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Vietnamese In-service Teachers' Perspectives towards Micro-teaching Component of a Professional Development Program

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Abstract

Since its inception, micro-teaching has been widely used as an important component of pre-service teacher training programs. It provides prospective teachers with valuable opportunities to develop effective teaching strategies and involves them in 'real' classroom experiences. However, little attention is paid to investigating the implication of micro-teaching in training programs for in-service teachers. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the attitudes of in-service teachers in a local area in Vietnam regarding the micro-teaching component of a four-week training program. This program consists of four phases: Face-to-face training, Online learning, Micro-teaching, and a Teaching Field trip. The data was collected from 103 in-service teachers who participated in the course. A questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions yielding both quantitative and qualitative data was used for data collection. The results indicated an overall positive attitude towards micro-teaching experiences besides some worth-addressing concerns. The study then proposed some recommendations for an improved version of the training program.

Keywords: micro-teaching, in-service teachers, professional development

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Introduction

Apparently, teacher quality has long become a topic of interest in many countries. Especially, with the changing roles and functions of schools, the need for in-service teacher education should not be underestimated. Numerous studies have highlighted that the key to enhance teacher's quality relies on effective professional development program (Guskey, 2003). In Vietnam, since the official launch of Vietnam's English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) in 2012 by Ministry of Education and Training, teacher quality has received more attention. ETCF requires that among the competence related to the knowledge of subject, knowledge of teaching, and knowledge of learners, teachers are supposed to possess a positive attitude towards continuous professional development. In order to equip teachers with these areas of knowledge, the Vietnam National Foreign Language 2020 Project, aiming to improve effectively the quality of English language learning and teaching across all school levels in Vietnam, has provided many in-service teacher training programs. In these programs, teachers are assisted to achieve their required standards in English competence according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and improve their pedagogical skills. One longitudinal program involving local teachers in many different public schools in Vietnam has been carried out to train in-service teachers how to teach with the new series of the textbook developed by the Ministry of Education and Training. In this program, teachers are involved into four training components, namely face-to-face pedagogical training, online learning, micro-teaching, and teaching field trip. Micro-teaching is one important component of the program.

Micro-teaching was a practical teacher training method developed in the 1960s. It has been used and gained its popularity as it is beneficial in helping pre-service teachers improve their teaching skills, assist their reflective teaching practice, reduce anxiety, develop autonomy, and connect theory and practice (Arends, 2000; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Amobi, 2005; Akalın, 2005; Ogeyik, 2009; Ismail, 2011; Ping, 2013; Cebeci, 2016). Although micro-teaching was claimed to be applicable at both pre-service and in-service development program (Allen and Ryan, 1969), micro-teaching has been more popular among pre-service teacher education. In Vietnam, many universities applied this method in their pre-service teacher training. However, micro-teaching has not been exploited in any in-service teacher training programs in Vietnam until recent years with the launching of the afore-mentioned in-service teacher training program of Project 2020. As a result, there are not any studies investigating the application of micro-teaching in an in-service teaching professional development program. Therefore, this research is carried out to seek answers to the two following questions:

What are in-service teachers' perceptions towards the impacts of micro-teaching on their teaching practice?

What are in-service teachers' suggestions to improve the quality of micro-teaching practice?

Literature Review

Micro-teaching was first introduced by Dwight W. Allen and his colleagues at Stanford University in 1963. Since its inception, micro-teaching has been widely exploited as a technique in teacher training, especially in pre-service teacher training programs. It has gained its popularity because of its undeniable benefits it offers to student teachers as showed by many studies. Micro-teaching is proved to be effective in helping pre-service teachers in their teaching profession (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Amobi, 2005; Akalın, 2005; Ismail, 2011). Pre-service teachers can improve their teaching skills in preparing and applying lesson plans to address students' needs and interest. Coşkun (2016) points out that micro-teaching is beneficial in assisting pre-service teachers in their language improvement, teaching practice and competence, as well as lesson preparation and effective classroom management. Another aspect of micro-teaching is that it

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promotes reflective practice. Micro-teaching gives pre-service teachers opportunities to analyze their teaching performance, so that they can realize their strengths and weaknesses (Kavanoz and Yüksel, 2010). Reflective practice is of enormous benefits to pre-service teachers as they can make thoughtful judgments about current teaching practice which inform reasonable decisions about improved ways of practice in the future. In addition, thanks to practice in micro-teaching, pre-service teachers can be provided with a clear connection between theory and practice (Benton-Kupper 2001, Peker, 2009; Fernandez, 2005). Moreover, many studies show that micro-teaching help pre-service teachers to reduce anxiety levels, defeat hesitation, and increase professionalism, become more efficient in teaching (Arends, 2000).

Despite many benefits shown, micro-teaching activity is also claimed to have limitations in teacher training programs. He and Yan (2011) indicated that the artificial classroom environment made students reluctant to participate in the activity. One important aspect of this unreal environment was the inconsistency of peer acted as students during activities. Due to this artificiality, pre-service teachers could not gain authentic teaching experience, which could fail to inform their future practice.

Methods

Research Design

This research employed a mixed method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions. According to Dörnyei (2007) the advantage of a mixed method approach is that it allows multi-level analysis of complex issues. This research adapted a questionnaire developed by Ismail (2011) which contains Likert scale questions for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative data.

Context of the Study

This study was carried out in a professional development program launched by the Vietnam National Foreign Language 2020 Project in a local province in Vietnam. The professional development program aimed at equipping in-service teachers with knowledge and skills to teach the new series of the national textbook of English. It is an obligatory course for all in-service teachers in public schools in Vietnam. Participating in this program, in-service teachers had to fulfill all the requirements in the four stages: two week face-to-face theoretical training, online learning, one week micro-teaching, and one week teaching field trip. In the micro-teaching section, teachers were divided into different big groups of 20 to 30, each of which was assigned with a level of the textbooks. Each in-service teacher was then supposed to select a lesson in the book to present in the micro-teaching session as long as no two teachers taught the same lesson. Prior to the micro-teaching session, they were given criteria for assessment and the lesson plan for one full lesson of 45 minutes was prepared. During micro-teaching section, delivering the lesson with their colleagues as students, oral self-evaluation, peer feedback, and instructor feedback were practiced.

Participants

103 (86 female, 17 male) in-service teachers volunteered to participate in the study. They were currently teachers at public secondary schools, participating in the course during summer time. Their teaching experience ranges from three to 25 years. There are teachers from specialized schools and also teachers from standardized schools. The researcher would like to acquire various perspectives, so there is no limitation of age or teaching experience.

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Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire adapted for this study was developed by Ismail (2011). His questionnaire has 23 Likert-scale items categorized in four themes: Language Improvement/Course Satisfaction, Teaching competence/Awareness, Preparation/ Management, and Attitudes/ Personal feelings. In this study, the researcher aimed to discover in-service teachers' perspectives of one component of the professional development program, namely micro-teaching, not the whole program itself. Therefore, some items related to course satisfaction were omitted to form the questionnaire of 22 items only.

In addition to 22 items, some open-ended questions were included by the researcher to enable respondents to express more in-depth reflection of their attitudes about benefits and problems of micro-teaching and make suggestions for a more useful micro-teaching.

Data collection Procedures

During one week of the micro-teaching section, each in-service teacher performed a 45 minute micro-teaching lesson and observed micro-teaching lessons of their peers. After each micro-teaching session, they were required to self-reflect, offer peer feedback, and receive feedback from the instructor. At the end of the week, they were required to respond to the questionnaire. It took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The responses to 22 Likert-scale questions were analyzed in percentages to recognize noticeable patterns. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by means of content analysis to find common patterns, corresponding to four aspects, namely benefits of micro-teaching, sources of benefits, problems of micro-teaching, and suggestions for better micro-teaching section.

Findings and Discussion

In-service teachers' perspectives towards micro-teaching component of the professional development course.

The respondents expressed their attitudes towards micro-teaching section in four themes. The results were presented in the tables below.

(SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NS = Not Sure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree)

Table 1. Language Improvement

	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Micro-teaching....	%	%	%	%	%
1. helped me develop confidence in my speaking ability	32.0	63.1	3.9	1.0	0
2. encouraged me to develop my vocabulary	9.7	23.3	32.0	26.2	8.7
3. helped me discover and fix my language problems	27.2	59.2	6.8	6.8	0

As can be seen from the table, in-service teachers had positive attitudes towards the role of micro-teaching in developing their confidence in their speaking ability and helping them fix their language problems, 95,1% and 86,4% respectively. It may be due to the chances of standing in front of their peer and instructor to deliver the lesson, together with a lot of time for preparation and rehearsal to ensure the success of the lessons. However, it is noticeable that in-service teachers

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possessed comparatively mixed feelings towards the roles of micro-teaching in improving their vocabulary. Only 33% agreed that micro-teaching section helped them with their vocabulary whereas 32% couldn't confirmed their views and nearly 35% thought that micro-teaching was not useful in their vocabulary development.

These results somewhat coincide with what was discovered by Ismail (2011) and Coşkun (2016). Surprisingly, although the participants in this research were in-service teachers, they shared the idea that micro-teaching helped them improve their English competence. This confirmed in-service teachers' concern about their language competence which should be at the level of B2 and C1 for lower and upper secondary level respectively according to ETCF. However, different from Coşkun (2016), in-service teachers did not advocate the idea that micro-teaching helped them improve their vocabulary.

Table 2. Teaching Practice Competence/Awareness

	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Micro-teaching....	%	%	%	%	%
4. helped me develop awareness of my teaching competence	12.6	81.6	3.9	2.0	0
5. gave me the opportunity to learn by observing others	41.1	58.0	1.0	0	0
6. gave me a valuable opportunity to apply my teaching skills	43.3	56.7	0	0	0
7. encouraged me to develop autonomy	25.2	49.5	18.4	6.8	0
8. helped me discover my teaching strengths and weaknesses	21.4	78.6	0	0	0

Table 2 demonstrates in-service teachers' perspectives towards the effects of micro-teaching to their teaching competence and awareness. It reflects an overall positive assessment among respondents. For all the items, the percentage of agreement is very high, above 74.7%. All participants advocated the role of micro-teaching in giving in-service teachers opportunity to apply their teaching skills and helping them discover their teaching strengths and weaknesses. However, it is worth emphasizing that 18.4% of the respondents marked "not sure" and 6.8% marked "disagree" for the role of micro-teaching in developing their autonomy.

The qualitative data also revealed important results related to the benefits of micro-teaching in improving teaching skills. The most noticeable ones are discovering strengths and weaknesses, improving teaching skills, practicing with the new series of textbooks, and connecting theory and practice.

Discovering strengths and weaknesses

Many in-service teachers (N=56) stated that thanks to micro-teaching session with feedback from their instructor and their colleagues, they could be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses from which they could improve their teaching practice in real life.

Teacher17: "There were many issues that I couldn't realize myself while teaching, so after listening to the instructor's and colleagues' comments, I could realize my weak points. From that, I could draw experience for later improvement".

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Improving teaching skills

37 in-service teachers stated that during the process of planning and delivering micro-teaching lesson and receiving feedback from the instructor and peer, their teaching skills were improved considerably in various aspects.

Teacher21: "Micro-teaching helped me know how to teach in each sections of the textbook and how to connect different parts of the lesson to have a smooth lesson"

Teacher92: "I learnt different ways to solve pedagogical situations."

Teacher102: "Micro-teaching helped me know more about different methods and how to choose a method that is appropriate for my students".

Teacher98: "The most beneficial thing I learnt is how to structure a lesson, sequence a lesson, and especially change my teaching methods to meet my students' needs."

Gaining more knowledge and skills related to the series of the new textbook

The purpose of this professional development course in this study is to equip the in-service teachers with knowledge and skills to teach with the new series of the textbook. Therefore, it is undoubted that in-service teachers realized the benefits related to this. Many of them (N=17) stated that the micro-teaching helped them understand more about the new textbooks in terms of aims, structures, and how to carry out the lesson effectively.

Teacher98: "Micro-teaching provided me chances to learn and practice with the new textbooks that I've never experience before."

Teacher44: "I gained knowledge about the methodology of the new textbook and techniques to teach each section of it."

Connecting theory and practice

One important benefit of micro-teaching section as pointed out by respondents is it helps in-service teachers to connect theory and practice, or in other words, to apply what they have learnt into practice. 23 in-service teachers confirmed this plus point.

Teacher56: "I could apply what I had learnt in the previous modules into my micro-teaching lessons."

Teacher102: "I could practice what I had learnt right away, so it was a good preparation in teaching in real context in Field trip."

These positive perceptions about the impacts of micro-teaching on pedagogical skills were consistent with the results of many previous studies (Arends, 2000; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Amobi, 2005; Akalin, 2005; Ogeyik, 2009; Ismail, 2011; Ping, 2013; Cebeci, 2016). However, these findings were quite contradictory to those in Cebeci (2016), who pointed out that micro-teaching helped develop participants' autonomy in the process of searching and preparing for their lessons. This may be because in-service teachers have done these things in their normal teaching life. To prepare for a lesson, they have to go through the searching, the lesson planning, and other revising work on their own, so they may not realize any differences concerning autonomy between micro-teaching and planning their authentic lessons.

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The researcher investigated what made the respondents claimed many benefits of micro-teaching and found that the opportunities to observe their colleagues' lessons and receive feedback from their peer and instructor are the two deciding factors.

Learning from colleagues' lessons and feedback

As stated previously, participants of this research were local teachers who have a range of experience of three to 25 years in teaching English at public schools. Therefore, when delivering micro-teaching sessions, they utilized great amount of experience into their teaching, so it could be a great source for others to learn from. Amazingly, more than a half (N=53) in-service teachers confirmed that they could learn a lot from their colleagues' lessons and feedback.

Teacher 38: "I could learn from various innovative teaching methods from my colleagues and improve my own teaching methods".

Teacher 52: "I could learn a lot from my colleagues' feedback when they comment and share their experience with me."

In fact, in-service teachers stated that they could learn from their colleagues in many different aspects such as approach in teaching in general, methods and objectives for each lesson (Teacher78), applying different techniques in teaching (Teacher94), getting students' involvement in a lesson (Teacher12), planning activities (Teacher68), classroom management skills (Teacher15), etc. This is also an environment where they could "encourage one another to enrich their knowledge and sharpen their teaching skills" (Teacher54).

Learning from instructor's feedback

Many in-service teachers (N=29) attributed the usefulness of micro-teaching to instructor's feedback. The instructor did not only give comments on the strong and weak points of the lessons but also offer constructive feedback on improving the lesson in real context of teaching.

Teacher34 claimed that "with the detailed, clear, and easy-to-understand comments and analysis, I can have necessary knowledge, methods, and techniques to teaching."

Teacher67: "The instructor gave detailed and useful suggestions for me to apply in my teaching".

The results give hints to the importance of reflective practice and peer-coaching in training pedagogical skills. These findings are in line with what Fernandez and Robinson (2007) and Lu (2010), Ismail (2011) found. They argued that micro-teaching provided valuable opportunities for self-reflection and peer coaching from which teachers could improve their future practice. These results also coincide with the statements of many previous studies that participants benefited from feedback by the educators and studies (Arsal, 2015).

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Table 3. Preparation/ Management

	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Micro-teaching....	%	%	%	%	%
9. helped me to learn to organize my time	36.9	52.4	5.8	4.9	0
10. helped me learn how to manage the class	30.1	63.1	5.8	1.0	0
11. gave me an opportunity to improve my lesson planning	28.2	69.9	1.0	1.0	0
12. encouraged me to develop teaching activities and materials	35.0	59.2	3.9	1.9	0
13. helped me learn how to predict classroom problems	24.3	63.1	9.7	2.9	0
14. helped me learn to use technology appropriately	14.6	77.7	1.0	6.8	0

With regards to the impacts of micro-teaching in preparation and management skills, the majority of respondents provided positive feedback. The highest level of agreement was found with the items of “micro-teaching gave me an opportunity to improve my lesson planning” and micro-teaching encouraged me to develop teaching activities and materials, 98,1% and 94,1% respectively. A worth noticing percentage of 6.8% stated that micro-teaching didn’t help them to learn to use technology appropriately whereas 9.7% were unsure about whether micro-teaching helped them to learn how to predict classroom problems. This may be because the participants are in-service teachers with real classroom experience and they are able to distinguish between the inauthentic classroom problems and the authentic ones causing by their real students. Therefore, the inauthentic classroom problems might not of great assistance to them.

Table 4. Attitude/ Feelings

	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Micro-teaching....	%	%	%	%	%
15. made me feel uncomfortable as it was carried out in an artificial environment	7.8	24.3	29.1	35.0	3.9
16. consumed a lot of my time	4.9	17.5	15.5	47.6	14.6
17. made me feel bored	1.0	2.9	9.7	82.5	3.9
18. forced me to do difficult tasks	14.6	11.7	23.3	21.4	29.1
19. was time limited and controlled	8.7	8.7	30.1	40.8	11.7
20. made me feel embarrassed when teaching my colleagues	9.7	35	23.3	22.3	9.7
21. forced me to think of the evaluation criteria when planning	11.7	65	14.6	5.8	2.9
22. forced me to think of the evaluation criteria while teaching	9.7	54.4	24.3	7.8	3.9

Table 4 illustrates the participants’ attitudes and feeling towards micro-teaching activity. Although respondents’ feedback was very positive concerning the roles of micro-teaching in different aspects as can be seen in the previous tables, their attitudes and feelings were quite mixed. The most prominent issue is related to the artificial environment of micro-teaching session. While nearly 40% of the respondents had no difficulty with the artificial environment, more than one third felt that the assumed class made them uncomfortable and nearly one third were unsure of their feelings. Concerning time-consumption of micro-teaching, 22.4% thought that micro-teaching was time-consuming whereas more than 60% didn’t advocate that. Many respondents felt embarrassed while teaching in front of their colleagues (32%), but nearly 45% thought that it was not a problem for them. However, there were some items that most participants agreed upon. The majority thought that micro-teaching forced them to think of the evaluation criteria when teaching and planning, 76.7% and 64.1% respectively.

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The qualitative data explained in detail the two most concerned aspects, namely the artificial environment and the time arrangement.

Artificial environment

As participants are local teachers at public schools, they have experience teaching their real students. Therefore, with the fact that they have to teach their colleagues acted as students, it is not surprising that many in-service teachers (N=21) would find this aspect problematic to them. Most of them found that they had problems with the unreal students' reactions to teacher's commands.

Teacher23: "It's more difficult to teach in this artificial environment as some activities could not be carried out normally."

Teacher29: "They were not real students so they did not respond appropriately to teacher's command."

Teacher30: "The students were my colleagues, so I felt a little embarrassed. And the lesson went too smoothly, not the same as in my real class."

Teacher54: "The students were not real, so they did not demonstrate the actual strengths and weaknesses of my real students."

Teacher11: "My colleagues lacked sufficient interaction with me when acting as students."

The limitation of artificial environment as pointed out by in-service teachers in this research is consistent with the findings from previous studies (Ögeyik, 2009; Wilson & I'Anson, 2006; He & Yan, 2011). The unrealistic environment restricts pre-service teachers' competence of real-life classroom competences as stated by He and Yan (2011). This research emphasizes this weakness with the in-service teachers pointing out that unreal students performed differently from their real students so that they might not deal with real problems as in their real class. Moreover, with the unreal students, it was difficult to carry out activities in a normal way as their colleagues as students may not provide appropriate interaction or perform much better than their real students.

Inappropriate Time Arrangement

The fact that the micro-teaching was done in five consecutive days, corresponding to about 7 hours of micro-teaching in one day was a burden for many in-service teachers (N=12). Being "tired" and "bored" were some words mentioned by some participants.

Teacher20: "The micro-teaching section was done intensively in one week, which required us to observe too many lessons. So, sometimes, it led to tiredness and unreasonable comments."

These findings quite contradict to the findings of Ögeyik (2009) who stated that student teachers consider the limited time as one challenge for them in micro-teaching session. Some other research pointed out the amount of time preparing the materials as one drawback of micro-teaching (Cripwell and Geddes, 1982; Stanley, 1998). However, in-service teachers did not consider these as their challenges. This may be because they are teachers doing their teaching jobs at public schools for some years of experience and they may be familiar with the lesson preparation process. In this study, they pointed out a different difficulty related to time. Due to the arrangement of five full days of micro-teaching, in-service teachers found that the long time for micro-teaching made them tired and bored.

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Suggestions for better micro-teaching practice

The in-service teachers in this study made some worth-considering suggestions to improve the quality of micro-teaching activity. They would like to observe model micro-teaching lessons carried out by the instructors, integrate micro-teaching section into lecturing stages, and increase the time for micro-teaching.

Providing instructor's modeling micro-teaching lessons

This suggestion was made by the most number of respondents (N=26). They expressed their desire to observe lessons carried out by the instructor so that they could learn from them. This is quite surprising because in the face-to-face training section, the instructors are supposed to deliver short demonstrations. However, it can be understood that the in-service teachers still need to observe a whole demo lesson.

Teacher22: "I want to observe a model lesson of the instructor so that I can learn from their experience and improve my own methodology."

Teacher84: "I wish the instructor could deliver lessons teaching all seven sessions of one unit for me to learn from them."

Teacher78: "I want to observe the instructor delivering their own lesson in the micro-teaching class so that I can learn how they organize activities and plan the lessons."

Integrating micro-teaching section into lecturing stage

Many in-service teachers (N=14) held the view that micro-teaching stage should not be separated from the face-to-face stage when they received instructional guidance on how to teach with the new textbooks. Instead, after each module of theoretical knowledge, micro-teaching section should follow so that there are more chances of immediate application of theoretical knowledge into practice.

Teacher15: "The micro-teaching should be integrated in the related module. For example, after learning how to teach Reading with the new textbook, trainees will carry out Reading micro-teaching lessons."

One advantage of integrating micro-teaching into face-to-face theoretical learning is that the lessons in one block of micro-teaching can be of the same types. i.e. a series of Grammar lessons or a series of Writing lessons. It will be more convenient and beneficial for the feedback section.

Teacher28: "Teachers should be allowed to carry out series of lesson (for example, Getting started, skills, ...) so that the feedback session would be more in-depth and we can learn more from our own strengths and weaknesses."

Increasing the amount of micro-teaching

Although micro-teaching consumed a lot of their time, some teachers (N=10) recommended that there should be more time allocation for micro-teaching, lesson time for face-to-face theoretical learning and online learning.

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Teacher11: "I realize that I learn the most when I do something, in this case, when I plan and deliver the lessons myself. So, I would like to do more micro-teaching with the guidance and feedback of the instructor."

This recommendation is also in line with one made by Koross (2016), who suggested that more micro-teaching sessions should be integrated with courses of teaching methods in teacher training institution because of the benefits that many studies have underlined.

Besides these noticeable recommendations, the in-service teachers participated in this course also suggested receiving the instructor's feedback on their lesson plan before the teaching practice, carrying out smaller group micro-teaching section to avoid the tiredness of observe too many lessons, having better quality of facilities such as projectors.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to discover in-service teachers' perceptions towards the role of micro-teaching component in a professional development course in their teaching practice. The study unveiled some significant results. First, the study showed that in-service teacher held positive attitudes towards the application of micro-teaching in their training course. Second, even though they are currently teachers at public schools who deliver lessons every day, micro-teaching provided them valuable opportunities in improving their language competence, teaching competence, and other skills. Third, among the benefits of micro-teaching, in-service teachers believed that they improved their pedagogical skills the most thanks to observing their colleagues' lesson, receiving feedback from their peer and the instructor. Fourth, the study uncovered that the artificial environment and the inappropriate time arrangement for micro-teaching sections were considered two biggest hindrances to the success of micro-teaching. Finally, the study revealed some worth-considering recommendations from in-service teachers. They would like to receive the model lessons delivered by the instructor prior to their own micro-teaching lesson. In addition, the micro-teaching lessons should not be separated from the theoretical modules but follow them so that they could immediately transfer theory into practice and receive more in-depth feedback. Moreover, they would also prefer to increase time allocation in the course for micro-teaching because they could learn most when they practiced. To conclude, micro-teaching can be considered a practical training tool for in-service teacher training programs. The suggestions proposed by in-service teachers in this study can inform better application of micro-teaching in teacher training programs in the future.

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