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Post-Pandemic Teacher Education: Opinions of English Teacher Educators on Hybrid System

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Abstract

The wave of change in the educational landscape started with Emergency Remote Teaching due to the pandemic and was followed by the hybrid system adopted in higher education institutions. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the effects of the hybrid system on English teacher education and get the reflections of English teacher educators regarding its post-effects on teacher candidates. To this end, 18 English teacher educators from 10 different state universities were reached to evaluate post-pandemic teacher education. Adopting a qualitative research design, the participants were asked to complete a survey that included nine questions about different learner types that emerged due to online instruction, the effects of the hybrid system on teacher educators and teacher candidates, and survival tips for teacher educators. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis and the findings were reported under the categories of "overall evaluation, post-effects of the hybrid system, crucial factors and survival tips, and learner types". The findings are discussed in line with the related literature and some implications for education faculties are presented.

Keywords: COVID-19, Hybrid system, Teacher educators, English teacher candidates.

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Introduction

Has COVID-19 irrevocably changed higher education? The experience of the educational world with Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), followed by a hybrid system, has turned the attention of researchers to this question. The sudden shift of instruction in higher education as a result of COVID-19, which is called "The Great Online Transition (GOT)", is indeed a rare opportunity to observe the transition to online instruction to that extent and within GOT, the educational world not only experienced ERT but also adopted hybrid teaching, maybe to the widest extent in its history (Howard, et al., 2022, p. 930). As defined by Carrasco and Johnson (2015), hybrid teaching is a mode of delivery in which courses are divided into portions of face-to-face instructional activities within the classroom environment and instructional hours within online settings. The Hybrid system can be seen as a "best-of-both-worlds" that combines the efficacious features of traditional face-to-face instruction and online instruction (Snart, 2010, p. xi). From a different point of view, the hybrid system is a response to entirely online instruction that is deficient in student-teacher interaction (Carrasco & Johnson, 2015). Online teaching is not free of challenges. It requires funding for the start-up costs, institutional readiness, and learner readiness (Bartolic-Zlomislic & Bates, 1999). However, hybrid teaching still has significant benefits such as flexibility of time and space, utilizing mobile devices for academic purposes, technology-integrated instruction that appeals to different learner types, providing interaction through face-to-face courses, and allowing learners to progress at their own pace through online courses (Carrasco & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, hybrid courses can provide opportunities for learners to develop media information, and digital literacy (Linder, 2017). Yet, it should be noted that "thoughtless urgency and uninformed decision-making will push hybrid learning into perilously uncharted territory, where it will be susceptible to the worst fates of online and correspondence education" (Snart, 2010, p. xii). In other words, a hybrid system requires a planning and decision-making stage early before its application. Compared to a traditional course, an efficient hybrid course requires a larger amount of preparation, and every single instructional material should be prepared in advance "to ensure the alignment between in-class and out-of-class content delivery, activities, assignments, and assessments" (Linder, 2017, p. 16).

Hybrid learning as a delivery mode of instruction dates back to before the pandemic. Many higher education institutions have been willing to provide hybrid courses as an option for faculty members and learners who would like to follow the content of the course in an online setting rather than a traditional one (Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006). The hybrid system has certainly been flourishing in the educational world with the decisions of higher education institutions to adopt the best fit (Moskal, 2017). Yet, it was the pandemic that transformed hybrid education from "an esoteric notion" into a "de facto norm" in the blink of an eye (Cohen et al., 2020, p. 1039). COVID-19 is one of the factors triggering the global shift towards online instruction, along with "(a) globalization, (b) an unprecedented movement of people in the latter decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, and (c) remarkable and seemingly endless advances in digital technologies" (Dixon, et al., 2021, p. 792). As a result of pandemic and lockdown, educators lived a "hybridized" version of their lives in which their homes became shared working spaces with their families and their students and the educators welcomed each other into their living spaces (Cohen et al., 2020, p. 1039). Although it has been quite challenging for them, educators in higher education institutions have become less resistant to online instruction, especially hybrid mode as they acknowledged the opportunities provided by the system during their applications during the pandemic phase (Müller et al., 2021).

The adoption of hybrid instruction in higher education, specifically in teacher education, has been an area of interest for researchers (Lin, 2008; Swenson & Redmond, 2009; Dickenson, 2016; Vininsky & Saxe, 2016; Solihati & Mulyono, 2017; Abdulhak et al., 2018; Mumford & Dikilitaş, 2020) and the ineluctable shift to hybrid instruction in teacher education due to the new normal turned the attention of the related literature to the applications during COVID-19 and post-pandemic (Calderón et al., 2020; Rachmadtullah et al., 2020; Saboowala & Manghirmalani-Mishra, 2021; Creely et al., 2022; Biberman-Shalev et al., 2023). However, verification of the system followed during the new normal calls for further research to examine the factors affecting teacher-student interactions that occur in this new online instructional environment and the reflections of the parties experiencing the hybrid system

are quite crucial (Raes, 2022). In the 2021-2022 academic year, a hybrid system was adopted by the higher education institutions in the Turkish context right after ERT. Contrary to ERT, the shift in the mode of delivery did not happen overnight for the term hybrid system was adopted, but we could still question the preparedness level of academic staff, teacher candidates, and technological infrastructure of education faculties for the application of this relatively new system. It is fair to state that post-pandemic instructional practices in higher education institutions will not be the same and all stakeholders within the process should take a lesson from their experiences of the pandemic era (Singh et al., 2021). As we have witnessed during the 2022-2023 academic year, higher education institutions always can return to a hybrid system and this possibility makes it crucial to get feedback on the practices conducted. Thus, this present study aims to reveal the reflections of English teacher educators on a hybrid system, its challenges, opportunities, and effects on English teacher candidates. The study seeks an answer to the following research questions:

RQ1. How do English teacher educators evaluate the hybrid system?

RQ2. What do English teacher educators anticipate about the post-effects of the hybrid system on English teacher candidates?

RQ3. What kind of survival tips can English teacher educators suggest to other teacher educators?

RQ4. What are the observations of English teacher educators regarding the different learner types that emerged within the hybrid system?

Method

Research Design

The present study adopted a phenomenological research design, which focuses on a concept or a phenomenon and reveals a "common meaning" (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p.76). As the study deals with the hybrid system as a concept and mainly attempts to reveal the experiences of English teacher educators and to reflect their perspectives regarding the issue, the phenomenological research design was chosen for the study.

Participants

18 English teacher educators from 10 different state universities in Türkiye participated in the study. Demographic features of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic Features of the Participants

ID	Gender	Area of Expertise	Years of Experience
TE1	Female	Teacher training, TEFL	30
TE2	Male	ELT/Pragmatics	39
TE3	Female	Acquisition and methodology	24
TE4	Male	ELT	20
TE5	Male	ELT	30+
TE6	Male	ELT	15
TE7	Female	ELT	9
TE8	Male	FLT	23
TE9	Female	Pre-service and In-service Teacher Training	32
TE10	Female	ELT, Teacher Training	31
TE11	Female	Distance Education	19
TE12	Female	English-American Literature	28
TE13	Female	Teacher Training	25
TE14	Female	ELT	10
TE15	Female	ELT	38
TE16	Female	ELT	11
TE17	Male	Teaching and Testing Four Language Skills, Approaches, and Methods in ELT, Teacher Training, Intercultural Communication	36
TE18	Female	ELT	11

As we can understand from Table 1, most of the participants have been working in the field for more than 10 years. The majority were female (f=12) and they were experts in the field of ELT, distance education, literature, teacher training, methodology, and testing. All participants were working at the Foreign Language Education Departments of 10 different state universities at the time of data collection and the regional distribution of the universities they worked for are three in the Mediterranean, two in Central Anatolia, two in Marmara, one in Black Sea, one in Aegean, and one in Eastern Anatolia. Except for the Southeastern Anatolia region, there were participants from all regions.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data were collected with the "Survey on Hybrid System for English Teacher Educators" developed by the researchers. After getting the experts' opinions and revising the draft in line with their feedback, the researchers prepared the final version of the survey which includes two parts: demographic questions regarding gender, area of expertise, and years of experience and nine open-ended questions related to the hybrid system experiences of the teacher educators such as "can you make an evaluation about hybrid teaching system you have been following to train teacher candidates in comparison to online teaching and face-to-face teaching in general, what limitations can you define about the hybrid system if there are any for English teacher educators, how will it affect the teacher candidates to take some of the major courses online during the hybrid process, and what kind of suggestions can you give to teacher educators to survive during the hybrid system".

Being teacher educators, the researchers of the present study realized that the whole process of Emergency Remote Teaching followed by a hybrid system created different 'learner types' within one single system. 3rd and 4th-year teacher candidates started their training face-to-face, then experienced ERT, and lastly graduated with a hybrid system. The researchers called them 'jugglers' as they had experienced all three systems. Then, there were 2nd-year teacher candidates who were called 'emergency remote trainees' because they had started their training with ERT and continued with a hybrid system. Lastly, 'post-lockdowners', the 1st-year teacher candidates who started their training directly with a hybrid system. In the survey, the participants were asked to evaluate the accuracy of the terms suggested by the researchers to define each learner group and 15 participants agreed on the terms. The survey also includes questions addressing the differences among the learner groups suggested by the researchers in terms of motivation, participation, and classroom interaction.

Once the researchers got the approval of the Ethics Committee (No-10/05/2022-208), the researchers sent e-mails, including an explanation about the study and a link to the online version of the survey, to English teacher educators in state universities in Türkiye. As the participation was voluntary, random sampling was used and eventually, 18 teacher educators from 10 different universities responded.

Data Analysis

The method utilized for the data analysis was thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012). Thematic analysis is "a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. Through focusing on meaning across a data set, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Braun and Clarke (2012), specify the following phases for the process: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) producing the report.

The whole process was conducted through the MAXQDA software package. At the beginning of the data analysis, the researchers went through the whole data set twice to have a general idea about the nature of the data. The responses of the participants were organized into sections in line with each question in the survey. The next step was to generate the initial codes. At this point, the researchers tried to write down as much as possible to be able to find the best-suited codes for the data set. A color coding system was used for this phase. After generating the codes, the codes were evaluated to see whether there could be a pattern of codes or groups. The codes were grouped under possible titles of themes. As a fourth step, the researchers went over the themes and checked whether there would be

other options. Then, the names of the themes for the code groups were found. As the last step, code maps were created and direct quotations were selected to support the reporting.

Findings

Overall Evaluation of Hybrid System

Comparing the hybrid system with online and face-to-face teaching, participants evaluated the possibilities and limitations of the hybrid system not only from their perspective but also from the teacher candidates' point of view. The codes defined as a result of the analyses were: convenience, learner autonomy, infrastructure which includes e-learning platforms, unstable learning environment, reliable internet connection, and stable power supply, digital literacy, the impact of transactional distance which includes dialogue and work overload, nature of the program, nature of online teaching-learning, changing educational landscape, and differences in the application as presented in Figure 1.

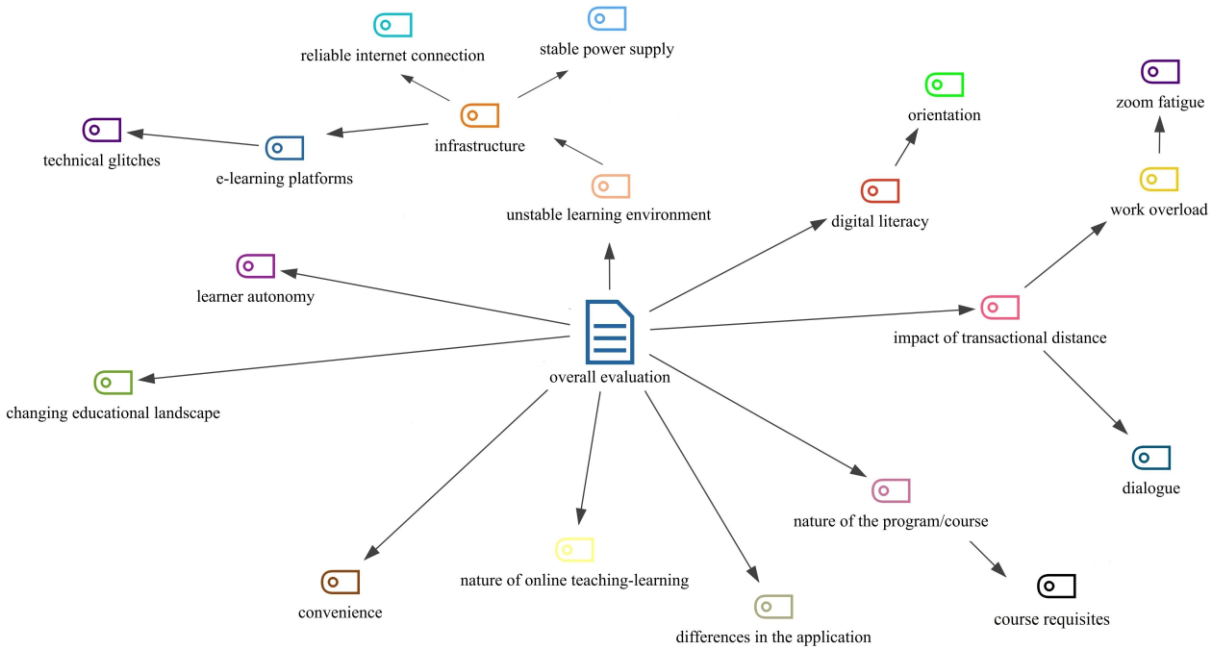

Figure 1. Overall Evaluations of English Teacher Educators Regarding Hybrid System

Some of the participants seem to question whether the system their faculty followed could be called hybrid. In other words, as they were aware of the prerequisites of online teaching and hybrid systems, the practices were not meeting the standards for the system to be called hybrid. One of the participants claimed that designing structures of the lessons and instructional materials suitable for online learning were crucial parts of the process and required a planning process before the application. It can be acceptable that most of the faculties were not ready for conducting online courses during ERT but that should not be the case for the following term in which the hybrid system was implemented. Lack of knowledge of the features and principles of online learning played a major role in the efficacy of the implementation process. One of the participants responded:

> …However, partly because of the planning process, I have observed although it is not emergency remote teaching anymore, many faculties still conduct online courses such as ERT courses, which have limitations, especially in terms of design and development. The other problem is "online", and unfortunately is perceived as "synchronous". Yet, in online learning, based on scientific evidence distance education and online learning professionals value the contribution of asynchronous activities. As far as I have observed in the online part of the hybrid system, asynchronous activities that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as creativity, have been left aside, and weekly online synchronous meetings have replaced the f2f classes, which is just a shift in the physical setting of the lessons, not a real change in

> pedagogy. I have been observing what has been done in the classroom is transferred to the online. This, unfortunately, is not online teaching/learning (TE11)

Along with their reflections on conducting the hybrid system properly, some of the participants seemed to have concerns over selecting which courses to be given with online instruction. They believed that if the course content was theoretical without any need for practice, then these courses should be chosen for online instruction. As they were concerned with training English teacher candidates as a whole and providing them with enough opportunities to practice, they preferred the field courses to be given face-to-face. Moreover, the importance of enculturation within campus life for the teacher candidates was highlighted by the participants.

Moreover, teacher educators evaluated the process for themselves and teacher candidates. They believed that both they and teacher candidates were worn out because of going back and forth between online and face-to-face classes, which also increased the workload of the teacher educators. Other than conducting their courses, the teacher educators had other responsibilities such as managing their time, arranging a suitable environment to conduct online courses, dealing with technical problems, and staying in front of the computer monitor for a long time, which resulted in zoom fatigue, and devoting attention both to the students in the classroom and the ones attending online. Moreover, the transactional distance decreased the dialogue within the classes and demotivated the teacher candidates. As mentioned by one of the participants:

> There is little to no student-teacher interaction in online classes. It is very difficult to create an atmosphere of discussion or a platform for philosophical discussions of significant concepts in literature classes. Face-to-face teaching enables authentic communication based on trust and reliance between student and teacher. Face-to-face teaching enables the teaching of life's crucial concepts, values, etc. interactively…. Alienation, isolation, and health problems are the consequences of online teaching (because of long sitting sessions 6-8 hours per day lecturing, answering e-mails, uploading materials, reading exam papers, reports, etc., and being available for online teaching 7/24 hours a day) (TE12)

According to teacher educators, one of the factors affecting the implementation of the hybrid system was digital literacy. They believed that the system required literacy in ICT but not every teacher candidate or teacher educator was digitally literate or had the experience of using e-learning software and this created the need for providing orientation or training both to teacher candidates and teacher educators in this regard. It was revealed that without proper ICT knowledge, it would be quite demanding for teacher educators to design effective online courses. The following excerpt illustrates the reflections of the participants on the issue.

> The greatest and maybe the sole possibility is access to a linguistically authentic context thanks to the internet and the utilities/functionalities that online software provides for running courses, monitoring learners' progress, and assessing and evaluating their growth. Yet I am almost sure that most of the academics are not aware of the possibilities -online software- of the web technologies, nor are they aware of ICT-based teaching techniques and strategies…This is largely dependent upon the competencies of the educator; if literate in ICT, then it can be a true experience for the learners, if not competent, then it is a sort of ceremonial course, ppt-reading torture (TE4)

In line with digital literacy, some of the participants addressed the changing educational landscape due to ERT and they claimed that the hybrid system would open new pages in the field of education and it was an opportunity for teacher candidates to have a first-hand experience of that change and see examples on how to conduct lectures online. One of them responded:

> …Considering the fact that online teaching/learning will be an inseparable part of all learning life, furnishing the teacher candidates with skills, competencies, and experiences of online learning does and will benefit them in the long run. The examples they have experienced so far might not have been very positive - and may have resulted in some negative attitude and perception- as it was an "emergency situation", both teacher candidates and teacher trainers will tune-in in time…..the teacher candidates will be exposed to several scenarios of online learning

> and teaching. Observing what works and what does not is I guess one of the best ways of learning how we should teach (the same goes for the f2f part). In the hybrid system, they are not only exposed to both f2f and online courses, but they also have a "feel of" what online learning is (TE11)

While reflecting on their experiences with the hybrid system, teacher educators touched upon learner autonomy. Although the hybrid system was evaluated as a chance to develop learner autonomy, some of the participants still believed that teacher candidates lacked the characteristics of autonomous learners and could not utilize the opportunities provided by the hybrid system. Compared to face-to-face learners, online learners were claimed to lack the skills and behaviors of autonomous learners, although some participants saw online learning as beneficial for autonomy as they had more opportunities to search for information sources.

One of the main concerns for the teacher educators was revealed to be the decrease in the quality of their lectures delivered and in the participation rates of teacher candidates due to the unstable learning environment, which includes technical infrastructure, stable power supply, reliable internet connection, and e-learning platforms. For the hybrid system to be practiced properly, both sides need to have the technological equipment and infrastructure. One participant shared that the teacher candidates were having attendance problems even during the face-to-face system and due to their living arrangements, they were having trouble in attending online sessions within the hybrid system. In parallel, despite the diversity of choice, the platforms used for the hybrid system were found to be insufficient as they were not originally developed for educational purposes. Two of them responded:

> I am not very satisfied with the system. Although the app (i.e. Microsoft Teams) is a good choice and offers a variety of tools, due to the interruptions in the connection and the speed as well as power cuts, the quality of the lessons we deliver online is affected negatively (for example, it takes ages to use the breakout rooms during the lessons) (TE1)

> The hybrid system requires initial requisites, such as strong hardware and software on the side of student teachers and a high level of literacy in ICT as well as financial flexibility of obtaining internet access without cessation. If these are not met, then the rest of any evaluation would not be grounded in the reality of education. If these are met on both learners' and professors' sides, I am still suspicious about any hybrid system within ELT teacher education. Face-to-face education will always be stronger, more influential, and durable for student teachers. Our hybrid system, if we may call it a system, is not different from any other models adopted in tertiary programs in Turkey; weak software that is not designed for teaching but rather for running meetings, limited opportunities for hardware and software access of the learners, and even professors as well as low literacy competencies (TE4)

Lastly, as an asset of the hybrid system, teacher educators mentioned the convenience of the system both for themselves and teacher candidates to use time and resources efficiently, to reach the lecture recordings any time they want to, thus, providing flexibility, and making attending lectures of different institutions possible. Two of the participants stated:

> It can address different types of learners. It provides flexibility in time and space. It has the potential to increase self-directed learning. Online has no boundaries. F2F is bound to rules strictly. Hybrid has invisible boundaries. It makes students feel more comfortable (TE7)

> Flexibility, variability, easy-reach, cost-effective materials, easier contact with peers (TE15)

Post-effects of Hybrid System

As a further question, teacher educators were asked to share their opinions regarding how getting trained through a hybrid system would affect teacher candidates' performances in practicum and their professional lives. Their answers mainly focused on the gap between theory and knowledge, teacher development, and mental well-being (see Figure 2).

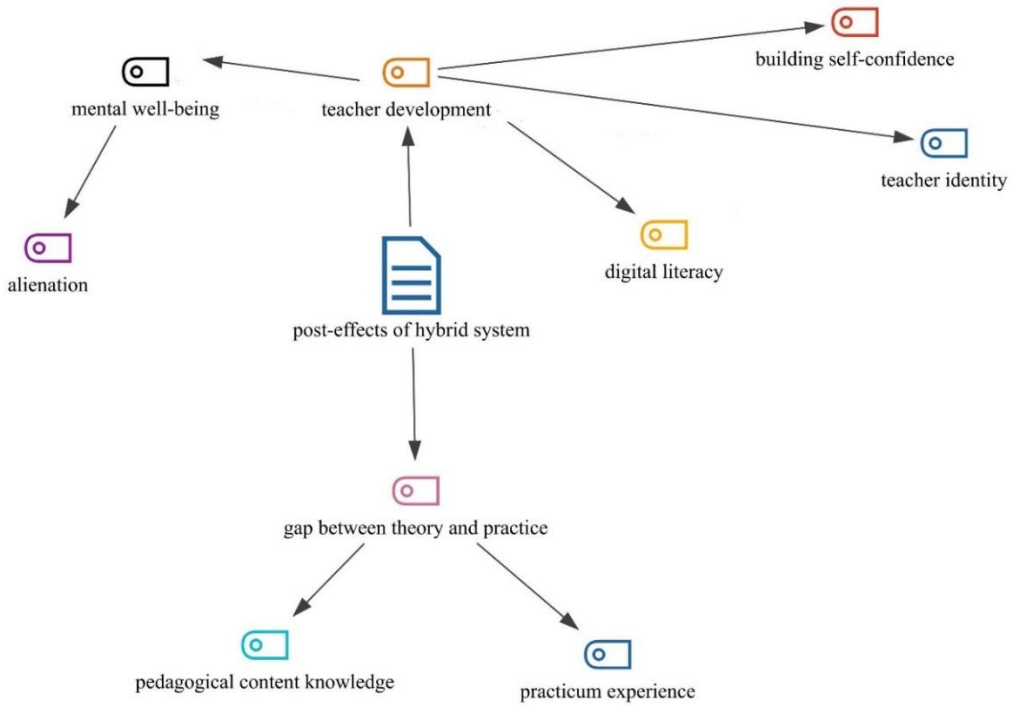

Figure 2. Post-effects of Hybrid System on Teacher Candidates

According to the participants, as teacher candidates had less chance to put their theoretical knowledge into practice compared to face-to-face learners and they could not get enough supervision, this would affect their teaching performances negatively. Although they had the chance to see the application steps for the hybrid system, due to lack of practice and lack of theoretical knowledge, they did not remember the content of the online courses well, possible problems regarding which technique to use, how to evaluate their students, or how to manage the class would be awaiting them. Some of them seemed to be sure that their knowledge in the field of teaching would be impeded. Moreover, it was claimed that the limited opportunities to put their knowledge into practice could affect their self-confidence. The following excerpts exemplify the responses of the participants.

> They may be knowledgeable about the process. However, they have not had a chance to perform in the classroom. Thus, they could not attain any experience… I believe that it will affect them negatively in making decisions related to methods and techniques, classroom management, reflection, and assessment in teaching activities (TE17)

> They might have difficulty in putting theory into practice as the theory part will be limited…. From a positive viewpoint, they know how to survive this process and can help students. From a negative viewpoint, on the other hand, they may have some problems with classroom management, etc.(TE18)

Focusing specifically on their professional lives, teacher educators stated that due to lack of practice in the hybrid system, teacher candidates were likely to have problems with shaping their professional identity and building self-confidence and have to deal with weak self-esteem and mental problems like burnout or even experience alienation in their professional environment. However, on the positive side, they would probably utilize digital materials in their classes more. Three of them responded:

> They feel that they lack important experiences, but I believe they also had important experiences for the future of education, which is already happening (TE3)

> …. one main advantage would be their willingness to integrate Web 2.0 tools in their teaching and they can make informed decisions as they would have a lot of experience (TE9)

> …since they will have been exposed to more digital materials, they will have a chance to adopt and implement these in their classes (some online activities/tools may well be used in both settings). Practicum is a great way to test these, but in my personal belief, teacher candidates

> learn a lot during their training and get a "bite" of teaching in the practicum, but they test everything out in their classes (TE11)

Crucial Factors and Survival Tips

To have a better understanding of their experiences with the hybrid system, teacher educators were asked to share some survival tips with other teacher educators and to point out what was crucial for them. As presented in Figure 3, the participants touched upon self-care, the digital divide, and creating opportunities for interactive learning along with other factors.

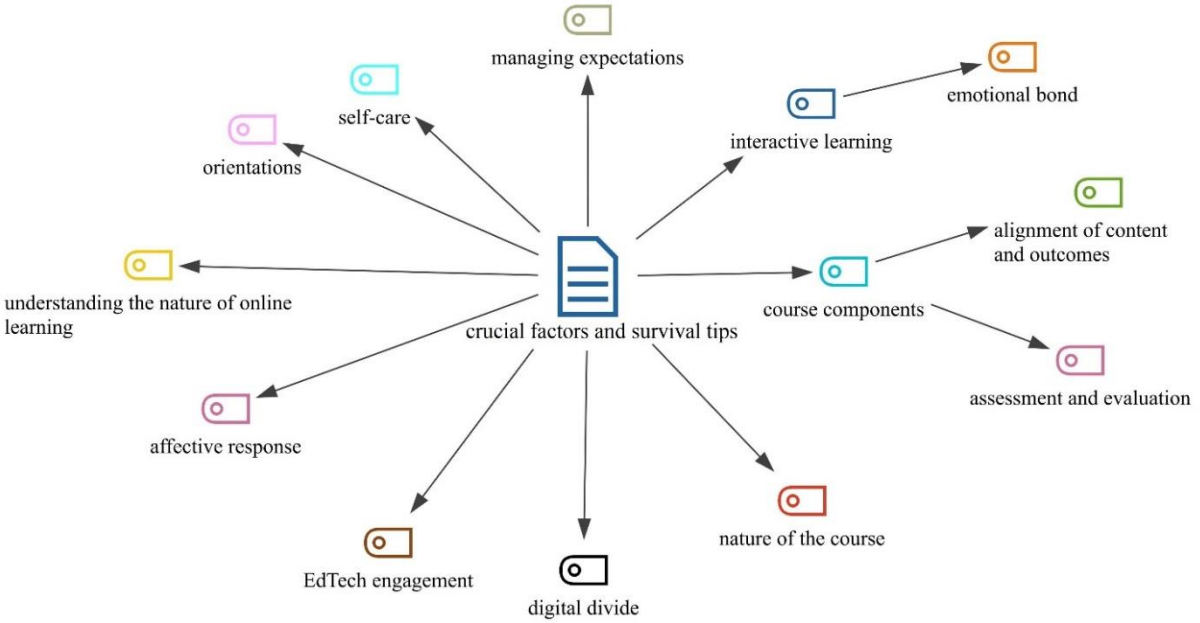

Figure 3. Crucial Factors and Survival Tips

Some participants focused on the planning phase before the instructional practice. The responses mainly suggested that it was important to decide the courses to be given online based on their nature, and the outcomes that were vital for teacher candidates should be prioritized. Specification of assessment techniques especially focusing on formative assessment was also mentioned. Two other factors were the digital divide and providing orientations on e-learning platforms. One of the participants believed that there would be no point in expecting participation if the teacher candidates did not have the technical equipment or did not know how to use it. The last factor of the planning phase was about understanding the nature of online learning. As one of the participants clarified:

> Everything has to be planned in the online classes. The course design should be planned ahead of the semester, the materials should be ready, the assessment evaluation, feedback templates, rubrics, interactions, everything should be ready. The materials should be self-explanatory, if not, they should be accompanied by clear instructions. This however can only be implemented if the decision to design to course as an online course at least 3-5 months before the semester starts. In f2f, we can save the day, online, we cannot, and in panic, I see many materials being shared by students to be "digested", which results in cognitive overload. This in return, creates overload for the teacher educators, too. Another survival tip is to follow best practices, find MOOCs that can easily be integrated into your online classes, and find, use and perhaps contribute to open educational resources (OERs). These all save a lot of time, especially in material design and development (TE11)

For the instructional practice phase of the process, some teacher educators highlighted the importance of motivation for teacher candidates while others mostly mentioned finding ways to facilitate interactive learning as a crucial factor. It was believed that whether the teacher candidates were attending face-to-face or online courses, they should be a part of the discussions and reflections, and teacher educators should search for new strategies and utilize educational technology to create an

interactive atmosphere. Aside from pedagogical factors, embracing self-care was mentioned as a tip for teacher educators. The following excerpts illustrate the opinions of the participants.

> * Attendance * motivation * participation * mutual understanding of difficulties (technological, physical, psychological, physiological) * get to know the LMS of your institution * familiarize yourself with web 2.0 tools * find ways to connect and pursue rapport with students * do physical exercise regularly (TE10)

> Looking for new strategies and solutions for interconnection and for ways of creating interactive classroom environments and changing previous problematic perspectives that prevent the understanding of students' needs (TE12)

> …engage in EdTech, pair in-class, and remote learners, and use interactive activities (TE15)

> We should develop our use of technological tools, apps, etc., and also learn how to develop interaction during the online process as well (TE16)

Parallel to the interactive learning, two of the participants touched upon human contact and the importance of mutual understanding, creating a group identity, and ensuring a feeling of being a part of that group. As it was phrased by one of the participants:

> Emotional bonds with the learners, empathy, and feelings of belonging should be established. We are educating people not machines. If you cannot establish any emotional code that is intelligible across individuals, no valuable learning can take place (TE4)

Seeing the whole experience as a chance for professional development, one of the participants concluded:

> Be realistic and consider the limitations of the circumstances, also take it as a learning experience for yourself because it seems there is no going back to traditional classrooms in the future…I believe everyone did their best, that was the reality, and it seems closer to the vision of education very shortly. There is nothing much we can do about the past but we should try to learn as much as possible and get adapted to our future roles (TE3)

Learner Types

As mentioned before the researchers of the present study believe that the whole teaching process with ERT and the hybrid system created three different learner groups: post-lockdowners, emergency remote trainees, and jugglers. One of the concerns of the study was whether there was any difference among these learner groups in terms of motivation, participation, and classroom interaction as they had experienced different teaching systems. Thus, the participants were asked to compare the groups with each other. In terms of motivation, the opinions of the teacher educators seemed to be diverse. While some of the participants specifically stated that post-lockdowners were the most motivated group, the others believed that it was not possible to make a comparison as there were times when all three groups were demotivated and confused. Based on the responses given by the teacher educators, it can be stated that due to the lack of clear instructions and uncertainty, teacher candidates felt lost at some point. Evaluating each group one by one, three participants explained themselves with the following words:

> Post-lockdowners are very motivated, emergency remote trainees feel disappointed and lack enthusiasm, jugglers want to graduate only, and they focus on job opportunities more than education quality (not all but most) (TE3)

> I had the chance to teach students from all three groups f2f. Jugglers were very happy at the beginning and they all expressed how much they had missed school. They all were motivated and I believe the majority of them maintained that high motivation. Post-lockdowners were mostly motivated. So was ERT. At the beginning of the fall term, the main worry was the uncertainty. None of us could know for sure that the lock-down was over and expected to go back to online teaching (TE9)

> I guess all of them were de-motivated in different ways. To start with the emergency remote trainees, I believe that they were the unluckiest ones since they had limited chances to make

> friends, and the online classes they had taken were not designed to foster social presence, which is a critical factor affecting student motivation in online learning. They did not have a "feel" of the university life. Now, ok, they have adjusted to the system, but I have seen them struggling to form social groups and rely on group cohesion. The arrival of the post-COV period was a relief to them, and I see them more motivated now. The post-lockdowners seem to be motivated since they are already familiar with digital learning environments, and right from the beginning of their uni life, they have this feel of "uni life" which makes them even more motivated... The jugglers seem to be the most motivated. They have learned how to cope with the problems of all these. They had their first year f2f -the 4th years-, had their friends; moved online, felt less isolated and more supported, and having a chance to be physically in their classes seemed to have motivated them even more. Though I have observed them to be pretty demotivated during the lockdown period, they learned a lot from the process and learned how to cope with problems - technical and pedagogical. This feeling of accomplishment I guess increased their motivation. Still, 4th year teacher candidates seem to be more motivated in both online and f2f classes than the 3rd years (TE11)

In terms of participation, the jugglers were mentioned to be the ones who had participated most, but it is quite important to state that participants mostly were not satisfied with the participation rates and it was not easy for them to make a comparison. While some teacher educators tried to overcome the "shyness" problem among the teacher candidates with pair and group work, some believed that although each group was willing to participate to some extent, they needed to encourage emergency remote trainees more. Focusing specifically on participation rates in online courses, one of the participants stated:

> No matter how you define them, they do not participate in the courses online with their cameras and microphones. Attendance must be compulsory. Otherwise, we have a huge attendance problem (TE17)

When it comes to classroom interaction, the prominent opinion was that there was no or limited classroom interaction. However, for some participants, although the classroom interaction was mainly affected by the nature of the course, jugglers seemed to be more interactive compared to other groups. The classroom interaction was revealed to be affected mainly by the transactional distance, which caused teacher candidates not to be able to bond with their classmates. One of the participants responded:

> The major problem for the jugglers and ERTs was not knowing their classmates. I believe the main reason was not using the camera throughout online teaching and not seeing each other outside the lessons. Hence, they were shy when they were asked to work in pairs or groups. One of my students admitted that through pair and group work they got to know their classmates as at the beginning they even didn't know each other's names (TE9)

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored the reflections of English teacher educators on the hybrid system that was implemented during the 2021-2022 academic year in higher education institutions right after ERT. The findings revealed that the instructions were disrupted because of technical glitches, lack of personal devices, or problems with net connections. The participants seemed to acknowledge the changing educational landscape and saw the hybrid system as an opportunity for teacher candidates to experience technology integration by themselves. However, they were worried that the system followed in their faculties might not follow the principles of online teaching and the differences in the application might cause problems. Besides, they were not content with the participation rates of teacher candidates in the lectures. The interactions between teacher candidates with their peers and teacher educators were mentioned to be below the average and teacher educators observed demotivation among teacher candidates.

Some of the participants questioned whether it was right for us to call the system followed in higher education institutions hybrid. Institutions and teacher educators were indeed caught off guard by the sudden and unexpected shift in delivery mode due to ERT but did they have a chance to get ready for

the hybrid system that started right after ERT? According to some of the teacher educators, they did not. Based on the responses of the participants, it can be understood that for most of the cases, the same contents with the same sources were presented through digital platforms, which were not originally developed for online teaching, instead of face-to-face instruction. In other words, the content, activities, and materials were not modified for online education. This brings us to the issue of the nature of online education and how we understood it during the hybrid system. As underscored by Gurley (2018), for hybrid or online education, we need to adopt different pedagogical approaches than the ones for face-to-face instruction. Drawing a line between ERT and online education, Hodges, et al. (2020) believe that for online education to be effective, it needs "investment in an ecosystem of learner supports, which take time to identify and build" (para.11). Thus, online education requires a preparation phase. Higher education institutions must prepare educators specifically for hybrid or online education as their level of preparedness affects the instructional quality (Gurley, 2018). Another crucial point that needs investment and preparation is the infrastructure. As mentioned by the participants, online courses were hampered by the factors of owning the necessary hardware and software, power supply, and reliable internet connection. The related literature also mentions the lack of infrastructure as a challenge for conducting effective online courses (Koi-Akrofi, et al., 2020; Kuleto, 2021; Roman & Plopeanu, 2021; Singh, et al., 2021; Oblina, et al., 2022). Moreover, investigating the distance education capacity of higher education institutions in Türkiye, Karadağ, et al. (2021) claimed that the universities in the Turkish context presented an inefficient profile in terms of infrastructure and any attempt to improve the capacity of higher education institutions in this regard would contribute to the efficacy of higher education system.

The question of how to improve teacher candidates' digital competence to prepare them for digitalization in education remains unanswered (König, et al., 2020). Some teacher educators touched upon the importance of digital literacy, providing training both for lecturers and teacher candidates on digital platforms and integration of technology into instruction and how they also can learn from the application process of hybrid systems. As explained by Borthwick and Hansen (2017, p. 47), "a common set of teacher technology competencies for teacher education faculty will provide a pathway for professional development and related essential conditions that can be targeted and purposeful". Moreover, when the faculty members have digital skills, they can use those skills in their lectures, which can be second-hand learning for the students (Udeogalanya, 2022). For effective learning, higher education institutions should equip their learners with digital literacy but to be able to do so, faculty members should be competent in this regard (Udeogalanya, 2022). Focusing on the challenges experienced by teacher educators during the pandemic, Van Nuland, et al. (2020) claimed that except for the ones from the area of expertise, educators are often not informed about the digital sources and materials for online courses. This shows us the importance of providing orientations and training to teacher educators and teacher candidates. Teacher educators should be role models to teacher candidates for technology-integrated instruction but to be able to do so, they should be equipped with the necessary training. The studies in the related literature also suggest the need for training on digital literacy not only for faculty members (Singh, et al., 2021; Shohel, et al., 2022) but also for teacher candidates (Christiani, et al., 2022; Karagözoğlu & Gezer, 2022; Ngao, et al., 2022).

Why is it so important for teacher candidates to have digital literacy skills? The answer to this question may be twofold. First, the teacher candidates would be educating the learners of the 21st century. These learners have been engaged with technology from quite young ages and most of them access technology through their devices (Hooft Graafland, 2018). To be able to prepare lesson contents and materials in line with the needs and interests of these digital natives, teacher candidates should have digital competence. According to Buckingham (2007, p. 53), the way technology is utilized in and outside the school is quite different for the younger generation and this may cause schools to be immaterial to the learners' needs and interests as the use of technology in school is mostly "narrowly defined, unimaginative and instrumental". This leads us to the challenge of attracting learners' attention and creating an in-class environment for effective learning, which makes equipping teacher candidates with digital skills more crucial. Second, as mentioned by the participants, the educational landscape has been changing due to COVID-19. Technology has become a key point for maintaining instructional practices during COVID-19 and it seems to do so even after (Bozkurt et al., 2022). COVID-19 catalyzed a paradigm shift in the mode of delivery in education and raised the

expectations for teachers to be competent in online teaching (Zhu & Li, 2020). The educational changes due to COVID-19 seem to be influential in the post-pandemic phase and we should prepare teacher candidates "by offering training on various teaching approaches, such as blended, hybrid, flexible, and online learning, to better prepare educators for emerging roles in the post-pandemic era" (Bozkurt, et al., 2022, p. 889). Thus, going through the hybrid system has been a simulation to see the basic principles of online education and a good opportunity for the teacher candidates to make a self-evaluation of their digital skills although we can still discuss how efficient the application was for them.

Participants pointed out the importance of determining which courses within the program to be given online and giving practice-based ones face-to-face. Practicum is not the only course for teacher candidates to practice and get feedback. Ideally, during the micro-teaching sessions in some field courses teacher educators and peers evaluate the performance of teacher candidates. Taking practice-based courses like teaching language skills online during the hybrid phase limited the opportunities for teacher candidates to put their pedagogical knowledge into practice and get feedback. The participants were concerned that this could affect their performance in a real classroom and make teacher candidates question their ability and perform poorly. According to Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007), if teachers are not provided any guidance when they are learning how to teach, they can barely survive rather than fostering learning in their students, thus, teacher education should provide constant prospects for practice and reflection to the teacher candidates. Studies in the related literature supported the opinion that conducting courses with practical aspects in a virtual setting remains deficient (Şen & Kızılcalıoğlu, 2020; Eker & Atıcı, 2023).

Although the hybrid system provides convenience, supports learner autonomy, and shows teacher candidates how to utilize digital materials for instruction, teacher educators seemed to be concerned about its post-effects on teacher candidates. They were worried that an unstable learning environment, due to technical glitches, net connection, lack of personal devices, lack of dialogue between teacher candidates and educators as a result of transactional distance, and a limited amount of teaching practice compared to face-to-face instruction would lead to a gap between theory and practice along with learning loss and thus, would affect the professional identity of the teacher candidates and cause mental problems like burnout in the long term. The study of Berces (2022) pointed out similar points. According to Berces (2022), being deprived of opportunities to practice teaching, pre-service teachers experienced the feeling of unpreparedness along with "a feeling of guilt, lack of confidence, and dissatisfaction" (p.71). With a different perspective, Choi and Park (2022) claim that contrary to the concerns of teacher educators, attending practicum within entirely or partly online settings caused teacher candidates to have a positive attitude towards the teaching profession, develop teacher identity, and "realize their potential as innovative and inspiring teachers in a post COVID-19 era" (p.7).

The present study suggests that due to the implementation of ERT and hybrid system, three learner types emerged: post-lockdowners, emergency remote trainees, and jugglers. When participants were asked to evaluate these three groups in terms of motivation, participation, and classroom interaction, the responses of teacher educators revealed crucial points. All three groups seemed to be confused at the beginning of the implementation because of the uncertainty, which also affected their motivation level. Just like educators, students found themselves in an unexpected situation and were dealing with challenges. The study of Acosta-Gonzaga and Ruiz-Ledesma (2022) revealed the impact of a sense of uncertainty due to the implementation of the hybrid system on students' self-efficacy levels. The self-efficacy of students in their ability to maintain their learning plays a crucial role as it may lead to anxiety, stress, and distraction, which eventually decrease their level of engagement in their learning (Acosta-Gonzaga & Ruiz-Ledesma, 2022).

In terms of participation and classroom interaction, the teacher educators seemed to be dissatisfied with the performance of teacher candidates regardless of their types in this regard. Studies dealing with the level of interaction within online settings revealed that compared to face-to-face, classroom interaction decreases in online instruction (Kusuma et al., 2021; Wut & Xu, 2021; Yazgan, 2022). According to Yazgan (2022), not having enough opportunities to communicate, not being able to participate in social activities, and the exhaustion of online interaction created a gap between students, and this new form of interaction had a negative impact on learning. Due to the decrease in interaction,

teacher candidates did not have many opportunities to know their classmates and this hindered the classroom interactions. As they were not willing to use their cameras during online courses, post-lockdowners, and emergency remote trainees might not even see the faces of their classmates or know their names. The situation remained the same even for jugglers who had experienced face-to-face learning. Wut and Xu (2021) also pointed out a similar point. Online instruction hindered interaction among students who were not acquainted with each other and it became challenging for them even to get the contact information of their classmates (Wut & Xu, 2021). Students' hiding behind the screens during online sessions worsened the situation. The reluctance to open webcams during online instruction made students invisible (Gherheş et al., 2021) and left educators alone with "black squares of nothingness" (Aagaard et al., 2023, p.113). However, within a classroom setting, the students show a physical presence. The interaction and moments shared in face-to-face instruction are "the catalyst for nurturing the senses of familiarity, friendship, and trust" (Kumagai, 2023, p.116). It can be concluded that the sudden shift to ERT and hybrid systems impeded interaction not only in online sessions but also in face-to-face settings.

Based on the findings of the present study, we can highlight some points for education faculties to consider before adopting a hybrid system. First, strengthening the technological infrastructure of higher education institutions. As phrased by Olapiriyakul and Scher (2006, p. 295), infrastructure is "the backbone of overall systems that supports the entire e-learning education". Thus, higher education institutions should find ways to improve their technological infrastructure considering the possibility of conducting hybrid or online education anytime in the future. Second, specifying the courses to be given online and redesigning their content in line with the principles of online education. As criticized by some of the participants, the systems followed in most of the higher education institutions were not hybrid. Without any further plans, the courses were only moved to e-contexts with the same content, techniques, and materials used in face-to-face instruction. For effective teacher education, every single detail should be planned. Third, providing a standardized online instruction. As mentioned by some participants, there were differences among the online instructions of teacher educators. For the efficiency of teacher education, higher education institutions should standardize the applications and support faculty members in this regard. Fourth, providing constant training for teacher educators. Education technologies are constantly evolving and to be able to keep teacher educators and their in-class practices up to date, education faculties should focus more on training on digital literacy skills. Lastly, it supports the mental health of teacher educators and teacher candidates. During the period of ERT and hybrid education, every party struggled with challenges such as workload, adaptation, and alienation. To get through this process healthily and learn to cope with similar crises, both teacher educators and teacher candidates should not neglect self-care, and guidance and support should be provided in this regard.

The present study is limited to the opinions of English teacher educators. Further studies from different fields can provide a different point of view. Moreover, the findings of the study are limited to the 2021-2022 academic terms, when the hybrid system was first applied due to the pandemic. More studies can be conducted to understand the post-effects of the hybrid system on teacher education and teacher candidates. The present study suggested three learner types created as a result of the implementation of ERT followed by the hybrid system and investigated their differences in terms of motivation, participation, and classroom interaction. Further studies can evaluate these learner groups from different perspectives, with different participants from various contexts. Online or hybrid education is not a new phenomenon. However, it is fair to state that the pandemic catalyzed the transformation in the educational landscape. As foreseen by Buzzetto-More and Sweat-Guy (2006, p. 153) long before the pandemic, "in the years to come, hybrid learning is poised to cause a paradigm shift in higher education". The shift has become more obvious and extensive due to online instructions conducted during the pandemic. Now for the mitigation phase, we should see ERT and hybrid applications as an opportunity to evaluate current teacher education programs and options for technology integration to keep the content of the programs contemporary.

Ethics statement: In this study, we declare that the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" are complied with and that we do not take any of the actions based on "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". At the same time, we declare that there is no conflict of interest between the authors, that all authors contribute to the study, and that all the responsibility belongs to the article authors in case of any ethical violations.

Author Contributions: If the articles are written by several authors a short paragraph identifying their contributions must be clarified. For example: "Conceptualization, first author and second author; methodology, first author and second author; validation first author and second author; analysis, first author and second author; writing, review and editing, first author and second author.

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