachers who want to gain a formal qualification and may want to progress to qualifications such as Delta. The course is not very well known among English teachers particularly in Georgia. There are some factors that English teachers are not able to get this course. However, it is inevitable for all English teachers who do like to improve himself or herself not only on theoretical but also in empirical aspects. CELTA is the practical English language teaching qualification that gives you the essential knowledge, hands-on teaching experience and classroom confidence to qualify as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

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