

MA Applied Linguistics/ TESOL
Module 5 Evaluation - Extended Assignment
The Participant Evaluation of an In-service Teacher Training Course
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1.0 Introduction

The Certificate For Overseas Teachers of English (COTE) is designed for non-native speakers of English teaching outside the United Kingdom. It is moderated by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). It differs from the UCLES/RSA Certificate in Teaching of English as Foreign Language to Adults not only in its target participants but also in the fact that it is an in-service course. Teachers are expected to be employed and participate in the course. The typical candidate should have at least 300 hours of classroom experience and their standard of English should be at least Cambridge First Certificate level. While there are moves to end the distinction between native and non-native speakers in UCLES/RSA courses, it appears the division will remain between the two Certificates due to one being in-service and the other primarily pre-service in its orientation. This essay examines participant perceptions of a one year COTE course that took place at the English Preparatory School, Eastern Mediterranean University, during the academic year 1996-1997. It uses the perceptions of teachers to provide an internal evaluation of the training offered.

2.0 Course Description

COTE courses have been held at the Preparatory School since 1989, and while there have been external candidates from other schools in North Cyprus most of the participants are internal. Approximately 90 people have successfully completed the programme and 80 of these continue to work at the school. The decision to take course is voluntary and is not a contractual obligation for teachers. Tutors value this voluntary participation as it means the teachers generally have a positive attitude towards the course. Some teachers, however, feel there is a strong expectation to attend. Once the teacher enrolls in the course, there is a COTE requirement that they attend 80% of the sessions.

The course content has evolved in the light of comments from COTE Moderators and the experience gained by the tutor in charge of the course of moderating other COTE courses in Turkey. Although there is a COTE syllabus, one of the most influential factors on course content is the COTE Written Assignments. In response to COTE Moderator suggestions, the training sessions provide a lead in to the written work required by the course. The Written Assignments titles are set by UCLES/RSA, but there is provision to submit titles that are decided locally. Due to incidents of copying on the previous course, the tutors took advantage of this option to change the titles for the 1996-1997 academic year. The changes enabled problems in the institution to be addressed.

There were eighteen candidates on the course for 1996-1997. Of the eighteen course participants, seventeen had taught for a minimum of one academic year full time and their standard of English tended to be high due to Cyprus's past links with Britain. There

are several teachers whose first language is English and have spent part of their lives in the UK or Australia. One new teacher who had already attended an RSA Certificate in TEFLA was also admitted on the course. The teachers with a years teaching experience had attended an initial in-service training course for new teachers.

Originally there were twenty five participants but several dropped out within the first few weeks of the course mainly due to work commitments. The course started at the beginning of the academic year when changes in the curriculum were introduced. Some teachers found it difficult to cope with the both events. These people were excluded from the survey as the aim was to gather impressions of the whole course.

Each teacher was assigned a course tutor for the length of the course. The course tutor provided support and guidance on written assignments, commenting on drafts and suggesting references. The tutor also held pre- and post-observation meetings with the teacher, giving feedback on lesson observations that the tutor conducted. There were five course tutors including two tutors in training. The only restriction on tutors in training is that they are allowed to have a maximum of two tutees each.

The course required attendance at weekly training sessions on Methodology and Language Development. The training sessions were divided into three hours on Methodology and one on Personal Language Development (PLD). Each session was normally presented by the course tutors or a guest tutor. In total there was at least 150 contact hours including an intensive week prior to the start of teaching when there were 3 hour sessions everyday. This included an introduction to Hungarian.

A further requirement is the completion of 4 written assignments of around 1500 words and 4 language development tasks. The essays are assessed and graded jointly by the 5 tutors according to the COTE grading criteria. This involves assessing not only content but also language.

Course participants also have to have completed;

- 1) 6 Peer observations - these are structured observations and can include teachers outside the course.
- 2) 6 Observed Lessons - observed by the teacher's course tutor and usually another co-observer.

The observed lessons and accompanying lesson plans are graded by one or two tutors again in line with COTE criteria. An external Moderator validates the final grading of lessons and checks a representative sample of the assignments.

3.0 Conduct of the study

According to Rea-Dickins (1994), evaluation involves collecting information in order to make decisions on policy and practice. Typically, evaluation can be classified as summative or formative . This study contains elements of both. It is summative in that it looks at the end of course responses of participants and formative in that the information is collected to influence later courses. A detailed scheme of how local evaluation feeds into local programme development in found in Hopkins (1988).

In designing the evaluation I used the questions posed by Nunan (1992:196).

What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- To gauge the level of participant satisfaction with the course - To identify areas of the course that may need to change
Who is the audience for the evaluation?
- In the first instance , COTE course tutors
What principles of procedure should guide the evaluation?
- The procedure should be participatory and collaborative where appropriate
What tools, techniques, and instruments are appropriate?
The evaluation will use two self report methods - a questionnaire and individual interviews
Who should carry out the evaluation?
Internal
When should it be carried out?
During July 1997 which is the end of the COTE course
What is the time frame and budget for the evaluation?
The evaluation should be completed by the end of July
How should the evaluation be reported?
The results will be discussed by COTE tutors and made available to course participants

The evaluation used two self-report methods - a questionnaire and structured interviews. As Weir and Roberts (1994) suggest, there is a need to “triangulate” data by confirming data from source with that from another. This being the case, the questionnaire was administered first and the structured interviews were conducted with six teachers to gain further information. An additional reason for using these methods was to supplement information available from assessment data on essays and observations and the comments of the COTE Moderator who provided an external evaluation of the course.

The questionnaire was constructed using the method suggested in the MA Applied Linguistics/ TESOL Course Units Module 5 Unit 6 (1997). As part of a training session on evaluation the participants were asked to write one positive and one negative thing about the course. I was able to get the ideas of twelve out the eighteen teachers on the course as six were absent. They were then put into groups of four and asked to produce four positive and four negative ideas about the course. These ideas were written on a large piece of card. Then the participants formed a circle and read their statements aloud. This allowed other participants to ask questions and confirm their understanding of the statements. I also asked questions to check my understanding and refine the wording. This produced three sets of eight statements which I later grouped into five areas and presented in a questionnaire format.

In the questionnaire the teacher were asked to respond to the statements using the categories “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”. After each grouping there was the opportunity to write comments relating to the answers given. I circulated the questionnaire amongst the other four tutors and invited the comments and suggestions. This was both a means of checking the questionnaire and also a way of ensuring areas the tutors were concerned about were covered. Further items were added (asterisked in questionnaire) and the final questionnaire along with responses can be seen in Appendix 1. The questionnaire was administered on the during the last training session

of the course and was completed by all eighteen participants. Analysis of the responses involved weighting the answers, giving a higher weighting to the answers that strongly agreed or disagreed.

I interviewed six teachers individually following a structured interview format. I attempted to follow the guidance on writing questions in Weir and Roberts (1994). The questions can be seen in Appendix 2. In order to limit the number of questions, I focused mainly on areas that were problematic according to the questionnaire results. The teachers were chosen approximately to represent a range of language ability on the course as the Personal Language Development section of the course was less positively rated. I also decided not to interview my own tutees as while a closer personal relationship may have encouraged greater openness, it might also have resulted in less critical comments.

The participants made suggestions on the process of the evaluation, such as putting the comments on the wall rather than reading aloud and conducting a group interview. However, I followed the format described above as talking about the comments in the group gave me more direct access to what the teachers were thinking. I also chose to interview individually as I noticed the aggregate response to the individual questionnaires seemed not to match the impressions I got from the group.

4.0 Survey Results

These results combine the information gained from questionnaires and structured interviews.

Section A COTE Training Sessions

The main COTE training session took place on Friday morning from 8.30 to 11.30 with two ten minute breaks. Twelve people agreed with the statement that the three hour sessions were too long. Four disagreed and two gave no answer. From the Comments section of the survey, one person thought it should have been on a different day, while others were able to qualify the statement that some sessions seemed long because of the content or methods used. During the interviews, the subjective element came out further with it being suggested that three hours was too long if the session was boring. This suggests that in some sessions the balance of activities needs to be examined. A further suggestion made during an interview was for there to be two 2 hour sessions.

There was a high level of agreement with the statement that they learned new ideas they could use in class. All eighteen participants responded positively and the weighted score was the second highest score. This also came out strongly in the interviews. When asked to compare their teaching at the beginning of the course with the end of the course several mentioned they taught more communicatively. However, there was a definite preference for the demonstration of activities that could be used immediately in class with little or no adaptation. The demonstration of techniques through other course content was not so highly rated. While one person wrote in Comments that techniques should be demonstrated first and followed by theory, this was very much a minority view. Most people also felt they had been able to share experiences and ideas.

A core of five trainers did most of the training and there were occasional guest trainers. This was strongly appreciated by all the participants. They also perceived a congruence between the methods advocated by the trainers and the methods used by the trainers. Only 5 people thought all the sessions were useful, though it was difficult to get any consensus from the interviews about which sessions were not useful. The category “useful” was sometimes conflated with “interest”. For example, a session on Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition was cited by one teacher because they were not interested in “theory”. Another session on using dictionaries was thought unnecessary as the teachers could have found out how to use dictionaries by themselves. Some sessions were thought to be “fillers”, because it was too late to use them in class. This again shows the short term perspective of the participants on gauging “usefulness”. It also highlights a problem of course design, it is inevitable that something will be first and something must be last.

Section B Observations (Tutor and Peer)

The most highly rated section was support given by tutors both in pre-observation and post observation meeting. In contrast the peer observations were less appreciated with participants being equally divided as to their usefulness. Additional Comments ranged from suggesting there should be only four peer observations to the typical criticism that observations result in the observed teacher changing their behaviour. During interviews there was an equal range of responses. In order to investigate a comment that most teachers used the same methods of teaching, a question was asked about how they chose someone to observe. While one person asked their tutor for guidance on who to observe, others chose from peers on the COTE course. Some chose experienced teachers and/or new teachers. Here new teachers were defined as teachers with less than a years teaching, while an experienced teacher would be one with more than two years teaching experience. One teacher said during an interview she did not take the peer observation as seriously as her own observation as there was no assessment attached. She also suggested that perhaps the tutor could take the peer observations more seriously and encourage trainees to work to the peer observation deadlines. Another teacher reported that it was difficult to discuss honestly what happened with peers.

Section C Tutors

Generally, tutor support was positively rated. However, one area of concern was that tutees felt the tutor system should be more standardised. Specific areas were mentioned in the comments included error correction, feedback on assignments and pre and post observations. This is a problem as there are requirements that have to be met that are specifically related to the COTE course rather than general professional practice. These COTE requirements are not contained in one document but have evolved over a period of time. This sometimes contributes to uncertainty and referral to the Tutor in Charge of the Course who is the most experienced member of the team. One comment expressed frustration at the situation as it resulted in re-doing things. Two tutees wrote in their comments that they had not received any written feedback. UCLES had been particularly mentioned the necessity of written feedback after the previous years moderation. Initially, it was thought that perhaps they had not handed in assignments or had only recently handed them in. A discussion with tutors, however, revealed that one tutor had not been giving written feedback. Tutor help in drafting assignments was rated positively by all tutees.

Section D Personal Language Development

One hour a week was allocated to Personal Language Development. This was held on Tuesdays from 2.50 p.m. until 3.40 p.m. The content of this section derived from several sources:

Common problems in tutees' work

Language Awareness

Continuation of the three hour training sessions. For example, the session on role play was extended to include writing role play cards.

Exam practice for Cambridge Examination in English for Language Teachers (Level 2) (CEELT)

Entering the CEELT exam was initially encouraged as besides motivating teachers to maintain and improve their personal language, it also gave exemption to a language component of the Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English (DOTE).

The results on this section are difficult to interpret. While there was almost a 50/50 division about the usefulness and benefit derived from the PLD sessions, the majority thought they were at about the right level. Since there was a range of language ability on the course from "native" or "native like" to approximately Cambridge Advanced English level, it might have been unexpected that the level would have been a problem. No additional comments were given, but further information was gleaned from the interviews. Despite being advertised on the course programme, the diverse source for the content was a cause for confusion and a lack of clarity over the aim of the hour. Two teachers also indicated that the time of the session affected attendance and motivation as they had been teaching all morning. The CEELT practice also drew conflicting statements. One participant who decided she did not want to enter the exam thought it was a waste of time to attend, others were more positive saying it gave them a useful idea about the level of the exam. However, the initial assumption that COTE participants would enter the exam proved to be wrong as none of them took the exam in June 1997 as expected. The main reason for this appeared to be an attempt at stress management by the teachers who preferred to concentrate on the COTE course and defer entry to the CEELT exam to a later date. One suggestion was made that the CEELT preparation should be done as an intensive course.

The COTE Moderator also posed the question of how the differing language need of the teachers were being dealt. To some extent tutors felt they were able to address this issue by working with their individual tutees.

Section E Assignments

The tutor team have a limited control over the number of assignments as this is set by UCLES. Most teachers seemed to think that there was not enough choice in assignments, while there was a fairly even split between those who thought there was enough time to

do assignments and those who did not. One teacher commented that there were too many assignments. Deadlines were given for assignments as guidelines, but again there was a fifty/fifty split between those who thought they needed more assistance and those who did not. There was also an equal division between who thought they had learned to organise their time. From the interviews one teacher mentioned that the observations took priority as they had definite deadlines and they also consumed a lot of time. Once one observation was finished, she tended to start thinking about the next observation to the detriment of her written work.

5.0 Relationship to other studies

Mackay et al (1995) point out that programme evaluation is not undertaken to provide general truths but to provide information about a particular course at a specific point in time. Further differences between evaluation and research are stated in Mackay (1991). However, teacher attitudes towards the value of the training does seem to be coloured by the “practicality ethic” as suggested in Doyle and Ponder (1977). Techniques that can be used immediately with few changes are preferred over those that might be useful at a later stage in their career. In general the most highly valued sections of the course are those that relate to the teacher personally and could be characterised as developmental. Those least valued (such as sessions on dictionary use) are typically those that could be said to be training.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

From the evaluation by participants the following suggestion for change can be made.

From Section A of the questionnaire there is a case to argue that instead of one 3 hour session and one 1 hour session on language development, there should be two 2 hour sessions. This would also provide continuity where the PLD session derived from the input in the main training session. For example, a PLD session writing cue cards following on from a session on using role plays.

Tutors should schedule peer observation dates with tutees in order to demonstrate a greater seriousness on the tutors’ part. This would also allow time to be scheduled for discussing individual observations rather than discussing a bunch of observations. Training on observation for the teachers should also pay more attention to attitudes and beliefs concerning its importance.

Standardisation of tutor responses could be achieved by producing a written statement about the tutor role and preparation of expected responses by tutors prior to issuing assignments. In producing the statement tutors would be able to share assumptions concerning the role and undocumented practices could be made explicit. This would be particularly helpful for new tutors but it would also help communication within the tutor group. It would also provide tutees with guidance on how the tutor can help as well making clear expectations of tutees. Part of producing the expected responses to assignments could involve identifying training objectives for the training sessions and resources available to the tutees.

Language Development needs to address the needs of the tutees in three areas. The teacher as a user of English, as an analyst and as a teacher of the language. The course

did this, but there should be more emphasis on the diagnostic use of the sessions to identify and deal with the personal language problems of teachers rather than exam practice. The exam preparation for CEELT should be separated from COTE with a definite commitment to enter the language exam being required from the participants as condition of attending the course.

Concerning the issue of assignments, there is a problem in that the number of assignments is decided by UCLES/RSA and is not decided locally. While Mackay (1991) cautions against asking question that can not be acted on, this issue was raised by participants and not to have asked it may have influenced the perceived validity of the participatory approach used. The information is useful, however, as in response to our request to change titles UCLES/RSA responded that we should restrict the number of assignment questions issued each year. Since the assignment titles are changed every two years, they suggested half should be given in the first year and half the second year. This option would clearly be unpopular with our participants as it would result in a further reduction in choice. For tutors this information supports the current practice.

It should be remembered that this evaluation is specific to the course held during the period 1996 to 1997. While changes can be made to benefit future participants, their needs and views will also have to be addressed if the course is to satisfy them.

Appendix 1

Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English - Course Evaluation 1996-1997

The aim of this form is to get your ideas about the course so that it can be improved where necessary.

Please tick the boxes according to the following scale;

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree

Use additional comments if you wish to add or explain your answers. Please, if you feel strongly about an item, specify why.

Section A

COTE Training Sessions	1	2	3	4
1. I thought 3 hours was too long	4	8	4	
2. I learned new ideas I could use in class	11	7		
3. I was able to share my experience and ideas	4	10	4	
4. I liked seeing different trainers	10	8		
5. The trainers used the techniques they advocated	7	10	1	
6. All the sessions were useful		5	12	1

Question 1. 2 no answers
Additional Comments

Section B

Observations	1	2	3	4
1. The observations by tutors were conducted in a non-threatening manner	10	8		
2. The pre-observation meetings with tutor were constructive	11	7		
3. The post observation meetings helped my development	12	5		
4. There were too many peer observations	9	6	1	1
5. The peer observations were useful	2	7	7	2

Additional Comments

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Section C

Tutors	1	2	3	4
1. The tutoring was effective and beneficial	9	9		
2. Tutor written feedback on assignments was appropriately detailed	9	6	2	

3. The tutoring system should be more standardized	8	7	2	
4. Tutor help while drafting assignments was constructive	9	9		

Additional Comments

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Section D

Language Development	1	2	3	4
1. I thought the Personal Language Development (PLD) sessions were useful	2	7	8	1
2. I improved my personal language as a result of the course	2	6	8	2
3. The level of the PLD sessions was about right	1	12	4	

Additional Comments

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Section E

Assignments	1	2	3	4
1. There was enough choice in the assignments	1	5	7	5
2. There was enough time to do the assignments	4	5	7	2
3. I learned to organise my time and work under pressure	2	8	8	
4. I needed more assistance in organising my time	1	8	8	1

Additional Comments

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Appendix 2

Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English - Course Evaluation 1996-1997

Interview Questions

1) Can you comment on the sessions you attended?

Which sessions do you remember most?

2) What do you think about the peer observations you did?

What do you think about the peer observation forms you used?

How did you choose someone to observe?

3) How did you organise your time to complete assignments?

There were suggested due dates for assignments. What do you think about this?

4) What do you think about the Personal Language Development ?

How could it be changed to meet your needs?

5) Can you compare your teaching now with your teaching at the beginning of the year?

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