УДК 378.018.8:373.5.011.3-051:811.111]:[378.016:811.111]

TRAINING EFL TEACHERS THROUGH LOOP INPUT IN METHODOLOGY SESSIONS

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The article explores the loop input approach as a special type of experiential training in teacher education. The research, conducted with 21 EFL trainee teachers at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University is aimed at studying trainee EFL teachers' attitude towards loop input-based training in methodology sessions and its capability to affect their reflective skills. The findings of the research allow the author to conclude that loop input training involves trainee teachers into their learning on multisensory level and ensures deeper processing due to the recursion, reverberation between process and content and through reflection over the newly gained experience with the possibilities of transferring it to their own teaching.
Keywords: *experiential training; loop input; EFL trainee teachers; EFL Methodology teaching; training sessions; Pre-Service Teacher Training (PRESETT) Curriculum on Methodology (Bachelor's level); The New Generation School Teacher Project.*

ПІДГОТОВКА ВЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ З ВИКОРИСТАННЯМ МОДЕЛІ «LOOP INPUT» У МЕТОДИЧНИХ МАЙСТЕРНЯХ З КУРСУ МЕТОДИКИ НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

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*У статті описано досвід використання моделі «*loop input*» на заняттях з методики навчання англійської мови із здобувачами вищої освіти факультету іноземних мов УДПУ імені Павла Тичини, яка являє собою особливий вид організації освітнього процесу в руслі конструктивістського підходу до навчання, навчання в дії. На противагу традиційному навчанню, конструктивізм орієнтується на здобувача освіти, який сам конструює нове знання. Специфіка «*loop input*» як особливого виду навчання в дії полягає у вирівнюванні змісту навчання і процесу навчання. Обов'язковим етапом моделі виступає стадія рефлексії, під час якої учасники обговорюють і аналізують отриманий досвід та можливості використання моделі у своїй власній професійній діяльності у майбутньому.*
Авторка переконана, що спосіб, у який майбутні вчителі навчаються впливає на їхню професійну діяльність у майбутньому, що зумовлює необхідність і підкреслює нагальність ґрунтовного відбору підходів для підготовки вчителя англійської мови здатного задовольнити освітні потреби учнів та до рефлексії власної професійної діяльності.
Мета дослідження полягала у вивченні відношення майбутніх учителів до використання моделі

«loop input» та з'ясуванні її впливу на їхні рефлективні вміння. Було використано такі методи дослідження: аналіз літературних джерел, спостереження, анкетування, групової дискусії. Авторка робить висновок, що використання моделі «loop input» є ефективним, оскільки залучає майбутніх учителів до участі в освітньому процесі на мультисенсерному рівні, створює умови для більш глибокого навчання через повторювання змісту навчання у способі здобуття нового знання чи уміння, забезпечує простір для рефлексії над здобутим досвідом і його перенесенням у майбутню професійну діяльність вчителя.
Ключові слова: *конструктивістський підхід; модель «loop input»; підготовка вчителів англійської мови; методичні майстерні; програма додипломної методичної підготовки вчителів англійської мови; проект «Шкільний вчитель нового покоління».*

The notion of 'loop input' as a teaching and learning strategy came into existence in teacher education as back as 1986 with the publication of the article by Tessa Woodward in The Teacher Trainer journal (Woodward, 1986). Later the author elaborated on the idea in her 1991 book *Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training*, published by Cambridge University Press (Woodward, 1991). So, to her loop input appeared to be the model which enabled giving input to trainees without actual lecturing. It is now widely recognised that lecturing is not an efficient way of delivering content. This idea is also in line with the Key Design Principles for the PRESETT Curriculum (Bevz, O., Gembaruk, A., Goncharova, O., Zabolotnaa, O. et.al., 2020) according to which EFL teachers have been trained at the Foreign Languages Department, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University since 2016 initially as piloting the Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course (Bachelor's Level) which is a result of the joint project of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and British Council Ukraine *New Generation School Teacher* (2013–2019), and now permanently.

The purpose of the research is to study trainee EFL teachers' attitudes towards loop input-based training in methodology sessions and its capability to affect their reflective skills.

The research population comprised 21 3rd Year bachelor trainee teachers who were in their third (out of six in total) semester of EFL Methodology Course. The training on the Course is based on experiential approach (Ellis,1986; Gembaruk, 2022; Kolb,1984). So, they are knowledgeable about and accustomed to 'learning by doing'. During the sessions, they analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating, and reconstructing it either in individual or group mode to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience. A more detailed description of how training session are designed and conducted is given in our previous study (Bevz, 2021). It is supposed that revision of their experience may lead to further action (Andresen, Boud, & Cohen, 2000). Thus, reflection is recognised as a key element in experience-based learning. On the other hand, Campana Días et al. (2022) express doubt that a teacher trainer 'cannot make sure that a real reflective process is happening on its own during a training session' and there is a danger for a trainer and trainee to refer to transmitting knowledge instead of adopting a real reflective approach. In this case, the authors recommend applying loop input naming it 'a more deeply developed view' of experience-based learning. Woodward (2003, p. 301) states that 'loop input is a specific type of experiential teacher training process that involves an alignment of the content and process of learning', i.e., of what is to be learnt, and the way it is learnt.

The loop input approach has found its way in various contexts in English teacher training programs. Krulatz and Neokleous (2017) describe successful application of pedagogical grammar instruction based on loop input. According to the authors "loop input is particularly beneficial in pedagogical grammar instruction. It not only allows for more in-

depth processing of the content but also leads to increased consciousness of how grammar works and fosters improvement of teachers' grammatical competence". The detailed analysis of each activity in which trainee teachers have just participated as language learners, and their reflection inspire the authors' hope that similar strategies will be applied in their grammar teaching as it prevents them from considering grammar as a set of rules that needs to be inserted into a learner's brain and prepares them to make use of different grammar teaching approaches in their classrooms.

Campana Días et al. (2022) focus their research on "finding an appropriate way of merging language and pedagogical components so that the trainees improve both aspects of their teaching". The authors conclude that only the trainer having a well-grounded understanding of loop-input theory is capable in a more satisfactory manner to involve the trainees in a framework based on their experience with reflection becoming 'crucial' if the trainees are to attain any significant outcomes.

Cullen (1994) approaches to link methodology and language improvement through making methodology the content of a language improvement programmed by creating 'loops' in such a way that "content is passed on through the very same process that is being described". The author claims that a substantial number of non-native English teachers are eager to improve their language command and loop input-based instruction is the key to it. It is worthwhile mentioning that this idea is consistent with the Key Design Principles for the PRESETT Curriculum (Bevz, O., Gembaruk, A., Goncharova, O., Zabolotnaa, O. et.al., 2020) that it to be "developed in English and taught through the medium of English". The innovative character of the Core Curriculum is traced here as traditionally EFL Methodology was taught in the mother tongue in the described context and remains the same in most teaching programmes in Ukraine. It is implied, though not stated directly, that trainee teacher might improve both their general and professional English proficiency.

The way trainee teachers are trained in preservice and in-service programmes affects their own teaching (Keck, & Kim, 2014). Through loop input, situated learning occurs (Ramírez, & Rodríguez, 2018), where context resembles the practice environment and trainee teachers, in our case, transfer learning to real-life situations through "immersion in and with the experience" (Stein, 1998). They not merely learn about a teaching strategy but can see the value it has for their teaching.

The participants of the research were exposed to a more standard modelling approach, according to which trainee teachers switch into the role of learners to experience the target teaching practices and then reflect on what they did afterwards switching back to their roles as trainees. This 'decompression stage' (Woodward, 2003) is an inseparable part of loop input strategy during which trainee teachers reflect on and analyse the instructional method they have just experienced and consider possible ways to apply it in their teaching.

The practice of including one or two loop input activities is rather common in educational context. The research is focused on both, single loop input activities, and the entire loop input-based sessions. Further, there are examples illustrating the two possibilities.

The loop input activity was the lead-in activity with the purpose to draw the trainee teachers' attention to the importance of pre-listening activities by creating shared experience of language learning. The participants were asked to listen to the recording and report back on what they had heard. The important thing here for the trainer is to select the right recording thus to make sure it is a loop-input activity, as Woodward admits from her closer inspection there are cases where mainstream experiential training rather than loop input is provided due

to the content of the materials suggested to trainees (Woodward, 1986). The trainees were expected not to accomplish the activity properly as it was indeed difficult to understand the recording for the absence of any preparation for listening: there was no pre-teaching of difficult vocabulary, the topic of the recording was unknown, they were not asked to predict the content, the purpose for listening was not given to them, etc. The reasons that caused difficulties in the activity were partially recognised by the participants themselves. They were exposed to a kind of negative experience, i.e., showing the wrong way of organising listening but it had a beneficial effect on them gained through reflecting on what they had been through, what they felt, what went wrong, why it went wrong and suggesting the ways for improvement. With the help of that lead-in activity, the participants also experienced the process of switching between the roles of learners and trainee teachers.

Here is an example of the entire loop input-based session on the theme "Reading Sub-skills". The objective of the session was to develop trainee teachers' understanding of reading sub-skills. At the beginning, the trainees were introduced to the topic by answering the questions about the things that make a 'good reader', whether good readers were only those who knew the meaning of most words or read quickly etc. To explore trainees' previous experience and to create a shared experience of learning at first, they were to evaluate themselves if they were food readers, to do the survey (the questions were given on the handouts) in pairs and to share their experiences with the group focusing on the characteristics that made a partner a good reader and comparing them with own reading habits. The last question of the survey was about the purposes for people's reading, and it severed as a bridge to the next activity about the interdependence of purpose and manner of reading. The participants formed four groups doing four different reading tasks. Then they reflected on the way they did them. Working in the same four small groups they prepared the posters with a graphical presentation of their eye movement (so called 'Eye Accenting Maps') using straight lines, curves, dots, and arrows. The reflection was made in plenary addressing the following questions: (1) What text did you read? (2) How did you read? (3) Why did you read it this way? (4) What helped you do the task in a very short time? (5) What was your reading purpose? The discussion was followed by the matching activity to agree the names of the reading subskills with the description of how to read texts with different reading purposes. To sum up, the participants were intrigued with the questions about the most important reading subskills giving their reasoning and about the things, the choice of subskills depended on.

Another loop input session was conducted on the theme "Stages of a Listening Lesson, Tasks and Activities for Teaching Listening Skills". The objectives of the session included trainee teachers' gaining awareness of pre / while / post-listening stages of a listening task and a range of activities for teaching listening at every stage and developing their abilities to identify the purpose of listening activities.

The participants were asked to 'put on their hats of learners' and to do all the activities accordingly. They predicted the content, watched the video about stages and activity types for developing listening skills two times with different tasks to complete, discussed the strategies they had chosen for doing the tasks and finally switched their roles to reflect on the session as trainee teachers.

Loop input as well as experiential learning are multi-sensory, but loop input has got 'the added advantage of involving self-descriptivity and recursion' (Woodward, 2003). Loop input aims to impart an understanding of the target practices from a number of angles. Some of the participants admitted, that they had a kind of sparkle when they became fully aware

they were watching a video about the process they were engaging with at that very moment. It enabled them to learn more deeply about listening purposes, strategies, and stages of a listening lesson. Using this approach, the participants were involved in a detailed and very useful discussion of the stages of a listening lesson, their aims, the purposes of the activities at each stage, listening strands and strategies, materials, content, etc.

The participants were asked to complete the survey designed to measure their attitude to the experience gained through participation in loop input training sessions. The procedure of collecting the data was duly observed in four aspects: the demand for information, consent, confidentiality and right of use. They were informed about the research project and its purpose, that their participation is voluntary, and they may stop participating at any time. The trainee teachers were assured that the survey was anonymous, and all information gained was used for research purposes exclusively.

The statements of the survey are given in *Table 1*.

Table 1

The Trainee Teachers' Attitude to Loop-Input Training Scale

#	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
		Number of responses				
1.	I feel embarrassed when I first encounter loop input activity.	**11**	**9**	**1**	**–**	**–**
2.	I feel fascinated to take part in loop input activity.	**–**	**–**	**1**	**10**	**10**
3.	I can recognize at once if I am listening to or reading about the process I am engaging with at that very moment.	**–**	**–**	**3**	**10**	**8**
4.	I never can see any reverberation between content and process until I am told about it.	**9**	**10**	**2**	**–**	**–**
5.	I can realize with ease that what I am to learn and the way I am learning about it are fully aligned.	**–**	**–**	**1**	**18**	**2**
6.	The recursion of what I learn and how I learn it produces little influence on my learning and processing.	**6**	**13**	**2**	**–**	**–**
7.	I learn even more deeply when describing what I do in an activity or a session and how I do it I find an alignment of these two things.	**–**	**–**	**–**	**5**	**16**
8.	I hardly remember my experience and knowledge better if I reflect on what I did, how I did it and why I did it that way.	**15**	**5**	**1**	**–**	**–**
9.	I am going to use loop input approach in my own teaching.	**–**	**–**	**1**	**14**	**6**
10.	I see no point in using loop input approach with my future learners.	**7**	**14**	**–**	**–**	**–**

The participants were asked to read statements 1–10 which described what they feel and think about loop input training mark an answer for every statement to the best of their ability. The 10 items asked the trainee teachers to respond in 5-point Likert scale format. The response continuum was: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree for statements 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 and 5 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2 = Agree, 1 = Strongly Agree for statements 1, 4, 6, 8 and 10. For each participant, an attitude score was derived by adding his or her ratings of the 10 items. The scale's construct comprises five dimensions: (1) trainee teachers' feelings; (2) trainee teachers' ability to recognize that loop input is being used; (3) the loop input's influence on trainee teachers' own learning; (4) the impact of reflecting over their experience of loop input on their training; and (5) the possibilities to apply loop input approach in their own teaching. The mostly positive trainee teachers' attitude is represented by a score of more than 25 while less than 25 identify mostly negative attitude.

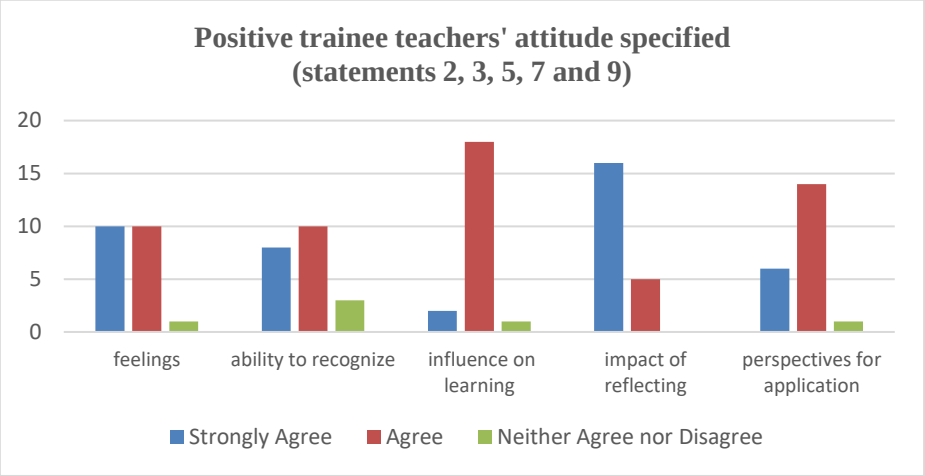

Figure 1. Rating of trainee teachers' agreement with positive statements

Figure 1 shows the rating of trainee teachers' agreement with positive statements based on the number of the responses indicated in *Table 1*. 95.2% voiced their delight of involvement in loop input-based training representing equal portion of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' options. As no one expressed any disagreement with the statements having positive connotations in all five dimensions the author sees no urgent need in specifying the degree to which the trainee teachers 'strongly agree' or just 'agree' with the statements. It should be marked that the wider fluctuation in the degree of their agreement which is 'agree' / rather than 'strongly agree' is traced in the influence loop input produces on their own learning (87.5% against 9.5%) and an intention to use the model in their own teaching (66.7% / 28.6). It is notable that the opposite findings are observed in respect with the impact the loop input training had on the participants' ability to reflect: 76.2% who 'strongly agree' against 23.8% of 'agree' option. The author attaches it to the fact the reflection stage was a regular part of their every loop input-based training experience. There were trainee teachers whose attitude is undecided ranging from 4.6% to 14.3% throughout all five dimensions.

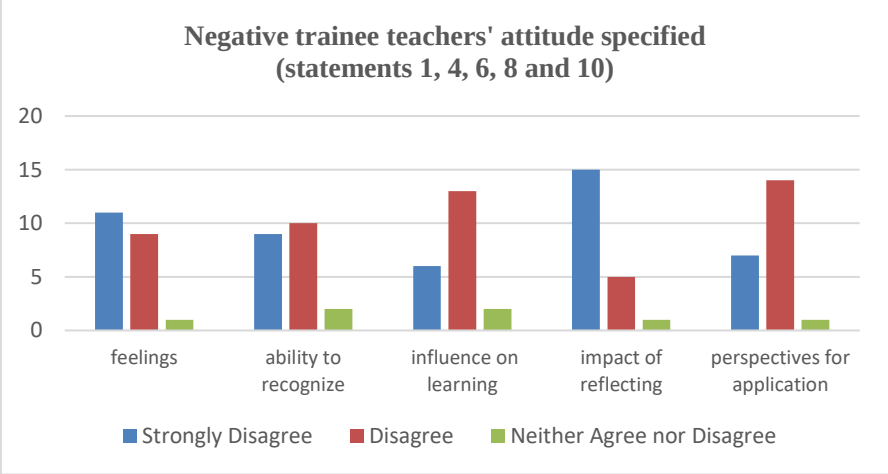

Figure 2. Rating of trainee teachers' disagreement with negative statements

Figure 2 demonstrates rating of trainee teachers' disagreement with negative statements. It is remarkable that it mirrors the findings given in *Figure 1*. 71.4% strongly disagreed that reflection did not make their training more memorable against 23.8% who disagreed.

The trainee teachers expressing their complete or partial disagreement with statements comprising negative connotations about loop input approach in the identified five construct dimensions thus appeared to add in creating the mostly positive attitude to the issue in focus.

The data collected through the survey demonstrated that 100% of the respondents developed a mostly positive attitude towards loop input training (see *Table 1*) though there were 4 trainee teachers (19%) who scored just a little above 25 points (two responses of 28 points, 30 and 31) which may indicate rather neutral attitude. Judging from the field notes taken during group discussions it should be mentioned that those trainee teachers tend to compare loop input training with the mainstream experiential training they had on Methodology Course highly appreciating them altogether in contrast with the lectures and seminars of the traditional training they had on other courses of their bachelor' programme. Still, finding out the reasons causing such a rating can be the focus of further investigation. Therefore, further work in the chosen direction might concern the study of trainee teachers' readiness to use loop input approach in their teaching.

It can be concluded that the considered loop input model is an effective approach in teacher education for developing trainee teachers' methodological competence. The advantageous incorporation of 'decompression stage' as its inseparable element ensures time and space for reflection on the part of the trainees making it a habitual practice and hopefully turning them into reflective practitioners. The participants' reflection on their experience of taking part in the single loop input activities and the entire loop input-based sessions from within, makes the experience and the knowledge much more memorable. The findings of the research allow the author to state that loop input training involves trainee teachers into their learning on multisensory level and ensures deeper processing due to the recursion, reverberation between process and content and through reflection over the newly gained experience with the possibilities of transferring it to their teaching.

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