

Re-reading Your CELTA Training Course: A Case Study of Four International Teachers Working at a Saudi HE Institution

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Abstract

This paper examines the philosophy and underlying assumptions of one of the most popular short TESOL teacher training courses, CELTA—Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. The findings from semi-structured interviews with four international teachers working at a Saudi HE institution that were designed to discover how these teachers viewed their CELTA training in retrospect are also presented. These findings show that the CELTA course was based mainly on a performance-based philosophy (competency-based training—CBT), which is an inappropriate approach for language teacher education. The paper also contends that it is inappropriate to realize language teacher education on a performance-based philosophy such as this, and that furthermore, in light of the neoliberal globalization of English education, the uncritical acceptance of language teachers with such qualifications in particular discourse communities may bring more contradictions to the already complex role a teacher is required to play.

Keywords: CELTA, TESOL, teacher education, competency-based, assessment

1. Introduction

English as a language of globalization, economy and politics plays a major role in today's global higher education (HE) milieu. Over the past decades, there has been a growing need for English as a foreign or second language programme across the world, and this has resulted in the very notion of Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) being turned into a profitable international enterprise (Barnawi & Phan, 2014; Walker, 2001). While issues related to commercialization, the discourse of marketization, neoliberalism, unethical practices, together with the cultural politics of Western TESOL training courses continue to be discussed and documented in the professional literature (Phan & Barnawi, 2015; Chowdry & Phan, 2014; Philippon, 2009; Pennycook, 1998; Widin, 2010), TESOL, as a profession, an international organization and a field of study, continues to develop rapidly within the global English language teaching (ELT) industry.

Specifically, taking short TESOL teacher training courses such as “ELT teacher training” courses, “SIT TESOL Certificate—School for International Training/Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages”, “CELTA—Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults”, “DELTA—Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages”—, and “Cert-TESOL courses” provided by leading mainstream institutions continues to be the best way of joining the ELT industry for English teachers worldwide. It has been estimated that, for instance, the University of Cambridge and Trinity College, London, have authorized over 400 international branches across the globe to offer CELTA and CertTESOL courses to TESOL teachers (Hobbs, 2013, p. 163). The certificates awarded at the end of these courses, which are often heavily colored by the popular discourses of marketization and commercialization, have been perceived by consumers (teachers) as a form of linguistic and economic capital. This is because although they offer consumers excellent career opportunities all over the world within a short period of time, they are geared solely toward the practical aspects (hands-on approach) of ELT.

Taking post-structural and socio-cultural theories as points of departure, this paper examines the philosophy and underlying assumptions of one of the most popular TESOL courses, CELTA. The findings of semi-structured interviews with four international teachers teaching at a Saudi HE institution that were designed to discover how these teachers perceived their CELTA training in retrospect are also presented. This paper argues that since the

CELTA training course is founded mainly on a performance-based philosophy (competency-based training—CBT), it is an inappropriate approach for language teacher education. It further contends that, in light of the neoliberal globalization of English education, the uncritical acceptance of language teachers with such qualifications may bring more contradictions to the already complex role a teacher is required to play in a given social and education context.

1.1 Conceptual Framework: The Use of CBT in TESOL Teacher Training Courses

Competency-based training (CBT) was developed “from a model of adult education developed in the 1950s by the American defense forces” (Murray, 2009, p. 18). It generally means “an educational movement that advocates defining educational goals in terms of precise, measurable description of the knowledge, skills and behaviours students should possess by the end of a course of study” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 14). This paradigm of education, which is heavily influenced by the behaviorist and positivist schools, has been widely implemented in technical/vocational education and training (Hodge, 2007; Mulcahy & Masters, 2000). In today’s neoliberal era, in which educational provision focuses more and more on accountability, efficiency and profit generation, CBT is used to help educators to measure the success of their prepackaged teaching materials, training programs and assessment practices “in terms of observable changes in the behavior of learners” (Murray, 2009, p. 18). It has been assumed that, in short intensive training courses, learners can master certain prepackaged and prescribed competencies and simultaneously adjust those competencies to the needs of their workplaces. Within this framework, “education and training become sites for the production of flexible workers and thus, [become] neoliberal subjects” (Lopez, 2015, p. 99). At the same time, the issues of lifelong learning and “*conceptual and experiential knowledge*” (Hager & Gonczi, 1993; Stevenson, 1993) have become linked to the demands and wants of the capital and labor markets.

There are also studies that have explored the neoliberal discourse and its far-reaching implications for English language instruction (see Davis & Phyak, 2015; Author; Lipman, 2011; Lopez, 2015; Pillar & Cho 2013). Researchers like Flores (2013) and Lopez (2015), for instance, warn the field of TESOL against the uncritical adoption of ‘plurilingualism’, on the grounds that it has neoliberal agenda and economic merits. Thus, Flores contends that the transition

“in the field toward multi- and plurilingualism parallels the production of a neoliberal subject that fits the political and economic context of our current socio-historical period — in particular, the desire for flexible workers and lifelong learners to perform service-oriented and technological jobs as part of a post-Fordist political economy” (Flores, 2013, p. 501).

These underlying ideologies and predominant discourses that project teachers as neoliberal subjects are clearly evident in many short TESOL teacher training courses, including CELTA, as I demonstrate in this study. I will also show (i) how this short training course, which is grounded in CBT philosophy, is designed in sets of easy to measure competencies, and (ii) how it is constructed by TESOL teacher training providers in such a way as to form professional standard for teacher qualifications. In this study, I use Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner and Cain’s (1998) notion of “*figured worlds*” to take this discussion further. The notion of a ‘figured world’ provides a conceptual understanding of “the social and discursive work that people engage in” (Lopez, 2015, p. 100) as they reflect on and justify the ways in which they take up or interpret their training experiences. According to Holland et al. (1998),

By ‘figured world’, then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by agents [teachers, educators, teacher trainers, etc,] who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state as moved by a specific set of forces. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52)

Since “figured worlds are characterized by particular cultural and discursive narratives that mediate actors’ participation and identity negotiation” in a given social space, as Lopez (2015, p. 100) remarks, the major intention of this study is to explore (i) the ways in which the four international teachers working at a Saudi HE institution made sense of their CELTA training course; (ii) what sort of outcomes or values they ascribed to the course, and (iii) how they interpreted and justified their experiences on this training course in retrospect. Within this theoretical construct, however, the cultural vocabulary and ideological values attached to the CELTA course differ in meanings across English as foreign or second language settings (Davis & Phyak, 2015). It is for these reasons that, in this study, I first closely examine the philosophy and underlying assumptions of the CELTA and then explore how it was viewed by its consumers in a specific context (Saudi Arabia in the case of this study).

1.2 CELTA training Course: A Critical Examination of its Philosophy and Underlying Assumptions

As clearly stated in its official document, the primary goals of the CELTA training course are to help 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”

(CELTA Syllabus, p. 2).

Elsewhere, it is stated that, “candidates who complete the course successfully can begin working in a variety of ESOL teaching contexts around the world” (ibid.). What is evident from the above stated aims of the CELTA course is that it prepares teachers “who have little or [no prior] experience of English language teaching to teach” English effectively anywhere in the world. It is based on a hands-on approach that assumes trainees will master required competencies through learning by doing. Specifically, the documents of this course state that the training is delivered through “a minimum of 120 contact hours, including supervised lesson planning, teaching practice, feedback on teaching”, classroom observations and consultation time. The participants in my research were assessed on 6 hours of teaching, 6 hours of observing experienced teachers’ classes, and a portfolio which they were required to submit, and that included all their written assignments and related materials. The course covers five main areas: “(1) learners and teachers, and the teaching and learning context, (2) language analysis and awareness, (3) language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing, (4) planning and resources for different teaching contexts, and (5) developing teaching skills and professionalism” (CELTA Syllabus, 2015, p. 2) (see the official CELTA website for further details).

In this short training programme, teacher training consists mainly of the transmission of prepackaged knowledge and skills. It is usually “focused on specific outcomes that can be achieved through a clear sequence of steps, commonly within a specified period of time” (Freeman, 1989, p. 39). Nearly 24 years ago, the creation of ELT teacher training programmes “on an assumption that, through mastery of discrete aspects of skills and knowledge teachers will improve their effectiveness in the classroom” was criticized by scholars like Freeman (1989). Nonetheless, the rhetoric that appears in the CELTA documents is based entirely on this assumption. Hobbs (2013) describes the shortcomings of such practices as follows:

“This notion of a starter pack survival course is most obvious in the intensive nature and rigorous timetable of the Certificate course as well as the limited number of teaching hours. In combination, these features paint a picture of the course as being a boot camp of sorts. The idea is that the content provided by the short course constitutes the bare essentials that will get a novice teacher through the first few months, beyond which she/he must acquire additional tools in order to develop” (p. 12).

Hence, it could be argued that, although foundation training such as lesson planning, teaching methodology, language elements and classroom observations are needed in language teacher education, these aspects cover only the basic practices and surface levels of English language teaching and learning (Brandt, 2006; Brown, 2007; Borg, 2005; Hobbs, 2013; Richards, 1990). Such short intensive training courses may not necessarily lead to effective classroom practices. The argument is that because the ancillary aspects of the teaching process (e.g., how people learn to teach, how to respond to learners’ emotional and social needs and the like) need to be carefully examined and better understood by language teacher educators. A close examination of the objectives of the CELTA training course, using Freeman’s model (1989), revealed that this course focuses mainly on the behavioral performance of teachers. Freeman’s model (1989), by contrast, defines teaching as “a decision-making process based on the categories of knowledge, skill, attitude and awareness” (27). Within this framework, each category is perceived as follows:

Knowledge: the what of teaching (subject matter; knowledge of students’ context)

Skills: the how of teaching (methods, techniques, materials, tools, activities)

Attitude: a stance towards self, activity and others that links interpersonal dynamics with external performance and behaviors

Awareness: triggers and monitors attention to knowledge, skills and attitude (a holistic function) (p. 36).

Table 1. Objectives of CELTA course compared with Freeman's (1989) model of language teaching

Course Objectives	CELTA	Constituent of language teaching
1	“Develop an awareness of language and a knowledge of the description of English and apply these in their professional practice	Knowledge
2	Develop an initial understanding of the contexts within which adults learn English, their motivations and the roles of the teacher and the learner	Knowledge
3	Develop familiarity with the principles and practice of effective teaching to adult learners of English	Knowledge
4	Develop basic skills for teaching adults in the language classroom	Skill
5	Develop familiarity with appropriate resources and materials for use with adult learners of English for teaching, testing and for reference	Knowledge
6	Identify opportunities for their own future development as professionals in the field”	Attitude
*Source	The above objectives were taken directly from www.studyelta.com	

The above table demonstrates that the objectives of CELTA courses are predominantly based on the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This training course actively reinforces the concept of a hands-on approach to ELT. It is also evident that the formation of this course was heavily influenced by the behaviorist and positivist origins of teacher education, pioneered by John Haycraft in the 1960s. Teachers are awarded the certificate on the basis of their successful acquisition of a set of “knowledge and skills” that include the following competencies:

- 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 Syllabus, 2015, p. 2).

However, the course does not necessarily prepare teachers to face the challenges they may come across in the various EFL learning settings, nor does it promote teacher autonomy. Throughout their assessment practices, they were assessed on the basis of their ability to plan lessons, demonstrate easy to measure teaching techniques and apply what they had learned, for instance were heavily utilized in order to assess the teachers’ competencies. It could be argued that language teacher training programs that pay attention only to immediately measurable competencies are likely have a washback effect on the content of the courses as well as their classroom application (Murray, 2009). What is more, because the CBT philosophy of teacher training is rigidly applied in this course, important aspects of TESOL that should be developed on teacher training programs, such as a critical awareness of the characteristics of different teaching contexts and a conceptualization of the social, cultural and linguistic peculiarities of learners, together with their educational traditions and their levels of literacy, are overlooked (Canagrajah, 2002; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Pennycook, 1998). We are indebted to Murray (2009, p. 22), who convincingly articulates that, in this era of emerging TESOL pedagogies, “performance indicators aligned to elements of competency sit more comfortably with the methods era than with pluralistic teaching and learning contexts”. Features of prescribed methods of teaching, for example, can be readily measured through performance indicators. It is relatively easy to assess how competent a teacher is at performing specific tasks (e.g., presenting a specific language structure, drilling, condemning the use of L1 in classrooms). Nevertheless, you cannot measure the timeframe and the ways in which teachers, as critical transformative practitioners, sustain their professional development, help learners take control of their own learning, and maximize learning opportunities, for example. Such teaching and learning abilities usually “span and underpin whole careers and are not demonstrable on demand” (Murray, 2009, p. 23). This performance-based approach to teacher education/training does not encourage a critical approach to EFL instruction, nor does it pay explicit attention to language awareness; instead, such language teacher training courses produce “teachers with a rationalized efficient method that is universally appropriate: McTeachers with

McQualifications” (Anderson, 2005, cited in Chowdhury, 2008, p. 342).

Despite the apparent shortcomings of such TESOL teacher training programs (i.e., CELTA), the number of such courses that are available is increasing in the global ELT industry, including Saudi Arabia. Through excerpts from semi-structured interviews, this paper examines how four international teachers working at a Saudi HE institution perceived their CELTA training in retrospect as a case study. Before I embark on this endeavor, below I will briefly describe the status of English education in Saudi Arabia.

1.3 The Status of English Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Over the past decades, English education has gained enormous attention in the Arabian oil-rich Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. The recent tumbling oil-prices, together with the Saudi government’s shift from an oil-based to a knowledge-based economy, have played a major role in increasing the desire to import Western products and services into the country. In the field of education, local universities have been aggressively revising their English curricula, visions and mission statements, and at the same time internationalizing their higher academic programmes in order to promote mass literacy in English (Phan & Barnawi, 2015).

The strong desire for internationalization and for Western forms of education has simultaneously turned the country into fertile soil for the dissemination of Western TESOL products and services. English has been offered as a core subject in the 4th grade of primary school. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has endorsed intensive preparatory-year English programmes at local HE institutions in the country in order to help first-year college/university students to enhance both their linguistic and communicative competencies. English has become a medium of instruction at most public and private colleges/universities across the country, and areas such as science, medicine, engineering and information technology are taught exclusively in English (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2015).

2. Methodology

This small-scale case study, using semi-structured interviews, investigated how four international English teachers (Amer, Tony, Baha and Ali [pseudonyms]) working at a Saudi HE institution viewed their TESOL training experiences in retrospect. It also explored the extent to which CELTA helped them play crucial roles in teaching and to respond to the emerging demands of ELT under the neoliberal economy. The data analysis was based on the major themes that appeared in the CELTA course: “(1) learners and teachers, and the teaching and learning context, (2) language analysis and awareness, (3) language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing, (4) planning and resources for different teaching contexts, and (5) developing teaching skills and professionalism” (CELTA Syllabus, 2015, p. 2) (see the official CELTA website for further details).

Prior to the interviews, consent forms were collected from all four participants and they were given pseudonyms, as shown above. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. All four participants were experienced teachers and had completed their CELTA training in their early careers. Table 2 below provides a comprehensive description of the backgrounds of the participants in this study.

Table 2. A comprehensive description of the backgrounds of the participants in this study

Name	Age	Nationality	Educational backgrounds	Former posts	Current post
Amir	45	Pakistani	English literature, CELTA and MA TESOL	Language teacher	English language teacher
Tony	40	British	BSc in Communication and Marketing, CELTA & MA TESOL	Advertising Firm	English language teacher
Baha	31	Pakistani	MA in Literature, MA in Political Sciences, and CELTA	Language teacher in Oman	English language teacher
Ali	47	Pakistani	English Language & Literature, CELTA	Language teacher	English language teacher

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 CELTA as a Quick Access Route to Global Career Opportunities

The findings of this study showed that all the four participants had taken their CELTA training courses for instrumental reasons: namely, “access to a better job”, “to teach English in the Middle East”, and “secure lucrative job opportunities”. Amir plainly stated that his former MA in English literature obtained in Pakistan was “a perfect and acceptable qualification for English language teaching at both public schools as well as higher education levels in his country”. However, he also stated that “financial gain”, “market forces” and “personal desires to work overseas” were the primary reasons for his taking the CELTA training course in 2007. He added that CELTA can “give you the edge in the market” and “you will be regarded as a trained teacher”. Likewise, Tony left his former job in the United Kingdom because “it was quite a parasitic career”, and he wanted to do something “worthwhile”. He did his CELTA training, in 2003, because “it is widely known” and needed in non-English speaking countries, and at the same time “you can get a job very easily”. Likewise, Ali reported his experience as follows: “I decided to do CELTA in 2007 because my former qualifications and experience could not help me to master teaching skills and get a better job”. He added that, “wherever I applied for a job in the Middle East, CELTA was required. Thus, I decided to take my CELTA training course”. In the same vein, Baha said that access to a “better job opportunity” and “job security” were main reasons for his taking the CELTA training course in 2012.

What is evident from the above responses is that “financial gain” was at the top of the participants’ employability and mobility agenda. These findings also consolidate the findings of Green (2005) and Hobbs (2013); the participants in both studies gave their primary reasons for completing their CELTA training courses as being to obtain a “better job opportunity” and as a “financial investment”. These instrumental and pragmatic reasons for obtaining Western TESOL qualifications for the sake of financial returns have also been widely discussed and documented in the field of TESOL (see Hobbs, 2013; Liu, 1998; Raqib & Phan, 2014; Singh, 2010; Walker, 2001 for more details on these issues).

3.2 Participants’ Views of the CELTA Training Course

The participants’ views on the element of language teaching in the CELTA course, coupled with its pedagogical practices, seem to be mixed, ranging from “deceptive”, “shallow”, “good –and bad”, to lacking “critical aspects of language teaching” and “massively practical”. At the early stage, Amir was astonished when his CELTA trainer plainly revealed the limitations of the course and warned him not to become overexcited. He narrated his first experience of the training as follows: “during the interview, the trainer told me, ‘if you think that this course of training will bring about a big change in your teaching context, then it is not going to happen’”. This statement was very disappointing for Amir, who had paid his money and planned to enter the market via a short cut, like many other international English teachers (Green, 2005; Hobbs, 2013). Nevertheless, he justified his decision on the grounds that the desire to strengthen “the face value of his CV” and “the market forces” that attached a high value to this type of training certificate (CELTA) had “pushed him to take” the course, although this decision had been a painful one. Nevertheless, this instrumental and pragmatic decision by Amir was rewarded, as he reported in retrospect: “I was turned down once after applying for a teaching job in the UAE. However, after I had my CELTA I found many job opportunities” in the Middle East.

After teaching English in Saudi Arabia for nearly 10 years, Amir strongly believed that his CELTA course had secured a lucrative teaching position for him, though it had not equipped him well from teacher education points of view. He believed that the course had not helped him to critically address issues of “motivation”, “teaching and learning styles”, and the role of “learners’ L1” in classrooms while teaching in Saudi Arabia. He also remarked that the course did not “offer much in the area of language awareness”. Instead, it addressed these issues at a “very basic level”. As far as the language skills are concerned he felt that the course had given him “a structure and framework to teach in the classroom”. In a similar way to Amir, Baha recalled his experience on the CELTA course as follows:

“I decided to do CELTA because my former education did not help me to master teaching skills”. “When I was teaching at higher education colleges of technology in Oman, I was not sufficiently trained to teach language skills. Thus, I wanted to improve my job”.

On the contrary, Tony, who had completed his training in 2003, noted that the trainer did not pay much attention to the issues of “context” or “language analysis and awareness” during the course. He acknowledged that “language elements and analysis” were important; however, he assumed that it was because in his cohort “all the trainees were native speakers of English, [that] the trainer did not focus much on language awareness or analysis”. He added that, “the issue of motivation” as discussed on the course was superficial for one main

reason: “when you are practising your teaching in CELTA, you are teaching volunteers who do not want to be there. I think there is a major problem with the design and curriculum of the course”. He also felt that the course should have given him “more about how to deal with students from different cultures, backgrounds and motivation”. However, he had had “a lot of [opportunities for] teaching practice and reflection”. Likewise, Baha stated that the course did not deal with “language elements”, “culture” or “multilingual challenges in classrooms” in any detail; instead, the course touched upon these issues at only rather “superficial levels”.

The above findings suggest that there were inconsistencies in the delivery of the CELTA course, in that different groups of trainees had been exposed to different content and different areas of English language teaching during their training courses. However, all the trainees had been awarded the same certificate at the end of their training, thereby constructing them as qualified teachers who can help English as a foreign or second language learners all over the world improve their linguistic and communicative competency. In this sense, issues of “respect [ing] the diversity of cultural patterns and expectations among our students, while utilising the best methodological approaches available to accomplish course goals and objectives” (Brown, 2007, p. 518) are neglected.

Tony reported that he had a lot of exposure to the “communicative language teaching approach” as well as “task-based teaching” during his CELTA training course. At the same time, however, he had not had enough training in “professional development” or in “teaching writing skills” because it was “a very short course”. He felt that the training had helped him a lot in areas like “lesson planning” and “materials adaptation”, as well as “the nuts and bolts of day-to-day teaching practice”. However, his view changed somewhat after doing his MA TESOL: “I noticed that the theoretical part was completely missing. After doing my MA TESOL, I believe CELTA is worth it because it prepares you to be a practitioner”. He added that, “my MA TESOL helped me to see the limitations of CELTA in general and of the communicative language teaching approach in particular”. According to Murray (2009, p. 26), in language teacher training programmes, “the role of the teacher educator involved explaining and demonstrating the best way to teach”. The CELTA training courses, however, require trainees to master certain sets of behaviour, skills, classroom practices and teaching strategies regardless of their relevance to the immediate needs of individuals. This contradicts the crucial role that a language teacher should play in the post-method era in regard to issues of “particularity”, “peculiarity” and “possibility”, as has long been discussed by scholars like Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 552).

“Teacher education must therefore be conceived of not as the experience and interpretation of a predetermined, prescribed pedagogic practice, but rather as an ongoing dialogically constructed entity involving two or more critically reflective interlocutors” (ibid.).

In fact, the underlying assumption of the CELTA training course echoes what Widdowson (1990, cited in Block & Gray, 2016) argued in his critiques of initial teacher preparation courses in the neoliberal era, including CELTA and the Postgraduate Certificate of Education-Modern Foreign Languages. According to Widdowson, “Training is a process of preparation towards the achievement of a range of outcomes which are specified in advance. This involves the acquisition of goal-oriented behaviour which is more or less formulaic in character and whose capacity for accommodation to novelty is, therefore, very limited. Training, in this view, is directed at providing solutions to a set of predictable problems and sets a premium on unreflecting expertise. It is dependent on the stability of existing states of affairs since it assumes that future situations will be predictable replicas of those in the past (p. 486).”

Ali remarked that when he started teaching in 2007, he “felt that there was something missing”. “I wanted to have a better job and wherever I applied in the Middle East CELTA was required; so I decided to apply for it in 2012”. After taking nearly four years to complete his CELTA, Ali continued to believe that CELTA is “a must qualification for teaching”. He described his experience as follows:

“before CELTA, I used to believe that I was a really good teacher, [but] after CELTA I learned that I was not a good teacher any more. I was not doing anything useful for my learners. I realize that now I am a better teacher. It gave me a good experience to handle my classrooms. There should be no learners left without proper attention”.

In addition to the above views that were shared by all four participants, they also seemed to have different views pertaining to the materials and pedagogies used in their CELTA training. Tony felt that, “I did not know much about teaching at the time I did my CELTA. But now my teaching philosophy is grounded in the experiences I had on the CELTA course”. He added that practical activities like “lesson planning”, “how to introduce my topic”, and “warm-ups” for his tasks were the most valuable aspects of the CELTA training course. However, he thought that the assessment of the course “was set in a specific and systematic way of teaching” and that this might “hinder creativity. Additionally, creating a lesson plan was one of the most difficult parts of his CELTA

experience, as he reported: “My lesson plan sometimes goes out of the window because the classroom realities always dictate something new to me”.

These findings suggest that Tony was unaware of the fact that one of the pedagogical aims of a lesson plan is to *help* his class, not to “control it”. Additionally, as [Barnawi & Phan, 2014] argue, “classroom realities often do not correspond to any recognizable method [or lesson plan]; in other words, a teacher might commence his class with a specific method in mind, but then might be influenced by classroom contingencies to alter his strategies as he goes on” (p. 11). Importantly, competency-based courses such as CELTA do not necessarily prepare language teachers to face emerging unpredictable challenges in different teaching-learning settings, as scholars like Murray (2009) and Hobbs (2013) argue.

Amir remarked that the CELTA course was “massively practical” and “the teaching practicum part” was the most useful part of it: “it validates your teaching practice”. “I have been observed by experts”. It “builds a foundation for lesson plan” and “gives you the skills to apply them in the classroom immediately”. However, he regretted the fact that “theoretical understanding was not part of the CELTA course”. As he put it, “I have many gaps and knowledge when it comes to ‘why’? ‘Is it worth it?’” This might be expected “because the requirement of the CELTA course was A2 level”. Amir went on to list the following issues as the most challenging aspects of the CELTA training course: (a) “the intensive nature of the course”; (b) the “difficulty of using your teaching practice, as an experienced teacher”; (c) “inconsistency between trainers when delivering CELTA materials—some trainers focus more on the communicative language teaching approach, as some of my colleagues told me”; (d) “the superficial level of assessment practices”; and (e) a lack of theoretical understanding—“people are teaching, but [they] do not know why, how or the reasons behind their practices”. On the contrary, Baha believed that the course had helped him to “understand how to teach English in an intensive manner” and that it had “increased his confidence”. It had also helped him to “master how to teach the four skills in a systematic way”. He liked the fact that there were focuses on “lesson planning”, “classroom observation” and “self-assessment”. At the same time, he expressed his concern that “there were no theories of language teaching or second language acquisition” taught in the course. This is exactly what scholars like Biggs (1994, cited in Murray, 2009) warn us about regarding the application of the competency-based model in TESOL teacher education. In this sense, trainers tend to

“consider the process rather than the products of learning, identifying hazards in the tendency of the quantitative approach taken in CBT to ignore psychological [pedagogical and socio-cultural] issues. It is argued that such reductionist and behaviourist assessment takes place at the expense of holism and encourages students to simply reproduce learned knowledge and procedures, leading to a sacrifice of complexity and depth” (p. 19).

Similar to the other three participants, Ali said that the CELTA course was useful, as it was “very intensive”, and involved “a lot of practice” as well as opportunities for “working independently”, “designing lessons” and “getting feedback from colleagues”. It also encouraged “time-management” and promoted the “culture of accepting criticism”. His major concerns, however, were that the course had “less focus on theory”, “the time was very short” and it involved “doing a lot of things” (e.g., reading, research, lesson preparation and the like). It also lacked “real practice” and “supervision”. Like Tony, Ali reported that the teaching practice was the most challenging task for him, “because you have to design lessons and then you have to face critical feedback from your colleagues and two trainers”. These findings provide additional confirmation of the narrow views of competency-based teacher training models (e.g., CELTA), in particular in failing to recognize “the underlying wisdom” that TESOL teachers are required to possess. According to Murray (2009), within CBT in TESOL,

“features that cannot be operationalised within the model are simply ignored. [Also, CBT] is a building block model of learning that assumes the candidate acquires discrete units of competency through training packages, and that these spontaneously accrete into a competent human resource tailored to the demands of the workplace” (pp. 24-25).

4. Concluding Remarks and Pedagogical Implications

The case study described here examined the philosophy and underlying assumptions of one of the most popular TESOL courses, CELTA. The findings from semi-structured interviews centered on how four international teachers working at a Saudi HE institution viewed their CELTA training in retrospect were also presented. The findings show that the CELTA training course is based mainly on CBT philosophy, and is thus an unsuitable approach for language teacher education. Specifically, the major challenge of this type of course for teacher education lies in “its failure to capture essential elements of what a teacher can know and judge” (Murray, 2009, p. 27). In this view, “the nature and outcomes of the learning experience of a student teacher can actually be adversely affected by the constraints of CBT” (ibid). The findings also show that the course lacks “criticality in

teaching” “flexibility” and “adaptability” to different English language teaching contexts, thereby leaving international teachers with various pedagogical challenges in actual classroom settings (see the case of Tony above, for example). Another important finding reported in this study is that this short-term training course does not help teachers to develop a critical consciousness and a meta-pedagogical awareness of their teaching practices. They are thus compelled to apply certain prescribed teaching methods, without any theoretical understanding, in their classrooms, as reported above by all the four participants. Such an obvious gap faced by international teachers as well as by the language teacher educators on this course means that “a greater understanding of the links between language and culture and between teaching methods and context, as well as a healthier respect for and awareness of the variations in English found in local and international contexts” is needed, as Hobbs (2013, p. 164) argues. Despite its shortcomings, it is inevitable that courses like the CELTA course will be popular with would-be teachers, in light of market demands and their own desires to further their careers. In this sense, “the self is seen as a bundle of skills in which individuals invest in a rational and calculating way” (Block & Gray, 2016, p. 483). Brown (2005) summarizes this view nicely as follows:

“[today] neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life ... [and i]t figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’ – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions (p. 43)”.

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