

The Multivoiced Classroom: Microteaching in EFL and CLIL Teacher Training

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Abstract—Studies report that a low level of competence in the foreign language can negatively affect both foreign language teachers' ability to teach in the foreign language, and their perceived teacher self-efficacy. This can be a problem in countries where, as in Spain, many preservice English teachers begin their training with an intermediate to low level of English. This paper supports the view that conducting microteaching sessions can be an effective strategy in the training of prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers in mixed language ability classrooms. In this exploratory qualitative study we examined the processes and mechanisms that enable trainees to develop their own "voices" as EFL instructors. Three focus group interviews were conducted with 13 EFL teacher trainees, with a range of language proficiency levels, in a medium-sized Spanish university. Microteaching was associated with significant improvements in intermediate-level trainees' pedagogical confidence, perceived self-efficacy, and emerging identity as future EFL practitioners. These changes were supported by collaborative group work, structured self- and peer assessment, and guided reflection. Framed within a socio-constructivist approach, microteaching offered a space for experimentation and feedback, enabling students to develop their instructional voice and teaching presence in English. These findings highlight microteaching's value not only as a reflective learning tool, but also as a strategy for reducing the gap between language proficiency and teaching readiness in EFL teacher education. Implications are discussed for the design of language pedagogy courses in mixed-ability contexts.

Index Terms—preservice teachers, EFL, microteaching, feedback, self-efficacy

I. INTRODUCTION

Microteaching has been defined as providing "a scaled-down teaching context where training is reduced in scope, done for a short period of time (usually 10–15 minutes), normally limited to one skill or lesson aspect at a time [...] and the learners being usually fellow trainees" (Hama & Osam, 2021, p. 1). From its origin in Stanford in 1963, it has become a popular instructional strategy both in teacher education in general, and in the training of second/foreign language teachers in particular, because of its ability to facilitate reflective and experiential learning (Cavanaugh, 2022; Mergler & Tangen, 2010). Microteaching can also be conducted online in synchronous formats, a practice which gained significant popularity in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as teacher education programs adapted to new challenges (Lee et al., 2023).

The aim of this paper is to describe specific ways in which the systematic use of microteaching strategies in language pedagogy courses can help to enhance the training of prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers, especially in mixed language ability contexts in which a perceived low level of English negatively affects trainees' teacher self-efficacy, as well as their own identity as potential English teachers. Although the context of this study is teacher education in Spain, its findings may help to shed light on comparable situations in other countries and regions with a wide provision of EFL and CLIL in compulsory education stages, but where teachers do not possess near-native language competence in English (see Richards, 2017).

Previous studies conducted with teacher trainees at our university (Custodio-Espinar & López Hernández, 2021; López-Hernández & Buckingham, 2021, 2024) have found that many trainees, especially those with intermediate and lower language levels (Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels A2-B1), have generally not been exposed to successful and effective models of English language teaching throughout their years of schooling. Furthermore, before beginning their language pedagogy courses in the final years of the degree, lower language-level trainees often do not see themselves as prospective English teachers, despite studying the EFL specialist track (López-Hernández & Buckingham, 2021, 2025). However, this perception is modified after their training in EFL and CLIL pedagogy, where microteaching emerges as the most highly valued instructional methodology.

Unlike most other studies on the topic (see, e.g., Mukuka & Alex, 2024), this exploratory study set out to investigate not the *what* but the *how* and the *why* of microteaching's success. In other words, it was interested in explaining the reasons and enabling factors of microteaching's positive effects on EFL trainee pedagogical competence, teacher self-efficacy and professional identity. To this end, we started with the following research question, which was deliberately given a general and open-ended formulation: In what ways does microteaching and related formative assessments contribute to enhancing the training of intermediate and lower language-level preservice EFL and CLIL teachers?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Role of Language Proficiency*

Language proficiency is widely acknowledged by experts and educators as a critical factor in preparing non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) for their roles as English or CLIL instructors in primary education (Amengual-Pizarro, 2013; Durán-Martínez et al., 2020; Richards, 2017). Indeed, a strong command of English will enable teachers to deliver lessons effectively in English, particularly when adopting a communicative approach (Freeman et al., 2015) or teaching within a CLIL framework (Pérez-Cañado, 2018). Furthermore, as highlighted in multiple studies (e.g., Faez et al., 2019; Morton, 2016), high proficiency in the instructional language enhances teacher efficacy, defined as "individual teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities that are required to attain given educational goals" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1059). Additionally, strong language skills play a pivotal role in shaping teachers' identities as language or CLIL educators (Pennington & Richards, 2016) and fostering their participation in the English Language Teaching (ELT) community (Young et al., 2014), both of which can be adversely impacted by the prevailing native/non-native English teacher dichotomy (Selvi et al., 2023).

In the Spanish context, a number of studies have highlighted that teacher trainees perceive the current teacher education programs as insufficient in preparing them to teach English or use English as a medium of instruction effectively. Specifically, trainees call for enhanced language development, emphasizing communicative practices (Amengual-Pizarro, 2013; Martínez Agudo, 2017), profession-specific language training (Fernández-Viciano & Fernández-Costales, 2017), and greater focus on classroom management skills (Martínez Agudo, 2017). Notably, language improvement courses often lack an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) focus (Torres Zúñiga & Carrasco Flores, 2020).

B. *Microteaching in Teacher Education*

Studies conducted on microteaching experiences suggest that the use of microteaching in preservice teacher education has several significant benefits. Chiefly, it offers trainees opportunities to develop and refine their teaching skills (Mukuka & Alex, 2024; Yan & He, 2017), as well as improve classroom management skills; in this sense it can help bridge the gap between theory and practice (Hama & Osam, 2021). Other reported strengths of microteaching can serve to address several specific challenges facing NNESTs, such as reducing teacher anxiety (Buyukkarci, 2014; Luo & Li, 2024) and increasing teacher self-efficacy (Mergler & Tangen, 2010). Such results also appear to transfer to online microteaching practices (Sezaki et al., 2023). As to its main drawbacks, microteaching is reported to be artificial, of limited connection to actual classroom practice (Yan & He, 2017).

In most contexts, microteaching practices are also linked to a focus on formative assessment and multi-directional feedback and, overall, assume a constructivist vision of such practices (Bozyiğit & Ekşi, 2017). Indeed, when we consider the four traditional stages of microteaching (plan, teach, critique and reteach), it is easy to see how the "critique" stage, when effectively designed, can provide an occasion for effective formative interactions, in which students both receive and provide feedback (Cavanaugh, 2022), and reflectively self-assess their own work (Park, 2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Context and Participants*

The study was conducted at a medium-sized Spanish university where preservice teachers pursue single and double bachelor's degrees in teaching (Pre-primary, Primary, and Sports Science/Primary). Even if students' initial language levels ranged from CEFR B1+ to C1+, they all take an EFL component that leads to a qualification to teach English in primary or pre-primary education. This component includes language improvement courses in the first two years of the program, followed by language pedagogy and CLIL coursework in years 3 and 4. It is during this latter period that students engage in microteaching sessions.

Microteaching is conducted across two semesters, encompassing three to four sessions per student, with small class sizes ranging from 12 to 20 participants. Each microteaching session is centered around a detailed lesson plan on which students receive feedback prior to the microteaching session. Its focus varies but typically includes teaching a language function using the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) lesson structure, combining receptive and productive subskills, using storytelling to present and practice language in pre-primary settings, or employing CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) strategies to teach curricular content in English, for instance, a physical education lesson. Depending on the class size, trainees teach in pairs, groups of three, or individually.

The formative assessment process integrates teacher and peer feedback at different stages, supported by structured checklists. Trainees also engage in self-assessment by reviewing video recordings of their sessions, ensuring a reflective and iterative learning experience. Finally, they are required to summarize their learning process in a reflective essay.

The study included 13 participants, drawn from a total population of approximately 75 students completing their fourth year of teacher training. Recruitment was conducted during a limited window at the beginning of the summer break, a period in which student availability is typically low. As such, convenience sampling was used: participation was open to all students who volunteered. However, sampling also incorporated purposeful elements. In line with the study's focus on mixed-proficiency teacher education, we aimed to include participants from across the three degree programs (Primary, Pre-primary, and Sports/Primary Education) and to prioritize those with intermediate or lower English proficiency. Table 1 presents the participant profiles.

TABLE 1
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Focus group <i>Degree course</i>	Student code	Gender (Male/ Female)	Perceived level of English (CEFR)	Maximum level certified*
FG1 <i>Sports sciences & primary education</i>	S1	F	B2	B1
	S2	M	B2+	B2
	S3	M	B2	B2
	S4	F	B2+	B2
	S5	M	B1	B1
FG2 <i>Primary education</i>	S6	F	B2	B2
	S7	F	B2	B1
	S8	F	B2	B1
	S9	F	B2	none
	S10	F	C1+	C1
FG3 <i>Pre-primary education</i>	S11	F	C1	B2
	S12	F	B2	none
	S13	F	B2	B2

*Certifications include recognized exams by examining bodies such as Cambridge Assessment, Trinity College, or TOEFL.

B. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to generate ideas and hypotheses for further research. Data were collected through three focus group interviews, including two conducted in person and one online. Students were informed of the aims of the study and signed consent forms agreeing to participate in it. A semi-structured outline covered participants' perceptions of lesson planning, microteaching, feedback processes, and overall training outcomes. This outline was originally drafted attending to the main research question of the study, the literature review, and the findings suggested by previous research conducted on the same profile of trainees (López-Hernández & Buckingham, 2021); moreover, a second researcher reviewed the draft to ensure validity. The outline is included in Appendix.

The focus group discussions were transcribed, anonymized, and uploaded to NVivo 14 software for analysis. A blended coding approach was adopted (Azungah, 2018), combining a priori codes derived from the literature review with inductive codes that emerged from the data. The coding process followed Braun and Clarke's (2020) iterative methodology, involving an initial reading of transcripts, comparison and discussion with a fellow researcher, refinement of codes and subcodes, systematic coding of the dataset, and generation of themes and subthemes to construct a narrative, leading to the creation of a thematic map (see Figure 1). In this interpretive understanding of thematic analysis, peer assistance was sought not as a way of ensuring coding reliability or eliminating "bias", but as a way of obtaining an additional subjective perspective on the dataset. Table 2 illustrates the codebook developed for this study, highlighting both a priori and inductive codes, and refined in conversation with the second researcher.

TABLE 2
FINAL CODEBOOK USED IN THE STUDY

A priori	Inductive
Pedagogical knowledge	Transfer
Readiness to teach	Continuity v break
Feedback	Scaffolding
Feelings	Improvement
Level of English	Context and culture
Collaboration	Challenges

IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the narrative generated from a reflective interpretation of students' responses and comments. This is illustrated by means of a visual display, thus employing multi-modality to enhance reader comprehension (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). Additionally, summaries of the main themes and their relations are interspersed with quotes from the focus groups. The quotes have been translated to English from the original (Spanish) by the author.

Figure 2 provides a thematic map summarizing the main themes, sub-themes and their relationships, as interpreted by the research team. Solid lines connect themes (round bubbles) with subthemes (square bubbles); broken lines connect themes with other themes, and arrows suggest a process. Color has been used to suggest overall interviewer attitude or feeling: red is negative, yellow is neutral, and green is positive.

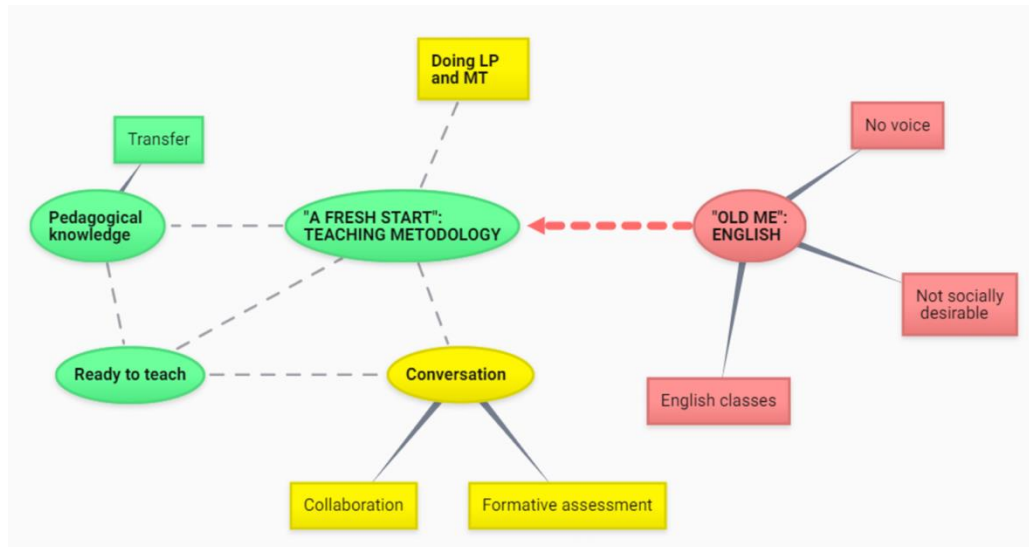


Figure 1. Effects of Microteaching on Preservice Teachers

Firstly, all three focus group interviews revealed a strong dichotomy between English improvement courses, perceived as “old”, and the “new” or fresh opportunity provided by teaching methodology courses. Intermediate-level trainees (B2, B2+) reported negative past experiences as EFL students and a feeling of lack of preparation to teach in English and, in some cases, held a negative perception of EFL teachers in primary schools.

FG3, S12: I’ll be honest: I don’t like English – I guess I wasn’t taught in a good way. Even if I had CEFR B2 level, when I was told I had to do a microteaching, I panicked. “How on earth am I going to teach in English?”

FG 2, S8: When starting the degree, almost everyone was afraid of English. They’d say “I want to be a teacher: Math, Spanish, and so on, but not English. English is something that is just there”.

However, language and CLIL methodology training were perceived as something “new”—challenging yet distinct from their previous, less positive language learning experiences.

FG2, S9: My friends and I have talked about this. We used to see teaching English as something boring – teaching grammar all day as we did in school. Now we have seen that English can be made dynamic and fun.

Microteaching was particularly effective in this context. Notwithstanding the “artificiality” of the setting, students reported learning about classroom management and materials preparation.

FG1, S2: [Delivering microteachings] you become much more aware of the materials you need to teach a specific content in English, which is a lot more than in Spanish.

FG2, S6: I believe that it’s in these courses [English teaching methodology] where we have most learnt about classroom management.

As a result of the fresh opportunities provided by the foreign language pedagogy training, and microteaching in particular, students demonstrated greater teacher self-efficacy. Moreover, they appeared to have developed their own “voice” as potential English teachers.

FG2, S7: I believe that I am ready now. Maybe not a year ago, but now, after these courses and projects, I feel a lot safer.

FG3, S12: After [this training] I say to myself, “If I have to teach English in the future, this is how I like it done”.

Still, some students expressed what is an important caveat in these results: their doubt that such benefits reached all students and, especially, the lowest-language level ones.

FG3, S11: All these projects have been a huge challenge for our peers with a low level of English. Even now, I feel that some of them are a bit lost.

Moving on to the factors and processes that have enabled student learning and transformation, perhaps the most important one is summed up in the concept, “conversation”, which reflects modeling, multi-directional feedback, and collaborative practices. Indeed, students valued formative interactions such as modeling, receiving teacher feedback or self-assessing using the video recording.

FG1, S1: You pick up ideas and strategies from other microteachings; for instance, attention grabbers like asking questions or playing a video at the start of a lesson.

FG2, S7: Being told what you’re doing well is helpful and motivates you to want to know how you could improve.

FG1, S3: Watching the recording was very useful. You can see how you move, how fast you talk, whether you give examples...

As to peer feedback, students appeared to have mixed feelings about its effectiveness. On the one hand, they valued it as a “softer”, potentially more supportive voice than the instructor’s (S9). On the other, they expressed concerns about situations where there may be a lack of personal rapport and trust between feedback providers and receivers (S6).

FG2, S8: I don't feel comfortable providing feedback. I feel that I need to be constantly thinking about what I say so that it's not taken the wrong way.

Finally, respondents in the three focus groups connected the effectiveness of their microteaching experience to collaboration, both in terms of team teaching and of belonging to a larger, supportive class group.

FG3, S11: This year our MT was in pairs. Working with someone else can help you create and organize materials and face the class. I learnt a lot more this way.

FG1, S3: We all felt comfortable in our groups. I could say, "well, if ever I get stuck or fumble for the right word, no one will judge me".

FG2, S6: The small class size also helped. We felt like it was our "English support group".

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are in line with previous research indicating that the language proficiency of Spanish teacher trainees significantly influences their teaching competence and teacher self-efficacy (TSE) (Amengual-Pizarro, 2013; Fernández-Viciano & Fernández-Costales, 2017). These studies underscore how lower proficiency often results in reduced confidence and reluctance to use English as a classroom language—issues that were echoed in our participants' early attitudes. However, an unexpected insight emerged regarding the TSE and professional identity of upper-intermediate-level trainees (CEFR B2) prior to the language pedagogy component. Despite pursuing an EFL specialization, many initially lacked confidence in their instructional abilities and viewed English as a secondary subject area. This finding suggests that even upper-intermediate-level trainees may not perceive themselves as legitimate language teachers until they are provided with authentic, scaffolded teaching opportunities. In this sense, microteaching functioned not only as a method for developing specific teaching skills, but also as a structured environment in which emerging teacher identities could be explored and affirmed.

This transformation in self-perception can be better understood through the lens of Bandura's (2009) theory of self-efficacy, which sheds light on the mechanisms through which microteaching contributes to professional growth. First, enactive mastery experiences, achieved through repeated practice in microteaching sessions, allowed trainees to build confidence in their ability to teach English effectively. Second, vicarious experiences, provided through peer modeling, enabled trainees to learn by observing and reflecting on their peers' teaching practices. Third, verbal persuasion in the form of constructive, informative feedback from instructors and peers reinforced their sense of capability. Finally, psychological and affective states were a significant factor. Many trainees reported feeling a sense of belonging and team support during microteaching sessions, stating that they "didn't feel judged." These emotional and social elements contributed to a positive and secure learning environment, further strengthening their confidence as prospective EFL teachers.

Another key strength of microteaching, as revealed in this study, is its emphasis on collaboration. Co-teaching partnerships emerged as a powerful mechanism for building stronger self-efficacy, promoting more positive attitudes toward the teaching profession, and enhancing the development of pedagogical knowledge (Sasson & Malkinson, 2021). This reflective dialogue emerging from co-teaching partnerships is consistent with Laurillard's Conversational Framework (2012, p. 225), that conceptualizes collaborative learning about teaching as a conversation in the light of feedback from learners' performance (in this case, peer and instructor feedback).

Overall, as argued by Hama and Osam (2021, p. 2), microteaching exemplifies a social constructivist approach to teacher education that fosters collaborative and task-focused dialogue, while simultaneously facilitating social relationships that help reshape teachers' self-perceptions. In this context, microteaching and related formative interactions support a dialogic pedagogy, providing opportunities for all students to engage and ultimately trust their own voices, regardless of their previous schooling and cultural capital (Dysthe, 2011). In this sense, creating opportunities for "multi-voiced" classrooms should be a critical concern when training prospective EFL and CLIL teachers in mixed-language ability settings.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how microteaching and related formative assessments contribute to enhancing the training of intermediate- and lower-proficiency preservice EFL and CLIL teachers. Results show that these practices play a key role in supporting teacher self-efficacy, pedagogical competence, and professional identity, particularly through structured opportunities for practice, collaborative learning, and formative interactions.

Microteaching proves to be a powerful tool for training English language teachers, offering a valuable opportunity for trainees to transition from language learners to confident instructors. This shift in perspective is especially significant, as it marks a clear departure from previous often negative experiences with language learning. As such, incorporating microteaching early in the teacher training process is highly recommended to maximize its impact.

Moreover, our research suggests that microteaching should be integrated with strategies that capitalize on formative assessments and promote collaboration and co-teaching. These strategies not only support the development of teaching skills but also contribute to the growth and self-assurance of future educators, as well as to their own identity as prospective EFL and CLIL practitioners.

While this study highlights microteaching's potential benefits, there are notable limitations that should be addressed in future research. The most significant one lies in the sample, which included very few low language-level participants. Future studies could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, in order to better understand the predicament of those trainees who are farthest away from near-native level. Moreover, while microteaching emerged as a central influence in students' reflections, we cannot rule out the impact of other factors—such as teaching placements, mentoring experiences, or end-of-degree maturity—that may also have contributed to their professional development. Therefore, more robust and valid instruments should be employed to measure possible increases in teacher self-efficacy among participants. These tools could provide more accurate insights into the effectiveness of microteaching in enhancing trainees' confidence and teaching abilities. Finally, a longitudinal study surveying trainees before and after completing the three-course language pedagogy component would provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of microteaching on teaching practices and professional development.

APPENDIX. FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- Describe your level of English, as well as previous experiences as a foreign language learner.
- Do you feel prepared to teach English? Why or why not?

PART ONE: LESSON PLANNING AND MICROTEACHING

- Tell me about your lesson plans (LPs) and microteachings (MTs). How did you feel preparing them and delivering them? (LP process, working collaboratively, "teaching" your peers)
- How did your level of English affect the process? (Possible insecurity, additional challenges)
- You have conducted several MTs. Have you noticed any improvements between the first and the last ones? What did you learn from watching other MTs.? Please give specific examples.

PART TWO: FEEDBACK AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- How useful did you find your teachers' feedback (on LP, on MT). And your peers'? What about self-assessment watching the recording?
- As a future teacher, do you consider that these courses have taught you about how to provide effective feedback to students? Give specific examples.

IN CONCLUSION...

- In general terms, to what extent have LPs and MTs contributed to your training as a teacher?
- Please give any suggestions on how to improve the use of LP and MT in the TEFL courses

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