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Hungarian EFL Teachers' Experiences of CELTA

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Abstract

The Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) is widely recognized as the most prominent English language teaching qualification. Although originally aimed at Native Speakers (NS), CELTA has become popular amongst non-native speaker (NNS) teachers in recent years due to its worldwide reputation. There is limited research focusing on NNS teachers' CELTA experiences, which is why this study explored the CELTA experiences of Hungarian English as a Foreign Language teachers.

This qualitative study involved reflective narratives and semi-structured interviews with three teachers, which were analysed using thematic analysis. The obtained data revealed that participants had similar perceptions of CELTA to teachers from other parts of the world (Anderson, 2016, 2018, 2020; Aydin et al., 2016; Tang, 2020). For instance, they found CELTA useful for enhancing their teaching skills and improving job prospects. Additionally, this study helped identify new reasons for enrolment, such as seeking a challenge and new inspiration. It also had implications for CELTA trainers and training providers by highlighting the challenges and experiences of non-native teachers.

Introduction

CELTA is an internationally recognised teaching qualification that trains candidates to teach English language without any teaching experience/background within one month. CELTA has become one of the most widely recognised qualifications in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), which is shown by its presence as a minimum requirement in three quarters of ELT job advertisements worldwide (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2018). Historically, CELTA has been associated with being a course for native speakers of English (Ferguson and Donno, 2003), and therefore has been mostly researched by focusing on trainees from Western anglophone countries (see Jenvey, 2022). However, limited research has focused on the CELTA experiences of trainees in non-native English-speaking countries. Two studies have focused on non-native trainees' experiences globally (Anderson, 2016, 2018), whilst some studies explored the Turkish (Aydin et al., 2016), Egyptian (Anderson, 2020) and Japanese (Tang, 2020) contexts. Given the scarce literature in the European context, it was found worthwhile to explore the CELTA experiences of trainees in this area. This study was specified on the Hungarian context due to the importance of quality English language teacher training in Hungary. As the local language (Hungarian) is not widely spoken outside of Hungary, it is crucial that English language education is at a high standard to encourage international connections via the use of English as a *lingua franca*.

In order to improve CELTA, which is having growing popularity amongst Hungarian teachers; the aim of this research project was to gain further insight into the experiences of Hungarian CELTA graduates by looking at their reasons for taking the course and how useful they have found it. It aimed to explore the efficiency of CELTA from Hungarian teachers' perspective, by looking at trainees' motivation and challenges in relation to CELTA.

Literature review

Foreign language teacher training

Up until the 1970s, Teacher Training (TT) in foreign language education in Western countries focused primarily on the teaching content, which meant knowing the subject language well (Graves, 2009). Since then, foreign language TT curricula have gradually become more inclusive of pedagogy, which meant equipping trainees with not only content-knowledge, but with the practical skills to transmit that knowledge to students (Farrell, 2021). With the globalisation of English, different teaching contexts started to require different approaches to training and qualifications. For instance, in a primary school context in Europe, teachers are generally required to have gained state-recognised qualified teacher status through a university degree, whilst adult courses in language schools may only require a short-term qualification (Barduhn and Johnson, 2009). These different contextual expectations of teachers have influenced TT curricula due to the different needs in such diverse teaching settings (Freeman, 2009). Farrell (2021) states that the level of emphasis on theory and practice varies according to different kinds of TT.

Although various scholars discussed the irrelevance of "nativeness" in foreign language TT (Farrell, 2021; Moussu and Llorca, 2008), some research show that English language proficiency is considered as a crucial factor for Non-Native Speakers' (NNS) professional training (Berry, 1990; Murdoch, 1994). Consequently, academics have found that TT for NNSs may lack sufficient training on the pedagogy aspect of the content-pedagogy dichotomy due to the crucial need for achieving proficiency in the language to become successful language teachers (Moussu, 2006; Randal and Thornton, 2001). For instance, Tang (2020) found that qualified non-native English-speaking teachers with many years of experience may seek additional courses to improve their methodological knowledge through pedagogy-focused courses, such as CELTA.

In Barduhn and Johnson's (2009) review of the issues around certification in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry, an array of qualifications was evaluated with their relevance to professional aspects (such as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), CELTA, DELTA (Diploma in English Teaching for Adults), BA, MA, MEd, PhD, etc.). One of their conclusions was that many teachers begin their journey in the ELT industry after completing 1-month introductory courses, which are usually referred to as TEFL certificates (Barduhn and Johnson, 2009). In the next section, I will review one of these TEFL courses, namely the CELTA.

CELTA

According to the official syllabus (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2022), CELTA is

an introductory course for candidates who have little or no previous English language teaching experience. It may also be suitable for candidates with some experience but little previous training (p.3).

It is a 120-hour long course, completed full-time in four/five weeks or part-time over 2-3 months. The minimum requirements to enrol include 1) having English language proficiency at least at Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR) C1 level (proficient), 2) being at least 18-years-old, and 3) having an education that would be required to enter higher education.

The syllabus covers the following five main themes:

- A - learners and teachers, and the teaching and learning context
- B - language analysis and awareness
- C - language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing
- D - planning and resources for different teaching contexts
- E - developing teaching skills and professionalism.

(Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2022)

Assessment is carried out throughout the whole duration of the course, and it includes written assignments and six hours of observed Teaching Practice (TP). Overall, it is a course that approaches TT in practical and dynamic ways to accommodate the trainees, who have diverse backgrounds and reasons for taking the course (Scott, 2007).

CELTA has both positive and negative aspects, which have been highlighted by researchers (Barnawi, 2016; Borg, 2002; Hobbs, 2016; Kanowski, 2004; Mackenzie, 2014; Stanley and Murray, 2013). On the one hand, CELTA addresses the content-pedagogy dichotomy in a disproportionate way. In the syllabus, four themes (A, C, D and E) focus on pedagogy and only one theme (B) focuses on language. Hobbs (2013) pointed out to the superficiality in language knowledge and awareness in TEFL courses, arguing that 120-hour courses are not suitable for equipping trainees with sufficient understanding of linguistic knowledge, despite it being crucial for second language teachers. Moreover, Stanley and Murray (2013) concluded that CELTA may deliver what can be expected from a 4-week course, but it does not provide sufficient content knowledge about the language, which would be crucial for both NS and NNS candidates. In this vein, it is worth re-mentioning that CELTA was originally designed for NS of English language (Ferguson and Donno, 2003) in an era when a NS language knowledge was considered the ideal (Phillipson, 1992). CELTA's Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is defined as an approach to teaching EFL with a focus on building communicative competence in students (Littlewood, 1981), emphasises an English-only classroom policy, which is particularly suitable for monolingual English NSs (Howatt, 1984; Anderson, 2020). However, due to the spread of English as a lingua franca and the disputed ownership over English language nowadays, such arguments are less relevant and in fact disputed (Houghton and Rivers, 2013).

Furthermore, arguments remain that CELTA does not provide suitable preparation to be considered a TT leading to a teaching qualification due to its brevity and highly procedural approach (Stanley and Murray, 2013). Although CELTA's learning outcomes may help trainees become English language teachers, the acquired teaching skills may only be useful in contexts similar to the TP sessions of CELTA (Barnawi, 2016). In various subfields of the ELT industry, such as EAP (English for Academic Purposes) or CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), CELTA qualified teachers may not be able to successfully deliver lessons in the environments that require more in-depth understanding of both language and teaching methodology (Ferguson and Donno, 2003).

Nevertheless, CELTA has some beneficial components and aspects. Research about CELTA trainees' experiences found that the TP is a highly beneficial and much-valued element of the course (Borg, 2002). Kanowski (2004) added that the real value behind those six hours does not necessarily lie in the teaching itself, but in the self-reflection on trainees' professional behaviour, which therefore creates a bridge between professional practice and pedagogical knowledge. Consequently, with a sensitive consideration of its position on the wide spectrum of teacher education and teacher development, CELTA could be regarded as a useful course (Mackenzie, 2018).

Non-Native Speakers experiences of CELTA

The first study that explicitly considered NNS teachers' experiences of CELTA was conducted by Anderson (2016) who explored the difference between NS and NNS in their perceptions of initial training courses (ITCs), such as CELTA and Trinity College London CertTESOL. The study found that NNSs tend to complete ITCs for improved job prospects, but they receive less relevant support than NSs. NNS participants mostly hoped to learn about innovative methodology, which may be incompatible with their future teaching contexts in their home countries. Also, it was found that experienced NNSs benefit less from ITCs' language awareness component due to their previous teaching and TT experiences. Consequently, Anderson (2016) concluded that ITCs are not suitable for the majority of NNS candidates and suggested that an alternative course could be more beneficial to them, despite the overall satisfaction demonstrated by NNSs. Overall, although this was a pioneering study due to researching NNSs in relation to CELTA, it did not provide in-depth explanations for some findings, which Anderson (2016) acknowledged by recommending further qualitative research.

Anderson (2018) further investigated NNSs teachers' experiences of ITCs with a focus on professional development. In this study, he found that participants' main reasons for taking an ICT were to improve their career prospects and their classroom practice, which is consistent with his previous findings in 2016. Reflecting on native speakerism (the ideology that considers NSs superior in language teaching), participants thought that a widely recognised ITC, such as CELTA, could be a qualification that somewhat removes the barrier between NSs and NNSs in hiring practices. In addition, Anderson found that the most useful element was the TP in conjunction with reflective feedback sessions. These findings could be connected to the strengths of CELTA

discussed by Borg (2002) and Kanowski (2004), such as the focus on practical teaching experience via reflective practice. However, some experienced teachers reported that incorporating new elements into their internalised teaching style was challenging (Anderson, 2018). The incompatibility of monolingual and highly communicative CELTA methodology with participants' future teaching contexts was another issue for some participants (Anderson, 2018), which was one of CELTA's limitation argued by Barnawi (2016) and Ferguson and Donno (2003). Moreover, although ITCs led to career promotions in some cases, participants felt that it did not help to obtain roles that were impacted by discriminatory NS-only policies (Anderson, 2018). It is worthwhile mentioning that participants had not heard of Cambridge's in-service courses, which might have been more useful (Anderson, 2018). These courses, however, have since been discontinued and replaced with courses, such as DELTA (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2023). Overall, Anderson (2018) provided multiple recommendations to tailor ITCs to become more suitable for NNSs (such as to be more inclusive of experienced teachers' expertise). He also concluded that despite its limitations, CELTA remained a positive experience for NNS trainees, who agreed that CELTA is "like a passport" in the international context of ELT (Anderson, 2018, p.6).

Contrastingly, a study in the Middle East has come to different conclusions. Aydin et al. (2016) investigated how CELTA is perceived by Turkish teachers with different teaching experience and with ELT and non-ELT-related educational background. This study, which involved 44 participants, revealed that CELTA is beneficial for trainees with different educational backgrounds. Although the study found that candidates with non-ELT education background and little teaching experience benefit the most from CELTA, the six hours of TP remains insufficient for them. For experienced teachers, however, the TP provided an opportunity to evaluate and reflect on their existing teaching style. Experienced teachers had previous knowledge about ELT theories, and therefore could focus more thoroughly on the improvement of their teaching style (Aydin et al., 2016). All participants reported that CELTA's feedback and reflective approach makes it a useful course, and that it was an internationally valuable certificate. These findings seem to oppose Anderson's (2016) conclusion by demonstrating that CELTA can indeed be a suitable choice for professional development for experienced NNS teachers. Aydin et al.'s (2016) results are persuasive because an in-depth explanation of the participants' experiences is provided through looking at the influence of their teaching and education backgrounds. However, the contextual specification makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions for NNS teachers because depending on each country/region, teachers might experience different approaches to teacher training, which then impacts their practice (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012).

Anderson conducted another qualitative study looking into NNS teachers' perceptions of changes in their classroom practices six months after completing CELTA (Anderson, 2020). In contrast to his previous studies involving a global cohort of participants (Anderson, 2016; Anderson 2018), he focused this project on Egyptian teachers. The study revealed that CELTA graduates intend to incorporate communicative and learner-centred approaches into their teaching. However, it is crucial that the application of CELTA's teaching approach on specific teaching contexts is

accounted for during the training, which is a finding that continually emerged in his previous studies (Anderson, 2016, 2018). It was also found that teachers' self-confidence both in the classroom and in the international job market was increased further due to completing CELTA (Anderson, 2020). This study provided an insight into the Middle Eastern context previously initiated by Aydin et al. (2016).

Another study by Tang (2020) explored three Japanese teachers' perceptions of CELTA in terms of usefulness and implementation in their teaching practices. By interviewing teachers, who had experience with both young learners and adults; it was found that their perceptions are consistent with previous studies (Anderson, 2018, 2020; Aydin et al., 2016) for three reasons: 1) CELTA's most valued element is the TP, 2) the relevance of linguistic knowledge teaching during CELTA is not significant due to the trainees' previous teacher training, and 3) they aimed to incorporate CELTA's core teaching techniques into their teaching settings by applying a more inductive approach. This is a crucial study because it explored NNS teachers' experiences who had previous training in East Asia.

Research Questions

Based on the existing literature about the CELTA program, it has been found significant to look at teachers' experiences in a European country (Hungary) to contribute to the holistic understanding of NNSs experiences of CELTA. Therefore, this research aimed to contribute to the globally available research on NNSs' experiences of CELTA by answering the following Research Questions (RQ):

RQ1: What were the participants' reasons to take CELTA?

RQ2: How useful did the participants find CELTA?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach because it aimed to investigate in detail people's experiences of teacher training. Two research methods were used. Participants were asked to write a reflective narrative, which is a method that can provide a written account of people's personal perceptions about their experiences. This was followed by individual, online, semi-structured interviews, which is a method that involves engaging conversations with participants to gather in-depth qualitative data. The reflective narratives were used to gain a general understanding of participants' pre-CELTA TT and teaching backgrounds. This research method helped develop the interview questions, allowing the researcher to collect even more in-depth data.

The research involved three participants, who were chosen via purposive sampling to ensure the relevance of the data collection to the RQs. There were three sampling criteria:

To self-identify as Hungarian and as a user of English as a foreign language,

To have completed CELTA successfully and

To have at least six months of EFL teaching experience after completing CELTA.

Table 1 providing information about the participants can be found below.

Participant pseudonyms	Year of CELTA	Educational background	Teaching experience (context)	Teaching experience (years)
Erzsébet	2015	Teacher training in EFL	Primary, Secondary, Further Education, Adults, Business English, Teacher training	Over 20 years
Margit	2018	Teacher training in EFL and Geography	Primary, Secondary, Higher Education	Over 20 years
Ilona	2012	Teacher Training and MA in EFL	Further Education, Higher Education, Business English, Exam Preparation, One-to-one Tutoring	Over 25 years

Table 1. Information about participants.

Data collection began with participant recruitment via social media. Participants were first asked to write a reflective narrative on their previous TT and teaching experiences in no more than 300 words. Once the reflective narratives were received by the researcher, a time was agreed for the interviews. The interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes. Interviews were automatically transcribed by Microsoft Teams software and then reviewed and edited by the researcher to correct transcription errors, as well as to improve readability by removing false starts, repetitions and unnecessary fillers. When the researcher identified an ambiguous comment during the editing process, follow-up emails were sent to the participants for clarification. The researcher wrote up the findings and sent the corresponding section to the participants to conduct member checking, which is a crucial process in qualitative research to ensure the credibility of the findings. After member checking, all sensitive data was permanently destroyed. The collected data was manually analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). Through engaging with the narratives and transcripts and identifying codes, the following themes were identified: seeking novelty, better career prospects, teaching methodology, teacher training methodology and collaboration.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges

This study was guided by the British Association of Applied Linguistics Good Practice Guidelines (2021) and the Association of Internet Researchers Ethical Guidelines 3.0 (2019). Some of the key

ethical considerations were obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and storing all sensitive data on an encrypted cloud space.

One ethical challenge was encountered by the researcher. Some interview questions could potentially bring up memories of negative experiences due to discriminations faced by NNSs in the ELT industry (Selvi, 2011). To avoid this risk, the researcher emphasized to participants at the beginning of the interview that they did not have to answer any questions that would make them feel uncomfortable.

Findings and Discussion

Seeking Novelty

Some participants recalled looking for new inspiration and/or a new challenge as a reason to take CELTA. Firstly, Erzsébet stated in her reflective narrative that “[she] wanted to gain first-hand practical experience on how to find inspiration again”. She further expanded on this reasoning in the interview:

‘I had been teaching for some 14-15 years at the time and felt that I didn’t really have the same drive I had when I started teaching, and I really wanted to find new ways to get back this inspiration again [...] to get back to teaching because that was a period in my life when I was contemplating giving up teaching or doing something else’

(Erzsébet, interview).

This could potentially be explained by experiencing teacher burnout. Khani and Mirzaee (2015) found that EFL teachers may experience burnout due to low self-efficacy in their teaching by failing to engage students. In Erzsébet’s case, CELTA was a tool to tackle demotivation after over a decade of teaching; and resulted in acquiring new classroom management techniques, which increased student engagement.

Secondly, Margit decided to do CELTA due to its reputation of being a challenging course. She recalled hearing about CELTA being a particularly difficult and demanding programme from her co-workers, and as she described herself as an audacious person, she wanted to experience it herself:

‘I actually wanted to do [CELTA] because I heard so much about the fact that it's so hard. So, I was wondering what can be so hard’

(Margit, interview).

Such reputation may have stemmed from her co-worker's experiences of CELTA, as various studies identified the high level of challenge associated with CELTA (Anderson, 2018; Borg, 2002). Margit further explained her challenge-seeking character, which suggests that this finding may be regarded as a personal reason to take CELTA.

Better Career Prospects

A crucial finding of the data collection was CELTA's role in having better career prospects. This was both a reason for and a result of obtaining CELTA. Furthermore, it elicited perceptions about the value of CELTA in the ELT job market.

Firstly, teaching abroad was the mostly associated notion with CELTA amongst the three participants. For instance, Ilona recognised that CELTA was considered a certificate with which “you can become an English teacher anywhere in the world”, which is a perception that emerged in Barnawi's (2016) research as well. As one of her dreams was going to the UK to teach on a pre-session summer course, it seemed that CELTA would help realising her ambitions of getting hired abroad. Further to completing CELTA, she taught on multiple summer courses, which she then associated with a sense of achievement in her career as demonstrated by the following extracts:

‘[CELTA] was good for fulfilling my dream. I have been to these pre-session courses three summers...’

(Ilona, interview)

‘...how can you be [prouder] of yourself than by saying that I have taught English language in the United Kingdom?’

(Ilona, interview).

Although one of Anderson's (2018) conclusions was that CELTA is not useful for finding employment abroad for the majority of NNS teachers, the findings of this study, despite the small sample size, can question this conclusion because not only Ilona, but Margit also reported success in securing EFL teaching jobs outside of Hungary. Margit recalled CELTA as a key to securing jobs in the international labour market. In her experience as a foreign teacher in the Middle East, the employers are “[keener] to keep you as a teacher” if you have CELTA, regardless of other qualifications and experience. This was especially relevant because around the time when she was considering CELTA, she noticed a tendency towards hiring local teachers over foreign ones. Although CELTA was not a reason for finding a job abroad, it was deemed beneficial in keeping her job. Participants in Anderson's (2018) research reported being made redundant unless they take CELTA, which is similar to Margit's experience towards the CELTA-dominated certification for securing a job. The experiences of Ilona and Margit provide an example for CELTA's usefulness for better career prospects for NNS teachers.

CELTA was considered as a tool for international job opportunities by Erzsébet too. The first time Erzsébet had considered doing CELTA was when she had plans for moving abroad and was looking at ways in which she could be hired as an English teacher in the Middle East. Ilona also mentioned that by getting CELTA-certified, she had anticipated a higher salary both for having the opportunity to move abroad and for being able to apply for vacancies with better remuneration locally. These findings confirm the conclusions of CELTA being strongly associated with improved job prospects in Anderson's (2018) and Barnawi's (2016) research findings.

Nevertheless, when asking about better career prospects, different forms of discrimination were mentioned in several responses. Margit felt that by having completed CELTA, she could now apply

to more vacancies than before with her master's degree only. She continued explaining that the main requirement has become to be CELTA-certified in the international EFL job market. However, she highlighted that “in many places they look for CELTA-certified teachers as only natives, which is [something that is] always going to be there”. Additionally, Ilona witnessed that even in the pool of CELTA-certified teachers, you can get hired because of your gender and your appearance, instead of for your knowledge and experience. This shows that the discrimination NNS teachers face can go beyond native speakerism and extend to sexism (discrimination based on gender) and lookism (discrimination based on physical appearance). This finding supports Fithriani's (2018, p.741) conclusion of racist policies, such as “recruiting White English teachers”, accounting for an additional challenge NNS teachers face in ELT professionalism. Consequently, this episode left Ilona questioning the actual value of CELTA:

‘If we say that [CELTA and DELTA are] the top English teaching industry qualifications, then if such things happen, it loses its value.’

(Ilona, interview).

12 of the 19 participants in Anderson's (2018) research also reported that having an internationally recognised teaching certificate cannot counteract hiring practices dominated by native speakerism. Therefore, the findings of this research project suggest that CELTA's value is questionable in the global job market as the interviewed Hungarian EFL teachers report experiencing unjust employment screening despite being CELTA-certified.

Teaching Methodology

Teaching methodology has been found as a controversial topic associated with CELTA. On the one hand, as a reason to take CELTA, Erzsébet and Margit recalled looking for the most up to date teaching methodologies. The following interview extracts demonstrate what they had hoped to gain from CELTA:

‘I've been already teaching for more than 10 years, and I wanted to brush up on my knowledge, to get to know more about what is up to date, what is more relevant to what I'm doing in the classroom’

(Margit, interview)

‘I wanted to find and explore new practices for methodology because I felt that I got to the end of my resources and even though I was reading a lot online and trying to discover new things, I just felt that on my own I wouldn't be able to implement those’

(Erzsébet, interview)

Erzsébet continued by explaining that she needed “proper guidance” on how to make her methodology more up-to-date and effective, which is why she chose CELTA. Based on the internet research she had done on the course provider's website, she concluded that CELTA would give her what other trainings, such as masterclasses or local language schools' training courses, have

failed to do. In addition, another participant, Margit, wrote in her reflective narrative that her reason for taking CELTA was her "desire to improve [herself] as a teacher and add to [her] existing teacher toolkit". Asking her about CELTA's usefulness, she went into more detail about how CELTA fulfilled her hope to improve her teaching methods. For example, with the help of CELTA trainers, she could properly acquire teaching techniques, such as Instruction Checking Questions (ICQ) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQ), which she has been using in her teaching ever since. As she does not speak the native language of her students, it was crucial that she applies the "CELTA way" in her classes every day:

'[ICQs and CCQs] are actually working. Even though I don't speak Arabic, I can understand whether my students understand me or not because of these questions'

(Margit, interview)

The notion of identifying and working on professional difficulties as a teacher, such as low student engagement, has similarly emerged from Erzsébet's views on CELTA. She considered the experience of "[facing] your own weaknesses as [an experienced] teacher" as a significant contribution to why CELTA was a positive experience for her. Despite the high workload she experienced during the course and having to prepare for the TPs with different levels, she enjoyed that she had to apply a new approach to teaching, which was different to what she had experienced in Hungarian state schools. Therefore, learning about a new teaching methodology was deemed beneficial and highly applicable in her post-CELTA teaching, which is demonstrated by the following interview extract:

'Before CELTA I was always giving an explanation [to the students]. After CELTA I was trying to make them work out things on their own because they can [do most things]. I was just not familiar with this method [of student engagement]'

(Erzsébet, interview).

Erzsébet also mentioned how certain CLT techniques, such as ICQs and CCQs, help her ensure that her students understand grammar. This may mean that, for Erzsébet, CELTA was the key in shifting from a deductive to inductive teaching. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies that focused on NNS teachers' experiences of CELTA (Anderson, 2016; Anderson, 2018; Aydin et al., 2016, Anderson, 2020; Tang, 2020). Therefore, this study supports the argument that one of CELTA's most appreciated features is its potential to provide trainees with efficient teaching methods.

On the other hand, Ilona concluded that as a one-to-one EFL tutor, she does not use the typical activities which they practiced during the CELTA course, such as pair and group work. This finding supports the argument about a limitation of CELTA discussed by Barnawi (2016), and Ferguson and Donno (2003). The four-week training cannot account for the diversity of ELT contexts, which was confirmed by Ilona's perception of CELTA's usefulness in relation to teaching methodology.

Moreover, such concern emerged in Anderson's (2020) findings too, in which it was reported by Egyptian EFL teachers that CELTA did not prepare them for specific teaching contexts. Anderson's (2020) findings combined with Ilona's comment emphasise that although CELTA can be useful for acquiring teaching methodologies, providing adjustment strategies to tailor the CELTA-way to fit specific teaching contexts may be desired to be incorporated in the CELTA curriculum.

Teacher Training Methodology

CELTA's training methodology received both positive and negative comments in the data collection. On the one hand, one of the reasons why Margit found CELTA useful was its practical approach to training. She highlighted that implementing the training input in her TP sessions was a crucial factor in improving herself during the four weeks of CELTA. She concluded that the trainers make you face your weaknesses as a teacher. She recalled that CELTA had a significant impact on herself from the very beginning:

'For me it was like I went to Budapest one day and the next day I wasn't myself... You fall fully apart and then you put [yourself] back together [piece by piece]'

(Margit, interview).

Additionally, she stated that trainers provided feedback in "such a smooth mode that it gets under your skin". They are not instructing you but "guiding" your development. To demonstrate, with the help of the trainers, she could acquire how to use the course material "for [her] own advantage". She also pointed out that she had never finished a class without acquiring something new: "you always have something to take away. There is no lesson that you walk out without a takeaway". This is a perception that is likely due to CELTA's reflective approach to training teachers. This has been highlighted as an advantage of CELTA in Kanowski's (2004) work by arguing that CELTA can be successful in only four weeks due to its reflective training methods.

On the other hand, Ilona had some negative experiences in relation to CELTA's training. She recalled facing humiliation due to being a qualified teacher with years of teaching experience. She remembered the training as an unpleasant interaction:

'I was humiliated, sort of oppressed every day [during the TPs], when I put such things in practice that I had seen before on methodology courses in the UK. You were told that 'no, no [don't do that, do this]'

(Ilona, interview).

She argued that trainers would not tolerate teaching techniques that were inconsistent with the CELTA curriculum. Therefore, she concluded that she would not do the course again, although she admitted the usefulness of being CELTA-certified later in her career as discussed above.

It is relevant here that when Copland et al. (2009) investigated post-observation feedback in CELTA and other TEFL courses, they concluded that many trainers do not receive sufficient training in how to provide reflective feedback and called for more support and resources from training

organisations. Whether Ilona's negative experience was a result of one of the CELTA trainer's training style or similar incidents have occurred with other trainees is a question that cannot be answered within this research, and therefore calls for future research.

This experience could also be connected to Anderson's (2018) and Aydin et al.'s (2016) contrasting findings about the effects on training experience of being an experienced teacher on CELTA. Although the usefulness of such a notion was found to be questioned in Anderson (2018) and confirmed in Aydin et al. (2016), it was unanimously found that it can be difficult to incorporate new methods into internalised teaching skills. Therefore, this may suggest that CELTA trainers should receive training to be more inclusive in training experienced teachers. However, this may be conflictive due to CELTA being advertised as an introductory course and not as a professional development course.

Collaboration

Firstly, another reason for enrolling in CELTA for Margit was to meet native speakers of English. She wanted to meet speakers of English who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to the people in her work environment:

'I was hoping to get trainers from England... because I hear English speakers from all around the world, but not natives. I meet Indian, Pakistani, Moroccan, Egyptian, Sudanese and Saudi English speakers, but none of them are native. So, I really wanted to get in touch with native speakers and hear their voices actually'

(Margit, interview).

For Margit, CELTA was a tool to meet native speakers due to the general perception of CELTA being a course for NSs as described by Ferguson and Donno (2003). It is notable that despite native speakerism being a key topic in TESOL research in the past four decades, there has not been a significant shift in how society thinks about NS and NNS teachers beyond academia (Tupas, 2022). Although Medgyes (2017) discussed that NSs have an undeniable role in ELT, this finding may also be understood as an example for the consideration of NS superiority as a pertaining issue due to their accents and associated ownership over English.

Secondly, it must be acknowledged that for some trainees, interacting with English speakers with different accents may pose an additional challenge. For instance, Ilona found it difficult to communicate with fellow trainees and trainers from Australia and Scotland for the first weeks due to their accents. In addition, as explained above, Margit considered CELTA as a course for NSs due to the traditional association of CELTA being designed for NS. She enjoyed this as a challenge, however it also caused communication difficulties that at times left her feeling that she was "lagging behind because of the language". NNSs' experiences of CELTA in relation to collaboration with NSs has received little attention in research. However, research on MA TESOL programs have identified similar perceptions to these findings. An example is demonstrated by international students on MA TESOL in Canada reporting the negative impact of the level of their English

language proficiency on their social engagement (Faez and Karas, 2019). Liu (1999) suggested that MA TESOL courses accommodate NNS students by providing more support to improve their English language proficiency. Consequently, although one of the requirements to enrol in CELTA is to have C1 level of English, it may be desired to provide additional language support on CELTA courses. As a conclusion, it is crucial that trainees are supported for their specific learning needs. This may mean further support in linguistics and grammar for example, which can be a crucial need of NS CELTA trainees too (Borg, 2002), or additional help with the improvement of trainees' English language proficiency.

Lastly, Erzsébet valued the collaboration with other trainees from different countries including the US, China, the UK, Germany and Russia. Although generally preferring to work independently, she enjoyed helping her British friend with the assignments by using her previous experience in learning linguistics. This relates to Barratt's (2010) recommendation about fostering collaboration amongst trainees by sharing their previous linguistics knowledge with each other. A similar idea of collaboration is recommended by Medgyes (2017) who emphasized the importance of reciprocal support in using NSs' and NNSs' individual strengths and weaknesses. He suggested recognising teachers' own highlights and challenges and complementing each other to create a better educational environment. Although this recommendation is for NS-NNS collaboration in teaching, it could be applied to training scenarios, such as CELTA.

Conclusion

The aim of the present qualitative research was to investigate Hungarian EFL teachers' experiences of CELTA. Firstly, a common reason of the participants for taking CELTA was for better career prospects. Each participant highlighted how the possibility of teaching abroad was a motivating factor in enrolling on CELTA. Secondly, participants also reported seeking a way to acquire a more up to date EFL teaching methodology in CELTA. It was viewed as a course that equips trainees with innovative teaching skills, which was a key factor in seeking professional development after over a decade of teaching. Moreover, an additional reason to take CELTA was the participants' aspiration for a challenge and new inspiration. Due to the role and perception of CELTA in the ELT industry, CELTA can be a way to achieve professional satisfaction and validation. Furthermore, one of the participants decided to enrol in the CELTA course to meet NS of English. This can be viewed as an additional benefit of CELTA for those seeking to interact with NS speakers. Overall, CELTA is useful in finding employment abroad. However, its value in the ELT job market was questioned due to native speakerism, sexism and lookism hiring policies. Furthermore, CELTA was considered useful for acquiring teaching skills that improve students' engagement. Particularly, ICQs and CCQs were highlighted by the participants. It is notable though that CELTA's usefulness in terms of teaching methodologies is highly context specific, which is why it is recommended that CELTA incorporates adjustment strategies that allow teachers to tailor the "CELTA way" to trainees' specific teaching contexts. Finally, it was found that the availability of language support may be desired for certain trainees. This is crucial in making CELTA more inclusive and effective for all trainees.

The key contribution of this research is that it provided valuable insight into trainees' perceptions of CELTA in the Hungarian context. The findings are relevant to CELTA providers for creating a more inclusive training space and helping trainers to recognise and adjust to NNS trainees' additional needs.

Limitations

The researcher identified two limitations of the research project. Firstly, the small sample size could be viewed as a limitation as to how strong the conclusions can be made for a broader (Hungarian/European) context. Secondly, participants had completed CELTA over five years ago. CELTA is continuously undergoing quality-control, which may suggest that certain aspects of this study's findings on CELTA have been improved over the past years.

Biography



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