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## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN THE MAKING: ELT MICROTEACHING THROUGH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' LENSES**

**Abstract:** Microteaching, as a teacher training technique that can effectuate personal and professional development in pre-service teachers, is part of the participatory paradigm, where learning is believed to occur naturally when students are immersed in contextual and authentic real-life activities. The study included 18 Year-Three English Language and Literature students, aged 21–26, who attended ELT classes at the State University of Novi Pazar in 2020/2021. The main objective was to determine how the pre-service English teachers from the sample perceive microteaching sessions. The employed research instrument was the *Microteaching questionnaire*, whose aim was to determine the perceived effectiveness of microteaching and giving/receiving feedback. The results show that microteaching had a positive effect on classroom management and self-confidence, with the consistent underlying idea that practice makes them better. These prospective teachers found the feedback received from their professor very helpful for being sincere and tactful. They also found the feedback given to and received from their peers useful since it came from someone being level with them. Judging from the participants' accounts, it would be therefore beneficial to investigate whether microteaching sessions bring benefits to lesson delivery and to what extent the type of personality shapes future teachers' perceptions of microteaching.

**Key words:** English language teaching (ELT), feedback, pre-service English language teachers, pre-service microteaching.

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## **1. Microteaching as a teacher training technique within the participatory approach paradigm**

One of the main preconditions for successful education nowadays, which is in line with modern teaching practices, is to meet students' both professional and practical needs by offering them a meaningful framework within which the process of learning is constantly taking place. With that in mind, the process rather than end-product is being increasingly emphasised in the literature within a wide range of educational fields. Within the open education paradigm, for instance, besides equity, access, and quality, there are other additional critical factors for successful education, such as student engagement and involvement, teacher training, quality standards, learning, and content design (cf. Ossiannilsson et al., 2016). The said factors are also relevant to the subject matter of our study in that that these factors influence the process of shaping teachers-to-be, as well as their beliefs and feelings about their teaching skills and their future job.

Since a plethora of research within teacher education assumes both student training in theory as well as practice-oriented knowledge and skills, microteaching sessions are conceived as an efficient technique for providing a wide array of learning opportunities for novice teachers with the aim of creating qualified, productive teachers. If we consider the fact that nowadays the concept of knowledge is believed to be created by flexible, collaborative networks in dynamic environments (Sangra, 2015 as cited in Ossiannilsson et al., 2016, p. 163), along with the fact that procedural rather than declarative knowledge is appreciated, accompanied by skills and competencies (Grubor, *in press*; Lave & Wenger, 2011), microteaching sessions enable pre-service teachers to plunge into the teaching profession via active participation within their ELT community of practice and implementation of the learning-by-doing principle.<sup>2</sup> Participation as learning can be found in a social practice theory of learning, in situated learning approaches, where learning is believed to occur naturally when students are immersed in contextual, cultural, and authentic real-life activities (Lave & Wenger, 2011). According to the situated-learning perspective, learning is largely seen as “a process of enculturation wherein students learn to use tools as practitioners” (Fernández, 2010, p. 352), which is closely related to the sample of this study (i.e. future practitioners, teachers).

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<sup>2</sup> It is essential to underline that we do not take communities of practice in the context of situated learning as a way of reference to minority groups, as is quite often the case (cf. Pease-Alvarez, & Schechter, 2005), but in a broader sociolinguistic sense of their conceptualisation (cf. Grubor, 2021a).

In a similar vein, within the teacher cognition research, which stresses the importance of teachers' professional ELT knowledge (e.g. Freeman, 2016), one of the central issues is to investigate how teacher education, continuing professional development and wider educational and sociocultural contexts can reinforce meaningful student learning (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 435). This research paradigm distinguishes between content knowledge (knowledge of the specific subject), pedagogical content knowledge (subject-related knowledge for the purpose of teaching), and general pedagogical knowledge (König et al., 2017, p. 110). In the context of the present study, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are included in the evaluation criteria of pre-service teachers' teaching, but the results pertain mainly to the pedagogical content knowledge. More specifically, König et al. (2017) found that the academic cluster Teaching Language (content), and categories of Teaching, Lesson Planning, Reflecting on Practice (EFL teaching practice categories) were significant predictors of pedagogical content knowledge. With this in view, the current study subsumes all of the predictors belonging to the EFL teaching practice. Lesson planning was included via the activity sheets the participants had to write prior to their microteaching sessions (lesson plans at a micro level), but were not elaborated on by the participants in the questionnaire.

As is the case with second language acquisition (SLA) research, where it has been consistently underlined that learning a foreign language (L2) is far different from any other school subject (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner, 2007; Grubor, 2021b; Grubor, 2015), in teacher education studies, there is a wide range of variables that are at work regarding L2 teachers in contrast to other subject teachers (cf. König et al., 2017). In line with functional and interactional views on language (Richards & Rodgers, 2015), which place the conveyance of functional meaning and maintaining social relations via meaningful communication as crucial, L2 teachers are also expected to employ teaching approaches providing students with different opportunities to learn (Freeman, 2016), but also to develop language awareness, language learning awareness and intercultural competencies (König et al., 2017, p. 111). Therefore, not only is the mastery of target language required but also knowledge of and competencies in professional knowledge for teaching (cf. König et al., 2017).

Since today's teachers-to-be are expected to be "implementers of expert-driven prescribed classroom routines" and thus "reflective enough to take informed professional decisions in the classroom" (Coşkun, 2021, p. 363), a teacher training technique that has been long in use as an effective training technique (Đorđević, *in press*), which can prepare future teachers for real-life

scenarios, is microteaching. It normally entails “teach[ing] a lesson to the peers in order to gain experience with lesson planning and delivery” (Bell, 2007, p. 24). Typically, it relates to delivering lessons, although in our study it refers to short teaching sessions (i.e. five-minute and ten-minute microteaching sessions). Therefore, we may define it as a teacher training technique by which pre- or in-service teachers deliver (part of) a lesson to their peers and/or teacher trainers in a simulation of real-life teaching.

There are many benefits speaking in favour of the employment of this technique in different teacher training settings. One of the reported advantages is the fact that it aids professional development (Lander, 2015) and provides trainees with many opportunities to scale down the general teaching skill into smaller parts, enabling them to try themselves out in controlled settings (Shi, 2020, p. 168). It is also useful because it enables a clear focus and informative feedback (Đorđević, *in press*) and (self-)reflection (Fernández, 2010; Peters, 2012). Furthermore, besides improving the practical skills of teaching, such as enhancing teacher efficacy, it also assists novice teachers in building self-confidence and overcoming stage fright over time by reducing anxiety (Adnyana & Citrawathi, 2019).

Accordingly, the main research question of the current study is as follows:

RQ: How do the pre-service English teachers from the sample perceive microteaching sessions?

## **2. Methodology**

The study was conducted in the academic year 2020/2021 with the Year-Three English Language and Literature students who attended the English Language Teaching 1 and 2 courses (ELT1 and ELT2) at the State University of Novi Pazar (SUNP). The idea behind the study emerged as the result of the ELT professor’s own experience as a licenced teacher trainer, on the one hand, and university students’ reactions to microteaching sessions in the previous years, on the other. Hands-on experience of the ELT professor and students’ development as teachers throughout the ELT1 and ELT2 courses in the past years gave rise to the idea that this format of teacher training may prove to be highly beneficial to in- and pre-service teachers for a number of reasons (tricks of the trade given by trainer trainers and/or teacher trainers can be put into practice immediately, raising awareness of many crucial teaching aspects such

as managing the classroom, building up self-confidence, and so on, all with the aim of improving their own teaching).

Therefore, we have set an aim to determine the participants' perception of microteaching as part of their pre-service training in order to generate some insights that may shed light on the employment of this teacher training technique in university settings.

### **2.1.Sample**

The sample recruited for the study included N=18 female English Language and Literature students, aged 21–26 (M=20.33), who attended ELT classes at the English Language and Literature Study Programme, Department of Philology in the academic year 2020/2021. Out of 18 students, only 2 passed the ELT1 exam at the time of the study, which was conducted after the ELT2 course was completed.

As part of their microteaching experience, English Language and Literature students at the SUNP are involved in volunteer microteaching sessions (a wide range of activities that are provided within the input they receive within different teaching methods/approaches or teaching of the language system and skills) and end-of-the-term coursework microteaching (i.e. 5-minute activities by Ur & Wright in ELT1) and volunteer microteaching sessions of their own choice and coursework microteaching (i.e. 5-minute activities for teaching young learners by Guse & McKay and 10-minute activities for teaching grammar creatively by Gerngross, Puchta & Thornbury in ELT2). In the ELT2 course, students also get additional teaching experience through group work microteaching of *Tools, techniques, activities* (Learning teaching by J. Scrivener), where they are required to demonstrate some of the activities, and have a 30-minute lesson to deliver upon completion of the student training in state schools. Finally, for every microteaching activity they had to prepare an activity sheet (lesson plans at a micro level), which was part of coursework, and for the entire lessons they prepared lesson plans, which was part of their exam lesson.

### **2.2.Study design**

The test battery for this qualitative study included a sociodemographic questionnaire (to determine the participants' age, gender, year of study) with one item testing their perception of course-attendance (in ELT1, ELT2), and the Microteaching questionnaire, specifically designed for the research (to determine the perceived frequency and effectiveness of volunteer and

coursework microteaching, as well as effectiveness of giving/receiving feedback).

The format of the test battery was dependent on the type of data we aimed to collect. Thus, it included self-reports (a five-point Likert-type scale for quantitative data, such as class attendance, degree of agreement: e.g. *How often did you volunteer to take part in microteaching suggested by your ELT professor?*) and open cloze items (narratives: e.g. *Did previous volunteer microteaching help you improve personally and/or professionally? Why (not)? NB State what exactly you found helpful and why!*). The former type of data was analysed quantitatively and the latter qualitatively, by employing content analysis (the participants' narratives were coded for categories and then more thoroughly analysed for specific instantiations).

### **3. Results and discussion**

The participants expressed their perceived ELT1 and ELT2 class attendance on a five-point scale (1 *very irregular*, 2 *not very regular*, 3 *neither irregular nor regular*, 4 *quite regular*, 5 *very regular*). Overall, the attendance was reported as quite regular (ELT1: M=4.11; ELT2: M=4.22). Upon close inspection into their attendance records, it was determined via a correlation analysis that the participants were quite realistic about their attendance in the ELT courses (perceived v. actual attendance in ELT1:  $r=.784$ ,  $p=.021$ ; ELT2:  $r=.716$ ,  $p=.046$ ).

Regarding volunteer microteaching, the situation was quite different (1 *never*, 2 *rarely*, 3 *not very often*, 4 *often*, 5 *very often*) – they rarely volunteered to microteach when they did not have to (M=2.33). When they did, they felt nervous at first, but then overcame stage fright and found it beneficial (e.g. for giving instructions, self-confidence and self-awareness). However, as we can see in Table 1, the majority of the participants did not take volunteer microteaching at all or not so often. The predominant opinions on whether they found such a choice wise (at the moment when the study was conducted) are given in Table 1 below.

answer	N	predominant reasons
never	8	not a wise choice because they were unaware at that point that they could have gained valuable experience
rarely	2	not wise because teaching is very demanding (involves effort, research, adjustments in line with learners' age), but at the same time challenging and exciting
not very often	2	at that time, skipping was easy but in the long run they realised that they lacked experience now
often	6	wise because practice makes them better, more prepared, more aware, more skilful (cf. realisation of the planned things), more self-confident (overcoming stage fright); hands-on experience

**Table 1** Participants' opinions on whether it was a good choice (not) to take part in volunteer microteaching

When it comes to the benefits, the participants who experienced it emphasised that volunteer microteaching had helped them develop both personally and professionally, and those who did not, regretted it. Personally, it helped them reduce stress of public performance and develop self-confidence because they realised that practice made them better. Professionally, the participants who took volunteer microteaching believed it improved their classroom management skills in the first place (e.g. setting up activities, voice projection, body language), but also raised their awareness of the importance of lesson planning in terms of preparedness and having a framework the teacher can rely on.

“It has helped me professionally and personally. Professionally, it helped me with the management of the classroom, giving clearer instructions, and louder voice projection. Personally, it improved my confidence”;

“As for my personal side, it helped me to feel more confident and freer, even in everyday communication with people”;

“Microteaching is extremely important since it highlights the things we are good at and the things we find a bit challenging. Doing microteaching repeatedly proves to be an effective way to change these things”.

Concerning coursework microteaching, as it is mandatory, all the participants took part in it. In terms of the benefits, they were all uniform in that that it helped them improve both personally and professionally, as a large body of research suggests (e.g. Adnyana & Citrawathi, 2019; Fernández, 2010;

Mergler & Tangen, 2010; Peker, 2009). In their responses they recorded that microteaching was beneficial in terms of time management and bringing their focus on learner centeredness, outcomes, it helped them improve their classroom management skills, prepared them for anticipating problems and providing solutions, triggered their creativity (making activities more creative and appealing to students), as crucial for their professional development, and self-confidence, self-realisation, overcoming stage fright as important for their personal development.

“It helped me in the way that I often thought ‘I can do this’, although I thought I couldn’t. It is a huge step towards progress”;  
“It is amazing how in a 5-minute teaching activity you can predict potential problems and solve them before you have stepped foot in a real classroom as a teacher!”.

There was a student who underlined both dimensions of a public performance of this kind, i.e. fear of losing face in front of their professor and peers, but also realisation that practice makes them better, which may lead to self- and professional development. In other words, although microteaching may be discomforting in terms of exposure, it also serves the function of overcoming stage fright and working towards self-confidence and composure.

“It forced me out of my comfort zone, but it helped me build my self-confidence and I got to know myself as a future teacher better.”

Since in- and pre-service teachers can gain valuable insights into the teaching skills through peers’ and professor’s feedback, which is the key part of the learning process via the microteaching technique, we included the participants’ perception of its usefulness as well. The participants were asked to what extent the feedback they received (from their peers and professor) was helpful and useful for their self-improvement on a 1–5 scale (1 *not helpful at all*, 2 *a bit helpful*, 3 *helpful*, 4 *quite helpful*, 5 *very helpful*). They found the feedback they received from their professor very helpful (M=4.77) because it was sincere and focused, including good points and things to work on.

“[*very helpful*] It helped me improve my skills and change the way I approach students”;

“[*very helpful*] I learned how to overcome nervousness and that I need to plan everything well, as well as to learn to react according to the situation”;

“[*very helpful*] It is always helpful to hear opinion of a professional. We cannot see or hear ourselves when we are doing something. I listened carefully and tried to improve some things and accept pieces of advice from my professor. Sometimes, the good things I did seemed to me wrong, but it was the opposite, which gave me confidence”;

“[*very helpful*] It was honest and precise, mentioning the good things and things to work on. Being framed like that, we did not focus only on what we should avoid but also what things were beneficial and should be repeated. It was very empathic and sincere”;

“[*quite helpful*] The professor’s pointing out both the good things and the things I should improve motivated me, and gave me a reason to show everyone that I can actually improve and get better in everything”.

As for feedback coming from their peers, they also found it helpful (M=3.77) because it came from someone being at the same level as they were.

“[*very helpful*] It gives a nice feeling when someone who is on the same level as you liked what you did”;

“[*quite helpful*] You pay attention more on what to improve, what to change, and what is already good. When they understand your instructions and teaching, it means you are on the right track”;

“[*quite helpful*] They helped me see myself from a different perspective”;

“[*helpful*] They had seen a lot of microteachings by then and they could compare it with some of the best works”;

“[*helpful*] The students [*peers*] were supportive and in general, they influenced my self-esteem in a positive way”.

With regard to the effectiveness of their giving feedback to their peers, they also found it helpful (M=3.66). Very interestingly 17 participants underlined the fact that giving feedback to the others was challenging for them, being under pressure either because they cared for other people’s feelings (the vast majority of them) or because they felt incompetent (a couple of them).

“[*quite helpful*] As much as it was interesting, it was challenging at the same time. I patiently waited to see how everything turns out, sometimes good and sometimes not so good. I commented politely and was cautious when talking about things to work on because at this time we should focus more on the good things and then lead into some things that need to be better”;

“[*helpful*] I found it responsible. I tried my best to point out the things they should improve without insulting them or in any way demotivating them”;

“[*a bit helpful*] I did not feel like I was competent enough to give such feedback, and I felt like my feedback had to be partial and I was not helping, especially when I mentioned things my peers should work on, because I was not sure I could work on them myself, and I was worried I was being harsh”.

Besides the feelings of uneasiness for having to point to the things that need brushing up that some participants mentioned, possibly because they found it difficult to verbalise their criticism in an indirect, polite way, one participant recorded they were aware they were still learning, while another explicitly reported they realised its effects on the teaching profession in general.

“[*very helpful*] I was really determined to see all the good sides and to avoid criticising, I have a really good relationship with all of them and I know them, so I was aware of their capabilities even if they failed to show them during their teaching. Various factors can influence their moves, and I was aware of the fact that we all were yet learning how to teach”;

“[*quite helpful*] It was quite interesting to be in the role of a teacher. It is not easy at all. You have to find balance, to have understanding and provide all your criticism with valid arguments”.

Finally, when they were asked to elaborate on whether giving feedback to the others was helpful and useful to themselves and their self-development, one-third of the participants reflected purely on themselves and their own teaching. The rest of the participants reported that they were aware they could learn from each other. Seeing someone else do certain things made them aware of those things and thus led them to implement them in their own teaching.

“[*very helpful*] It was very useful and helpful. You can see yourself through the lenses of others and vice versa. It helps you realize not every critique is a bad one, but rather helpful”;

“[*quite helpful*] All of us made similar mistakes. That is why I watched their microteaching closely to see how we got to the same mistake and why”;

“[*quite helpful*] I had to learn first what good or bad teaching looks like, so that I could give feedback, it helped me to apply everything to my own microteaching”;

“[*helpful*] While watching the others perform, I noticed the things I need to change about my teaching”.

As feedback is not meant to be perceived as “a tool to punctuate assessment” but rather as “an on-going evaluation that is provided continuously” (Shi, 2020, p. 170), it seems that the majority of these teachers-to-be did not feel quite at ease to comment on other people’s performance. However, since reflection is a useful instrument to encourage pre-service teachers to use and develop their critical skills (König et al., 2017), both receiving and giving feedback were recognised as beneficial, regardless of whether they felt comfortable with it or not. Some studies within the MLS format (microteaching lesson study) in the field of mathematics, showed that reflecting and deliberating on MLS lessons were found to be valuable because novice teachers get opportunities to learn, especially in the sense of “the knowledgeable advisor” from the study who had to draw the participants’ attention to the learners and learner-centred classes away from teachers (Fernández, 2010), as was the case with the teacher trainer in this study. A study conducted with pre-service teachers being trained at university and those going to schools for internship also indicates that their teaching skills definitely improve by practice (König et al., 2017), as our participants noted. Furthermore, the said study (König et al., 2017) also revealed that the more they studied the key teaching topics and conducted activities in practical settings, the higher they scored in pedagogical content knowledge, which gives further support to the idea that microteaching, as a teacher training teaching, is by far beneficial (Đorđević, *in press*).

#### **4. A look further ahead**

Many authors underline the importance of pre-service training and emphasise that future teachers need to get involved in opportunities to

experiment and learn from their experiences (Clift & Brady, 2005; Grossman & McDonald, 2008). The concept of participation as learning can be found in the SLA research (e.g. Grubor, 2020; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015), but it is directly applicable to teacher education, particularly in the context of microteaching.

The current study aimed at determining how pre-service English teachers perceive the use of microteaching with regard to their professional and self-development, along with the effectiveness of giving and/or receiving feedback. The method was qualitative due to the sample size, and the main objective was to gain some insights into these prospective teachers' perception of their employment and efficacy. The results indicate that both volunteer and coursework microteaching had a positive effect on classroom management and self-confidence, with the consistent underlying idea that practice can only bring benefits to the trainees. In addition, the idea of employing feedback as a useful tool for learning (to teach in this respect) is significant in teacher education since "fostering reflection as part of planning and implementing lessons would seemingly be deemed a valuable feature of situated experiences and authentic tasks for prospective teachers" (Fernández, 2010, p. 352). These teachers-to-be found the feedback received from their professor very useful and they seemed to appreciate the professor's sincerity and tact most. They also found the feedback given to and received from their peers useful. They felt comfortable because it came from someone being level with them, and they realised they could learn from one another and thus apply the addressed points to their teaching. Very interestingly, not one participant reflected on the fact that they were preparing for giving or trained to give useful feedback to future students, but they were rather self-oriented towards their own teaching.

This micro-level study can provide valuable insights into the employment of microteaching as a teacher training technique and feedback as a learning tool (particularly in the context of awareness-raising) at the tertiary level. What further research might pursue is the effect of microteaching session on delivering lessons. Finally, since individual accounts showed, as expected, mixed feelings towards microteaching accompanied by feedback, we believe that it will be significant to investigate whether teacher personality type (e.g. openness to experience) shape pre-service teachers' perception of and beliefs about the role that microteaching and feedback may play in their personal and/or professional development.

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**NASTAVNICI ENGLESKOG JEZIKA U NASTAJANJU: MIKRONASTAVA  
KROZ PRIZMU STUDENATA METODIKE NASTAVE ENGLESKOG JEZIKA**

**Rezime:** Mikro nastava, kao tehnika za obuku nastavnika kojom se može ostvariti njihov lični i profesionalni razvoj, pripada participatornoj paradigmi, prema kojoj se učenje javlja prirodno kada su učenici uključeni u kontekstualne i autentične aktivnosti. Istraživanje je uključivalo 18 studenata treće godine Engleskog jezika i književnosti, starosti od 21 do 26 godina, koji su odslušali predmete Metodika nastave engleskog jezika 1 i 2 na Državnom univerzitetu u Novom Pazaru u školskoj 2020/2021. Osnovni cilj istraživanja je utvrditi kako budući nastavnici engleskog jezika iz uzorka percipiraju sesije mikronastave. Primenjen istraživački instrument bio je *Upitnik o mikronastavi*, čija je glavna svrha da utvrdi percipiranu efikasnost mikronastave, kao i dobijenih i datih povratnih informacija (fidbeka). Rezultati pokazuju da mikronastava ima pozitivan efekat na upravljanje učionicom i samopouzdanje, i prožima se ideja da je u osnovi svega vežba kojom postaju sve bolji. Ovi budući nastavnici smatraju da je fidbek profesorke veoma koristan, zbog iskrenosti i taktičnosti. Takođe smatraju da je fidbek koji su dali drugim studentima kao i fidbek koji su dobili od njih koristan jer su na istom nivou kao oni. Na osnovu opisa ispitanika, zaključuje se da bi bilo korisno ispitati da li sesije mikronastave mogu imati pozitivan učinak na održavanje nastavnog časa, kao i u kojoj meri tip ličnosti oblikuje način na koji budući nastavnici poimaju mikronastavu.

**Ključne reči:** fidbek, mikronastava, nastava engleskog jezika, studenti Metodike nastave engleskog jezika.