

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES (CATs) IN EFL CLASS IN THE ARMENIAN SETTING: APPLYING THE “INVENTED DIALOGUE” TECHNIQUE

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The given paper is devoted to the application of Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) in EFL class in Armenian schools. CATs are generally simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities designed to give the instructors and students useful feedback on the teaching/learning process as it is happening. The observation over the assessment techniques enabled us to come to the following conclusion: most teachers and lecturers use traditional grading system and very few use CATs in their teaching practice. To overcome this gap a few lesson plans were developed by us and teaching with the application of CATs was delivered during the second term of this academic year. The experimental teaching was delivered with the 8th grade students of Gavar school № 4 after Avetik Isahakyan (Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia) in the second term of this academic year (2019-2020). During the teaching the “Invented Dialogue” assessment technique was applied. This technique belongs to the group of CATs which assess students’ skill in synthesis and creative thinking. All the stages of experimental teaching are presented in the paper: planning the teaching, delivering the teaching, evaluation of the teaching. To evaluate the efficiency of the experimental teaching with the implementation of CATs SWOT analysis was used (for self-evaluation) as well as feedback was provided from the students. The SWOT analysis matrix and the results of the feedback are also presented in the given paper.

Keywords: *assessment, formative assessment, Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), application of CATs, experimental teaching, SWOT analysis of the teaching experience, feedback.*

Introduction

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are generally simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities designed to give the instructors and students useful feedback on the teaching/learning process as it is happening. CATs are “relatively quick and easy formative evaluation methods that help you check student understanding in “real time”. These

formative evaluations provide information that can be used to modify/improve course content, adjust teaching methods, and, ultimately improve student learning” [3].

CATs are widely used at all levels of learning and teaching starting from pre-school education and finishing with post-graduate studies as well as in all types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning). They can be easily applied while teaching all subjects and disciplines.

Tomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross present fifty CATs in their book “Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers” [1].

In the focus of our attention is applying CATs in a foreign language class (EFL) in the Armenian setting.

The importance of the topic of the research can be explained by its **relevance**. It is well known that Armenian educators prefer using grading system for assessment and mostly avoid using CATs. Therefore, the application of CATs can be highly beneficial not only for the instructors but for the learners as well. The relevance of our research is determined by the reforms in the educational sector in Armenia. These reforms are aimed at the modernization of school curricula, methods of teaching and learning, as well as assessment system. A lot of efforts have been made to improve the teaching content, methodology of teaching and little has been done to improve the assessment techniques. Most schools and teachers are “addicted” to the old grading system and resist the new assessment techniques. This paper is an attempt to fill that “misbelief” towards the non-grading assessment. We are hopeful that it can become a humble contribution to the improvement of the whole assessment process in Armenian schools.

The main goal during the research was to analyze different types of CATs and to check their didactic potential via the application of CATs while teaching/learning EFL in an Armenian classroom.

The main **object** of the expedition was the set of CATs which could be applied during the EFL class in the Armenian setting.

Methodology of the research

The methodology of our research was determined by the overall goal and the specific objectives put forward and hence included the following **steps**:

- ✚ to study different scientific approaches towards the notion of assessment in general and formative assessment particularly;
- ✚ to discuss the role of formative assessment and CATs in the teaching/learning process;
- ✚ to conduct comparative analysis of various CATs;

- ✚ to monitor the teaching delivered by other instructors in order to see if CATs are used by them in class or not;
- ✚ to deliver teaching with the use of CATs in EFL classroom in the Armenian setting;
- ✚ to analyze the results of the teaching using SWOT analysis method for self-evaluation as well as interviews and questionnaires with learners.

During the research the following **methods** were applied:

- *theoretical*: study of relevant scientific literature covering the same or similar topics;
- *social and pedagogical*: observation and monitoring of the learning/teaching process;
- *experimental*: delivering teaching sessions with the use of CATs;
- *statistic*: statistic analysis of the data received;
- *SWOT analysis* method (for self-evaluation of the teaching delivered).

The theoretical part of our research dealt with many types of CATs. They were explored and compared with each other. Naturally, we were unable to test all CATs suggested by Angelo and Cross (there are 50 of them), therefore, only some of the CATs were applied during our teaching.

Implementing CATs while teaching EFL: Assessing skills in synthesis and creative thinking (“Invented Dialogue”)

Before applying CATs we had monitored the teaching delivered by several instructors (both school teachers and university lecturers). The observation over the assessment techniques enabled us to come to the following conclusion: most teachers and lecturers use traditional grading system and very few (at least from the ones we worked with) use CATs in their teaching practice. To overcome this gap a few lesson plans were developed by us and teaching with the application of CATs was delivered during the second term of this academic year.

The experimental teaching was delivered with the 8th grade students of Gavar school #4 after Avetik Isahakyan (Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia) in the second term of this academic year (2019-2020) before the State of Emergency due to COVID-19 was announced.¹ Unit 7, “Travelling is my dream”, from the textbook by Lusine Grigoryan [2], was selected for the teaching. In total 29 students were involved in the teaching.

¹ We had planned several teaching sessions during the second term of the year, but, unfortunately, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 we did not have the opportunity to implement our planned activities on a large scale. The main problem was that online lessons were not delivered regularly in schools which deprived us of the opportunity to continue with the implementation of CATs.

Planning the teaching session

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the teaching session the students were expected to

- improve reading skills (reading the text),
- improve rendering skills (rendering the text),
- express their opinion on the topic of the lesson,
- improve their oral and written skills (doing exercises, having discussions, etc.),
- use the new vocabulary in discussions,
- improve communicative skills (e.g. by conducting pair work activities),
- improve their creative thinking skills (through the implementation of CATs / “Invented Dialog”).

Teacher’s objectives during the teaching session were the following:

- to motivate learners to be involved in active discussions on the topic,
- to enhance learners’ speaking and writing skills,
- to improve learner’s creative and critical thinking,
- to manifest the spirit of competition,
- to get content-based feedback.

Delivering the teaching session

The delivery of the teaching was planned as a combination of three main sections. The table below represents the structure of the lesson with the time framework.

Table 1: The structure of the experimental lesson.

Section	Duration
Introduction	5 minutes
Explicit instruction	20 minutes
CATs application and closing	20 minutes

Introduction (5 minutes)

The lesson was initiated with the greeting, identifying the absent students and the announcement of the topic of the lesson.

Explicit Instruction (20 minutes).

The topic of the lesson was “The Pool of Tears”, an adapted text from “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll.

After announcing the topic of the lesson the new words were introduced. Learners were asked to guess their meanings (while reading the text) and of course the proper synonyms for those words were found. Here “*Matching the words with the meanings*” strategy was applied. Learners were asked to answer the questions written under the text

on page 118. While doing that they expressed their ideas about “Our hero Alice”. As the second step we applied “*Thick vs Thin Questions*” or “*Questioning*” strategy to deal with the text. Doing this it was possible to see how they had understood the contents of the text and the new words. Learners should answer the questions using their newly gained vocabulary. While developing questions we had paid great attention to the new vocabulary items urging the learners to think critically and use it in their answers. Our third step was to do the exercises concerning the text after reading it. We did exercises 30, 31, on page 118. Then we did exercises 32 using “True/False Statement” Strategy.

CATs application and closing (20 minutes)

As our new material had actions and heroes, which was relevant for “Invented Dialogue” technique, it had been decided to apply that CAT during the lesson.

The **Invented Dialogue assessment** technique helps teachers to study students’ creative thinking abilities. This technique belongs to the group of CATs which assess students’ **skill in synthesis and creative thinking**.¹ By inventing (making up) dialogues, learners combine their understanding of topics, people, incidents or times into an imaginative and deliberately organized discussion. They can study and use existing examples from primary sources to construct more plausible situations, or they can concoct alternative words that may have been used in this sense. As a consequence, students build imaginative coping abilities, draw inferences from experiences and extrapolate from the content they have learned. It is a perfect opportunity to involve students in challenging debates and evaluate their capacity to turn supportive statements into conversations or even essays.

While applying this technique our teaching goals were:

- ✚ to improve the students’ ability to make logical inferences from observations;
- ✚ to develop the students’ capacity to synthesize and combine knowledge and new ideas;
- ✚ to improve the capacity to think creatively and improve imagination of learners;
- ✚ to study how to grasp the viewpoints and principles of the topic;
- ✚ to introduce the strategies and techniques used to gain new knowledge in this topic;
- ✚ to learn how to analyze techniques and materials in this context;
- ✚ to show that all students’ contributions are important and valued;
- ✚ to make learners work together as a whole and be responsible for the result equally.

¹ Other CATs which assess students’ skill in synthesis and creative thinking are “One-Sentence Summary”, “Word Journal”, “Approximate Analogies”, “Concept Maps”, “Annotated Portfolios” to name just a few.

The procedure of the implementation of the CAT / Invented Dialogue

First of all, we explained what we were going to do. Getting into details helped to motivate learners to be as creative as possible, even in the case when they would not get a mark for that work. As we already had a chosen topic, we asked to build a creative dialogue between Alice and White Rabbit. Learners should work in pairs. The time limit was 10 minutes. The working process was noisy, which was difficult to control. In this phase of CATs implementation, we were a little embarrassed, because we had planned to analyze the dialogues during the lesson, but our time management did not work well and did not let us do that. Therefore, all the works were collected to be checked and discussed during the next lesson. What we did during the last 10 minutes was listening and watching the performance of a pair, that fulfilled the task first. While reading and analyzing the dialogues we came up to the conclusion that the majority of the class thought nearly the same way.

In most of the dialogues created by the students *Alice was asking for help (she needed candies, she wanted to get out and return home, she was tired and asked for a place to sleep, she lost the way and asked for a map, she sang to get money), she asked the White Rabbit to take photos of her.* In some other dialogues *Alice was sad, she was crying or she was quarreling.* And in the two of the invented dialogues, *the White Rabbit announced he was busy and did not let Alice speak.*

As a result, we got acquainted with the learners' way of thinking, we adopted the manner they prefer to fulfill the given task, we got information about their working pace and level of understanding. All this was needed to improve our teaching approaches.

For students, this task was beneficial because they were allowed to be flexible while choosing ideas and scenarios, they could freely express their feelings and wishes, we had a good partnership and competition, which motivated the learners to think as creatively as possible.

Self-evaluation and feedback on teaching with the implementation of CATs

1. Applying SWOT analysis for self-evaluation

To sum up the experimental teaching session with the implementation of CATs the SWOT analysis was used. SWOT is an acronym which stands for:

- S-Strengths,
- W-Weaknesses,
- O-Opportunities,
- T-Threats.

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning technique used originally to help a person or organization identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to business competition or project planning. Nowadays SWOT analysis is used not only in business or related fields but in educational sciences as well. Strengths and weaknesses are internal

and can be directly managed, while the opportunities and threats are external and can be only anticipated and reacted.

Below is the SWOT analysis matrix designed to assess our experimental teaching with the implementation of some CATs.

Table 2: Personal SWOT analysis matrix on experimental teaching

PERSONAL SWOT ANALYSIS MATRIX FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING SESSION WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CATs	
<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Application of new assessment techniques, rejection of traditional ways of assessment by means of grading system. ▪ Using interactive methods of teaching alongside CATs which enabled the students to be involved in teaching and learning activities and assessment as well. ▪ Making use of both individual and group/pair learning styles through a set of activities, enhancing the students' social competence through cooperative learning. ▪ Promoting students' reflection, self-evaluation and self-assessment skills as life-long learning skills. 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New techniques of classroom assessment were perceived with difficulties at first since most of the students are not used to assessment beyond grades. In majority cases students are not used to giving feedback or self-evaluation and reflection. The introduction of CATs needs explanations and time. ▪ Students are also used to traditional teaching style with traditional methods and approaches. Thus the introduction of new interactive methods was not initially perceived properly.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students can be taught and instructed on using CATs in their learning for self-reflection. There are a lot of materials (both text and visual) on the Internet that can help the learners to understand better the benefits of CATs. ▪ They can use CATs not only under the supervision of the teacher or instructor but also on their own. This will help them improve their learning style and habits. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resistance from school teachers who do not want to use innovative methods of assessment and are stuck to grading system. ▪ Diseases (like COVID-19) which can interfere with the educational process and transfer it to the virtual zone. But even here we can use some CATs, thus overcoming threats, modifying some CATs for the virtual environment.

2. Feedback from students on the experimental teaching with the implementation of the “Invented Dialogue” CAT

It is generally accepted that one of the indispensable parts of each teaching session, especially of experimental one, is providing feedback. We carried out a survey on the use of CATs in the foreign language teaching among the 8th grade students.

In order to measure the outcomes of the experimental teaching we carried out interviews with the target audience as well as developed questionnaires to understand the strong and weak points of the teaching and to use the feedback gained from the participants for the assessment of the effectiveness of the experimental teaching. By the end of the experimental teaching session the students were kindly asked to answer the following questions using this feedback grid.

Table 3: Feedback form for the students.

Feedback form for the students

Grade: _____

Date: _____

Dear student! Please, answer the following questions choosing one of these answers.

1. Was it interesting to learn with the use of the new techniques of assessment (Invented Dialogue)?

- a) Yes, it was
- b) Yes, but we need time to get used to them
- c) No, it was not interesting.

2. How did you like the way of your learning?

- a) It was motivating
- b) It was not so interesting
- c) It was boring.

3. Did the techniques used during the teaching prompt you to reflect on what you have learned and how you have learned?

- a) Yes, they did
- b) No, they didn't.

4. Do you want your teacher to use these assessment techniques frequently?

- a) Yes
- b) No.

5. Can these techniques be useful for you in learning a foreign language?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I am not sure.

To sum up the results from the feedback, it's worth mentioning that the feedback was highly positive. For the majority of students it was extremely interesting to learn English with the use of new techniques, which helped them reflect on what they learn and how they learn. Most students would like their teachers to use these techniques during classes as they could help improve a foreign language proficiency level as well as enhance their learning habits.

Conclusion

CATs application is an indivisible part of the modern educational system, which has a strong influence not only on learners' daily progress but also on teachers' skills improvement. The classroom assessment provides more proper information about learners' attainments or failures than traditional grading system does. Due to CATs, a teacher evaluates different abilities and skills of his/her students. This set of techniques is aimed at assessing the prior knowledge and understanding, learners' skills in synthesis and creative thinking, analysis and critical thinking, skills in application and performance, learners' reaction to class activities, assignments and new materials, etc. Gained data can assist teachers in lesson organization and classroom management.

To sum it up, the assessment study offers various techniques, methods and approaches for teaching/learning process evaluation. Teachers may choose the one, which they consider more proper and effective for classroom assessment. CATs provide wide opportunities for both teachers and students to be sure the work they do is assessed in an honest way, and not graded. As for the students, they get a flow of encouragement and motivation, have an active role in their learning because now they take responsibilities and share them with their instructors. As for the teachers, CATs allow them to be more informed about their student's progress, attitudes, challenges, etc. and to be more capable in performing their everyday tasks.

References

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**ԼՍԱՐԱՆԻ ԳՆԱՀԱՏՄԱՆ ՏԵԽՆԻԿԱՆԵՐԸ
ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ՄԻՋԱԿԱՅՐՈՒՄ ԱՆԳԵՐԵՆԻ ԴԱՍԻՆ. «ՀՈՐԻՆՎԱԾ
ԵՐԿԽՈՍՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ» ՏԵԽՆԻԿԱՅԻ ԿԻՐԱՌՈՒՄԸ**

ՍԱՐԳՍՅԱՆ ՌՈՒԶԱՆՆԱ

Մանկավարժական գիտությունների թեկնածու, դոցենտ,

ԳՊՀ դասախոս

ՄԱԼԱՔՅԱՆ ՍՅՈՒԶԱՆՆԱ

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Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է հայկական դպրոցներում անգլերենի դասերին լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների կիրառմանը: Լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաները պարզ, անանուն /հիմնականում/ լսարանային առաջադրանքներ են, որոնք մշակված են ուսումնառության գործընթացի վերաբերյալ դասավանդողներին և սովորողներին անհրաժեշտ հետադարձ կապն ապահովելու համար: Դասապրոցեսի մշտադիտարկումը /լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների կիրառման տեսանկյունից/ թույլ է տալիս կատարել հետևյալ եզրահանգումը. դասավանդողների մեծ մասը կիրառում է գնահատման ավանդական թվանշանային համակարգը, քերն են օգտագործում լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաներն իրենց դասավանդման պրակտիկայում: Այս բացը լրացնելու նպատակով մենք մշակել էինք դասեր՝ լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների կիրառմամբ՝ սույն ուսումնական տարվա (2019-2020) երկրորդ կիսամյակում անցկացնելու համար: Այդպիսի տեխնիկաների կիրառմամբ փորձարարական ուսուցումն իրականացվել է ՀՀ Գեղարքունիքի մարզի Գավառ քաղաքի Ավետիք Իսահակյանի անվան հ.4 դպրոցի 8-րդ դասարանում: Ուսումնառության ընթացքում օգտագործվել է «Հորինված երկխոսություն» (“Invented Dialogue”) տեխնիկան, որը պատկանում է լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների այն խմբին, որոնք գնահատում են սովորողների ստեղծագործ մտածողությունն ու նյութ սինթեզելու կարողությունները:

Հոդվածում ներկայացված են փորձարարական ուսուցման բոլոր փուլերը՝ ուսուցման պլանավորումը, դասի անցկացումը, ինչպես նաև փորձարարական ուսուցման գնահատումն ու ինքնագնահատումը: Լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների կիրառմամբ ուսուցման արդյունավետության գնահատման համար օգտագործել ենք SWOT վերլուծության մեթոդը (վեր ենք հանել ուսուցման ուժեղ և թույլ կողմերը, հնարավորություններն ու վտանգները): Նաև վերլուծել ենք սովորողներից ստացված հետադարձ կապի արդյունքները: SWOT վերլուծության մատրիցան և հետադարձ կապի արդյունքները ներկայացված են սույն հոդվածում:

Բանալի բառեր. *գնահատում, ձևավորող գնահատում, լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաներ, լսարանի գնահատման տեխնիկաների կիրառում, փորձարարական ուսուցում, ուսուցման SWOT վերլուծություն, հետադարձ կապ:*

ТЕХНИКИ ВНУТРИКЛАССНОГО ОЦЕНИВАНИЯ НА УРОКЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В АРМЯНСКОЙ АУДИТОРИИ. ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ТЕХНИКИ “ПРИДУМАННЫЙ ДИАЛОГ”

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Данная статья посвящена использованию техник внутриклассного оценивания при обучении английскому языку в школах Армении. Техники внутриклассного оценивания – это, как правило, простые, анонимные (в основном) внутриклассные задания, разработанные с целью предоставить преподавателям и учащимся необходимую обратную связь о процессе обучения в реальном времени. Наблюдение над учебным процессом (с точки зрения использования техник оценивания) позволило прийти к следующему выводу: большинство учителей и преподавателей используют традиционную “балльную” систему оценивания, лишь некоторые используют техники внутриклассного оценивания в своей преподавательской практике. Чтобы восполнить данный пробел, нами была разработана серия уроков с применением техник внутриклассного оценивания для проведения во втором полугодии этого учебного года (2019-2020). Опытное обучение с применением таких техник было проведено в 8-ом классе школы № 4 имени Аветика Исаакяна г. Гавар (Гегаркуникская область РА). Во время обучения была использована техника под названием “Придуманный диалог” (“Invented Dialogue”), которая относится к группе техник, оценивающих творческое мышление учащихся и навыки синтеза. В статье представлены все этапы опытного обучения: планирование обучения, проведение опытного урока, оценивание (в том числе самооценивание) опытного обучения. С целью оценки эффективности опытного обучения с применением техник внутриклассного оценивания нами был использован метод SWOT анализа (были выявлены сильные и слабые стороны обучения, возможности и угрозы), также были проанализированы результаты фидбэка (обратной связи), полученного от учащихся. Матрица SWOT анализа и результаты фидбэка представлены в данной статье.

Ключевые слова: оценивание, формирующее оценивание, техники внутриклассного оценивания, применение техник внутриклассного оценивания, опытное обучение, SWOT анализ обучения, обратная связь (фидбэк).

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