

# The Effects of Training on Reflective Reciprocal Peer Coaching in Pre-Service Teacher Education: A Sample from a Turkish EFL Teacher Education Context

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## Abstract

*Implementing reflective practice in pre-service teacher education requires careful organization and training. The aim of this study is to train pre-service teachers about reflective reciprocal peer coaching (RRPC), and to find out how this training affects their reflectivity levels as well as to explore their perceptions about it. For this purpose, 12 pre-service teachers enrolled in an ELT teacher education program at a Turkish university participated in the study. A systematic training program was designed and implemented for twelve weeks with various aspects related to reflectivity and peer coaching. For the effectiveness of training, tools such as the observation forms, coaching cycle checklists and intervention session checklists were developed and used. The participants were administered a reflectivity profile to detect any change in their reflectivity, and they wrote reflective diaries. Furthermore, focused-group interviews were conducted to triangulate the data. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by using Wilcoxon signed-rank statistics for quantitative results, and by using Constant Comparison Method for qualitative ones. Inter-rater reliability was also assessed for further reliability. The results of the study have put forward that pre-service teachers highly benefited from the training they received on RRPC practice. There was a significant change in their reflectivity, and they asserted positive views on this practice. The results yielded enthusiasm about applying ideas of reflective peer coaching for future development.*

## 1. Introduction

It has been widely accepted that reflective practice is a primary condition to achieve professional improvement and development in the quality of teaching [1]. Following Dewey's [2] ideas of reflection as an active and dynamic process, Stein [3] highlights the nature of reflection suggesting it a process where people find out the underlying assumptions of their actions and create alternative ways. Collaboration and commitment in the value of learning from the wider social context of education lie in the heart of reflection [4].

Reflective reciprocal peer coaching (RRPC henceforth) practice in this paper is based on the ideas of collaborative teaching practices embedded in reflection. It is emphasized that engaging in peer coaching has the potential for sustaining reflection and enhancing teachers' ability to analyze the teaching practices [5], [6]. In pre-service teacher (PST henceforth) education context, Anderson, Barksdale and Hite [7] highlight the reflective nature of peer coaching as it sharpens observations and make them more meaningful by increasing skills of analysis and reflection. Although the benefits of a peer coaching program is numerous such as fostering collaboration and gaining awareness about teaching, implementing such program to improve reflectivity requires careful planning and commitment to reflective practice ideals especially in PST education.

When PSTs improve their reflectivity, they gain more self-confidence about what they do in the classroom and how they can work on their weaknesses [8]. Liakopoulou [9] and Cohen-Sayag and Fischl [10] asserted that PSTs generally reflect at a superficial level on their teaching practices lacking critical levels of reflectivity. It is clear that for the real value of a RRPC to be recognized in PST context with a critical perspective, PSTs need time, training, personal commitment, and tools for effective reflective practices [11], [6]. What is more, investigating perceptions of prospective teachers can also help to see how they benefit from training opportunities. As a result, this study asks the following research questions:

1. Does the reflectivity of the PSTs change after training on RRPC practice?
2. What are the perceptions of the PSTs on the RRPC training?

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## 2. The Study

### 2.1 Participants and the setting

The participants of this study were 12 PSTs at the ELT department at a Turkish university. They were taking a field experience course to practice teaching at the assigned schools. They were all familiar with teaching methodology and peer coaching.

### 2.2 Instruments

To detect any change in reflectivity quantitatively, The Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes (TPRTA henceforth) developed by Taggart and Wilson [12] was administered. In order to investigate the perceptions of the participants on training qualitatively, reflective diaries and focused-group interviews were used.

### 2.2 Training on RRPC and data collection

For the purposes of the study, training included five basic parts:

- training on reflection and reflective thinking: lasted for three weeks
- training on RRPC: lasted for five weeks with a focus on interactive tasks
- training on the use of reflection tools: lasted for two weeks with a focus on language skills
- training on reflective diary keeping: lasted for two weeks
- training on cognitive coaching model: lasted for two weeks

The participants were administered TPRTA at the beginning and at the end of the study, and they wrote reflective diaries on the effects of training. All PSTs took part in focus-group interviews. Whole study lasted for 12 weeks.

### 2.3 Data analysis

In order to see whether training on RRPC had effects on the reflectivity of the participants, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was computed between the pre and post scores of TPRTA. For qualitative analysis, reflective diaries and interviews were analyzed by using Constant Comparison Method based on grounded theory. Inter-rater reliability was also measured.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Does the reflectivity of the PSTs change after training on RRPC practice?

Descriptive mean scores of TPRTA before training ( $M=77,75$ ) and after training ( $M=97,17$ ) indicated a total of 19,42 points of increase. In support of descriptive data, results of Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a statistically significant difference between pre and test scores of TPRTA ( $z=-3,061$ ,  $p<.02$ ). These results indicated that the PSTs' reflectivity advanced as they received training on RRPC.

### 3.2 What are the perceptions of the PSTs on the RRPC training?

A total of 103 communication units (CU henceforth) within three main and 10 sub-categories were identified by the raters. Inter-rater reliability was measured as .86. Table 1 below shows the main and sub-categories related to the perceptions of participants.

Table 1. Main and sub-categories related to the effects of training on RRPC practice

Main Categories and Sub-Categories	N*	%	
<b>Sub-categories related to effects on reflective practices</b>			
Noticing the strengths and weaknesses in one's teaching	25	46	Main Category I
Noticing the importance of reflection in teaching	21	39	
Noticing the strengths and weaknesses in others' teaching	6	11	
Noticing differences with peers who were not involved in reflection	2	4	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Sub-Categories related to effects on teaching/learning practices</b>			
Gaining multiple perspectives about teaching practice	17	47	Main Category II
Gaining self-awareness about teaching/learning practices	13	36	
Gaining analytical problem solving about teaching/learning	6	17	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Sub-Categories related to effects on personal gains</b>			
Improving critical thinking skills	7	54	Main Category III
Personal improvement	4	31	
Improving positive criticism	2	15	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>	

According to Table 1, training had positive effects on improving reflective practices (54 CU) as the PSTs were able to notice their strengths and weaknesses in their own and others' teaching, importance of reflection in teaching as well as how receiving training made a difference when they compared themselves with other PSTs who were not trained. What is more, training had effects on teaching/learning practices (36 CU). That is, PSTs gained multiple perspectives about their teaching along with self-awareness and analytical problem solving skills. Training on RRPC practice also caused some personal gains (13 CU) such as improvement in critical thinking skills, positive criticism along with personal improvement. As a result, this study yielded that training PSTs on RRPC helped to improve reflectivity and caused positive changes.

The actual atmosphere of teaching beyond the technical considerations might become more visible and the awareness they gained throughout the RRPC practice would help them to become more reflective practitioners. As Cook, Young and Evensen [13] and Griffin [14] suggest, the teacher's being aware of reflective practice might help them to move forward in reflectivity.

Research on reflective practices suggests that reflectivity can be increased when PSTs are provided with opportunities to reflect with various reflective tools and activities [15], [16], [17]. Lu [6] asserts that success of a peer coaching program depends largely on the trainings provided and time reserved for the implementation of best practices. The period reserved for training (12 weeks) might likely to help participants focus on different aspects of RRPC, and internalize their effectiveness for reflectivity and professional development.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study highlighted that a systematic and long-term training on RRPC would have a significant role in designing effective peer coaching practices. What is more, the well-organized design with various tools and materials would enlighten the way for offering more practical experiences for PSTs. It is implied that offering training prior to reflective peer coaching experiences would help to decrease anxiety and eliminate negative beliefs for taking part in such practices. Although the results presented here were limited due to the number of the participants and the tools used, it illuminated the way for future practices of peer coaching experiences by stressing the numerous benefits of including a training aspect.

Note: This paper is derived from an unpublished doctoral thesis dissertation named *A study on reflective reciprocal peer coaching: An application in pre-service English Language Teaching context*. It is written by the author S. İpek Kuru Gönen and is accepted by Anadolu University Graduate School of Educational Sciences, January 2012.

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