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Turkish Pre-service Teachers' Reflective Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners

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Abstract: The course 'Teaching English to Young Learners' is the first stage where pre-service teachers are introduced to a child's world, developmental characteristics, needs, interests as well as teaching and learning techniques for these learners in English language teaching pre-service teacher education programmes in Turkey. This action research study identifies the gap that pre-service teachers experience between the theoretical considerations and realities of teaching, and the problems they face in this course. It provides the opportunity for monitoring and evaluating themselves in a pre-service teacher education programme in Turkey. Hence, this piece of research aims to promote reflective practice at the pre-service level in teaching English to young learners through video recorded microteaching sessions, reflective journals, and lesson plans of pre-service teachers. The study reports on the results by highlighting the contribution of these reflective tools to pre-service teachers' professional development, self- and peer- reflections and the preparedness to teach English to young learners. Finally, insights and recommendations concerning teacher educators and pre-service programmes are offered to promote reflective practice and make methodology courses more beneficial before pre-service teachers embark on their practicum experience.

Introduction

Reflective practice has been a widely accepted paradigm, which according to Dewey (1933) involves three main features: open-mindedness, which involves considering different points of views, responsibility, which refers to being attentive to the conclusions of one's own actions, and finally, wholeheartedness, which concerns struggling to place arrangements with open-mindedness and to accept responsibility for one's professional actions. To be more precise, as Bailey (2012) states, open-minded teachers are those who accept their own strengths and weaknesses and welcome others' perspectives. Responsible teachers consider the teaching atmosphere and their actions in the classroom from at least three different perspectives: personal view, the effects of teachers' actions on their learners' self-concepts; academic view, the effects of teachers' actions on their learners' intellectual improvement; and social and political views, the effects of teachers' actions on learners' lives related to future career opportunities. Dewey's final element, wholeheartedness, refers to teachers' analyses of their own assumptions, beliefs, the results of their actions and to the idea that teachers can learn something new in all teaching experiences (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Reflective practice has been defined from multiple perspectives. To exemplify, it is considered to be a tool to deepen the understanding of the teaching-learning process, expand teachers' repertoire of techniques, monitor the impact of the utilization of these techniques,

and evaluate teaching (Bailey, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Reflective practice has been divided into reflection in action and reflection on action (Schön, 1987). He states that teachers use knowledge and behaviour that they gain in daily life for reflection in action while they utilize the declarative and procedural knowledge and experiences for reflecting on action. Bailey (2012), on the other hand, refers to teachers thinking about the things happening in their classrooms and about alternative ways to achieve goals and objectives. To realize these aims, teachers need to collect data about their own teaching, examine their attitudes, assumptions and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for reflective practice (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Within this frame of reflective practice, the focus of this study is primarily on pre-service teachers' (PSTs) reflective practices while the data collection and analysis processes have also led the research itself into a reflective process.

Reflective Practice in Pre-service Teacher Education

Pre-service teacher education (PSTE) has generally shifted its emphasis from a transmission oriented to a constructivist and reflective approach, in which PSTs focus on what they know by combining previous knowledge and personal experience to reflect on the new learning situations (Lee, 2007). PSTs become more aware of themselves as future teachers and of the methodological content on teaching and learning through reflection (Bartlett, 1996; Yeşilbursa, 2011). Reflective practice also involves critical thinking, self-direction, problem solving, and self-awareness. Hence, it may be a difficult process to carry out this mechanism all the time, especially in PSTE where PSTs have little or no real teaching experience (Burton, 2009; Eröz-Tuğa, 2012; Lee, 2007).

To better understand the issues related to this study, the course TEYL and its effects are briefly examined. TEYL is the first stage where PSTs enter the children's world and become familiarized with their developmental characteristics, needs, and skills in ELT programmes in Turkey. Young learners are defined as children from the first year of formal schooling to 12 years of age whereas very young learners are those who are between the ages of 3 to 6 years old (Cameron, 2001). Although these groups may seem to represent one homogeneous group, there are distinctive characteristics with regard to the abilities of 5-year-olds and those of 8-year-olds. Hence, PSTs taking the TEYL course study these differences, compare and contrast both groups and their characteristics, and also develop sample lesson plans based on various approaches and methods for young learners. Furthermore, they enrich their knowledge with microteaching practices in simulated classroom atmospheres (Kponja, 2001). This makes PSTs more anxious and tense toward TEYL since they have neither done their practicum nor observed young learners in a real atmosphere (Shinde & Karekatti, 2012).

To specify the situation in Turkey, English language teaching (ELT) programmes in PSTE provide subject knowledge, content knowledge, education studies, and general knowledge throughout four years at education faculties. Content knowledge courses include language acquisition, teaching language skills, ELT methodology, teaching English to young learners, English language teaching materials adaptation and development, English language testing and evaluation, and a practicum. It is only in the last year of the ELT programme that PSTs experience the practicum in either primary or secondary schools for two terms. Apart from the practicum course, PSTs have to carry out their teaching experiments in simulated classrooms through microteaching presentations, which limit their ability to experience, observe, and develop their teaching and learning practices in real classroom settings. The declarative and procedural knowledge gained in courses such as Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) I and II cannot be reflected onto real teaching settings in the practicum that

subsequently follows. This creates a gap, difficult to bridge, between theoretical considerations and the realities of teaching practice (Eröz-Tuğa, 2012; Lee, 2007).

A reason cited for this gap is the lack of importance attached to real teaching contexts in most ELT teacher education programmes in the world (Farrell, 2009; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Freeman, 2002; Lee, 2005; Legutke & Ditfurth, 2009) and in Turkey (Yeşilbursa, 2011). Therefore, helping PSTs to develop reflective practice in the real classroom both as teacher learners and as practitioners is crucial once the teaching-learning process starts (Freeman, 2002; Lee, 2007; Legutke & Ditfurth, 2009). To this end, the present action research is designed to investigate whether (or not) reflective practice can be promoted and how this practice may contribute to professional development, self- and peer- reflections, and the preparedness of PSTs through video recorded presentations, reflective journals, and negotiated lesson plans. Moreover, the current study aims to foster PSTs' reflective practices through these data collection tools in TEYL where no school experience or practicum is offered and make potential implications for PSTs, teacher education programmes, and further research. The following three research questions have emerged out of afore-mentioned aims:

(1) How do video-recorded microteaching presentations and diaries contribute to PSTs' reflective practices?
(2) How does receiving regular feedback on PSTs' microteaching presentations promote their self- and peer- reflection?
(3) In what ways do PSTs benefit from reflective practices in TEYL courses?

Methodology

Research Design

The current action research study employs a qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2007) to deepen the understanding, the nature and the development of reflective practice with PSTs through microteaching sessions in TEYL courses. The TEYL courses in Turkish universities start in the 3rd year of a four-year undergraduate programme. The PSTs' teaching practices thus start to be shaped by the initial declarative knowledge (Wallace, 1991) and through the microteaching conducted in front of peers and professors in a simulated teaching context. Yet all these efforts fail to offer genuine teaching practices in ELT programmes in Turkey. Course professors have identified a number of challenges PSTs experience in this course. First, these PSTs have no previous experience with young learners in a real classroom teaching atmosphere at the beginning of the course. Although this lack of experience is compensated for by the existence of declarative knowledge, PSTs tend to lack sufficient procedural knowledge. Second, they need concrete teaching steps for most activities including storytelling techniques with children in ELT; PSTs also need modelling by the professors prior to microteaching presentations. Third, PSTs receive detailed or general feedback following their presentations but they do not have the opportunity to apply this feedback to their teaching practices so as to develop their teaching skills with young learners. The final challenge is that PSTs are given no precise guidance on the grading criteria for these microteaching presentations.

Various tools and techniques with regard to promoting a reflective approach in second language teacher education (Wallace, 1991) were employed in this study to offer remedy. To this end, PSTs were provided with specific reflective tools during the TEYL course. These tools were (a) lesson plans as a mediation and negotiation tool, (b) peer checklist forms used for evaluating performances of peers during the microteaching presentations, (c) videos

recordings of PSTs during microteaching performances, and (d) reflective diaries of PSTs throughout the course.

Participants

The participants are 20 3rd year undergraduate PSTs (17 females, 3 males; aged between 20-23 years) from the ELT programme of a large state university in central Turkey. These voluntary participants were taking the TEYL course at the time of the study and were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The ELT programme, which consists of two terms entitled as 'Fall' continuing from September to January, and 'Spring' between February and June in this university, offers four-year undergraduate studies to PSTs. There were seven different TEYL classes in the 2014 - 15 academic year. Each class consisted of 20 3rd year PSTs. Among these seven TEYL classes, only one with 20 3rd year undergraduate students was chosen based on the convenient sampling model (Creswell, 2007). These participants were provided with a foundation in theoretical and applied areas through courses in advanced language (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) skills, language acquisition, and introduction to linguistics I-II. After PSTs complete these courses successfully, they attend TEYL-I, TEYL-II, literature and language teaching, ELT methodology I-II, classroom management, teaching language skills I-II, and translation studies until the end of the third year. Courses such as 'ELT materials design and adaptation', 'ELT testing and evaluation', 'school experience', and 'practice teaching' are offered in the last year of the programme.

PSTs are introduced to the language pedagogy, developmental characteristics, learning styles and teaching techniques peculiar to young learners for the first time within courses TEYL-I and TEYL-II. Professors of TEYL in this programme are non-native English speaking teachers with TEYL teaching experiences ranging from five to twenty years and hold their PhD in the same field.

The Research Context

The course content and description used for years in this programme are briefly explained below. In the fall term, the content of TEYL-I covers the topics, i.e. the characteristics of very young and young learners, their learning styles, the use of songs, games, and art and craft activities, and the integration of multiple intelligence theory into young learners' classrooms. PSTs are to prepare and present two microteaching sessions, each of which is a 45-minute lesson. These microteaching attempts are also included in the evaluation process for both mid-terms and final examinations. The first one is based on teaching English to young learners through games, songs, and art and craft activities, and the latter is based on teaching English to young learners through multiple intelligences theory. No other assessment is made for PSTs in this term.

Contrary to the fall term, a more practical content, i.e. syllabus types for young learners, materials adaptation and development for young learners, teaching language components and skills to young learners, and the use of storytelling with young learners, is offered to PSTs in the spring term. PSTs are to prepare and present two microteaching sessions, each of which is a 45-minute lesson, for mid-term and final examinations in simulated teaching contexts: the first one is teaching language components and skills to young learners, and the latter is using storytelling to teach English to young learners. All topics in both terms are introduced through lecturing, workshop, and group discussion techniques. PSTs are required to submit a detailed lesson plan and perform their presentations

in 45-minute lessons. However, it is stated that PSTs are not provided, throughout the year, with either detailed feedback or the chance of applying the existing feedback after the presentations through reflective tools. Furthermore, no practicum or observation of young learners' real classrooms exists in TEYL course. All 3rd year undergraduate PSTs, except the participant class chosen for this study, take this course as outlined above.

Data Collection

As Richards and Lockhart (1996) state, reflective practice has been composed of three dimensions: gathering data about one's teaching, analysing these data for one's attitudes, beliefs, and teaching practices, and using the results as a basis for reflective and critical teaching in one's teaching. In accordance with the necessity of data collection, data for this study were collected during the fall and spring semesters of the 2014-15 academic year during TEYL I-II courses. Three data collection tools were employed in this study. First, video recordings (video + audio) that provided an abundance of details in a lesson were made throughout the microteaching presentations in the TEYL course, which involved PSTs and their multiple perspectives actively in the process of reflective practice. Microteaching presentations of PSTs were video recorded to gather data about PSTs' own and pair teaching throughout a year. Second, PSTs' lesson plans of microteaching presentations involved detailed presentation techniques, instructions, classroom management techniques, feedback giving strategies, and materials and activity types for young learners. Such data helped the researcher analyse the presentation in terms of acknowledged teaching and formal assessment of teaching. These recordings also served as a reflection tool both for PSTs to focus on their microteaching presentations more in detail and observe themselves as a teacher and for the researcher to enable the research methodology to embody a reflective perspective. The third group of data was collected via the reflective diaries of PSTs throughout the year to integrate them into the reflection process actively by sharing their views on what they thought about the course, the change in their teaching performances, and the contribution of video recordings to their preparedness.

Diary studies were especially helpful in PSTE as they revealed their reactions to academic courses, encouraged changes in their behaviour, and boosted their self-confidence, and gave them a chance to reflect and combine content with practice (Bailey, 1996; Lee, 2005). Accordingly, data collection was sufficiently triangulated. All in all, these data collection tools played a central role in detecting and observing the gap, and overcoming the problems resulting from this gap by applying these tools as a part of the reflective practice.

Number of video recorded microteaching presentations	40*
Length of microteaching presentations	45 min
Total number of diaries collected from PSTs	80
Total number of lesson plans collected	40*
Number of PSTs in TEYL course	20

Table 1: Amount and Type of Data Collected during Data Collection Process

*20 PSTs presented their microteaching performances and prepared the lesson plans in pairs; therefore, the total number of video recorded microteaching presentations and lesson plans equals 40 in the table above.

PSTs were given a checklist as a guide while they were watching and evaluating their own teaching performances during the video viewing process. This checklist was developed to provide standardization in the evaluation process and concentrated on general issues based on Cameron (2001) in the field, i.e. a) teaching skills for young learners, b) PSTs' self- and peer- reflections on classroom management and paralinguistic factors during the presentations, and c) PSTs' readiness levels to teach English to young learners. Part A covered subtleties, i.e. the use of appropriate materials, the selection and adaptation of age appropriate activities, the utilization of techniques to teach young learners, the type of feedback and instruction they gave during their microteaching. Part B dealt with the analysis of PSTs' nonverbal and verbal elements, and classroom management techniques on their own and peers' microteaching performances. Subsequent to part B, part C required PSTs to evaluate and comment on their own and peers' readiness levels, based on the analysis in part B, to teach English to young learners.

Data Analysis

Video-recorded microteaching presentations were viewed at the end of presentations in two terms allowing each PST to watch their own teaching performance. These video and audio data were first recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analysed to become more grounded in the data and develop richer concepts. With the aim of gathering more data from participants, lesson plans and diaries were successively analysed by comparing and contrasting themes (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). Employing videos, diaries, and lesson plans with the checklist helped the researcher capture the details of the event and allowed participants to explore their views on TEYL through three dimensions.

All types of data were evaluated iteratively based on these three general dimensions. After watching video recordings each time, they wrote reflective diaries both on self- and peer-performances during the presentations. Grounded theory was utilized to analyse all the data in this action research study. The data were read multiple times to generate and pinpoint certain codes through the constant comparison method from the systematically obtained data (Cohen & Morrison, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Those codes were then assigned to different dimensions of PSTs' diaries and other relevant documents, i.e. lesson plans, peer evaluation checklists, and transcribed verbatim video recordings. The data were then coded and read cyclically until the saturation among the themes was secured. This process yielded data-driven constructs and conceptualizations, which were then defined with regards to the constructs of the literature concerned.

Findings

Certain common themes emerged as a result of the constant comparison method in grounded theory from the data analysis in this study.

Codes	Themes
Classroom management, The flaw of interaction, The use of L2 (target language), Adapting PSTs' behaviour, Ignorance, Stress during the microteaching, Materials adaptation and activity design, Smooth transition between activities, The use of body language, The use of teacher voice, PSTs' waiting time for young learners' response, Frequent teacher correction Instruction giving before activities	Problems and weaknesses in teaching skills for young learners
PSTs' fluency and accuracy in TEYL PSTs' oral and written language proficiency, The lack of presentation skills, The lack of modelling by their trainers, The lack of observations in real settings,	Self- and peer- reflection in TEYL
Anxiety and tension in feedback session, Fear of being despised, Giving and receiving feedback on their self-performances, Finding alternative solutions toward problems in the presentations,	Preparedness to teach English to young learners

Table 2: The List of Codes and Themes

Emerging Themes

Teaching Skills for Young Learners

Microteaching as a professional development technique in teacher education programmes provides PSTs with opportunities for self- and peer- reflection, and the acquisition of new teaching skills. It not only enables PSTs to gain teaching experiences for real settings but also helps developing teaching skills and experiences (Kponja, 2001). In this study, 3rd year PSTs performed four microteaching presentations successively in teaching English to young learners through art and craft, song, and games for the fall mid-term, teaching English to young learners through Multiple Intelligences for the fall term final examinations, and teaching language skills and components to young learners for the spring term mid-term, and teaching English to young learners through storytelling for the spring term final examinations. In each of these presentations, PSTs prepared the presentations in pairs and submitted joint lesson plans. For young learner teachers, however, presentations were prepared separately in the instructional setting by dividing the 45-minute lesson into two phases. Their classmates played the role of young learners and PSTs were recorded in videos throughout the year. They were evaluated and graded upon those four presentations in this course. In utilising these video recordings, PSTs watched, evaluated and kept diaries both for their own and their peers' performances by referring to the checklist.

After watching the first videos in the fall term, PSTs pointed to a number of common weaknesses and problems related to their own teaching skills. One of the most commonly cited weaknesses in presentations was classroom management. They observed in the videos that they could not manage young learners, even though it was a simulated teaching atmosphere, due to some reasons including classroom interaction, language use in class, and PSTs adapting their own behaviour in the classroom. It was highlighted that the source of

interaction problems was mostly from the teacher to young learners. For example, Deniz saw that he could not manage them in the classroom during the activities. In his diary, he commented:

> *I couldn't manage the classroom in my first microteaching presentation. I kept asking questions like 'What is this?' but I did not wait for the answer. I should have given them some time to think or encourage them to answer by paraphrasing the question when they do not understand. Using teacher correction all the time gave no space for peer correction and interaction among young learners in the class. This bored them a lot. They were passive and not so much enthusiastic about joining the lesson.*

Similar to Deniz, Aysun also observed the classroom management problem arising from a different reason during her presentation. She acknowledged that:

> *I should have given instructions through simple, clear and short language before handing out the worksheets and materials. I distributed materials beforehand to make puppets of farm animals and then tried to give instructions with the language above their proficiency. But, they did not listen to me. They immediately started making them as they wished. At the end, I could not make use of most of those puppets because they were not as I instructed. Not being able to express myself made me very sad.*

Another reason for classroom management problems was identified by half of the participants. Tülin, for example, observed that when her peers started to behave like children, she was disturbed by such behaviour and her attitude changed during the presentation. Instead of ignoring minor distractions, she insisted on asking why they behaved like that and lost concentration when participating in her activities. This affected her presentation in a negative way. All participants stated that they could not understand and observe the reasons for classroom management problems during their on-going presentation due to stress, tension, and too much concentration on the teaching steps. It was reported that this stress and the difficulties of maintaining concentration resulted from the fact that it was their first experience of teaching young learners in a simulated context. However, after watching video recordings, they reflected on their own teaching performances in a more analytical and realistic way through diaries.

Another weakness widely expressed by most of the participants was the materials and activity adaptation and preparation for young learners. PSTs in TEYL spent too much money and energy on materials design. However, PSTs generally tended to pay little attention to the smooth transition between the stages of these activities. Also, during the activities they highlighted and used materials without giving sufficient importance to the linguistic items targeted in the lesson. To exemplify, Pelin confessed that her materials were not appropriate to very young learners' levels. They found it too challenging to follow the instructions in cutting in detail and folding as shown. Selma acknowledged that:

> *Materials in my presentation should have been bigger so that they could have been viewed at the back of the classroom. Also, I should have used more colourful and specific visuals both to take their attention and to clarify the meaning. In my presentation, as visuals on the board were relatively small, they did not capture young learners' attention enough.*

Ceren, on the other hand, reported very different findings. She found that she could not make smooth transition between activities, just like some of her peers. Materials were used in the art and craft part of the lesson but observed that young learners then never used them again. This proved that even though PSTs focused heavily on materials preparation, especially on visuals, there was not a sufficient focus on either the linguistic element or the smooth integration of materials into the activities. It appeared then that materials were often used for 'fun' rather than for instructional purposes.

The effective use of body language and the teacher's voice was also highlighted in diaries and video-recordings. Most of the participants criticized themselves heavily because of the excitement and tension they felt during the presentation. As they conducted microteaching presentations in pairs, each PST compared themselves to their pair although they prepared their lesson plans together. For instance, Sevgi stated that:

> *My tone of voice was very suitable for very young learners and childish during the storytelling, which raised the sympathy of my peers toward me as a young learner teacher. I conducted the storytelling dramatization very successfully but in instruction giving part my voice was so weak that steps were not heard clearly. During the activities my partner, Emre, outperformed me in terms of body language. Peers in the classroom were much more affected by his behaviour rather than mine because he conveyed the meaning through Total Physical Response (TPR) in a funny way and walked around the classroom during the activities to observe the young learners better.*

Pre-service Teachers' Self- and Peer- Reflection in Teaching English to Young Learners

The second research question analysed the ways regular reflective feedback contributes to their self- and peer- reflection as a young learner teacher. There were two emerging sub-themes to this question as perceived by PSTs through diaries and video-recorded sessions. In the final microteaching presentations of the second term, PSTs were able to make comparisons, criticise their teaching performance, and emphasize the effects of video-recordings and diary keeping process on their reflective practices.

The first one of these two themes was about their own language proficiency. At the beginning, they stated that teaching English to young learners would be very easy because their English proficiency was very low. However, they understood that teachers' pronunciation, fluent and accurate speaking skills especially in terms of storytelling and dramatization were vital for young learners. This raised their awareness of the fact that young learners should be introduced to an accurate, fluent, and clear language easy enough for them to understand. For example, Merve was not satisfied with her performance on using language skills effectively with young learners.

> *There were a lot of pronunciation mistakes in my presentation topic 'fruits and vegetables'. I was not aware of any of them during the presentation. But the video clarified mistaken points in the presentations. Also, there were collocation and grammar errors in my presentation. For example, I always said 'listen me' to manage the classroom. Major pronunciation mistakes were on the target words: 'cucumber' and 'banana'. I understood that if I taught mistaken words to young learners, they would turn into errors throughout their lives.*

Similar to Merve, the majority of the class had the tendency to memorize the words and sentences they were going to recite in the presentation. Therefore, when an unexpected question arose in the presentation, they were not able to express themselves appropriately and fluently.

The second theme was the teacher's creativity in microteaching presentations. The creativity was not varied either in materials design or in activity preparation. All presentations in the first term followed a similar routine, which was not engaging and lacking creativity. Upon analysing their lesson plans at the end of the first term, it was obvious that most of the participants prepared similar activities, designed very similar materials for very young and young learners. Elif, for example, confessed that the first term consisted of more repetitive ideas and lesson plans. As they struggled to engage with young learners at their own level, their efforts to produce a sufficiently varied set of activities and materials were limited. However, after the first presentations in the second term, it was observed that they came up with more innovative and creative ideas for their presentations. Seda acknowledged that:

> *After studying the comparison of very young and young learners in detail, and analysing sample syllabus types for young learners, we were inspired by those ideas and reflected them in presentations. My favourite activities are those that initiate young learners' creativity and promote their critical thinking. Also, I could combine the target vocabulary items taught in English lesson with the ones in another subject lesson, and introduce them to young learners through theme-based unit design.*

It was revealed in their diaries that PSTs needed more modelling by the professor and observation of young learners' real classrooms. The lack of both observations in real contexts and modelling by professors limited their repertoire of activity and material types, and presentation techniques and skills while also resulting in simplified teacher talk with young learners. While they were mentioning these missing parts in each other's presentations, they could not produce alternative or more creative solutions to address those limitations. Therefore, it was reported to be significant to provide PSTs with sufficient modelling and sample lesson plans during the course.

Pre-service Teachers' Preparedness to Teach English to Young Learners

At the beginning of the year, most of PSTs were anxious and tense because they feared they would seem uninformed and lacking in professional expertise in front of their peers and professors during the feedback sessions. Negative or harsh feedback was reported to reduce their self-confidence in teaching young learners in their diaries while positive and constructive feedback following presentations helped them analyse and revise the weaknesses in the practice. Hence, the type and content of feedback were related to an increase or decrease in their preparedness levels to teach English to young learners.

Surprisingly, all PSTs made very positive statements about video recorded microteaching presentations and diaries with reference to reflective practices as future teachers and the increase in their preparedness levels to teach young learners English at the end of the academic year. For example, Neslihan wrote that she would laugh at herself and her basic mistakes during the presentations while watching the videos. Sevgi was too anxious to observe her mistakes in presentations. Emre was too emotional about any comment at the beginning of the video sessions. In time, this became a part of the TEYL classroom routine

and everybody started observing, criticising, and evaluating each other constructively, which reduced the prejudices and fears. Even though some pairs were a little sensitive to some criticisms, they accepted this as a nature of the reflection. Merve had a positive attitude toward being watched and criticised. She added that:

> *Video recording sessions helped me analyse and observe my behaviour toward young learners objectively. For example, we watched our peers' mistakes. This encouraged me to take precautions and produce alternative solutions toward possible problems related to my teaching performances. Although I performed twice in a term, I gained a lot of experience through my peer's videos, which contributed to my preparedness as a young learner teacher.*

Neslihan was satisfied with the process throughout the year.

> *Watching my own teaching steps and teacher behaviour after the presentation was more realistic to me because I could view and observe myself as an outsider. In other practical methodology lessons, trainers criticised us immediately after the presentation. Then I was exhausted and unconscious just after the presentation, which made some comments unbearable for me. But this was very different and constructive. I laughed a lot at my performance. I observed the reflections of TEYL course on my teaching performance and preparedness to teach English to young learners in a positive way. I love young learners and working with them.*

Discussion

How Do Video-recorded Microteaching Presentations and Diaries Contribute to PSTs' Reflective Practices?

One striking point was that although 3rd PSTs were not sent to the practicum to observe young learners in real classrooms, the reflective process they went through contributed to their awareness and preparedness for their future young learners' classes. This reflective process was achieved through reflective diaries and video recorded microteaching sessions. Of key importance is the willingness of the trainer to foster reflective practices, a point remarked upon by Akcan and Tatar (2010), Chien (2014) and Yeşilbursa (2011). Similar to their findings, the criteria for grading microteaching performances of PSTs should be clarified so that PSTs can prepare effective and successful lessons, and lesson plans for their assessed teaching (Eröz-Tuğa, 2012).

In addition, diaries, one of the data collection tools, contributed to the nature of the study by supporting and shedding light on the findings of video recorded microteaching presentations. In terms of this contribution, findings in this study support the results of Bailey (1996), Burton (2009), Lee (2005), and Yeşilbursa (2011) in the value of diaries in nurturing reflective thinking of PSTs. PSTs could evaluate their own teaching practices and their effects on the young learners' academic, social and personal developments, which increase their responsibility as a part of the reflective practice process (Dewey, 1933). These diaries were found to serve as a reflective and pedagogical tool that helped PSTs personalize, conduct and make decisions on relevant teaching techniques and theories about each other's and their own teaching. PSTs need to be provided with thought provoking and guiding questions or prompts through diary keeping process to increase their awareness more, however.

How Does Receiving Regular Feedback on PSTs' Microteaching Presentations Promote Self- and Peer-Reflection?

PSTs expressed the strong need for constructive, detailed and sustainable feedback following microteaching presentations by the trainers and peers, which also generated their enthusiasm to become committed future teachers. Such feedback may both prevent the conflicts between trainers and PSTs since they can observe and point out the weaknesses and strengths of the microteaching performances via video recorded sessions, and reduce their anxiety before presentations. Hence, receiving feedback on microteaching performances is vital, particularly, in TEYL courses where PSTs have no previous background in teaching young learners English. PSTs emphasize the growing need for detailed assessment and feedback criteria to reduce their excitement and tension before the presentations.

In What Ways Do PSTs Benefit from Reflective Practices in TEYL?

Similar to Chien (2014), findings of this study revealed that PSTs could evaluate their teaching strengths and weaknesses specifically on classroom management, the use of target language effectively, giving instruction, and materials design and activity preparation for young learners through video recorded microteaching sessions that increased personal awareness about the teaching process. This finding is also in line with Eröz-Tuğa (2012) in which she concluded that watching video recordings enabled PSTs to develop a critical eye on their teaching and increased their awareness of classroom issues. To this end, as Bailey (2012) states, these PSTs have developed open-mindedness, a key component of reflective practice, thus taking them one step forward in reflective PSTE. They were also found to come up with their own solutions to the problems they experienced with young learners, which fosters their individual decision-making and problem solving processes and leads them to be more autonomous teachers (Brandth, 2008; Lee, 2007).

Reflecting together with their peers and individually on personal microteaching performances increased PSTs' awareness about teaching practices more, helped them improve professionally, and increased their open-mindedness and whole-heartedness during the reflection process (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Bailey, 2012; Chien, 2014). This raised the PSTs' tolerance and sense of self-critique among themselves, which turned the classroom atmosphere into a more professional place of learning and teaching.

Conclusion

This action research study aimed to reduce the gap between theoretical considerations and the realities of teaching English to young learners by detecting the difficulties and needs of PSTs in current TEYL courses, to develop PSTs' reflective practice through three different data collection tools in TEYL, and to identify implications for future research. It was inferred that PSTs made use of the one year reflective practices by increasing their awareness and preparedness levels to teach English to young learners.

The results showed that PSTs focused on three emerging themes as a result of the application of videos, feedback upon microteaching presentations, and diaries. These themes were based on teaching skills with young learners, self- and peer- reflection in TEYL, and their preparedness levels to teach young learners. The advantages gained from reflecting and sharing additional comments on self- and peer- teaching through videos and diaries helped them weigh teaching strengths and weaknesses as future teachers. Using videos, diaries, and

checklist throughout the year provided the scaffolding needed to achieve deeper reflection since they helped teaching to become more understandable and open. These data collection tools also helped PSTs to evaluate, understand, and improve their reflective teaching practices. PSTs seemed to have started detecting their own difficulties and making decisions to overcome them. This advantage also fosters PSTs' preparedness levels to teach English to young learners. Additionally, these advantages gained as a result of the current study help reduce the gap between ideal and real teaching considerations. In other words, procedural knowledge is developed effectively via reflective tools and techniques building upon the declarative knowledge in TEYL.

This study is limited to a local teacher education context with 20 PSTs and three data collection tools for reflective practice. Future reflection studies may include more participant PSTs in international teacher education contexts and may investigate critical teacher education practices in courses like practicum or TEYL. Critical incidents, anecdotes, checklists, video recordings of international in-service teachers and awareness raising activities may be employed to achieve more insightful results from PSTs who step into the reflective practice process for the first time. In spite of some embarrassing points on the part of the PSTs such as the fear of being despised, distress while watching video recorded microteaching performances, and feedback in front of their professors and peers, and the extra time commitment required of the trainer, video recorded microteaching presentations in TEYL and teacher education programmes are found to be an invaluable gain for PSTs. Therefore, various sample demonstrations specific for each teaching technique and culturally divergent teaching videos from different young learners' contexts may be used in PSTE.

Additional audio and visual tools may be necessary to introduce PSTs to more real experiences. This requires collecting as many videos of in-service teachers as possible on teaching experiences with young learners in real classrooms to offer PSTs plenty of real cases to observe and analyse. It would be preferable to collect these videos from various countries and geographical regions to enable PSTs to observe culturally divergent teaching contexts and situations in their country and the world to prepare them for their future career in teaching.

PSTs need encouragement to make use of journals, video recordings and self- and peer- reflection activities to develop a critical and reflective eye toward their professional development as part of the reflective teacher education programmes. If diaries are thought to take an excessive amount of time to read, respond to and evaluate, they should be integrated in PSTE in the form of group journaling. The presence of a variety of reflective ideas in diaries may even be used to detect the weaknesses of current TEYL courses. Considering this, conducting action research studies on reflective practices appears to reveal more insights from local teaching contexts to learn from divergent experiences and to embrace contextual differences more gently in various language teacher education programmes.

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