

A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL FOR TEACHING PRACTICE COURSE^{xii}

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to introduce a blended learning environment and a model for pre-service teaching practice course in English Language Teacher Training Program at Anadolu University. It is supposed that providing a blended learning environment for teaching practice course would improve the practice and contribute to the professional growth of pre-service teachers. Since it will increase the contact hours among students and university supervisors and facilitate peer feedback among pre-service teachers, which in turn, create a productive learning environment for them. Thus, the present paper aimed at providing a blended learning model for teaching practice courses at teacher training institutions and give impetus for the researchers or instructors who would like to implement blended learning in their own teaching environments. Additionally, the present study intends to contribute expanded understanding to the way blending the learning environments, and contribute additional understanding to the knowledge base about the implementation of blended learning for a teaching practice course. Finally, through illustrating a blended learning environment for teaching practice course, it is hoped that this study might contribute to the growing body of knowledge of blended delivery and blended learning in higher education.

Keywords: Blended learning, teaching practice, Teacher Training

INTRODUCTION

The advancements in technology and developments in teaching and learning methodologies have presented new circumstances for more efficient and effective implementation of learning programs, which “make it simple for students and teachers to communicate in non-traditional methods” (Hickman, 2007) and which “are characterized by the introduction of flexible and innovative teaching and learning technology into teaching (Vogel & Klassen, 2001, p. 105). What is more, along with the information technologies, particularly, Internet becomes “one of the most important economic and democratic mediums of learning and teaching” (Khan, 1997, p.5) in the world of education.

The wide spread of Internet technology and advances in computer and information technologies as well as networked learning made it possible to design and utilize new generation learning environments that are realistic, authentic, and engaging. As it is stated, “the availability of computer technologies, such as the Internet, has greatly expanded the educational options available to learners and instructors alike” (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003, p.227)

When the scholars started to employ the online technologies in the field of education, the two forms of learning environments, namely, face-to-face and distant learning environments remained largely separate because they used different media or method of combinations and addressed the needs of different audiences. For example, face-to-face learning typically occurred in a teacher-directed environment with person-to-person interaction in a live synchronous environment. On the other hand, distant learning systems put emphasis on self-paced learning and asynchronous interactions in text only environment. In the same way, earlier models of online learning environments put emphasis on the learner-material interactions in the text-only environments and mostly ignored the human-human interaction. However, as Kern and Warschauer (2000, p. 11) indicated "a shift in dynamic away from learners interacting with computers to interacting with other humans via the computers" started to be very important aspect of distant education environments recently. Rather than simply making online technologies available to students, the initiatives in this field are characterized by the introduction of flexible and innovative teaching/learning technology into teaching. Thus, in terms of providing a human-to-human interaction as well as diminishing the isolation from other learners force distant learning scholars to find out a solution for the instruction delivery models that they offer to their students. Consequently, the need for collaboration between the face-to-face and online learning leads the educators towards a new approach to teaching and learning which is "called as hybrid or blended learning" (Rogers, 2001, p.11).

The wide use of online technologies and Internet in the field of education and the opportunity of blending face-to-face instruction with online teaching environments foreshadow a shift in the way of delivering instruction to the learners as well. "An important implication of this shift is the need for a recommitment to create an ideal learning environment for students and employing new pedagogies and technologies, where appropriate" (Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p.2). Those who implement blended approaches in their courses ground their pedagogy on the conjecture that there are fundamental benefits in face-to-face interaction as well as the conception that there are some ingrained conveniences of using online methods in their teaching. Thus, it can be claimed that the main goal of blending the learning environments is to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003).

Although the studies in the field of blended learning as an instruction model has an increasing interest, especially in the field of higher education, the concept of blended learning is still in its infancy and there are few research projects providing insights into how exactly it should be implemented into the higher education curriculum. The reviewed literature revealed that while much of the literature on online and blended learning addresses the effectiveness and mechanics of the different delivery methods, a few writers have conducted studies dealing with solely blended learning as a medium of instruction (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Waddoups, Hatch, & Butterworth, 2003).

With the attempt of closing the gap and contributing to the literature in the field, more studies, which deal with blended learning, should be conducted. Regarding this fact, the present study intended to introduce a Blended Learning model for 'Teaching Practice' course in a teacher-training program in Turkish context. The motive and the aspiration for such an attempt will be explained in the following section.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching Practice as a course is an important component of the Bachelor of Education Programs, which is designed to provide the critical opportunity for pre-service teachers to demonstrate their ability to write lesson plans, deliver individualized instruction, and manage the classroom in a relevant field setting. It is a triadic developmental process, which includes pre-service teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers each of who has definite roles and responsibilities (Glickman & Bey, 1990; Casey & Howson, 1993; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

Within the framework and objectives of the teaching practice course, the pre-service teachers are usually placed in participating schools. Each pre-service teacher is monitored by supervisor from the university as well as a cooperating teacher from the participating school throughout their teaching experience process. The university supervisors give feedback for the pre-service teachers' lesson plans, observe their teaching practices and give further feedback for the teaching performances of pre-service teachers. During the actual teaching practice, in addition to university supervisors' supervision, the cooperating teachers, who are assumed as model teachers in the participating schools, are expected to be with pre-service teachers in order to observe their teaching practice and provide feedback to them. The main duties associated with the supervisory role required cooperating teacher to provide necessary assistance in lesson preparation and lesson observation and providing feedback throughout the pre-service teachers' teaching experiences.

Within the context of the present study, it is observed and experienced by the researcher that, pre-service teachers were encouraged to reflect on their experiences and to exchange their thoughts with their university supervisor or with their peers, yet the time allowed for this process was considered not to be sufficient. As the participants of the present study stated, they had only two class hours per week to discuss the preparation processes of their lesson plans as well as the issues they observed in participating schools. What's more, although it would be very favorable for the pre-service teachers to see each other's lesson plans, even the students in the same group might not have chance to see or examine his/her classmate's lesson plans, and they could not exchange their ideas either about the lesson plans or teaching practices.

Besides, there was a lack of coordination among peers and lack of a specifically designated learning environment where the peers could exchange their opinions related to the lesson plans or teaching practice of each other. The researcher frequently witnessed that a group of six or more pre-service teachers were assigned to perform their teaching practices in a participating school, however, none of them were able to share their opinions about each other's lesson plans that they have prepared or the lessons that they have taught. That is, especially, peer reviewing of the lesson plans prepared by pre-service teachers, the peer observations of practices of all students originate a critical problem in teaching practice or teaching experience courses.

The above-mentioned problems observed during the teaching practice processes as well as the observed needs of pre service teachers provided an impetus for a broader study.

The review of studies in the field of online learning environments inspired the researcher that through implementing a computer mediated or an online learning environment for such a course, which could also facilitate peer feedback and peer observation, might be helpful for decreasing the observed problems of pre-service ELT teachers in their teaching practice courses. Facilitating peer feedback for the lesson plans, observation of the performances of the pre-service teachers by other peers and exchanging ideas through discussions might also help the growth of the teaching skills of pre-service teachers. However, due to the nature of the practice teaching course, which requires on-ground face to face meetings for all of the parties, providing a solely computer mediated or online learning environment might not serve its purpose. Therefore, it is supposed that such a learning environment can be obtained through implementing a 'blended learning' environment where pre-service teachers are able to get feedback both from their university supervisors and their peers through both online discussion forum and face-to-face meetings.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study is to provide a blended learning model for teaching practice course through taking an on-ground course and blend it with online learning environment to enhance the quality of the teaching experiences of pre-service ELT teachers. Through implementing such a learning environment, where many ideas related to the pre-service teachers' lesson plans and teaching practices are shared and debated both by pre-service teachers and university supervisor, a virtual classroom community can be constructed for teaching practice courses. Establishing such a learning environment might also provide opportunities for pre-service teachers where they are able to coordinate with their peers without isolation from the learning environment. Likewise, providing a blended learning environment where both lesson plans and videotaped teaching practice sessions of pre-service teachers are available for rest of the students with the aim of scrutinizing and discussing them for further supervision and peer feedback could be very beneficial for pre-service teachers in a teaching practice course. Although online learning is not new, blending online and on-ground face-to-face instruction is a relatively new phenomenon in the field of teacher training. Thus, the present study might also contribute expanded understanding to the way blending the learning environments, and contribute additional understanding to the knowledge base about the implementation of blended learning for a teaching practice course. Finally, it is hoped that this study might contribute to the growing body of knowledge of blended delivery and blended learning in higher education.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the PhD study that this paper was derived is twofolded. First of all, it intends to provide an alternative dimension to the learning environment for teaching practice courses and secondly, it concentrates on evaluating and appraising the educational effectiveness of a blended learning environment for teaching practice course, concerning the participants' opinions and their satisfaction with blended teaching practice course. However, within the context of the present paper, only the blended learning environment for teaching practice course that was designed by the researcher will be introduced to the readers. Thus, through introducing blended learning environment, it is aimed at providing a blended learning model for teaching practice courses at teacher training institutions and give impetus for the researchers or instructors who would like to implement blended learning in their own teaching environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although it is believed that blended learning is an almost new concept in the world of education, the blends of instructional methodologies have been used in this field for a long time. Therefore, as Clark (2003) claimed some skeptics see blended learning as an old idea dressed up in new clothes, something everybody has been doing all along. However, it has been driven by a series of technical innovations in learning for many decades. Today, the academics appreciate that both face-to-face and online learning environments have a variety of pros and cons. In an effort to capitalize on the advantages of both instructional modalities and minimize the disadvantages, many institutions have begun to blend elements of these two separate learning environments. Such form of educational delivery is universally cited as, 'Blended Learning' and can include many different ways of combining pedagogical approaches in order to produce optimal learning outcomes (Driscoll, 2002; Boyle, et. al. 2003; Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2004).

With reference to the attempts for combining the best sides of the instructional environments, 'blended learning' has become a kind of motto in most educational settings, yet there is still a sort of ambiguity about what is meant when the term is used. For instance, in his article titled "Blended learning: driving forward without definition," Laster (2004) stated;

"[A]t one extreme; one could argue that 'blended' learning can be any kind of learning. However, in an applied view, one generally equates blended learning to a teaching and learning experience that uses technology. Within the bounds of the applied view, great variability still exists around a firmly established blended learning definition" (p.154).

Although there are a wide variety of definitions of blended learning, most of the definitions in the literature are just variations of a few common themes; Driscoll (2002) summarizes the four different concepts that blended learning was referred to in the literature as:

- To combine or mix modes of Web-based technology (e.g., live virtual classroom, self-paced instruction, collaborative learning, streaming video, audio, and text) to accomplish an educational goal.
- To combine various pedagogical approaches (e.g., constructivism, behaviorism, cognitivism) to produce an optimal learning outcome with or without instructional technology.
- To combine any form of instructional technology (e.g., videotape, CD-ROM, Web-based training, film) with face-to-face instructor-led training.
- To mix or combine instructional technology with actual job tasks in order to create a harmonious effect of learning and working. (para. 2, p.54)

The first two concepts that referred to the blended learning are the ones which also forced Laster (2004) to affirm that "blended learning can be any kind of learning" (p. 154), because they are very general descriptions that might cover almost all learning systems. For instance, if we take these two definitions into consideration, a teacher's use of characteristics of behaviorist learning and constructivist teaching together within a lesson, or, if a teacher uses the technology while s/he is teaching any subject and asks his/her students to send their homework through e-mail, the instruction can be considered as blended learning.

It is obvious that it could be very hard to find any learning system that does not involve different instructional methods, instructional technology and delivery media. Thus, defining blended learning in either of these two ways really does not get at the core of what blended learning is and why the concept of blended learning is inspiring for so many people. In another definition in the literature, blended learning defined as a blend of online and face-to-face instruction (Reay, 2001; Rothery, 2004). The last definition seems to reflect more accurately the idea that blended learning is the combination of instruction from two separate modes of teaching and learning, which are on-ground face-to-face learning systems and online distant learning systems. It also underlines the central role of Internet-based technologies in blended learning. Similarly, Osguthorpe and Graham enounced that,

"Blended learning combines face-to-face with distance delivery systems. [T]he Internet is involved, but it is more than showing a page from a Website on the classroom screen. [I]t all comes back to teaching methodologies—pedagogies that change according to the unique needs of learners. Those who use blended learning environments are trying to maximize the benefits of both face-to-face and online methods— using the Web for what it does best, and using class time for what it does best" (Osguthorpe & Graham 2003, p. 227).

Likewise, Allen and Seaman's (2003) and Allen, Seaman, and Garrett's (2007) studies, illustrates a prototypical course classifications and the proportions of online parts of the different learning and teaching environments. In their classification, they defined blended learning with reference to the proportion of the online parts in the content and claimed that, substantial proportion (30 to 79 %) of the content is delivered online and blended courses typically uses online discussions in addition to some face-to-face meetings. Their classification will surely contribute to the in-depth understanding of the definition of blended learning, traditional learning environments as well as the other type of instructional environments that integrates the technology into its curriculum.

Blended learning includes a wide variety of approaches. It may be as simple as making online resources and materials available to students outside of class, or using online technology as a forum for and means of interaction and communication outside of a face-to-face classroom experience. Likewise, blended learning may include synchronous or asynchronous online instruction and a wide variety of sophisticated technologies and rich online learning tools. In many cases, blending of instructional models includes a combination of both face-to-face and online instruction within a particular course.

What is more, blended learning model replaces, rather than supplements, some face-to-face classroom time with online, interactive learning activities (Twigg, 2003). In most cases, blended learning has advantages over a purely distance learning course, as it also allows face-to-face time with the instructor and/or with other students. In addition, blended learning environments provide students the option to select the type of learning environment that best meets their individual learning and scheduling needs. It is commonly believed, blended learning combines 'the best of both worlds'.

Thus, blended learning allows students to experience and take advantage of the best educational elements that both the face-to-face classroom environment and the online learning environment have to offer.

The blended learning concept for the present study is a blend of the definitions in the literature and primarily based on Driscoll's (2002) concepts referring to the blended learning, the definitions of Osguthorpe and Graham (2003), Reay (2001), Rothery (2004) and Allen, Seaman, and Garrett (2007). That is, the blended learning is a blend of face-to-face and distributed learning environments that highlights the use of Internet-based technologies which is characterized by a reduction in the number of face-to-face meetings and which emphasizes the use of online discussions at the course level instruction.

Types of Blended Learning

Although there is a wide variation in the blended learning practices that are taking place, there are also some similarities among them. For instance, all the blended learning examples occur at one of the following four different levels, which are Activity level, Course level, Program level and Institutional level. In all four levels, the nature of the blends can be determined either by the learner or by the instructor. At the institutional and program levels, blending is generally left to the decision of the learner, whereas at the course and activity levels instructors are more likely to take a role in laying down the blended learning.

Blended learning at the activity level takes place when a learning activity contains both face-to-face and online or computer mediated elements. For instance, there are some military training facilities (Bonk & Wisner; 2000), such as training the air force pilots and astronauts, which incorporate both face-to-face and virtual elements. In terms of higher education, there are strategies for using technological tools to make learning activities more authentic, especially; we see how technology is used to bring experts at a distance into the classroom creating a simultaneous face-to-face and online activity.

A blended instruction at the course level engages face-to-face and online activities that are used as part of a course. Some blended learning approaches engage learners in different circumstances but supporting face-to-face and online activities that overlap in time while other approaches separate the time block so that they are chronologically put together and not overlapping.

At the program level of blended learning, there are certain face-to-face courses that are required for a program and the rest can be taken at a distance or online. One of the significant examples of program level blended learning in the Turkish context is DELTT (Distant English Language Teacher Training). In this program, which aims to train students as English language teachers, students are offered two year face to face instruction and the first two years are followed through online supported distant education program. DELTT is the first blended program in Turkey with its face-to-face component in the first two years and the distance component in the 3rd and 4th years (Durmusoğlu-Köse, Özkul & Özyar, 2002).

In addition to some private universities, Anadolu University and Sakarya University are good examples of such institutions that provide institutional models of Blended Learning in Türkiye. Besides the Turkish context, the University of Phoenix also has an institutional model for Blended learning where students have face-to-face classes at the beginning and at end of the courses with online activities in between. Likewise, at a university level, the University of Central Florida has created the 'M course' designation for blended learning courses that have some decrease in face-to-face seat-time.

In the same way, at the University of Illinois, traditional on-campus economics students have been allowed to take a required course online while they were off-campus for the summer (Bonk & Graham, 2006). These are some of the institutional models of blended learning in higher education settings.

Recent Research on Blended Learning

Since blended learning and its implementation in the field of education is relatively new subject in the higher education institutions, there is limited number of studies dealing with solely blended learning environments in teacher education. It is also acknowledged by Young and Lewis (2008) that there is limited number of research on online and blended learning in teacher education specifically when it is compared to the research on the practice and theory of blended learning in other disciplines. However, there are plenty of studies in the literature that dealt with implementation of Web based instruction into campus based instruction and there are a growing number of faculties experimenting the innovative technology-mediated approaches to teaching, such as the use of tools for simulations, visualization, communication, and feedback that are transforming the ways that their students learn (West & Graham, 2005).

The review of the literature on the blended instruction depicted that the studies in the field of blended instruction are generally interested in inquiring the students/participants' perspectives about implementation of such learning environments into their existing instructional systems. They used either questionnaires or participant reflections in order to appraise the implementation. Additionally, several studies gathered their data through utilizing questionnaires accompanied with interviews with a focus group of participants.

The available literature on the studies dealing with blended learning and its implementation in different contexts revealed that most of the studies dealt with theoretical grounds of blended learning implications in corporate environments. However, there are some precious studies conducted in educational settings that inspired the researcher while planning his PhD study.

Among the studies dealing with implementation of Web based instruction into face-to face instruction, Sze (2006) and Holstrom, Ruiz, and Weller's (2007) studies inspired the researcher a lot. In Sze's (2006) study, the researcher attempted to describe the development of an online peer observation platform for primary ESL teachers in Hong Kong. In his study, Sze (2007) aimed at making peer observation more accessible, flexible, and user-friendly, which would not be possible in a traditional, school-based setting. In Holstrom, Ruiz, and Weller's (2007) study, the researchers piloted a study that examined perceptions of Early Childhood Education student teachers towards e-practicum.

Although studies in the field of blended learning environments are becoming common abroad, there are very limited studies in Turkish context. One of the recent empirical studies on blended learning environment in the Turkish context is **Akkoyunlu and Yılmaz-Soylu's (2006 and 2008) study**, which inquire students' preferences associated to blended learning environments.

Akkoyunlu and Yılmaz-Soylu's (2006) study highlighted that combining face-to-face teaching and the use of online instruction with forums and other available media contributed to students' learning.

Another study dealing with the blended instruction in the Turkish context is Orhan's (2008) study, which intended to discuss the process of redesigning a course for blended learning and to explore college students' perceptions of blended learning environment, revealed that university students do not want to continue their education with only traditional face to face learning environments or with a purely online learning environment. The literature related to learning environments, practice teaching, use of Internet, particularly, the use of discussion boards, and the use of videotaped classroom teachings in teaching practice or ELT methodology courses provided the necessary background and justification for the Ph.D study which explored the impact of a blended teaching practice course on the professional development of pre-service teachers enrolled in a English language teacher preparation program.

In the following part of this paper, the blended learning model that was developed for the teaching practice course in a teacher-training program will be elaborated and illustrated in detail.

THE BLENDED LEARNING MODEL FOR TEACHING PRACTICE COURSE

Subsequent to review of literature in the field, an online program template, namely blended teaching practice course template, was planned and designed by the researcher in order to provide an alternative instructional environment for the on ground teaching practice course. That is, as to provide a course level blended learning environment, the teaching practice course, which was subject to a broader study, was organized as a combination of both face-to-face and online instructional activities. The class meets face-to-face once a week for 2 hours in the campus and the rest of the activity is carried out online. The participants were also required to perform their teaching in participating schools for 6 hours per week. The on-ground face-to-face portion includes discussion of the lesson plans, and other aspects of teaching practice that either provided on the course Web page as PowerPoint presentations or in-class discussions related to their teaching practice.

Within the framework of the present study, the pre-service teachers enrolled in a 14 week blended teaching practice course. Every week, each participant was asked to prepare a lesson plan in Word format and mail them to the researcher 2 days prior to their actual teaching practices in the participating schools. As soon as the researcher received the lesson plans, transferred them into Flash and PDF format and uploaded them onto the Web page. When the pre-service teachers logged on to the Web page of blended teaching practice course, their first task was to examine their friends lesson plans in the 'Lesson Plans Module' of the Web page and provide feedback for the lesson plans through an asynchronous computer-mediated discussion forum where other pre-service teachers have also examined the same lesson plans and gave their feedback. Another weekly task for each participant was observing the videotaped teaching practices and providing feedback to the pre-service teacher through the discussion forum.

The program template that was developed for the purpose of the present study consisted of a series of hyperlinked HTML pages. The online component of the course is accompanied with WebCT (Web Course Tools) software program that consisted of a series of hyperlinked HTML pages with the aim of increasing the collaboration among the participants. The WebCT software program, which is used in the present study, is campus licensed by Anadolu University and provided for its entire instructors who wish to implement it as an online component for their courses.

The major reason of utilizing WebCT in this study is that, it provides tools to enhance interaction between students and faculty and includes security, administration, and facilities for backing up, etc. that supposed to serve the purpose of the study sufficiently.

When the students log on to the WebCT via the Anadolu University's home page, they come across with an introductory screen where they are asked for user name and password. After they fill in their user names and passwords, which is provided for the participants in advance, the home page of the Blended Teaching Practice course (Figure: 1) become visible.

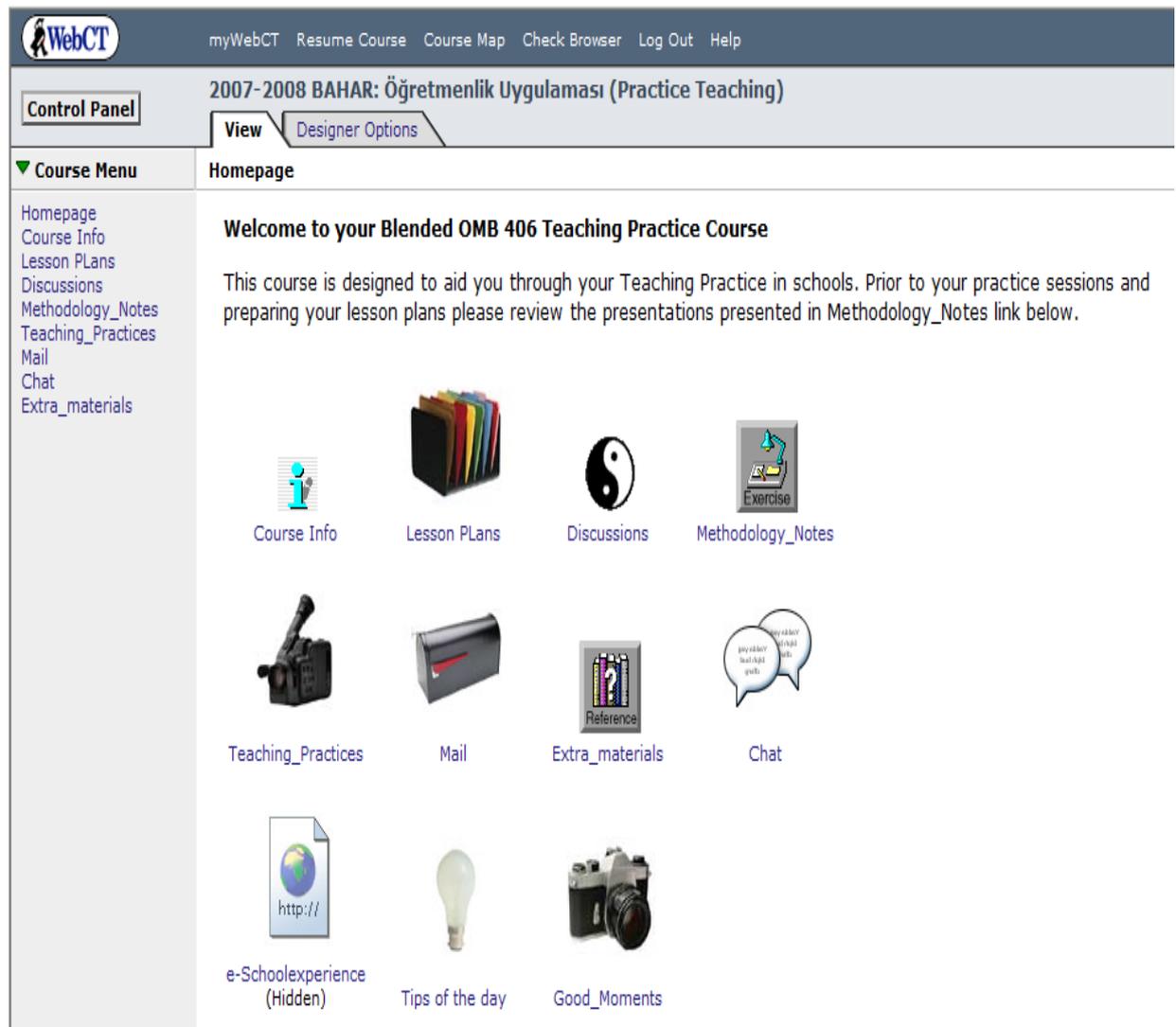


Figure: 1
Homepage of Blended Teaching Practice Course

The home page of the Blended Teaching Practice course consist of some extra content modules including Course info, Lesson plans, Discussion, Methodology Notes, Teaching Practices (videos), Mail, Extra Materials, Chat, Tips of the day, Good Moments where students uploaded their photos in participating schools as well as a hidden link to accompanying Web page.

The 'Course Info Module' is used to inform students about the objectives and the course outline of Teaching Practice course in detail. The 'Lesson Plans Module'

(Figure: 2) is divided into sections as each covering a week's lesson plans of the pre-service teachers.

In this module, students are able to view the weekly lesson plans of their classmates, examine them and provide feedback for those lesson plans through the discussion (forum) page of the WebCT platform.

The screenshot shows the WebCT interface for the course '2007-2008 BAHAR: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması (Practice Teaching)'. The top navigation bar includes 'myWebCT', 'Resume Course', 'Course Map', 'Check Browser', 'Log Out', and 'Help'. Below this is a 'Control Panel' with 'View' and 'Designer Options' tabs. The 'Course Menu' on the left lists: Homepage, Course Info, Lesson Plans, Discussions, Methodology_Notes, Teaching_Practices, Mail, Chat, and Extra_materials. The main content area has a heading 'Homepage > Lesson Plans' and a text block: 'Here you will find your and your friend's lesson plans, which are grouped weekly. Please give your peer feedback and comment on your friends' lesson plans through discussion link on the left hand column of this Web page.' Below the text is a grid of 12 lesson plan icons, each consisting of a stack of books with a red apple on top. The icons are labeled: I.Week, II.Week, III. Week, IV.Week, V.Week, VI.Week, VII. Week, VIII.Week, IX.Week, IX WeeK (Cont.), X.Week, and Make-up Plans.

Figure: 2
Lesson Plan Page

The asynchronous computer-mediated 'Discussion' forum of WebCT provides an additional learning opportunity as an adjunct to other activities that are held within the framework of teaching Practice course. Through using discussion board students can interpret and analyze others' feedback related to their lesson plans and practice teachings, present their points of view, and provide further information that support their rationale of preparing the lesson plan. What is more, the feedback on the discussion board makes visible the other participants' feedback for the lesson plans and practice teachings for longer terms. Concerning the characteristics and significance of the discussion boards in online learning environments, the discussion board formed one of the functional elements of the proposed blended teaching practice course.

This tool provides a time of convenience and place of convenience opportunity for student-student contact and student-instructor contact. It also provides a shared

space and meeting place for the participants of the blended teaching practice course.

The asynchronous discussions related to the participants' lesson plans and teaching practice served as virtual peer feedback or peer supervision seminars where the instructor to student and student-to-student feedback exchange occurred in the blended teaching practice course. In the asynchronous discussions within the blended teaching practice course, participants were directly involved in each other's learning by being supervisors for each other. It is not to imply that peer feedback can occur only in a pair, however, each pre-service teacher acts as a peer supervisor for at least one other. Furthermore, the feedback sessions through the asynchronous discussion board can be regarded as a part of social constructivist learning, as the social constructivist view of learning suggests that learning should be "participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative and given over to the construction of meanings rather than receiving them" (Bruner, 1996, p. 84).

The 'Discussion Board' (Figure: 3) of the course is divided into sections to cover each week's lesson plans and classroom practices. Each section on the discussion board is activated in the beginning of the related week and left accessible in the following weeks. The researcher regularly checked the students peer feedback and other postings in the discussion board and acted as moderator of the discussion platform. Sometimes he asked questions to foster participation and provided feedback about the students' lesson plans and their videotaped classroom practices every week.

The screenshot shows the WebCT interface for the course "2007-2008 BAHAR: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması (Practice Teaching)". The page is titled "Discussions" and includes a "Control Panel" and "Course Menu" on the left. The main content area displays a table of discussion topics with columns for Topic, Unread, Total, and Status.

Topic	Unread	Total	Status
Main	0	1	public, locked
1. Week	2	50	public, unlocked
II. Week	1	96	public, unlocked
III. Week	0	123	public, unlocked
IV. Week	72	103	public, unlocked
V. Week	3	163	public, unlocked
VI. Week	64	139	public, unlocked
Teaching_Practices	16	29	public, unlocked
make-up plans	0	2	public, unlocked
VII. Week	104	139	public, unlocked
VIII. Week	45	124	public, unlocked
TeachingPracticesII	8	26	public, unlocked
Telafi Planları II	0	12	public, unlocked
IX. Hafta	29	58	public, unlocked
TeachingPracticesIII	10	14	public, unlocked
9.Hafta_II	33	64	public, unlocked
X. Week	30	35	public, unlocked
TeachingPractices_IV	0	10	public, unlocked
Genel Yorumlarınız	0	8	public, unlocked
All	417	1196	---

Figure: 3
Discussion Forum Page

The track of student participation to the discussion board was encouraged and their visiting the course content pages was monitored through WebCT's control panel.

In the 'Methodology Notes Module', students find some additional materials such as lecture notes in PDF and PowerPoint presentations, which intend refreshing students' methodological knowledge. The additional materials in this module include the lecture notes related to the features of classroom practice such as lesson planning, writing objectives in lesson plans, giving instruction properly, etc. They are not used to teach new subjects but to activate and refresh the students' background knowledge that they gained during their previous methodology courses.

Once students log on to the 'Teaching Practices Module', they see an introductory screen that shows a list of recorded videos that capture each pre-service teacher's classroom practices. When the students click on the related course's video link, they immediately log on to the incorporating page, where they can watch the videotaped classroom practice accompanied with the lesson observation criteria that was developed by the researcher and his dissertation advisor.

The video-recorded classroom teaching practices of each participant is placed on a separate Web page but linked with their names through the 'Teaching Practices Module' on the WebCT. The entrance page of teaching Practices provides brief information about how to access the videotaped classroom practices of the students. When students log onto the 'Teaching Practices Module' (Figure: 4) they see the focus points of the week that was assigned for each of them and links for the video clips of the recorded teaching practices.

The screenshot shows the WebCT interface for the course '2007-2008 BAHAR: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması (Practice Teaching)'. The left sidebar contains a 'Course Menu' with links to 'Homepage', 'Course Info', 'Lesson Plans', 'Discussions', 'Methodology_Notes', 'Teaching_Practices', 'Mail', 'Chat', and 'Extra_materials'. The main content area has a title '2007-2008 BAHAR: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması (Practice Teaching)' and a 'View' button. Below the title, there is a section for 'I. Grup;' with the following text: 'Sevgili Öğretmen Adayları, izleyeceğimiz kaydedilmiş ders anlatımlarına dönütleriniz için odaklanacağınız konular gruplarınıza göre aşağıda ayrı ayrı verilmiştir. Dönütlerinizi verirken kayıtlı ders videolarının yanındaki "Ders Gözlem Kriterlerini" dikkate alınız. Derslerin kaydedilen videolarına isimlerinizin yazılı olduğu linkleri tıklayarak ulaşabilirsiniz'. This is followed by a list of focus points: 'Dersin Giriş Bölümü: Student 1, Student 2, Student 3', 'Öğretim Yöntemi: Student 4, Student 5, Student 6', 'Hata Düzeltme ve Değerlendirme: Student 7, Student 8, Student 9', 'Materyal Kullanımı: Student 10, Student 11, Student 12', 'Dersin Sonuç Bölümü: Student 13, Student 14, Student 15', and 'Sınıf Yönetimi: Student 16, Student 17, Student 18'. Below this list are four underlined letters: 'D', 'S', 'H', and 'M'. A dashed line separates this from the '2. Grup;' section, which has similar text and focus points, followed by four underlined letters: 'E', 'Es', 'B', and 'T'.

Figure: 4
Teaching Practice Entrance Page

Each video clip is also accompanied with a classroom observation criterion and both of them are published on the same Web page (Figure: 5).

The screenshot displays the WebCT interface for the course '2007-2008 BAHAR: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması (Practice Teaching)'. The page is titled 'Teaching_Practices' and features a 'Control Panel' with 'View' and 'Designer Options' tabs. A 'Course Menu' on the left lists various resources like 'Homepage', 'Course Info', 'Lesson Plans', 'Discussions', 'Methodology_Notes', 'Teaching_Practices', 'Mail', 'Chat', and 'Extra_materials'. The main content area is divided into two sections: a video player on the left showing a classroom scene with a teacher and students, and a 'Gözlem Dönüt Kriterleri' (Observation Criteria) panel on the right. This panel is divided into two sub-sections: 'Dersin Giriş Bölümü' (Lesson Introduction) and 'Öğretim Yöntemi' (Teaching Method). Each sub-section contains a list of seven criteria for evaluation.

Gözlem Dönüt Kriterleri

Dersin Giriş Bölümü:

1. Dersin hedef-davranışlarını öğrencilere bildirebilme
2. Derse uygun bir giriş yapabilme
3. Konuyu önceki derslerle ilişkilendirebilme
4. Öğrencilerin derse ilgi ve hazırbulunuşluk düzeylerini artırabilme

Öğretim Yöntemi:

1. Konuyu pratik ve anlaşılabilir örneklerle açıklayabilme
2. Konuyu yaşama ilişkilendirebilme
3. Konuya uygun düşünürücü sorular sorabilme
4. Kabılanları, konu ile ilgili düşüncelerini açıklamaya ve soru sormaya özendirilme
5. Anlaşır açıklamalar ve yönergeler verebilme
6. Verilen yönerge ve açıklamaların anlaşılırlığını kontrol edebilme
7. Öğrencilerin yapılan etkinliklere etkin katılımını sağlayabilme

Figure: 5
Videotaped Teaching Practice in Teaching Practice Page

The purpose of placing observation evaluation criteria on the same page is to enable the students to scrutinize the videotaped lesson through a holistic criterion and provide their feedback regarding the provided criteria. The lesson plans of the videotaped practice sessions, which are placed in the 'Lesson Plans Module' beforehand, are also linked next to the video clips in order to enable the viewer more easily to work out what is taking place in the videotaped lesson if necessary. Additionally, in order to ease the feedback providing process, a link to the 'Discussion' button on the same page is placed. If the students click on the discussion button, they are directly taken to an online forum page (WebCT) where, after logging in, s/he is able to take part in an asynchronous discussion with other pre-service teachers who have watched the same video-recorded classroom practice. The 'Mail' function of the WebCT is mainly used for communication among the participants. Through registering the WebCT each student obtained a mail account automatically which can be traced within the program template.

Participants used it for two main purposes, which were sending their weekly lesson plans to the instructor in order to be uploaded on the Web page and communicating with each other, including the instructor, on the basis of the course subjects.

There is also an 'Extra Material Module' in the home page of the blended teaching practice course which is used to share extra materials that can be used in the teaching practice course such as a sample yearly practice program for pre-service teachers and printable forms of feedback and evaluation criteria.

A 'Chat session' function was also added in the home page of the blended teaching practice course in order to facilitate out-of-class refreshment for students. This module allows instructor and the students to communicate in real time in any one of five different rooms. It is observed that, from time to time, participants use this module for out of class subjects.

'Tips of the day tool' originally allow the instructor to write tips for students on topics such as using WebCT, however, in this course this tool is used for the purpose of warning the students on the specific issues such as reminding them to send their lesson plans, or to provide feedback for their friends' lesson plans. These tips are displayed randomly each time a student logs onto the home page of the course.

In addition to the above outlined online platform, students were also enrolled in a two-hour face-to-face session every week. The aim of this face-to-face session was for the orientation purposes at the beginning of the term, however, throughout the course of the time, these face-to-face sessions are held regularly in order to facilitate on-ground part of the blended teaching practice course. Every week on Mondays, students and the instructor came together in a classroom and discussed the course related subjects including problems the pre-service teachers faced in the practice schools or planning proper activities for their practice teachings.

CONCLUSION

Students in teaching practice courses need to get plenty of feedback both for their lesson plans and for their practice teachings. It could be suggested that teaching practice courses should provide more opportunities for the pre-service teachers to see and analyze a plenty of lesson plans and practice teaching performances throughout their teaching practice courses. This could be achieved through providing a platform where their instructor and their peers provide them with plenty of feedback through online or asynchronous discussion forum and where they can see and analyze a great amount of lesson plans as well as recorded teaching practices.

Likewise, analyzing videotaped teaching practices of pre-service teachers could contribute to their professional development especially to their skills on preparing the lesson plans. Therefore, it could be claimed that pre-service teachers might benefit from the advantage of accommodating their teaching practice courses with blended learning environments in their teaching practice process.

Additionally, it could be claimed that a well-organized blended teaching practice course can encourage students to be active participants in the class discussions and may help to create a collaborative learning environment through providing asynchronous interaction among students and between instructors and students that is a key factor in student learning.

We can conclude that blended teaching practice course can improve the interactivity, foster peer collaboration and establish a sense of community, since students could interact with their instructors or with their peers through both face-to-face and online communication and information channels of WebCT such as discussion forum, mail and chat. What is more, such a learning environment for teaching practice course might also meet the pre-service teachers' expectations who get plenty of feedback for their performances that play important role in their professional developments as teachers.

The blended learning model that was utilized in teaching practice courses of pre-service teachers will be of practical interest primarily to the teaching practice course supervisors in teacher training programs. For supervisors, understanding the current state of blended teaching practice course could be useful in forming their opinions and guiding their future behavior, such as whether or not to begin or continue teaching such courses. Similarly, educational administrators such as program and department chairs, or teaching practice course coordinators could also benefit from the results of this study, because, the findings of this study could be used by administrators to identify obstacles to the successful integration of blended courses in the curriculum.

With reference to the findings of the PhD study (Caner, 2009), in which the course level blended learning model was practiced and utilized in a teaching practice course and that originates the present paper, it was found that utilizing blended learning model for teaching practice course of pre-service teachers generally satisfied the participants and this type of instruction in the teaching practice courses or micro teaching practice courses could be implemented in teacher training programs.

What is more, as the findings of the PdD study revealed that participating in a course level blended teaching practice course increased the pre-service teachers' teaching skills, primarily their skills on preparing lesson plans and the skills on performing their teaching practices.

Therefore, it is believed that providing a blended learning model for the teaching practice course of pre-service teachers where they are able to get continual guidance of their university supervisor, besides constant peer support and continuous peer feedback for their lesson plans and teaching practices will contribute to the training process and professional growth of pre-service teachers.

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