

## USING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES(CATS) AND DIARY KEEPING IN TEACHER TRAINING

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### Abstract

This study describes the use of classroom assessment techniques and diaries as a reflection technique in the 3rd class students of English Language Teaching Department in Buca Faculty of Education. The outcome of this study suggests that the inclusion of learners in the learning-teaching process through the use of CATs(classroom assessment techniques) provides teachers-in-preparation with access to important information about the learning process,their own teaching styles,teaching materials and activities they use and the importance of affective factors in teaching a foreign language. There were 33 3<sup>rd</sup> class students,each tutoring a learner they themselves chose.During the five-week period ,each practiced teaching one hour a week and each week they applied a different CAT to their learners to get feedback on their own teaching and learners' learning.Totally 11 different CATs were used and learners' ages were between 10 to 41. After each lesson and after getting CAT results they kept diaries as a self-reflection and evaluated themselves, their teaching and their drawbacks during the lessons.All of their reflections were collected under 18 main headings.After their reports on CAT results and their diary entries were collected ,they informed that they found their learners' CAT results very valuable to develop their way of teaching, and keeping diaries was invaluable for them to have a cool and objective look at their own teaching practice. It was hoped that trainee teachers would apply the information they get from CATs and their diaries to their lesson planning to reflect on their teaching

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and students' learning and to make necessary changes in their teaching styles and in this way to develop their teaching to bring about more effective student learning.

### Key Words

Self-assessment, diary keeping,teacher training

## Introduction

The role of learners in the process of teacher training is potentially dynamic and the direct involvement of learners in the training process can help teachers-in-preparation develop an awareness about the learners' ideas and perceptions of the teaching /learning process. As Cray and Currie (in Gray 1998:29) have suggested, "Learners have ideas about such issues as the role of the classroom in language learning, the function of the teacher and the appropriateness and relevance of various teaching practices."

In her case study of the use of learner diaries at the British Language Centre in Madrid, Burke suggested that "the more learners are listened to, the more the trainers are likely to experience a genuinely effective teaching encounter"(in Gray, 1998:30).

Classroom Assessment, which is a major component of classroom research, involves both teachers and students in the ongoing monitoring of students' learning. The data obtained from CATs can be very useful for improving learning and teaching in various ways. For example, it provides teachers with feedback about their effectiveness as teachers and analyze themselves objectively and it enables students to measure their own progress as learners (in Enerson, 2007:1). CATs help teachers to get useful feedback on what, how much and how well their students are learning, and furthermore they can provide early feedback about students' learning at initial or intermediate levels so teachers can modify their teaching to make students' learning more effective when it is less than satisfactory. The more you know about what and how students are learning, the more effectively you can plan learning activities to structure your teaching. These techniques are simple, anonymous, non-graded, in-class activities. CATs are formative evaluation

methods which involve giving learners useful advice rather than marks or grades and comparing a learner's attainment over time rather than with other learners' attainments.

In Zekeriya Nartgün's research (2010:113) he tried to examine the effect of CATs instruction in a Research Techniques Course on students' competency levels and he also tried to show whether or not CATs used in the Research Techniques Course contributes to students' learning within the framework of students' opinions. The results revealed that students' competency levels of research techniques in the experiment group (instructed through CATs) are significantly higher than those of the students in the control group (instructed without these techniques). For teachers, frequent use of CATs can;

- provide feedback about day-to-day learning/ teaching process when it is still likely to make mid-course changes.
- provide useful information about what students have learned without preparing exams and checking papers.
- help to develop a good relation with students and encourage them to understand that teaching and learning are continuous processes that require full participation.

For students, the use of CATs can;

- help them to become better monitors of their learning and increase their ability to think critically about the lesson content.
- point out where they need to change study skills.
- help to reduce feelings of isolation.
- show that their teacher really cares about their success (in Angelo and Cross, 2011:1).

The primary goal of using CATs is to better understand students learning and in this way to improve teaching.

A diary study, "is a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events" (in Bailey, 1990:215).

Diary studies in language research and pedagogy have been used to document language learning experiences, student-teachers' reactions to academic courses, and language teaching experience (in Bailey, 1990:215). In this study the third one was used.

Diary writing is a procedure which is becoming a valuable tool for developing critical reflection. In diary keeping participants keep a regular account of learning or teaching experiences, which may be used as a basis for a later reflection. In writing for reflections, observations should be focussed on a specific aspect of teaching, that is, keeping the problem "small" is important. Records may be short or lengthy depending on participants' time and inclination to write. The aim is to raise the consciousness of teachers-in-preparation about their teaching. (in Barlett, 1990:210)

The main point in diary writing is that these entries must be candid if the diarist wants to get benefit from them. Teachers or trainee teachers must feel free to reflect, criticize, express frustration and raise questions in their diaries. Otherwise, its benefits will be minimized. It is also important to support reflective comments in the entries with examples from class sessions. A diarist has commented on the advantages of conducting a diary study "...Keeping a diary helped me very much in clarifying my thoughts and feelings about learning and my way of handling problems that came forth from doing real learning." (in Bailey, 1990:224).

Katleen Bailey used the diary study with her graduate students in the practicum which is the course in which the graduate

students complete a teaching practice. The resulting diaries have focused on issues such as lesson planning, time management, creativity, classroom control, group work and difficult teacher-student relations (in Bailey, 1990:217). According to Katleen Bailey diaries are often very useful for teachers-in preparation both in generating behavioral changes and in developing self-confidence.

This study tries to show that the use of CATs and diary keeping will help teachers-in-preparations to learn more about their teaching styles, problems and their students' learning process, and in this way to develop their way of teaching and make necessary changes to cause more effective learning.

## Material and Methods

33 3<sup>rd</sup> class students of English Language Teaching Department in Buca Faculty of Education tutored a learner they themselves chose for five weeks. During this period, each practiced teaching one hour a week and each week they applied a different CAT to their learners to get feedback on their own teaching and learners' learning. Totally 11 different CATs were applied, and the learners' ages were between 10 to 41 (10x2, 11, 12, 14x3, 15x2, 16, 18x2, 19x2, 20x9, 21x4, 22x2, 23, 25, 30, 41). After each lesson and after getting CATs results, they kept diaries as a self-reflection and evaluated themselves, their teaching and drawbacks during the lessons. All their reflections were collected under 18 main headings.

11 Classroom Assessment Techniques which were used are the followings:

1. One-Minute Paper: (32 students used it) During the last few minutes of the class period, ask students to write "the most important thing I learned today and what I understood least."

2. Muddiest Point: (26 students) Only ask students to describe what they didn't understand and what they think might help.
3. Application Cards: (20 students) During the last fifteen minutes of the class period after teaching an important principle, rule or procedure, ask students to write down at least one real-world application of what they have learned to find out how well they can transfer their learning.
4. One-Sentence Summary: (16 students) Students summarize knowledge of a topic by constructing a single sentence.
5. Chain Notes: (8 students) Pass around an envelope with a question about the class content. Each student writes a short answer, puts it in the envelope and passes it on. However, because they had only one student they were tutoring, they wrote a question on a piece of paper and left the student alone to answer it.
6. Memory-Matrix: (7 students) Students fill in cells of a two-dimensional diagram for which the teacher has provided labels.
7. Suggestion Box: (6 students) Put a box near the classroom door and ask students to leave notes about any class issue.
8. Student-Generated Test Questions: (4 students) Allow students to write test questions and model answers. This will give students the opportunity to evaluate the course content, reflect on what they have understood and what good test items are.
9. Exam Evaluations: (2 students) Select a test and add a few questions at the end which ask students to evaluate how well the test measures their knowledge and skills.
10. Directed Paraphrasing: (1 student) Ask students to paraphrase something they have learned to their partner to assess their ability to comprehend.

11. Student Rep Group: (1 student) On a regular basis discuss with the students how the course is progressing, what they are learning and suggestions for improving the course.

## Results

### Analysis of Teachers-in-preparation's Diary Entries about CATs Results

After the five-week period, their diary entries about CATs results, their own teaching and the learning process were collected. Trainee teachers' comments and reflections covered a wide range of areas, which were collected under 18 main headings:

1. Maximizing Student Speaking Time: About allocating students more time to speak, here are teachers-in-preparations' reflections after getting CATs results;

- I should have encouraged my student to speak during the activities.
- I should have had more speaking practices.
- I have realized that I need to create more meaningful and communicative activities.
- After my 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson, I have noticed that I should maximize the use of the target language to make the student speak.
- In my 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson I realized that I talked more than my student and later paid attention not to talk too much and not to interrupt my student while he was doing exercises.

2. Teaching Vocabulary Items: The followings are their reflections about vocabulary teaching:

- I realized that by playing games my student could memorize vocabulary items more easily.

- I should have used some flash cards to give the meaning of vocabulary items.
- I need to make lessons more challenging by using harder vocabulary items.
- In “the muddiest point” my student wanted me to teach new vocabulary items in context and choose frequently used ones.
- Most of them think they should give some real world activities after introducing new vocabulary items.
- I should revise all the vocabulary items before starting a new lesson.

### 3. Teaching Grammar:

- I had some difficulties in teaching regular/irregular verbs in the simple past tense so I should learn how to teach them more effectively.
- Activities were too mechanical .I should develop my student’s creative thinking ability.
- I decided to teach grammatical structures in a text to make lessons more meaningful.
- I used inductive teaching in which the student found out the rules in the examples, which was very enjoyable for the student.
- After my student’s suggestion in the “Suggestion Box”, I taught rules first and then examples, which was what my student wanted.
- As a result of “Suggestion Box”, I first gave lots of examples and then grammar rules, which worked best for my student.
- I should have taught more simply and provided my student with more examples.

- I realized that when I compared two tenses, the student got them better and from this time onwards I have decided to use this technique.
- After trying to teach two tenses in one lesson and after my student’s getting bored and losing concentration, I have learned that I must teach one subject in one lesson.
- I have found out that a ten-year old child doesn’t learn in the same way as adults do. Children don’t need a lot of grammar rules but need to be active during the lesson.

### 4. Time Management:

- Most of them informed that their time management should have been better and they should have organized lessons more carefully. They couldn’t apply their lesson plans properly, and one class hour wasn’t enough for the lessons they prepared.
- During my 3rd lesson, I observed that I had some problems with time management while doing the activities.
- I need to develop my time management skills
- After my lessons I have realized that I should use my time more effectively.

### 5. Creating a Fun and Warm Atmosphere and Using Interesting Topics:

- I should have played the games in the middle of the lesson to motivate students rather than at the end of the lesson.
- As a result of the student’s CATs result, I have found out that I have to find more interesting texts.

Most of them have found out that if students are interested in the topic, they want to join in the discussion so they have decided to choose topics attracting students’ attention.

- I need to use fun to keep my student alert.

- That my student enjoys the lesson is the most important thing for me, which also helped my student to enhance her self-esteem.

Most of them have realized that after 20 minutes students get bored so in order to make lessons more enjoyable they should use a variety of activities.

- I realized that my student lost concentration after a while so I decided to choose more appealing topics for my student.
- In order to get the student's attention and to make the lesson more enjoyable, I have discovered that I should use pictures, videos, colorful cards, etc.
- As a result of "Suggestion Box" I have learned that the reading topic wasn't interesting for the student so I started to ask what topics he liked.
- Using dialogues made the lesson more attractive and the student was more active and competent in the lesson.

#### 6. Exercises:

- I should prepare more speaking and vocabulary activities
- I should have prepared a worksheet before the lesson.
- I should have prepared more examples and exercises to make the subject clear.
- I have found out that the student wants to use various kinds of drills, not the same kinds.

#### 7. Using Videos, Pictures and Other Visual Aids:

- According to "Memory Matrix" results, I should use different materials such as maps, pictures, the internet, etc. to make the student understand more.
- In my 3rd lesson I used colorful charts and pictures, which was highly effective in the student learning.

- I used songs and in my opinion songs are invaluable sources of learning and memorizing something.
- I decided to use videos more frequently as a result of "Suggestion Box".
- Using coloured pencils is important if you are teaching small children.

#### 8. Being a Model and Having Responsibility:

In general, they informed that their students take them as a model, which makes them feel confident and they feel their responsibility and influence on their students.

- As a result of "Chain Notes" I have learned that my student wants to learn more about the language, and I think, I must be a guide for him to develop his English.
- I have understood that becoming a teacher requires responsibility.
- I'm afraid of teaching something wrong and this feeling helps me to improve myself.
- I have really understood that my dearest wish is to become a teacher.
- How difficult it is to fix pronunciation errors. I have realized that I should be a perfect model for pronunciation because the student imitates my pronunciation.

#### 9. Assigning Homework and Revising:

- After seeing that the student could remember 3 words out of 14, I decided to assign homework to make the student study.
- I should have checked the assignment.
- After discovering the student didn't revise, I decided to give homework.

- I have realized the importance of revision of the previous lesson before beginning a new one.

#### 10. Students' Level and Pace:

- I assumed that the student has understood everything and never forgets them but in the worksheet I have noticed the student's mistakes and understood that I should take my student's level more into consideration.
- I should have planned my lesson according to the student's pace.
- I couldn't decide whether the exercises were appropriate for my student's level or not.
- Trying to decide my student's level was difficult for me.

#### 11. Assuming Students Know A Lot:

- I spoke as if the student knew every word I uttered.
- I should never assume that the student knows a lot of English.
- I shouldn't assume that the student already knows about the topic.

#### 12. Teaching Style:

- All of them agree that lessons are getting much better day by day, which strengthens their self-confidence and self-esteem. They have also decided to change their teaching styles as a result of CATs results.
- I have experienced that I can teach English and my student has learned something from me.
- After my lessons I have realized that teaching isn't as easy as I thought and I have some problems with pronunciation.
- I think there is a long way to take to develop my teaching techniques and communication ways.

- After my 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson I felt to be more successful because my student and I got used to each other's learning and teaching styles.
- I have realized that my teaching skills have been improving day by day.
- After the 4<sup>th</sup> lesson, I have realized that I should always think how I could teach differently.
- I need to develop my teaching strategies and to be always energetic and relaxed.

#### 13. Feeling Successful:

- After seeing that my student can prepare questions by using his knowledge of the Simple Past Tense, I felt successful.
- After "Application Cards" technique I saw that my student can express his ideas in real-life situations, which made me feel successful.
- As a result of "Application Cards" I have seen that the student has learned the structure, which made me happy.
- I tried to teach the subject by using different techniques because I didn't want a teacher-centered lesson and I think that I am successful at achieving it.

#### 14. Using the Target Language In the Classroom:

- When the lesson proceeds, I avoided using Turkish, which, I believe, will help to develop my student's English.
- I used both Turkish and English to explain the topic.
- While explaining the meaning of new vocabulary items, I used simple English and I think the target language must be used in the classroom.
- I noticed that when my student asked the meaning of a new word, I said it directly in Turkish. I should have explained them by giving examples in English.

#### 15. Being Patient:

- In my 3rd lesson I found out that I interfered too much when my student made a mistake, but later I made her find the mistake by herself.
- I must be more patient with the student's mistakes.
- While the student was speaking, I shouldn't have interrupted because she couldn't remember what she was going to say.
- I need to give more time to my student to do the activities and need to learn to be more patient.
- I have found out that I must teach patiently and slowly.

#### 16. Using Body Language:

- I used my body language and facial expressions, which my student liked a lot. The atmosphere was sincere.
- I used my body language in an exaggerated way, which facilitated my student's understanding.

#### 17. Preparation Before the Lesson:

- I tried to have my first lesson without preparation and had some difficulties in finding examples while explaining grammar.
- I didn't find my 1st lesson so beneficial because I wasn't fully prepared for it.

#### 18. Student's Health Problems and Emotional Conditions:

- In my 4th lesson I couldn't stick to my lesson plan due to my student's tiredness and illness and understood that sometimes I had to change my plans and had to be flexible.
- I have learned that health problems can distract students' concentration even if I am ready to teach.

## Discussion

This study attempted to investigate that the inclusion of learners' opinions through the CATs and the use of diary keeping as a reflection technique in the 3rd class students of English Language Teaching Department in Buca Faculty of Education will greatly help teachers-in-preparation to understand and analyze their teaching practice, teaching styles, some problems they face with while teaching and their students' ideas about the effectiveness of teaching and learning process.

After the five-week period of time, teachers-in-preparations' diary entries about CATs results and teaching and learning process were gathered under 18 main headings. About time management, for example, most of them stated that they should have organized their lessons more carefully. About using interesting topics most of them have found out that if students are interested in the topic, they want to join in the lesson so they have decided to select topics getting students' attention. Moreover they have realized that after twenty minutes students get bored so they should use a different variety of activities to make lessons more enjoyable. They also stated that their students' taking them as a model makes them feel confident. Lastly, as a result of CATs they have decided to change their teaching styles.

After the study completed, teachers-in-preparations stated that they found their students' CATs results very valuable to develop their way of teaching and students' learning. In the same way, keeping a diary helped them to have an objective look at their own teaching practice.

## Conclusion

It can be stated that the opportunity teachers-in-preparation get to access the information about the learning process, their own teaching styles, teaching materials and activities they use and the importance of affective factors in teaching a foreign language through CATs and their own diary results will enable them to plan more effective lessons and modify their teaching according to learners' needs and feedback.

It is hoped that when these trainee teachers become real classroom teachers, they will understand the importance of learners' being involved in the teaching/ learning process and using diaries to reflect on their own teaching, and through which they will make necessary changes and improve themselves as teachers to bring about more effective student learning because teaching and learning is an on going process.

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