'Buying in' to communicative language teaching: The impact of 'initial' certification courses on the classroom practices of experienced teachers of English

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'Buying in' to communicative language teaching: The impact of 'initial' certification courses on the classroom practices of experienced teachers of English

This study reports on the impact of an 'initial' certification course (ICC) for English language teachers (the Cambridge CELTA) on the self-reported classroom practices and related beliefs of experienced teacher-participants. Although many participants on such courses are experienced non-native speaker teachers of English (NNESTs), almost nothing is known about the impact of ICCs on their classroom practices. Qualitative data, including questionnaire and interview data, was collected from 29 experienced Egyptian teachers of English 6 months after course completion to understand what changes had occurred in their self-reported classroom practices, their beliefs, and what challenges they had faced interpreting what they had learnt for their own teaching contexts. The data reveals a commitment on the part of most participants to implement the practices imparted on the course, indicating a noticeable shift in beliefs about how languages are learnt and taught towards more communicative, learner-centred practices. It also reveals increases in self-confidence from some participants, both regarding classroom practices and personal status as internationally certified teachers. However, significant variation in self-reported implementation was also found depending on contexts, constraints and challenges, indicating strongly that the communicative practices promoted on 'international' ICCs need adaptation in order for them to work effectively in primary, secondary, tertiary and adult classrooms in the Middle East. Recommendations provided include more discussion, both in inputs and assignments, of issues of how course participants will appropriate what they have learnt on the course for their own classrooms, and the provision of opportunities for peer-support, possibly online, after course completion.

Keywords: communicative language teaching; teacher training; methodology; initial certification, CELTA; CLT; NNESTs.

Introduction

Initial certification courses (ICCs) such as the Cambridge CELTA and the Trinity CertTESOL provide qualifications to over 10,000 candidates every year to teach English as a foreign or second language around the world (Hobbs 2013). Such courses evolved in Anglophone countries to provide native-speaker teachers with a toolkit of basic teaching skills to enable them to work largely in the private sector, with adults as the envisaged target learner (Hobbs 2013). Despite criticisms of the brevity and intensity of ICCs (Ferguson and Donno 2003), their native-speaker orientation (Anderson 2016; Hobbs 2013) and concerns over the generic nature of an 'international' qualification (Hobbs 2013), the popularity of these courses has increased steadily alongside the rise of English as a global language.

However, this increase in popularity has been paralleled by a largely unnoticed second trend, an increase in non-native speaker teachers taking ICCs, rising from 26% of CELTA participants in 2005 to over 48% today (Charnaud 2017), the majority of whom are also experienced teachers (Anderson 2016). Anderson (2018) found that non-native speaker teachers take ICCs both in order to gain parity with native-speaker teachers in local and international job markets, and to develop professionally through the practical, classroom-based training in learner-centred, communicative language teaching (CLT) that they offer.

Despite the increasing popularity of ICCs among experienced teachers, almost nothing is known of what impact these courses have on their long-term classroom practices. Here I report on a qualitative study investigating this question. It involves 29 experienced Egyptian English language teachers working both in Egypt and Saudi Arabia who personally funded their own participation on CELTA courses in 2016. 'Impact' here is operationalised as 'self-reported practice', recognising that, while not

necessarily indicative of actual practice (Borg 2006), these reports provide useful insights into the perceived challenges and successes experienced during the following 6-8 months. Their discussion of these issues also sheds light onto aspects of their beliefs and attitudes towards course content as they attempted to adopt the broadly communicative practices promoted on the courses.

ICCs and CLT

Characteristics of ICCs

The two most popular ICCs worldwide are the Cambridge CELTA and the Trinity CertTESOL (Charnaud 2017). Both originated in the UK, where they are regulated at level 5 on the UK Qualifications and Credit Framework. They are most commonly taken intensively (usually over 4 weeks), require over 120 hours of instruction and 6 hours of observed and assessed teaching practice. Both are externally assessed or moderated and are intended for 'candidates who have little or no previous English language teaching experience' (Cambridge ELA 2015, 2).

Evidence for communicative practices in the CELTA syllabus

The content of the syllabus for the Cambridge CELTA has, over the years, largely reflected the shared practices of multilingual adult ELT classrooms in Anglophone countries (UK especially) and today it promotes what Howatt (1984, 279) called the 'weak version' of communicative language teaching. Evidence for this can be found in the CELTA syllabus (Cambridge ELA 2015, 15-16), where assessment criteria promote a balance between outcomes-oriented teaching (e.g. 'identifying and stating appropriate aims/outcomes for individual lessons') and the development of communicative competence (e.g. 'providing clear contexts and a communicative focus for language';

'ensuring balance, variety and a communicative focus in materials, tasks and activities'), a central feature of CLT. Other assessment criteria that promote specific features of CLT (see: Brown 2000, 266-7; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011, 119-25) include the teaching of language skills, functions and 'features of spoken English' alongside more traditional explicit grammar instruction, an emphasis on 'establishing good rapport with learners', and the inclusion of collaborative learning through 'pair and group work' alongside more traditional whole class work and individual work (Cambridge ELA 2015, 8-16).

Literature review

Language teacher learning and the impact of 'training' on experienced teachers

While language teacher education for much of the twentieth century typically viewed teacher learning as a primarily cognitive process involving the 'front-loading' of decontextualised theory (Johnson 2009, 12), more recent, socioculturally-informed approaches to teacher learning have argued for a reconceptualisation of the knowledge base of teacher education. Freeman and Johnson (1998; also see Johnson 2009) advocate greater prominence for three key elements: the nature of language teaching (as opposed to language learning); a recognition of schools and schooling as the contexts for teacher learning, and the characteristics of the teacher-learner, in need of a reflective, developmental process, not just the transmission of specific skills and techniques.

Despite these recommendations, attempts to introduce innovative approaches to language teaching (especially CLT) to experienced teachers around the world have often involved top-down 'training' programmes, and typically reported low levels of

implementation, citing a variety of factors as to why success was limited:

(1) the issue of (perceived) cultural incompatibility between the innovation and local culture, something that Holliday calls 'tissue rejection' (1994; also see Hu 2002; Kırkgöz 2008);

(2) teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Choi 2013; Kırkgöz 2008);

(3) the challenge of teaching communicatively for teachers with relatively low levels of proficiency in English (Freeman et al. 2015; Liao 2000);

(4) poor quality initial training and/or a lack of post-training support (Choi 2013; Kırkgöz 2008; Liao 2000);

(5) systemic resistance to change (incorporating aspects of several of the above), especially when implemented top-down (Choi 2013; Gorsuch 2000; Hu 2002).

With these findings in mind it would be reasonable to expect that 4-week intensive ICCs would be unlikely to catalyse change in the practices of experienced teachers.

Why ICCs may be different

Given Freeman and Johnson's (1998) recommendations, the intensive four-week shock of the CELTA during which teachers are expected to modify habituated practices rapidly to meet course assessment criteria could be seen to be inappropriate training for teachers who are likely to need more developmental support, situated in their own classrooms. However, a number of features of ICCs could lead to them having a greater impact on experienced teachers than many mandatory top-down in-service training programmes, such as those mentioned in the previous section:

(1) The largely intrinsic motivation to participate (Anderson 2018) may increase the likelihood of implementation (Guskey 2002), as may the significant financial investment made (Gino 2008) – the 'buy in' factor;

(2) Given that the qualification provides an opportunity for NNEST participants to assimilate into the international community of CELTA graduates, seen to be a desirable goal by many NNESTs (Anderson 2018), becoming part of this community may increase the likelihood of adoption of its practices;

(3) The teaching practice element of ICCs provides daily opportunities for participants to engage in what could be seen as effective (albeit intense) praxis, with daily cycles of practical inputs, lesson planning, observed teaching practice, reflection and feedback on teaching involving both tutors and colleagues. This contrasts with the often-cited challenge on many MA-TESOL courses of participants being front-loaded with theory, then posted into often isolated environments for the practicum (e.g. Ogilvie and Dunn 2010);

(4) Observing the effect of CLT in both their own and colleagues' lessons during teaching practice may influence participants' beliefs about its effectiveness. As Guskey (2002, 383) notes, it is the 'experience of successful implementation that changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs. They believe it works because they have seen it work';

(5) ICCs typically require participating teachers to have high levels of language proficiency (C1+), an important factor influencing their ability to teach communicatively (Freeman et al. 2015).

If indeed these factors do lead to greater impact, evidence should come from studies on the impact of ICCs in the literature. Unfortunately there are few.

Research on the impact of ICCs on novice language teachers

Two in-depth studies on the impact of ICCs on mainly novice language teachers are of note:

A study by Kiely and Askham (2012) examined the impact of an ICC (Trinity CertTESOL) on the practices of participants during the first few months of work after the course, recording impact of learning on their knowledge, skills, disposition and identity. They were surprised by two findings, firstly that participants 'were much more positive in their evaluations than noted in end-of-course feedback' and secondly that 'they felt well prepared for work, compared to evaluations of longer courses' (515). Although 4 of their 27 participants had language teaching experience, none are mentioned in their findings, shedding little light onto the specific impact it had on them.

Hobbs (2007) conducted an ethnographic study into the beliefs, experiences, behaviour and attitudes of 12 British trainees, 2 of whom had a little language teaching experience. It followed their progress for 9 months after a CertTESOL course, and reached a largely critical conclusion of the design of 4-week courses, noting that:

> Trainees emerge from short-term teacher training with confidence well in place in most cases but lacking in an understanding of the foundations of informed language teaching, an explicit in-depth knowledge of language, and a view of the field as a profession worthy of long-term commitment. (ii)

Prior research into the impact of ICCs on experienced language teachers

While studies exist on the impact of qualifications designed for experienced teachers, such as the Cambridge Delta (e.g. Borg 2011), data is almost non-existent with regard to the impact of ICCs on experienced language teachers. This is perhaps not surprising, given that ICCs are intended as 'initial' qualifications. However, in view of the fact that many ICC participants are NNESTs, the absence of such studies is a significant gap in

the literature.

Perhaps the only relevant research in this area is a study by Anderson (2018), conducted to understand the role ICCs play in the careers and professional development of NNESTs. Although not the primary focus of that study, findings indicated that ICCs 'have an impact on the classroom practices of many NNESTs towards more learner-centred teaching' (15), including increased use of collaborative learning, interactive teaching and more peer-teaching opportunities. It also reported a number of difficulties implementing the methodology and indicated that respondents 'appropriated selectively from what they had learnt' (21). However, given that the study collected comparatively little data in this area, and that most respondents were recalling the impact of courses taken several years previously, these findings should be treated as indicative.

The Study

This study was carried out to investigate what changes experienced teachers report in their teaching practices as a result of taking an ICC, the Cambridge CELTA. The following main research question and sub-questions are investigated:

What long-term changes do experienced teachers report as a result of taking the Cambridge CELTA?

(1) How much change was reported by participants in their teaching 6 months after the course?

(2) To what extent did participants report implementing what they had learnt on the CELTA?

(3) What other areas of change were discussed?

(4) Do the changes reported indicate a move towards more communicative practices in line with the objectives of the CELTA?

The participants and their relationship to the author

The participants were 29 experienced Egyptian teachers of English as a foreign language who had participated in one of two Cambridge CELTA courses conducted in Egypt in 2016. With one exception (an English/Arabic bilingual from early childhood), all had learnt English as an additional language themselves (i.e. 'non-native speakers' of English). At the time of the survey, 15 were teaching in Egypt, 13 in Saudi Arabia and 1 in Kuwait, all but one in private institutions. 13 were teaching at secondary level, 8 at tertiary level (in universities), 2 at primary level, 1 was teaching adults and the remainder were teaching combinations of these (2 primary/secondary, 2 secondary/tertiary and 1 secondary/adult).

The author had been a freelance tutor on both courses, although all professional relationship between author and participants had concluded upon course completion, 6 months previously. He had had an opportunity to work with all participants personally, including observation and feedback during teaching practice. Working together within this community of practice enabled the author and participants to develop an open, exploratory rapport, as well as a shared understanding of key terminology, practices and concepts from the course itself, which helped to ensure greater shared discourse, understanding and empathy during the data collection process, as recommended by Woods (1985).

Data collection

Using mainly open questions allowing respondents to provide extended responses, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed and trialled with four teachers of similar background. It was modified to incorporate their feedback, and sent to 36 teachers along with an invitation to participate in the study. 29 teachers returned the questionnaire, and

19 of these agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Eight were chosen based on the principle of maximum variation sampling (Seidman 2006), considering especially how much change was reported, but also to represent as wide a variety of teaching contexts (primary, secondary, tertiary and adult, both in Egypt and Saudi Arabia), and experience as possible (see Table 1).

Table 1: Interview respondent profiles (pseudonyms used).

Name	Years of prior teaching experience	Current teaching context
Nada	15	Egypt, secondary and adult, both private.
Donya	12	Saudi, secondary, private.
Assem	11	Saudi, upper primary, private.
Menna	9	Saudi, lower secondary, private.
Nour	5	Egypt, primary/secondary, private.
Adham	3	Egypt, upper secondary (exam classes), private.
Raneem	2	Egypt, adult, private.
Abdallah	1.5	Egypt, tertiary (at 3 universities).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by Skype video lasting 45-70 minutes. Open, exploratory initial questions were asked as scripted (see Appendix 2). Follow-up questions depended both on initial responses and personal questionnaire data to encourage participants to explore themes and issues raised. Interviews were audio

recorded. Given our prior relationship, I felt it important to disclose my aims as researcher, both in the invitation to participate and the interview introductions, where I stated 1) my independence from the qualification and course providing organisations; 2) my aim to understand the impact of the course on their practice, not approval for the course. Nonetheless, I treated the interviews both as 'resource' (providing information about participants' experience) and 'topic' (a social event in its own right), aware that their responses may be influenced by our relationship (Byrne 2012).

Data analysis

Data from completed questionnaires were analysed to identify common themes and topics, codified, and then categorised. Data from interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively, broadly following stages recommended by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011, 555). Important themes were identified and alongside insights into changes, challenges, the influence of contextual factors, constraints and participants' beliefs. Key quotes illustrating the relationships between these insights were identified to exemplify the narratives that emerged. Denaturalised transcription and standard orthography (Roberts 1997) have been used below to enable participants' stories to come through as directly to the reader as possible. Questionnaire data is reported anonymously. Interview data is reported using the pseudonyms above.

Given that this is a study into self-reported classroom practice, data is interpreted accordingly, as indicative of changes in beliefs, perceptions about teaching, and self-image, but never assuming that it is representative of actual practice. As Borg (2006, 184) notes:

> Theoretical measures of teacher cognition cannot be used as measures of actual practices… Even where teachers report on their teaching, it is essential that these data be treated as reports.

Findings and Discussion

1. How much change was reported by participants in their teaching 6 months after the course?

The 29 questionnaire respondents were asked 'Overall, how much did your teaching change as a result of the course?'. Respondents were able to select from 5 options. All reported having made changes to their practice as a result of the course, with the vast majority reporting making 'quite a lot' (10), 'a lot' (9) or 'some changes' (7) (see Fig. 1). While this self-reporting should not be considered evidence of actual change, it is indicative of personal impressions, and facilitated the maximum variation sampling used in this study. The 8 interview participants included representatives of all chosen categories except 1 ('A little'), as both respondents in this category declined the invitation to participate in interview.
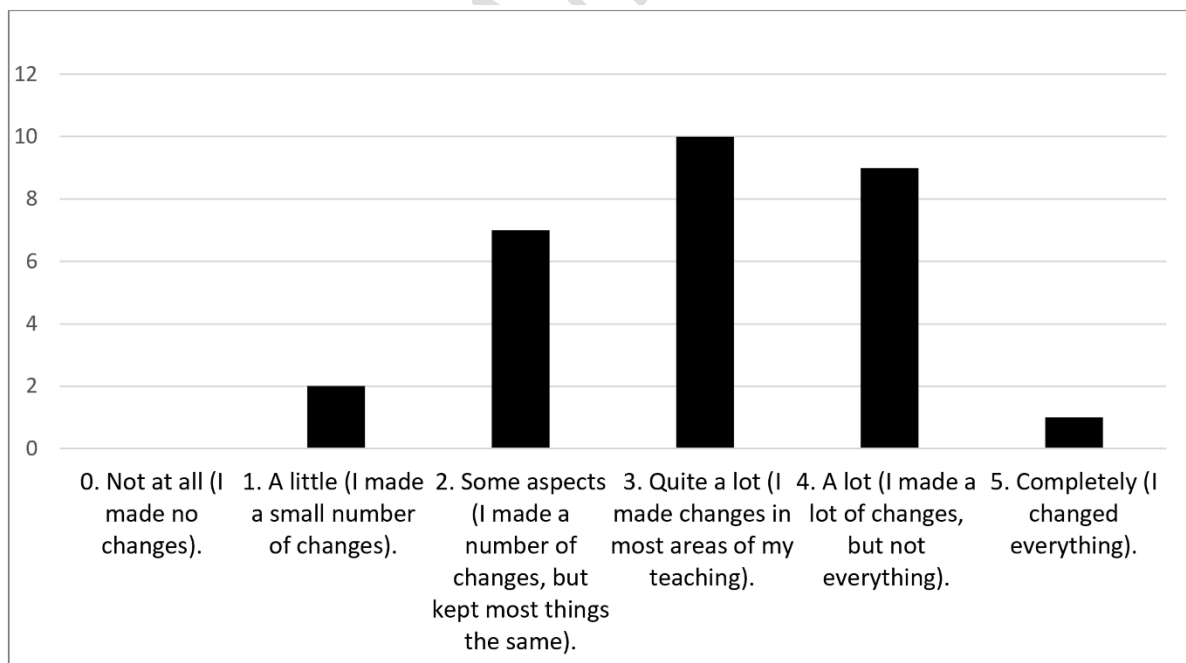

Figure 1. Self-reported overall change as a result of the course.

2. To what extent did participants report implementing what they had learnt on the CELTA?

Analysis of the 29 questionnaires provided broad answers to this question that were analysed both quantitatively (through mentions of specific areas of practice) and qualitatively. However, only a small number of respondents provided detailed reasons, so the interviews became important for understanding more about these, as well as participants' related attitudes and beliefs. While there was consistency between the questionnaire and interview data, tension was often detected in both between what participants wanted to do in their classrooms, and what they actually reported doing, due to contextual challenges and institutional constraints, leading to several respondents discussing both positive change and challenge for a single topic (e.g. lesson planning, collaborative learning). Questionnaire responses are discussed first, then interview data.

1. Questionnaire responses

Figure 2 provides a quantitative snapshot of areas of teaching mentioned in questionnaire responses.
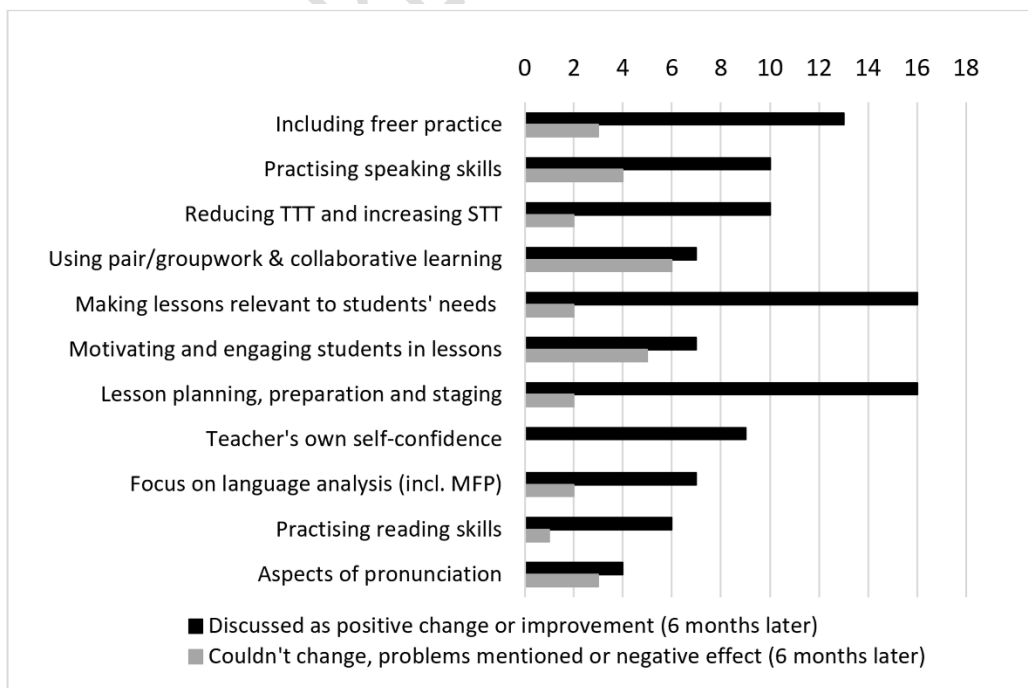

Figure 2. Positive changes and areas of challenge reported 6 months later.

Reports of perceived positive changes and improvements outweighed mentions of challenges or negative effects significantly, including:

(1) mentions of the closely related areas of freer practice (cf. controlled practice) of language introduced in lessons, and practice of speaking skills, from 23 participants: 'A fruitful speaking class that results from preparing several freer activities.';

(2) the frequently mentioned belief that they were now making their lessons more relevant to their learners' needs and lives: 'I am more confident now that I can vary my teaching techniques to suit the types of learners I have in my classes.';

(3) frequent references to improvements in lesson planning, preparation and staging '…my plans changed based on students' abilities and levels.' 'More effective staging of the lessons.';

(4) reported reductions in 'teacher talking time' (TTT) and increases in 'student talking time' (STT): '…the use of flashcards and handouts were my tools to minimize my TTT.';

(5) closely related to (2), a belief that they were now motivating and engaging students in lessons more: 'They become more willing to learn more and more and enthusiastically participate.';

(6) related to (1) above, reports of increased or more successful use of collaborative learning (e.g. pairwork, groupwork): 'individual reading then pairwork, after that group check and finally I confirm answers (think, pair, share)';

(7) perceived improvements in how they focus on language analysis;

(8) reports of more effective practice of reading skills.

Of the 29 respondents, 20 reported challenges, negative impact of some kind, or an

inability to introduce change, with the most commonly mentioned topics the same as those where positive change was mentioned. The most frequent of these were:

(1) reports of challenges with collaborative learning (6 respondents), some significant: 'I tried to focus on group and pairwork yet I suffered from students' lack of interest especially in teen classes.';

(2) closely related to (1), reports of challenges experienced with freer practice of language and speaking skills: 'Sometimes students turned the freer activity into chaos and start resorting to Arabic or they start going off track which forces me to stop the game or the activity.';

(3) mentions of motivational issues, including a lack of intrinsic motivation and an expressed need among students to prepare for exams rather than use language more communicatively: 'Most of the students focus mainly on the preparation of the exam other than practising the language skills and systems in other contexts, they need a lot of encouragement and inducement.'.

Less widely discussed areas of teaching included aspects of pronunciation teaching, contextualisation of new language, use of CCQs (concept-check questions), corrective feedback, time management and use of L1, only the last two of which involved as much (time management) or more (use of L1) discussion of challenges than positive change, both due primarily to institutional constraints (e.g. teachers not being allowed to use L1 in class).

2. Interview data

Interview data helped to contextualise both the positive changes and the challenges reported, with the 8 participants focusing on similar areas of change to questionnaire responses, although each prioritised specific areas of practice that tended to relate to

their current teaching context and constraints. At one end of the scale was Donya, a secondary teacher in Saudi and the only participant who had reported that her teaching had changed 'completely' since the course. She linked together several of the most commonly mentioned themes by questionnaire respondents: planning, understanding students' needs and engaging them more. Similar to another interview participant (Nada), Donya felt that the CELTA had brought together much of what she had learnt in various workshops before, enabling her to organise her planning and teaching:

> '[before] I was lost - I knew that I had lots of strategies, but how can I implement them? …Getting the CELTA was like the first step in organising everything.'

Donya felt that this sense of organisation was key to enabling her both to structure her lessons and to see her role as facilitator, rather than lecturer, able to focus on students' needs and interests:

> 'My way of thinking changed, so as a teacher, I started thinking from the point of view of [my learners] …I started putting myself always in my students' place and thinking how I can just enjoy the class.'

While Donya was atypical in describing almost no difficulty implementing what she had learnt on the course, data from all 7 other interviewees at times revealed tension, or even conflict, between what they perceived was a more effective approach to language learning (that promoted on the CELTA), and the constraints, beliefs and attitudes of learners and institutions. This was very evident in the story of Abdallah, who taught English at university level in Egypt. Having had less than 2 years' experience before taking his CELTA, Abdallah was the least experienced teacher of all participants in this study, yet had done well on the course. In our interview he talked extensively about the needs and interests of his learners and his aim to 'create a friendly atmosphere' to engage them. However, he felt that his belief in the need to reduce TTT and increase STT conflicted strongly with the expectations of learners in his beginner class:

'They are willing to learn, they are very good students, but the problem is that sometimes they are complaining because they find that I am focusing more on eliciting from them information and asking them to speak. However, they are coming to listen to the teacher... they need me to explain more, they don't want me to follow the CELTA methodology.'

Adham, an upper-secondary exam class teacher in Egypt also felt tension between his CELTA training and his learners' expectations, reporting that he had only implemented 'some aspects' of what he had learnt on the course. Despite stating that he was 'a firm believer in teamwork and its benefits for the learners', he found it challenging to engage his learners in anything other than exam practice:

'They're so worried about their exam, so… the way that you give them language has to be related to the exam… When it comes to reading it has to be reading texts similar to the exam. You teach them reading skills as much as you can and try and use vocab. from the text but it all has to be related to the exam for them to really engage.'

Significant differences in proficiency levels within some of his classes made it very challenging for him to do groupwork successfully:

'I think the variation in the students' level made it really difficult for me to benefit everyone… some students doing the work and the rest just taking a break.'

However, his determination to make learning more collaborative enabled him to find a solution to this problem through pairwork as a tool for peer-mediated differentiation:

'The good thing about pairwork is I could put students together who I felt could help each other: if one student was good with tenses, the other could be good with vocabulary… It also kept the students engaged.'

Discussion of this ability to creatively appropriate and adapt what they had learnt on the CELTA recurred regularly in the interview data, and another interview respondent,

Menna, also reported greater success with pairwork than groupwork in her lower secondary classes. Two respondents, Abdallah and Raneem, a teacher of adult learners in a private institution in Egypt, both reported adapting speaking practice activities to meet learner expectations, and both found that role-plays served this purpose more effectively than discussions or debates. However, adjustments were needed to make role plays work effectively, as Raneem reports:

> 'They like to present the speaking in front of everybody. They were not satisfied with just speaking together and I monitor them and give them feedback… They said, "Maybe I'll make mistakes that you didn't hear. I wanna make sure that everyone listens to me, and I wanna be sure that you listen to me."'

Two interview respondents discussed the CELTA in relation to other training they had received. This included Assem, an upper-primary teacher in Saudi, and Nour, a teacher of grades from primary to secondary level in an international baccalaureate (IB) school in Egypt. Assem felt that there was fairly strong agreement between what had been promoted on the CELTA regarding collaborative learning, and what he had learnt more recently on a training programme on cooperative learning:

> 'I used to lecture a lot [but now] I target the process as well as the product, because in cooperative learning it is important to engage students, to give each learner a voice in the group.'

This was particularly important for him, because he had moved to a new school since the CELTA and was now teaching less motivated learners. He noted 'I feel that this is one of the most difficult contexts that I have had in my life…'.

In contrast to Assem, Nour felt that the constructivist philosophy of the curriculum at her IB school at times conflicted with what she had learnt about controlled practice on the CELTA:

> 'My experience working with the IB people, worksheets kill the children's

creativity, kill the critical thinking, especially the gap filling... so this is the challenge facing me that whenever the IB people see me doing controlled practice... [they say:] No, no! You're not letting them explore the language in a creative way, in their way. They have to try and make sense of the language themselves.'

Nour was confident that the course had benefited her, especially by helping her 'plan better language lessons with logical staging', and the importance of freer practice, which was going 'smoothly' at grades 4 and 5. However, she found freer practice problematic at lower-primary level, and here reports on the challenge of implementing an andragogic approach with younger learners:

'If I tackle freer practice... it's very difficult, challenging for the kids... How can you make the students use language in free practice for 20 minutes without them stopping... I feel controlling kids is way harder than having adult students do it.'

While the interviews revealed similar areas of change to the questionnaire responses, they provided insight into the challenges that participants reported encountering when trying to implement what they had learnt on the course. These included learner beliefs, expectations and motivations, the challenges of teaching mixed-ability classes, institutional requirements and other training and development received. The data indicated strongly that participants' beliefs had undergone a shift, a commitment to change as a result of the CELTA, but that there had been a subsequent need on the part of most of them to adapt and appropriate what they had learnt to make it work in the varied contexts where they were now teaching, adaptation that often involved creativity and innovation.

3. What other areas of change were discussed?

Only one other notable area of personal change was discussed by 9 of the 29 questionnaire respondents and 4 of the 8 interviewees, despite never being asked

directly about it: an increase in self-confidence. It was often linked both to classroom practice and belief in themselves as teachers:

> 'This course was very beneficial as it helped me to change the way I handled different lessons, and it has a tremendous impact on enhancing my self-confidence. For the time being, I can teach adults more effectively and creating interesting lessons started to be just like walking in the park.'

One interview respondent, Menna, also linked her increased self-confidence to her career progression, providing a concrete example of how the qualification had helped her to get a job at a more prestigious school:

> 'In the school where I'm working now, I've done an interview last year before I had the CELTA, for the same position, but the coordinator told me that it's OK, you're good, but you still need more self-confidence in the class. And, when I went this year for the interview, she said that there is something different with you, so I told her, yeah, I've done the CELTA. She said it's very clear that you've got more self-confidence about how you teach inside the class.'

It seems likely that reasons for this increased self-confidence relate closely both to classroom practice and career progression, correlating well with participants reporting greater understanding of what they are doing in the classroom and a sense of value at having what is often viewed as a prestigious qualification (rightly or wrongly) among many non-native speaker English teachers around the world. Both these findings are consistent with research by Anderson (2016, 2018).

4. Do the changes reported indicate a move towards more communicative practices in line with the objectives of the CELTA?

Depending on how these terms are defined (see above), approximately 6 of the areas where change was most commonly reported involved movement towards more communicative approaches, including use of freer practice; practising speaking skills; reducing TTT/increasing STT; using pair/groupwork/collaborative learning; making

lessons relevant to students' needs; and motivating and engaging students in lessons (see Figure 2). Such changes were frequently mentioned by interview respondents, as Menna does here, reporting on a shift from a deductive to a more inductive approach in her teaching:

> 'I used to write things on the board; here are the rules and here is the exercise so we have to apply the rule and so on, but now I'm trying more to let students get things out of the text and try to figure out what is the rule here and how to apply it.'

While reported changes in practice should always be interpreted with caution, all respondents expressed a strong belief in the value of CLT. Despite the challenges he met with implementing a more communicative approach in his exam classes, Adham's commitment to developing contextualised communicative competence was clear:

> 'You're creating a context where the learner can pick up language easily and understand it and see how it's used, and then also provide an environment for them to practise that language that they've learnt. If you don't do that… It's pointless. They'll forget about it by the time they're out the door.'

Conclusion

Key findings

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the expressed commitment on the part of the majority of participants to implement much of what they had learnt on the course 6 months later, revealing a shift in their *beliefs about* how languages are best learnt and taught. Broadly speaking the changes described were towards more communicative, learner-centred practices, albeit with significant variation between participants that resulted from the diversity of teaching contexts, institutional constraints and beliefs of stakeholders involved. For a number of respondents, these changes were accompanied by an increase in self-confidence, a *belief in* their own ability as a teacher.

A second significant finding of this study is that the broad brush CLT methodology promoted on the CELTA was reported as having been implemented very differently by participants in different contexts. Despite the fact that all were Egyptian teachers, working mainly in 2 Arabic countries, the stories and challenges reported indicate that the majority of communicative practices promoted on the CELTA need adaptation in order for them to work effectively in primary, secondary, tertiary and adult classrooms in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Most participants also found the need to reject certain aspects of their training, supporting a conclusion that context-specific appropriation is essential for successful implementation of teacher education programmes focused on making teaching practices more communicative, in agreement with Hu (2002) and Anderson (2018). This has implications not only for generic certificate and diploma level teacher qualifications marketed internationally by organisations such as Cambridge ELA and Trinity College London, but also for internationally marketed teacher development products for English language teachers (e.g. by the British Council), products that are expanding to fill growing markets in developing countries.

Limitations and recommendations

This study involves only self-reported data, an acknowledged limitation. Thus, the first recommendation must be for further research, particularly involving observation of classroom practices to ascertain the degree to which the changes reported in teachers' beliefs, opinions and self-confidence is reflected in their teaching.

In addition to this, three practical suggestions for CELTA course providing organisations (CPOs) are offered here. All of these suggestions can be implemented by CPOs whenever courses involve significant numbers of experienced teachers. No changes to Cambridge syllabi are required for this to happen, although small

amendments/additions to the CELTA syllabus itself may promote awareness of their importance among trainers:

(1) CPOs can provide opportunities (e.g. through workshop/input sessions in the final quarter of the course) for experienced teacher-participants to discuss critically how they will appropriate what they have learnt on the course for their envisaged teaching contexts. Even on courses that include inexperienced participants, such discussions are likely to raise awareness of issues of appropriacy of methodology and social context (Holliday 1994). This awareness is recognised to be an important attribute of internationally-aware English language teachers today (Kumaravadivelu 2012) that is not mentioned in the Cambridge CELTA syllabus. I suggest that it could be.

(2) At least one of the standardised assignments included on CELTA courses, 'Lessons from the classroom' can potentially be adapted to help raise awareness of the issue of critical implementation of what they have learnt, by inviting participants to reflect not only how they 'might develop their knowledge and skills beyond the course', but how they anticipate needing to adapt what they have learnt to their own teaching contexts. Such reflection through this assignment may serve as a useful prelude to the preceding discussion activity.

(3) Given that many of the respondents to this study describe significant, and often similar challenges adapting what they learnt on their ICC to their current teaching contexts, it is likely that they would benefit from a post-course teacher support network (e.g. online) to enable participants from a specific cohort to stay in touch, discuss successes, challenges and other issues after course completion, something that either Cambridge ELA or CPOs themselves could set up.

Over 20 years after Holliday wrote his seminal book 'Appropriate methodology and social context' (1994), generic international English language teaching certificates such as the Cambridge CELTA continue to gain in popularity among experienced teachers around the world. While this study supports what has long been argued for in the literature, that appropriacy of teaching methodology is closely connected to, and highly dependent on, social and pedagogical context (Canagarajah 1999; Holliday 1994), this study also, paradoxically, provides support for the much less fashionable view today that experienced teachers can benefit from generic training in CLT methodology. However, this latter finding should be interpreted with caution, given the specific nature of the CELTA qualification that is likely to influence course participants' practices more than other types of 'in-service' training. This includes the largely intrinsic motivation that teachers have for enrolling, the significant personal cost involved (a year's salary for many of the participants in this study), and the ability of the certificate itself to facilitate career progression for many NNESTs (Anderson 2018). Rightly or wrongly, it may be that this 'buy-in' to the CELTA methodology plays an important role in influencing the beliefs and practices of many experienced teachers who take it.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire: Changes 6 months later

Overall, how much did your teaching change as a result of the course? Put an 'X' in one box only:

	Not at all (I made no changes).
	A little (I made a small number of changes).
	Some aspects (I made a number of changes, but kept most things the same).
	Quite a lot (I made changes in most areas of my teaching).
	A lot (I made a lot of changes, but not everything).
	Completely (I changed everything).

Please write your answers to the next 6 questions, giving as much detail as possible. Please be honest in your answers:

(1) How has your teaching changed since the CELTA? (Here talk about general changes that you have noticed, either positive or negative)

(2) Please provide 3 examples of the most useful things that you learnt on the CELTA that you were able to implement in your own teaching:

(3) Are there any aspects of your teaching that you wanted to change after the CELTA, but you couldn't? If yes, provide 3 examples and explain why it wasn't possible to make each change.

(4) Are there any things that you tried to implement in your own teaching from the CELTA that had a negative effect of some kind? If yes, provide examples and explain what the negative effect was.

(5) Has any change occurred in your position/salary/status since the CELTA? Has it had a positive or negative effect on your own career and professional development?

(6) Are you happy that you did the CELTA? Please provide a reason for your answer.

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview schedule

Topic 1: Returning to the classroom after the CELTA

(1) First of all tell me a little bit about the context – Was it a class you already knew or were you teaching a new class? Was it in the same school or somewhere else?

(2) Would you say that you introduced what you learnt on the course gradually, or would you say that you changed your practice suddenly? Please provide examples.

(3) Did you find it necessary to experiment with things from the CELTA to see how well they'd work? How did it go?

Topic 2: Long-term changes since the course

(4) What were the most significant changes that you made to your teaching? How are they significant?

(5) Is there anything that you tried out, but then stopped doing? Why?

(6) Are there any things that you never tried to implement? Why?