Rethinking the Practicum after the COVID-19 Crisis: Insights from Pre-service EFL Teachers

Melike Bekereci-Şahin [a*]

a Asst. Prof. Dr., İstanbul Medipol Universty, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3803-4399 *melikebekereci@hotmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative study aims to investigate the insights of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers about their school practicum experiences after the pandemic. To achieve this aim, fourteen pre-service EFL teachers at a university in Turkey shared their experiences and observations for two semesters in the process of their school practicum. The relevant data was collected via weekly reflection papers and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The results put forward that pre-service EFL teachers feel themselves unready and stressed after spending two years with online education and having fewer teaching practices. Also, this study indicates the changing classroom practices after returning to face-to-face education and the need to redesign school practicum in accordance with these alterations. Additionally, this study aims to make contributions to the relevant literature by giving place to the suggestions made by pre-service teachers in the post-pandemic era. The findings of this study also have implications for teacher education programs in terms of preparing pre-service EFL teachers for unexpected changes in education.

Keywords: School practicum, pandemic, pre-service teacher, pre-service EFL teachers.

COVID-19 Krizinin Ardından Öğretmenlik Uygulaması Deneyimi Üzerine Yeniden Düşünme: Hizmet Öncesi İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri
Öz

Bu nitel çalışma, Türkiye'deki hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin COVID-19 pandemisi sonrasındaki öğretmenlik uygulaması deneyimlerine dair iç görülerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, Türkiye'deki bir üniversitedeki İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören on dört hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmeninin iki dönem boyunca edindikleri tecrübeler ve yaptıkları gözlemler veri olarak kullanılmıştır. Veriler, haftalık yansıtma yazıları ve yarı-yapılandırılmış yüz yüze görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular, öğretmen adaylarının, iki sene süren çevrimiçi eğitim sonrasında kendilerini öğretmenlik uygulaması için yetersiz ve stresli hissettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bunun başlıca nedeninin, Eğitim fakültesindeki çevrimiçi derslerdeki yetersiz öğretim aktiviteleri olduğu belirlenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, katılımcılar, çevrimiçi eğitim sonrasında değişen sınıf içi pratikleri ve bu doğrultuda ortaya çıkan öğretmenlik uygulaması dersini yeniden tasarlama ihtiyacını dile getirmişlerdir. Öğretmen adaylarının bu konulara getirdiklerini öneriler sayesinde bu çalışmanın pandemi sonrası dönem için alan yazına katkı sunacağı öngörülmektedir. Son olarak, bu çalışmanın bulguları, öğretmen adaylarını eğitim alanındaki beklenmeyen gelişmelere hazırlayabilmek adına kullanılabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: öğretmenlik uygulaması, pandemi, hizmet öncesi öğretmen, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenleri.

INTRODUCTION

Providing initial teaching practices in a real classroom atmosphere, teaching practicum plays a critical role in teacher training where pre-service teachers go through the process of thinking about teaching and the teaching profession (Yuan & Lee, 2014). During the practicum, pre-service teachers have opportunities to improve their teaching skills, enhance their pedagogical content knowledge, and apply strategies for classroom management under the supervision of mentor teachers (Farrell, 2008). Also, thanks to the practicum experience, pre-service teachers construct insights into being a teacher and how their practices affect learning in the classroom (Erduran & Kaya, 2018). Practicum relies on a collaboration among mentor teachers, student teachers and teacher educators to help pre-service teachers have positive experiences about the teaching profession and internalize what it means to be a teacher (Trent, 2013). On the other hand, practicum experience is sometimes challenging and complicated for pre-service teachers in terms of struggling with lack of confidence and shifting from student life to the professional arena (Moore, 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to that type of a challenging process for teacher education as it affected both teaching and learning activities (Kidd & Murray, 2020). As one of the important components in EFL teacher education programs, school practicum was modified in various forms in order to address the requirements of the pandemic period (Kosar, 2021; Krishnapatria, 2020; Robinson & Rusznyak, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused drastic changes in education in Turkey, as it has all over the world. After the explosion of COVID-19 cases in Turkey, both K-12 lessons and university level courses started to be delivered online (MoNE, 2020; YÖK, 2020). During the following term, teachers carried out lessons online besides very limited face-to-face sessions (MoNE, 2021a). At the beginning of 2021 Fall Semester, it was officially announced that universities would decide on their own education modalities by considering the latest status of the pandemic; therefore, while some universities were still pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies online, some of them were trying to implement hybrid education (YÖK, 2021a). Also, pre-service teachers completed their school practicum through virtual classrooms until September 2021 (YÖK, 2021b). As a result of the controlled normalization process after vaccination and hygiene precautions, pre-service teachers started their school practicum face-to-face in October 2021 (MoNE, 2021b). On the other hand, pre-service teachers who had a chance to attend face-to-face practicum sessions had had to take pedagogical content and content knowledge courses online when they were sophomores and juniors. Thus, pre-service EFL teachers might have had struggles while readjusting to face-to-face education after almost two years of remote learning (Mavuru & Pila, 2022).

This study is significant since it will hopefully make contributions to the discussion of post-COVID-19 teaching-learning practices of pre-service teachers. In the shade of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new era of education is described with a more inclusive and flexible mindset to teaching and learning; therefore, investigating insights of pre-service EFL teachers may lead to new ways of rethinking teacher education and school practicum. This study aims to put forward the present situation of pre-service EFL teachers at a practicum school. There are studies focusing on views of pre-service teachers about practicum in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Kurtdede-Fidan & Yıldırım, 2022; Tekel et al., 2022) investigating online teaching readiness of university students and pre-service teachers (e.g., Ersin et al., 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Yüksel & Basaran-Uysal, 2021), examining the cooperation among student teachers, mentors, and supervisors during online practicum (e.g., Babanoglu, 2021; Çoban & Vardar, 2021), and analyzing perceptions of teacher candidates on distance education in the course of the pandemic (e.g., König et al., 2020; Tatlı et al., 2022). Since very few studies (e.g., Guerra-Reyes et al., 2023; İlya & Daloğlu, 2023) have focused on insights of pre-service teachers about post-COVID-19 school practicum experiences, there is a research gap that will help teacher educators redesign school practicum components effectively. In light of these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What insights do Turkish pre-service EFL teachers have on post-COVID-19 school practicum?
2. What are the suggestions of pre-service EFL teachers about school practicum after COVID-19 outbreak?

Literature Review

During the pandemic, the transition from face-to-face education to online learning brought forth new difficulties for teacher education programs in terms of keeping teacher candidates motivated and providing them with opportunities for professional development (Fernández et al., 2022). Karataş and Tuncer (2020) conducted a study to investigate the impact of distance education on language skills of pre-service English language teachers. The results showed that distance education affected their speaking skills negatively since speaking activities were ignored during online courses while writing was used as a new medium of communication. In parallel with this

study, Sayan (2020) examined views of instructors on distance education during the pandemic and the results showed that instructors found practice-based courses inefficient because of their limited communication with students and low motivation of students towards online practice. A study by Karatepe et al. (2020) found that student teachers showed a negative attitude towards online courses at education faculties. According to the participants, curricula of teacher education programs include both theoretical and practical courses; therefore, not every course is suitable for distance education. They especially drew attention to the fact that even practice-based courses were turned into theoretical sessions in distance education. In a similar vein, Tatlı et al. (2022) surveyed the views of teacher candidates on distance education in the course of the pandemic. It was found that teacher candidates showed low motivation towards distance education and mentioned their dissatisfaction with practice-based teacher education courses.

As an integral part of teacher education programs, the main goal of the practicum is to provide pre-service teachers with first-hand experience in teacher education programs (Graves, 2010). Thanks to the classroom activities, pre-service teachers blend theory and practices which allows them to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Schulz, 2005). Experiencing the real school context helps pre-service teachers have more realistic expectations and develop strategies in professional settings (Farrell, 2008). A study by Çoban and Vardar (2021) evaluated distance English language teaching education during the COVID-19 pandemic by investigating perspectives of student teachers and their instructors. The results showed that student EFL teachers and the instructors have both positive and negative experiences about online school practicum; however, they did not have negative opinions about online theoretical courses. In the Chilean context, Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) conducted a study to unveil the challenges and advantages of online practicum. The study showed that student teachers had negative experiences during online practicum because of lack of immersion into a real classroom context. Likewise, Assunçao Flores and Gago (2020) investigated the school shutdowns in Portugal and reported the decrease in student engagement and lack of sufficient teaching practice opportunities for pre-service teachers.

During the controlled normalization process, schools were reopened with strict precautions amid COVID-19. After coming together in the shade of pandemic, both classroom practices and materials have been changed (Oranga & Matere, 2022). It is asserted that school closures and online education have made a negative effect on student achievement in primary and secondary education in terms of causing unwillingness to do homework and participate in lessons during the post-covid era (Hammerstein et al., 2021). Dimitrova (2022) investigated teaching pronunciation to middle school students during the controlled normalization process. She concluded in her study that unlike reading and writing, pronunciation is a very physical activity including using speech organs; therefore, pronunciation activities were mostly neglected when the students and the teacher wore face masks. In a similar vein, classroom materials have been changed during this process since teachers tended to use more technology-mediated and audio-visual tools in order to increase student engagement after a long time of computer-aided remote learning (Donham et al., 2022). According to Krishnapatria (2020), both teachers and students indicated that they were still in an adaptation process to the post-covid era at the time of her study. She concluded that switching to face-to-face education from online education during the new normal brought along the change in the entire learning experience, such as increase in the anxiety and boredom of students, classroom discipline problems, and technology addiction. In parallel with this study, Basinger et al. (2020) put forth that uncertainties emerged after unexpected cases, such as pandemic, results in student dissatisfaction, negative emotions, boredom, and stress in the classroom.

Yi and Jang (2020) examined the process of reopening of schools during the new normal in South Korea. They put forth that all stakeholders should take into consideration the potential long-term impact of remote learning on students and online teaching on teachers during the post-pandemic education. In the South African context, Nel et al. (2021) investigated the post-covid practices in practicum. Their study put forth that the way teaching and learning happened at practicum schools have been changed forever after the pandemic. It was found in the study that distance education revealed the urgent need for more practice-based components to teacher education programs in order to tolerate the semesters lost during online education. According to the study, the pandemic unveiled the vital importance of face-to-face classroom experiences during practicum and the need for developing practice-based activities hand-in-hand with the theoretical knowledge before school practicum.

In the Turkish context, school practicum is conducted via theoretical and practical components during the fourth year of EFL teacher education program. Pre-service teachers spend 14 weeks per semester, and they are placed at state or private schools where they conduct classroom observations and deliver lessons under the supervision of mentor teachers and university supervisors. Pre-service teachers complete pre-assigned observation

tasks and write weekly reflective papers as requirements of the practicum course. Also, they attend sessions with university supervisors to discuss theoretical and critical aspects of practicum experiences every week. As an integral and challenging part of teacher education programs (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005), research studies on practicum were conducted in the Turkish context during and after the practicum. Tekel et al. (2022) investigated the policies on school practicum in different countries including Turkey. They mentioned that online school practicum caused significant problems because of limited access to schools, lack of opportunities to observe and teach lessons, and insufficient feedback sessions. A very recent study conducted by Polat (2022) found that after reopening the schools, pre-service teachers struggled with classroom management as a result of lack of practice opportunities because of online education. According to the study, pre-service teachers experienced individual and environmental uncertainties in the classroom after a long period of remote learning. Also, pre-service teachers mentioned the changing habits of young learners and the communication problems they experienced in the classroom. Finally, İlya and Daloğlu (2023) conducted a research study to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of adaptation of school practicum in an EFL pre-service teacher education program. They found that online components should become an integral part of face-to-face school practicum in the digital world we live in. Moreover, they concluded that teacher education curricula and school practicum should be redesigned during the post-covid process in order to be prepared when it is inevitable to make a shift to online education again.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uncovered insights of pre-service EFL teachers studying at a university in Turkey while taking a school practicum course after the COVID-19 outbreak. Another aim of this study was proposing suggestions for practicum experiences after the pandemic. To achieve this aim, this study was designed as a case study. Since case studies focus on real people in real environments, they offer a detailed and rich description of the situation examined (Cohen et al., 2007; Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

Participants and Sampling

Participants in this research were fourteen pre-service English language teachers studying at a university in Turkey. Their ages ranged between 22 and 24. During this study, the participants were taking both hybrid courses at a teacher education program and doing practicum face-to-face at a middle school in Istanbul, Turkey. All participants took teaching skills courses online when they were juniors. For the current study, purposeful sampling was employed in order to choose participants. All participants were senior year students who could provide in-depth and detailed information about the research topic (Creswell, 2013). In fact, there were nineteen pre-service teachers taking the practicum courses under the supervision of the university instructor. However, five of the students were excluded from this study because of the following reasons: one of them had repeat courses at the time when this study was conducted, one of them had taken the practicum course before and failed, and three of them did not write the reflection paper after their first two visits to the practicum school. The university and the practicum school have been cooperating for three years. The school assigned four mentor teachers to train and support pre-service EFL teachers. At the time of this study, all mentor teachers had at least ten years of teaching experience. Pre-service teachers spend eight hours a day for 24 weeks at this school under the guidance of their mentor teachers and university supervisors for two semesters. The participants were pre-service EFL teachers since this study aimed to investigate post-covid experiences of pre-service teachers with a long-term study.

Data Collection Tools

Yin (2003) suggests the following data collection tools for case studies: documents, interviews, archival records, observation, and physical artifacts. Thus, the relevant data were collected by means of reflection papers and semi-structured interviews throughout two semesters. Firstly, reflection papers were collected on weekly basis from the beginning of the first semester until the end of the academic year. The participants wrote the first set of reflection papers to share their opinions about teaching in general and jot down first impressions of the practicum school. The rest of the reflection papers were about their classroom observations and teaching experiences. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five volunteer participants at the end of the second semester to learn their insights about face-to-face practicum experience after the COVID-19 outbreak. During the interviews, the participants were asked questions related to their face-to-face practicum experiences after a long time of online and hybrid learning at the teacher education program due to pandemic. In addition, they were asked

to share their observations about the impact of post-covid condition on classroom practices at the practicum school. All interviews were conducted individually and lasted 15-20 minutes.

Data Analysis

In data analysis process, stages suggested by Wellington (2000) were utilized in order to follow a systematic order. In a general sense, this process involves taking all the data in, taking them apart in accordance with the relevancy, and then putting them together again to have a fuller picture of the case being studied. The first step starts with reading and rereading the data. Then, the researcher stands back and reflects upon the data underlined. In the third stage, the data is categorized by using chunks. Before finalizing the data analysis process, similar categories are combined, and large categories are divided into two parts, if necessary. Then, similarities and contrasts are found while synthesizing the emerged categories. As a final step, the data is compared to the similar records in the literature. Throughout this process, the researcher goes back to reflect upon the data for the missing parts.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher read all transcripts to group responses according to interview questions. In order to eliminate the unconnected data, most salient themes were selected and marked. Then, the data were reread to generate overall categories. After reflecting on the categories emerged, similar categories were merged. During this process, categories came from interview questions, vignettes of participants, and interpretations of the researcher. Presenting viewpoints of participants was very crucial to synthesize the data. To achieve this aim, different views were chosen on the same matter. Finally, the whole data were checked again to control whether there were any parts missed or not. A similar procedure was employed for the analysis of reflection papers written by the participants. The process of reading and rereading documents, underlining relevant parts, reflection upon them, revealing categories, and synthesizing different views was followed. After completing two stages of data analysis, interpretations of the meaning of the case are presented, which is also called *lessons learned* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In qualitative studies, certain measures should be taken to ensure that findings and interpretations are trustworthy (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To this end, strategies suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985) were adopted in this study. The first strategy used in this study was triangulation to facilitate validation of data by using more than one data collection tools. In addition, credibility was provided through member checking. Finally, the researcher coded the raw data twice to ensure dependability of this study.

Research Ethics

It is confirmed that this study followed the academic research ethics. Firstly, the research proposal was submitted to the social sciences scientific research ethics committee of the institution where the participants were studying. After receiving the approval, the researcher gave informed consent forms to the participants. The informed consent form included aim of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. The participants were also informed that participation in this study was voluntary. Additionally, all participants were given numbers (P1, P2 and so on) to ensure the anonymity.

FINDINGS

This part presents the findings of this study under three themes that emerged after the data analysis process. The themes can be listed as follows: *Classroom Management Issues after the Pandemic*, *Adjusting to the New Normal*, and *Redesigning English Language Classes*.

Classroom Management Issues After the Pandemic

The participants in this study declared that students could not stop using their mobile phones during the face-to-face lessons as a result of overuse of tablets and mobile phones in the course of online education. One of the pre-service teachers shared her observations with the following words:

> [P1] Because of the pandemic, students have spent too much time with their phones and tablets. This is the reason why students get distracted in the classes more easily. Our mentor teacher always walks around the classroom to monitor her students and make them focus on the classroom activities. I think that classroom management is harder than before (Reflection paper, October 2021).

According to the participants, classroom management issues stemmed from changing habits of students in consequence of the pandemic lockdown. It was mentioned by one of the participants that the pandemic increased individualism among students and caused classroom discipline problems during face-to-face education.

[P14] As students sat down alone in their homes during online education, they have difficulties in learning in a social environment and following classroom rules after the pandemic. They want to act alone, they do not want to come to the school, and they get bored very quickly. Sometimes our mentor teacher spends half of the lesson to maintain discipline (Reflection paper, October 2021).

They also stated that the mismatch between theory and practice in classroom management created need to develop new strategies after an unexpected pandemic and compulsory online education process.

[P7] So far, we have learnt many classroom management theories at the university. All of them were written for moderate classrooms. I do not think that the writers consider unexpected events that have downsides. Even our mentor teacher has difficulties with keeping their students on track because they spent their last two years seated in front of their computers. Should we still try to use the theories we have learnt? (Reflection paper, October 2021).

One of the participants shared that teachers have changed their classroom material preferences after the pandemic in order to maintain classroom discipline. According to her, students got used to learn by means of audio-visual materials during online education; therefore, teachers were trying to integrate technology more into the classroom. She wrote:

[P8] Visual materials became more important during online education. As far as I observed, teachers are trying to use more auditory and visual materials after the pandemic. For example, our mentor teacher starts her lesson with a web-based game. She told me that she had started to use this strategy to draw attention to her lessons during online education. Then, it became a classroom routine for them. I will use technology in my future classrooms; otherwise, it is difficult to draw their attention (Reflection paper, December 2021).

Two of the participants referred to their own teaching experiences while sharing their thoughts about classroom management issues after the pandemic. The excerpts of both participants implied that they felt anxious while teaching and keeping the classroom focused. According to them, the first reason for their anxiety was having fewer speaking opportunities during online education. They said:

[P3] We spent last year taking online courses. I did not even open my mouth during some online courses throughout the semester. We took even teaching skills courses online. So, it is very normal for me to feel stressed while teaching and managing the classroom (Interview, May 2022).

[P9] I wrote a lot last year, but I did not speak. Most of our courses were theoretical, even the practical ones. I did not feel myself ready to teach because I spent almost two years with online education. I was lucky that my mentor teacher was very supportive; however, I got stuck from time to time when I could not remember even very simple words in English. When my students felt my anxiety, they became noisier (Interview, May 2022).

In summary, students' changing habits and discipline issues arisen because the compulsory online education period created a need to alter classroom management strategies and classroom materials. Also, pre-service teachers felt themselves stressed and unready to teach face-to-face due to the fact that they took teaching skills courses online which resulted in having less teaching practices. Finally, it was summarized by pre-service teachers that traditional classroom management theories should be enriched with new techniques and strategies to address students who experienced long term online education.

Adjusting to the New Normal

After the COVID-19 pandemic, schools are still trying to adapt to the new normal process, which includes redesigning school life by taking precautions and designating new classroom routines due to changes brought by the pandemic. One of the participants indicated that students were unwilling to participate in lessons, and she shared her observations related to the uneasiness of students. Although she was happy with experiencing face-to-face practicum rather than e-practicum, she still had concerns about her own practicum experience. She said:

[P4] Students were extremely unwilling to participate in lessons. They first met with their teachers and classmates via Zoom because of quarantine. Even though it has been six weeks since the school started, most of them got used to neither their classmates nor their teachers. They were shy and afraid of making mistakes. Adaptation to the new normal is a big struggle for us as well because we were instructed online for two years (Reflection paper, November 2021).

Two of the participants indicated that returning to face-to-face education has made students leave their comfort zones. The participants observed that students feel pressure while doing tasks and they do not want to do

group work activities. One of the participants mentioned that although pair and group work activities were suggested in the courses at teacher education programs, the emerging situation created a need to design individual tasks. He said:

> [P11] In my opinion, students feel uncomfortable. They want to sit alone while doing group work activities, which is not possible. I think instead of insisting on having group work activities, we should change our perspectives. We ignore the changing world. It is not rational to go on with traditional pre-pandemic theories. If our classrooms need a shift, we should do it (Interview, May 2022).

Finally, two of the participants stated during the interviews that students were unwilling to do homework as a result of experiencing difficulties in readapting themselves to the idea of having responsibilities. He shared his opinions as follows:

> [P14] Students see doing homework as a burden. Teachers make photocopies and distribute them to their students as homework; however, we went through an online process for two years and students did their homework via online platforms. So, I think we should continue to use online platforms to give homework (Interview, May 2022).

In brief, pre-service teachers observed that students experience adaptation problems in new normal conditions. They also identified themselves with the students at the practicum school in terms of being instructed online for two years and feeling unready for face-to-face education. After a long time of online education, both pre-service teachers and students were struggling with adapting to altered classroom atmosphere.

Redesigning English Language Classes

Because of the precautions taken for the pandemic, cluster seating style was not recommended. The participants implied that row seating style was preferred; however, this arrangement inhibited classroom interaction and student engagement in the classroom. [P7] mentioned this with the following words: "I am at the end of my practicum experience; I have never seen a group-work or a pair-work activity. Neither parents nor students question this because of the pandemic. I can totally understand the reasons behind this, but English classes need interaction" (Interview, May 2022). Two of participants shared their experiences as follows:

> [P2] We need horseshoe seating style for discussions while we need clusters for group work activities. As far as I observed, teachers use only row seating style. The thing we should question is whether the pandemic becomes an excuse in order not to do interactive and effort-needed activities in English classes. (Reflection paper, December 2021).

> [P8] Unfortunately, I could not find a place to implement what I learnt from my instructors at the university. When I wanted to design group work activities or games during practicum, my mentor teacher warned me about the health measures (Interview, May 2022).

The last issue mentioned by the participants is the drawback of teaching pronunciation with a face mask. Language teachers generally ask students questions such as "*What's the position of my tongue?", "Did you watch my lips?", "Is my mouth open or closed?"*; however, teachers are now struggling to visualize pronunciation that their masks hide. The participants observed that teaching pronunciation is neglected with the *new normal* of teaching behind a face mask. One of the participants said:

> [P6] It is very difficult to pronounce words with a face mask because students cannot see their teachers while pronouncing. When my mentor teacher cannot hear or understand her students because of face masks, she asks them to repeat themselves. This situation violates the course flow (Interview, May 2022).

Another participant mentioned the same issue and she also puts forth a suggestion for teaching practices after the pandemic. She expressed herself as follows:

> [P7] When teachers pronounce a word, students cannot see their faces. Our practicum school is equipped with technological facilities, so teachers can use the projector for pronunciation practices. They can open a website to show her students word stresses and intonation. Also, there are videos recorded by English language teachers pronouncing different words. They can watch videos in the classroom (Interview, May 2022).

Likewise, it is asserted that pronunciation parts are skipped by teachers. Reading parts became the focus of English lessons due to the fact that reading activities are mostly done individually. She said:

> [P8] Students must learn the correct pronunciation from their teachers. Nowadays, wearing a mask is an obstacle. Sometimes teachers lower their masks to show their mouths while pronouncing; however, they do not let their students lower their masks. So, they cannot check if they pronounce correct or not. I think

the best solution for that is using a tool for pronunciation tasks. Teachers can ask their students audio-record themselves on their phones and then email the recording to them (Interview, May 2022).

In a nutshell, modifying classroom seating with the demands of classroom activities is of vital importance to maximize classroom interaction and student engagement. According to the participants, even though there was a need to push students away from each other because of pandemic precautions, teachers should find a way to keep classrooms active and dynamic. It was mentioned by the participants that pronunciation activities were neglected most of the time because of wearing face masks. The participants suggested that teachers should benefit from technology-mediated learning and adapt themselves to approach teaching with a new perspective.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study aimed to reveal the insights of fourteen Turkish pre-service EFL teachers about school practicum they experienced during the post-covid era. Also, their concerns and suggestions were examined in the current study. Since online education brought along technology addiction and the habit of individual learning among students, classroom practices have been changed after returning to face-to-face education. This finding was also found by Hammerstein et al. (2021) and Oranga and Matere (2022) to assert that school closures and online education have made a negative effect on students and led to changing classroom routines. The participants indicated that students have difficulties in learning in a social environment and following classroom rules after spending two years alone in front of their computers. The findings suggest that pre-service EFL teachers observed and experienced classroom management problems after reopening of the schools. Along with this, they observed that students get bored quickly and seek for the technology-mediated part of the lesson. Basinger et al. (2020) found similar results indicating the increase of boredom and anxiety of students after reopening of the schools. To this end, according to the participants of the current study, pre-service teachers need to learn new classroom management strategies to use in unexpected and challenging situations like pandemic and lockdown. Both the current study and the research conducted by Yi and Jang (2020) drew attention to the potential long-term impact of online education on teachers and students and the need to have a new perspective about this issue. In this sense, the participants also added that classroom management theories and strategies they learnt at teacher education faculties were written for moderate classrooms and should be reconsidered. Besides, it was found that as a result of remote learning, classroom materials were changed and became more technology-based after reopening the schools. In line with this finding, Donham et al. (2022) remarked that teachers preferred to use more technology-mediated and audio-visual materials in order to increase student motivation after a long time of remote learning.

With the reopening of schools, both students and pre-service teachers were still trying to adapt to the new normalization process (Krishnapatria, 2020). Pre-service EFL teachers felt unprepared, stressed, and anxious because of having very few teaching practices and speaking opportunities. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Polat (2022) indicating pre-service teachers' struggles with classroom management issues at the practicum school after the pandemic. Pre-service teachers shared that they experienced remote learning for two years as the students they taught in practicum school. To this end, they could totally understand students' unwillingness to participate in lessons. They also mentioned that although pair and group work activities were neglected because of health precautions, students were not offered interactive and collaborative activities instead of them. It was also concluded that using online platforms and computer-aided materials should be continued to use in order to make a smooth shift from remote learning to face-to-face education. In parallel with this, İlya and Daloğlu (2023) highlighted that online components should become an integral part of face-to-face practicum in a changing digital world and school practicum should be redesigned to prepare student teachers technologically for unexpected shifts to online education. Although the participants expressed their dissatisfaction about taking teaching skills courses online, they shared their contentedness to complete school practicum face-to-face. This finding is important since the study conducted by Tekel et al. (2022) revealed that online practicum resulted in lack of opportunities to observe and teach lessons and insufficient feedback sessions. However, the participants of the current study also mentioned that during the school practicum, they could not find a place to implement what they learnt at the teacher education program. In a similar vein, Karataş and Tuncer (2020) and Sayan (2020) put forward that online education affected pre-service teacher education negatively in terms of lack of speaking opportunities and having very few teaching practices. Moreover, although pre-service teachers did not mention their dissatisfaction with taking theoretical courses online (Çoban & Vardar, 2021; Sepulveda- Escobar & Morrison, 2020), both the current study and studies conducted by Karatepe et al. (2020), Tatlı et al. (2022) and Assunçao Flores and Gago (2020) put forth pre-service teachers' dissatisfaction with taking practice-based courses online and their negative impact on their face-to-face school practicum. The current study presented a crucial

finding that pre-service teachers who took teaching skills and pedagogy courses online when they were sophomores and juniors needed more practice opportunities and guidance to decrease their anxiety during face-to-face practicum. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Nel et al. (2021).

Since it is of vital importance to maximize classroom interaction in English classes, the participants indicated that teachers design more dynamic lessons in order to make their students engaged in the classroom after a challenging pandemic process. They also mentioned that pre-service teachers should be prepared and supervised in accordance with this need. In addition to this, it is suggested to benefit from technology in the classroom in order to decrease the classroom discipline issues, students' adaptation problems to the new normal, and also to create opportunities for activities which are neglected because of pandemic, such as pronunciation practices. In parallel with the current study, Dimitrova (2022) asserted that pronunciation activities were skipped because of wearing face masks. At this point, the current study put forward an important suggestion made by pre-service EFL teachers that students should be offered online platforms or technological tools to overcome the drawbacks of pandemic, such as asking students audio-record themselves and send the recording to their teachers for pronunciation practices.

In conclusion, the focus of the current study is two-fold: pre-service teachers started their school practicum in classrooms filled with students who spent their last two years with remote learning in front of their computers, and pre-service teachers who participated in face-to-face school practicum spent their last two years with online education and took teaching skills courses online. The findings revealed worthy concluding remarks about adapting the teacher education curricula to respond the unexpected changes and challenges in learning and teaching. Also, since the pandemic has reshaped many aspects of teaching and learning, this study makes contributions to the literature thanks to the suggestions made by pre-service EFL teachers. Finally, this study has the following limitations. First, fourteen pre-service EFL teachers participated in this study. To this end, the findings reflect insights from a group of pre-service teachers. So, this study can be expanded by reaching more participants. Besides, quantitative, or mixed-methods research studies may report views of larger groups. Lastly, this is a small-scale research study hence the findings of this study are not generalizable. Perceptions of mentor teachers can be added to the future studies in order to give a voice to their experiences, thus, to have more generalizable findings.

Statements of Publication Ethics

I declare that this study strictly followed the academic research ethics. Approval of ethics committee was taken from Istanbul Medipol University with the following document number: E-43037191-604.01.01-72787 on December 13, 2021.

Conflict of Interest

This study has no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Assunçao Flores, M., & Gago, M. (2020). Teacher education in times of COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal: national, institutional and pedagogical responses. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4), 507-516.

Babanoglu, M. P. (2021). Online ELT practicum: views of student teachers, cooperating teachers and faculty supervisors. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, *4*(4), 455-471.

Basinger, K., Crawford, T., Critchley, L., & Romano, J. (2020). Using uncertainty reduction theory to help students deal with stress and anxiety and improve their overall classroom performance. *Disabled World*, Retrieved 2022-05- 05, from https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/edu- cation/uncertainty-reduction-theory.php

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. New York: Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Çoban, B. T., & Vardar, A. K. (2021). Evaluation of distance English language teaching education during COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of ELT student teachers and their instructors. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, *5*(3), 198-220.

Donham, C., Pohan, C., Menke, E., & Kranzfelder, P. (2022). Increasing student engagement through course attributes, community, and classroom technology: lessons from the pandemic. *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, *23*(1), 1-10.

Donitsa-Schmidt, S., & Ramot, R. (2020). Opportunities and challenges: teacher education in Israel in the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 46*(4), 586-595.

Dimitrova, S. (2022). Teaching English pronunciation during the COVID pandemic. *Pedagogy, 94*(3), 90-100.

Erduran, S., & Kaya, E. (2018). Drawing nature of science in pre-service science teacher education: Epistemic insight through visual representations. *Research in Science Education*, *48*(6), 1133-1149.

Ersin, P., Atay, D., & Mede, E. (2020). Boosting preservice teachers' competence and online teaching readiness through e-practicum during the COVID-19 outbreak. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, *2*(2), 112-124.

Farrell, T. S. (2008). 'Here's the book, go teach the class': ELT practicum support. *RELC Journal*, *39*(2), 226-241.

Fernández, M.B., Silva-Peña, I., Fernández, L., & Cuenca, C. (2022). When the invisible makes inequity visible: Chilean teacher education in COVID-19 times. *Education Sciences*, *12*(1), 1-17.

Graves, S. (2010). Mentoring pre-service teachers: A case study. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *35*(4), 14-20.

Guerra-Reyes, F., Naranjo-Toro, M., Basantes-Andrade, A., & Guerra-Davila, E. (2023). Pre-service primary educators´ alternative conceptions of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19: a study of Universidad Técnica del Norte, Ecuador. *F1000Research*, *12*(67), 1-15.

Hammerstein, S., König, C., Dreisörner, T., & Frey, A. (2021). Effects of COVID-19-related school closures on student achievement-a systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12(*1), 1-14.

İlya, A., & Daloğlu, A. (2023). Adaptation of practicum in an EFL pre-service teacher education program in response to the COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 13*(1), 25-41.

Karataş, T. Ö., & Tuncer, H. (2020). Sustaining language skills development of pre-service EFL teachers despite the COVID-19 interruption: A case of emergency distance education. *Sustainability*, *12*(19), 81-88.

Karatepe, F., Küçükgençay, N., & Peker, B. (2020). Öğretmen adayları senkron uzaktan eğitime nasıl bakıyor?: Bir anket çalışması. [What are the perspectives of teacher candidates on synchronous distance education?: A survey study]. *Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences Research*, *7*(53), 1262-1274.

Kidd, W., & Murray, J. (2020). The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on teacher education in England: how teacher educators moved practicum learning online. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4), 542-558.

Kosar, G. (2021). Distance Teaching Practicum: Its Impact on Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Preparedness for Teaching. *IAFOR Journal of Education, 9*(2), 111-126.

König, J., Jäger-Biela, D. J., & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(4), 608-622.

Krishnapatria, K. (2020). From 'lockdown' to letdown: Students' perception of e-learning amid the COVID-19 outbreak. *ELT in Focus*, *3*(1), 1-8.

Kurtdede- Fidan, N., & Yıldırım, N. (2022). Teacher education in Turkey in the Covid-19 pandemic: Experiences of the pre-Service teachers about the online teaching practice. *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews*, *11*(1), 77-92.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage Publications.

Mavuru, L., Pila, O. K., & Kuhudzai, A. G. (2022). Pre-Service Teachers' Levels of Adaptations to Remote Teaching and Learning at a University in a Developing Country in the Context of COVID-19. *International Journal of Higher Education, 11*(1), 12-30.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

MoNE (2020). Haberler [News]. Retrieved 2022-06-05, from https://www.meb.gov.tr/egitim-ogretim-31-aralik-2020ye-kadar-online-olarak-surdurulecek/haber/21983/tr

MoNE (2021a). Haberler [News]. Retrieved 2022-06-05, from https://www.meb.gov.tr/2020-2021-egitim-ogretim-yilinin-ikinci-donemi-uzaktan-ve-yuz-yuze-egitimle-basliyor/haber/22553/tr

MoNE (2021b). Haberler [News]. Retrieved 2022-06-05, from https://www.meb.gov.tr/6-eylulde-tam-zamanli-olarak-yuz-yuze-egitim-baslayacak/haber/23878/tr

Moore, R. (2003). Reexamining the field experiences of preservice teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *54*(1), 31-42.

Nel, C., Botha, C., & Marais, E. (2021). A COVID-19 re-envisioned teaching practicum curriculum. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *6*(2), 249-266.

Nunan, D. & Bailey, K. M. (2009). *Exploring second language classroom research a comprehensive guide*. Boston: Heinle.

Robinson, M., & Rusznyak, L. (2020). Learning to teach without school-based experience: Conundrums and possibilities in a South African context. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 46*(4), 517-527.

Polat, M. (2022). A case study of preservice teachers' classroom management dilemma in a climate of uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *10*(1), 90-102.

Sayan, H. (2020). Assessment of faculty members' views on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process. *AJIT-e: Online Academic Journal of Information Technology*, *11*(42), 100-122.

Sepulveda-Escobar, P., & Morrison, A. (2020). Online teaching placement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile: challenges and opportunities. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(4), 587-607.

Smith, K., & Lev-Ari, L. (2005). The place of the practicum in pre-service teacher education: the voice of the students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *33*(3), 289-302.

Tatlı, Z., Er-Nas, S., & Şeyihoğlu, A. (*2022). Views of teacher candidates on distance education in the COVID-19 pandemic process. Kastamonu Education Journal, 30*(2), 378-389

Tekel, E., Bayır, Ö. Ö., & Dulay, S. (2022). Teaching practicum during the Covid-19 pandemic: A comparison of the practices in different countries. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, *18*(2), 71-86.

Trent, J. (2013). From learner to teacher: practice, language, and identity in a teaching practicum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 41* (4), 426–440.

Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational research contemporary issues and practical approaches*. London: Continuum Books.

Yi, Y., & Jang, J. (2020). Envisioning possibilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications from English language teaching in South Korea. *Tesol Journal, 11*(3), 1-4.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. (3rd ed.), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

YÖK (2020). Basın Açıklaması [Press Briefing]. Retrieved 2022-04-06, from https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2020/universitelerde-uygulanacak-uzaktan-egitime-iliskin-aciklama.aspx

YÖK (2021a). Basın Açıklaması [Press Briefing]. Retrieved 2022-04-06, from https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2021/2021-2022-egitim-ogretim-doneminde-verilecek-egitime-iliskin-aciklama.aspx

YÖK (2021b). COVID-19 Bilgilendirme [COVID-19 Briefing]. Retrieved 2022-05-17, from https://covid19.yok.gov.tr/AnaSayfa

Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2014). Pre-service teachers' changing beliefs in the teaching practicum: Three cases in an EFL context. *System*, *44 (1)*, 1-12.

Yüksel, İ., & Basaran-Uysal, B. C. (2021). Foreign language education through online communities of practice. In C. H. Xiang (Ed.), *Trends and Developments for the Future of Language Education in Higher Education* (pp. 141-165). IGI Global.