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## **ENRICHING MICROTEACHING IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS (TEYL): AN ACTION RESEARCH**

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## ENRICHING MICROTEACHING IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS (TEYL): AN ACTION RESEARCH

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### Abstract

This action research is conducted upon noticing the need to provide pre-service teachers of English with a deeper insight into their microteaching demonstrations in TEYL course, which takes place in third year of the teacher training program before the practicum. Regarding the microteachings in TEYL course, the pre-service teachers complained about not being sure how children learn, think and act. Their concerns and dissatisfaction about the performance and feedback stages of microteaching sessions were also acknowledged by the researchers. Thus, 71 pre-service teachers were required to re-conduct their storytelling with target age children and complete a reflection questionnaire. The qualitative analysis of the data reveals that microteachings had some drawbacks in preparing pre-service teachers to the teaching profession. Actual practices with children enabled the pre-service teachers experiencing the natural atmosphere of teaching and developing understanding how children think, learn and react.

*Keywords:* teacher training, teachers of young learners, young learners of English, microteaching, video-recorded reflection

### 1. Introduction

The recent decades have witnessed the increasing importance of English as a lingua franca of international communication, commerce, science, technology, culture and tourism. As in the model of concentric circles proposed by Kachru (1988), English is not only spoken by its native speakers or as a second language but also by millions of speakers with no historic or colonial connection to it. The importance of English has magnified as it has become the language of globalisation- world economy and trade, international affairs, even leisure, internet and the other media. The trend to start learning a foreign language, English in most cases, at a lower age has its roots in governments' desire to catch up with and eventually excel in commerce, science, information and communication technologies. To meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, governments have taken steps to introduce English language courses as a compulsory part of primary school curricula.

Not long ago learning a foreign language in schools was reserved for the secondary level. However, today children all over the world are being taught foreign languages in state schools and in growing private sector education organizations at an increasingly early age. According to the *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012* report, several countries in Europe have lowered the starting age for compulsory language learning in the past 15 years and some even offer it in pre-school. The objective "mother tongue + 2" was set by EU heads of state and government at the Barcelona Summit in March 2002, that is, everyone is taught at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue from a very early age (Eurydice, 2005). Furthermore, European Commission Press Releases (as of 20 September 2012) report that

English is the most taught foreign language in nearly all of the 32 countries covered in the survey which are 27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. Graddol (2006) also states that “English learners are getting younger. Across the world,... English is being introduced in primary schools, with greater compulsion, and at a steadily lowering age” (p. 88). Many countries like China, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and Brazil have also lowered the age of learning English as a compulsory subject (Kırkgöz, 2005).

This global trend to introduce early language instruction is regarded as “possibly the world’s biggest policy development in education” (Johnstone, 2009, p.39). Yet, disregarding how children are different socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically different from older learners might put the success of early introduction of English at stake. Girard (1974) points to important conditions to be taken into consideration in early introduction of English: having appropriately trained teachers, proper timetabling with sufficient timing, appropriate methodology, continuity and liaison with secondary schools, provision of suitable resources and integrated monitoring and evaluation (cited in Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002)

Hastily planned and implemented programs may be ineffective or even counterproductive, particularly in cases where the numbers devoted to English instruction are limited and the training of TEYL teachers suffer (Butler, 2009; Graddol, 2006; Nunan, 2003; Enever & Moon, 2009). Enever and Moon (2009) highlighted the importance of ongoing teacher development and training for the successful implementation of such programs (cited in Tomlinson, 2013, p.258). Graddol (2006) states that teachers of young learners should be proficient in English, have wider training in child development, and are also able to motivate young children. Wang (2009) also draws attention to the concerns regarding teachers’ quality in terms of language proficiency and Teaching English to Young Learners (hereafter TEYL) pedagogy and about the teacher supply in case of rapid introduction of English into the primary schools.

In the Turkish education context, English as a foreign language became a part of primary school curriculum starting from Grade 4 with a law that took effect in 1997. This move was a part of a major curriculum innovation project (5+3 compulsory continuous education). With the introduction of English to Grade 4 and Grade 5, foreign language learning shifted from the secondary school to the primary school. The most recent revision was made in 2012 and the age to start learning a foreign language was dropped lower. In the current practice in Turkey, English as a foreign language starts at Grade 2 (6 and 7 year olds) in the new educational reform, called as 4+4+4 model. The name 4+4+4 model refers to the duration of each tier; four years for primary, secondary and high schools. Private schools, on the other hand, introduce foreign language instruction from earlier grades, even from the kindergarten in most cases.

However, lowering the starting age does not bring along success necessarily. The new trend has required a number of renovations to be done in pedagogy and training. After the Ministry of National Education (MONE) introduced English as a foreign language at the primary schools, it became apparent that teachers were not equipped with necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to teach younger learners. In fact, due to alternative recruitment policies to meet the demand over the years, there are teachers who have not been trained to teach English. Regardless of their major, graduates of an English medium university can also become language teachers provided that they have a pedagogical certificate in Turkey. As to those who have graduated from an English Language Teaching (ELT) department, a substantial number of practicing teachers have not specifically been trained to teach at that age level. The MONE established the In-Service English Language Teacher Training and Development Unit (INSET) and organized seminars and in-service teacher training workshops around the country for the practising teachers to be able to adapt the changing

conditions and requirements (Gürsoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2013). One other important aspect is the training of prospective teachers of young learners. Similarly, Turkey renewed the curriculum of FL departments of faculties of education in 1997. The "Pre-Service Teacher Training Project" was conducted with the collaboration of the Ministry of National Education (MONE) and The Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC) with the aim of re-structuring education faculties to help them train highly qualified, specialized teachers who can keep up with the rapidly changing world. To this end, a new course "Teaching English to Young Learners" (TEYL) was introduced to help pre-service teachers (hereafter PSTs) develop skills and knowledge related to teaching children (Gürsoy et al., 2013).

Teacher training programs primarily aim to train teachers equipped with specialized professional knowledge. The training and education process of teachers comprises theoretical knowledge and microteachings and practice teaching. Mere knowledge of a teaching skill does not automatically guarantee its mastery (Lewin et al., 1998; Seferoğlu, 2006). Teaching skills can only be acquired when teachers are actively engaged in real teaching act (Shulman, 1987). Therefore, pre-service teacher education programs use microteachings to integrate theory and practice.

Microteaching has been used as a training technique and a professional development tool in pre-service teacher education since its first introduction by Dwight Allen in 1960. Allen and Eve (1968) explained microteaching as "a system of controlled practice that makes it possible to concentrate on specific teaching behaviour and to practice teaching under controlled conditions". Nowadays, microteaching is used in teacher training programs due to its contribution to development to PSTs. Microteaching has been found effective by helping prospective teachers transfer their knowledge and skills into action, having reflective teaching practices and experiencing teaching profession (Amobi, 2005; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Çakır, 2000; Görgeç, 2003).

Moreover, microteaching is in line with Wallace's (1991) two dimensions of knowledge for second language teacher education: received knowledge and experiential knowledge. The former is about the scientific theories related to research findings about second language teaching while the latter is about practices of the profession based on knowing in action and reflection. However, it has also been acknowledged that microteaching applications in pre-service teacher education have certain negative aspects and limitations in itself. These negative aspects or limitations can be summarised as: the artificiality of classroom environment, the problems in material development such as the time allotted, the difficulty and the high cost of material development (Cripwell & Geddes, 1982; He & Yan, 2011; Stanley, 1998 and Ogeyik, 2009). Pertaining to the non-natural atmosphere of the classroom, Ogeyik (2009) concluded that PSTs mostly do not feel themselves as they are in real classroom settings since they practice teaching to their own classmates.

Tütüniş (2014) reports that generally pre-service teacher training programmes lack observation of target learners and actual practices. In Turkey, only in fourth grade of their education, PSTs have a chance to meet the target learners. Especially in TEYL context, it is stated that pre-service teacher education programmes need more actual practices (Bekleyen, 2014, Büyükyavuz, 2014 and Tütüniş, 2014). Since there are differences between teaching children and teaching adults (Gürsoy, 2010) due to several peculiar characteristics of young learners, the need for more practice in TEYL context is salient. It is significant that practicing teachers and prospective teachers of young learners of English should comprehend the reasons for an early start to learn foreign languages, the characteristics of young learners, their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, psychological and motor development, how they differ from older learners and adult learners and the implications of these differences in the classroom instruction. The TEYL course serves an important purpose by combining theory

and practice through microteaching. It is one of the teacher training courses in the curriculum, in which the student teachers are asked to plan and teach certain parts of a lesson.

PSTs during microteaching with their peers somehow experience what it is like to teach. However, they may not be able to understand and experience what it is like to teach young learners since teaching to young learners require different skills. A language teacher of young learners should be competent in how children think and learn, activating children's interests, managing age-appropriate classroom activities, motivating tasks and interesting materials (Butler, Sameya & Fukuhara, 2014; Copland & Garton, 2014; Coyle & Gomez Gracia, 2014). Moreover, Büyükyavuz (2014) suggests that the micro-teachings in TEYL course may be practiced in actual YL classrooms in the day-care centres located on almost each campus at universities. Bekleyen (2014) has studied the experiences of PSTs with very young learners to identify the differences before and after short-term teaching experience with very young learners. The results of the study revealed that applying the syllabus in real context and practicing self-reflection has led progress in understanding how young learners think and learn as prospective teachers.

Furthermore, recent studies on in-service language teachers at state schools in Turkey reveal that there is a gap between the policy, teachers' beliefs and classroom implementations in TEYL contexts at state schools. (Gürsoy et al., 2013; Haznedar, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2009). Garton, Copland and Burns's (2011) research on investigating global practices in TEYL concludes that there is still a lack of fully qualified teachers, particularly to teach English in primary schools in Europe. To this end, they suggest that the pre-service and in-service training of teachers for TEYL should be considerably strengthened and more opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences in this sense are needed. Therefore, the importance of TEYL in PST education has special significance as there is a need for qualified teachers in primary schools.

Along with the literature presented so far, the researchers, who are at the same time teacher trainers of TEYL course, have felt the need to enrich the microteaching experience of the PSTs taking TEYL course with field experience. In TEYL courses, during feedback stages of the microteaching sessions, the PSTs expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction about the inability to develop materials, to conduct developmentally appropriate instruction to children and receive natural reactions in classrooms. Similarly, the teacher trainers have also observed and acknowledged these problematic issues of microteachings. Therefore, the artificiality of classroom environment, the lack of knowledge about how to really appeal to young learners instead of classmates (adults) and the need for qualified teachers in TEYL have been the basic driving forces of this study. Moreover, as Copland and Garton (2014) reports, there is still lack of research in training teachers in the field of English for young learners. In this sense, the researchers conducted an action research to provide PSTs with a more actual and reflective sense of teaching to young learners of English. To this end, the PSTs were required to re-conduct their storytelling microteaching to have actual teaching experience with children. As a result of the action research, it is hoped that the results of the study would shed some light on PST education to improve TEYL such as developing and re-examining PST training programmes in this respect.

The research questions guided the study are in the following:

1. What are the reflections of the PST ELT students regarding the field experience?
2. What are the differences between microteaching with peers and field experience with children in the view of the PSTs?
3. Are there any differences between the perceptions of the PSTs towards TEYL after the field experience?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Participants**

The participants of the study were third year PST ELT students attending the TEYL II course at spring term at a large state university in Turkey. TEYL I at the first term and TEYL II at the second term are two obligatory four-hour courses per week as it is stated in the National Curriculum for English Language Teaching Program in Turkey. TEYL I includes the following topics: the characteristics and needs of young learners, the learning theories and multiple intelligences, the materials specific for young language learners, classroom management, classroom activities. They also do microteaching activities particularly song, craft and game activities. TEYL II is the follow-up course of TEYL I and includes storytelling practices and skill-based activities for TEYL. The study was conducted at the second term at TEYL II so the students have certain level of knowledge and microteaching experience in TEYL. Thus, convenience sampling was used. There were 71 PSTs participating in the study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 28. Of the 71 trainees, 14 % were males and 86 % were females. This gender ratio is normal in language teaching departments in Turkey. Only 14 % of the PSTs had previous teaching experience with young learners such as part-time work in language courses, tutoring or as a requirement of social services course. The rest of the PST (86 %) had no actual teaching experience with young learners.

### **2.2. Design**

This classroom-based study is an action research that aims at bringing about change in a practice with the hope of finding a new and more effective procedure. The researchers are the teacher trainers, as the research is centred on real problem to see immediate benefits and tangible improvements in practice (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

As a result of dissatisfaction of the PSTs about failing to figure out the reactions and abilities of children, this study followed the steps below: As a course requirement, the PSTs were to re-conduct the same storytelling task that they had done in the class as a microteaching demonstration. The task was obligatory and to be graded. As to the number of children, the trainees studied with, the number varied from a single child to a group as many as twenty-five. The difference in numbers was because of the availability of target learners. The PSTs teachers found the participant children with their own efforts. Some were lucky to have classes with groups, some persuaded the parents they knew, and some studied with cousins. The age of the children ranged between five and twelve. It was important that the PSTs should find children at the age that they had prepared the task for. Last but not least, consent from parents was sought after for each and every child. The PSTs reported that all children were beginners or starters in terms of their level of English. The PSTs recorded the storytelling so as to be able to reflect of the experience. The recordings were submitted to the instructors along with the reflection reports.

### **2.3. Data Collection**

To research the objectives of the study, the data were collected through reflection reports. After the field experience, the participants were required to write a reflection report and submit it by e-mail. The report included 20 guiding open-ended questions about their reflection on the experience (see Appendix 1). The reflection questions were designed by the researchers to elicit the reflections of the participants regarding the experience with young learners. The questions were explained to the participants in detail. Also, the participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions so that they could state their sincere thoughts about the experience. All of the participants signed written informed consent forms for the data collection instruments to be used in this research.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative design of data analysis was used to reach the objectives of the study. Particularly, content analysis was conducted on the data collected from the reflection reports. Content analysis includes the processes such as coding for themes, searching patterns and making interpretations to draw conclusion on the recurrent themes (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). For the reliability of the qualitative analysis, the themes and sub-themes were defined by two researchers and with feedbacks, they were finalized. The analysis has researcher triangulation in this sense. The intercoder reliability with two researchers was calculated as 95 %, which was interpreted as reliable (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Another critical researcher who has PhD in the field and an expert in qualitative analysis was also asked to evaluate the themes suggested by the researchers.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Below are the findings yielded through the content analysis of the reflection reports. The data is presented under recurring themes. The data is also enriched with quotes from the PSTs and discussed in line with the research questions.

Table 1. *Concerns prior to the storytelling with children.*

Themes and Subthemes	<i>n</i>	<i>f</i> (%)
<i>Concerns about children</i>	<b>84</b>	<b>73</b>
Failing to comprehend	39	34
Little English	18	16
Possibility of boredom	16	14
Lack of participation	11	9
<i>Concerns about self</i>	<b>31</b>	<b>27</b>
Failure in classroom management	17	15
Afraid of having to teach children	6	5
Unfamiliar me as a teacher	5	4
Inappropriate level of the presentation	3	3
<b>SUM</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 illustrates that 73 % of all concerns prior to the teaching experience were about the children. The underlying reason for most of the concerns was related to not knowing children, their abilities, their motives and reactions. Though a small number, six PSTs (5 %) even described the situation as frightful.

Regarding the reactions of the children to the story, all the PSTs stated that the children enjoyed the storytelling activity with an exception of three cases in which the PSTs were not sure whether the children liked the experience. The majority of the PSTs (*n*: 47, *f*: 66 %) pointed out that the stories were appropriate for the children because they were able to follow the stories. Twenty-one PSTs (30%) reported the stories to be difficult and beyond their level whereas only three (4 %) said that the stories were below their level. The PSTs (*f*: 80 %) found that the activities were mostly appropriate for the level and age of the children while 20 % of them commented that their activities were either too easy or difficult for the children. The materials used are reckoned as effective and helpful for comprehension (*n*: 52, *f*: 63 %) and motivating (*n*: 31, *f*: 37 %).

Table 2. Appropriateness of instructions during the storytelling.

Themes	<i>n</i>	<i>f</i> (%)
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Simple and easy to understand instructions	39	35
Support with body language	31	27
Support with demonstration	13	12
Support with L1	13	12
Support with slow pace	2	2
Support with repetition	2	2
Support with visuals	2	2
Still difficulty in understanding instructions	9	8
<b>SUM</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>100</b>

Most PSTs stated that they achieved giving clear, simple easy to understand instructions. The PSTs also reported that they supported understanding of the children using body language, demonstration, L1, slow pace, repetitions and visuals along with their instructions and thus had no difficulty. However, a small number of the PSTs mentioned failure to provide appropriate instructions.

When asked how well the children followed them 65 % of the PSTs said the children easily followed the story. In addition, 32 PSTs stated that they used body language and demonstration to overcome the problem. Fifteen PSTs said they had used puppets, visuals to help children understand the story. Lastly, seven PSTs mentioned that the children had difficulty on the first round but better comprehended on the second or third telling.

Nineteen PSTs (27 %) reported that they had unanticipated problems during the storytelling such as power cut, children losing concentration while playing with puppets or materials or children not displaying any reaction. Below is a sample quote from a PST:

*The child who is 6 year-old stood up and walked around the room. It is too difficult an experience for me. I didn't know what I should do, so I preferred ignoring his behaviour. I continued to tell my story. Finally, he came back to his seat. He went on listening to me. (PST 3)*

When assessing their performance on controlling and directing the class, the majority of PSTs ( $n: 59, f: 83\%$ ) regarded their performance as good and eight PSTs (11%) thought they performed fair enough. Only four PSTs (6 %) found their classroom management as problematic.

Table 3. Use of L1.

Themes		N	f (%)	Subthemes (n)
Use of L1 by the PSTs	Yes	28	39.5	Comprehension problems (15) Instruction giving (12) Classroom management problems (4)
	No	43	60.5	No need because of body language, visuals, puppets (26)
Use of L1 by children	Yes	54	76	Answering questions (20) Always (11) Translating (6) When summarizing story (5) Talking to each other (3)
				No

When asked using L1 during the storytelling, most PSTs (60.5 %) managed to conduct the storytelling in the target language only with the help of body language, visuals and puppets. Some of them also acknowledged that L1 can be used when they had difficulty in instruction, classroom management and comprehension. On the other hand, children used their mother



tongue in most cases (76 %) such as summarizing the story, asking and answering questions and interacting. The quotes below illustrate some instances of L1 use:

*They used the native language generally. While I was introducing the characters, they said their names in Turkish because of not knowing the English version. When they had a question or problem with any activity, they used their native language. Actually, they used the target language only when they said 'teacher, thank you very much, good morning teacher and fine, thanks and you.' Other than these, they usually used their native language. (PST 22)*

*Mostly I tried not to use Turkish. When they really really couldn't understand what I said, I helped them. (PST 17)*

*I used it but I used it in target language. For example they said 'Tırtıl.' And I said 'Yes it is tırtıl in Turkish but in English it is a caterpillar. (PST 13)*

*I didn't use any native language. I finished my task. When I was about to leave the classroom, I used my native language. They all were surprised when they saw me while I was speaking Turkish. Speaking English in the classrooms is a little bit difficult in Turkey, but it isn't impossible. The teachers should insist on using their target language. The learners will be motivated if the teachers keep on using it. (PST 7)*

In terms of participation, most of the PSTs ( $n: 60, f: 84.5\%$ ) regarded their children's participation as satisfactory during storytelling while 11 PSTs ( $f: 15.5\%$ ) were not content with their participation. However, the children's participation differed, in that, some children were quiet but they listened very attentively while others participated enthusiastically or could only do so on the second telling. The PSTs also mentioned the presence of the camera as the distractor for children. The following quote is given as a sample instance for the children's participation:

*When I introduced the characters of the story by showing pictures and by asking questions about them, they could give one word answers, at lexical level. Also, when I told the story by acting out they were saying the native equivalent of what was said. Sometimes they could repeat the words said. (PST 26)*

Pertaining the general behaviour and the attitude of the children, the reflections showed that the children mostly ( $n: 56, f: 79\%$ ) held a positive attitude and were motivated while 15 PSTs (21 %) mentioned shy, tense and bored children.

When asked if they achieved the objectives of the lesson, a significant number of PSTs ( $n: 57, f: 80\%$ ) believed that they fulfilled their goals and six PSTs (9 %) thought they partially achieved the objectives. However, only eight PSTs (11 %) thought they had failed to achieve the planned learning outcomes.

The PSTs listed the strengths of their storytelling performance as materials and activities they developed ( $n: 31, f: 37\%$ ), body language and gestures ( $n: 19, f: 24\%$ ), voice and intonation ( $n: 11, f: 13\%$ ), establishing rapport ( $n: 9, f: 11\%$ ), the story itself ( $n: 7, f: 8\%$ ) and using appropriate language ( $n: 7, f: 8\%$ ).

As to their weaknesses, the PSTs believed that they should improve giving effective instructions ( $n: 17, f: 29\%$ ), their use of body language and voice ( $n: 6, f: 10\%$ ), their pronunciation and fluency ( $n: 10, f: 17\%$ ) and classroom management ( $n: 7, f: 12\%$ ). They also stated that they should have used more speaking activities and dramatization ( $n: 11, f: 18$

%). They also commented that they needed much more experience with children ( $n: 8, f: 14\%$ ).

One of the most significant findings of the study was to highlight the differences between the microteachings with peers and the actual teaching experience with children. All of the PSTs defined both procedures as “completely different” and Table 4 illustrates the main points.

Table 4. *Microteaching with peer PSTs versus real teaching with children.*

<b>Microteaching with peer PSTs</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>f</i> (%)</b>	<b>Real teaching with children</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>f</i> (%)</b>
Easier as peers always understand	49	71.1	More difficult because they may really fail to understand	29	34.1
Artificial experience	17	24.6	Difficult to simplify language	4	4.7
More stressful	3	4.3	Difficult to make them participate	2	2.3
			Difficult to manage them	7	8.2
			Difficult in instruction giving	2	2.3
			Difficult in time management	2	2.3
			Natural	17	20
			More fun	12	14.1
			More eager and enthusiastic children	4	4.7
			More relaxed with children	6	7
<b>SUM</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>

A quick glimpse at Table 4 shows that the majority of the PSTs found microteaching with peers easier whereas the actual teaching experience with children involved a number of difficulties. But this “ease” with peers is not a desirable one; on the contrary it shows the shortcoming of microteaching experience. The PSTs felt at ease because they were sure that their peers would understand and answer regardless of the level or the appropriateness of their teaching. They also reported microteachings as artificial while actual teaching experience as natural and fun. Thus, it can be concluded that microteaching experience with peers falls short of preparing PSTs for being a teacher of young learners. These findings are in line with Ogeyik (2009) and He & Yan (2011) in that the PSTs do not feel the real teaching profession while they are doing with microteachings with peers.

Some sample quotations:

*In microteaching demo, all people in the classroom know what they will do, and the atmosphere is predictable and artificial and we are in a utopia. However, in the story telling with children, the atmosphere is natural and some of things happening are unpredictable and children behave themselves and sometimes they don't care you. (PST 26)*

*When I saw their sincere reaction to the story, I got really happy. I just thought that I achieved something good but in the class it was not like that because in the class, sometimes we do something only if we are forced to do that. (PST 4)*

*Our peers understand us easily and our task is easier in microteachings. (PST 43)*

*The main difference is the ability of understand each other. In microteaching demo with my peers, I'm sure that my friends will understand me and give answers without hesitation. Storytelling with a child is more challenging of course. Children couldn't totally understand me and their reactions are also different. I had to repeat my instructions again and again. (PST 27)*

*This was the first time I had an experience with "real" children in real life. This is the biggest difference. When we are at class, our friends don't act like children. We know they understand everything we say and we don't know what children can understand or not. Our peers' reactions and responds aren't real also. (PST 65)*

*In microteaching demo with my peers I am more relaxed because they are my friends; I know them and they know me. But they cannot behave as if they did not know the meaning of a sentence like 'Where is Amy?' So, there is an unexpected success in my microteaching demo with my peers. But when it comes to storytelling with children, I am not relaxed and it is even harder. This was my first teaching experience. (PST 33)*

All of the PSTs acknowledged the efficiency and benefits of storytelling in TEYL and reported the following as the main reasons: stories are interesting and motivating ( $n: 47, f: 70\%$ ); they improve the whole language (skills and L2 knowledge) ( $n: 11, f: 17\%$ ); they are good for retention ( $n: 5, f: 7\%$ ); they enrich the classroom ( $n: 4, f: 6\%$ ). The characteristics of the storytelling to young learners pointed by the PSTs are all in line with the necessary tasks and activities to be used for young learners stated by previous studies (Copland & Garton, 2014; Coyle & Gomez Garcia, 2014).

About the contributions and the best parts of the experiences, the PSTs mentioned the following as the main benefits: getting to know more about the children (their abilities, cognitive development and their nature) ( $n: 45, f: 29\%$ ); linking theory and practice ( $n: 33, f: 21\%$ ), reinforcing the desire to be a TEYL teacher ( $n: 29, f: 18\%$ ); realizing the need for more real experiences ( $n: 16, f: 10\%$ ), increasing self-confidence as a teacher ( $n: 12, f: 8\%$ ), to be able to teach children ( $n: 12, f: 8\%$ ) and increasing self-awareness ( $n: 10, f: 6\%$ ). According to the report of Tütüniş (2014) PST training programs need more actual practices and observations of target learners. Thus, as stated by the PSTs in terms of contributions of the experiences, this kind of field experience helped them understand more about the children, which corresponds with Büyükyavuz (2014).

*Real children, real atmosphere does not have anything to do with the one in our school. We saw the reality. (PST 18)*

*Teaching a language to young learners is not as easy as it seems. It is so tiring. But, this fatigue reminds us of the most beautiful part of being a teacher, I guess. After I finished the story, children came to me and hugged me. It showed me that I would love this job so much. And also it taught me that it was so hard to teach something to someone. (PST 70)*

*It was a very important experience. I experienced personally what works and what doesn't work in young learner's classroom. I wish I could have that more. As prospective teachers we should get more real experiences. (PST 17)*

*Before that, in the courses, I thought very young children wouldn't understand stories in English because they didn't know English much. But then I saw they really understood the story. So it works. (PST 64)*

*I understood one more time that I was created to be a teacher. It was amazing to teach something to the children. I saw in their eyes that they were enjoying the lesson and they wanted to learn something. They loved my lesson and me, and I loved them. They were very pure; I could easily see in their eyes what they felt. I saw my weak and strength sides. I saw what should be improved and what I could achieve. Although we have done many presentations, real life teaching is very different. Therefore, I think it was my first presentation. Thank you very much for giving this chance to us. In a way, we saw how the work goes on in the real class. (PST 22)*

*The best one is being with children because they are enjoyable and they loved me. (PST 9)*

*They made me feel like a teacher, which was the best part. (PST 42)*

*The best part is watching students while they were acting out the story. (PST 11)*

About the frustrating parts of the experience, the reflections showed that the PSTs had difficulties due to lack of experience and the unpredictable reactions of children. These involve children's failure to follow ( $n: 18, f: 58\%$ ), unanticipated children reactions ( $n: 5, f: 16\%$ ), lack of motivation of the children ( $n: 4, f: 13\%$ ) and unfamiliarity with children ( $n: 4, f: 13\%$ ). Finally, it is clear that the benefits of the experience outnumber the drawbacks.

Along with the findings and discussion above, the study has attained the answers to the research questions. It can be inferred from the findings that the PSTs have gained deeper insights about TEYL through the field experience. They have experienced how it was really like to conduct appropriate activities, to give appropriate instructions and to support their teaching with body language, voice, illustrations and demonstrations. In this way, they have realized how theory linked to practice. Thus, the PSTs mentioned positive attitudes towards having field experience in addition to the microteaching. The results showed that such a field experience have filled the gaps of microteaching. He and Yan (2011) have also found out that microteachings, to some extent, limit PSTs' development in terms of real-life teaching competence, so that microteachings should be supported with other kinds of practices. Particularly, in young learner context, the microteachings alone would not enhance PSTs regarding how children really think, learn and react. In order to prepare the PSTs for the teaching young learners of English, more actual practices should be conducted. Moreover, this study revealed that in TEYL course of the ELT programs, microteaching applications should be supported with field experiences. As it has also been supported by the previous studies (Copland & Burns, 2011; Gürsoy et al. 2012), in spite of the developments and innovative implementations in language teaching, there is still lack of fully qualified teachers for young learners of English. Thus, English teacher training programs might have graduates who are capable of the skills that a young learner English teacher should have.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Microteaching, as an important practice to improve the quality of teacher education by providing teacher trainees with the opportunity to teach in controlled environment, is widely used in teacher education programs worldwide (Amobi, 2005 and Benton- Kruper, 2001). Microteachings help teacher trainees develop desired teaching skills (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Fernandez & Robinson, 2006; Higgins & Nicholl, 2003); positive attitudes and self-confidence and reduce first-time teaching anxiety (Şen, 2009). Despite its obvious benefits, microteaching is not free of drawbacks. It inherently involves artificial interaction. The

effectiveness and success of microteaching heavily depends on the quality of informal discussions with peers and the supervisor (Brandl, 2000; Jerich 1989). Any defect in the process would harm the benefits to be obtained.

The worldwide trend of early introduction of English to primary schools has revealed a weakness in teacher education programs to come to the fore, that is, teachers are not fully and appropriately trained to teach primary level English (Copland & Garton, 2014; Enever, 2014). Despite a number of books suggesting good practice when studying with children, research-based publications into effective practices for teaching YLs continue to be quite rare (Copland & Garton, 2014). More empirical evidence is needed on the micro (in-class) level to be able to make sound decisions on the macro (policy) level. Hence, the present study aimed to provide PSTs with deeper insight into TEYL via a short practice opportunity.

The main concerns of the PSTs resulted from not knowing what children are capable of practically. As a result, the PSTs were dissatisfied about the storytelling microteaching in terms of level of appropriateness. They also expressed doubts about the feedback that they provided and about their own performance acting like children. An actual teaching experience with children was thought to help the PSTs to get a deeper insight into the procedure and find answers to the above questions. The PSTs reflected on the experience. This kind of experience helped them to reflect on themselves and their teaching. By mirroring their experience with children, the PSTs have enriched their knowledge about the children and tested their theories that they have learnt so far in real atmosphere. The positive outcomes of the field experience have put forward the necessity of more real experiences in TEYL courses of the ELT programs. Thus, it is suggested that similar experiences should be integrated into TEYL courses. Yet, this study is conducted with 71 PSTs and this limitation might be eliminated if it is duplicated in other ELT programs. For more effective implementation of the procedure, a practicum-like process should be used rather than leaving the PSTs to find groups of children for the experience. It is also suggested that the faculties should run a small scale practicum officially and in cooperation with schools.

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## APPENDIX 1:

*Dear prospective teacher,*

*Below are some questions to guide your reflection on your storytelling experience with young learners. Your sincere answers will be appreciated.*

*There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Do you give consent for your answers to be used for a research on the evaluation of this course? YES NO*

*Please send your reflection report to the following address: [goncayangin@gmail.com](mailto:goncayangin@gmail.com); [asuman.asik@gazi.edu.tr](mailto:asuman.asik@gazi.edu.tr)*

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Sex:**

**Any previous teaching experience with children (if yes, please specify):**

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**Name of the story:**

**Materials used:**

**Number / Age/ level of participating children:**

1. What were your concerns before you started storytelling with children?
2. Did the children like the story?
3. How appropriate was your story (in terms of children's level of comprehension)?
4. How appropriate were the activities?
5. How appropriate were your instructions?
6. How appropriate and effective were illustrations and the materials you used?
7. How well did the children follow you? Did you know when children were having trouble understanding you? If yes, how did you understand and what did you do then?
8. Were there any unanticipated situations? Describe what happened and what you did.
9. How was your classroom management (controlling and directing the class)?
10. Did you (have to) use any native language? If yes, when?
11. Did the children use native language?
12. Describe the children's participation.
13. What was the general behavior and attitude of the children?
14. Do you believe you achieved the objectives of your lesson?
15. What were the strengths of your storytelling performance?
16. What areas need improvement?
17. In what ways is *storytelling with children* different from *microteaching demo with your peers*?
18. Based on your experience, do you think storytelling is an effective tool in teaching English to young learners?
19. How did this experience contribute to you as a prospective teacher?
20. What was the best and most frustrating part of this experience?