

Developing observation and reflective skills through teaching practice

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Abstract

This case study explores the effects of addressing observations and reflective skills of 12-student teachers during their teaching practices for infant education in Guadalajara, Spain. The participants had been studying the basics of CLIL methodology and reflexive-teaching during a four-month learning period. Then, they participated in a six-hour workshop in which they were required to observe, participate in, and reflect on the teacher and each other's on a four-minute teaching practice to assess their presentations following the given guidelines. The results show that students could demonstrate they are on the path of making effective observations and reflections on an observed practice.

Keywords: Reflective skills, Spain, effective observations, practice, workshop.

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1. Introduction

Several authors agree that teaching practices in the classroom should be a part of the Teacher Training Programme, especially for those who will be working in infant education (Beltran, 2015; Duarte & Fitzgerald, 2006; Halim, Aishah & Mohd, 2011; Rabano, 2015; Stingu, 2012). It is believed that these practices will enrich student teachers' experiences in improving their teaching skills (Rabano, 2015). Moreover, integrating certain methodologies, such as CLIL, into student teachers' learning experience could increase their abilities to incorporate them in to their teaching practices (Beltran, 2015). This study aims to explore the influence of addressing observation and reflective skills of the fourth year student teachers' teaching practices, after having revised some concepts related to CLIL teaching guidelines (Halim, Aishah & Mohd, 2011) and pedagogical reflection steps (Duarte & Fitzgerald, 2006; Stingu, 2012).

2. Literature review

Being able to teach in a foreign language has been a concern in the European context in the last years. Not only are student teachers expected to apply teaching techniques and knowledge, but they are also supposed to engage in critical reflection practices to improve their teaching skills and strengthen their teaching identity (Rabano, 2015; Stingu, 2012). Stingu (2012) presents Larrive's four levels of reflection, but this study will focus only on the third level of reflection. The pedagogical reflection deals with the relationship between the educational goals and the teaching practice (Stingu, 2012). This type of reflection seeks to identify learning objectives during a lesson by reflecting on teaching experiences. This exercise will improve the teaching skills of the reflexive practitioner (Rabano, 2015; Stingu, 2012).

Several studies have addressed the need of providing guidelines or rubrics to facilitate the observation process (Halim, Aishah & Mohd, 2011; Rabano, 2015; Stingu, 2012). The teaching of English as a foreign language allows the application of different methodologies. The CLIL Methodology has been chosen since it has been found in four European scenarios, where it is considered an important indicator of the effectiveness of teachers training (Beltran, 2015). Being knowledgeable of CLIL methodology is the 33rd item in the European profile for language teacher education and it also corresponds to one question from the European portfolio. In addition, CLIL has three modules in the European Framework for CLIL and one section in the Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test. Beltran also highlights the importance that this trendy methodology has got among the different Spanish autonomous communities, both in the secondary and tertiary environments.

This case study focuses only on two main aspects of this methodology. On one hand, Beltran (2015) presents some teaching characteristics that infant teachers should follow to apply it. For example, infant teachers should provide rich, varied and contextualised input. They should also take advantages of their body language, tone of voice and multisensorial environments so that their learners receive a scaffolding support and a verbal and non-verbal opportunities to communicate in the foreign language. On the other hand, the rubric 'How "CLIL" are you?' (Cambridge University Press, 2012) includes different items that a CLIL teacher should consider when introducing a topic, guiding understanding, focusing on language and the speaking and writing skills as well as the assessment and the feedback. This case study took into consideration the aforementioned aspects for the development of the guidelines that student teachers used to assess their classmates' performances.

3. Research questions

1. To what extent English IV students can identify examples of CLIL learning goals when observing others' teaching practices?
2. Which CLIL criteria are more frequently used by the participants?
3. Could this practice be considered effective for the development of observation skills?

4. Methodology

This study was carried out during the first term of the academic year 2018–2019 in the Guadalajara Campus, Spain. A total of 12-student teachers from the infant education were participated in this three-phase study. In the first phase, students were introduced to the basic concepts about CLIL methodology. The students were also working with three teaching videos suggested by Beltra (2015) that aimed to develop their awareness of looking for the evidence of learning goals, so they could report evidence of their assessment. They were introduced to the rubric 'Checklist: How "CLIL" are you?'. The participants were told which items would be essential for their four-minutes teaching. The second phase was devoted to observing the teacher and classmates' practices, and each student has received their own evaluation with the rubric items and evidence observed by the teacher. In the final phase, the students were expected to apply their observation and reflective skills to think of their classmates' teaching practices using the 'Checklist: How "CLIL" are you?', its adapted version, and the evaluation they had received from their own practice as a reference for the assessment. Finally, they upload their results to their individual classroom drive folder.

5. Analysis of results

Students' responses were typed and tabulated in Microsoft Excel. Only one student did not upload her contributions. The research questions of this study were answered with the information collected from the teacher and the participants. To answer the first question, it was necessary to determine to what extent the teachers' and students' observations agree. As a result, a number of teachers observations cases and students observations cases per CLIL item were counted and compared. Figure 1 illustrates the results.

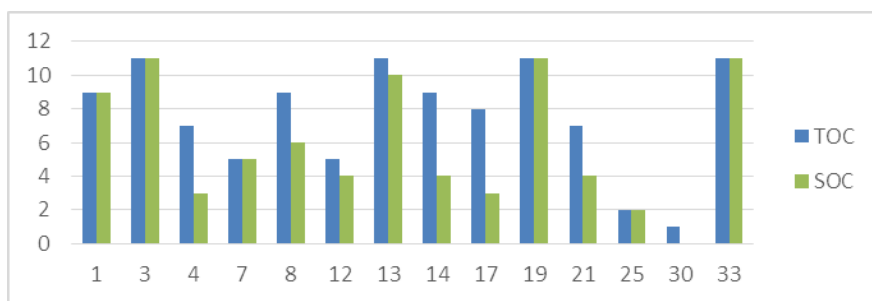


Figure 1. Teacher and students' observation consistency per CLIL item

Figure 2 shows the consistency degree between students and teachers' observations considering 100% agreement when there is a ≤ 1 . In general, there is an agreement between the two groups of observers. Therefore, it could be said that students have been applying their observation skills.

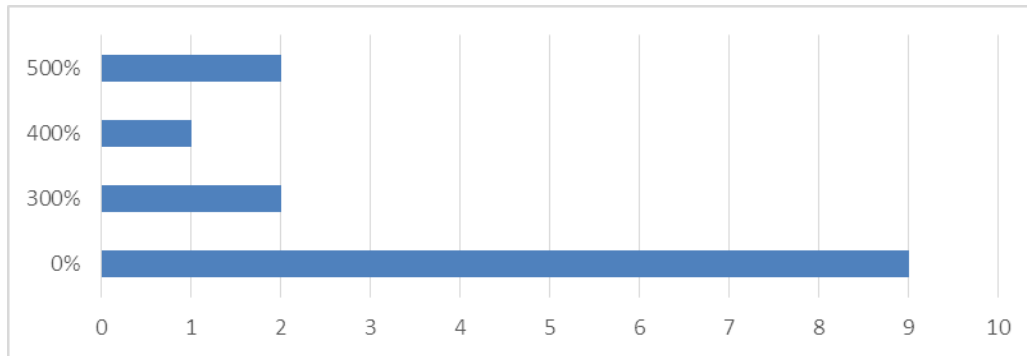


Figure 2. Consistency degree between students and teachers' observations

In order to answer the second question, the criteria tendency number was established by the number of times an item was observed by more than the 50% of the participants.

According to Figure 3, it can be observed that participants tend to apply more frequently to codes 1, 3, 13, 19 and 33 that correspond to finding out what learners know about the topic, using visuals to introduce new topics, using different tasks to recycle vocabulary, encouraging spoken output, and giving feedback. This result is 100% consistent with the teacher's observations. The graph also shows that working with hands-on activities (4), developing thinking skills (8 and 12), using subject-specific terminology or vocabulary (17) and encouraging written output (25) were the less frequent items identified during the teaching practice. Both the teacher's observations and students' observations agree on the less frequent items.

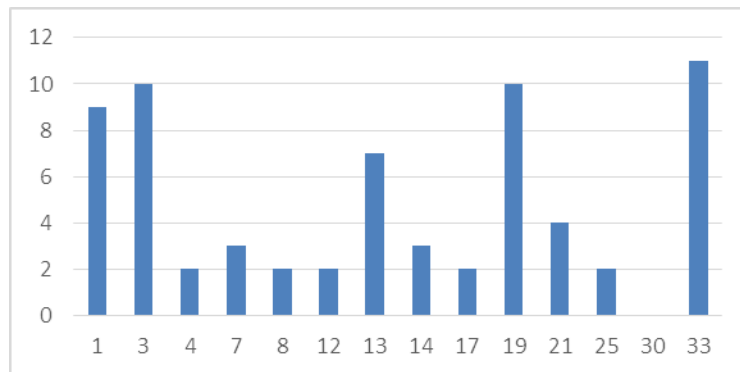


Figure 3. Criteria tendency numbers by code

The final question was measured by analysing each frequently observed criterion (FOC) or the item that has been reported by more than the 50% of students. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the whole teaching practice was defined by the highest FOC items number. It is thought that if this number represents more than the 50% of the 14 criteria, then the practice has been effective for students. The results show that this study was an effective practice for English IV students as the highest FOC item was 9, which represents the 71% of the 14 criteria items and most of the student's classmates got closer results. Therefore, it can be concluded that they are on the path of developing observation skills as it is illustrated in Figure 4.

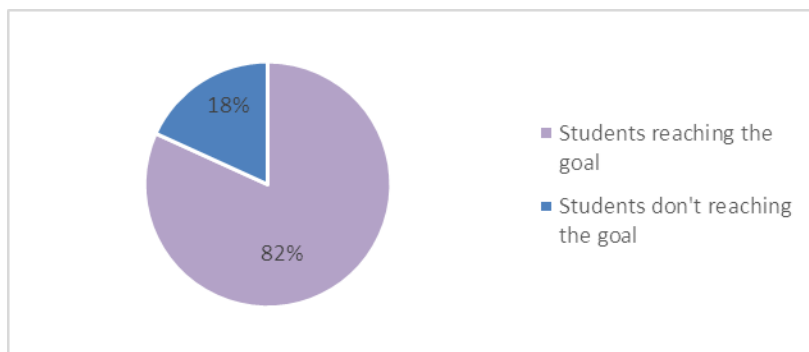


Figure 4. Effectiveness of the teaching practice

6. Conclusion

This study shows student teachers sensitivity for infant education's to observe and reflect on observed-teaching practices. It also gives an insight of student teachers' need to socialise the different items that would guide them during the reflection stage and the further discussion about their observations and reflections. As Halim, Aishan and Mohd (2011) suggested some student teachers do pay attention both to their own performance and students' learning. Keeping a learning diary and conducting interviews would be an interesting resource to explore the development of student teachers' reflections during the process.

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