Prospective teachers' beliefs about micro-teaching

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Abstract

Microteaching as a practical training technique provides prospective teachers with many opportunities in order to design their own effective teaching style before they involve in real classroom experiences as teachers. Therefore, in this study, the attempt was to investigate the prospective teachers' attitudes towards the course "Teaching English to Young Learners I" (TEYLs I) which requires micro teaching presentation. The second aim of the study was to find the impacts of the theories they studied in the course and the practice they implemented in the kindergartens voluntarily on their teaching practice. The study is descriptive in nature. The participants of the study were twenty five, third year prospective teachers of English Language Teaching (ELT). The study was carried out at the ELT department of a Turkish university. Of the participants, five were male and twenty were female. For data collection, semi-structured interviews were used. The gathered data were analyzed through content analysis. The overall findings displayed that the participants had positive feelings about the microteaching practices and kindergarten applications in terms of professional development.

Keywords: Young learners, micro-teaching, theory and practice

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Introduction

Teaching English to young learners has recently been the concern of many teacher training programs. It is also among the government policies all over the world (Johnstone, 2009). The current education system in Turkey, English as a foreign language starts at Grade 2 (6 and 7 year olds) in the new educational reform, called as 4+4+4 model. With this revision made by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in 2012, the starting age for learning a foreign language dropped lower. In the name 4+4+4 model refers to the duration of each tier; four years for primary, secondary and high schools. Private schools, on the other hand, introduce foreign language instruction from earlier grades, even from the kindergarten in most cases; however, lowering the starting age does not bring along success necessarily (Ekşi &Aşık, 2015). Girard (1974) points to important conditions to be taken into consideration in early introduction of English and insists that qualified teachers are trained to use appropriate methodology regarding the age and linguistic levels of students, to manage teaching time appropriately, to use suitable sources in the classroom, and to be competent enough to monitor and (cited in Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). Graddol (2006) states that teachers of young learners should be capable of training and motivating children as well as having proficiency in English. Wang (2009) also draws attention to the concerns regarding teachers' quality in terms of language proficiency and Teaching English to Young Learners (hereafter TEYL) pedagogy and about the teacher supply in case of rapid introduction of English into the primary schools. Therefore the primary aim of teacher training programs is determined as to train teachers equipped with specialized professional knowledge. Seferoğlu (2006) also states that the education process of training teachers requires theoretical knowledge and microteachings and practice teaching.

Microteaching is the practical teacher training technique which gives prospective teachers opportunities to practice teaching skills in an artificial environment before actual teaching settings (Yusuf, 2006). It is assumed that microteaching helps prospective teachers to improve tremendously both in contents and methods of teaching while developing specific teaching skills in a simulated environment (Banerjee et al.,2015). Çakır (2000) states that a micro lesson offers prospective teachers opportunities to deal with the issues in terms of what/how/where/whom and to get feedback on their teaching practices during training process in a constructive manner. Additionally, microteaching helps prospective teachers develop professional competencies in educational settings in which time is limited. Such limitation directs prospective teachers to choose their course subjects and teach in a well-organized schedule (Sevim, 2013).

In recent years, many teacher training programs attempt to expand the scope of prospective teachers for practicing teacher experiences by orienting them to various teaching skills (Amobi, 2005). In Turkey, the faculties of education share a common aim of training prospective teachers to become effective and reflective in teaching profession. English Language Teaching program includes the courses TEYLs I & II which mainly focus on how to teach young learners at the primary level. These courses taken by the prospective teachers in the 3rd class in both semesters are 4-hour- class (2-hour theory and 2-hour practice course). The TEYL course serves an important purpose by combining theory and practice through microteaching. It is one of the teacher training courses in the curriculum, in which the student teachers are asked to plan and teach certain parts of a lesson. Practice part of the course

requires students to do micro-teaching presentations. Tütüniş (2014) reports that in Turkey, generally pre-service teacher training programs lack observation of target learners and actual practices; especially in TEYL context, it is stated that pre-service teacher education programs need more actual practices. Küçükoğlu, et. al. also (2012) found in their research that prospective teachers who were exposed to microteaching practices in teacher training process encountered fewer challenges than those who did not practice microteaching. This conclusion reveals the contribution of microteaching practices to teaching proficiency. Therefore, in this study, it was aimed to investigate the prospective teachers' attitudes towards this course and how well the theories and the practice matched in real classroom atmosphere.

Research questions

This study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do prospective teachers feel about micro-teaching practices?
2. In terms of course satisfaction, what are prospective teachers' beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching
   a) on their teaching performance in "Teaching English to Young Learners" courses?
   b) on their teaching experiences in real atmospheres/pre-school classes?

Methodology

Participants

In the study, 25 prospective teachers of English participated. Of the participants, 5 were male and 20 were female attending the 3rd class. All class members did not participate in the study. The participants were the volunteer prospective teachers who wanted to attend the kindergarten to teach to young learners. Since the participants were nearly at the same age level (21-22), age level of the participants were not evaluated as a variable in the study. Those who participated in the study who were enrolled in the course of "Teaching English to Young Learners I" were also exposed to other methodology courses, such as ELT Methodology I and II, Literature and Language Teaching I and II, Teaching Skills I and II.

Instrument

In order to collect the required data, interview questions (see Appendix 1) were developed. The questions were prepared regarding the research questions of the study and organized under three headings as their personal feelings and attitudes, teaching performance and course satisfaction.

Both semi-structured and standardized open-ended types of interviews were applied to determine the questions to better understand and analyze the interviewees' reflections. The interview questions were designed on three topics: prospective teachers' experience/behavior, opinion/values and their feelings.

Data collection

Data were collected at the end of the fall semester of the academic year 2014-2015. The main reason for applying the study by the end of the semester was that prospective teachers would have finished all their micro-teaching presentations and they would have practiced their teaching experiences by teaching at kindergartens.

The study is descriptive in nature and for qualitative data collection semi-structured interviews were used. Woods (2006) and Bolderstone (2012) mentioned various classifications for methods of data collection in qualitative studies such as observations, interviews, written documents, recordings. Pope and Mays (1995:42-45) define *qualitative research* as data collection technique for understanding the social phenomena in non-experimental settings by analyzing with an emphasis on the meaning of the views of participants. That is, qualitative data are related to the concepts, opinions, values and transcripts of individual interviews.

Data analysis

Content analysis as a type of qualitative research method was conducted in this study to find out the prospective teachers' feelings with regards to micro-teaching applications in the course TEYLs via individual interviews. Since the qualitative data analysis was mainly based on an interpretative philosophy, the researcher examined the meaningful and symbolic content of the data. Goddard and Melville (2004) declare that inductive approach starts with the observations in order to formulate theoretical views based on the findings. Therefore, the researcher in this study used inductive approach in the analysis to interpret the data gathered from the interviews. After determining the content of the data, the categories were designed and interpreted by two experts in the field.

Results and discussions

The study attempted to investigate prospective teachers' feelings and beliefs about micro-teaching practices in the course Teaching English to Young Learners I. The results of this study were analyzed by discussing the two research questions. Analysis of the responses to the research question 1 (How do prospective teachers feel about micro-teaching practices?) showed that students were very pleased to do micro-teaching (see Table 1). The data gathered from the interview sessions revealed that the prospective teachers had positive feelings about microteaching practices. Nearly all prospective teachers (20) indicated that they valued the practical experiences they gathered from microteaching practices. They stated that "*We learned many activities suitable for young learners. We learned how to prepare a lesson and gained experience during micro-teaching practice. So we feel self-confident and full-filled*." The categories displayed that micro-teaching was regarded as beneficial for their teaching profession and the benefit of the microteaching practices lies in the self-confidence and fulfillment. The research highlighted the positive views of the prospective students towards micro-teaching practices (İsmail, 2011; Saban & Çoklar, 2013; Ralph, 2014; Ekşi, 2012). As consistent with the findings of those studies, the data in the present study indicated that the prospective teachers became aware of using novel teaching techniques, developed their professional competence, and enjoyed teaching to young learners.

Content analysis revealed that only five interviewees thought that micro teaching practices were boring in terms of designing lesson plans. They declared that they did not like designing a lesson plan since a lesson plan was assumed to be a type of framework which limited what they wanted to do in a lesson. Among the participants, only one prospective teacher stated that "*When my topic is grammar teaching, I feel bored before and during micro-teaching. If the subject is enjoyable I have fun and eager to do micro-teaching a lot*".

The content analysis indicated that the prospective teachers felt themselves more motivated during teaching when they chose enjoyable topics to teach.

Table 1

The feelings of prospective teachers about micro-teaching practices

Research Question 1: How do prospective teachers feel about micro-teaching practices?

Interview questions	Category	Sentence	Total
	Feedback	I like being observed and receiving feedback from my lecturer and colleagues	25
Q 1	Useful	I think micro-teaching presentations are useful because when it's my turn I feel myself as a teacher for a while.	20
	Nervous	I feel nervous cause the atmosphere is artificial	22
Q 2	Practice	I feel the peer pressure	20
	Boring	Fun, but grammar teaching, and writing a lesson plan is boring	5
	Responsible	I feel myself responsible to my mentor because she assigned me to do the presentation	3

The responses for the second research question "what are prospective teachers' beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching a) on their teaching performance in the course "Teaching English to Young Learners I" and b) on their teaching experiences in real atmospheres/pre-school classes?" were sought through the reflections of the prospective teachers. The prospective teachers believed that micro-teaching practice played a crucial role in shaping their teaching methodology and gave them a great chance to transfer the theoretical information they learned into the practice. The interview results revealed that microteaching practices had a positive effect on their teaching in the kindergartens in terms of material preparation and adaptation, various activities, peer interaction and sense of readiness (see Table 2 and Table 3). Overwhelmingly, the participants agreed that they learned from their friends' micro-teaching practices and they were influenced by some of the presentations and kept notes about the procedure and the feedback provided. Whereas, one interesting finding of

the study was that one of the participants confessed that she did not care about the others' presentations since she regarded all the micro-teaching practices are all the same, there was no difference. This finding was interpreted as a personal reflection on micro-teaching practices regarding peer-interaction. However, in a similar study, İsmail (2011) found that trainee teachers who have similar level of linguistic proficiency and microteaching experiences consider observing their classmates a valuable experience to learn from each other.

Table 2

Evaluation for the impacts of micro-teaching on prospective teachers' performance

Research question 2a: What are prospective teachers' beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching on their teaching performance in the course "Teaching English to Young Learners I"?

Interview questions	Category	Sentence	Total
	Autonomy	I do internet search, prepare on my own. I observe the presentations and give feedback and criticize	23
	Peer interaction	I learn a lot from my friends while observing them. Only one stated that there is nothing new, they are all same. I don't care the others presentations She motivates herself that today I will do my micro-teaching and finish my job, that's all.	24
	Performance	I learn better by doing	18
		I think doing micro-teaching only once is not enough. It should be carried out at least twice during the semester.	
Q3		cause we do only one micro teaching	
Q4	Observation	I learn many activities from good presentations, take them as role model, adapt some of them to my class.	24
Q6		Only one stated that she takes notes while observing and keep notes of feedbacks	1
Q7	Feedback	I do care about feedbacks, I learn from feedbacks and design my mini-lesson procedure according to the feedbacks given before.	24
		Feedbacks are not important cause I forget immediately cause someone else says it. I should live it in real atmospheres	1
	Theory	Knowing the theory is not that much important unless you put it into practice.	25

	I design a lesson but I am not aware which theory it refers. I am not good at theoretical knowledge. I cannot label the activity according to the theoretical info.	3
	Theory says children love songs but kids in my class do not singing song. We should be given more chance to do micro-teaching.	8

Nearly all (23) agreed that micro-teaching presentations helped them develop autonomy since they had to search for the topic and organize their mini-lesson on their own. This might show that microteaching practices boosted the prospective teachers' thinking ability and their creativity which play an important role in the design of a lesson. In line with this finding, Bentob-Kupper (2001) reported that the students viewed micro-teaching as a tool assisting them to recognize and discover their thinking skills. Additionally, by interacting with the others and observing them during micro-teaching sessions, they declared that the critical aspects of discussion contributed to their teaching knowledge. This result is in line with the findings of Arsal (2015) who reported that in teacher education programs, microteaching practices should be implemented in the pedagogical courses in order to foster prospective teachers' critical thinking skills. The participants also stated that they benefited from feedback by the educator and their peers in this study. Similar results were detected in the study carried out by Al-Humaidi and colleagues (2015). Thus, participating in discussion sessions after the microteaching practices in terms of feedback and interaction, participants might be directed to behave autonomously (Kourieos, 2016).

All the participants stated that micro-teaching practices gave them a chance to put the theory they learned into practice. This result displayed that micro-teaching is considered as a significant occasion to implement the various teaching theories they learned in the course about teaching young learners. The results displayed that prospective teachers were satisfied with the theoretical knowledge they were exposed to in the course, and when they were asked to transfer the knowledge to the practice, they felt confident enough to display and implement what they learned in the course in their micro teaching experiences. In a similar fashion, Britton and Anderson (2010) found that prospective teachers agreed that micro-teaching practices trained them to be more competent in comprehending the theoretical field knowledge and inter-relating the theory with practice and teaching methods.

Table 3

Evaluation for the impacts of microteaching on prospective teachers' experiences in kindergarten

Interview questions	Category	Sentence	Total
		**Research question 2b:** What are prospective teachers' beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching on their teaching experiences in real atmospheres/pre-school classes?	
	Kindergarten	One time is not enough, preschool helped more	23

	Lesson plan	All agree that micro teaching practices help prepare a lesson plan but there is problem applying methods-we know but we do not how to apply	22
		"I do not like writing a lesson plan. I use my mind and compose the procedure in my mind and apply"	3
Q5 Q8 Q9	Management	I have problem using classroom management strategies during micro-teaching presentations since the environment is artificial.	18
	Preschool teacher mentor	She helped me a lot to develop ideas and adapt them to English language teaching.	5
	Being a teacher	Before the course I was thinking about being such a classical teacher, yet now my idea has changed and I believe I will be a modern teacher.	25
		I will have graduated holding a teaching experience in my hand and it will be easier when I started to teach.	

The results displayed in Table 3 revealed that micro-teaching had a great impact on prospective teachers positively and played a crucial role in promoting their sense of what it is like to be a teacher. Nearly all participants (23) indicated that they felt content regarding the beneficial experiences they gained from micro-teaching. This finding displayed that incorporating micro-teaching into teacher training program was highly appreciated by the prospective teachers. The content analysis revealed the significance of microteaching in having prospective teachers became aware of the fact that micro-teaching presentations provided invaluable teaching and learning atmospheres. They learned from each other while observing and discussing over their mini-lessons. This might indicate that they found peer-interaction beneficial. Dweikat (2010) found that most of the participants thought that micro teaching provided them with opportunities to reflect on the teaching performance and to gain understandings of others' teaching practices. Apart from peer-interaction, they believed that micro-teaching was crucial to lead to potential self-improvement. In her study, Coşgun Ögeyik (2009) also found that student teachers appreciated microteaching experiences for developing teaching skills, reflective attitudes, and increasing self-confidence.

When they were questioned about the effects of micro teaching on the experience they had in the kindergarten, surprisingly, most of the prospective teachers mentioned the positive effects of the kindergarten experiences on their school life. They stated that they had the chance of teaching to very young learners and observing them closely which let them adapt the procedure to the school atmosphere. Such a result might be explained by the idea that the prospective teachers enjoyed micro teaching practices which gave them a great opportunity to apply theoretical issues to real life situations in the kindergartens. The results of this finding revealed that as consistent with a previous study carried out by Punia et al. (2016) prospective teachers found a chance to transfer the experience they gained from microteaching practices

to the real atmosphere in order to explore pedagogical experiences. According to the report of Tütüniş (2014) training programs need more actual practices and observations of target learners. Thus, as stated by the participants of this study, in terms of contributions of the experiences, this kind of field experience helped them understand more about the children attending the kindergarten, which corresponds with Büyükyavuz (2014).

Limitations

This study was restricted to 25 prospective teachers of English at 3rd class in ELT Department of Education Faculty at a Turkish university. Further studies can be carried out with the participation of large size prospective teachers form other universities -national or international- to compare the similarities and dissimilarities of microteaching applications. In the study, the data collection was centered on the beliefs of the participants about the micro teaching presentations done in the course TEYLs disregarding the other courses which require micro-teaching presentation. Other variables could also be included into the study such as academic achievement. For data collections, surveys could be used, and both quantitative and qualitative research methods could be utilized for in-depth statistical analyses.

Conclusion

Although the study was carried out with a small size of prospective teachers, the data which were examined to find out their feelings and beliefs about the micro teaching they had to do in the course TEYLs reflected some positive aspects of the implementation. The microteaching practices in the faculty and in the kindergarten motivated the prospective teachers for teaching profession, particularly to young learners. The implementation encouraged them to share their ideas about teaching issues with the others. This sample study may represent a model for teacher education programs to support the prospective teachers to take place in microteaching practices in their faculties and real school environments to develop their own teaching techniques and use teaching methods. The results of this present study may also persuade educators in order to choose pre-school education institutions as pilot schools.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Name & Surname:

Gender:

1. Do you believe that micro-teaching practices are useful in your department?
2. How do you feel about the micro-teaching practices? (artificial environment, consume of time, time limited, feel embarrassed, feel bored, feel nervous...)
3. To what extent, do you believe that micro-teaching practices encourage you develop autonomy?
4. Do you think micro teaching practices give you an opportunity to learn by observing others?
5. Do you think micro teaching practices help you prepare a lesson plan and use of teaching methods you learned in TEYLs courses?
6. What are your beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching practices on your performance in TEYLs courses?
7. Dou you think micro teaching practices give you an opportunity to apply the theory you have learned from TEYLs?
8. What are your beliefs about the impact/s of micro-teaching practices on your teaching experiences in real atmospheres/pre-school classes?
9. How do you feel about the impact of microteaching practices on your future academic life?