PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' EMERGENCY REMOTE MICROTEACHING EXPERIENCES AND ADJUSTMENTS: GROWING GAINS AND LESSENING PAINS

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1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has remarkably affected the domain of education on a global scale. According to the reports of UNESCO (2020), 1.5 billion students and 63 million educators had to leave their educational environments all around the world. The school closures were followed by a transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT) in which "courses [are] offered online in response to a crisis or disaster" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 1) through web-conferencing platforms. Higher education institutions and teacher training programs were no exceptions. During the lockdown in Turkey, higher education institutions had ERT for three consecutive semesters, in which students had to attend courses via their computers, tablets or mobile phones. Although online teaching was already in practice within some of the higher education institutions, "it was the first time in the educational history of Turkey that face-to-face education was interrupted countrywide" (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 83). At the faculties of education, planning teaching was relatively complicated, as the teacher candidates had to learn how to teach. While creating online platforms for pre-service teachers, decision-makers had to consider not only the future teachers' expectations, but also the general requirements of teacher training, and the feasibility of the training in the conditions provided by universities and schools (Flores & Gago, 2020). Against this backdrop, teacher educators resorted to alternative ways of delivering practical courses to equip pre-service teachers with the skills that will help them transfer their knowledge into practice upon taking part in teaching practicum. In this sense, one common teacher training technique was remote/online microteaching through which pre-service teachers practise and refine their teaching skills in a low-risk environment under the auspices of lecturers with follow-up feedback from the teacher and peers (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

The transition to ERT had even more complex implications for the teacher training professionals working at ELT departments as they had to take action for educating pre-service English teachers on teaching how to communicate in a foreign language in a virtual classroom. In other words, training prospective English teachers was more complicated given that they were learners of language teaching, rather than mere language learners (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Hence, remote microteaching was integrated into the curricula of ELT departments and mostly utilised for courses, such as "approaches to teaching English as a foreign language" or "ELT methodology". During the online classes, prospective English teachers had mini-teaching sessions in which they presented target structures and materials to their peers, and they recorded the meetings for further reflection. Although the technique was a commonly used pedagogical tool before the pandemic, its remote applications and ramifications for English teachers call for further research. To this end, the present study aims to investigate 30 pre-service English

teachers' remote microteaching experiences, particularly their adjustments to practices, in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in Turkey.

2. Distance English Language Teacher Education

In recent years, more English teachers have been needed with English becoming a lingua franca for education, commerce, and employment (Christison & Murray, 2021). However, it is not always possible to receive a traditional education for teachers in a face-to-face setting due to limitations, such as time constraints and geographical barriers (Murray, 2013). Besides, advances in computer technology and the Internet have made it possible for not only practising English teachers but also candidate teachers to get credentials online without attending quality institutions. Distance education as an alternative is perfect for English language teacher candidates in rural, secluded, or underprivileged areas, as well as those with limited access to regular educational institutions. Therefore, distance language teacher education programs enabling teachers to earn certificates online have been expanded with the help of those affordances that computer and internet technologies have gained over the last decades.

Recent growth in the number of distance language teaching education (DLTE) programs has accompanied the emergence of new concerns over the overall quality of DLTE. The lack of DLTE-specific accreditation and research makes it difficult to find effective courses and curriculum designs, implementation, and pedagogical approaches, particularly activities focused on learner outcomes. However, fortunately, researchers and teacher educators have access to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Computed Mediated Communication (CMC) literature to better understand the characteristics of DLTE and the factors that may influence its quality (Christison & Murray, 2021). Similarly, pre-service language teachers have also started taking advantage of various Web 2.0 tools and mobile applications for the betterment of their linguistic and teaching competence (Karakaş & Kartal, 2020).

Several issues have been put forth regarding objectives, teaching and learning experiences, and assessment in distance language teacher education programs and its characteristics. One of these issues has been how to define and classify distance language teacher education programs. The bulk of information in a fully online course is often delivered online, without face-to-face sessions. Online education courses typically use synchronous or asynchronous delivery to assist teaching and learning while the instructor and the student are physically apart (Shin & Kang, 2018). A blended/hybrid course often consists of a decreased number of face-to-face sessions while also providing students with access to a significant quantity of knowledge via online resources. A web-facilitated course utilises the web to facilitate a face-to-face course in which the curriculum and assignments may be posted on a course management system or website (Murray & Christison, 2017). A flipped classroom, on the other hand, presents key information online and uses face-to-face time for problem-solving.

Preparing teachers for online teaching is one of the issues to handle in order to secure the quality of DLTE. In order for DLTE to yield successful outcomes, language teachers or teacher candidates should obtain an alternative skills framework for distance language teaching skills besides their existing framework. Compton (2008) put forth four major recommendations to aid in preparing language teachers for distance language teaching. The first is to enhance skills in online language teaching by utilising current courses. This covers technology use in distance language teaching and its pedagogy and evaluation. The second suggestion is to improve distance teaching skills with varying degrees of proficiency and responsibility for multiple roles. While varying degrees refer to novice, proficient, and expert online language teacher educators, multiple roles include teachers, teacher educators, coordinators, and administrators. Modernising current technology training is the third suggestion which emphasises integrating CALL technology training into the current teaching schema. The last recommendation is to administer early field experiences in distance education including virtual practicum.

Another concern in DLTE is to balance social interaction and learner autonomy. For a successful distance language teacher education program in different contexts, it is vital to communicate via the mediation of computer technology in virtual classrooms (Shin & Kang, 2018). Shin and Kang (2018) emphasize that DLTE programs pose new challenges when compared to face-to-face classroom interaction regarding the diverse cultural background of the participants. They provide Chinese students' avoidance of disagreeing with Canadian instructors and their unwillingness to post messages stating any disagreement with their peers as an example to show the influence of Chinese students' cultural background on a virtual classroom (Zaho & McDougall, 2008). DLTE may support learner autonomy with the facilities, such as learning based on students' own pace and having the opportunity to reach recorded sessions, especially with the use of mobile and technological devices (Karakaş & Kartal, 2020). However, it may also pose a threat to required social interaction, which can be overcome through building a virtual community and collaborating by distance.

Enhancing engagement and social interaction is of paramount importance to obtain successful outcomes in DLTE programs. Therefore, building community and collaboration is another issue to be handled. This may mainly be achieved through instructors' initiative within the role of a facilitator promoting collaborative enterprises of the class participants. Rather than being an authoritative figure, the instructor should approach specific contexts with sensitivity and empathy (Pawan et al., 2016). In addition to the teacher's role as a facilitator, participants of distance classes can also take part in building a distance community in which they can collaborate and cooperate with one another or in groups. To provide an example regarding the writing skill component of language learning, such online facilities as online peer feedback, wikis, blogs, electronic mails, and virtual classrooms enabling constant interaction can be utilized for instructional purposes (Yeşilyurt & Kartal, 2018). In addition to that of the students, it is vital that the instructors/faculty build an online community and cooperate and collaborate.

Another critical aspect to which particular attention must be paid in DLTE is to provide the required feedback during the practicum (Murray & Christison, 2018; Karam et al., 2020). Practicum and field experience enable prospective teachers to observe how teaching and learning take place in real-life contexts and to acquire direct experience through applying theoretical knowledge to actual teaching practice. Here, it should be kept in mind that the practicum in DLTE should cover experiencing teaching both in conventional and virtual instructional settings (Shin & Kang, 2018). Although distance-only language teacher education programs lack actual classroom practice, Cheng (2010) states that there are advantages on the part of in-service teachers since they have the opportunity not only to apply what they learn theoretically to their real classes but also to study at their own pace. In order to closely monitor the virtual practicum and provide feedback to prospective teachers, instructors in DLTE have them video-record their own teaching practices. These videos may then be analyzed in order to give way to not only instructors' comment and feedback but also self- and peer reflection as the positive impact of video-mediated microteaching sessions on pre-service teachers' critical reflection were reported before the transition to ERE (e.g. Karakaş & Yükselir, 2021; Kohen & Kramarski, 2012; Kourieos, 2016; Önal, 2019). This can also enable receiving feedback from other related parties like collaborating teachers.

One other issue covers designing DLTE programs with the aim of producing reflective practitioners. Reflective practices include establishing a connection between what we attempt to accomplish and what we obtain as a result (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019). Since distance education provides great opportunities for monitoring and capturing videos of classes, it contributes a lot to reflective practices. As mentioned above, video recordings of teaching practicum of prospective teachers enable them to critically reflect on their teaching practices (Kourieos, 2016). Recording virtual setting practicum of prospective teachers can even be organized through a robust framework in which very detailed micro-moments of teaching activities are analyzed closely and meticulously (Sert, 2021). Thus, prospective teachers can have the opportunity to evaluate their teaching in and outside the classroom more objectively and to learn lessons for further teaching.

The final issue in DLTE is to define and measure quality in order for its evaluation. In order to secure a quality education by distance, researchers, such as Lee (2020) and Koruyan, Meri-Yilan and Karakaş (2022) suggest that the challenges faced should be overcome. They draw attention to the main challenges on the part of students which are acquainting learners with online teaching, evaluating them in an online setting, and providing necessary virtual assistance. They conclude that both course-external and course-internal quality assurance strategies should be applied within which not only summative but also formative assessments are included. Likewise, Shava and Ndebele (2019) observed that inadequate resources and quality management procedures were among the most significant obstacles to the delivery of quality distance education. Angolia and Pagliari (2016), on the other hand, attract attention to university infrastructure and faculty support system. According to them, it is highly critical that program

administrators constantly challenge the existing online teaching paradigms and adjust pedagogy to newly adopted technologies in order to maintain quality and success. This quality issue and the other issues mentioned above can be considered inevitable components of a DLTE program to achieve sustainable success.

3. Microteaching in Language Teacher Education

Microteaching requires pre-service teachers to plan and deliver small, simplified lessons to their peers under the supervision of a lecturer (Wallace, 1991). It is an efficient way of transferring theoretical knowledge into practice, receiving feedback, and exchanging ideas (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Kılıç, 2010; Mergler & Tangen, 2010). After they observe their peers' way of teaching, pre-service teachers have the chance to engage in a process of self-reflection, which will allow them to plan and implement their own microteaching sessions more effectively. Starting from the 60s, microteaching has been widely used to train pre-service teachers in different teacher education programs all around the world (Amobi, 2005). Before prospective teachers start teaching in real life, they find opportunities to develop their professional skills in a less challenging environment. Despite the fact that microteaching sessions cannot fully match what future teachers might experience in real classrooms (Grudnoff, 2011), they are considered highly effective in preparing pre-service teachers for their professional lives (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Payant, 2014).

Teaching English as a second/foreign language is likely to pose additional challenges for pre-service English teachers as they have to pay attention not only to their teaching skills but also to their own ways of using the target language. Given the fact that prospective teachers practise English mostly in the academic settings in the Turkish (EFL) context, it could be argued that microteaching sessions are valuable tools for preparing future ELT professionals in the country.

In line with the global evidence, research conducted in the Turkish academic settings shows that Turkish pre-service teachers of English generally find microteaching quite beneficial in terms of their language proficiency, self-confidence, teaching skills and classroom management (e.g., Coşkun, 2016; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Kavanoz & Yüksel, 2010; Kılıç, 2010; Ögeyik, 2009; Önal, 2019). Microteaching, when supported with video recordings, allows pre-service teachers to watch and reflect on their teaching experiences in a more objective way (Karakaş & Yükselir, 2021). They could analyse the process and evaluate feedback by distancing themselves from the classroom environment (Kokkinos, 2022). In addition, video-supported microteaching could help teacher candidates control their anxiety levels (Büyükkarcı, 2014), and could be used to initiate classroom discussions about the optimal ways of teaching in a specific situation (Kokkinos, 2022).

So far, several studies have investigated the outcomes of microteaching experience among prospective English teachers (e.g., Bağatur, 2015; Coşkun, 2016; Karakaş & Yükselir, 2021; Kavanoz & Yüksel, 2010; Ögeyik, 2009; Önal, 2019; Savaş, 2012). For example, Bağatur (2015) aimed to examine the general attitudes of 72 pre-service teachers of English towards

microteaching and investigated whether a number of variables such as GPA, gender, and year of study had any effects on these attitudes. The findings of the study showed that students had positive attitudes regardless of their gender, GPA or year of study. Some students reported that they learned different methods and techniques from their peers and others favoured microteaching as it gave them an opportunity to have self-reflection and to improve their ways of teaching.

In another study, Coşkun (2016) investigated the perceptions of 86 teacher candidates about the microteaching sessions which lasted fourteen weeks. The results showed that the participants had positive feelings about microteaching in general. They reported that the sessions helped them improve their English proficiency, teaching skills and lesson planning. On the other hand, some participants argued that microteaching took place in an artificial environment, and they felt pressure as they had to perform in a limited time, knowing that they were being graded. They also highlighted that preparing materials took too much time and money for such a limited period of teaching practice. Another shortcoming reported by the teacher candidates was the nature of feedback they received from their peers. Some suggested that structured feedback forms, rather than open-ended evaluation sheets, could work better as some of their friends made unfair and personal comments about their teaching performance.

In a similar study, Kavanoz and Yüksel (2010) investigated the views of 38 pre-service English teachers about microteaching. Their findings showed that the participants found microteaching useful as it facilitated learning, provided opportunities for self-reflection and helped them improve their teaching and evaluation skills. However, some of the teacher candidates acknowledged that the process was stressful, especially at the beginning of the semester. Others reported that it was difficult to implement microteaching in crowded classrooms and to keep their peers' attention in the class. In another study, Ögeyik (2009) examined the perceptions of 57 pre-service teachers of English about microteaching. Her findings indicated that the participants found microteaching beneficial in terms of personal and professional development. More specifically, the participants reported that microteaching facilitated self-reflection and self-confidence; it boosted creativity and helped them with material development, classroom management, lesson planning, online decision making and efficient application of teaching strategies. On the other hand, a few students complained about the unrealistic environment and the costly procedure of material production while preparing for the microteaching sessions. In a different study, Savaş (2012) found that pre-service teachers of English (N = 40) mostly had highly positive attitudes towards video-supported microteaching and believed that it improved both English proficiency and the teaching skills of teacher candidates. In the domain of proficiency, the participants mostly reported that microteaching helped them improve their pronunciation, followed by speaking, vocabulary, grammar and listening. In the domain of teaching skills, they mostly believed that microteaching had a positive influence on giving instructions, followed by other skills such as time management, monitoring students, board use, giving feedback and activity/material design. A study by Önal (2019) on the advantages of the

integration of smart phone video-recording into pre-service EFL teachers' microteaching sessions indicated that they showed remarkable progress in the areas of reflective skills. Additonally, the participants were found to be relatively positive about their sessions' being recorded for several reasons (e.g. managing classroom, adjusting classroom talk, non-verbal language use and L1 use). In a more recent study, Karakaş and Yükselir (2021) studied pre-service EFL teachers' engagement in reflection and reflective practice via video-recorded microteaching sessions and found that post-microteaching guided-focus group discussions and watching their own and others' sessions emerged to be helpful in terms of involving them in reflection on their practices and noticing several issues, which they did not notice at the time of teaching.

Overall, the studies reviewed so far show that Turkish pre-service teachers of English generally have positive attitudes towards microteaching. However, the case of online microteaching, as a relatively new and challenging way of training prospective English teachers, needs further investigation. The following section reviews the recent research on online microteaching, which was a commonly used tool for training teacher candidates during the pandemic.

3.1. Online Microteaching

The increasing adoption of online or remote teaching has necessitated the adaptation of traditional face-to-face classroom practices for online classes. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, education institutions at almost every level resorted to online teaching (Koruyan et al., 2022; Meri-Yilan, Koruyan & Karakaş, forthcoming). Most of the teacher education programs in higher education followed the same fashion. Therefore, these programs tried to reflect the practices that they carry out in face-to-face classrooms to online classes in distance education.

One core practice that teacher education programs have attempted to adjust is microteaching practices where pre-service teachers try to put what they have already learnt theoretically into practice. Hence, online microteaching sessions became part of the courses in online teacher education programs. As in other components of the language teacher education process, which have been tried to adapt from real-life classes to virtual classes, both advantageous and disadvantageous aspects have arisen in online microteaching.

The relevant literature includes studies on microteaching in English language teacher education regarding the dimensions such as fostering autonomy and learner engagement (Bodis, Reed & Kharchenko, 2020), overcoming challenges in microteaching (Kokkinos, 2022), the effectiveness of virtual microteaching (Dharma et al., 2022), prospective English teachers' microteaching experiences (Handayani, 2022), real-time feedback in online microteaching practices in English language classes (Hidayah & Idriani, 2021), online microteaching and reflective thinking (Ambarini et al., 2022), and a transformation of teaching practices (Mahmud, 2021). Each one of these studies reports both positive and negative aspects of online microteaching in English language classes. Based on the above studies, we can briefly look into

both sides of the coin; the challenges and benefits of online microteaching in distance English language teacher education.

Regarding the positive aspects, Bodis et al. (2020) reported that online microteaching boosts cooperation and collaboration. They also added that it fosters learner engagement and autonomy. Afrijon and Rosita's (2022) study revealed that despite the weaknesses of the computer-mediated medium, microteaching lectures are run at a level very close to certain standards. In addition, Hidayah and Indriani (2021) found that real-time feedback from peers helped pre-service student teachers to obtain different beneficial perspectives. Finally, Pham (2022) and Bodis et al. (2020) reported that online microteaching practices helped pre-service teachers learn teaching and digital competencies and improve ICT skills, respectively.

Studies also reported some challenges that pre-service teachers and teacher educators have faced in online microteaching practices. Jin (2022) found out that preservice teachers had difficulty sustaining children's active participation during online microteaching. Pham (2022) determined three major challenges that preservice teachers have faced in their online microteaching practices. These challenges are constant assessment of learners' progress and concentration in learning, fostering students' active involvement and engagement, and using technology. Kokkinos (2022) reported that preservice teachers complained about being not visible to their learners at the time of material presentation and not having the opportunity to have eye contact with them as well as lacking the support of body language in interaction. Based on the findings of her study, Zalavra (2022) listed some other challenges regarding preservice teachers' online microteaching practices. These are the inability to adopt the nature of online microteaching, difficulty in adopting digital tools for implementing online teaching, difficulty in selecting appropriate digital tools, and problems with timing.

The literature has put forth evidence of utilising online microteaching by pre-service language teachers. The relevant studies discovered both challenges and benefits of online microteaching practices. While the benefits encourage teacher trainers to make more use of this facility, the challenges imply the requirement of coping strategies on the part of both preservice teachers and teacher trainers.

3.2. Exploring Emergency Remote Microteaching

In this study, within the scope of a mixed-methods research design, online surveys with open-ended and closed-ended questions were used after the delivery of student microteaching sessions, which lasted 6 weeks. The participants (n=30) were third-year pre-service English teachers from the Education Faculty of a state university located in a southwestern Turkish city. As part of the language teacher education program in Turkey, they were required to attend the mandatory course entitled '*Teaching Language Skills',* an English language teaching methods course. This is a three-credit course that lasted 14 weeks in total, eight weeks of which were spared for theoretical foundations about major language skills and the rest for microteaching sessions. As part of the course requirements, students were placed into different groups to

perform online microteaching by means of a web-conferencing platform, i.e. Zoom. Additionally, before their microteaching sessions, students were required to prepare a lesson plan they would follow during their teaching sessions. Their assessment was done through a ready-made rubric consisting of the following sections: organization of content, clarity of presentation, communication (voice, eye contact), interaction with the audience, use of computer aids and overall effectiveness, each being judged on a 1-to-5 scale (1= poor – needs much improvement and 5=excellent – little or no room for development).

At the end of the term, pre-service teachers were sent semi-structured online questionnaires adapted from Ismail (2011) regarding their microteaching experiences (e.g. benefits, challenges, adjustments) followed by group discussions. Ethical issues, such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity of the responses, were addressed before the data collection commenced. The questionnaire consisted of 32 items on issues ranging from developing self-confidence in language production and skills, bridging existing knowledge with course methodology, and boosting motivation to practising their theoretical knowledge. The data from the closed-ended items from the questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistics (frequency and mean scores) and the data from the open-ended items were analysed through thematic analyses. For practical purposes, while presenting the questionnaire data, we only provided the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the items with Agree/Strongly Agree options. However, when needed, we also elucidated on the Neutral and Disagree options, especially when the majority of the participants did not show a positive orientation to the items.

4.1. Online microteaching experiences and adjustments

The 32 items in the questionnaire were analysed thematically with respect to their content as follows: a) language improvement and course satisfaction, b) teaching practice competence and management, c) preparation and management and d) attitudes and personal feelings. These themes are followed by the exploration of the challenges participants faced and the likely adaptations they would make to maximise their microteaching and teaching behaviours.

4.1.1 Language improvement and course satisfaction

There were eight items in this theme and it was found that most participants perceived gains in the area of language improvement and course satisfaction (83%). When inspected individually related to language-related matters, it became clear from each item that the majority of the participants felt improvement in developing confidence in their speaking ability (90%), developing their vocabulary knowledge (80%), discovering and fixing their language problems (e.g. pronunciation) (76.7%) and learning to speak clearly (73.3%). Concerning course satisfaction, most participants reported that online microteaching experiences encouraged their eagerness to work harder for their classes (70%), increased their motivation in the methodology course (90%) and accordingly helped them to better grasp different teaching methods to be employed in the act of teaching English (86.7%).

Table 1. Experiences in language improvement and course satisfaction

Items	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Online Microteaching: helped me develop confidence in my speaking ability.	27	90
helped me learn to speak clearly.	22	73.3
encouraged me to develop my vocabulary.	24	80
allowed me to apply ideas I learned from different courses.	29	96
encouraged me to work harder.	21	70
raised my motivation in the present methods course.	27	90
helped me to better understand different teaching methods.	26	86.7
helped me discover and fix my language problems.	23	76.7

Such gains were also mentioned by several participants in their answers to open-ended items in the questionnaires. For instance, one participant noted how s/he increased her/his speaking self-confidence in public speaking due to engaging in online microteaching sessions:

> I have gained self-confidence thanks to the presentation assignments. Now I feel more relaxed while I speaking in front of people (P. 15)

While speaking of fixing language-related problems, another participant highlighted the importance of learning from the mistakes of others through critical observations: "I saw my mistakes by looking at my classmates and learned how to correct them." (P. 18).

4.1.2. Teaching practice competence and awareness

There were seven items concerning this theme and it was found that most participants perceived gains in teaching practice competence and awareness as a consequence of running online microteaching (85%). To be more precise, the data indicated that online microteaching experiences increased participants' awareness of their teaching competence (90%), what makes someone a good teacher (90%) and their instructional strengths and weaknesses (76.7%). Moreover, all participants reported developing teaching skills needed in their future careers (100%) and a vast majority admitted seizing an opportunity to learn by observing their peers (90%) and to apply their teaching skills (83.3%). Probably, thanks to such gains in their teaching practice with increased awareness about the profession and the 'ideal' teacher identity, the majority of the participants (73.3%) believed that online microteaching enabled them to develop autonomy.

Table 2. Experiences about teaching practice competence and awareness

Items	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Online Microteaching:		
helped me develop an awareness of my teaching competence.	27	90
helped me develop the actual teaching skills I'll need later.	30	100
gave me an opportunity to learn by observing others.	27	90
made me aware of what makes a good teacher.	27	90
gave me a valuable opportunity to apply my teaching skills.	25	83.3
encouraged me to develop autonomy.	22	73.3
helped me discover my teaching strengths and weaknesses.	23	76.7

Substantiating the quantitative findings, the qualitative data revealed that most participants developed a positive view of themselves as teachers-to-be as one participant said:

> I get an idea of how to proceed with a lesson. I gained self-confidence because I used to think that I was not ready to be a teacher but after this experience, I think I am ready (P. 5).

> Online micro-teaching was a platform for beginner teachers to improve teaching competencies. It effectively increased our confidence level of us (P. 11).

Most also reported improving their professional self-confidence by constructing a teacher professional identity thanks to engaging in critical reflection on their own and peers' sessions as noted by some participants below:

> Online microteaching improved my self-confidence and it made me feel like a teacher. So I could see my mistakes clearly (P. 1).

> I have learned the stages of preparing an effective microteaching and presenting and also I tried to find the pros and cons by examining the microteaching of my classmates (P. 24).

A few students also mentioned becoming more aware of the nature of the teaching profession and what challenges and commitments lie in wait for them. In this regard, one participant said "I learned what is it like a being teacher and its difficulties especially in the case of teaching online" (P. 8) while another mentioned learning "how to be a good teacher and how to approach my [his/her] students" (P. 27).

4.1.3. Preparation and management

This theme also had eight items in the questionnaire, mainly concerned with time management, classroom management, lesson planning, writing lesson objectives, developing materials and tasks, and appropriately using technological tools in their microteaching sessions. In terms of time management, most participants highlighted the positive impact of online microteaching in their effective organization of time while teaching (86.7%) and management of the class (76.7%). Perhaps, it is thanks to their gains in classroom management that almost all (90%) reported learning how to predict potential classroom problems in classes. Similarly, a great majority (90%) felt that they obtained an opportunity to run an actual solo lesson under the

supervision of an experienced teacher (course tutor) in front of an audience (classmates). Besides running a practical lesson, they reported achieving improvement in writing good performance objectives (86.7%), well-thought lesson plans (90%), developing suitable activities and materials (83.3%) and using technology appropriately (96.7%) in line with the instructional purposes.

Table 3. Experiences in preparation and management

Items	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Online Microteaching:		
helped me learn to organize my time.	26	86.7
helped me learn how to manage the class.	23	76.7
offered me a practical opportunity to teach a lesson.	27	90
gave me an opportunity to improve my lesson planning.	27	90
helped me write good performance objectives.	23	76.7
encouraged me to develop teaching activities and materials	25	83.3
helped me learn how to predict classroom problems.	27	90
helped me learn to use technology appropriately.	29	96.7

It is not surprising that participants felt gains the most in the domain of technology use since, during the COVID-19 era, they have become familiar with technological devices as one participant wrote:

> I used a laptop computer, camera, the internet, telephone and speaker. Because these were what I needed to prepare for online microteaching. I couldn't prepare online microteaching without using them (P. 13).

From their responses to the open-ended items, it becomes obvious that the qualitative data lend further support to the quantitative findings. For instance, one participant made the following remarks as to his/her perceived gains related to running an effective class.

> We learned how we can prepare a lesson plan. We learned how we can manage our time. We managed our lesson plan according to our teaching point. I believe that my friends and I learned very well online microteaching process (P. 8).

Likewise, in terms of developing activities for target student groups, one participant told: "I learned to prepare activities suitable for the language skills that need to be acquired and to present these activities to students" (P. 21). Another felt improvement in the design of the course, i.e. what to do in each stage of the lesson: "I think that what I gained most importantly is how I should organize the course" (P. 26). One can conclude from these remarks that most participants observed, due to online microteaching sessions, a high level of advancement in their knowledge of teaching methodologies, and communication of course content to students.

4.1.4. Attitudes and personal feelings

Regarding this theme, students answered nine items in the questionnaire which were mainly about participants' attitudes towards and feelings about how microteaching sessions were run, their impact on their psychological states, and their overall success in bridging methods courses with practices. In this respect, it emerged that most (70%) considered that their sessions were carried out in a non-natural environment due mainly to the absence of real students in their sessions. Participants were not decisive about whether online microteaching led to the negligence of key activities in the methods since slightly more than half (53.4%) perceived that they could not perform the key activities they learned in the methods course in their teaching thanks to the online nature of the microteaching sessions whereas several others (44.4%) did not share this view, stating that they managed to take advantage of essential activities in their teaching sessions without much difficulty. However, as for the time issue, some students were a bit hesitant about whether online microteaching sessions were time-consuming (30%), yet more than one thirds (40%) did not deem that online microteaching consumed a lot of time whereas the rest (30%) found them to be time-consuming.

Table 4. Attitudes and feelings about online microteaching experiences

Items	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Online Microteaching:		
was carried out in an artificial environment.	21	70
resulted in neglecting key activities in the methods course.	10	33.4
consumed a lot of my time.	9	30
made me feel bored.	3	10
forced me to do difficult tasks.	5	16.7
was time limited and controlled.	21	70
made me feel embarrassed when teaching my colleagues.	6	20
forced me to think of the evaluation criteria while planning.	9	30
forced me to think of the evaluation criteria while teaching.	11	36.7

Regarding the impact of online microteaching on participants' emotional and psychological state, it was observed that more than half (63.3%) did not feel bored during microteaching sessions while the rest was largely neutral (26.7%) and just a few perceived them to be boring (4%). Most (66.7%) also reported being comfortable while teaching their classmates although around one-fifth of the participants admitted that online microteaching made them feel embarrassed during their sessions. While engaging with tasks for preparing their microteaching sessions, most participants (63.4%) thought that they did not have to deal with difficult tasks while a small number of them (16.7%) reported that online microteaching forced them to do difficult tasks. However, it appeared that the time limitation and controlled nature of the microteaching sessions turned out to be a vital issue for most participants (70%). Finally, as regards the evaluation component of their sessions, a small ratio of participants (30%) held the view that they had to think of the evaluation criteria while planning their online microteaching

sessions; however, almost half of them (46.7%) surprisingly did not report if they were compelled to be concerned about the evaluation criteria during the planning stage. Slightly more than one-fifth (23.3%) did not feel that they were forced to think of the evaluation criteria while planning their sessions. Likewise, the majority (43.3%) were unsure about being forced to think about the criteria while running their sessions whereas more than half of the rest (36.7%) expressed being concerned about the evaluation criteria while teaching and only a small group (17.3%) reported not being bothered by the assessment throughout their teaching sessions.

The qualitative data supplemented the above findings indicating that most participants saw microteaching as a technique that would add to their existing teacher knowledge base and sharpen their teaching skills through the 'practice and more practice' premise. Speaking of their views about microteaching, some mentioned the following views about their experiences with online microteaching:

> Microteaching was a good method to improve the teaching process of pre and in-service because today there are many innovations in the field of education, and I learned how to prepare skilled teachers in a short time (P. 23).

Several students also expressed their satisfaction with online microteaching sessions by alluding to how they became more cognizant about themselves and their strengths/weaknesses and what they could achieve even before getting into the profession in the real sense as student teachers. In line with the questionnaire results, several students reported being rather comfortable in their teaching. Below are some sample views expressed in these respects:

> I am satisfied because it made me know my skills and myself, also learned my mistakes at the end of my microteaching, also I saw the fundamental parts of microteaching, not only after my microteaching but also while watching the others (P. 4).

> My lesson was suitable for the level of learners and my lesson plan was well prepared the tools [activities] that I used were also suitable for my learners' level and learners' age. My videos and activities were interesting and good for my learners (P. 9).

From these results, it would be feasible to conclude that albeit having mixed feelings and attitudes toward online microteaching, the vast majority of the participants appeared to be considerably contented with their online microteaching experiences.

4.1.5. Troubles faced

The perceived challenges faced were asked of participants in one of the open-ended items in the questionnaires. There were various challenges reported in the data. Most participants mentioned issues that originate from the ineffective use of technological devices (e.g. laptop, camera, and microphone) and the external problems caused by the Internet providers.

> The only challenge was the poor internet connection. Thanks to my internet provider I couldn't even join the online courses I watched all the recordings after the class (P. 6).

> Because of the laptop, my voice is not clear for a teacher (P. 17).

> Camera and mic problems were common because of the platforms we are using. Different apps need different settings for the same device (P. 22).

Several participants related the troubles they experienced to lacking the required information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

> Figuring out how to use and record on the zoom was quite challenging (P. 2)

> I didn't know anything about the programs like loom. I have to check the tutorials before using them (P. 9).

> I used the loom program. As I used it for the first time, I had some problems solving the contents of the program. And I couldn't upload the audio recording to my ppt file because of the computer (P. 19).

A few participants were untroubled by the limited time given for preparing online microteaching.

> Time was too limited that's why I had to take a video again and again because time was not enough (P. 14).

The reported challenges are summarized in the following figure:

Figure 1. The most frequently mentioned challenges

Nevertheless, albeit such challenges, most participants (f=27) expressed satisfaction with remote microteaching experiences as they could see their strengths and weaknesses regarding lesson planning and putting their plans into practice. More strikingly, they were considerably content with experiencing running online microteaching in line with the current practices at schools (e.g. "It was a great opportunity to do something like this. First I thought that it would be hard and boring. When I started to do I enjoyed a lot" P. 13).

4.1.6. Further adjustments for future practices

The final open-ended item in the questionnaire was about the kind of changes the participants would make if they were given a chance to run another online microteaching session, especially considering the range of troubles they experienced in their teaching. Out of 30 participants, only four students stated that they would not make any changes in their original lesson plans and teaching while the rest mentioned a large number of areas where they would either make minor

or major adjustments to improve their performance. Among the areas of amendments, what became the most notable were the choice of appropriate technological tools, time management and key changes in the lesson plans which lacked the consideration of potential problems that might arise in classes:

> I would buy a new laptop. Because I experienced a bad and hard process in my microteaching session (P. 1).

> I would find a proper camera and proper microphone (P. 9).

> I would include more speaking skills in the lesson plan. I would manage time better (P. 17).

> I would make my lesson plan more detailed (P. 23)

Several participants referred to the selection and development of classroom activities and the need to use more diverse activities in their teaching.

Some students reported that they would accommodate their language use and materials to the language proficiency of their target student groups bearing in mind the time constraints in classroom communication:

> I took a video only myself it took 17 minutes but interacting with students too much made me lose control of time. So next time I need to consider interaction time too and also, in general, I will take a shorter time for A1/A2 students (P. 20).

Lastly, a couple of students expressed that they would integrate different skills in their teaching rather than basing their lesson on a single skill throughout their teaching in order to capitalize on student learning outcomes.

> I would change some of my activities a little bit and I would definitely integrate more than 2 skills. I would use listening, speaking, reading and vocabulary teaching (P. 3).

It is evident from the above remarks that most participants became aware of what went wrong and well in their initial online microteaching sessions and felt ready to make changes in their lesson plans, classroom communication, activity selection and time management most probably as a result of critically reflecting on their practices and the feedback received from the course tutor at the end of each session. The role of feedback was highlighted by a few participants about their satisfaction with online microteaching. To illustrate, a few participants offered the following accounts:

> Feedbacks are the best way to improve. It enabled us to gain instant feedback from the teacher. Also, it broadened our knowledge about a variety of techniques of teaching (P. 14).

> The teacher was cool and experienced in the lesson, his feedback helped improving myself (P. 15)

> I'm happy with my online microteaching because I've had positive feedback from my teacher and that's made a big difference (P. 29)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings suggest that albeit the inherent challenges of ERE, pre-service teachers find online microteaching valuable for their professional learning. This finding corroborates the previous evidence indicating that microteaching is an efficient tool for teacher education (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Payant, 2014). The teacher candidates mostly had positive views about online microteaching in the aspects of language improvement/course satisfaction, teaching practice competence, preparation/management, and attitudes/personal feelings.

In terms of language improvement, the majority of the participants reported that microteaching helped them put their theoretical knowledge into practice, as suggested by researchers (e.g., Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Kılıç, 2010; Mergler & Tangen, 2010). Most of them also emphasised that thanks to microteaching, they became highly motivated for the course, and gained self-confidence in English speaking abilities. This finding is in line with the results of Savaş (2012), who reported that pre-service teachers benefited from microteaching mostly for their speaking and pronunciation skills in English. The participants of the current study also believed that microteaching allowed them to understand a variety of teaching methods (Bağatur, 2015), develop their vocabulary, notice and fix their language problems, speak more clearly, and work harder.

Regarding teaching competence, all the participants reported that microteaching allowed them to develop teaching skills they would need later in their lives. This finding parallels the results reported by Ögeyik (2009) and Karakaş and Yükselir (2021), who found that teacher candidates found microteaching highly useful for their professional development. The participants also indicated that they became aware of their teaching competence, learned new things by observing others, applied their teaching knowledge, gained autonomy, and discovered their strengths and weaknesses with the help of microteaching.

As for preparation and management, the majority of the participants reported that microteaching contributed to their skills in technology use, which was in line with the suggestions of Bodis et al. (2020). They also believed that microteaching was useful for planning lessons, predicting potential problems in the classroom, practising teaching, organising their time, developing activities and materials, writing good objectives and classroom management.

For the attitudes/personal feelings part, the participants mostly reported that the microteaching sessions took place in an artificial environment, which replicated the findings of Ögeyik (2009). Another drawback emphasised by the majority of the teacher candidates was that online microteaching was a time-limited and controlled activity, which was also reported in previous studies (e.g., Coşkun, 2016). Although limited in number, some of the participants considered microteaching time-consuming, boring, embarrassing or difficult. Some believed that microteaching forced them to think of the evaluation process during planning and teaching while others argued that it resulted in neglecting some of the important activities in the course.

The qualitative findings of the current study supported the quantitative ones, showing that the teacher candidates mostly enjoyed the process of online microteaching, and they found it useful for improving their language and teaching skills. On the other hand, there were some negative experiences, mostly stemming from technical problems or the participants' problems with ICT skills as was observed in previous studies on ERE (e.g., Koruyan et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings indicate that online microteaching could be used effectively with pre-service English teachers and they are ready for online teaching if COVID-19 continues in the years to come or if any other emergencies that disrupt face-to-face teaching arise. Based on the commonly reported difficulties regarding ICT skills among the teacher candidates, it could be suggested that ICT courses might be revised and updated for a more efficient implementation of ERT at higher education institutions. The present study was conducted with a limited number of participants throughout one semester. Further research is needed for a deeper insight into the role of online microteaching in language teacher education. For instance, future studies could compare the perceptions of pre-service teachers studying at different universities or cities across different years of study. Likewise, follow-up studies could be conducted to see how experiences of online microteaching are put into practice after the participants start their teaching careers.

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