

Microteaching and Pedagogical Competence among Pre-Service EFL Teachers: Bridging Procedural and Conceptual Dimensions

¹*Sucipto, ¹Muh Saeful Effendi

¹English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. Jl. Ki Ageng Pemanahan, Kragilan, Bantul, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55191, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: sucipto@bi.uad.ac.id

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Abstract

Microteaching plays a central role in EFL teacher education as a platform for developing initial teaching competence; however, its contribution to deeper pedagogical understanding remains underexplored. This study investigates how pre-service EFL teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence, how it is enacted in teaching practice, and how it is evaluated by lecturers, with a particular focus on the gap between procedural and conceptual competence. A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was employed involving 35 pre-service teachers and two lecturers. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to explore teaching practices and lecturer evaluations in greater depth. The findings indicate that students demonstrate relatively strong competence in lesson planning and instructional implementation, while showing weaker performance in assessment and student development. A notable discrepancy is also found between students' self-perceptions, their enacted teaching practices, and lecturers' evaluations. These results suggest that microteaching tends to strengthen procedural teaching skills, while deeper pedagogical understanding remains limited. The study highlights the importance of positioning microteaching as a transitional learning space that should be complemented with authentic teaching experiences, reflective practice, and targeted feedback to support more holistic pedagogical competence development.

Keywords: English learning-teaching; Pedagogical competence; Microteaching; Pre-service teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary discussions in curriculum and teaching methodology increasingly emphasize the need for teacher education programs to develop not only technical teaching skills but also deeper pedagogical understanding that can adapt to complex and dynamic classroom contexts. The global shift toward competency-based education has positioned pedagogical competence as a central outcome in preparing future teachers, particularly in language education where instructional decisions must be responsive to diverse learner needs and sociocultural contexts (Mirza et al., 2025). In this context, teacher preparation is no longer seen as simply transmitting teaching techniques, but as a process of shaping reflective practitioners who are able to connect theory, practice, and context in meaningful ways (Jolly, 2024). Within this broader perspective, microteaching has become a widely used approach to help pre-service teachers move from theoretical knowledge toward actual teaching practice, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs.

Recent studies across different educational contexts have highlighted the potential of microteaching as a transitional learning space where pre-service teachers can experiment with instructional strategies in a low-risk environment. Research conducted in various countries shows that microteaching effectively improves teaching performance, particularly in lesson planning, classroom interaction, and instructional delivery (Rodrigue & Enama, 2021; Otsupiuos, 2014; Kilic, 2010). In addition, structured feedback and peer observation have been found to enhance reflective practice and professional awareness among pre-service teachers (Li, 2025; Dos Santos, 2020). However, emerging evidence also suggests that such improvements are often limited to procedural aspects of teaching, while deeper pedagogical competencies such as assessment literacy, differentiated instruction, and student-centered learning remain underdeveloped (Stacki et al., 2020; Ortega-Alvarez et al., 2025). These findings indicate that microteaching may support skill acquisition but may not fully facilitate the development of comprehensive pedagogical competence.

Despite the growing body of research, a critical gap remains in understanding how pedagogical competence is constructed and manifested across different dimensions within microteaching contexts. Most previous studies rely heavily on self-reported data or performance-based observations without integrating multiple perspectives to capture the complexity of competence development. As a result, relatively little attention has been given to the possible differences between what pre-service teachers believe they are capable of doing, what they actually demonstrate in teaching practice, and how their competence is interpreted by lecturers or experts. In addition, the distinction between procedural competence (the ability to carry out teaching tasks) and conceptual competence (the understanding of the underlying pedagogical principles) has not been sufficiently examined in microteaching research. This issue is particularly important, as current discussions in teacher education emphasize that sustainable professional competence depends on the integration of both dimensions, rather than the dominance of one over the other (Imara & Altinay, 2021; Lohmann et al., 2021). This concern becomes more pressing in the Indonesian EFL teacher education context, where microteaching is widely implemented as a key preparatory stage, yet opportunities for authentic classroom engagement and extended teaching practice remain relatively limited.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by conceptualizing microteaching as a transitional learning space that reveals the gap between procedural and conceptual pedagogical competence. Unlike previous studies, this research adopts a triangulated approach by integrating three sources of data: students' perceived competence, their enacted teaching practices, and lecturers' evaluations. This approach enables a more comprehensive and critical analysis of pedagogical competence beyond surface-level performance. A key novelty of this study lies in identifying how pre-service teachers tend to demonstrate procedural competence, such as structuring lessons and delivering instruction while lacking deeper pedagogical reasoning, particularly in assessment and student development. By highlighting this multidimensional gap, the study contributes to the broader discussion on teacher competence by underscoring the importance of moving beyond performance-based evaluation toward a more holistic understanding of pedagogical development.

To address these issues, this study investigates how pedagogical competence is demonstrated, enacted, and evaluated within microteaching contexts among pre-service EFL teachers. The research is guided by the following questions: (1) How do pre-service English teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence across key dimensions in microteaching contexts? (2) How are these pedagogical competencies reflected in students' teaching practices during microteaching? (3) How do lecturers evaluate the

pedagogical competence of pre-service teachers in microteaching? (4) What gaps exist between students' perceived competence, their enacted teaching practices, and lecturers' evaluations? and (5) To what extent does microteaching contribute to the development of both procedural and conceptual pedagogical competence? By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role and limitations of microteaching in preparing pre-service teachers for real classroom practice.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design to examine the development of pedagogical competence among pre-service English teachers in microteaching contexts. Mixed-methods research allows the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, making it possible to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of educational phenomena, particularly when both measurable outcomes and contextual experiences are involved (Pregoner, 2025; Curry et al., 2009). This design is considered appropriate for the present study, as it enables the identification of competence levels through quantitative data, followed by a more detailed exploration of teaching practices and lecturer evaluations through qualitative inquiry (Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Participants

The study was conducted in an English Language Education Study Program at a private university in Indonesia, where microteaching is a compulsory course designed to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching practicum. The participants consisted of 35 pre-service English teachers who were enrolled in the microteaching course and had completed relevant coursework in teaching methodology, curriculum design, and language assessment. In addition, eight students were selected for interviews, along with two lecturers who were responsible for teaching and supervising microteaching sessions. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in educational research to identify individuals who are able to provide rich and relevant information in line with the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015; Kanaki & Kalogiannakis, 2023).

The object of this study is pedagogical competence, which is operationalized into five key dimensions: understanding students' characteristics, lesson planning, instructional implementation, assessment and evaluation, and developing students' potential. These dimensions are based on established frameworks in pedagogical competence and teacher education literature, which emphasize the integration of knowledge, skills, and reflective practice as essential components of effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ryan & Ryan, 2013). The study examines how these competencies are perceived by students, enacted in teaching practices, and evaluated by lecturers within the microteaching context.

Instruments

Data were collected using two main instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guidelines. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always" to capture students' perceived pedagogical competence. Likert-scale instruments are widely used in educational research to measure attitudes and self-reported competencies due to their reliability and ease of interpretation (Mahmood, 2017; Hendrick et al., 2013). The interview guidelines were designed to explore students' teaching practices and lecturers' evaluations, focusing on strengths, limitations, and observed gaps in pedagogical

competence. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in probing participants' responses while maintaining consistency across key themes (Byrne, 2022).

The research procedure was conducted in several stages. First, the questionnaire was administered to all participants after they completed their microteaching sessions to ensure that responses reflected actual teaching experiences. Second, based on the quantitative results, selected participants were invited for interviews to provide deeper insights into how pedagogical competence was enacted and evaluated. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Third, the qualitative data were organized and prepared for analysis. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation throughout the research process, in accordance with established research ethics standards (Kennedy, 2006).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two interconnected phases. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly mean scores, to determine the level of pedagogical competence across the five dimensions. Mean scores were interpreted using predefined categories (low, moderate, and high) to describe competence levels. Descriptive statistics are appropriate for identifying patterns and trends in educational data (Stopar & Bartol, 2019). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving processes of coding, categorizing, and developing themes to identify patterns related to pedagogical competence and teaching practices. A focused coding approach was applied to highlight key themes, considering the relatively small number of participants. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated through data triangulation by comparing results from the questionnaire, student interviews, and lecturer interviews. This triangulation process strengthens the credibility and validity of the findings by combining multiple data sources and perspectives (Donkoh, 2023). As teaching practices were not directly observed in real classroom settings, the analysis of enacted competence was based on students' self-reports and interview reflections, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A more comprehensive understanding of how pedagogical competence develops in microteaching is presented through the integration of quantitative results and qualitative insights within a triangulated framework. This approach makes it possible to examine how competence is perceived by students, how it is demonstrated in teaching practice, and how it is evaluated by lecturers, while also highlighting the gaps that emerge across these perspectives. In support of the conceptual model, Table 1 presents the quantitative results of students' perceived pedagogical competence across the five dimensions.

Pedagogical Competence in Microteaching Contexts

As shown in Table 1, pre-service teachers demonstrate a moderate level of pedagogical competence overall, with mean scores ranging from 2.14 to 2.37. Instructional implementation shows the highest mean ($M = 2.37$), indicating relatively strong performance in teaching delivery. In contrast, developing students' potential has the lowest mean ($M = 2.14$), suggesting limited competence in fostering long-term student development. These results indicate that students tend to demonstrate stronger competence in observable teaching practices than in more complex pedagogical dimensions.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Pedagogical Competence Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Category
Understanding Students' Characteristics	2.22	Moderate

Lesson Planning	2.34	Moderate–High
Instructional Implementation	2.37	High
Assessment and Evaluation	2.22	Moderate
Developing Students' Potential	2.14	Moderate–Low

To further examine how these competencies are manifested and evaluated, Table 2 presents the triangulation of findings based on students' perceptions, observed teaching practices, and lecturers' evaluations.

Table 2. Triangulation of Pedagogical Competence

Dimension	Student Perception	Teaching Practice	Lecturer Evaluation
Lesson Planning	Moderate–High	Structured	Strong
Instructional Implementation	Moderate	Active	Adequate
Assessment and Evaluation	Low	Limited	Weak
Developing Students' Potential	Low	Minimal	Weak

Table 2 shows that although students perceive their competence as moderate to high in several areas, their actual teaching practices reflect only partial competence. Teaching practices are generally described as structured and active, indicating that students are able to carry out instructional tasks in a visible way. However, this performance tends to reflect procedural competence rather than deeper pedagogical reasoning. Lesson planning, for example, is frequently approached as a formal requirement rather than as a tool that guides instructional decisions. Similarly, assessment practices tend to be limited, and attention to student development remains minimal. These patterns suggest that students are able to perform teaching actions, but the connection between those actions and underlying pedagogical purposes is not yet fully developed.

These findings align with previous research indicating that pre-service teachers often demonstrate an emerging understanding of pedagogical concepts, yet encounter difficulties when translating these ideas into actual classroom practice. While they may be aware of communicative and student-centered approaches, their instructional decisions frequently remain shaped by more traditional and procedural models (Raditya et al., 2026). This suggests that developing pedagogical competence involves not only acquiring knowledge, but also the ability to enact that knowledge in context-sensitive ways.

The overall relationship among these findings is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents a triangulated competence gap model integrating the three perspectives.

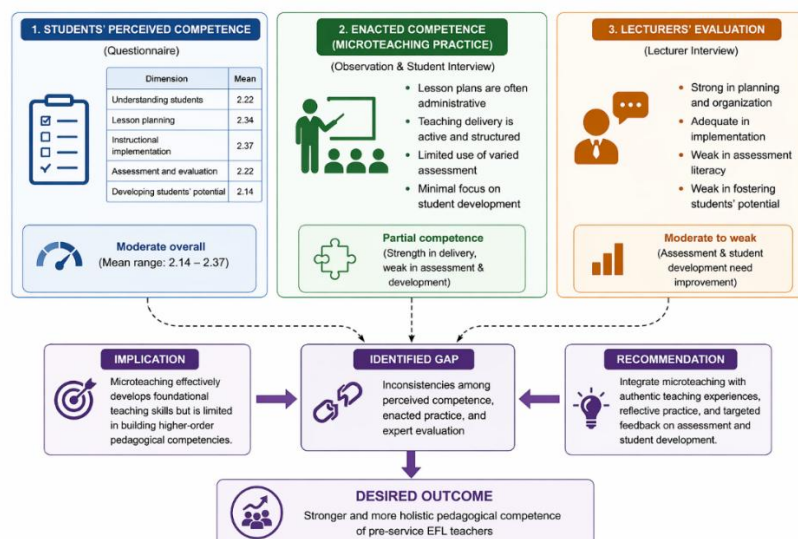


Figure 1. Triangulated Model of Pedagogical Competence Gaps

As illustrated in Figure 1, students' perceived competence is categorized as "moderate overall," reflecting relatively positive self-assessment across dimensions. However, enacted competence in microteaching practice is described as "partial competence," characterized by strengths in instructional delivery but limitations in assessment and student development. Meanwhile, lecturers' evaluations indicate a "moderate to weak" level of competence, particularly highlighting deficiencies in assessment literacy and the ability to foster students' potential.

The integration of these findings reveals a significant competence gap among perceived competence, enacted practice, and expert evaluation. Students tend to overestimate their abilities, while their actual teaching practices and lecturers' evaluations reveal inconsistencies and limitations. This gap indicates that pedagogical competence is not fully internalized and remains largely procedural.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that microteaching contributes effectively to the development of foundational teaching skills, particularly in lesson planning and instructional implementation. However, its contribution to deeper pedagogical competence such as assessment and student development is limited. This suggests that microteaching functions as a transitional learning space, supporting initial competence development while exposing the need for more comprehensive and context-rich teaching experiences. The results indicate that while pre-service teachers demonstrate moderate pedagogical competence, significant gaps remain between what they perceive, what they perform, and how their competence is evaluated. These findings provide empirical support for the argument that microteaching alone is insufficient to develop holistic pedagogical competence. These findings warrant further interpretation, particularly regarding the imbalance between procedural and conceptual competence.

A closer examination of the findings reveals that procedural competence tends to be more strongly developed than conceptual competence. Pre-service teachers show confidence in structuring lessons and delivering instruction, yet they experience difficulty in areas that require deeper pedagogical reasoning, such as assessment and student development. One possible explanation for this pattern lies in the design of microteaching itself, which often prioritizes observable teaching performance within limited time frames. As a result, students may focus on fulfilling visible instructional tasks rather than engaging with the underlying pedagogical principles that inform those actions. This imbalance reflects a broader tendency in teacher education to privilege

performance over understanding, where success is measured through what can be demonstrated rather than what is conceptually grounded (Zhang & Tian, 2025).

The competence gap identified in this study also provides further insight into the well-documented theory–practice divide in teacher education. While students tend to perceive themselves as competent, their teaching practices and lecturers' evaluations reveal inconsistencies that point to partial internalization of pedagogical knowledge. This finding supports previous research showing that self-perception often overestimates actual competence, particularly in early stages of professional development (Xu et al., 2025). At the same time, the present study extends earlier work by demonstrating that this gap is not only a discrepancy between belief and action, but also a multidimensional misalignment across perception, practice, and expert evaluation. This triangulated perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how pedagogical competence develops within microteaching contexts.

One important contribution of this study lies in clarifying the distinction between procedural and conceptual pedagogical competence. The findings show that pre-service teachers are generally able to perform visible teaching tasks, such as delivering lessons and organizing classroom activities, yet they often demonstrate limited understanding of the pedagogical reasoning underlying those actions, particularly in assessment and student-centered learning. This finding reinforces the argument that pedagogical competence should not be understood merely as observable performance, but also as the integration of reflective, conceptual, and context-sensitive dimensions of teaching (Korthagen, 2016; Vernon et al., 2019). In this regard, microteaching appears to strengthen procedural competence while providing less support for the development of deeper pedagogical understanding. The findings also extend previous research by showing that the competence gap is not simply a divide between theory and practice, but a multidimensional discrepancy involving self-perception, enacted performance, and lecturers' evaluations.

Another noteworthy finding is that lesson planning is frequently approached as an administrative requirement rather than as a pedagogical framework that guides instructional decisions. This suggests that many pre-service teachers engage with lesson planning at a surface level, focusing more on completing formal components than on building coherent and meaningful learning experiences. Similar patterns have been identified in previous studies, which report that pre-service teachers often experience difficulties in translating lesson plans into responsive classroom practices (Widodo et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need to reposition microteaching as a space that encourages pedagogical reasoning, reflection, and instructional decision-making rather than emphasizing performance alone.

The limited development of assessment competence also emerges as a significant concern in this study. Although assessment is widely recognized as a core dimension of pedagogical competence, it remains one of the weakest areas across all data sources. This finding is consistent with previous research identifying assessment literacy as a complex and frequently underdeveloped aspect of teacher education (DeLuca et al., 2013). The results suggest that microteaching may not yet provide sufficient opportunities for pre-service teachers to design, implement, and critically reflect on assessment practices in meaningful and context-sensitive ways. Consequently, students may become familiar with instructional delivery while remaining less prepared to evaluate learning processes and outcomes effectively.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that microteaching should be understood as a transitional learning space rather than a complete model of teacher preparation. While it plays an important role in developing foundational teaching skills, its limitations in fostering deeper pedagogical competence indicate the need for

complementary learning experiences. Integrating microteaching with authentic classroom practice, extended teaching engagement, and structured reflective activities may help bridge the identified competence gap. Such an approach would allow pre-service teachers to connect pedagogical theory with the realities of classroom interaction and student diversity. This recommendation is supported by previous studies emphasizing the importance of situated learning and authentic teaching experiences in teacher development (Flores, 2020 ; (Yuan et al., 2022).

Moreover, the triangulated competence gap model proposed in this study contributes to broader discussions in curriculum and teaching methodology by offering a more comprehensive framework for evaluating teacher competence. Rather than relying solely on performance-based indicators, the model emphasizes the importance of integrating multiple perspectives, including self-perception, teaching practice, and expert evaluation. This multidimensional perspective provides a more balanced understanding of how pedagogical competence develops and may inform the design of more responsive teacher education programs.

Overall, the findings indicate that although microteaching remains an important component of teacher education, its current implementation may unintentionally place greater emphasis on procedural competence than on conceptual understanding. Addressing this imbalance requires more integrated, reflective, and context-rich learning experiences that encourage pre-service teachers not only to perform teaching tasks effectively, but also to understand the pedagogical purposes underlying their instructional decisions. Strengthening these reflective and authentic dimensions is essential for supporting more holistic professional growth among future EFL teachers.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that pre-service EFL teachers tend to demonstrate stronger competence in procedural aspects of teaching, particularly in lesson planning and instructional implementation, while more complex conceptual dimensions, such as assessment and student development, remain less developed. The findings also point to a clear gap between students' perceived competence, their enacted teaching practices, and lecturers' evaluations, suggesting that pedagogical competence has not yet been fully internalized. These results contribute by clarifying the distinction between procedural and conceptual competence and by offering a triangulated perspective for examining pedagogical development. At the same time, the findings are drawn from a specific context with a relatively small number of participants. Future research could therefore extend this work by exploring more diverse contexts and employing longitudinal designs to better understand how this competence gap develops and evolves over time.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, future research should focus on developing and testing instructional interventions that explicitly bridge the gap between procedural and conceptual pedagogical competence. One promising direction is the integration of microteaching with authentic classroom experiences, such as school-based practicum or simulated teaching environments involving real learners. This would allow pre-service teachers to engage with the complexity of actual classroom dynamics, particularly in areas such as assessment and student development, which were identified as weak in this study. In addition, future studies should explore the role of structured reflective practice and guided feedback in enhancing conceptual understanding, especially in relation to lesson planning and assessment literacy.

Longitudinal research designs are also recommended to examine how pedagogical competence evolves over time, beyond the microteaching phase, and whether the identified competence gap persists or diminishes during real teaching practice.

Expanding the sample across multiple institutions and educational contexts would further improve the generalizability of findings. However, several potential barriers should be considered. Time constraints within microteaching courses may limit opportunities for deeper reflection and repeated practice. Institutional limitations, such as large class sizes and limited access to authentic teaching settings, may also affect the implementation of more comprehensive training models. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data and a small number of lecturer participants may influence the interpretation of results. Addressing these challenges will be essential in designing more effective and context-sensitive teacher education programs.

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AI DECLARATION

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited capacity to support language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity of the manuscript. These tools were not used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation. All content has been reviewed and finalized by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity of the work.

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