A new decade for social changes
Reflection on action: peer micro-teaching process of prospective EFL teachers and class teachers focusing on mother tongue teaching

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Abstract. Teaching experience plays a productive role in teacher professional development, so it is necessary to examine such experience systematically, either as reflection on action or reflection in action. In a sense, reflection has the power to help the teacher connect experience and theoretical knowledge and to use each area of expertise more efficiently (Knezevic and Scholl 1996). Therefore, reflection is an important ‘tool’ to articulate how we know what we do when we teach (ibid.). For this reason, micro-teaching is an opportunity to link theory and practice, critically evaluate one’s teaching skills and to discuss alternative approaches and solutions for the specific teaching context with peer colleagues. This paper will focus, firstly, on the micro-teaching process by explaining the background of this procedure and then by giving the detailed description of the two micro-teaching sessions conducted in January and February 2020 at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac, Serbia. Secondly, it will consider giving feedback to others, in person and online, using video records, self-evaluation and reflection in peer-teaching process. Finally, the paper will evaluate two peer micro-teaching sessions with a focus on student-student, interaction in university teaching context and advantages and disadvantages in teaching English as a foreign language on one side, and Serbian as the mother tongue on the other.

Keywords. Micro-teaching, Serbian as mother tongue, English as a foreign language, university students.

1. Peer micro-teaching process: research background

According to Cohen (1998), peer micro-teaching process is an opportunity for cultural exchange and at the same time target language practice. Further, Ramani (1987) points out that one of the merits of micro-teaching sessions, either in foreign language or mother tongue teaching, is that it moves from theory to practice and then again from practice to theory. That is, the trainees conduct a lesson and then evaluate it from the theoretical point of view either by using a video, on-line feedback or face-to-face feedback. Then they evaluate their teaching from the theoretical point of view and reflect on the whole process of teaching (methods, principles,
didactic approaches, materials, activities, teacher talking time - TTT, students’ talking time – STT, etc.). Therefore, students are more motivated if the organization of university lessons uses incentive elements that are an integral part of the approach to classroom teaching or planned learning situations (simulations, dynamic alternation of different methods and forms of work, use of modern digital information and communication technology, etc.) (Dimitrijevic and Ilic, 2020). In line with the previous statement, authors believe that micro-teaching sessions strengthen students’ collaborative skills and self-confidence in relation to exclusively individual mastering of materials and subject tasks (ibid.).

Video can be played and replayed as often as necessary and in that way it can help trainee teachers to discover even small details about the particular lesson (ibid.). On the other hand, Ho (1995) claims that teacher trainees who have recorded their class sessions, seldom have time to go back to review these records after they have made them. Hence, while video records are effective ways to help teachers reflect, they are also time consuming because these reflections have to end up in a report of some sort – one more task for the micro-teacher (Ho 1995). Cullen (1991) does not take into account negative aspects of video recordings and states that the main purpose of using classroom video recordings in training is to inspire greater self-awareness among trainees, so that they can reflect and evaluate their teaching more objectively. Therefore, combining video records and online feedback (using PebblePad or similar tool) with face-to-face feedback may be an efficient mean of sharing reflections with peer colleagues (Cirkovic-Miladinovic and Dimitrijević, 2020).

In terms of peer response, Hansen and Liu (2005:31) define it as the “use of learners as sources of information” in such a way that “learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher”. Peer response may be conducted by means of online or face-to-face feedback. According to DiGiovani and Nagaswami’s research (2001) students felt more comfortable in online peer review and they found it more interesting while in terms of face-to-face feedback students pointed out that they received more useful information and that they preferred to give feedback in this way. “I like face-to-face feedback better because it is easier to give and to ask explanations of a certain moment that occurred in a session during the micro-teaching process” (a student’s reflection on micro-teaching). One of the advantages of online peer review is that students are focused on the task and what is more teachers can monitor students’ interaction more easily comparing to the case when students talk to each other in the classroom and only bits of conversation can be heard (DiGiovani and Nagaswami 2001). Online peer review was more used from March 2020 and 2020/2021 school year because of the Corona virus pandemic and it is in current use even in this school year 2021/2022. Thus, online communication allows students to respond more freely and to work at their own pace, in their own time, safe at home without fear of getting infected. Thus, both online and face-to-face feedbacks provide possibilities of a valuable group work which gives an opportunity for negotiation of meaning (e.g. in Nunan, 1988). Thus, this paper will focus on both face to face and online peer review and students’ reflection on their own teaching skills.

Nevertheless, “many trainers have expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of microteaching because the skills practiced cannot be satisfactorily isolated from a real language learning context” (Cripwell and Geddes, 1982: 235). Another possible problem in peer review might be that some students may feel uncomfortable in giving feedback to others. For example, the Chinese students in Carson and Nelson’s study in 1996 tended to withhold critical comments (Rollinson, 2005). This was sometimes the case in our micro-teaching group that participated in this research. Perhaps, the reason for withholding comments may be that not many students have strategy training knowledge in order to provide each other with useful suggestions (Cohen 1998). Furthermore, while Assinder (1991) states that peer teaching led to a greater motivation,
sense of progress and self-esteem, Sprat and Leung (2000: 224) argue that “peer teaching is not sufficient in itself to produce these effects”. They suggest that peer teaching needs good preparation, discussion with students and guidelines by the teacher. Therefore, in the same manner, Rollinson (2005) states that only if the class is adequately set-up and trained for the micro-teaching process, the benefits of the peer feedback activity may be fully realized.

In spite of the limitations of the peer micro-teaching process there may be some positive applications within the language teaching context. For example, peer feedback might provide trainees with some novel ideas by sharing responsibilities with colleagues of the same status (Vacilotto and Cummings 2007). Further, according to Edge (1984) one of the benefits of micro-teaching is that even a short period of teaching in highly unnatural conditions can motivate useful discussion among participants. Hence, he adds that in micro-teaching sessions trainees are able to experience the techniques being used from a learner’s point of view which is also valuable experience. According to Dimitrijevic and Ilic (2020: 422), innovation and specific modelling of university literature classes for students is an important precondition for a higher level of achievement in the final years of study within the methodological practicum of teaching Serbian language as a mother tongue and literature because it facilitates students’ upcoming preparation and implementation of practical activities in preschools and schools. In the same manner, students prepare for future teaching of English as a foreign language with one additional requirement – they have to speak English at least at C1 level.

In terms of the teaching context at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, we may point out that we educate class teachers (they teach students from 7 to 11 years old in primary school), preschool teachers and boarding school teachers. In addition, we have a special group of students who, after passing the entrance English exam, may choose certain group of subjects and profile themselves as English language teachers for young learners from 7 to 11.

For this reason, we have chosen two groups of participants for the micro-teaching study, class teachers and English language teachers. The process of peer micro-teaching has provided an opportunity for the participants to be teachers and learners at the same time. Each participant of the study was, at some stage, “materials writer, problem solver, expert, technician and evaluator. This multiplicity of roles further increased self-confidence and respect for peers” (Assinder, 1991: 226).

2. Teaching context and lesson focus

It is interesting to consider at this point that both micro-teaching sessions (MT1 and MT2), were conducted in January and February 2020 at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, both had had the same teaching context and the same lesson focus. The reason for choosing the same teaching context and lesson focus was that we believed that one 15-minute micro-teaching session was not enough for the micro-teacher to take a critical, clear, and constructive approach to planning, teaching and evaluating either L1 (Serbian as mother tongue thought by class teachers) or L2 (English as a foreign language thought by English language teachers) teaching practice in the specific teaching context. Also, if a micro-teacher wants to develop an ability to reflect on his/her own practice and to give constructive feedback to others then the amount of time to be allotted on the micro-teaching process should be taken into consideration. This idea finds an echo in Cripwell and Geddes (1982: 232) article saying that it is difficult to see how micro-teaching can give much help with the improving of teaching skills that are observable only in the real classroom situation, “particularly if trainees are teaching a ‘micro-class’ of other trainees” (ibid.). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to point out to major benefits of micro-teaching at the university teaching context as well as to detect drawbacks that arise in such
processes. The other crucial thing was to compare and contrast teaching Serbian as L1 and English as L2 language.

Accordingly, in order to present ideas of our participants and their teaching reflections, we have chosen two groups of students to participate in this research. One group of students was the group of future English teachers and the other group was consistent of class teachers with the focus on their teaching Serbian as L1. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on reflection provided by two students, two micro-teachers, one is a future class teacher who will teach Serbian as L1 to young learners (Student A), and the other is a future English teacher (Student B). While analyzing both micro-teaching sessions, we will point out to the similarities and differences between the two groups of students who participated in the study.

Micro-teaching sessions took place at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac in Serbia. Lesson focus for both groups had two strands 1) interaction between students and their motivation to cooperate while working together and 2) advantages and disadvantages in teaching English as a foreign language on one side, and Serbian as the mother tongue on the other. The importance of productive group interaction and productive response and revision during the micro-teaching session is highlighted by Rollinson (2005). Senior (1997) supports the above statements by pointing out that experience teachers defined the quality of their classes in terms of class cohesion. The quality of class interaction and class cohesion seemed very important to evaluate so for that reason we chose student-student interaction for the lesson focus. One more reason for choosing this lesson focus was to develop and enhance cooperation and collaboration of all participants taking part in the session. The other focus was to find out the similarities and differences between teaching English as L2 and Serbian as L1. Hence, we will present two micro-teaching sessions for the purpose of this paper, one has been conducted by a Student A from the group of class teachers and the other was conducted by a Student B from the group of English language teachers. Both students agreed that we can use their reflection diaries in order to point out to major aspects of reflection-on-action in the micro-teaching process depending on the subject participants had thought.

3. Method and research results

3.1 Reflection on micro-teaching session 1 (MT1)

Ur (1996) suggests that a teacher should advance in professional expertise and knowledge by using own teaching experience and reflection as the main tools for personal progress. Further, Ur (ibid.) explains that teacher development takes place when teachers consciously take advantage of such resources to enhance their own teaching skills. Therefore, one of the most important bases for professional development is teacher’s own reflection.

Scrivener (1994) also supports the idea of professional development through one’s own self-evaluation. According to Scrivener (ibid.) learning teaching is a desire for professional improving by examining what happened in the class. He suggests that teachers should consider rationale for their practices asking themselves questions like: “What did happen in that class? What was I like as a teacher? Did I enable learning or prevent it? Why did I do the things I did? What were the other options – the ones that I did not take?” (Scrivener, 1994: 195). Hence, cooperation and collaboration between micro-teachers during the micro-teaching sessions may be an opportunity for heightened reflection and for developing knowledge of teaching skills.

Twelve participants were included in this study, that is, ten trainees and two professors who were monitoring the sessions (the professor of Serbian language and the professor of English). Five students were part of the group of class teachers teaching Serbian. The other five students were part of the group of future English language teachers. Both groups conducted two micro-teaching sessions. The major topic: Applying reflection-on-action as an integral part of
classroom activities in teaching Serbian/English to young learners (YLs) was chosen for both micro-teaching sessions (MT1 and MT2) for the purpose of making participants of this study reflect on the MT1 and then to improve and change MT2 according to peers’ and their own observations. Students, prospective teachers, chose the lesson topics for each lesson of Serbian/English language and the aim they would like to achieve with their young learners. While teaching, students-participants practiced appropriate question forms, language and syntax forms while talking about a piece of literature in Serbian lessons or English language vocabulary and grammar in English lesson. The aim was also to enable participants (university students) to become independent in the process of learning and teaching and to accept additional responsibility for making decisions in terms of self-directed learning while teaching (Lake 1997). Lesson aims for the MT sessions were raising students’ awareness about benefits and drawbacks of reflection and self-assessment and using these in teaching practice. Thereby, the purpose of both processes was also taken into consideration.

In terms of class feedback for MT1, it was organized as group feedback. Namely, two groups of five peers agreed on the feedback that was later presented to a Student A/Student B (micro-teachers). One of the group comments to Student A was: “We think that you have covered successfully on what you have focused on and that the methodological approach to discussing literature with YLs was also appropriate” and the other group comment was “We believe that you should have given a bit more explanation of the meaning of key words, just for YLs to understand the topic. You had good presentation, organization, and no stress was visible”. It may be said that giving feedback to a colleague, while working in a small group, up to 10 people, is more free, open and relaxed. In Edge’s (1984) view the key to the success of the micro-teaching is the feedback that was focused on teaching techniques, not on the personal criticism of the student-teacher who had carried out the task. Further, small group discussions seem to be more appropriate for the participants to state and exchange frank opinions. In addition, it is important to express criticisms and suggestions concerning teaching techniques in a clear, comprehensible, yet tactful way. However, one of the possible problems is that teachers may feel endangered by their peers’ comments. Another problem might be that some members of the training group are often unwilling to objectively give their comments of a colleague’s performance (ibid.). For this reason, Student A said in her reflection diary that she felt that comments given to her in written form after the session were in a way general and did not cover the quality of teaching methodology concerning the lesson focus. She also added: “My peers’ blunt opinions and critics (not only praising) are something I need in order to improve both the concepts and my teaching methodology”. (Student A’s Reflection diary, 24/01/2020).

Similarly, Student B pointed out in her reflection diary: “My peers’ online feedback after my first MT session was in the same manner: general and not really concentrated on my lesson focus, that is, classroom interaction. Only one of my peers wanted more information about my lesson in order to give more detailed comments on my video clip and my lesson focus. I thought that online feedback would provide an opportunity for my peers to be more relaxed in giving their comments but it did not happen with all my peers. Even so, I felt the need to be open and to say to my colleagues what I mean. Nevertheless, giving comments to others and receiving comments from my peer colleagues, was very useful experience, especially because we used PebblePad for the first time. That was awesome.” (Student B’s Reflection diary, 27/01/2020). In this way, students learned about the peer review process face-to-face and online by the use of computer interactive software PebblePad (DiGovani and Nagaswami, 2001) and became, in a way, more efficient in using it later, during MT2.
Let us now turn to editing video clip. Students in both groups used their video clips in order to evaluate their peers’ teaching and their own teaching process. Process of editing video clip was useful experience too, because the whole process made students focus on certain details concerning the lesson. Student A said: “It also helped me reflect better and assess my own teaching practice by thinking about the priorities I want to make in my future professional development”. Further, using video in the micro-teaching process helped students to explore new ideas and possible changes in their teaching techniques (Cullen 1991). Student B added: Actually, I have noticed some details that I would not be able to notice if we did not use video recording in the first place”. Thus, in the first micro-teaching session students were given a chance to plan, teach and observe (reflect) and the second micro-teaching session gave them another opportunity to re-plan, re-teach and re-observe (Brown, 1975).

3.2 Reflection on micro-teaching session 2 (MT2)

According to O’Neill (1991) even the best teachers cannot have the full insight in what works or does not work for their students. His suggestion for teachers is to try out various new ideas. Micro-teaching process can provide such an opportunity as well as action research defined by Hopkins (1985) as a kind of research in which teachers look critically at their own classrooms in order to improve their teaching skills. Therefore, second micro-teaching session was an opportunity for students to reflect on MT1, to improve their lesson outcomes and to enhance their teaching skills in MT2. Evidently, it is not enough to practice teaching skills in only two micro-teaching sessions, that was not the plan at all, these two micro-teaching sessions were only a small segment of many practice lessons our students have during their four-year study.

As it was previously pointed out, the teaching context and the lesson focus were the same for both micro-teaching sessions. The reason for this was that we wanted to give students enough space and time to reflect on the MT1, to exchange feedback with their peers, in person or online and then to improve certain aspects of their lesson in MT2. Thus, students were able to analyze and reflect on their teaching ‘performance’ in MT1 session in their Reflection diaries and to plan another session (MT2) with the focus on weak points in their teaching.

In terms of feedback, according to participants’ reports, face-to-face feedback was a remarkable experience in comparison to feedback in written form after MT1. Student A stated: “I felt more confident to ask explanations from the micro-teacher who conducted the session and then to give feedback. What is more, it was easier for me to give rationale for my micro-teaching session in order to make clear why I conducted certain activity in that particular way. In case of online feedback, we had to exchange many messages in order to talk to each other or explain the reasons why we did what we did”. Giving and receiving face-to-face feedback confirmed that peer response can create a rich source of information about ELT practice and enhance intercultural communication and give students a sense of group cohesion (Hansen and Liu, 2005). In addition, face-to-face feedback after MT2 was more useful in terms of friendly communication that pointed out both weaknesses and strengths of teaching practice and “thus helped peers see both gaps and positive aspects in their own lessons and practices of which they were not previously aware” (Vacilotto and Cummings, 2007: 157). However, only 7 students gave their opinions about others teaching in the form of online feedback, and only one of them gave comments concerning the wanted lesson focus (“Good students’ interaction, in the lesson, for example, I said something and Student C said something opposite and you asked Student D to comment on our ideas, beliefs, and so on. I think that we were very productive in terms of exchanging ideas and discussing our teaching skills”) (Student B’s Reflection diary,
Hence, “even with some disadvantages, peer feedback helped me recognize my weaknesses and my strengths as a teacher and to be open to innovative ideas” (ibid.).

According to Caulk (1994) peer readers can provide useful feedback. 89% of his students made comments he felt were useful. He found very little bad advice. What is more, he found that mentor’s feedback was rather general, whereas student responses were more specific. This is another argument in favor of peer feedback which we found during this study very useful in order to move on to the next stage of professional development.

Yet again, editing video clip after the second micro-teaching session was an efficient way in helping students to reflect and to assess their own teaching performance by identifying significant moments that occurred in their sessions. This time it was much easier for them to edit a video clip because they have already done it after the first MT session. However, the major problem according to the students’ reports and diaries was to choose 2 minutes’ significant moments of their sessions for PebblePad page bearing in mind that this would lead to considerable variations in interpretation depending on what was being recorded at any given point in the lesson. In fact, video recordings proved once again that it is an efficient technique for noticing significant moments in the session. Although video recordings are very practical in terms of re-observing, these recordings present sometimes one-eared or one-eyed view of the class, and both what trainees hear or see and what they have to ignore at any particular moment may lead to a distorted record of reality (Cripwell and Geddes, 1982). In order to suppress this, we used reflection diaries of all participants and drew overall conclusions in the end.

4. Reflection on action: giving feedback to peer micro-teachers

For the micro-teacher teaching has a twofold intention: that his learners learn while he learns to teach. For this reason, giving and receiving feedback from peer colleagues is an occasion whereby micro-teachers help each other and learn by teaching (Mynard and Almarzonqi, 2006).

The next point we would like to make is that some students during these two MT sessions felt confident in giving feedback to others. This perhaps has to do with their practical experience in former years of study at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina (at each study year students go to schools and have practice classes with young learners) or maybe with students’ character (being open to new ideas and suggestions and willing to state an opinion). In the process of giving feedback to others some students tried to concentrate on the focus that a micro-teacher chose for his session. For example, student A wanted comment on error correction, classroom management, timing, and Student C’s online comment was: “Activities were well planned and organized as well as classroom management (this was one of your focus area). Also, I want to add that correcting errors was very successful. You've made your point and aims were completed. Furthermore, timing was also well organized for the activities”.

Then, student D wanted feedback on several things: interaction between the teacher and students, interaction between students, classroom management and teacher’s guiding and monitoring. This was a comment given to student D: “In my opinion, you should have less focus areas in order to be in a position to monitor your improvement as a teacher. Otherwise, you can lose the impression of your improvement” (Student B’s online comment).

Student C wanted feedback on time management, student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction so one of the comments was: “I like the way you teach because you encourage your students all the time and that is the gist in the classroom. Your students do not feel that they are inferior to their teacher. Then, your energy is very supportive too. That is, when a teacher is willing to teach students, supports them constantly, then students will be more motivated to learn! In this way you have achieved your lesson plan and enhanced your focus
area” (Student D’s comment in his Reflection diary on 31/01/2020). Student E’s comment in a diary was: “The whole process of giving feedback to others, either face-to-face or online, helped me to consider the main aspects of ELT practice and with wisdom of hindsight, I would say, to enhance teaching methods. Also, on a more positive note, I believe that my peers and I learnt from our mistakes and what is more, we realized our strengths that we were not aware of before the micro-teaching process”.

Having all previously said in mind, micro-teaching sessions are useful means of teaching improvement and reflection practice. Either face-to-face or online, our students had the chance to perform, to teach, in front of their peers and to practice reflection on action, that is, to reflect after the session by the help of peers’ comments and the university professor as well. After all, teaching is a public, not a private activity (Harmer, 1995).

5. Pedagogical implications

There is no doubt that micro-teaching is a well-established and highly valuated teacher education technique that allows experimentation as a means of developing professional action (Wallace, 1991). In our case, micro-teaching study process provided students a chance to learn from preparing and presenting their own materials and to learn from listening to other peers’ presentations. In addition, teaching peers, either in Serbian or English session, was an extremely valuable experience worth going through it again (students’ feedback).

However, peers are often inconsistent in playing their roles because the situation is too remote from their own personalities and experience. So, for this reason, trainees and micro-teachers need some preparation before conducting the session. This may be done by a teacher trainer who would conduct a session and in that way introduce the point of micro-teaching and a lesson focus. According to teacher trainer’s example micro-teachers would have clearer ‘picture’ what they are expected to do later in their sessions. Another possibility might be to teach the same lesson two times but to a different group. This would be useful experience because not two classes are ever the same and a micro-teacher would have better insight into his achievements.

In order to point out to major advantages and disadvantages on micro-teaching experience, we made the following table (Table 1) according to students’ reflections registered in their reflective diaries.

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<th>Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of peer micro-teaching process</th>
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<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
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## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say that both micro-teaching groups had a valuable experience during the micro-teaching process. Major advantages for both groups were: improving the teaching skills, building up confidence, full student participation, practicing time management, and availability of an expert supervision by the university professor. The only advantage that was different from English language teachers, and was pointed out by class teachers, was that of teaching in Serbian – mother tongue, which was a very important advantage in terms of forming questions, praising students, discussion with them about the story, more fluent speaking in the class and visible confidence by the participants while teaching. English language teachers pointed out that, except the advantages that are relevant for both groups, their major advantage was in using teaching aids and variety of activities available on the internet in English.

On the other hand, class teachers said that they noticed disadvantages in the following aspects: it was more difficult to form a proper question in order to elicit students’ answers in terms of didactic rules, students needed more time to read the story, peers gave more profound answers than young learners would give, some stories were not so motivating for children and illustrating with examples and connecting the content to other familiar stories was also an issue. English language teachers had the following concerns: how to organize a proper activity for young learners, how to form a proper, grammatically correct question in English, it is more difficult to give explanations in simple language, fluency was in question all the time, teaching in English as L2 was a major problem to concentrate on teaching skills, illustrating with examples in terms of young learners’ language level, and how to motivate young learners to speak only English during a lesson.

To sum up, according to our participants’ beliefs, micro-teaching process made students build on their teaching experience and bring about improvement in both Serbian and EFL practice by reflecting on the sessions they have conducted. Both groups agreed that face-to-face feedback was more friendly and that online feedback demanded more messages to be exchanged. Students also reported that they enjoyed sharing ideas on teaching with peers and discussing about certain situations that occurred during the lesson. Moreover, this experience helped them to build confidence, increase self-esteem and to enhance team-working skills. Above all, participants pointed out that making friends with their peers during this study was the most precious reword they have ever had.

<table>
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<th>English language teachers</th>
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<td>Improves the teaching skills</td>
<td>Organize a proper activity for young learners</td>
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<td>Build up confidence</td>
<td>Forming a proper question in English and only then to think about didactic rules</td>
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<td>Full student participation</td>
<td>Explanation is more difficult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practicing time management</td>
<td>Fluency is in question</td>
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<td>Expert supervision involved</td>
<td>Teaching in English as L2 – major problem</td>
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<td>Skills in using teaching aids and variety of activities available on the internet</td>
<td>Illustrating with examples in terms of young learners’ language level, sometimes not much is possible</td>
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<td>Face-to-face feedback was more friendly than online feedback which was time consuming</td>
<td>Motivate young learners to speak only English during a lesson</td>
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References


