Microteaching in Connection with Real Classroom Teaching under Reflection: Focused on Preservice Teachers in Korean EFL Context*

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Yim, Yoon-kyung. "Microteaching in Connection with Real Classroom Teaching under Reflection: Focused on Preservice Teachers in Korean EFL Context." Studies in English Language & Literature 47.2 (2021): 319-338. This study aimed to explore preservice EFL teachers' reflection on the microteaching task by comparing it with their reflection on teaching in the EFL classroom after a semester. This research examined major features the preservice EFL teachers focus on in their microteaching and changes in the areas of reflection after they experience classroom teaching during the teaching practicum. The study participants were 36 undergraduate students who enrolled on an English teaching methodology course at a university in Korea. The data collected from these preservice EFL teachers included reflective essays on their own microteaching and post-practicum reflective reports. The findings revealed that the most frequently commented areas regarding microteaching performance were nonverbal communication, language ability, and managing the learning environment whereas for lessons during the practicum classroom teaching, managing the learning environment, planning & timing, and effective teaching techniques were the main areas of their focus. The author proposes some suggestions for reflective practice in EFL teacher education. (Wonkwnag Uniersity)

Key Words: preservice EFL teachers, microteaching, real classroom teaching, teaching practicum, reflective practice,

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I. Introduction

Teaching ability in the classroom is essential qualification not only for inservice teachers but also for preservice teachers. Microteaching, so called demo lessons has been widely utilized in teacher education programs in order to enhance teaching skills and make a transition easier between teaching theories and their application to teaching practice. Microteaching is acknowledged as an effective means for reflection that can change the behavior of teachers (Amobi, 2005; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Cho, 2017; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kim & Yi, 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2011).

By reflecting on one's microteaching, preservice teachers can have a better chance to think about what went well and what can be improved in implementing their lessons. Accordingly, reflection has emerged as an important part of professional development, and there has been a growing demand for reflective practice in teacher training in the recent decades. Richards and Farrell (2011), for example, applied the concept of reflection to teacher training, and define it as a process of reviewing past teaching experiences and setting goals to improve one's teaching methods. In other words, reflective practice in teaching is to critically reflect on one's own teaching process to improve teaching skills and make proper pedagogical decisions (Amobi, 2005; Kottcamp, 1990).

In teacher education programs, reflection is practiced through a variety of forms such as writing journals, debriefing sessions with trainees, instructor-trainees conferences. The English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) field is no exception (Amobi, 2005; Mok, 1994; Richards & Farrell, 2011; Wallace, 1991). In fact, some provincial school district in Korea has included reflection as part of the teacher selection test procedures by having them evaluate their own microteaching performance. It indicates that the teacher's depth of reflection is an important component of teaching ability (Clarke, 1995).

Even though reflection is considered to be an important part of teachers'

professional development, however, there is relatively little research on preservice EFL teachers' reflection on microteaching and its connection to their real classroom experience.

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of preservice EFL teachers' reflection at different settings to examine any differences in their reflection process. To achieve this objective, this research will compare and contrast the preservice EFL teachers' reflection on their lessons during microteaching and teaching practicum. It is hoped that the findings of this research will shed light on the discussion of how to better prepare the preservice EFL teachers for the educational practice.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Reflective Practice and Microteaching

The concept of reflection and reflective thought has been expounded by Dewey (1910), and he defined reflective thought as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 6).

According to Dewey, reflection is composed of five steps: (1) the occurrence of a difficulty, (2) identification of the nature of the problem, (3) suggestion of possible solutions, (4) development of ideas, and (5) verification of ideas. Following Dewey's notion of reflection, Schon (1983) emphasized knowledge-in-action in professional practice and added a term, "reflection-in-action" (see also Clarke, 1995; Mok, 1994). He regards thought and action as not so much separate domain but complementary as he calls it "reflective conversation with the situation" (Schon, 1983, Location No. 4216).

Wallace (1991) then proposed the *reflective model* and uses the term *experiential knowledge* in contrast with, what he calls, *received knowledge*. The major

difference between these two concepts is that the received knowledge in the craft model does not include change or growth of knowledge whereas experiential knowledge in the reflective model is related to the "professional's ongoing experience" (p. 17).

One approach to foster reflection-in-action is microteaching, and its use has been stressed in many curricula. Many researchers support microteaching as a valuable tool in that it allows the pre and/or inservice teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of their teaching abilities and gain confidence in teaching (Amobi, 2005; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Cho, 2017; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kim & Yi, 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2011; Yim, 2017).

Microteaching can be video-recorded to be used for preservice teachers to reflect on their own performance. Even though the use of videos may have some drawback such as causing anxiety on the part of the performers, the major advantage is, for example, to assist preservice teachers view their performance more objectively rather than relying solely on recollection (Masats & Dooly, 2011; Pyant, 2014; Tailab & Marsh, 2020). Advantages of video-recording have been discussed extensively in various fields including language education (e.g., Amobi, 2005; Cho, 2017; Tailab & Marsh, 2020). When microteaching is combined with video recording and reflective practice, it may provide a valuable opportunity to reflect upon their teaching practice. As Schon (1983) claims, "radical critique cannot substitute for (though it may provoke) the qualified professional's critical self-reflection" (Location No. 4291), and thus reflective practice seems to be an essential component in teaching profession.

2.2. Reflective Practice in ESL/EFL Teacher Education

The study on reflective practice has been conducted in various sectors. Clarke (1995), for example, conducted a case study of four science student teachers on a practicum and generated three categories of reflective themes: ownership of one's

practice, the ways in which pupils learn, and seeing practice through the eyes of an experienced teacher. What is noticeable in his findings is the student teachers' change in their attitudes, perspectives, and the level of reflection. For example, the study reports the changes of the student teachers' focus of reflection from themselves to the pupils' learning.

In the ESL teaching context, Mok's (1994) study results are note-worthy. She contrasted experienced and inexperienced teachers' concerns about ESL teaching by analyzing the data from reflective journals, practicum reports, and interviews, but found no difference between these two groups in the number of issues addressed. Mok generated five categories of common issues, which are teacher's self-concept (Teacher's role), attitude (attitude toward learners), teaching strategies, materials used, and expectations of learners (classroom behavior). The most common issues addressed by both groups were teachers' role and attitude toward learners.

Regarding preservice teachers' reflection on microteaching performance in the Korean context, Paek (2008) played a leading role. Her research illustrates how critically undergraduate students in a teacher education program reflect on their teaching performance. As the analysis of the journals generated the elaborate categories of reflective comments, the most frequently commented areas were related to giving instruction, class activities, and planning whereas the interview analysis, which generated more diverse comments indicated that the prospective teachers' major concerns were related to instruction, class interaction, and lesson contents. Paek pointed out that prospective teachers' scope of reflection was limited in terms of quality and quantity suggesting that the instructors need to provide the prospective teachers with more guidance.

Cho (2017) examined the differences between beginning teacher trainees and advanced trainees in terms of their reflective focus on microteaching. She reported the findings that the beginning trainees seemed to prioritise teacher role and classroom management while the advance trainees focused more on language specific features and student learning. Yim (2019), on the other hand, explored

preservice English teachers' reflection on their practicum lessons and asked them compare their real teaching experience with a microteaching experience that they had conducted one semester before. According to her analyses, preservice EFL teachers' reflection on their real teaching experience focused more on classroom management, teaching strategies, and lesson planning than anything else.

This study takes one step further by examining preservice teachers' reflective notes at two different phases. This study will examine preservice EFL teachers' reflective focus of microteaching task by comparing it with their reflection on EFL classroom teaching in the following semester. I hope that the study results will provide insight to teacher training on how to better prepare preservice EFL teachers for educational practice. The research questions examined in this study are as follows:

- 1) What features do the preservice EFL teachers focus on in their microteaching performance?
- 2) Are there changes in the areas of reflection by preservice EFL teachers after they experience real teaching during the teaching practicum? If so, how does their reflection change?

III. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Context

The study was carried out in a teacher education program at a four-year university in Korea. The course chosen for this research was one of the English teaching methodology courses taught by the researcher. The instructor had been teaching this type of language teaching methodology courses for over 10 years. The study participants were 36 preservice EFL teachers who enrolled on this undergraduate course. Among the 36 participants, 30 were English education major,

and six others were pursuing double-major in English education.

The objectives of this course were to have students learn theories and principles of second language teaching in different skill areas and the applications to teaching practice. The preservice teachers learned various aspects of teaching skills of EFL through participating in lecture, discussions, simulations, and textbook analysis. For the remaining six weeks of the semester the students learned how to design lesson plans and conduct microteaching in English language. Except for one senior student who had already finished teaching practicum in the previous semester, the participants were junior students. These novice preservice teachers had not received formal training either in drafting lesson plans or microteaching in English until they enrolled on this course.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Data Collection

The data included preservice EFL teachers' reflective essays, post-practicum reports, and course documents. The preservice EFL teachers were informed in advance that microteaching performance would be video-recorded for the purpose of self-reflection. Video recording is considered to be an effective technique for reflection and self-assessment by helping preservice teachers reflect on their microteaching performance more objectively (Tailab & Marsh, 2020). The participants were also informed that the recorded video would not be released to anyone outside the classroom and only the reflection essays of those who would sign the agreement forms would be used for research purposes.

At the lesson planning stage, the preservice EFL teachers were required to draw up a lesson plan in pairs and prepare a 20-minute microteaching which they should conduct for 10 minutes each. They were given instruction on how to draft lesson plans, which included lesson objectives, details of each step, language use and sequencing. To help them gain better idea of the microteaching routine, the

instructor showed a sample video clip of microteaching followed by a question-and-answer session. The instructor also provided evaluation criteria for lesson plans and microteaching (Appendix A). Microteaching performance of each preservice teacher was video-recorded, and a copy of the video that contained their own microteaching performance was distributed to each individual. The preservice teachers were told to observe their own teaching performance at home and submit the reflective journal in a week. The instructor did not specify the format of the reflective essay but asked them to write three things about strengths and weaknesses of their microteaching performance while watching the video.

In the following semester, the same group of preservice teachers went out on a teaching practicum for a month. On the first week of their return, they were asked to submit a two- to three-page long post-practicum report. This practicum report was composed of three sections: their practicum experience in general, reflection on their lesson experiences, and the comparison of EFL teaching experience with a microteaching experience. The first section included 12 questions probing the unique context of their practicum school and the number of lessons they had observed. The second section included questions on the aspects of the lessons the preservice teachers percieved as success and failure, unexpected problems, and aspects that they would like to do differently next time. Finally, in the third section, they were asked to compare and contrast their classroom teaching experience during the practicum with the microteaching experience in the previous semester.

Among those who participated in the teaching practicum, 21 preservice teachers submitted the second set of reflective reports. Thirteen of them served at high schools and eight others at middle schools for teaching practicum.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

Most preservice teachers wrote reflective journals and the post-practicum reports in Korean language. While reviewing reflective essays and the practicum report a

number of times, I tried to identify commonalities present in the preservice teachers' writing. Before and while I was analyzing the data, I reviewed previous literature in order to come up with reasonable analytical framework to refer to. Finally, I chose the framework components of Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2019) as the basic analytical framework and adjusted the categories as the data unfolded. Every time a key word which contains a new theme appears, a new category was created. It was often the case that the same theme was repeated throughout one single report. Those occurrences were counted as one for frequency analysis. In generating the analytical framework, I tried to produce the categories that are mutually exclusive so that the generated themes would not overlap with each other in terms of meaning and function. The following is the description of the categories of successful lessons generated from the preservice teachers' reflection, which can be applied to both microteaching and real classroom teaching.

3.2.3 Categories of Reflective Themes for Microteaching and Real Teaching

- (1) Effective teaching techniques is related to how the preservice teachers delivered lessons demonstrating instructional techniques. It spans techniques for selecting and demonstrating activities, questioning techniques, providing feedback, and effective use of instructional materials.
- (2) Managing the learning environment refers to classroom logistics and maintaining positive learning environment. It includes the ability to demonstrate awareness of learner differences, encouraging interactions, establishing rapport, and motivating students. The major difference between managing the learning environment and effective teaching techniques is that the former is related to classroom logistics and affective dimensions whereas the latter has more to do with achieving pedagogic goals of language skills and systems.
- (3) Language ability is demonstration of clear communication and proper use of language including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.
 - (4) Planning and timing refers to ability to sequence, pace, and finish the lesson

in time.

(5) Nonverbal communication refers to preservice teachers' demeanor such as body movement, eye contact, hand gesture, and voice quality. Voice quality includes tone, loudness, and speed of voice.

IV. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Preservice EFL Teachers' Reflection on Microteaching

The types of reflective comments made by preservice EFL teachers varied. The most frequently commented area was nonverbal communication followed in order by language ability, managing the learning environment, effective teaching techniques, and planning & timing as is summarized in Table 1.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of their microteaching performance, all the participating preservice teachers commented on the aspect of nonverbal communication, which seems to carry various important functions as the data unfolded. Firstly, nonverbal communication indicates confidence, as one individual wrote:

I used gestures properly. At first, I had a fear of doing microteaching. So I prepared and practiced a lot not to feel nervous, which made me look confident, I guess. (*Preservice teacher #3*).

	the frequency of	
types of comments	comments	
	(percentage)	
1) nonverbal communication	36 (33%)	
2) language ability	24 (22%)	
3) managing the learning environment	23 (21%)	
4) effective teaching techniques	19 (18%)	
5) planning & timing	6 (6%)	
Total	108 (100%)	

Table 1. Frequency of Reflective Comments on Microteaching

The appraisal adjectives that the preservice teachers used frequently to describe their demeanor were "natural," "confident," "nervous," and "awkward." Being nervous while performing microteaching was said to display discomfort and rigidity through their body posture, facial expressions and voice quality. On a similar note, the preservice teachers saw the composed tone and loudness of their voice as a sign of confidence.

Secondly, proper use of nonverbal communication seems to improve communication and effective instruction. While most of the preservice teachers seemed to consider vocal quality as teachers' confidence or competence, seven out of them seemed to regard the vocal attributes as an ability to increase mutual understanding. For example, one preservice teacher reflected on his microteaching performance as follows:

First, my voice was clear and loud enough to be heard in any part of the classroom. Secondly, the speed of my speech was not so fast and nor too slow to understand. (*Preservice teacher #19, original version*).

Additionally, nonverbal communication seems to contribute to classroom management. For example, 10 out of 36 preservice teachers commented on voice

quality and eye contact in particular as a means to hold students' attention in class, as one individual wrote:

From the students' point of view, how much the teacher is prepared and has passion for the lesson is conveyed through their tone of voice, which in turn affects students' attitude and attention in class. While I was watching my performance in the video, the first thing I noticed was that the tone of my voice carried clarity and confidence. (Preservice teacher #28)

Many preservice teachers seemed to think of using proper tone and speed of voice as an important quality as commending good pronunciation in order to maintain students' attention.

It is worth noting that many preservice EFL teachers focused on non-verbal characteristics such as eye contact, body movement, and voice quality in their reflection. The preservice EFL teachers' reflection on this type of nonlinguistic communication has been discussed in other studies as well (e.g., Cho, 2017; Paek, 2008; Payant, 2014; Yim, 2017). Paek (2008), for example, interpreted a lack of comments on body movement as an indication of limited ability of reflection. Payant (2014), on the other hand, suggests that preservice teachers should learn to focus more on issues related to L2 pedagogy rather than behavioral elements. Apparently, preservice teachers considered a microteaching task as equivalent to oral presentation mainly because they resorted to a memorized script with no interaction with *real* students during their performance.

Language ability was the second mostly commented area and includes both fluent and accurate use of language. The following excerpts illustrate preservice teachers' general observation of their language use in the video:

I think I should study grammar and syntax more to have a good command of grammar and pronunciation. I noticed that my pronunciation was not clear at some points and was using wrong tense. The teacher's language modeling has the strongest influence on students' language learning, so it is important to pay attention to the details of expressions and pronunciation. (*Preservice teacher #1*)

I think I lack in clear communication and proper use of language. I have problem with fluency. I had not noticed that I paused and stuttered that much until I watched the video. (*Preservice teacher #4*)

As to managing the learning environment, the preservice teachers commented particularly on their selection of vocabulary and grammatical forms that are in accord with students' levels of language ability. For example, several preservice teachers wrote, "I tried to use simple grammar and expressions so that students could better understand." (*Preservice teacher #26*). This may be attributed to their effort to conform to the guidelines provided by the instructor who had emphasized the level appropriate use of vocabulary for instruction in their lessons.

Lastly, comments related to effective teaching techniques involved a variety of techniques the preservice teachers used to make the lesson more effective. The following example was witnessed in the reflective journal:

While I was doing vocabulary building, I provided the students with specific examples to help them understand it better. I also broke the words down to different parts to show how combination of each unit contributes to the whole meaning of the word. (*Preservice teacher #36*).

Techniques for providing feedback was also counted as an effective teaching technique. To cite one preservice teacher, for example:

¹ The preservice teachers decided on the target students' proficiency level at the lesson plannning stage according to the level of the textbook they had chosen.

It would've been better if I had checked students' understanding and provided timely feedback when I was explaining concepts. I guess I was preoccupied with explaining the definitions. (Preservice teacher #4)

4.2 The Preservice EFL Teachers' Reflection on the Actual Classroom Teaching

During the practicum period, the preservice teachers seemed to have gained opportunities to teach students under the guidance of a supervising teacher, but the number of opportunities to teach varied from person to person.

Preservice EFL teachers' accounts of successful lesson for real teaching were unfolded quite differently from their reflection on their microteaching performance. The major teaching abilities that the preservice EFL teachers prioritized in the actual classroom were managing the learning environment, planning & timing, and effective teaching techniques (see Table 2). The most frequently commented areas in microteaching such as nonverbal communication and language ability rarely appeared in the data.

The differing results reflect the different nature of these two settings, which was also identified in the preservice teachers' post-practicum reports. The biggest difference between these two settings might be related with the artificial versus natural teaching conditions. Microteaching was conducted with virtual students (their peers and the instructor) in front of them. Hence, teachers' effort to manage the positive language learning environment was established with quiet and supportive audience. In the real classroom, however, the preservice teachers had to deal with unexpected response from the *real* students, who were often reluctant and undisciplined. The problem of engaging unmotivated students in class activities, in particular, seemed to have been a daunting task for the most of the preservice EFL teachers, as one individual stated:

"I was teaching a demo class, and the students showing no interest in class were going so disruptive that my mind went blank." (Preservice teacher #13)

Table 2. Frequency of Reflective Comments in the Real Classroom

types of comments	frequency of comments (percentage)	
1) managing the learning environment	18 (39%)	
2) planning & timing	13 (28%)	
3) effective teaching techniques	10 (22%)	
4) nonverbal communication	3 (7%)	
5) language ability	2 (4%)	
Total	46 (100%)	

With regard to planning and timing, the conditions in each setting differed when they managed pacing the lessons. For microteaching, each team was given 20 minute time limit, within which they had to conduct a contrived version of real classroom teaching. Most preservice teachers had timed and rehearsed microteaching at the planning stage so that they could showcase the activities and finish microteaching in time. During the practicum, however, quite a few preservice teachers recollected the moments when they ran out of time in class by getting caught up in one activity and had to rush out of the classroom as the bell went off. The opposite case also occurred when they had run out of materials to cover for the day and failed to generate ideas to fill the remaining time. In either case, they experienced some resentment about not having managed the class time effectively as one wrote:

I had to cut short the lesson because I had not prepared an additional activity to fill the time, which I found so embarrassing. (Preservice teacher #30)

With no classroom teaching experience, the preservice teachers who were exposed to interactions with *real* students often had to deal with spontaneous situations. It seemed to be a challenging task for preservice teachers who had heavily relied on the planned lessons to make impromptu decisions in unexpected situations (Cho, 2017).

Even though it was the first time teaching experience in a real teaching setting for the most of them, comments on nonverbal communication were very few compared to those for microteaching. Only a few preservice teachers recollected that they were feeling nervous standing in front of the students.

Table 3, Comparison of Importance of Behavior Between Microteaching and Real Classroom Teaching

types of comments	Microteaching (Rank)	Real class (Rank)
1) nonverbal communication	1	4
2) language ability	2	5
3) managing the learning environment	3	1
4) effective teaching techniques	4	3
5) planning & timing	5	2

Interestingly, there were few explicit comments on language ability in the real classroom (see Table 3). One reason for this might be that, unlike in microteaching situations, preservice teachers used L1 (Korean language) in the real classroom except the case of conducting demo lessons. While the need for English proficiency might have been taken for granted, it might be that in real classroom, knowledge *about* English was demonstrated more than English communication ability.

V. Conclusion

This research explored what areas the preservice EFL teachers focus on in their microteaching performance and how their reflection changes in the real teaching context. Preservice EFL teachers' accounts of successful lesson for microteaching and real teaching differed in terms of salient features they perceived. In the microteaching setting, the preservice teachers focused mostly on the appearance of confidence whereas in the real classroom teaching they focused more on managing the learning environment than anything else.

This contrasting result may be attributed to the different nature of the two settings. The crucial element that differentiates these two settings is the artificial versus natural nature of teaching condition. The preservice teachers in this study equated microteaching with oral presentation rather than teaching in a real sense. Therefore when they observed their own microteaching performance in the video, the first thing they paid attention to was *presenter*'s demeanor including voice quality and eye contact. This finding has been interpreted differently in the previous studies. Some researchers claimed that novice teachers tend to be particularly self-conscious and focus more on self-image until they become experienced teachers (Cho, 2017; Kagan, 1992). In another respect, the change of reflection focus might be a natural consequence when factors around these two different situations come into play.

This study offers some implications and pedagogical guidelines for EFL teacher education. First, the curriculum of the EFL teacher education program should include a variety of opportunities to engage preservice teachers in teaching practice to help them develop both teaching skills and language ability. The microteaching task itself may have limitations in providing preservice teachers with complete real-life teaching experience due to its artificial and contrived nature. Providing the preservice teachers with simulated teaching condition might be an alternative to a shortened version of microteaching, for example, by extending the performance time

to actual class time. Nevertheless, the ability to improvise on the unpredictable classroom situations can be built up over time with experience.

Second, the instructor could break the microteaching tasks into smaller phases, which make the task easier to approach and manageable to work with. By engaging in the microteaching tasks in small steps, the preservice EFL teachers will be able to build confidence in language teaching.

Third, during the practicum the preservice teachers noted above all the issues specific to the classroom management including understanding learners and student discipline. The course curriculum can include brainstorming sessions on anticipating learner difficulties and how to promote student motivation and participation in the classroom.

Fourth, reflective practice can be fostered by feedback from the instructor and the peers. Having opportunities to assess peers may help the preservice teachers develop awareness of effective teaching and ability to assess themselves more critically.

Clearly, the findings of this research may not fully generalizable to understanding of the whole group of preservice EFL teachers and their reflective processes. Nevertheless, the results of this study demonstrate the value of reflective practice for professional development in teacher education.

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Appendix A: Evaluation Criteria for Microteaching

- (1) Instructional strategies & techniques: has a good understanding of principles and techniques for teaching language skills
- (2) Use of language learning materials: demonstrates selection of appropriate and engaging materials
- (3) Language knowledge: demonstrates a high level of knowledge for describing language
- (4) Level appropriateness: uses the lesson objectives, classroom activities, and formative assessment including classroom language that are appropriate for the students' grade level
- (5) Language skills: uses a wide range of classroom language which is accurate throughout the lesson
- (6) Demeanor:
 - a. demonstrates preparedness of the lesson
- b. proper eye contact or body movement
- c. appropriate volume (loudness), speed, and tone of voice
- (7) timing: stays on time in conducting activities and finishes the lesson in time

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