



The Perceptions and Views of Prospective ELT Teachers on Teaching English in Preschools: A Microteaching Lesson Study and Practical Experiences

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Abstract

The perceived importance teaching English to younger learners has increased in the last few decades. For the need of studying on early language learning, various studies have been undertaken over many years. In these studies, nearly all aspects such as those relating to learners, teachers, parents, education systems, policy-makers, school administrators, environmental factors etc. have been considered by researchers. However, not just in-service teachers but also prospective teachers should be listened to improve the foreign language teaching process. Consequently, the views and perceptions of prospective English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers on teaching English to very young learners are discussed in the present study. In terms of the main aims of this study, it is examined the prospective ELT teachers' current knowledge, common views, suggestions for improvement via microteaching, practical experiences in real classrooms and suggestions with regard to early language teaching. These aspects have been analyzed in the light of related studies. A total of 64 prospective ELT teachers who have been studying in the ELT Department at Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University during the 2022-2023 academic year were involved as participants. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, these individuals were asked about the research aims, and the data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods. The findings of the study show that the prospective ELT teachers had positive attitudes and views with regard to early language teaching; however, they suggested that they needed to be trained in teaching English to very young/young learners in order to develop themselves professionally.

Key Words

Preschool education
Prospective ELT teachers
Microteaching
Very young learners
English Language Teaching (ELT)

About Article

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Introduction

The universal view of the importance of teaching foreign language (FL) at an early age has been a global issue in education systems and has become policy in many countries throughout the world (Gürsoy, Korkmaz and Damar, 2017). In terms of the developing and rapidly-changing needs and requirements of such countries, there is a common acceptance of the benefits and necessities of foreign language learning in early childhood education. In a broader view, in the related literature, it can be seen that younger learners have benefits and advantages when it comes to acquiring a foreign language in that they may have low affective filters and anxiety levels, and the younger ones have the potential to adopt native-like pronunciation (Demirezen, 2003; Enever, 2011; Halliwell, 1993; Mirici, 2001). Early foreign language teaching, accordingly, may support very young learners when it comes to developing their cognitive, linguistic and critical thinking skills at an early age (Vos, 2008). As it is defined in the related literature, young learners (YL) are being learners aged between five to twelve in general (Cameron, 2001), therefore, YL can be defined as primary and elementary school students in many countries. However, very young learners (VYL) can be defined as learners under seven years (Slatterly & Willis, 2001), and these learners are seen as students in preschools during early years of education. In the light of the common consensus about teaching foreign languages in early years of schooling, in recent years it has become a fashion in many countries to start introducing foreign language teaching courses in preschool years.

However, there is no doubt that effective early language learning is possible only if suitable teaching policies, language awareness and pedagogical practices exist (Widlok, Petravic, Org and Romcea, 2011). As for teaching policies with regard to early language learning, it is believed that language teaching curricula, teaching practices, pedagogical knowledge, physical conditions and well-qualified foreign language teachers are vital parameters in preschool education. In order to achieve the main goals of early foreign language learning, all of these aspects should be taken into consideration by policy-makers. Meanwhile, the means by which very young learners acquire foreign language competence should be carefully designed so that they benefit fully.

As in all developing countries throughout the world, in Türkiye there have recently been some attempts to teach a foreign language, especially English, as early as possible. Specifically, in 2012 a new education reform entitled (4+4+4) relating to the 12-year compulsory education program, the English language learning age was lowered to about 8 years -second grade- in all primary schools in Türkiye (MoNE, 2012). However, this is not early since it ignores very young learners in preschools in terms of the *critical period* (Krashen, 1975; Lenneberg, 1967) of acquiring a language. Yet, this is not the only problem relating to the early language learning process in Türkiye in the last 10 years; one of the most important questions has been English language teachers' readiness and pedagogical knowledge when it comes to dealing with younger learners while teaching English.

It should be kept in mind that successful and qualified teachers are essential for the effectiveness of educational systems, ensuring academic achievement and providing quality learning experiences for all learners (Rockoff, 2004; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009). From this perspective, the role of the teacher with regard to teaching a foreign language cannot be ignored in terms of young learners. However, in this context, ELT teachers are not the ones who are solely responsible for improving their pedagogical knowledge and developing positive perspectives when it comes to early language learning; it is known that teachers or prospective teachers should be guided or trained with the help of appropriate policies and the provision of suitable courses during their academic career. In this sense, in-service teacher training programs might be helpful for in-service ELT teachers (Tarakçioğlu and Tunçarslan, 2014) in order to inform them about the pedagogical features and the academic needs of very young/young learners. In addition, prospective ELT teachers have to be trained in early language teaching via some specific courses during their bachelor's degree education in order to be ready to teach younger learners when they start their teaching career. Accordingly, ELT teachers' professional development has become a vital aspect of early language teaching (Richards, 2017) since ELT education programs have gained in popularity with the introduction of the new education system in Türkiye.

Within the perspective of training prospective teachers in the English language teaching department during their bachelor's degree, the main course entitled "Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners" has been thought of as a significant means of preparation for ELT students. The basic purposes of the course are training prospective teachers on the pedagogical formation of young learners, introducing them to various teaching methods and approaches on foreign language teaching to young learners, different assessment methods, and the common issues and new trends on early language teaching in general. Thanks to these main aspects, it is believed that prospective ELT teachers gain some necessary knowledge about early foreign language processes before they start to teach young learners. However, it is thought that there is a need to enhance the content of the course syllabus via different practices and *microteaching* activities for prospective teachers in order to make them ready for introducing their classroom practices to younger learners.

1.1 Microteaching Studies for Prospective English Language Teachers

Microteaching is a technique which is used in order to improve practical knowledge on professional development (Bell, 2007; Fernandez, 2005; Taşdelen-Karçkay and Sanlı, 2009). Since the 1960s, it has been a practical technique that is used to enhance the learning-teaching environment of prospective teachers during their teaching education. Allen, who was the originator of the term *microteaching*, and Eve (1968), defined microteaching as "a system of controlled practice that makes it possible to concentrate on specific teaching behavior and to practice teaching under controlled conditions". As for a common definition, microteaching is "a training context in which a teaching situation has been reduced and simplified in terms of time and scope by focusing on only one aspect of teaching like teaching vocabulary, etc." (Yüksel and Özkalan, 2019, p. 2380). Microteaching enables prospective teachers to manage different practices with regard to specific themes and offers them an opportunity to obtain feedback on their teaching experiences from academics, classmates and other prospective teachers. The main purpose of microteaching is to improve prospective teachers' teaching skills and enhance their professional development.

In microteaching, there are a number of main stages or steps associated with the teaching process; in the literature, however, different authors suggest different steps or phases with regard to microteaching. In one of these studies Wahba (1999) suggests four main microteaching stages namely *the briefing stage, the teaching stage, the analysis and discussion stage, and the re-teaching stage*. In the first stage, *briefing* means to inform prospective teachers with regard to the context of the process; secondly, in *the teaching stage*, prospective teachers teach a piece of a sample lesson using microteaching techniques. The second stage is video-recorded if possible. It is known that the use of video recording in microteaching lesson studies is very effective for teacher training purposes (Kpanja, 2001). These recordings might be helpful for prospective teachers reflecting on their performance and for giving them a chance to evaluate themselves in terms of the teaching process (Taşdelen-Karçkay and Sanlı, 2009). Thirdly, in the *analysis and discussion stage*, the teaching performances of the prospective teachers are evaluated in general, and feedback is supplied by tutors and classmates. Finally, in *the re-teaching stage*, the prospective teachers are expected to re-teach the lesson in the light of the feedback that they have received following their first performance.

There is no doubt that microteaching activities supply important pedagogical tools and facilities for prospective teachers before they start the practicum and engage in real classroom activities (Yiğitoğlu-Aptoula, 2021). Similarly, according to Kılıç (2010), prospective teachers may have an opportunity to improve their teaching skills, the ability to speak in front of the class, presentation skills and classroom management techniques, thanks to microteaching practices. Additionally, in terms of professional development requirements, it can be said that microteaching positively affects prospective teachers in terms of their teaching skills, anxiety, critical thinking skills and self-efficacy beliefs (Arsal, 2015). The prospective teachers, consciously or sub-consciously, make a connection between theory and practice as a means of improving their planning, evaluation and teaching skills (Fernandez, 2005). Since the importance and benefits of microteaching have been argued in many studies in the related literature (Allen and Eva, 1968; Arsal, 2015; Bell, 2007; Fernandez, 2005; 2009; Kılıç, 2010; Kpanja, 2001; Saban and Çoklar, 2013; Taşdelen-Karçkay and Sanlı, 2009; Yiğitoğlu-Aptoula, 2021; Wahba, 1999; Yüksel and Özkalan, 2019), it is believed that it

should be used to train prospective ELT teachers on early language teaching in the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners” course during their Bachelor degree.

In the present study, in terms of regarding the importance of early language learning and the necessity of teacher education, it is thought that prospective ELT teachers need to be trained in early language learning for very young and young learners. However, this training should involve the use of microteaching lessons under the main scope of the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners” course in the third grade of the bachelor’s degree offered by English language teaching department. After completing the study of microteaching lessons, it is thought that prospective teachers might teach in real classrooms to very young learners in order to improve their experiences and develop their practical pedagogic knowledge on early language teaching and learning processes. Accordingly, as for the question which was stated above with regard to the lack of awareness, contextual knowledge and pedagogical readiness of prospective ELT teachers, it is also thought that there is a need to examine their views, current knowledge, feelings, perceptions and beliefs with regard to teaching English to very young learners. However, since the teaching of foreign languages is not compulsory in preschool education in Türkiye, the review of the related literature indicates that there is no specific study on the views and perceptions of prospective ELT teachers on teaching a foreign language to very young learners after they have studied microteaching lessons as part of their course at university.

From the perspective of teacher training and teaching English to very young learners, in this study, the first aim is to conduct “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners” courses in the English language teaching department involving microteaching lessons for prospective ELT teachers. The second aim of the present study is then to ensure that the prospective teachers who have completed the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course would teach a foreign language to very young learners in public preschools in order to see the differences between their microteaching practices and real-life experiences. As for the last and the main aim of the study, the prospective teachers’ views and perceptions with regard to early language learning/teaching are to be analyzed in order to draw a picture of professional teacher development, and also on the progress of early language learning in Türkiye.

1.2 Research Questions

In this study, the main aim is to determine the views and perceptions of prospective ELT teachers on teaching English to very young learners in preschools. This will relate to conducting microteaching lessons with the prospective ELT teachers and considering their views, expectations and perceptions. A further aim is to determine the experiences of prospective ELT teachers during this process. Finally, we wish to come up with some common suggestions for improving early foreign language teaching for ELT teachers, since the teaching to very young learners has gained popularity in a global context. For the purpose of achieving these aims, the following research questions are asked:

1. What are the prospective ELT teachers’ views and current knowledge with regard to foreign language teaching to very young learners prior to the microteaching sessions in the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners” course?
2. What are the prospective teachers’ expectations with regard to teaching English to very young learners in preschool?
3. What are the effects of microteaching lessons on prospective ELT teachers’ classroom practices in the early language teaching process?
4. What are the prospective ELT teachers’ views and suggestions with regard to teaching a foreign language to very young learners after their classroom practice in preschool?

Method

2.1 Research Design

The present study is designed as a qualitative research study since it involves relevant data collection through the use of a semi-structured interview aimed at revealing the perceptions and views of prospective ELT teachers on teaching early foreign languages to very young learners. Since qualitative research aims to describe a phenomenon, social event, perspective, attitude, and perception

of an individual or group of participants (Creswell, 2003), it is purposefully selected for this study in order to achieve the research aims confidently. The study made use of a one group pre-test / post-test qualitative research method in order to determine the progress and views of the prospective ELT teachers before and after the microteaching lesson sessions. Accordingly, a specific semi-structured interview form was developed by the researcher in order to collect systematic and reliable data for the current study. In line with the main principles of qualitative research design, after collecting qualitative data, it was analyzed with the help of content analysis. Finally, the findings were discussed with regard to the research questions.

2.2 Sample and Universe

In the present study, the universe was determined as the prospective ELT teachers who have been studying in the English Language Teaching Department at Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University in the 2022-2023 academic year. As for the sampling, ELT students were purposefully selected as the participants; the pre-condition of the sample was determined as completing the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course. Therefore, all of the participants had undergone the stated course during their studies. Meanwhile, the convenience sampling method which involves using respondents who are convenient to the researcher (Galloway, 2005) was used to make up the sample in order to collect data. Although collecting data from too many participant groups in a large universe is not practical or advantageous for the purposes of qualitative research (Karataş, 2015), in this study, the aim was to reach all participants in the universe in order to reduce data loss and take into account the presence of reluctant participants. Data was collected from 64 prospective ELT teachers –all the students who attended the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course- in order to achieve the research aims. The demographic features and the numbers of the sample group are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Variables		n	%
Gender	Female	44	68.75
	Male	20	31.25
Class	3 rd Year	56	87.50
	Senior Class	8	12.50
Total		64	100.00

Table 1 shows that 44 of the participants were female, while 20 of them were male. Additionally, while most of the participants were third year students, eight participants were in the senior class. This was acceptable in that it was the first time they had attended the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course since they had not attended this course when they were in the 3rd year. All the participants volunteered to take part in the study, and they were informed about the process at the beginning of the study.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, a semi-structured interview protocol which included open-ended questions was mainly used to collect data about the prospective ELT teachers’ views and perceptions with regard to teaching a foreign language to very young learners. However, there were also some common questions about early language learning and also foreign language teaching to very young learners. The interview form that was used for the study was specifically designed by the researcher. As adding three questions, the same form was used twice in order to obtain pre-test and post-test data. During the interview form development process, firstly the related literature was reviewed in a detailed way. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge there was no instrument which could be used to achieve the goals of the present study even though there were some studies on the effectiveness of microteaching and also some on early language learning. As far as the second step of instrument development was concerned, the related terms and common concepts were included in the interview form as an item pool; the questions and terms used were then presented for comment to three experts from the preschool education department and English language teaching department. However, the interview questions were not piloted due to the limited number of participants in universe. Finally, the final version of the interview form was examined by two different experts in order to increase the reliability

of the instrument. The questions in the interview form were then adapted in order to gather the post-test data; specifically, the tenses of the questions were altered to the past tense and two extra questions were added on microteaching lesson studies in order to examine the final perceptions and views of the prospective ELT teachers.

Consequently, the semi-structured interview form consisted of two sections; the first section included 4 questions about the demographic features of the participants, while the second section incorporated 11 questions relating to the main research aims. Details of the sections are as follows: (1) the prospective teachers' age, gender, grades and teaching experience (e.g., "Do you have any experience of teaching English to any group of learners?"), (2) prospective ELT teachers' common views and perceptions about early language teaching to very young learners, the beliefs of the prospective ELT teachers on the benefits of microteaching for their real-life teaching practices, the experiences of the prospective ELT teachers during their teaching in preschool, the perceptions and views of the participants about teaching English to very young learners, the handicaps and positive aspects of teaching English in preschools, and the suggestions/expectations of prospective preschool teachers in terms of teaching English to very young learners in terms of using their own pedagogical knowledge (e.g., "What do you think about teaching English to very young learners in public preschools in Türkiye?"). All the questions in the instrument were written in English since the participant prospective teachers were in English Language Teaching Department at the university, and they were good at English. After the interviews, the answers of the participants were not needed to be translated into English; and some excerpts were presented in order to discuss the data.

The participants were firstly asked to complete a protocol to state they were volunteers for the present study. The semi-structured interview questions were then presented with a hard copy of the interview form and the participants were asked to answer the questions sincerely. Prior to the collection of the pre-test data, the participants were asked to choose a nickname for themselves such as 'Sally', 'Jack', 'Sam' etc. in order to allow a comparison of the pre-test and post-test answers. The participants used the same nicknames for both of the interview protocols during the study. The participants, accordingly, were asked to write their answers in English. They completed the interviews twice – before microteaching and after teaching English to very young learners in public preschools. The duration of the interviews was 15-20 minutes for both interviews.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

For the data collection procedure, the researcher firstly determined the participant groups as being ELT students who have attended the "Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1" course at Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University in the 2022-2023 academic year. All the participant prospective ELT teachers were then informed about the details of the study and were asked to sign a protocol indicating that they were a volunteer for the study. Then, in order to obtain the pre-test data, the interview form was delivered to all participants, and they were asked to answer all the questions in the form. For the second step, a microteaching lesson plan was designed by the researcher for the prospective ELT teachers and was used in "Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1" course. After presenting information about the pedagogical features of very young learners, the characteristics of young learners, and specific teaching methods and techniques relating to young and very young learners, the prospective ELT teachers were asked to design and present their own lessons for very young learners on pre-determined themes such as "colors", "numbers", "animals" etc. During the microteaching sessions, the participants were video-recorded. The video was then watched by all the class, and both the instructor and classmates provided feedback about the teaching activities. In addition, there was a chance for self-evaluation on the part of the participants. The sample lesson presentations were about 15-20 minutes for each of the prospective teachers. The microteaching lesson studies were completed over a 7-week period. The prospective ELT teachers were then required to teach very young learners in public preschool in the city center, Erzincan. For this phase, 21 public preschools in Erzincan were chosen and the prospective teachers visited these preschools over a 5-week period. During this time, all of the participants taught the previously-determined themes to very young learners under the supervision of in-service preschool teachers.

At the end of the 5-week teaching experience, the prospective ELT teachers were asked to complete the revised semi-structured interview form in order to collect the post-test data for the study. As before, the written form of the interview was used with each participant writing their answers for each question. The interviews were completed in approximately 15-20 minutes.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the collected data was systematically analyzed using a qualitative data analysis procedure. During this process, the pre-test interviews were first read one by one and the main codes and sub-titles of the codes were determined. The answers of the participants were noted in terms of their nicknames. Secondly, using the common qualitative data analysis steps, the post-test results were analyzed. In terms of the presentation of the findings, the main pre-test codes were shown in a “**bold**” writing style, while the post-test codes were presented in an “*italic*” writing style. Based on these codes, samples of excerpts from the prospective ELT teacher were also presented to support the coded data. This was done in order to supply respondent validation which means checking that the researcher’s findings were clearly presented in terms of the participants’ own views (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in tables which illustrate the main codes and sub-categories.

3.1 The Pre-test Results of the Interviews

In this study, the participants were asked to reveal the details of their views and perceptions with regard to early language learning and teaching. The data were coded in terms of the quotations from the interview forms. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The First Perceptions of the Prospective ELT Teachers on Teaching English to VYL

Main Codes	Sub-Categories
Current Knowledge	Teaching Methods & Techniques Teaching Instruments Pedagogical Knowledge The awareness of the Importance of ELT
Expectations of Microteaching	Practical Knowledge Classroom Management Designing a lesson plan
Views on Early Language Teaching	The necessity of teaching FL The needs of modern era Challenges of teaching FL

As can be seen in Table 2, three main codes were identified with regard to the first impressions of the prospective ELT teachers on teaching a foreign language to very young learners in preschools. In the pre-test semi-structured interview form, all the questions were about the common ideas and perceptions of the participants. In addition, they were asked about their expectations with regard to microteaching.

As for the first main code, it was seen that the current knowledge of the prospective ELT teachers with regard to early language learning and teaching processes was insufficient to teach that target group. The answers with regard to the first and second interview questions about their current knowledge when it comes to teaching English to very young learners showed that nearly all of the participants had no knowledge of appropriate teaching methods or different teaching techniques for use with very young learners. Since they had not had any specific course or training with regard to teaching English to very young or young learners at that point, this result was not surprising. As far as this code is concerned, as a sample excerpt from the answers, Sam claimed that “*I don’t know how I teach English to preschoolers or primary school students effectively, because they are very energetic and I think getting their attention to the courses is not an easy task for teachers. Maybe I know English, but teaching is different and challenging.*” Accordingly, the participants stated that using the correct techniques is important for successful teaching, although they were not aware of any specific

effective and suitable materials and teaching techniques for very young learners. In support of this code, Daisy wrote *“I think worksheets and coloring activities are enough to teach main vocabularies for preschoolers. We don’t need to design many different materials because it can be confusing. I can just use a few worksheets if I teach in a preschool.”* However, as Table 2 revealed, the prospective ELT teachers were aware of the importance of teaching English to very young learners, and they knew some of the advantageous features of working with very young learners in terms of language learning. As Table 2 highlights, the importance of early language learning and teaching has been stated by the prospective ELT teachers; accordingly, Jack answered the related question by stating *“English should be taught in preschools as compulsory, for instance I have a nephew and he can count numbers as English and he knows colors thanks to the courses in his preschool. It is very useful and important for preschoolers. I can easily learn and memorize many different things; also they will not forget the words in their whole life. So English should be a main course in preschools in Turkey”.*

As for the expectations with regard to microteaching in the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course, the participants stated that they expected to obtain some practical knowledge about teaching, classroom management tips and how to design a suitable lesson plan for very young and young learners. Additionally, they commonly expressed the view that microteaching would be very effective and significant for their own learning process because they might have a chance to realize their own deficiencies while teaching in front of the classroom. For instance, Simon reflected his views by stating *“I will firstly have an experience like that. For my other courses, of course, I presented some themes but this will be different. Teaching -like a teacher- in the classroom will be very exciting and I think microteaching will be useful for all of us in this course.”* Similarly, Kevin suggested that *“I can learn designing a lesson for my students and there is a chance to apply it. The duration of the tasks and material design can be improved here and it will be useful and effective for me. I am looking forward to attending microteaching lesson studies.”* In referring to all the participants’ answers, it was seen that there was a common view about the benefits of microteaching, and nearly all of the participants believed in the advantages of microteaching for their own teaching experiences. It was a positive perspective with regard to learning via microteaching in terms of early language teaching.

As for the final main code, the participants stated their general views and perceptions with regard to early language learning and teaching English to very young learners. In this code, it was seen that all of the participants argue the importance and necessity of learning English in this era. They also expressed that teaching English should be viewed as a need of the modern era. In this sense, Tom declared that *“Learning a language is not an optional case now, but it is a necessity. Everybody should learn it and if we start earlier, it will be easy. It is a need for all professions and actually, English is not enough as a foreign language, maybe, people -in the future- should learn German, Chinese etc. in order to have a job. So, we should learn and teach English properly.”* However, it was stated by the participants that teaching English to very young learners was not an easy task for teachers since very young learners could be so energetic and curious. Many of the participants were worried about classroom management and students’ motivation during early language teaching. For instance, Summer stated that *“Maybe I can teach English to preschoolers but I am afraid of controlling them in the classroom. I think they are so young for learning a foreign language in formal education. Getting their attention is not easy; also they always ask many relevant questions. I think I am not so patient for them.”* Briefly, in terms of the pre-test results of the interviews, it can be said that the prospective ELT teachers were aware of the importance and necessity of teaching English to very young learners; however, they did not have enough knowledge to teach them. Yet, they commonly believed that microteaching would be an effective way to learn how to teach in the classroom, and they were excited about the microteaching sessions since they expected to learn about lesson design, classroom management and practical knowledge as it related to early language teaching.

3.2 The Post-test Results of the Interviews

In the present study, the participants were asked questions at the end in order to determine the effectiveness of microteaching and also to reveal their views and perceptions on early language learning and teaching in terms of their own experiences. The data were coded in terms of the excerpts from the second interview forms, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Prospective ELT Teachers' Views and Perceptions on Teaching English to VYL

Main Codes	Sub-Categories
Professional Development	Teaching Methods & Techniques Teaching Instruments& Material Design Pedagogical Knowledge
Views on Microteaching	Practical Knowledge Classroom Management Designing a lesson plan Feedback on sample lesson studies
Experiences with real preschoolers	Ideals vs. realities Dreams vs. real conditions Motivation vs. anxiety
Suggestions on Teaching English to VYL	Curriculum & Syllabus Courses or training on VYL In-service teacher training

As can be seen in Table 3, three main codes were determined for the post-test data results. Specifically, improvements with regard to the concept of teaching English to very young learners, the effects of microteaching on the prospective ELT teachers' development, the real experiences with real preschoolers in public preschools, and finally, the prospective ELT teachers' suggestions on teaching English to very young learners were put forward as the final perceptions and views at the end of the study.

As for the first main code, it was concluded that the prospective ELT teachers' views and perceptions with regard to teaching English to preschoolers were improved in terms of designing materials and instruments, learning about appropriate teaching methods and techniques, and developing pedagogical knowledge as it applies to young/very young learners. All of the participants stated that they learnt about the main characteristics of young/very young learners, and they were trained about the suitable teaching methods and techniques available for these learners. In the course, they were also informed about the differences between young learners and adults in terms of learning a foreign language. In this sense, Lila stated that *"During 'Teaching Foreign Language to Young Learners-1' course, we learnt much new and important knowledge about young learners, firstly we defined these learners and we learnt the details about very young learners, also. We learnt the main pedagogical knowledge about the learners and then we learnt how we can select suitable methods and how we can design some materials for these groups of learners. I felt myself as being knowledgeable at the end of the semester."* Accordingly, as another sample excerpt from Jane indicated, *"I learnt who young and very young learners are; I can define these students and since I know the main characteristics of them, I can easily understand their feelings and necessary materials for them. Also, I learnt correct instruments for my future courses thanks to our 'young learners' course.* As can be seen in the first main code, at the end of the study, the participant prospective ELT teachers felt that they could improve their understanding and knowledge with regard to teaching English to young/very young learners, since they were purposefully trained about teaching these students throughout the semester.

With regard to the second main code, the participants were asked about the effects of the microteaching lessons in terms of their own experiences during their teaching practice. The responses showed that all of the participants were aware of the benefits of microteaching on their teaching practices because they had the chance to teach in the classroom by designing their own materials and lesson plans. During the microteaching sessions, the participant prospective ELT teachers had to determine suitable materials, methods, techniques, games, instruments to be used and the duration of the tasks; and they had to present their lesson plans for a limited period of time. It was a fascinating experience for the participants because they were also given feedback after their performances. The feedback which was given by the instructor and other prospective ELT teachers had a vital role to play with regard to the effectiveness of their microteaching. In addition, thanks to the use of video-recordings, the participants were able to see their own mistakes and also the positive aspects of their microteaching and were able to engage in self-evaluation. In this code, Cameron answered the question with regard to the pros and cons of microteaching: *"I designed my own plan and I decided to*

use some different materials, also, I could select listening materials own by own. I understood my weakness at the end of the feedback session. It was the first time that I presented a lesson in front of the classroom and I enjoyed during the microteaching lessons”.

Thirdly, the participants were asked about their own experiences with preschoolers in the real classrooms, and to share their feelings and perceptions about teaching in reality. Nearly all of the participants stated that they had enjoyed their teaching experiences. However, some of them expressed that they had had some difficulties because of the young ages of the students they had to deal with. The realities and the ideal lesson plans were sometimes really different since the participants could not complete all their plans in the time available. At the end of their experiences, the prospective ELT teachers realized that teaching in the real classroom was different from the microteaching studies situation because many different problems and unexpected handicaps could arise during their teaching practice. For instance, Candy stated that *“I selected a very enjoyable game but I couldn’t use it because I couldn’t control the classroom and I couldn’t get their attention, they tried to dance in the classroom and they didn’t want to attend my own game. I was terrible; I think it was really difficult with real students”*. Similarly, Jennifer declared that *“I bought some original cartoons and art-craft activity materials for my preschoolers, but I couldn’t use them because all students wanted to go to toilet together and then they wanted to ask some questions about me. Then I realized that the course time was over and I didn’t use any of them as I planned. It was difficult but luckily in the following weeks I used them.”* In this sense, it can be seen that the prospective ELT teachers were able to understand the differences between dreams and realities, and also they became aware of the importance of real-life experiences working with real preschoolers or young learners. Therefore, it can be said that the prospective teachers were able to develop their views and perceptions on teaching English to very young learners, and also benefited from engaging in early language teaching practices with the help of real classroom applications.

As for the last main code, the participants’ suggestions and comments on teaching English to very young learners were asked for at the end of the study. It can be seen that many of the participants suggested a common curriculum or syllabus for very young learners, some specific courses on early language learning at universities, and in-service teacher training programs for in-service ELT teachers. All of these suggestions could be seen as the common views of the participants. For instance, Kelly expressed the following view: *“I think we should have much more courses on teaching English to young or very young learners at university and we need some seminars or trainings on this issue. So, we can improve our own teaching methods and we can learn so many details about early language teaching.”* The common views and perceptions of the prospective ELT teachers showed that they felt that they could create some solutions to the problems they would face in the real classroom, and also that they had enough knowledge to suggest some solutions with regard to early childhood education and teaching English to young/very young learners.

Discussion

The present study has examined the viewpoints of prospective ELT teachers on foreign language teaching to preschoolers. Four research questions were asked to determine the first impressions and general views of the prospective ELT teachers on teaching English to very young/young learners, the effectiveness of microteaching sessions on this issue, the experiences of the participants during teaching real preschoolers, and suggestions with regard to teaching English to very young learners. The study findings are now discussed in terms of each research question.

The first main point was the current knowledge of the prospective ELT teachers with regard to early language learning and teaching. The findings indicate that most prospective ELT teachers had positive attitudes and perceptions when it came to teaching English to very young/young learners. At first glance, it was seen that prospective teachers believed about the positive effects of early language teaching in pre-school and primary schools (Gürsoy, Korkmaz and Damar, 2017). The importance of teaching English in early years has been stated in many related studies (Enever and Moon, 2009; Johnstone, 2009; Krashen, 1975; Unesco, 2012). However, in the present study, it was seen that the prospective teachers were aware of the significance and need for teaching a foreign language to younger learners, even if they hadn’t attended any courses or engaged in a specific training program

on this issue. The results with regard to the first research question revealed that, at the beginning of the study, the current knowledge of the prospective ELT teachers was not enough to allow them to teach English to very young learners. Nevertheless, they were aware of the importance and some of the main concerns relating to early language teaching.

The second main point of the study was about the microteaching sessions for the prospective ELT teachers. After comparing the pre-test and post-test results of the prospective teachers, it was concluded that the microteaching sessions which were conducted as part of the “Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners-1” course were beneficial for the participants. Since it gives prospective teachers a chance to practice working in a classroom situation, microteaching can be a useful way to train prospective teachers on early language teaching. Similarly, in their study about the effectiveness of microteaching with regard to pre-service teachers, Taşdelen-Karçkay and Sanlı (2009) argued that “micro-teaching can be used as an effective method for especially practical lessons of teacher education program” (p. 847). Additionally, in their study on EFL prospective teachers’ life-long learning via microteaching lesson practices, Suryani, Rukmini, Anggani, Bharati and Hartono (2018) revealed that such teachers would have some advantages when it came to teaching a language to their students during their practicum and subsequent teaching career. In the related literature, the studies on the benefits of microteaching (Arsal, 2015; Bell, 2007; Fernandez, 2005; 2009; Kılıç, 2010; Kpanja, 2001; Saban and Çoklar, 2013; Taşdelen-Karçkay and Sanlı, 2009; Yiğitoğlu-Aptoula, 2021) support the results of the present study in terms of improving teaching skills, increasing self-evaluation abilities, and enhancing the practical experiences of prospective teachers. In the present study, similarly, with regard to the benefits of microteaching on critical thinking (Arsal, 2015), the findings identified improvements on the part of the prospective ELT teachers in terms of thinking about their lesson plans, designing materials, and interpreting feedback on their performance after the microteaching sessions. It is known that early childhood teachers’ performance is significant for young learners’ language acquisition (Reynolds, Ha, Ding, Zhang, Liu and Ma, 2022). Therefore, it can be said that if prospective ELT teachers develop their teaching skills for dealing with younger learners, they will be successful in terms of early years English teaching during their teaching in the future. As for this case, the result of the present study on the improvements of the prospective teachers in terms of early language teaching could be appreciated as a major benefit of the microteaching sessions.

The third main point was about the teaching experiences of the prospective ELT teachers after working with real preschoolers in public preschools. After the participant prospective ELT teachers had taught in the public preschools for five weeks, they were again asked for data to obtain the post-test results of the study. They shared their experiences and views on early language teaching by referring to their own experience. The findings revealed that most prospective ELT teachers had developed positive attitudes towards teaching English to very young learners. Since teachers’ beliefs and attitudes might directly affect their teaching performances and professional development (Wallace, 1991), getting a positive perspective on teaching English to very young/young learners could develop the prospective ELT teachers’ teaching career in terms of all their teaching experiences. In the present study, the prospective ELT teachers honestly stated that they could recently understand the characteristics of young/very young learners after they had completed their real classroom practices. However, in the pre-test results, it was seen that they had argued about the different characteristics and learning styles of young learners prior to the practice. Similarly, in their study about a new educational system in terms of English language teaching, Gürsoy, Korkmaz and Damar (2017) revealed that the prospective teachers were aware of the different learning styles of young learners, and they thought that young learners should be taught in line with these differences. In this study, the prospective ELT teachers’ views and perceptions with regard to teaching English to very young learners were shaped with the help of actual classroom practices, and they were able to assess their own knowledge and teaching abilities in real classrooms. It was seen that the prospective teachers were able to realize their deficiencies and identify the positive aspects and improvements resulting from their teaching practice in the public preschools. Developing the prospective ELT teachers’ views about early language teaching was a positive study result.

As for the last main point, in the post-test interview protocol the prospective teachers made suggestions and offered comments with regard to teaching English to very young/young learners. The

findings showed that the prospective teachers generally suggested the need for a standard curriculum or syllabus for very young learners, many more courses on early language teaching for prospective teachers at universities, and finally a teacher training program on teaching English to VYL/ YL for in-service ELT teachers. As was suggested by Akdeniz and Gelmez-Burakgazi (2020), English language teacher education programs should involve courses relating to teaching English to young learners, in order to develop the language teaching process. This study also concluded that prospective ELT teachers should be provided with many more courses in English language teaching departments on teaching English in the early years. Although the course “Teaching English to Young Learners” has been available for pre-service ELT teachers in order to service constructivist and communicative perspectives since 2005 (Haznedar and Uysal, 2010), it is thought that this course should be revised in terms of the practical knowledge of prospective teachers and teaching in early childhood. Finally, the prospective ELT teachers’ suggestions and comments with regard to teaching English to very young learners were seen as remarkable for developing early language learning in Türkiye. Briefly, it was concluded that by the end of the study the prospective ELT teachers had developed an improved perception and a positive attitude with regard to early language teaching and the learning process.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In the modern era, many different perspectives with regard to early language learning have been discussed, since the importance of learning a foreign language in the early years has been proved by experts, educators and researchers (Gürsoy, et.al., 2017; Halliwell, 1993; Mirici, 2001). As for early language learning, teachers’ beliefs, views, professional development levels, pedagogical knowledge and attitudes can be seen as some basic parameters (Wallace, 1991). Within this perspective, it is necessary to determine the views and perceptions of both in-service teachers and prospective teachers on the main aspects of teaching foreign languages to very young/young learners. Referring to this need, in the present study the prospective ELT teachers’ views and perceptions on teaching English to preschoolers were examined in terms of applying microteaching practices in support of such teaching. Microteaching was purposefully used in this study in order to improve the prospective ELT teachers’ teaching skills and practical knowledge before offering the man experience to work with preschoolers in real classrooms. It was thought to be a useful way to allow prospective teachers to practice course planning. The findings showed that the prospective ELT teachers had positive attitudes towards teaching English to very young learners, and also a belief that they could improve their knowledge and experience with the help of microteaching sessions followed by practical applications in real classrooms. Additionally, they suggested the need to establish many more courses relating to teaching this age group during their bachelor’s degree program since they wanted to develop their teaching skills for dealing with very young/young learners in general.

In subsequent studies, it is suggested that various courses could be examined in terms of the effectiveness of microteaching. In addition, prospective teachers should be listened to much more in order to realize the challenges they face and current knowledge about the education system in Türkiye. When revising programs or courses at universities, the needs of prospective teachers should be borne in mind by policy-makers. In this sense, it can be said that there is a need for studies based on the views and suggestions of prospective teachers. Additionally, in-service training programs should be developed for in-service ELT teachers in terms of teaching English to younger learners. The implementation of the suggested training programs could also be analyzed in further studies. Thanks to these kinds of studies and the incorporation of new perspectives, English language teaching in Turkey can achieve an acceptable level when it comes to common education standards in future years.

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