

## Microteaching Experience in Distance English Language Teacher Training: A Case Study

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### Abstract

The purpose of this single-subject case study was to document the experiences of a teacher trainee during a 12-week microteaching process in the Distance English Language Teacher Training program (DELT). The student teacher subject responded to questionnaires, submitted online dialogue journals, and answered open-ended questions before and after the practicum. An online interview was also conducted at the end of the practicum process. The analyses of the data suggested that distance EFL teacher trainees experienced a certain degree of foreign language teaching anxiety. It was also found that the microteaching practice in the program was useful for teacher candidates despite some problems. Assessment and evaluation via the e-portfolio system, on the other hand, was a satisfying system from the student teacher's eyes. The analyses yielded to a brief explanation of the challenges and concerns of teacher trainees in distance context. Implications for the present and future distance teacher training programs chiefly focus on more guidance and support for the student teachers. The role of mentors are also vital for more fruitful teaching practice opportunities for the teacher candidates.

**Key Words:** distance teacher education, pre-service EFL teacher education, language teaching; teaching practicum

### INTRODUCTION

The Distance English Language Teacher Training program (DELT) was started in 2000-2001 academic year as a four-year BA program within a protocol signed between

Anadolu University and Turkish Ministry of Education in February 2000 in order to meet the increasing demand for English teachers that appeared following the start of the eight-year compulsory primary education (Köse, Cantürk, & Ülsever, 2002). Teaching practicum component of the program, on the other hand, has been on track since 2003-2004 academic year (Keçik & Aydın, 2014).

The first semester of the teaching practicum in the program is devoted to microteaching in DELT. Allen and Ryan (1969, p. 1) had defined microteaching approximately 45 years ago as “a training concept that can be applied at various pre-service and in-service stages in the professional development of teachers”. The concept of microteaching is still active and fit. Even though different practices of microteaching are available, the general philosophy still remains (Benton-Kupper, 2001). Besides, pre-service teachers see microteaching as a very meaningful learning activity and it alleviates the heavy work load of the practicum by providing student teachers with a rather pressure-free environment to plan, teach, and reflect on their teaching (Amobi, 2005). The microteaching experience was found to be a valued chance for student teachers to practice what they learnt in theory and gain experience on the teaching profession by furnishing them with essential know-how and skills for an effective teaching for Ghanaian (Ampofo & Orodho, 2014), Chinese (He & Yan, 2011), and Turkish (Ekşi, 2012; Tavil, 2012) student teachers. Moreover, microteaching in teacher training programs has a positive influence on student teachers’ consciousness and perceptions about their teaching skills and in developing operational teaching strategies (Ismail, 2011). The practicum also helped pre-service teachers develop themselves in classroom management, in encountering students’ varied needs, in distinguishing students’ viewpoints, and in providing a basis for their consideration of the meaning of being a real teacher (Busher, Gündüz, Çakmak, & Lawson, 2014). Beginning teachers also highly valued microteaching as an effective pedagogical tool that boosted their

teaching skills and self-confidence (Ralph, 2014). Furthermore, video-taped microteaching helped pre-service language teachers' reduce their teaching and foreign language anxiety to a moderate level (Büyükkarcı, 2014). Likewise, micro-teaching practices were found to be operational in plummeting the difficulties experienced in the real teaching process (Küçükoğlu et al., 2012), to give student teachers a chance to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses as well as to help them develop timing, planning, asking questions, management of class, using different materials and examples, and physical appearance during the teaching process (Saban & Çoklar, 2013). Finally, the microteaching experience was stated as an influential process for teacher trainees' strong self-efficacy beliefs (Arsal, 2014).

Naturally, microteaching has some drawbacks, especially from the student teachers' perspectives. For instance, sudden visits by the supervisors, heavy workload and school administrators' information gap about the practice process (Ampofo & Orodho, 2014), inauthenticity of the practicum (He & Yan, 2011), and assessment procedures (Ismail, 2011) were some of the challenges identified in different contexts. In the same vein, Turkish student teachers were not pleased with the extent of the time allocated to micro teaching and teaching practice (Seferoğlu, 2006); were often unwilling to supply clear feedback in the process (Ekşi, 2012); and were concerned about the overlap within the methodology courses (Tavil, 2012).

The teaching practice opportunities supported with technological tools have been in practice in different contexts. For instance, Wu and Alrabah (2014) recently reported that the WebCT application in the practicum suited to students' digitized lifestyles and learning preferences very well and also enriched students' learning practices. Also, student teachers could diagnose the problems they and their peers came across very easily during teaching practice by linking reflective teaching practice to technology (Yüksel, 2013).

In line with these ideas, an e-portfolio system was implanted into the teaching practicum in DELT in 2009-2010 academic year within an objective to establish a strong link among university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers in every single step of the teaching practicum process (Aydın & Keçik, 2014). The e-portfolio system embraces a collection of student teachers' lesson plans, reflection reports related to their practices, and the feedback versions of the lesson plans uploaded by the university supervisors and cooperating teachers (Keçik & Aydın, 2011). E-portfolio experiences have gained teacher educators' attention in recent years. For example, Natesh (2014) very recently discovered that pre-service EFL teachers had positive attitudes towards using a blog-based instructional strategy in the teaching practicum course. Studies conducted in the Turkish context have also obtained encouraging results. For example, the web-based standard was observed by participants as a standard that allowed easy access and development of better portfolio work in addition to its advantage of helping student teachers gain high-reflective skills (Oner & Adadan, 2011). Moreover, the use of portfolios aided student teachers to develop their level of autonomy about their individual and professional development and student-teachers displayed positive attitudes towards the portfolio process (Yıldırım, 2013). Kocoglu, Akyel, and Ercetin (2008), on the other hand, had found that the course of preparing a pen/paper portfolio provided a useful approach to augment professional development, reflective thinking and self-confidence while the course of preparing an electronic portfolio did not enrich reflective thinking as student teachers were more concerned about the mechanics and the design of the electronic portfolios instead of the content.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON DELT**

Although it does not have a long history, the DELT has been the research interest for many scholars as it is one of the unique applications in the world and the pioneer in Turkey (Köse et al., 2002; Latchem, Özkul, Aydın, & Mutlu, 2006; Savaş, 2006) as it offers the

Turkish young generations to realize their dreams of becoming an EFL teacher as well as providing them a systematic foreign language instruction (Altunay & Mutlu, 2008). Certain studies considered the students in DELT as EFL learners while some others dealt with the teacher training issues regarding the distance teacher education practices. To begin with, Sakar (2009) investigated the efficacy of web-based asynchronous courses designed for the students in DELT and found that most of the students had computer and internet connection in their houses and attended online courses once or twice a week, but more during exam weeks whilst students who don't rely on the positive impact of those courses did not attend regularly. Likewise, Kopkallı-Yavuz and Mutlu, (2009) checked the use of online environments by students in DELT and found that there was a positive correlation between the frequency of log-ins and the students' grades. In another study, Aydın & Yüzer (2006) reported on a virtual classroom project prepared for students in DELT and concluded that the virtual classroom assisted better authentic interaction and promoted learner autonomy among DELT students as high-level EFL learners. In a similar study, Aydın (2008) examined the views of learners who took part in an e-class application and its effect on their success. The researcher asserted that students in DELT viewed the e-class as a very effective method of leading the reading lessons, that an e-class practice could be as operational as the traditional face-to-face classroom method, and that an e-class could be employed to nurture the efficacy of the DELT program. Altunay and Mutlu (2010), on the other hand, found that students in DELT mostly had difficulties developing their written and oral production skills as distance learners. In the same study, it was also found that the distance learners preferred using technological tools for developing their vocabulary as information technologies allow them to reach authentic materials faster and easier (Altunay & Mutlu, 2010).

In addition to the studies concerning DELT students as EFL learners, certain studies considered them as teacher candidates. In one inquiry, Güven (2009) found that the

epistemological beliefs of the pre-service teachers in DELT developed at low level and these beliefs diverged in terms of gender, department, grade, academic achievement, and education level of parents. Also, there was a significant positive correlation between the epistemological beliefs and metacognitive strategy use of pre-service in DELT and in face-to-face programs (Güven, 2012). In another study, Guven, Kurum, and Saglam (2012) conducted a study to find out the views of the students in DELT about the teaching practice course. The findings revealed that while some teacher candidates were prepared and well-motivated about the teaching practicum, some were not that willing and set for it. As the advantages of the teaching practice, the DELT student teachers identified that the practicum experience helped them know about the pupils and different learning contexts, prepare effective lesson plans, become familiar with teaching-learning processes, manage the class well, pace the lesson effectively, make use of the coordinator teachers, and gauge their own efficacy in teaching. As the disadvantages, on the other hand, they believed that they did not have sufficient knowledge about lesson planning and practicum portfolio, had problems related to classroom management, efficient time management; and they complained about indifference of the coordinator teachers, poor equipment in practicum schools, lack of adequate supervision, and restricted opportunities for fruitful practice.

In a study regarding the e-portfolio organization, Keçik et al. (2012) questioned the needs of the pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and the university supervisors and to what extent those needs were met with the implementation of the e-portfolio system. The researchers found that all three groups agreed upon the needs of the students in DELT as pre-service teachers; accordingly, the e-portfolio use was able to meet most of the needs related to planning, teaching, and reflection essentials in the teaching practicum. In addition to the e-portfolio experience, Koç (2011a) developed a Mentor Teacher Role Inventory (MTRI) with the participation of 1843 student teachers completing their teaching practice in DELT in

order to find out the role of mentors in the DELT practicum. The five major mentoring roles were identified by the student teachers in DELT as self-trainer, networker, social supporter, academic supporter, and psychological supporter (Koç, 2012). It was also found that gender, the type of graduation school, the type of the cooperating school they are experiencing teaching practice at, and the number of student teachers in the supervisory group did not have a significant influence on the views of the student teachers in DELT about the mentoring roles Koç (2011b).

In a doctoral dissertation, Savaş (2006) conducted a case study to examine the faculty support structure in DELT from the faculty academics' perspectives. The findings revealed that faculty members had a positive attitude toward distance education; however, as they had to run both face-to-face and distance programs, they experienced problems about their workload because they were not able to spend their time on their distance students as effective as they wished. The researcher concluded that faculty support organization in DELT should be incorporated into the whole working milieu of faculty members in a more satisfying manner. In contrast to many optimistic ideas about the DELT, Bıyık (2007) asserted that the DELT program did not grow EFL teachers who are adequate and competent for Turkey's immediate need for English teachers. In another study, Hismanoglu (2012) examined the perceptions of teacher trainees in DELT toward ICT implementation in language teaching and documented that a certain number of teacher candidates expressed negative attitudes to ICT integration because they found the nature, level and delivery of the training inadequate. They confessed that they did not feel themselves competent enough to use ICT in their future career unless they obtained satisfactory training.

### **Significance of the Study**

As the review of the literature suggests, most studies in DELT have focused on the technology integration into the program to develop students as better learners. Limited

number of studies concerning the practicum experience, on the other hand, have focused on the description of the program setting, students' perceptions on certain variables about teaching and learning, or the mentoring roles. No empirical work has, to date, documented the real problems of the teacher trainees completing their teaching practicum in a distance environment. Hence, this study aims to present the actual teaching practice experience of distance foreign language teacher candidates by documenting the real experiences of a distance foreign language teacher trainee. Research questions were not formed for the present study as the data obtained from a student teacher's experiences, views, and perceptions about the teaching practice process would determine the points to present and discuss.

### **THE CASE STUDY**

This study employs a single-subject case study model, the benefits of which have been known as a strong research method: verifying evidence-based practice and detailing underlying relationships between dependent and independent variables as an experimental research design (Horner et al., 2005).

#### **The Subject**

The subject of this inquiry was a 24-year-old female student teacher enrolled in the 'School Experience' course as part of her graduation requirement in the DELT program. Although there was not any significant reason to select this student teacher for this study, voluntariness and eagerness to take part in a scientific study were the motives for the researcher to include her in the study as the subject. Even though she knew that she was being experimented, she was never told about the purpose of the study in order to avoid some biased responses. She agreed to participate in the study within the consent that the extra conversations and data tools would not affect her passing grade, and would not be used for any other purposes except the present inquiry. After completing the face-to-face courses for the first two years and the distance courses in her third year, she was completing the 4<sup>th</sup> year

distance courses, and at the same time, completing her teaching practice a student teacher in one of the cities located in the southeastern part of Turkey. She did not have any formal teaching experience, except her mentoring the secondary school students as part of one of the courses (Community Services) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

### The Setting

The student teacher participants was enrolled in the ‘School Experience’ course as part of her graduation requirement in 2014-2015 Fall Semester. In the fall semester, the student teachers are given the opportunity to practice teaching English in a 12-week practice teaching placement. The student teachers are not only able to observe classroom teaching but also have the chance to conduct micro-teaching activities with an assigned cooperating teachers in practicum schools for four classroom hours per week. The first week is the ‘observation week’ for the student teachers to enable them familiarize themselves with their cooperating teachers, pupils, other teachers, and the school atmosphere. Throughout the semester, each student teacher delivers one piece of a full lesson for approximately 20 minutes in each teaching week. Table 1 presents the working and schedule of the e-portfolio system for the microteaching component of the teaching practicum in 2014-2015 Fall Semester.

Table 1

#### *Schedule for the E-portfolio Application*

Dates	Activities
October 20-24, 2014	Announcement of the practicum schools and placements
October 27-31, 2014	Meeting the cooperating teachers; preparing and submitting the ‘School Experience Practice plan’ and the ‘School Experience Weekly Schedule’
November 3-7, 2014	Observation week

November 10, 2014	Last day for submitting the 1 <sup>st</sup> lesson plan
November 11-14, 2014	Feedback and evaluation by supervisors and cooperating teachers
November 17-24, 2014	Teaching week
November 23, 2014	Last day for submitting reflection reports
November 24, 2014- December 7, 2014	2 <sup>nd</sup> teaching (The same cycle as the 1 <sup>st</sup> teaching)
December 8, 2014- December 21, 2014	3 <sup>rd</sup> teaching (The same cycle as the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> teaching)
December 22, 2014- January 4, 2015,	4 <sup>th</sup> teaching (The same cycle as the 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> teaching)
January 5, 2015- January 18, 2015	5 <sup>th</sup> teaching (The same cycle as the 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , and 4 <sup>th</sup> teaching)
January 19-23, 2015:	General overview of the school experience process

As Table 1 shows, the student teacher in our case was supposed to submit her lesson plans before delivering a lesson, get feedback on her lesson plans, teach, and submit a reflection report about her teaching experience. She was placed at an Anatolian High School, where English gets a lot of attention by the students, with three other trainees under the supervision of a cooperating teacher as the actual classroom teacher of the practicum school. A university supervisor (the researcher in this case) was also assigned to provide the student teacher with the feedback on her lesson plans and reflection reports as well as to assess and evaluate her teaching performance via the e-portfolio system.

### Data Sources

Single-subject studies utilize a single subject but multiple baselines and instruments (Butler, 2014; Horner et al., 2005; Liao, 2012; Ting & Tai, 2012), and this study was not an exception. In addition to the regularly submitted lesson plans, supervisor feedback, and reflection reports, scales, online dialogue journals, open-ended questionnaires before and after the practicum experience, and a follow-up online interview via Skype™ generated the data for this inquiry. As for the anxiety experienced by the student teacher, a Student Teacher Anxiety Scale (STAS), developed by Hart (1987), a Foreign Language Student Teacher Anxiety Scale (FLSTAS) developed by Merç (2010a), an open-ended follow-up questionnaire, and the correspondences from the online dialogue journals were used. To obtain information regarding the assessment and evaluation in teaching practicum via e-portfolio system, a questionnaire given at the beginning of the questionnaire and the open-ended follow-up questionnaire were utilized. In order to elicit the problems of the student teacher throughout her teaching experience, a questionnaire developed from the findings of previous research (Veenman, 1984; Merç, 2010b) was exploited. To provide data related to student teacher's self-efficacy about teaching English, an adapted version of the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SEQ) developed by El-Okda and Al-Humaidi (2003) was administered. Finally, in order to obtain data related to the effectiveness of the e-portfolio system, the microteaching practice, and the concerns related to being a distance teacher trainee, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The quantitative data obtained via the questionnaires (the STAS, the FLSTAS, the SEQ, and the assessment questionnaire) were analyzed by the researcher to reach a conclusion for each item on each scale. The qualitative data, on the other hand, were initially sorted and organized by the researcher by identifying the points to discuss related to the student teacher experiences in distance language teaching practice. Having identified the four

themes emerged from the data, the extracts and samples were identified that would fit into each of themes as the points of discussion.

### Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

The findings obtained from various data tools are presented and discussed under four main themes: teaching anxiety experienced by the student teacher, views on microteaching practice, assessment and evaluation via the e-portfolio system, and challenges and concerns of teacher trainees in distance context.

#### **Anxiety.**

Single subject studies allow for the analysis of behavior in multiple baselines (Butler, 2014; Horner et al., 2005; Liao, 2012). The primary baseline in this study was formed by the student teacher's reflections related to how anxious she was about teaching English at the very beginning of the practicum experience just after the second teaching week. She expressed her feelings as follows:

*I've got some problems about the teaching practice. I exactly don't have any problems with the courses or the practicum school, but with myself. I'm often talking to my cooperating teacher, but I can't overcome this problem; that's why I wanted to talk to you. The problem is that I cannot feel comfortable and relaxed enough while I'm teaching. Actually, classes are going well, everything's all right, but when I'm in the class, I can't get into mood of a real teacher. As I deliver my lessons, I'm always in panic, I'm so nervous about flubbing, and I'm always anxious to be disgraced by the pupils. Most of the time I beg my cooperating teacher for not coming to class to observe me teaching. I really feel incompetent and desperate. Do you think I'll never get*

*better? I'm really stressed each week. Believe me, I can't concentrate on anything, I'm living with the stress of the teaching practice all the time...*

In response to this confession, the researcher provided the student teacher some advice related to anxiety ensuring that it was a normal feeling but needed to be considered and alleviated. Some suggestions included:

*It's normal to experience these feelings; even very experienced teachers sometimes suffer from teaching anxiety*

*Do not hesitate to consult your cooperating teacher about things you don't know or you aren't sure about*

*If you plan well and have a few successful classes, make sure that things will eventually be better, and you'll feel more relaxed*

*Think about your previous accomplishments. Think about your own student life. You're now here because you were successful. Think about last year [Public Service Practices course] and how helpful you were for those students. Etc.*

In further correspondences, the student teacher indicated that she was more relaxed but still experienced anxiety, especially when she needed to make instant decisions and use of English in front of the students. Some basic personal advice as well as some extra reading suggestions were also provided by the researcher to help the student teacher to deal with her anxiety. It was observed from student teachers' reflection reports and the online dialogue journals that she was more able to control her anxiety even though it was not over. She was mostly concerned about teaching writing, fluency in speaking in front of the students, and conducting a speaking activity in the class throughout the teaching experience. The responses the student teacher gave to the scales to measure the level of her anxiety as a

student teacher considering the whole experience were in line with her concerns. First, she strongly agreed with the 16 statements of the 26-item STAS as cases that created anxiety on her very much. Her concerns were particularly centered on pupil and professional concerns anxiety such as how to give each child the attention he/she needs without neglecting others, class control anxiety such as controlling the noise level in class, and teaching practice requirements anxiety such as maintaining a 'buoyant' enough approach. Second, her responses to the FLSTAS, as an anxiety scale peculiar to foreign language student teachers, showed that she was very anxious about language proficiency such as feeling nervous when she corrects her students' mistakes with the feeling that she will also make mistakes, academic incompetence such as never feeling comfortable however well-prepared she is, fear of being criticized by peers such as feeling anxious about her peers' showing her the mistakes she makes in the class, and pupils such as feeling uneasy when teaching a class that she never taught before.

It is no surprise that the student teacher experienced anxiety in her first teaching experience during the microteaching process as many of her peers worldwide suffer from teaching anxiety as teacher candidates (Capel, 1997; Morton, Vesco, Williams & Awender, 1997; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003). Language teacher candidates, in addition, are more desperate when it comes to teaching a language which is not theirs (Merç, 2010a). Several studies have shown that foreign language teacher trainees in Turkey (Coşkun, 2013; Merç, 2010a; Oztas Tum, 2012; Oztas Tum, 2014; Yuksel, 2008) and in other contexts (Canessa, 2006; El-Okda & Al-Humaidi, 2003; Horwitz, 1996; Kim & Kim, 2004; Suwannaset & Rimkeeratikul, 2014) experience teaching anxiety to a certain extent while delivering English lessons.

Another interpretation for the reasons for experiencing a high degree of teaching anxiety might be the academic incompetence of the student teacher. As research suggests, there is a negative correlation between overall foreign language learning anxiety and learning

self-efficacy (Tsai, 2013). In addition to learners' perspective, it is also known that there is a negative correlation between pre-service EFL teachers' level of language teaching anxiety and their perceived language-teaching efficacy (El-Okda & Al-Humaidi, 2003). Therefore, it is safe to assume that student teachers, and the one in this case, experience anxiety as they hold negative feelings about their academic competence or vice versa.

Research also suggests that student teachers' anxiety decreases throughout the teaching practicum as they gain experience in teaching, get feedback on their performances, and get used to the school environment, the pupils, and the teaching profession (Canessa, 2006; Merç, 2010a; Merç, 2010b). The student teacher in this study also mentioned the usefulness of the feedback from the university supervisor to alleviate her teaching anxiety. For example, she indicated how handy it was to learn to be well-prepared as follows:

*I tried to revise my bad writing lesson plan that I wrote last week considering your advice; at least it was an applicable writing lesson in the end. Although the topic was boring, I think dividing the class into groups and providing each group with a task worked well. The lesson just flew; at least it was not a speaking lesson any more.*

*Yeah, I'm sure I'm more relaxed when I'm better prepared and knowledgeable about the subject matter, but I believe that I'll enjoy the teaching job as soon as I'm away from the negative feelings of unexpected things happening in the class.*

Furthermore, the student teacher's reflection on her last experience in the microteaching was an indicator of the decrease in her anxieties. She explained her feelings about her last lesson as follows:

*In the last teaching week, I entered the class leaving all my anxieties behind, and it worked. It was the best 9<sup>th</sup> graders of the school. I was able to manage*

*although their proficiency level was so high. I was very well-prepared; and although they were ahead of the subject, I was very good to survive. At once, there was a question that I didn't know the answer, I set up a discussion for the students to gain time for myself to find the answer 😊 After the lesson, my cooperating teacher was so surprised to see me that cheerful because I was always complaining about my stress about the lessons. All in all, I think my self-confidence which I had lost weeks ago, was back to some extent.*

In a nutshell, the student teacher in our case will probably have lower levels of anxiety as she becomes more experienced in teaching, especially in concerns related to her relationship with the mentors, her language proficiency, her academic competence, and her peers and others' ideas about her teaching performance (Merç, 2010a). Obviously, this does not mean that time solves all of the problems, instead, she needs the essential guidance and support from all stakeholders involved in professional teacher training as Valdez, Young, and Hicks (2000) states, "the issue of change is critical to the growth process of the pre-service teachers" (p. 44).

### **Microteaching**

Investigating the role of microteaching in teacher trainees' teaching experience was also among the goals of this study. The microteaching experience, in our case, provided the student teacher with a certain level of self-reliance to have the confidence about her academic competencies. She identified the microteaching experience quite helpful in terms of giving the student teachers the opportunity to focus on only a portion of teaching in a more detailed way. On the other hand, there were some problems identified related to the application of the microteaching in the DELT teaching practicum. One obstacle was about the time restrictions. The student teacher complained about the limited duration of activities allocated (20 minutes) as things were never complete or rushed her to a quick pass between the activities. In fact,

she is not the only one to be concerned about time management or pacing the lesson. She explained her opinions as follows:

*I think it's so unnecessary, dividing the lesson is not that useful. Most of the time I couldn't decide how to begin or end the lesson. And I think it's easier to control the lesson as a whole. For example, if our teacher started something, say a grammar point, we try to continue the lesson with the same point with a different technique. This time, students are in trouble, bored, or they dislike it, etc. It's a big problem for the students as well. I think the pre-, during-, and post- parts clash, and eventually our cooperating teacher is in trouble, too.*

Student teachers in previous studies were also found to be suffering from managing the class time effectively to conduct the pre-planned learning activities or pacing the lesson well (Kerdikoshvili, 2012; Kwo, 1996; Merç, 2010b; Veenman, 1984). In spite of the concerns related to its nature, the microteaching experience as an attempt to make the brilliance of the microteaching comes alive within the provision of the valuable opportunities with the student teacher, is a valuable mechanism to lessen the student teacher's anxiety. It can be seen as a very valuable tool by the student teachers, which gives them the chance to be introduced to the teaching profession (Benton-Kupper, 2001). Also, it is seen as a fruitful opportunity for pre-service student teachers to put theory into practice (Amobi, 2005; Ampofo & Orodho, 2014; Busher et al., 2014; Ekşi, 2012; He & Yan, 2011; Küçükoğlu et al., 2012; Saban & Çoklar, 2013; Taviş, 2012). The complaints of the student teacher in this case might be resulting from the very fact that the student teachers and the cooperating teachers were not made aware of the benefits and different alternative implementations of the microteaching.

Valuable suggestion here is that microteaching should be accompanied by different other practices of teaching practice process (He & Yan, 2011), and it can be a more effective

way if it is assessed formatively (Büyükkarcı, 2014). Coskun Ogeyik (2009) reminds that microteaching practices are likely to play a vital role in increasing future teachers' professional self in teacher training programs.

### Assessment and Evaluation

Data as regards the views of the student teacher about the assessment and evaluation in teaching practicum in DELT via the e-portfolio system came from questionnaire responses, open-ended questions, and the interview. By means of a questionnaire, student teacher's ideas about how effective the criteria to assess and evaluate her performance in teaching practice were elicited. The student teacher rated each criterion in the 20-item assessment form used by the supervisors and the cooperating teachers on a scale from very effective to very ineffective. In general, the student teacher was satisfied with the criteria: she identified nine items as very effective, five as effective, and she was neutral about one. On the other hand, she valued three items as ineffective and two of them as very ineffective. The ineffective criteria were:

*Item 1. Are the learning outcomes achievable and related to language teaching?*

*Item 2. Were the learning outcomes stated in a clear and appropriate wording?*

*Item 12. Were the error-correction techniques used in a varied way?*

The criterion measures ranked as very ineffective were:

*Item 7. Have the possible obstacles in the course of explanations and activities that students might face been considered?*

*Item 17. Are the cover page and the body of the lesson plan written clearly and neatly?*

The student teacher also stated in the open-ended questions and interview that the assessment and evaluation were not fair enough. She explained her views as follows:

*I don't really think that the evaluation system is fair enough. In a way, you [university supervisors] don't see we're how much able to transfer the things we wrote in our lesson plans, which is the crucial point. Of course, our cooperating teachers observe us, but I wish you were in my class and told me about my strengths and weaknesses. You evaluate us considering only the lesson plans we write. I also think that there are mistakes related to writing lesson plans. I feel like writing a fictitious plan, and it is like that. I never know about the characteristics of the pupils in my classes, but every single book announces loudly that every learner has his own learning styles. I'm not happy with the fact that I have to compose my lesson plans without any knowledge of my students.*

A quick look at practicum assessment programs shows that they are not theoretically strong, and accordingly, the impact of assessment to any of the commitments given to practice teaching is problematic (Brooker et al., 1998). Likewise, Seferoğlu (2006) put forward that assessment procedures together with the type of courses offered, course contents within the Turkish teacher education program needed to be redesigned to meet the requirements of an innovative and flexible professional. Moreover, Al-Mutawa and Al-Dabbous (1997) acknowledged that personal qualities, language/linguistic knowledge, interpersonal relations, planning, and implementation as the components of the teaching practicum assessment were significantly correlated with each other serving hand in hand for a successful assessment. According to Leshem and Bar-Hama (2008), trainees need “explicit criteria for effective teaching in order to identify the quality of their teaching. Their

preferences for assessment show that they regard the observation lesson as both a test and a means for reflection and professional development” (p. 264).

The student teacher, on the other hand, mentioned that the e-portfolio system was useful to the teacher trainees in several ways in her responses to the open-ended questionnaires and during the interview. First of all, it was a tool that disciplines student teachers in the practicum:

*Actually, I personally found this system very complicated at first. I couldn't handle it but when I compare myself with my friends in the face-to-face system I see there is a big gap. I mean this system forces us to study more and be more careful, and this means we're having good experiences.*

Second, it is a useful device to get feedback:

*Our university teachers do not have the chance to observe us, so in this way we're at least able to get feedback. And this helps us shape ourselves as teachers.*

Third, it gives the chance to become more familiar with the technology use in education:

*To speak for myself, I can say that I'm really skilled in file keeping, uploading with the help of this system because I'm not very good at these computer, word files, etc. In this way I searched and learned a lot and improved myself on these things.*

In addition to the advantages, some disadvantages of the e-portfolio system such as lack of necessary attention by teachers and ease of use were mentioned by the student teacher:

*But there's something important that many cooperating teachers in many schools do not pay the necessary attention to this lesson. This eventually makes e-portfolio something done as a matter of form. Teachers don't want to spend time and energy. I think it must be a voluntary practice.*

*I think the beginning stage in the e-portfolio system is complicated. When I first started I was really concerned if I did well or wrong, if my files are uploaded, or if I prepared the right documents, etc. I think it must be reorganized for an ease of use.*

To discuss further, Keçik et al. (2012) found that the e-portfolio application is capable of meeting various needs of the student teachers in the DELT teaching practice such as planning, teaching, and reflection. Similarly, e-portfolio has been found quite useful in terms of using a blog-based teaching (Natesh, 2014), acquisition of teacher reflectivity (Oner & Adadan, 2011), or becoming more autonomous learners and teachers (Yıldırım, 2013).

### **Challenges and Concerns of Distance Teacher Trainees**

A questionnaire tailored to the context of the student teacher indicated some of the problems she experienced throughout her teaching experience. For instance, she was found to be suffering from the following circumstances at all times: classroom management (maintaining discipline), establishing rapport with the pupils, psychological well-being (depression, burnout, etc.), course materials (inadequate, improper, etc.), curriculum, external interruption to the classroom (announcements, etc.), and lack of resources (computer, smart board, etc.). In addition to the questionnaire items, the qualitative data also documented some problems experienced by the student teacher such as using technology in the classroom, beginning the lesson effectively, writing lesson plans within the given time limits, and finding classroom activities that will not bore the students. For example, she explains her problem about using the smart board in her classes as follows:

*My biggest problem was about using the smart board. I experienced it for the first time. I was really ashamed of not being able to use it. The students made fun of me, but I just turned it into a funny activity and we had fun, but anyway, it's really a big shame that I didn't know how to use a smart board.*

In point of fact, many student teachers all over the world (Kwo, 1996; Mau, 1997; Valdez et al., 2000; Veenman, 1984) and in Turkey experience these problems during teaching practice (Aydın & Bahçe, 2001; Korukcu, 2010; Merç, 2010b; Mutlu, 2014). Therefore, it is quite normal that distance teacher trainees suffer from maintaining class discipline, dealing with students, choosing the materials or tasks, etc. Benefiting from technology is another concern for the DELT students. Most of the pre-service EFL teachers at distance higher education context showed more negative attitude toward ICT integration in teaching than their peers in the face-to-face context (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011), and they indicated three problems for technology integration in their teaching experiences: lack of exposure to lessons fully designed with ICT-integration, an exam-based system, and exam-oriented study habits (Hismanoglu, 2012).

Although these concerns are not peculiar to the distance context but valid for all types of student teachers placed for practicum, the findings of this case study were able to document some challenges and concerns of the student teacher in a distance environment. These concerns, wishes, and expectations mentioned by the student teacher, can be listed as follows:

- *We, students in DELT, need to study more than our peers in the face-to-face education as we had lower levels of proficiency in English at the beginning; but I believe that DELT is able to prepare us for this.*
- *I wish we the right to take the classes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades in a face-to-face environment because DELT students, including me, lack presentation skills.*
- *Our teachers at university in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year were very good. I learned a lot from them. If I had the chance to take the practicum course face-to-face, I would benefit a lot from the university supervisors.*

*- I'm disappointed about the fact that we need to learn everything by doing, just reading at home and taking the exams. But I think that we need to improve ourselves, and if you believe in something, you can do it.*

*- Finally I believe that although it has some shortcomings, teaching practice in DELT helps us improve ourselves academically.*

Research has also put forward that the obstacles distance teacher trainees suffer from are not limited to the ones listed here. DELT students as teacher candidates already indicated earlier that they did not possess satisfactory familiarity about writing lesson plans and keeping a practicum portfolio, managing the classroom and lesson time well, relations with coordinator teachers, lack of technological tools in practicum schools, limited supervision, and limited practice occasions (Güven et al., 2012).

## CONCLUSION

Although the practicum in DELT is not problem-free, it is a good opportunity for distance teacher trainees to develop themselves as teachers. The e-portfolio system, in particular, allows for a feedback cycle in addition to its role for assessing and evaluating student teacher performance. However, some forms of refinement is necessary, especially to avoid student teachers' frustration about the necessary documents and for a more user-friendly system. This study also showed that student teachers might benefit from others' feedback on their planning, actual teaching experiences, and reflections on the experiences. Hence, online dialogue journals can be incorporated into the e-portfolio system that will allow distance student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors to view and comment on each other's works as these journals benefit teacher trainees a lot (Hulme & Hughes, 2006). Not only after-lesson reflections but also the in-class activities and teacher behaviors can be shared and discussed by the participants of the practicum via the technology: video-recording of the lessons can be obtained and uploaded to a system for future dialogue.

Moreover, DELT should revise its present program and do its best to supply a training related to technology-integration in the current curriculum both to make students more familiar to the use of e-portfolio system and to encourage them to use technology, which is inevitably a vital language teaching tool nowadays, in their practicum and future teaching experiences.

This study also calls for well-organized training opportunities for the university supervisors and cooperating teachers to serve the distance teacher trainees better. As student teachers in a distance environment are more vulnerable and in need of intimate support, the ones in the mentoring role must be ready to voluntarily assist them with their know-how, positive attitudes, and timely experiences (Yaman & Alkaç, 2010). Also, the mentors should be aware of the anxieties their trainees might experience considering that they might even experience anxiety from time to time, and should try to create a non-threatening and empathetic atmosphere for teaching practice. They should support teamwork, peer-teaching and sharing of ideas, and ensure that they are certainly important for good teaching arises when “the various components of a lesson have been well executed by a trainee, as determined by the supervisor (George Worrell, & Rampersad, 2002, p. 301). In sum, teacher trainers’ ultimate aim should be to meet the expectations of the student teachers were declared by the student teacher in this study at the very beginning of the semester:

*As a teacher candidate, my highest expectation from teaching experience is to gain experience to become a real teacher. I mean, if I am to do this job, I want to be as good as possible: equipped with the necessary know-how and skillful in teaching.*

Furthermore, it is necessary to construct a lucid assessment mechanism is an indispensable measure of practicum. Therefore, the assessment should be used principally as a tool to certify student reflection and development, hence, valuation should not be regarded as the overall concern (Yan & He, 2010). The assessment tools used in DELT are perceived

as useful despite some problems. As soon as these problems are overcome, it will serve student teachers and other parties involved for feedback and assessment purposes.

Finally, this study provides some suggestions for the prospective distance teacher trainees. They should be aware that learning how to teach is a life-long, on-going process and that the practicum is just the first step of a long journey in professional growth. In this journey, they should be familiar with their feelings of anxiety about teaching English, and believe that a certain level of anxiety may help them become more responsible and motivated. They should be sympathetic to their peers and their learners, and reflect on their experiences by documenting their teaching experiences to become more mature both as an individual and as a teacher. Last, the most important suggestion for the DELT teacher trainees comes from the student teacher in this study. She states:

*I exactly advise them [prospective distance teacher trainees] to plan well before the class: making research and reading at least one sample lesson plan. And if they have the chance, they should review the course books beforehand. And more important: even if your cooperating teacher offers them not to attend the classes, they should insist on attending the classes regularly and teach regularly. These will benefit them a lot as they'll discover at the end.*

**Note:** Sample extracts given in the text were originally Turkish. They were translated into English by the researcher.

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