

PREPARING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS FOR CURRICULUM INNOVATION THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Cao Thi Hong Phuong^{*1}, Pham Xuan Tho² and Nguyen Thi My Hang³

¹*Faculty of English, Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi city, Vietnam*

²*Faculty of English Language and Culture, University of Languages and International Studies,
VNU, Hanoi city, Vietnam*

³*University of Foreign Language Studies, the University of Danang, Danang city, Vietnam*

*Corresponding author: Cao Thi Hong Phuong, e-mail: hongphuongct@hnue.edu.vn

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Abstract. The integration of reflective practice, such as feedback from teachers and peers and self-reflection in micro-teaching, has emerged as an effective approach in preparing pre-service English teachers for curriculum innovation. This qualitative case study employed social constructivist theory to investigate the extent to which this practice had impact on the instructional strategies of pre-service teachers at a public Vietnamese Teacher Training University. Thirty-two pre-service teachers participated in a fifteen-week ELT methodology course, engaging in lesson planning, micro-teaching, feedback, and self-reflection. The findings indicate that these pre-service teachers benefited significantly from teacher feedback, peer feedback, and their own self-reflection to critically analyse their pedagogical approaches and align them with the communicative language teaching principles outlined in Curriculum 2018. The results suggest that the integration of reflective practice in micro-teaching provides valuable insights for pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their micro-teaching before carrying out actual practicum. Teacher trainers may incorporate reflective practice in association with social constructivist approach to enhance the quality of language teacher education.

Keywords: Microteaching; Pre-service Teachers; Reflective Practices; Curriculum 2018.

1. Introduction

Supporting pre-service teachers in building confidence for their future teaching careers is a critical focus in teacher education. Among these methods, microteaching stands out as a particularly effective and widely used approach (Canagarajah, 2012) [1]. It is a structured practice that provides pre-service teachers with a simulated teaching environment which offers valuable opportunities for them to develop teaching skills. Research has also shown that feedback and self reflection play a significant role in shaping teachers' belief (Karm, 2010 [2]; Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2024 [3]). For language pre-service teachers, this shaping is ideally developed through reflective practice (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019) [4]. Hong Kong pre-service teachers, in particular, have shifted their teaching beliefs from a transmission-oriented to a social constructivist approach, from form-focus to meaning focus (Lee, 2007) [5]. In Vietnam, to meet the requirement of new curriculum (hereafter Curriculum 2018), language teacher educators need to introduce reflective

practice such as feedback and self-reflection (MOET, 2018) [6] to empower pre-service teachers to be ready for their future teaching profession. Given the well-established effects of reflective practice on L2 teachers' professional development, to date, exploring how pre-service teachers in Vietnam transformed their teaching beliefs has been under-researched. To address this gap, this study explored how reflective practice had shaped Vietnamese pre-service English teachers' instructional strategies.

2. Content

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Theoretical Backgrounds

Many approaches have been employed in language teacher education to equip pre-service teachers with theoretical underpinnings and practical knowledge. The recent paradigm shift from positivist to social constructivist epistemology indicates that teachers are required to be proactively engaged in their learning process (Borg, 2003) [7]. This shift has promoted the use of microteaching, collaboration, reflective practice, and feedback focusing on process-oriented teaching practices rather than transmission (Farrell, 2015) [8], in accordance with microteaching with their peers under the guidance of teacher trainers. Microteaching is centrally a reflective practice, as it requires pre-service teachers to establish a reciprocal link between experiential knowledge and received knowledge (Asregid et al., 2023) [9]. This link can be achieved through reflection on action (Lee & Mori, 2021 [10]; Mann & Walsh, 2017 [11]) which requires teachers to evaluate their teaching practice for future improvement.

This study is informed by the principles of social constructivism, a learning theory that highlights the importance of social interaction in the development of knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) [12] emphasised that learning is a collaborative process, shaped by interactions with peers, educators, and the broader sociocultural context. A key concept within this framework is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the gap between an individual's current abilities and their potential for growth with guidance. As Vygotsky [12] defined it, the ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level, gauged by independent problem-solving, and the potential developmental level discerned through problem-solving under the guidance of an adult or in partnership with more adept peers" (p. 86).

This theoretical framework aligns well with the focus on integrating feedback and self-reflection through microteaching. Scholars including Palincsar (2012) [13] and Rust et al. (2005) [14] have contributed significantly to the understanding of how social interaction facilitates knowledge construction. A social constructivist approach helps create a supportive learning environment where individuals can thrive and reach their full potential. This approach also aligns well with the contemporary focus on classroom-based formative assessment in L2 classroom, highlighted by Gu (2021) [15] comprehensive work, which underscored the importance of feedback and self-reflection in enhancing student learning outcomes.

2.1.2. Conceptual Framework

Microteaching in a simulated teaching environment provides pre-service teachers with reflective practice to refine their instructional strategies. Microteaching allows pre-service teachers to apply specific teaching techniques which students have already learned in a controlled environment. Each microteaching activity typically lasts from 10 to 20 minutes without actual students present. This process is typically recorded for self-reflection. Past studies have consistently demonstrated that microteaching positively impact pre-service teachers in terms of enhancing verbal communication skills, refining their teaching techniques, improving professional competence and using teaching material effectively (Nguyen, 2016 [16]; Wang et al., 2024 [17]; Zulfikar et al., 2020 [18]). Reasons for the positive impact may stem from the process of

feedback from teacher and peers, and self-reflection. For example, pre-service teachers in Wang's (2024) [17] study can critically analyse their teaching techniques, identify areas for improvement after they reflected on recorded videos and received feedback from peers, and instructors.

Studies on similar issues have been carried out in different educational contexts to investigate the effects of microteaching courses on pre-service teachers' professional development. For example, students developed their verbal communication skills, increased self-confidence, and professional competence (Acquah & Commings, 2013 [19]). Another study in Turkey found that pre-service teachers benefited greatly from reflective practice. This practice could help them improve their practical skills in teaching English. Similarly, in a micro-teaching in the United State, (Hinojosa, 2022) [20] also found that feedback and onsite coaching could help promote pre-service teachers' instructional strategies. Erdemir and Yeşilçınar (2021) [21] also explored reflective practice in micro-teaching course from students' perspective and realised that self-reflection was more useful than teacher and peer feedback. This is because experiencing self-reflection, students could reshape their instructional strategies.

This study draws on the conceptual framework of reflective practice proposed by Larrivee (2000) [22] which takes place in three stages: Examination, Struggle, and Perceptual Shift.

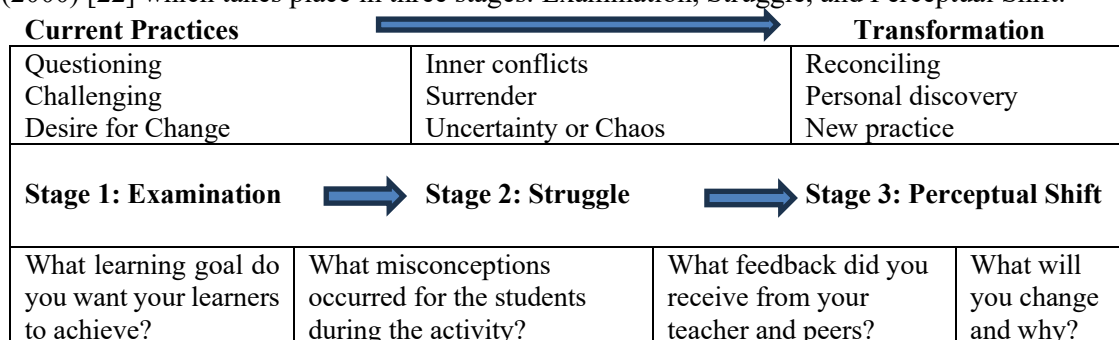


Figure 1. Three-Stage Reflective Process with Questions for Student Learning

The conceptual framework is appropriate for this study because it explains steps of shaping students' beliefs. Additionally, this framework could also help examine misconceptions of teaching that students may hold. Therefore, this framework was used to guide students' reflection and through the whole process of analysis.

It is also worth to note that whether the micro-teaching course has been useful for pre-service teachers in this study to undertake future teaching jobs is significant. This is because they are public funded students from a leading teacher training university. Those students are considered the main force of English teachers for public schools in Vietnam in the future. For this reason, this study aims to explore pre-service teachers' views in relation to the impacts of reflective practice for their readiness for their future teaching jobs. Specifically, the study addressed the following research question:

2.2. Research Question

How did reflective practice, including self-reflection, teacher's and peer feedback, support pre-service teachers in improving their micro-teaching practices?

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Research Design

This study investigates how reflective practice, including feedback from teachers and peers, and self-reflection, influences the professional development of pre-service teachers through microteaching. To effectively explore this, a qualitative case study design was employed.

Yin (2018) [23] defines a case study as an in-depth examination of a real-world phenomenon. Yin emphasizes the versatility of this approach, allowing for the exploration of individuals, groups, or organizations in their natural settings. The primary goal of a case study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Yin further highlights that case studies delve into the reasons for the phenomenon under investigation, emphasizing the importance of in-depth analysis.

2.3.2. Context and Participants

The research was carried out at a public Teacher Training University in North Vietnam. The participants were 32 Vietnamese pre-service English language teachers enrolled in a compulsory ELT methodology course called microteaching practice. The primary aim of microteaching course is to practice basic instructional skills in teaching such as teaching four language skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing and classroom management. These students followed the four-year Bachelor of English Education program with a minimum of 20 credits in pedagogy courses. Prior to microteaching, these students had already completed three compulsory courses related to L2 teaching methodology theories. For this micro-teaching practice course, these 32 pre-service teachers were divided into eight microteaching groups. The activities include lesson planning, developing teaching materials, and microteaching for their peers, giving and receiving feedback, and writing reflection papers.

Coached and guided by the first author, this 15-week course, meeting for 150 minutes weekly, was the final course in a Bachelor of English Pedagogy programme. This course also aims to help students apply key language teaching theories and techniques in microteaching before the students take their actual practicum. All participants received consent forms for the study procedure and voluntarily agreed to take part in the study.

2.3.3. Micro-teaching Procedure and Materials

Microteaching session these pre-service teachers involves designing a brief lesson, delivering it to their peers, receiving feedback from lecturer and peers, and subsequently reflecting on their instructional plans and practices. During these sessions these pre-service teachers adopted multiple roles as students, observers, and teachers, accompanying responsibility of giving and accepting performance feedback. Materials chosen for micro-teaching sessions are Global Success Book 11, one of the book series designed to carry out the 2018 curriculum innovation. Details are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Procedure for language microteaching course

Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation and briefing on the Objective of the course. • Deciding on the teaching materials • Discussing curriculum goals (Curriculum 2018) • Briefing on the feedback protocols
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 practiced microteaching listening activities. • Peer and teacher's feedback • Group 1 wrote reflection paper
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 2 practiced microteaching • Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 3 practiced microteaching reading, • Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 4 practiced microteaching writing • Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 5 practiced microteaching vocabulary • Peer and teacher's feedback

Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group 6 practiced microteaching grammar• Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group 7 practiced microteaching pronunciation• Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group 8 practiced microteaching• Peer and teacher's feedback
Week 10	Assigned readings and discussions
Week 11	Assigned readings and discussions
Week 12	Assigned readings and discussions
Week 13	Revisiting lesson plans
Week 14	Discussions and reflection paper writing
Week 15	Semi-structured interviews

2.3.4. Data Collection Instrument

To gather in-depth data, four sources were used. First, video recordings of micro-teaching sessions allowed detailed observation of each pre-service teacher's instructional strategies, classroom interaction, and use of communicative techniques. The recordings also provided a stimulus for peer and teacher feedback. Second, peer and lecturer feedback was collected after each micro-teaching session. Peer feedback was based on observation rubrics, while lecturer feedback was provided both in writing (on lesson plans) and orally after the teaching session. Third, each participant completed two rounds of written reflection. The first round (8 papers) occurred after their initial teaching experience. The second round (32 papers) encouraged teachers to move from descriptive to critical reflection on their practice. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the course, these interviews explored participants' perceptions of the role of reflection in shaping their instructional strategies. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Table 2 summarizes the data collection tools.

Table 2. Data collection tools

Types of data	Volumes
Video recordings	8 videos
Peer and teacher feedback	Notes
First round self-reflection	8 papers
Second round self- reflection	32 papers
Semi-structured interviews	8 audios

In relation to the sequence of research, before carrying out the microteaching, the students sent their lesson plans to the lecturer for written feedback. After revising the lesson plan, they conducted their microteaching. After that, they also received oral feedback from the lecturer and peers.

2.3.5. Data Analysis

Following thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2020) [24], this study used three main steps of data analysis. Initial steps included transcription and translation of eight interviews with the preservice teachers into English. This was followed by multiple readings to gain a holistic understanding of the data, in line with Creswell's (2007) [25] recommendations. Using NVivo 15 software, the data was coded and thematically categorized by the second author. The coding was then checked by the third author. After queries, three themes and emerged.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was achieved by drawing on four sources of data: microteaching video recordings, teacher and

peer feedback notes, self-reflection papers, and semi-structured interviews, which allowed for cross-verification of insights. Member checking was conducted through an intercoder agreement process: the first author, a PhD in Applied Linguistics, independently reviewed ten percent of the coded data. Differences were discussed to achieve consensus and improve the consistency of the coding scheme. In addition, an audit trail was maintained through analytic memos within NVivo to document coding decisions and the development of themes. Ongoing peer debriefing between the authors further enhanced the credibility and confirmability of the analysis.

2.4. Findings

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the data analysis. The three major themes are: (1) transforming teaching beliefs, (2) struggling with instructional decisions, and (3) developing effective teaching strategies. Frequencies of each sub-theme are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequencies
Transforming teaching beliefs	Shifting from transmission to facilitation	18
	Unlearning test-oriented practices	24
	Reframing the value of skills integration	10
Struggling with their own teaching practices	Uncertainty about own teaching practices	16
	Managing time and cognitive load	8
Developing effective teaching strategies	Designing communicative tasks	25
	Adapting textbooks creatively	17
	Incorporating peer and self-assessment	12

2.4.1. Transforming Teaching Beliefs

The first major theme centres on belief transformation, a process that formed the foundation for instructional change among participants. For many, reflective engagement, through reading, dialogue, and personal teaching trials, encouraged a critical reappraisal of assumptions inherited from their own schooling. A notable number of data (18 times) described a clear transition from viewing teaching as the transmission of content to embracing the role of facilitator. Prior to the course, these participants often equated effective teaching with thorough explanation and teacher control. However, exposure to constructivist principles and peer models, combined with feedback and reflection, allowed them to question this approach.

Student 1's reflection exemplifies this shift: *"I used to think I had to explain everything, but now I realize that giving space for students to figure things out helps them learn more deeply."* This reimagining of the teacher's role reflects movement within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners grow through scaffolded interaction, not passive reception. Such perspectives indicate a growing sense of trust in learners' capacities and recognition of the teacher as a guide, facilitating rather than dictating the learning process.

A second and more frequently cited transformation (24 instances) involved rethinking the purpose of English teaching. Many participants entered the course with a strong orientation toward test preparation, shaped by their personal experience within Vietnam's exam-focused education system. Through reflective cycles, however, they began to articulate a shift in priorities, from helping students succeed in tests to enabling them to use English communicatively and confidently. Student 2, for instance, captured this shift succinctly, *"Before this course, I thought my job was to help students pass the tests. But now I think it's more important to help them communicate confidently, even if they make mistakes."* The reflection shows increased alignment

with Curriculum 2018, which emphasizes the development of communicative competence and life-long language use over memorization and performance in exams.

Finally, students reported (10 times) a transformation in how they perceived the interaction between language skills. Initially, most viewed reading, writing, speaking, and listening as isolated components to be taught sequentially. However, readings on integrated-skills instruction and collaborative reflection helped participants see the pedagogical value of interconnectedness. Student 3 remarked, *"I didn't know reading could help students speak better. After reading more, I realized how connected the skills are."*

2.4.2. Struggling with Instructional Decisions

While many participants experienced belief transformation, applying these new perspectives in practice was not without challenges. The second theme captures the emotional and cognitive tensions that emerged as pre-service teachers transitioned from theory to classroom action. Two sub-themes characterize this process: (1) uncertainty about one's own teaching practices and (2) managing time and cognitive load. The participants reported (16 times) moments of uncertainty, particularly during and after their microteaching sessions. These moments were often triggered by feedback that contradicted their self-perceptions or exposed blind spots in their delivery. Such disorientation, while emotionally taxing, became a catalyst for deeper reflection and self-questioning. Student 4 described how a seemingly minor issue led to a major realization, *"My instructions made sense to me, but not to them. I learned that communication as a teacher needs rehearsal too."* These reflections illustrate a growing metacognitive awareness, pre-service teachers were beginning to look inward, not just at what they taught, but how they made pedagogical decisions.

Another frequently reported difficulty was time management and the cognitive demands of microteaching. The participants reflected (8 instances) on either running out of time or overloading lessons with too many steps or theoretical explanations. Student 5 shared a common experience, *"We ran out of time before students could do peer feedback. I realized I tried to include too much."* These insights point to the need for developing not just instructional knowledge, but pedagogical management.

2.4.3. Developing Effective Teaching Strategies

The third theme captures the pedagogical growth that emerged through iterative reflection, peer exchange, and microteaching feedback. Many participants progressed from merely identifying problems to experimenting with practical strategies that aligned more closely with communicative language teaching and the learner-centered aims of Curriculum 2018. This theme includes three sub-themes: (1) designing communicative tasks, (2) adapting textbooks creatively, and (3) incorporating peer and self-assessment.

The most frequently observed instructional change (25 instances) was the use of communicative tasks. Participants began replacing mechanical drills with tasks that encouraged interaction and real-world relevance. These shifts often resulted from experimenting with role plays or personalized content. Student 1 described the impact of textbook adaptation, *"I asked students to role-play a conversation at a train station. They really got into it."* This example shows participants embracing learner agency and awareness of communicative language teaching.

Seventeen participants reflected on growing confidence in modifying textbook materials. Moving away from textbook activities, they began to see the textbook as a flexible resource rather than one-size-fits-all materials. Student 6 shared, *"I turned the reading activity into a comic strip task, and students were excited to read."* This sub-theme reflects a growing pedagogical ownership, an essential quality for curriculum innovation.

Finally, twelve participants reported beginning to incorporate formative assessment strategies, such as peer checklists and guided self-assessment. These tools supported learners in becoming more reflective, aligning with Curriculum 2018's emphasis on assessment for learning.

For example, Student 3 observed a shift in classroom dynamics, “*Students started noticing things they’d normally wait for me to correct.*” This suggests that formative assessment can be nurtured through reflective learning cycles. Overall, the findings demonstrate that reflective practice, through self-reflection, peer feedback, and teacher feedback, played a pivotal role in supporting pre-service teachers’ professional growth during their microteaching experience.

2.5. Discussions

While previous research has acknowledged the benefits of reflection for teacher growth (Farrell, 2015 [8]; Lee & Mori, 2021 [10]), this study contributes distinctive insights by illustrating how such practices specifically support Vietnamese pre-service teachers in interpreting and enacting Curriculum 2018.

The result of this study confirms that structured reflection could enable pre-service teachers to critically examine and revise their instructional strategies. However, a more insight lies in how participants negotiated these shifts. For example, students 1 and 4 did not adopt communicative methods uncritically, but they expressed initial uncertainty, which reflection helped mediate their microteaching. This transformation is consistent with previous literature (Farrell, 2015 [8]; Lee & Mori, 2021 [10]), which highlights the power of reflection to support teachers in questioning their existing beliefs. Moreover, this finding contributes to the literature by demonstrating that reflective practice in Vietnamese pre-service teacher education is not yet embedded but can become meaningful when scaffolded. This highlights a critical implementation gap in Curriculum 2018. Reflection also helps participants gain a clearer understanding of the curriculum innovation agenda. Through readings, discussions, and microteaching experience, students began to internalize key pedagogical principles such as integrating skills, promoting fluency, and designing tasks with communicativeness. These principles are foundational to Curriculum 2018, which aims to move Vietnamese classrooms away from grammar-focused, test-oriented instruction toward competency-based education and language use (MOET, 2018) [6].

Teacher and peer feedback emerged as powerful tools for shaping instructional improvement. Rather than viewing feedback as evaluative, participants increasingly perceived it as formative practices. Peer feedback was valued not only for its practical suggestions but also for offering diverse perspectives. This echoes the findings of Farrell and Kennedy (2019) [4], who emphasize the role of collaborative reflection in deepening teacher awareness. Teacher feedback, meanwhile, provided more focused pedagogical guidance, especially in helping students align their teaching practices with communicative goals. Participants’ reflections on how their lecturers’ questions prompted them to clarify the objectives of the activities. Such reflections supported what Larrivee (2000) [22] describes as a perceptual shift in teaching consciousness.

Curriculum 2018 demands a significant paradigm shift from knowledge transmission to communicative competence development. The study provides new insight into how reflective practice can mediate the tension between policy and classroom realities. A distinctive contribution of this study is its evidence that pre-service teachers began to see themselves not only as implementers but as key agents of reform. This finding is especially relevant for teacher education programs in post-reform settings, where teacher preparation might not keep pace with curricular change. Microteaching with structured reflection created a transitional pedagogical space, which enables participants to experiment, receive feedback, and refine their teaching in order to align with the reform goals.

2.6. Implications

The findings of this study highlight the need for teacher education programs in Vietnam to integrate reflective practices more systematically and intentionally into their curricula. Microteaching, when accompanied by structured self-reflection, peer feedback, and teacher feedback, creates a safe environment for pre-service teachers to trial, evaluate, and refine their

instructional decisions. This practice supports the development of pedagogical judgment and promotes better alignment with communicative, student-centered goals as outlined in Curriculum 2018. Additionally, the study indicates that reflective practice is not only useful for skill development but also crucial for agency. By engaging in reflection and feedback, pre-service teachers begin to reposition themselves from passive implementers of textbook content to proactive curriculum adapters and critical practitioners. This shift is essential for successful curriculum innovation, especially in the Vietnam context. For reflection to be truly transformative, however, it must be facilitated through supportive mentorship mentioned in reflective frameworks, such as Larrivee's (2000) [22].

2.7. Limitations

This study was limited to a small cohort of 32 pre-service teachers from one public teacher training university in Vietnam, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The research focused on self-reported reflections, interviews and microteaching tasks conducted within a controlled course environment, rather than actual classroom teaching. Additionally, the study did not track long-term changes in teaching practices or student learning outcomes. Future studies could address these gaps by employing longitudinal designs and including diverse institutional contexts.

3. Conclusion

The findings affirm that reflective practice can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. When embedded in teacher training programs, reflection fosters deeper instructional awareness and supports curriculum innovation. As Vietnam continues to implement its national education reforms, empowering preservice teachers with reflective tools is essential and beneficial.

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