

THE EFFECTS OF CASE BASED INSTRUCTION ON THE SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF TURKISH PRESERVICE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Cases have proved to be useful tools in teacher education as they reflect the characteristics of a real classroom and provide a context for preservice teachers to prepare for realities of teaching (Butler, Lee, & Tippins, 2006). The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of case-based instruction on the self-reported teacher efficacy beliefs of Turkish preservice teachers of English. Data coming from the questionnaire showed that creating video cases collaboratively helped them improve their classroom management related efficacy beliefs and the interviews revealed that they benefited from this collaborative task as they produced alternative solutions to the cases reflecting real life situations and discussed their suggestions in detail.

Keywords: Self-efficacy beliefs, case-based instruction, classroom management, EFL context

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to meet the personal demands of becoming teachers, particularly the demand of reasoned decision making, teacher educators apply case-based instruction as one means to prepare prospective teachers for their future careers. Case-based instruction has been used to improve prospective teachers' reasoning (Lundeberg, 1999), facilitate their decision-making skills (Jay, 2004), develop their pedagogical and professional knowledge (Mayo, 2002) and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Mainglila & Doerr, 2002).

Within the framework of case based instruction prospective teachers' awareness is raised to the "theoretical principles, maxims and norms" of being teachers (Orland-Barak 2002, p. 452), as each case reflects the characteristics of a real classroom, providing a context for prospective teachers to prepare for realities of teaching (Butler, Lee & Tippins 2006). When prospective teachers analyze a case, they have the opportunity to understand what could happen in a real classroom and gain perspectives on teaching in different settings before they have their field experiences. Harrington (1995) claims that using classroom teaching dilemmas has openly challenged the technical-skills ideology in teaching. In traditional teacher education programs prospective teachers are introduced to methods, strategies and activities, and provided with knowledge on theories on second language learning. Even though such instruction is necessary to develop the basic skills and knowledge, it is not totally sufficient for them to grasp the interrelationship between theoretical and practical knowledge, and the moral nature of teaching, as noted by Harrington (1995):

Because teaching and learning in increasingly diverse contexts are complex, prospective teachers cannot come to understand the dilemmas of teaching only through the presentation of techniques and methods (p.203)

That is, there is often a void between theory and practice, and case-based instruction is believed to fill this gap. The incorporation of the case method into preservice courses enables prospective teachers to examine problem situations presented in the cases, reflect on their own values and decisions, and debate their decisions with their peers and instructors.

To date, very little has been written about the effects of case based instruction. Haley (2004) presents the case study of one student teacher involved in his 15 week experience in a linguistically and culturally diverse secondary school setting and how his case was used in foreign language methodology course. Results of the study revealed that case based methodology can be an instructional tool as students studying this case discovered that they were able to link theory to practice and could understand and use educational theories and principles in becoming effective educators. Barksdale-Ladd et al., (2001) examined professors' framings for student-written cases in 6 elementary teacher education classes. All professors felt that a good case reflected a genuine dilemma containing details, support and reflection. Findings showed through their experience with case writing and through engaging in self-inquiry about case writing, the professors came to understand their students in different ways, students came to understand professors and teaching in different ways and developed new insights into their own practices.

According to many researchers, when moving from the role of student to teacher, student teachers face tremendous challenges (Chen & Chen 2001; Veenman, 1984). To help student teachers solve real world problems during their internships, Hsu (2004) developed a website and asked student teachers to share cases and personal experiences and exchange comments about posted cases with both peer student teachers and experienced teachers. After 2 months of using the web for case discussion, questionnaires were distributed and interviews were conducted with a group of 20 student teachers. Results indicated that such an exchange helped them to increase their understanding of problems, to obtain knowledge and skills to solve problems, and to gain positive attitudes towards teaching as a profession.

Finally, in his study, Koç et al. (2009) explored the potential value of online video case discussions among preservice and inservice teachers and the use of video case as a tool for professional development of teachers. The study was conducted with 26 preservice and inservice mathematics teachers and a veteran teacher who appeared on the video case. Results indicated that participant teachers were able to make theory-practice connections by articulating specific frameworks that guided the study. The researchers contended that online forum discussions of video cases in which collective engagement of preservice and inservice teachers, and the case teacher have a great potential to support teachers' professional development.

The present study aims to extend the knowledge on the use of case based instruction by investigation its effects on prospective teacher efficacy. More specifically, the present study aims to investigate the effects of a case-based instruction on the self-reported teacher efficacy beliefs of Turkish preservice teachers of English (PTs). Teacher efficacy (TE) defined as the beliefs teachers hold regarding their teaching capabilities (Tschannen Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) has been found to affect instructional practices (Deemer, 2004), classroom management (Henson, 2001), teacher burnout (Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2002), student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and student self-efficacy (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray & Hannay, 2001) at a significant level. As the first years of teaching are found to be critical to the long-term development of TE, we believed that case based instruction would provide a context for preservice teachers gain perspectives on teaching in settings different from their own classrooms and help them "think like a teacher", thus, affecting their self-efficacy positively.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the present study were 41 PTs enrolled in the ELT department of a state university in Turkey. All participants were second year students with an average age of 19.4 and they were randomly chosen from four intact groups of students.

Procedure

The present study took place in the second term of 2008-2009 academic year in the 12-week classroom management course which aims to prepare PTs to be effective managers of their classrooms so that student learning is maximized. More specifically, the course focused on understanding the causes of problems in relation to classroom management, creating a favorable climate in the classroom by communicating and cooperating with students and parents, and dealing with problem behavior patterns.

During the course, PTs worked collaboratively in groups of three and prepared 10-15 minutes long video cases each exemplifying different classroom management problems and possible ways of dealing with the problems. Cases, provided by the instructor, reflected real classroom situations and in each case one specific classroom management problem was demonstrated by PTs. One PT acted as the teacher and applied a specific strategy choosing among the strategies discussed theoretically during the course. PTs were encouraged to adapt the given case to the Turkish context. The video cases created by the PTs were shown to the rest of the class during the course and PTs who watched the videos were asked to reflect on the case and suggest alternative solutions or interpretations. During the term, 30 video cases were created, explored and commented by the PTs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the present came from Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) and semi-structured interviews. The scale with 24 items and three subscales aims to determine PTs' efficacy in student engagement, in instructional practices and in classroom management.

Example items from the subscales are as follows: “To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies?” (Efficacy for instructional strategies); “How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?” (Efficacy for classroom management); and “How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?” (Efficacy for student engagement). PTs were asked to indicate how much they can do in the given statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (a great deal) to 1 (nothing). The questionnaire was piloted with 32 PTs in the same institution. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the present study was .87 while it was .94 for the study of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001).

The scale was conducted at the beginning and end of the study to see if there would be a significant difference in the self-reported efficacy beliefs of PTs who have created video cases. Data from the scale were analyzed via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and a t-test was applied to the data.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten randomly selected PTs after the study, to gather in-depth information about their opinions related to case-based instruction. Each interview session lasted between 10-15 minutes. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed by means of pattern coding as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to the data from the questionnaire and results of the t-test revealed a significant change only in the subscale of self efficacy for classroom management indicating that PTs developed more positive self-efficacy beliefs in relation to classroom management issues (see Table 1). The eta squared statistic (.22) indicated a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). Higher scores in the subscale of efficacy for classroom management reflect PTs’ increased efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to establish an effective classroom management system, to set effective rules and procedures and get students follow them and to deal with problem student behavior.

No significant difference occurred for the scores gained from the efficacy subscales in student engagement and instructional strategies.

Table 1: Distribution of mean scores in three subscales

Scale	Test	M	SD	df	t	p*
Student Engagement	Pre	31.3	3.7	36	-.126	.90
	Post	31.4	3.9			
Classroom Management	Pre	28.8	4.1	35	-3.16	.003
	Post	31.8	4.4			
Instructional strategies	Pre	30.2	3.9	39	-.860	.39
	Post	31	3.5			

*p<0.05

Interviews

The interviews were conducted with randomly selected 10 PTs at the end of the study to gain in-depth data on their opinions related to case-based instruction. Two major categories emerged from the data: PTs’ opinions of their classroom management skills and their experience of creating video cases.

Classroom management skills: The interviews conducted with the PTs revealed that seven PTs out of 10 mentioned that they felt competent in terms of their classroom management skills while three stated that they did not. The PTs who felt competent gave the following responses to explain the factors affecting their self-efficacy:

Last term, I went to a school for observation for one of my projects and saw how classroom management and teaching were closely related. The teachers I observed had to deal with a lot of discipline problems, but they failed most of the time. During this course, we discussed a lot of possible problems that might occur in every classroom and learned the strategies to deal with them. Now, I think I am equipped with the necessary classroom management skills.

During the course, we had a lot of discussions on problems that occur in real classrooms. Most of the examples given in the book were from American culture and from other disciplines, but we discussed the examples by referring to language classrooms in our own context and suggested strategies accordingly. I have the feeling that I can use those strategies when I become a teacher.

The responses of the PTs who stated to have low competence in their classroom management skills indicated that they did not feel ready to deal with a real classroom. The following responses reveal their points:

Although I learned a lot of things to deal with difficult students in the classroom, I know that real classroom setting is different. When I graduate I will be very young and this might affect my students' attitudes towards me. Applying the strategies that we have learned might not very easy. I think I will develop my skills when I actually start teaching.

I wish we had a chance to observe a real classroom setting during the course. We would focus on the student behaviors occurring in a real classroom and observe and evaluate the way teachers react to them. Then, I would be prepared to teach a real classroom.

Creating video cases: In relation to the experience of creating video cases, all PTs mentioned that they benefited from that collaborative work. The following comments illustrate these:

The cases that the instructor gave us were not reflecting the Turkish content very well. So, we worked in groups and first tried to understand the case. Then, we made some adaptations to make it more familiar to our situation. For example, in the cases given, the number of students mentioned was 15-20. But in our adapted version we had a more crowded classroom.

Working with my friends made this project more beneficial for me. Prior to videotaping, we had long discussions on choosing the best strategies. We had to go over the book again and again, come up with ideas and vote for the best ones among us. I learned a lot from our own discussions.

After we showed our videos to the rest of the class, they gave us feedback on our solutions. They also asked some questions about our choices. I mean why we reacted in that way, what we thought, etc. Listening to their comments gave us different ideas about our case.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Data coming from the questionnaire showed that creating video cases collaboratively helped PTs of English improve their classroom management related efficacy beliefs. The interviews conducted at the end of the study further revealed that they benefited from this collaborative task as the cases they demonstrated and videotaped reflected real classroom practices, as they produced alternative solutions to the cases given and reflected on their choices.

These findings suggest that case-based instruction provided PTs with a context to prepare for realities of teaching and understand what could happen in a classroom given a specific scenario. Gaining perspectives on teaching in settings different from their own classrooms helped them feel more prepared for their future teaching and increased their classroom management related self-efficacy beliefs.

The present study confirms the findings of the research stating that case based instruction improves preservice teachers' decision making skills (Jay, 2004); provides a context for prospective teachers to prepare for realities of teaching (Butler, Lee & Tippins 2006); and develop their pedagogical and professional knowledge (Mayo, 2002).

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