

# Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Micro-teaching Experience vs. School Practicum Realities

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## ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to young learners requires pre-service teachers to be prepared by combining practice and theory. In Turkey, pre-service teachers in many education faculties participate in school practicums to develop their teaching competencies before graduation through teaching practices and observations. In addition, English Language and Teaching Departments include Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) as a compulsory course through which students learn about the theory and practice of micro-teaching. This study aimed to investigate the extent to which micro-teaching practices were effective in preparing university students for the challenges of teaching EFL to young learners. With this in mind, this study attempts to answer the following research questions: 1. What aspects of teaching English to young learners are the most challenging for pre-service teachers and micro-teaching students? 2. Is there any difference between the opinions of pre-service teachers and micro-teaching students regarding their teaching experiences? The researcher followed a mixed-method procedure to explore the opinions and experiences of pre-service teachers and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders at a state University in Turkey. Qualitative data were gathered through a questionnaire, and quantitative data were obtained from pre-service teachers' observations of the school practicum. Forty pre-service teachers and 40 3<sup>rd</sup> graders taking the TEYL course were involved in the study. The survey results of the two groups were analysed using the SPSS program to determine whether there was a significant difference. Content analysis was applied to explain the qualitative data, which helped us understand the quantitative data in detail. Both groups thought that teaching writing and speaking was the most challenging part of teaching practice, and they marked using technology as the least challenging experience.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language; pre-service teachers; teaching practice; learners