

Observation as key development, assessment and evaluation tool on the Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka Project

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1. Abstract

Observation of teachers and trainers is a key method in both developing and assessing their skills; it is also key to evaluating the impact of training input. Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka (iTESL), an English language teacher education project running in Sri Lanka from 2017 to the present day, makes full use of observation. The project works in both pre-service and in-service teacher education sectors. In pre-service, the target group is the teacher educators of the National Colleges of Education (NCoEs); in in-service, the target group is provincial In-Service Advisors (ISAs) and the teacher educators of the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), Teacher Centres (TCs) and Regional English Support Centres (RESCs). Observation is one factor contributing to the project's success. As a teacher educator project, observation and feedback methods and techniques firstly is one of the training modules; secondly the teacher educators experience continual observation and feedback on their own training, therefore experiencing a model for their own behaviour, and are given the opportunity to practice during and post course; thirdly, in the cascade Continuous Professional Learning and Development for Teachers (CPLDT), in-service advisors (ISAs) conduct observations of teachers to demonstrate and evaluate the training impact. Observation results at all levels of the cascade were collected and used as monitoring and evaluation data. This paper explores the use of observation in iTESL, arguing that it is both a key tool in teacher and trainer development and assessment and a key monitoring and evaluation tool in any teacher educator project.

2. Sub-theme

This paper comes under the sub theme of observation and feedback methods and techniques and it explores observation for development, assessment and evaluation.

3. Story

iTESL Project: Context and Description

The Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka Project started in 2017 with the aim to train both pre-service teacher educators and in-service teacher educators in the secondary school state sector in principles of current ELT methodology (both communicative and participatory) and mentoring skills and embed these in the education system. It also trained principals to support and facilitate the embedding of the skills.

Observation and Feedback as development tool

As a development tool, observation and feedback is a skill that teachers and trainers need to be made aware of, receive training in and practise over time. Noticing areas of strength and development in teacher or trainer observation and delivering constructive feedback require work. They are skills that need to be developed and honed.

The ITESL participants completed courses incorporating training in observation and feedback. In the pre service sector, both the Master Training (MT) course and the Teacher Educator Course (TEC) (delivered to NCoE lecturers) covered the use of training and teaching criteria and observation tools, the observation cycle, standardisation, how to deliver constructive feedback including the language of feedback and micro-training to put these skills into practice. In the in-service sector both the Mentoring Skills Course and the ELT Methodology courses (delivered to ISAs and senior teachers) covered the observation cycle, and how to deliver constructive feedback including the language of feedback. Specific topics covered included criteria for assessment; observation skills (e.g. noticing and recording, evidence of learning); feedback skills (e.g. the language of feedback, recognising damaging behaviour and changing it to useful behaviour, developing self-reflection skills) and observation tools (e.g. action plans, feedback reports, self-reflection templates, scoring grids, session plans). The project developed twenty-one criteria for teaching divided into lesson planning, lesson delivery, managing the learning environment and activities, and managing student interaction and engagement) and sixteen for training divided into planning, delivery, observation and feedback, and role modelling and reflection. (see Appendix One for assessment criteria for both).

The project then incorporated observation and feedback into the syllabi of the courses. It developed and used assessment tools based on clearly stated and easily measurable criteria and this was standardised across its users and it gave the participants ample opportunity to put these new skills into practice both on the project and outside it.

Observation and Feedback as assessment tool

Observation and feedback skills were also heavily used as a participant assessment tool: the British Council consultants observed their Master Trainers (MTs) and assessed them on delivery; the MTs observed their teacher educators (TEs) and ISAs and assessed their delivery; the ISAs observed their teachers and assessed their delivery; and the TEs observed their trainee teachers and assessed their delivery.

This can be divided into course experience and post course experience. On their initial course the MTs experienced micro training and receiving feedback while simultaneously receiving a model of constructive feedback. They also standardised with the British Council consultants. During the two courses they co-delivered with the British Council consultants, they both were observed and given constructive feedback and observed their TEs doing micro training and gave feedback. The TEs and the ISAs who received training from the British Council consultant and their two MT counterparts, also had experience of micro-training and receiving feedback. They received a model of constructive feedback and had that model of constructive criticism reinforced.

During TEC1, the participants were observed twice: at the beginning for the baseline and in the third week for the end-of-course (EoC) scores. The trainer competency tool scored 16 training competencies. Overall, the scores showed a 26% improvement. In terms of personal ability, relative to the participants' starting point, there was a 58 per cent increase in training ability observed overall. See table one.

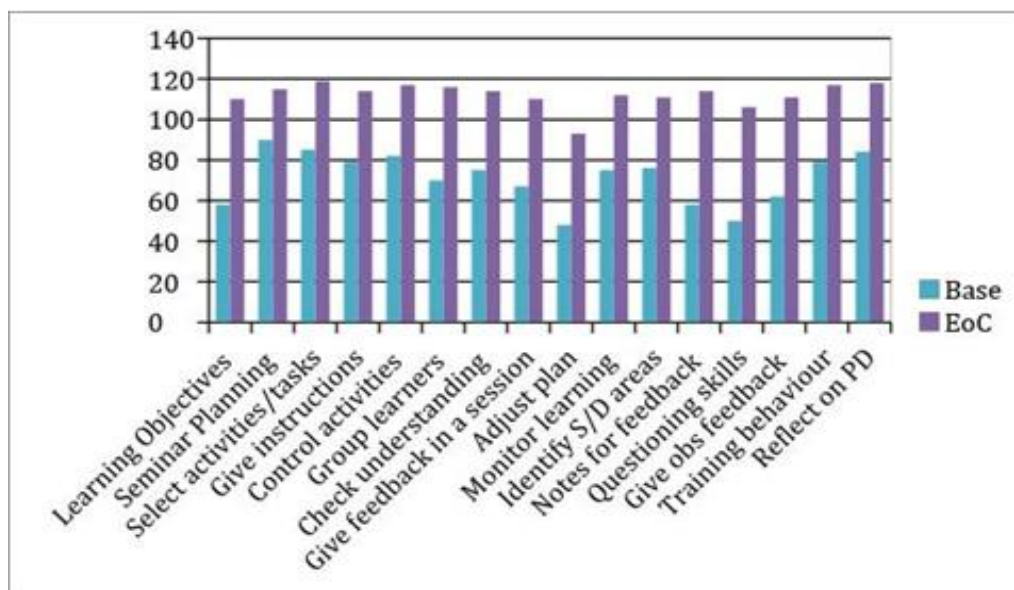


Table 1: TEC1 Competency scores

TEC 2 told a similar story. See Table 2 below

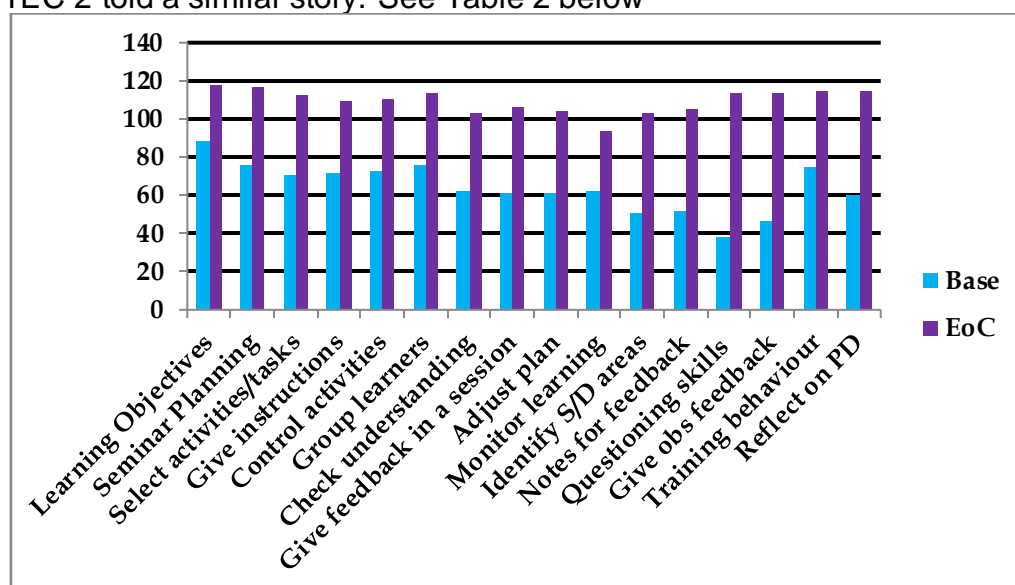


Table 2: TEC 2 Competency Scores

In TEC3 improvements were observed in each of the 12 training competencies (see Table 3 below), with significant improvements observed in ten of them.

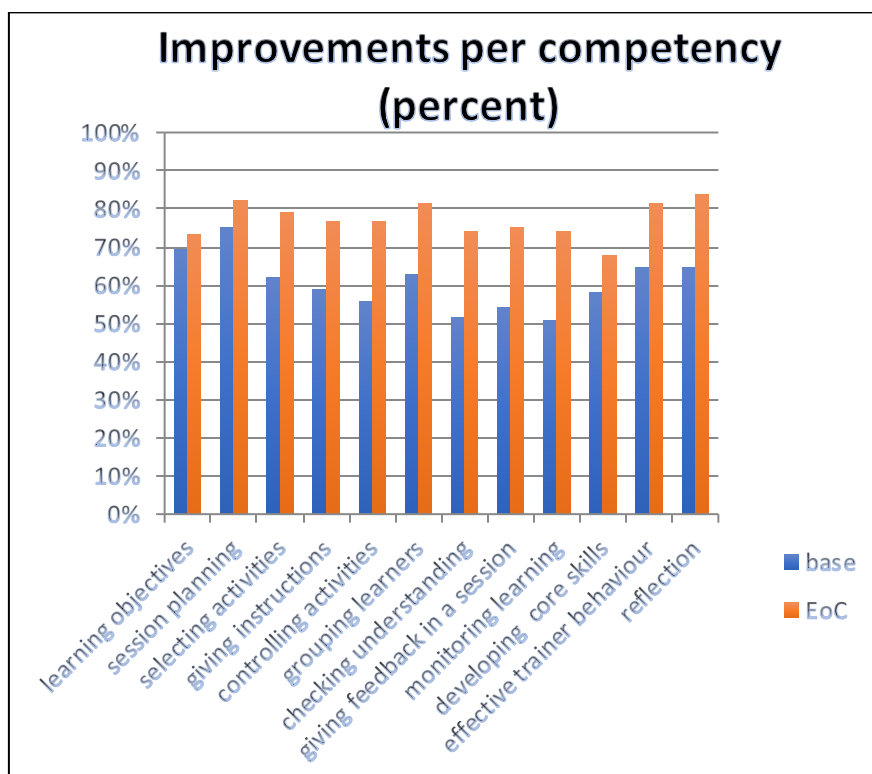


Table 3: TEC 3 competency scores

As an assessment tool, observation gives clear criteria and can generate numbers to demonstrate improvement in specific areas as well as overall.

Post course experience of observation and feedback came from the Certificate of Practice (COP) work in the pre-service sector. On training course completion, the participants received a provisional certificate which graduated into a full certificate only on COP completion. COP involved teacher educators being observed by British Council consultants in their institution. The full COP cycle used on TEC 1 consisted of a TE observing either an MT, a British Council consultant or (where that was impossible) a DVD observation, submitting a plan to their observer for discussion, delivering the first observation, reflecting on it, meeting their observer and receiving oral and written feedback. The process was repeated for observation 2. A much shorter cycle involving only one observation was used with TEC 2 and 3 because of logistical issues.

The performance results both at the beginning and end of course were compared with the results of the COP statistics. The participants were graded numerically: - 0 not evident/ not applicable; 1 – attempting; 2 – developing; 3 doing well; and 4 mastering. The two tables below show that a comparison of baseline, the end of course and the COP observations from TEC 1 and 2 and 3, demonstrates the most difference and therefore impact is seen in TEC1 COP. Here you can see a measure of the participants achieving level 4 of mastery of competencies as measured by British Council training consultants. The main difference here is that COP on TEC1 completed a cycle of observation twice.

Tabel 4: TEC 1 participants observed at level 4 - 'Mastering'

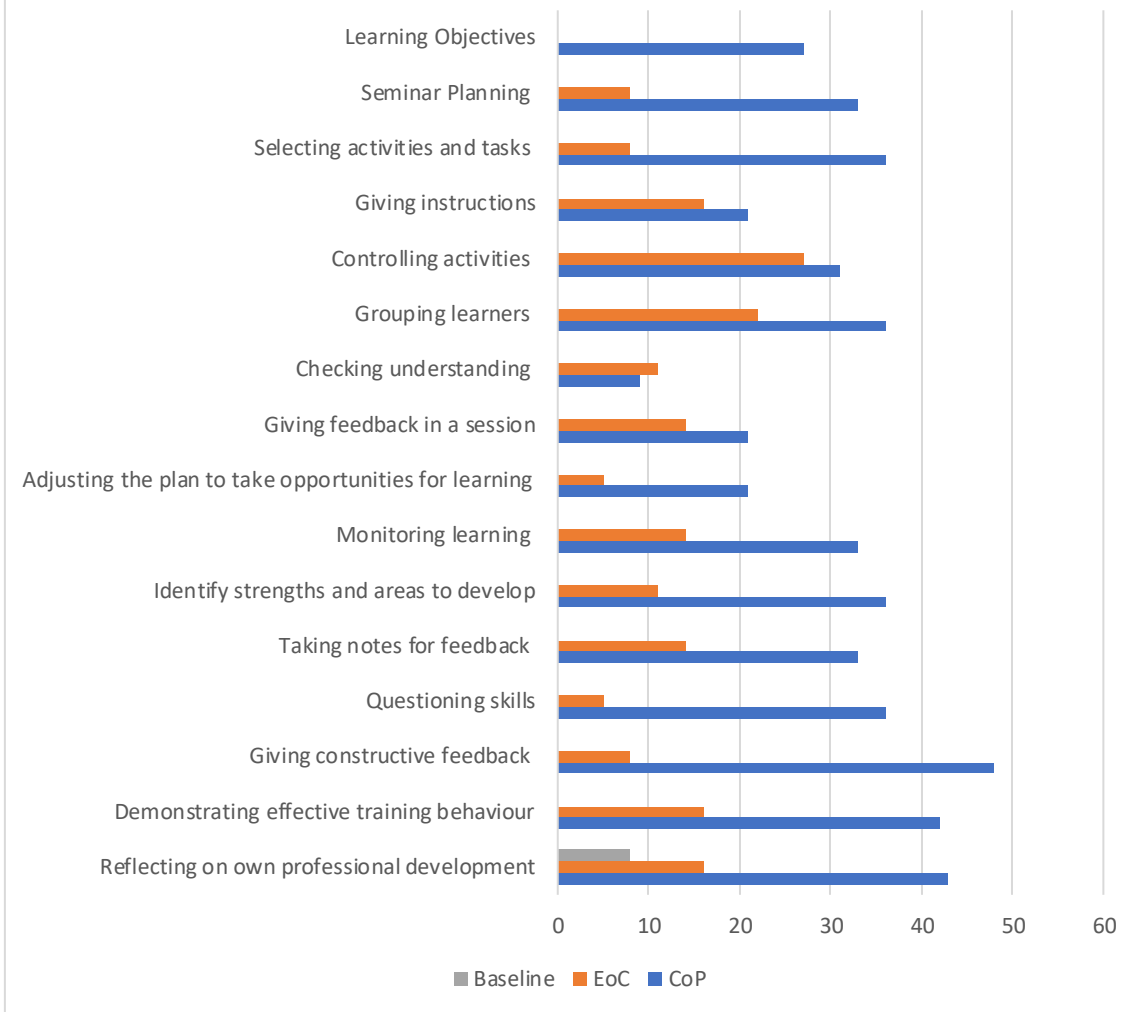
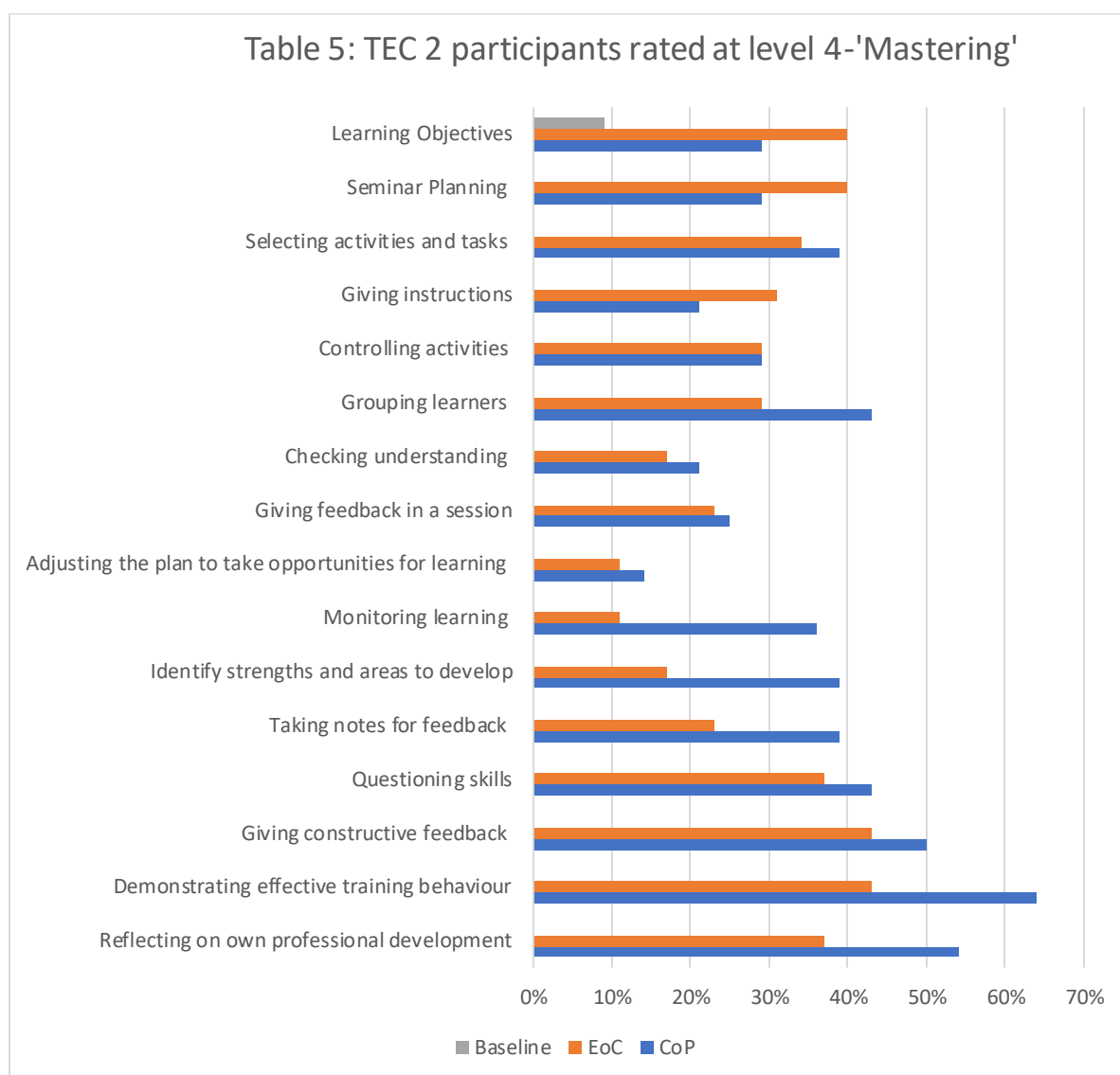


Table 5: TEC 2 participants rated at level 4-'Mastering'



The comparison of the results of the short and long COP are significant for future learning. They demonstrate clearly the impact of a longer cycle of observation and feedback on the skills of the participants.

Observation for Project Evaluation

One part of the ITESL Project where observation was used to evaluate the project impact was in the Continuous Professional Learning and Development for Teachers (CPLDT), an initiative by the Ministry of Education (MoE) under ITESL which aimed to contribute towards establishing an enabling environment for best practice English language education in Sri Lankan secondary schools. CPLDT was an 18-hour course targeting over 10,000 secondary school English teachers drawing on the Teacher Educator Courses (TEC). To identify components of the TEC course that should be prioritised in CPLDT, focus groups and surveys were used. Based on the findings, the following course content was selected:

- Teaching reading
- Teaching grammar communicatively
- Using activities to maximise participation

The course used a ‘cascade’ process for its delivery. Phase one involved iTESL consultants training ISA MTs; Phase Two, ISA MTs delivering the course to ordinary ISAs at the nine provincial training venues; Phase Three, these ISAs delivering the course to secondary school English teachers. To measure the impact of the course two methods were used: a quiz pre and post course; an observation of teachers post course. The observation was carried out by ISAs using Survey Monkey questionnaire on their phones (see Appendix Two for questionnaire). It used 6 criteria to score 216 teachers based on evidence of use. It was analysed by province and reviewed by zone. The results were centrally collated and analysed against the baseline of teachers who had not done the course. The results are shown below.

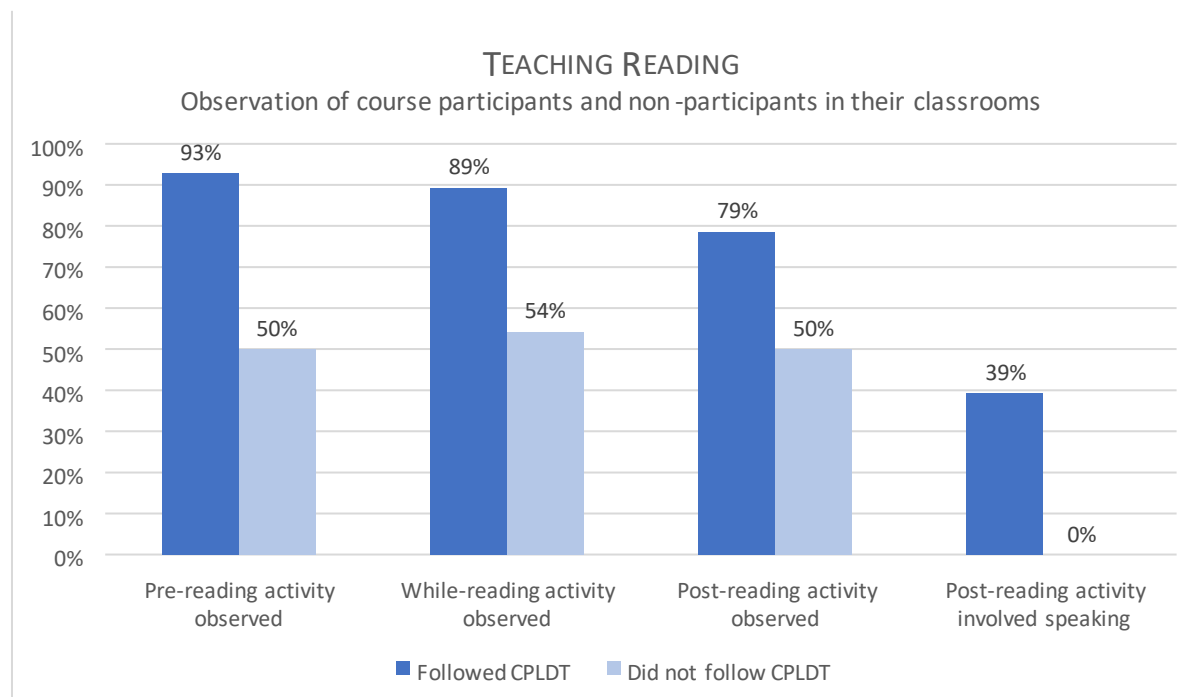


Table 6: CPLDT - Reading

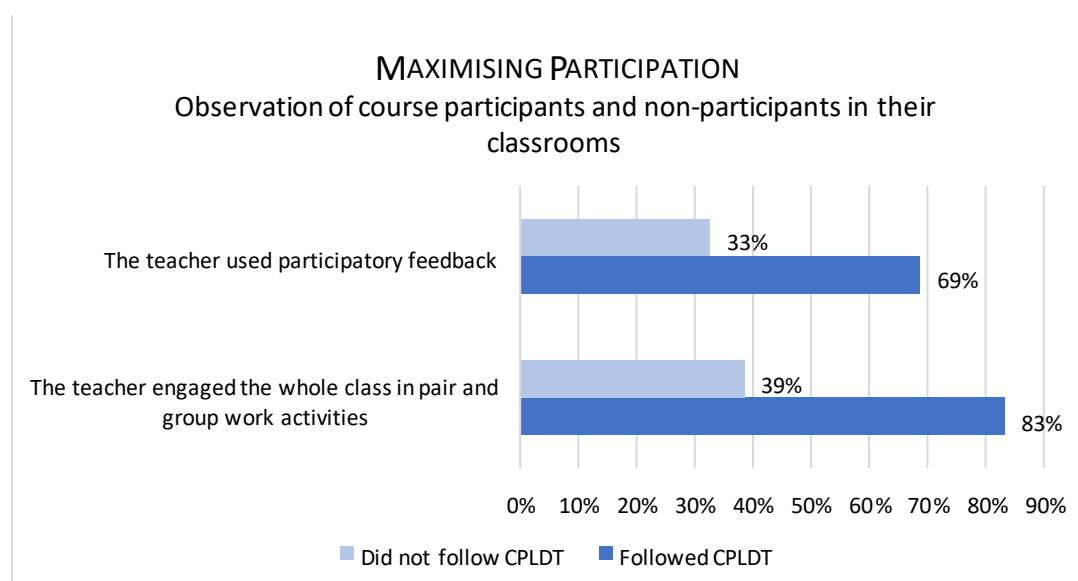


Table 7: CPLDT – Maximising Participation

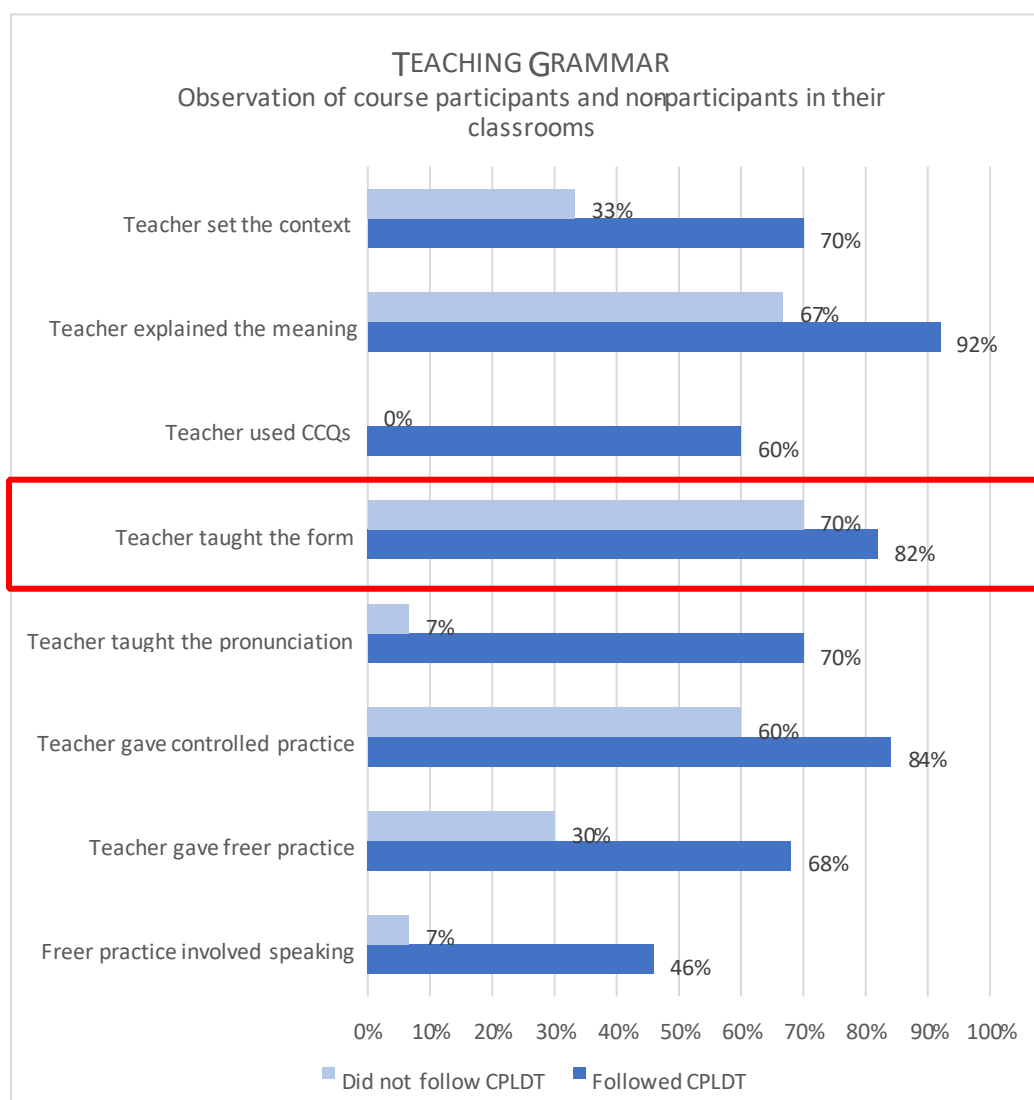


Table 8 : CPLDT - Grammar

All areas demonstrate evidence of course and therefore project impact. Only one area did not show much difference and that was in the teaching of the form (under grammar) which is associated with traditional teaching.

CPLDT is important because it demonstrates a quick, easy to use project and course evaluation tool being used to evaluate teacher classroom performance, with results collated nationally and reported on quickly and easily. The survey monkey questionnaire here was based on the course content; however, it would be simple to adapt this to criteria for general observations with easy to record options for ISA use in their regular observation of teachers for developmental purposes. It could also form the basis of a database of results on teacher observations which could be reviewed and updated annually.

4. Lessons and/or Recommendations

- Input on assessment of teacher / trainer classroom behaviour and on the observation cycle had a positive impact on both trainer and teacher making it an essential element of any teacher educator syllabus.

- The full COP cycle is clearly the most effective training cycle and should be embedded into NCoE curriculum and into in-service CPD.
- The ISAs' use of Survey Monkey for observations on CPLDT proved viable as an efficient tool for gathering and collating data. It could be adapted into a teacher observation tool, and standardised across pre and in-service sectors.
- Both pre and in-service sectors could establish a database based on first observation, then progress tracked over time by ISAs. A similar database could track teacher proficiency increase. Both could be used as career progression tools.

5. References

Deborah Wyburn 2020 Impact Evaluation Report: Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka Project British Council, Colombo.

Appendix One

	Criteria for Teaching
Lesson Planning	1. Aims were clear.
	2. The lesson was well-planned with attention to anticipated problems and solutions.
	3. There was a logical progression to the lesson
	4. The course book was suitably adapted to the learners' needs/level.
Lesson delivery	5. Teacher set the scene and engaged the learners' interest in the topic
	6. New language was presented clearly and correctly.
	7. Teacher checked understanding of target language.
	8. Learners were given opportunity to practise new language through spoken and written activities.
	9. Teacher used mime, gesture / body language.
Managing the learning environment and activities	10. Teacher monitored unobtrusively and gave support when needed.
	11. A variety of tasks / activities was used. Pace was varied to suit learners' needs.
	12. Timing was observed and managed well throughout the class
	13. Instructions were clear and checked.
	14. Teacher used the board effectively and wrote new language up.
	15. Mother Tongue was used effectively but not over used.
	16. Teacher regrouped learners appropriately and efficiently.
Managing interaction and student engagement	17. Teacher established good rapport with learners ensuring they were fully involved in activities.
	18. Interaction patterns were varied
	19. Teacher encouraged learner talk and controlled teacher talk.
	20. Learner errors and feedback were dealt with in different ways and at appropriate times in the lesson.
	21 Teacher elicited information / language from students whenever possible.

		Competency	Description
1	Planning	Learning Objectives	Writing LOs that are SMART and related to the teaching context.
2		Seminar Planning	Preparing a session that is logically staged with each stage supporting the Los
3		Selecting activities and tasks	Selecting a range of activities and tasks to effectively support the participants in achieving the LOs.
4	Delivery	Giving instructions	Consistently giving clear, well-staged and checked instructions / demonstrations.
5		Controlling activities	Consistently managing transitions between activities well in response to participants' progress.
6		Grouping learners	Utilising appropriate and varied interaction patterns to maximise learning with consideration of individual participants in support of the LOs.
7		Checking understanding	Checking participants' understanding at different stages in the session using a range of techniques effectively.
8		Giving feedback in a session	Providing feedback in a timely manner. The trainer can respond to participant contributions / needs to support learning.
9		Adjusting the plan to take opportunities for learning	Demonstrating flexibility within the session to take advantage of opportunities for learning that emerge.
10		Monitoring learning	Monitoring for task progress and feedback and using this to inform the rest of the session.
11	Observation & Feedback	Identify strengths and areas to develop	Identifying strengths and areas to develop in relation to the participant's professional practices as well as developmental resources.
12		Taking notes for feedback	Taking notes in relation to the observation criteria to support and provide evidence in the feedback stage.
13		Questioning skills	Using questions to guide the participants in raising awareness of strengths and ways to develop areas identified in need of development.
14		Giving constructive feedback	Giving feedback that is evidence based, constructive and timely. The trainer gives feedback in a sensitive manner creating a safe environment. The trainer guides the participant to reflect on strengths and areas to develop and how.
15	Role Modelling & Reflection	Demonstrating effective training behaviour	Modelling best practice during the session in terms of facilitating teaching-learning activities consistently throughout the session.
16		Reflecting on own professional development	Reflection on own professional needs, interests and learning preferences and able to identify areas for development in relation to own professional practices as well as institutional needs.

Appendix Two: Survey Monkey Questionnaire

1a. Did the teacher do the following during the lesson? Tick all that apply.

- i. Pre-reading activity/ies
- ii. While-reading activity/ies
- iii. Post-reading activity/ies

1b. If a post-reading activity was done, was it a speaking activity?

2a. Did the teacher do the following during the lesson? Tick all that apply.

- i. Set the context
- ii. Explain the meaning
- iii. Use CCQs
- iv. Teach the form
- v. Teach the pronunciation
- vi. Give controlled practice
- vii. Give freer practice

2b. If freer practice was done, was it a speaking activity?

3. Did the teacher do the following during the lesson? Tick all that apply.

- i. Engage the whole class in pair and group work activities
- ii. Use participatory feedback