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### The Impact of an Online Teaching Practicum on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Negotiation of Emotions, Ideal and Feared Teacher Selves

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# The Impact of an Online Teaching Practicum on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Negotiation of Emotions, Ideal and Feared Teacher Selves

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated (1) the ideal and feared teacher selves of eight pre-service EFL teachers during an online practicum conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye, (2) their emotional trajectories throughout the practicum, and (3) their perceptions of online teaching as articulated through metaphors. Thematic analysis revealed that most participants positioned themselves closer to their ideal teacher selves while actively distancing themselves from their feared selves over the course of the practicum. Moreover, initial negative emotional experiences gradually subsided, giving way to feelings of relief and, by the end of the second semester, predominantly positive emotions. Metaphorical analysis of the pre-service teachers' online practicum experiences yielded five interrelated sub-themes: emerging teacher identity, distance, challenge, uncertainty, and hope. Collectively, these findings illuminate how pre-service language teachers negotiated their emotional experiences and possible language teacher selves within an online practicum context, shaped by the unprecedented conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Language teaching is a profession that inherently involves emotional labor. This emotional labor extends to online education, where effective emotion regulation remains essential (Liu et al., 2024). Online instructional contexts may give rise to teacher emotions that are distinctive to the digital environment. For example, in online settings, emotional labor often arises from tensions between teachers' pedagogical expectations and institutional demands regarding student engagement, instructional materials, and assessment practices, as reported by Nazari et al. (2024). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted teaching and learning practices worldwide. During this period, teachers were compelled to rapidly adapt their instructional approaches and transition to online teaching with limited preparation, as the shift occurred under unprecedented and unexpected circumstances.

Research has shown that language teachers' emotions shape their identities (Wolff & de Costa, 2017). We view emotions as "socially constructed, personally enacted ways of being that emerge from conscious and/or unconscious judgments regarding perceived successes at attaining goals or maintaining standards or beliefs during transactions as part of social-historical contexts" (Schutz et al., 2006, p. 344). Consequently, teachers' emotional experiences are not merely individual psychological states but dynamic, context-sensitive forces that continuously shape how they see themselves as professionals and how they act within their instructional, institutional, and sociocultural environments.

It appears appropriate to adopt the possible selves theory to examine student teachers' future-oriented identities during the teaching practicum, as this period marks a critical transitional phase from student teacher to professional teacher. Possible selves theory explains how future-oriented self-concepts shape individuals' motivation for both present and future actions and captures "an individual's expectations, including hopes, aspirations, fears, and threats that she or he anticipates in the near or distant future" (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351). It is important to note that possible selves are socially constructed and formed

within specific sociocultural contexts. Previous research has examined language teachers' and student teachers' possible selves in face-to-face educational settings across diverse contexts (Sahakyan et al., 2018; Werbińska, 2017; Zhang & Phyak, 2025). However, the present study focuses on student teachers' possible selves as they emerge during an online teaching practicum conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our study may provide insights into how EFL student teachers negotiate who they are, who they want to be, and who they do not want to be through an online practicum in the Turkish EFL setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploring language teachers' ideal selves can reveal "the tension between external and internal standards, past experiences and future expectations, and may be able to explain some of the pressures teachers, and particularly language teachers are experiencing." (Stickler, 2021, p. 10). There are a few studies that explore possible selves among pre-service teachers in an online setting (e.g., Maddamsetti & Yuan, 2024). With similar intentions, but in a different context, this study aimed to look at the impact of online teaching practicum on the negotiation of possible teacher selves of student teachers in the Turkish EFL context, to explore their emotions concerning online teaching, and additionally to explore their online practicum experiences of student teachers through metaphors. Accordingly, the research questions that are posed in this study are:

1. How does an online teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic affect pre-service EFL teachers' ideal and feared teacher selves?
2. How do EFL pre-service teachers' emotions evolve during online teaching practicum amid the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What metaphors do pre-service EFL teachers use to describe their online teaching practicum experience?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study uses the possible selves theory as a theoretical framework. The concept of possible selves was first proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986), who suggested that there are different dimensions of possible selves: selves which we would like to be (ideal self), selves which we think we should be (ought-to self), and selves which we are afraid of becoming (feared self). Later, Higgins (1987) introduced the self-discrepancy theory in which he defined the actual self, ought-to self, and ideal self. He further claimed that “when there is a discrepancy between one’s actual self, and one’s ideal or ought selves, one is motivated to engage in actions to reduce that discrepancy” (Sahakyan et al., 2018), which is what connects the notion of possible selves to teacher motivation. Based on Dörnyei’s (2005) motivational self-system, Kubanyiova (2009) applied the concept of possible selves to teacher motivation and came up with the ideal language teacher self (teachers’ goals and aspirations), the ought-to language teacher self (teachers’ professional responsibilities and obligations), and the feared language teacher self (what teachers are afraid of ending up with). These possible teacher selves are not static mental representations but are dynamically shaped through social interaction, institutional discourses, and emotionally charged teaching experiences. In this sense, the salience and accessibility of particular possible selves—especially during demanding contexts such as a teaching practicum—can influence teachers’ emotion regulation strategies, identity negotiation, and sustained motivational engagement.

### 2.2. Studies on Teachers’ Emotions in Online Education

A substantial amount of research has been conducted on perspectives on the effectiveness and shortcomings of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic in EFL contexts, both globally and within Türkiye (Liu et al., 2024; Nazari et al., 2024; Tao et al., 2024). Tao et al.’s (2024) study pointed to “the L2 teachers’ emotional trajectories as being dominated by outcome emotions and

featuring the co-existence of positive and negative emotions across the three stages of online teaching” (p. 8), and it emphasized the connection between teacher emotions and agency. Derakhshan et al., (2021) examined boredom in online classes with its solutions in the Iranian EFL setting. Their study found that such issues as teachers’ monotonous teacher talks, lack of student interaction, and boring instructional tasks were among the causes of boredom in online classes and it was implied that teachers needed to improve their technology literacy, creativity and empathy skills to avoid boredom in online classes.

In Turkish EFL contexts, several studies have addressed pre-service English teachers’ views and emotional experiences in online education. As reported by Atmaca (2023), pre-service teachers perceived online education as beneficial for developing technological competencies and for delivering theoretically oriented courses; however, it was primarily regarded as inadequate for the teaching practicum component. Likewise, according to Doğruer and Güvendir (2023), pre-service English teachers expressed more negative opinions regarding distance practicum during the COVID-19 period, as they were primarily assigned theoretical tasks and lacked opportunities for genuine classroom interaction or teaching practice. Furthermore, Türegün-Çoban and Kuyumcu-Vardar (2021) emphasized that although distance English language teacher education offered time and space flexibility during the pandemic, it also led to technical problems, limited interaction, and low motivation.

### 2.3. Programs Previous Studies on Teachers’ Possible Selves

Using the possible selves theory for studying teacher motivation may be considered a relatively unexplored yet promising research trajectory in applied linguistics (Zhang, 2025). Ideal teacher images may vary from students to teachers. For instance, a study conducted in Russia found that, while paying attention to students’ individual differences, treating each student equally was regarded by students as an ideal teacher quality; professionalism and adherence to ethical values

mattered more to teachers (Semenova & Khanolainen, 2024). On the other hand, research shows that student teachers want to be “the caring, warm, approachable teacher who facilitates children’s learning, but who is firm and in control. A teacher, who commands respect, yet is remembered fondly.” (Furlong, 2013, p. 79), pointing to a conflict between a traditional and progressive teacher identity.

English teachers’ self-beliefs influence their motivational flux (Costa Ribas, 2012; Zhang, 2025). According to a study conducted with two English teachers in a Brazilian context, the actual and future self-beliefs of English teachers influenced changes in their motivation. Zhang (2025) examined changes in English teachers’ teaching motivation in a Chinese setting, adopting the possible selves theory alongside an ecological perspective and found that the harmony between the teachers’ ought-to selves and ideal selves increased their motivation. On the other hand, Zhang and Phyak’s (2025) longitudinal case study conducted with an English pre-service teacher in a Chinese setting identified conflicts in the participant’s current selves that hindered her from envisioning herself as an L2 teacher. Similarly, a longitudinal study of Mehdizadeh et al. (2024) examined an Iranian EFL teacher’s professional identity trajectory for an extended period of time. It indicated that the teacher experienced a shift in his possible selves and in his positioning of others by reflecting on his teaching practices and creating opportunities for his agency, all of which were attributed to his evolving community of practice. Another study investigating various career-changers’ ideal teacher images after becoming teachers found that real teaching practice, rather than expectations, did not alter participants’ previous ideal teacher images but added new features due to the challenging and surprising aspects of teaching (Cuddapah & Standford, 2015). The importance of their study lies in the sense of “exploring ideal images as being a form of goal-setting” (Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015, p. 35).

Maddamsetti and Yuan (2024) examined primary pre-service teachers’ possible selves through metaphors in an online, asynchronous course during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.

The researchers related the pre-service teachers’ future-oriented identities to the temporal, social, and spatial context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded that “PSTs narratively and metaphorically (re)define and realize future-oriented professional aspirations as an ongoing and contested process embedded in temporal, spatial, and social interactions between contextual forces and individual PSTs’ agency.” (p. 702). While their study and ours may appear similar at first glance, there are key differences. In our research, the metaphors created by pre-service language teachers were explicitly related to their online teaching practicum experiences, not to their possible selves. In our study, data regarding pre-service EFL teachers’ ideal and feared selves were derived from other sources. Again, these studies differ in terms of settings, although both were conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, it is worth noting Muñoz-Salinas’s (2025) study, in which metaphors were used by pre-service teachers to form identities, obtain professional knowledge, and reflect on experience.

Several studies have been conducted on student teachers’ possible selves in the Turkish setting. In their qualitative case study, Erdem-Çoşgun and Savaş (2023) worked with different participants, including student English teachers and novice and experienced teachers, to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the teachers’ ideal and feared selves in the context of Türkiye. In their research, the researchers found that the teachers expressed their ideal selves as able to use technology effectively, and their feared selves as unable to do so. Tatlıoğlu-Dalıoğlu and Adıgüzel’s (2016) study, conducted to investigate teacher candidates’ self-efficacy beliefs and possible selves concerning their first year in the profession after the completion of teaching practice, indicated that while there were positive changes as regards to teacher candidates’ feared teacher selves, there was no significant change in their expected teacher selves.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design and can be situated within the tradition of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry conceptualizes education as “the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others’ stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). From this perspective, lived experiences are understood through the meanings individuals assign to them over time and across contexts. Narrative inquiry is particularly valuable for exploring complex, subjective phenomena, as it seeks “to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 2).

In the context of teacher education, narrative inquiry enables an in-depth examination of how pre-service teachers make sense of their professional development, emotional experiences, and emerging identities. By foregrounding participants’ stories, this approach allows the researcher to capture the temporal, social, and situational dimensions of learning to teach, particularly during periods of disruption or transition. Accordingly, narrative inquiry was deemed an appropriate methodological framework for investigating pre-service English teachers’ possible selves and emotional experiences during an online teaching practicum conducted under the extraordinary conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 3.1. Context

Pre-service English teachers were supposed to complete a two-semester teaching practicum during their final year at university. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and its spread to Türkiye, the teaching practicum- originally designed as face-to-face was conducted online. The student teachers participated in English lessons that were part of the standard curriculum administered by the Ministry of National Education and delivered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, students at schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education were not required to turn on their

cameras during online instruction. This abrupt shift from face-to-face to online education was unexpected, and the student teachers were unprepared for it.

#### 3.2. Participants

Using purposive sampling, eight participants were included in this study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research, and participants are selected because “they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 156). They were studying English Language Teaching at a state university in Türkiye. All the participants were expected to graduate at the end of the semester. They were all conducting their practicum online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. They were all supervised by the second author and assisted by the first author. Only two of them were male (P1 and P5) and the others were female. Except for one (P8), the participants were approximately 22 years old. P8 was in her fifties and a second-career teacher. All the participants were Turkish. Only volunteering students participated in this study, and all signed written informed consent forms.

#### 3.3. Data Collection

In line with the qualitative research method, we collected only qualitative data for this study. Data collection began at the start of the second semester (spring term) in 2021 and ended at the start of the semester. Our data collection instruments included two narrative frames, three post-teaching journals, and an open-ended questionnaire for each participant. These tools were prepared by the first author in line with the relevant literature. Expert opinion was taken on the appropriateness of the questions or prompts used in the data collection tools.

We first asked the student teachers to fill in Narrative Frame 1 at the beginning of the second semester. A narrative frame can be described as “a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying

lengths” (Barkhuizen et al, 2014, p. 45). It enables participants to create a coherent story based on their experiences and reflections (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Participants also completed the written open-ended questionnaire at the beginning of the semester. Open-ended questionnaires can be used to elicit participants' thoughts on a particular topic in an unstructured manner (Brown, 2009). We also expected each participant to keep a journal, which is widely used in narrative inquiry (Connely and Clandinin, 1990). They wrote three post-teaching journals after their online teaching performances during the semester, at different times during this process. During their online teaching performances,

we also observed them and gave feedback on their performances as part of their coursework. Finally, the participants wrote their Narrative Frame 2 at the end of the second semester.

The data collection process was successfully conducted, with all participants completing all instruments. As post-teaching journals were also used for reflection as part of their coursework, the participants wrote their journals in English. As their English proficiency was high, we did not face any challenges. Yet we still preferred to collect the other data types in Turkish, their mother tongue, so they could express their emotions more comfortably.

Table 1.  
Information about the Focus of Each Data Collection Tool

Data collection tools	Focus of the data collection tools
Narrative frame 1 (NF1)	Emotions, thoughts, and experiences regarding the first-semester online teaching practicum; expectations for the second-semester online teaching practicum.
Narrative frame 2 (NF2)	Emotions, thoughts, and experiences regarding the second-semester online teaching practicum, the effect of the online teaching practicum on student teachers' ideal and feared teacher selves, and metaphorical descriptions of the online teaching practicum.
Open-ended questionnaire (OEQ)	Student teachers' identity, ideal and feared teacher selves, and the effect of ideal teacher selves on their motivation.
Post-teaching journal 1 (PTJ1)	The effect of first online teaching performance on their ideal and feared selves, metaphorical descriptions of online teaching, and emotions in the online teaching experience.
Post-teaching Journal 2 (PTJ2)	The effect of second online teaching performance on their ideal and feared selves, metaphorical descriptions of online teaching, and emotions in the online teaching experience.
Post-teaching Journal 3 (PTJ3)	The effects of third online teaching performance on their ideal and feared selves, metaphorical descriptions of online teaching, and emotions in the online teaching experience.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was inductive, as it was data-driven. Most narrative studies “take stories as their object of inquiry or source of data and then subject them to some form of content or thematic analysis.” (Benson, 2018, p. 597). In other words, thematic analysis can be used for narrative inquiries, and it helps us arrange data into broader themes by revealing patterns and differences across narratives; however, the narrative nature of the data could be lost (Barkhuizen et al, 2014). In this study, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used

to analyze qualitative data gathered from narrative frames, post-teaching journals, and an open-ended questionnaire completed at various stages of the practicum. All data sets were read multiple times to ensure familiarity and understanding. The initial coding, which was inductive, involved recognizing meaningful units in the data. We initially looked for patterns within the same type of data and then examined the codes across the entire data set to identify similarities and differences. The codes were subsequently organized into themes and subthemes. Once they were finalized, each theme

was defined and illustrated with excerpts from the data.

We adopted two strategies to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Even though all the data were written, we employed different data collection instruments that focused on similar issues. Consequently, the data were triangulated. Secondly, we used “member checking” by asking the participants to clarify ambiguous points. For instance, when we did not

fully understand the metaphors they created despite the explanation in the tasks, we asked them to confirm that we had interpreted them accurately. You can see the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic analysis conducted in this research in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Themes and Sub-themes that Emerged as a Result of the Thematic Analysis

Themes	Sub-themes
Exploration of student teachers’ ideal teacher selves and feared teacher selves in online teaching practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student teachers’ ideal teacher selves in online teaching practicum</li> <li>• Student teachers’ envisioned ideal teaching acts in online teaching</li> <li>• The effect of online teaching practicum on student teachers’ ideal teacher selves</li> <li>• Student teachers’ feared teacher selves in online teaching practicum</li> <li>• The effect of online teaching practicum on student teachers’ feared teacher selves</li> </ul>
Navigating online teaching practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges in online teaching practicum</li> <li>• Contribution of online teaching practicum to student teachers</li> </ul>
Student teachers’ emotions about online teaching practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions before the first semester online teaching practicum</li> <li>• Emotions during the first semester online teaching practicum</li> <li>• The frequent emotions at the beginning of the second semester online teaching practicum</li> <li>• The frequent emotions towards the end of the second semester online teaching practicum</li> </ul>
Student teachers’ metaphors about conducting online teaching practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging teacher identity</li> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Challenge</li> <li>• Uncertainty</li> <li>• Hope</li> </ul>

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. *Exploration of student teachers’ ideal teacher selves and feared teacher selves in online teaching practicum*

#### *Student teachers’ ideal teacher selves in online teaching practicum*

When pre-service EFL teachers were asked to describe their ideal teacher selves in an open-ended

questionnaire, most referred to more than one teacher quality. To clarify, they reported that they wanted to be a well-liked teacher (P2, P3, P8), an innovative teacher (P2, P3, P6), a fun teacher (P3, P6, P7), a caring teacher (P6, P7), a teacher who loves their job (P2, P4). These were the characteristics or qualities of the ideal teachers for them. For instance, P2 wrote:

*I envision myself as an authentic teacher who is loved by students and especially respected, who enters the classroom every day with enthusiasm and without complaint, who is open to innovation, constantly researching, and keeping up with the class (OEQ).*

Likewise, P6 wrote:

*I want to be a teacher who is constantly productive, open to innovation, draws on other disciplines, and can provide students with a wide range of support. (OEQ).*

#### *Student teachers' ideal teacher selves in online teaching practicum*

This theme captures student teachers' envisioning of the concrete instructional behaviors they imagine their "ideal" teacher self would enact differently in their online English classrooms, focusing more on discrete behaviors or actions rather than traits or teacher characteristics. Six participants (P3, PTJ1; P4, PTJ1; P3, PTJ2; P4, PTJ2; P1, PTJ3; P8, PTJ3) reported that their imagined ideal teacher selves would behave more calmly during online teaching. For instance,

P4 wrote in her first post-teaching journal:

*She would handle the problems calmly and coolly, and she would make up her mind quickly to ensure the students participated in the lesson.*

Participants P4 and P5 indicated in their first post-teaching journals that their ideal selves would succeed in increasing student participation. Two participants (P4, PTJ2; P6, PTJ1) stated that their ideal teacher selves would monitor their spoken English more effectively. Three participants (P1, PTJ2; P5, PTJ3; P6, PTJ3) reported that their imagined ideal teachers would be better at elicitation. Two participants (P1, PTJ3; P6, PTJ1) noted in their post-teaching journals that their ideal teacher would avoid giving complex or lengthy instructions. Finally, one participant (P1) wrote in both the Post-Teaching Journal that they engage in more spontaneous interaction in online English

classrooms. P6 wrote in her first post-teaching journal that her ideal teacher self "would avoid using complex sentences because the students get confused and distracted easily."

*The effect of online teaching practicum on student teachers' ideal teacher selves*

Five of the participants (P3, P4, P5, P7, P8) wrote in the second narrative frame that their ideal teacher selves remained consistent throughout the online teaching practicum. Three of them (P1, P2, P6) expressed that they cultivated their ideal selves and added new qualities to them. For example, P1 wrote in his first post-teaching journal:

*My take on a modern teacher identity has undergone tremendous change over the couple of months of observation and teaching. Now, I would like to be much more aware of what students like, hate, and enjoy, and to integrate this into my classes. Students love it when they feel they are talking to someone of authority, yet close to their "world". (P1, PTJ1)*

Again, P1 in his second narrative frame clearly stated that his ideal teacher image changed through the online teaching practicum:

*Doing an online practicum changed the image of the ideal English teacher I had in mind because, without it, I might not have had the chance to prepare myself for hybrid education, which is likely to emerge in the future. (P1, NF2)*

P6 also expressed that she reshaped her ideal teacher self as she learned new things regarding material use in online teaching, as was clearly expressed:

*Doing my practicum online reshaped my ideal image of an English teacher. Before the pandemic, I used materials such as realia, worksheets, and posters in class, but thanks to this practicum, I can say my horizons have broadened in terms of materials. This was also reflected in my ideal image of a teacher. (P6, NF2)*

All participants reported feeling closer to their ideal teacher selves through their online teaching practicum. For instance, P4 wrote in her journal after her second teaching performance:

*With this teaching experience, I felt I was getting closer to the teacher image I want to have, as I was better than in the previous one. In this lesson, I felt that I started adopting some teacher roles because I acted like a guider when I tried to elicit some information from the students by asking questions. (P4, PTJ2)*

In addition, all participants responded “yes” to the question of whether their ideal teacher images served as a source of motivation and stated that these ideal images did indeed motivate them. In her open-ended questionnaire, P7 wrote:

*Absolutely. Seeing that my students genuinely love me and participate in my class with enthusiasm is priceless for a teacher, and I can't wait to experience it. (OEQ)*

*The effect of online teaching practicum on student teachers' feared teacher selves*

In Narrative Frame 2, all the pre-service EFL teachers participating in this study reported distancing themselves from their feared teacher selves during the online teaching practicum. For instance, P6 wrote:

*Thanks to my online practicum, I've moved away from the image of the English teacher I feared becoming, thanks to feedback from both my supervisor and my friends. This made me aware of things I hadn't noticed before. (P6, NF2)*

#### 4.2. Navigating Online Teaching Practicum

##### *Challenges in online teaching practicum*

In their narrative frames, the pre-service EFL teachers reported that they had some problems during their online teaching practicum. Five of them (P2, P3, P4, P6, P8) reported difficulty enabling or fostering student participation in online classes. Again, five participants (P2, P3, P4, P7, P8)

reported technical issues, such as problems with the internet connection. The third sub-theme was limited teacher-student interaction. As students did not have to turn on their cameras in online classes, the pre-service EFL teachers could not see their students' faces, which many (P2, P3, P6, P7) regarded as an obstacle to genuine student-teacher interaction. The last sub-category to emerge as a recurrent theme was difficulty with time management. Three participants (P1, P5, P6) reported having difficulty managing their time. It was too short for them. For instance, regarding the challenges of the online teaching practicum, P2 wrote the following in her Narrative Frame 2:

*The three biggest challenges I faced during my online practicum this term were:*

- (1) Not being able to see the students' faces. I constantly felt like I was talking to imaginary people, especially when I didn't get answers to my questions.*
- (2) Internet connection. Since three of us were joining the class at the same time at home, I also had difficulty with this. We solved it like this: While I was teaching, my brother and father used their own phones' internet connections. Only then was I able to teach without disconnections or freezes.*
- (3) Low student participation. Sometimes I had to teach only two or three students, which lowered my motivation. The activities I prepared were always group work, so I hesitated, wondering whether they would be meaningless when teaching to two or three students.*

##### *Contribution of online teaching practicum to student teachers*

Navigating all these challenges contributed to their professional development as prospective teachers. One of the recurring sub-themes was improvement in technological knowledge. Three participants (P3, P5, P7) stated that they improved their technological knowledge and how to use it for pedagogical purposes. The other repeated category was flexibility. Two of the pre-service EFL teachers (P2, P6) reported that they learned to be more flexible as a result of their online practicum experiences. For instance, P6 wrote:

*Things don't always go as planned during the process, so I've learned to come up with alternative solutions and be flexible. (NF2)*

#### *4.3. Student Teachers' Emotions about Online Teaching Practicum*

##### *Emotions before the first semester online teaching practicum*

The data from Narrative Frame 1 revealed student teachers' emotions before they began their first-semester online teaching practicum. Three participants (P2, P5, P6) reported feeling excited, and three (P3, P7, P8) wrote they felt nervous. P1 and P2 reported feeling sad, P4 and P5 reported feeling stressed, and two participants (P4, P6) reported feeling anxious. P1 wrote:

*Before starting my practicum last semester, I felt sad and helpless because it might be online. I thought I wouldn't be able to connect with students and that my practicum would go to waste because I hadn't seen any contribution from my department regarding online teaching. (NF1)*

##### *Emotions during the first semester online teaching practicum*

The data collected through Narrative Frame 1 indicated that the student teachers (P4, P5, P7, P8) experienced relief as a positive emotion after they started their first-semester online teaching practicum. They realized it was not as scary as they initially thought and began to adapt to the situation. P4 reported:

*After starting the practicum, my feelings changed. I realized my worries were unnecessary because nothing went as I feared; our teachers were very helpful to us. (P4, NF1)*

##### *The frequent emotions at the beginning of the second semester of the online teaching practicum*

Data from Narrative Frame 2 indicated that anxiety was the most frequently reported emotion among student teachers at the start of the second-semester online teaching practicum; five participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7) reported feeling anxious. The next most common emotion was disappointment, reported by P4, P7, and P8. Two participants (P3, P8) reported a lack of confidence. Motivation was the only positive emotion mentioned repeatedly across the second narrative frames, but it was reported by only two participants (P2, P6). P7 wrote:

*Before starting my online practicum this term, I can say I was incredibly anxious. Also, since I was one of the first to experience such a process, I felt I had to make an effort not to be overwhelmed by the responsibility it entailed, which is why I felt stressed and sad. I knew that even the activities and games we did in class, even the mechanical activities, would be very difficult to do in a Zoom environment. [...] I thought that if I couldn't manage it, I would blame myself directly, because the process was already very difficult, [...] so the fact that the practicum we had imagined doing face-to-face was ruined upset me very much. Dealing with the disappointment and intense emotions that came with it was honestly tough at first. (P7, NF2)*

##### *The frequent emotions towards the end of the second semester online teaching practicum*

Data from Narrative Frame 2 indicated that pride and self-confidence were the most frequently reported emotions among student teachers at the end of the second-semester online teaching practicum, each mentioned by five participants (pride: P3, P4, P5, P7, P8; self-confidence: P3, P4, P5, P6, P8). They were followed by motivation, reported by four participants (P3, P4, P6, P8). Hope was expressed by two participants (P1 and P7). Lastly, anxiety was the only negative emotion reported, noted by P1 and P2. For instance, P5 wrote:

*After starting my practicum this term, my thoughts and/or feelings changed. After the practicum began, I*

*understood what I could do and what I needed to do, and by getting used to the practicum atmosphere and routine, I began to gain confidence in myself. After the first few observation classes and practice, my confidence increased, and I was satisfied with my performance every week and I felt good about myself. (NF2)*

#### 4.4. Student Teachers' Metaphors about Conducting Online Teaching Practicum

The thematic analysis of the metaphors produced by the pre-service EFL teachers regarding their online teaching in this study yielded five sub-themes. These are as follows: (1) emerging teacher identity, (2) distance (3) challenge, (4) uncertainty, and (5) hope.

##### *Emerging teacher identity*

The metaphors under this category are about “learning to become a teacher” or forming a teacher identity throughout the online teaching practicum. Some of these metaphors imply how inexperienced the student teachers were during this process. For example, P3 wrote in her post-teaching journal, compared her future experiences to “new parents trying to raise their first baby.” But the metaphors under this category also suggest that there is progress or at least hope for it. Generally, the explanations showed this side of the situation. For example, P4 compared herself to a child learning to fly a kite, and she was aware of how to succeed using the necessary tools, maybe their knowledge or experiences that she is equipped with.

*My teaching was like a baby who try learning how to walk. From the beginning of my journey, I first learned to crawl, and now I am walking. (P4, PTJ3)*

*I was like a child trying to learn how to fly a kite and my teaching was this kite. When I learn how to get the wind behind, it starts flying perfectly. (P4, PTJ2)*

*My first years as a teacher will be like new parents trying to raise their first baby, knowledge is there but practice will take time. (P3, PTJ1)*

##### *Distance*

This sub-theme refers to both physical and emotional distance between the pre-service EFL teachers and their teachers during their online practicum. As the participants were not in a face-to-face class with their students, they emphasized this in some of their metaphors. These metaphors suggest that the situation bothered the participants a great deal and made them feel lonely.

*All my online teaching experiences felt like a confession in church. I was there every time but could not see anyone, only hear them. (P5, PTJ1)*

*Doing the practicum remotely felt like talking to a wall because, even though I was interacting with students, not being in the same space made me feel lonely. (P1, NF2)*

*Doing the practicum remotely was like asking my mom for a recipe while we were in different cities-she explains the steps and I learn something, but you want to see it in practice. (P3, NF2)*

##### *Challenge*

This sub-theme under the broad category of metaphors clearly reveals the negative side of online teaching from the perspective of the pre-service EFL teachers in our study. This category presents the difficulties and challenges, and the negative experiences they had during their online teaching performances in a different way. These were about situations in which participants seemed helpless or lost control during their teaching performances, which eventually led some to lose their students' interest, as implied by the metaphors.

*My teaching was like a driverless car; it was going to the destination, but a driver was needed to be in the seat. (P4, PTJ1)*

*It was like losing your child in a store; I should have guided my students to follow me better so they wouldn't get lost while learning English. (P1, PTJ2)*

*It was like taking some students across the stream while losing others. I used this simile because I lost most of the students during the activity due to its difficulty (P6, PTJ2)*

*It was like swimming in a sea who got rough at the end of the day. It was smooth and cheerful at the beginning, but towards the end, it got more difficult. (P5, PTJ2)*

### Uncertainty

This sub-theme indicates that participating in an online teaching practicum was an unfamiliar experience for the participants; they did not know what to expect. This situation sometimes seemed to trigger curiosity, though.

*It was like walking at night; among all my unknowns, I had to focus and see my path which was to get students to grow a liking for English (P1, PTJ1)*

*Doing the practicum remotely was like giving directions to people who were asking for directions in a city I had just arrived in, because we, both prospective teachers and the students, along with the mentor teachers, were in a situation that was new to all of us and we were just beginning to explore. (P6, NF2)*

*Doing the practicum remotely was like tasting new food because we didn't know what to expect, but we were curious. (P2, NF2)*

### Hope

This sub-category shows that the pre-service EFL teachers still had hopes for their future. Some metaphors also point to clarity and growth in their online teaching performances. This category could be regarded as the most positive, since the metaphors generally imply a positive or pleasant situation in online teaching practicum, specifically regarding the participants' online teaching performances.

*If I described my experience with a metaphor, it would be a kid with a balloon in her hands. The balloons would be the hopes she has for the future. They are fragile and can leave the girl for the sake of freedom in any moment but the girl is trying to hold them tightly. That would be my description of me and my current situation. I hold my hopes tightly and I won't let them go that easy. (P7, PTJ2)*

*In terms of performance, it was like swimming in clarified water. I was able to see my way and it was enjoyable. (P5, PTJ3)*

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion section of this study is structured in accordance with the three research questions in this study, which are: (1) How online teaching practicum during COVID-19 pandemic affects pre-service EFL teachers' ideal and feared teacher selves; (2) How pre-service EFL teachers' emotions evolves during online teaching practicum amid COVID-19 pandemic; (3) What metaphors pre-service EFL teachers use to describe their online teaching practicum experience. These questions guide us to how we interpret the study's findings.

### 5.1. The effect of an Online Teaching Practicum during the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Ideal and Feared Teacher Selves

To begin with, the pre-service EFL teachers participating in this study described their ideal teacher selves as well-liked, innovative, fun, caring, and a teacher who loves their job. On the other hand, they described their feared teacher selves as boring, strict, and uncaring. These findings differ from those of the studies conducted in similar Turkish online settings during COVID-19 (e.g., Erdem-Coşkun & Savaş, 2023). In their study, teachers conceptualized their ideal selves as technologically competent, while their feared selves were characterized by a lack of competency in effectively using technology, which made sense given the demands of online instruction. The participants in our study offered more diverse insights, yet the category of "being innovative" may implicitly reflect a similar aspiration, highlighting the importance of Technological Pedagogical

Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) as a necessary component of teacher knowledge in online teacher education. To clarify, our study indicated that pre-service EFL teachers were able to improve their technological knowledge and apply it for pedagogical purposes despite the challenges of online teaching. This may be linked to their ideal teacher image of being innovative in a sense.

Regarding the pre-service EFL teachers' envisioning of specific instructional behaviors they imagine their "ideal" teacher self would enact differently in their online English classrooms, they reported that their ideal teacher selves would behave more calmly during online teaching, they would be able to increase student participation in online English lessons, they would monitor their speech more effectively, avoiding making mistakes, they would be more effective at elicitation and incorporating spontaneous interaction, and lastly, they would avoid using complex sentences not to confuse students in online classes. These findings complement those of Derakhshan et al.'s (2021) study, which focused on Iranian EFL students' boredom in online classes. Their study found that such issues as teachers' monotonous teacher talks, lack of student interaction, and boring instructional tasks were among the causes of boredom in online classes, while our study indicated that the pre-service EFL teachers envisioned their ideal teacher selves as actively avoiding such disengaging instructional behaviors. This contrast suggests that pre-service teachers' ideal possible selves may function as anticipatory motivational guides, shaping their pedagogical intentions in ways that directly address learners' emotional and engagement-related needs in online contexts.

While most participants' ideal teacher selves remained unchanged throughout the practicum, some student teachers' ideal selves were reshaped as they gained new perspectives on the material and its use. This finding aligns with those of Mehdizadeh et al. (2024) and Cuddapah and Stanford's study (2015), which also reported changes in teachers' possible selves over time. Such shifts suggest that teaching practicum experiences—particularly in novel or constrained

contexts such as online instruction—can act as critical reflective spaces in which pre-service teachers reassess and refine their professional aspirations.

It was found that all participants moved closer to their ideal teacher selves through their online teaching practicum, while simultaneously distancing themselves from their feared teacher selves. This pattern can be explained through self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), which posits that individuals are motivated to engage in actions that reduce the gap between their actual and ideal selves. The finding can also be interpreted in light of the motivational dimension of possible selves theory (Hamman et al., 2010), suggesting that future-oriented self-images play a regulatory role in guiding behavior. In this sense, the online teaching practicum functioned as a goal-directed learning space in which ideal teacher selves became more salient and actionable. Moreover, the avoidance of feared teacher selves indicates that negative possible selves may have served a protective motivational function, helping participants regulate their instructional choices and professional conduct in challenging online contexts.

### *5.2. Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Emotions Evolving during Online Practicum amid COVID-19 Pandemic*

Pre-service EFL teachers' initial negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety, regarding their first semester online teaching practicum, gradually gave way to relief and were ultimately pre-dominated by positive emotions, such as pride, confidence, motivation, and hope, by the end of the second semester online teaching practicum amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns with a review by Li and Peng (2024) of pre-service English teachers' teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic, which found that student teachers experienced a range of negative and positive emotions, with anxiety among the most prevalent. The participants in our study completed their online practicum with positive emotions such as hope. In the literature, hope is associated with teacher well-being and growth over time (MacIntyre et al., 2022), which helps explain the

perceived effectiveness of the online practicum for the participants in this study. Moreover, the emotional shift from anxiety to hope suggests the development of adaptive emotion regulation strategies over time. This emotional trajectory may also indicate that sustained engagement in online teaching contexts can foster resilience and a more stable professional identity among pre-service teachers.

### 5.3. *Metaphorical Descriptions of Pre-Service EFL Teachers regarding Online Teaching Experience*

The metaphorical analysis conducted in this study indicated that the online teaching and practicum experiences of pre-service EFL teachers were characterized by five central sub-themes: emerging teacher identity, distance, challenge, uncertainty, and hope. The dark side of the unexpected shift to online teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic was revealed through the metaphors produced by the student teachers. Specifically, the sub-themes “distance”, “challenge”, and “uncertainty” shed light on this. The negative emotions of student teachers arising from the distant, challenging, and uncertain nature of the online teaching practicum may be related to the coping strategies they preferred. According to a study conducted by MacIntyre et al. (2020) on language teachers’ coping strategies in conversion to online teaching showed that psychological wellbeing of language teachers’ “approach coping” strategies (such as accepting the situation, proactively working on a solution etc.), while negative emotions were linked to “avoidant coping” strategies (such as denying the situation, distracting oneself etc.) On the other hand, we could argue that the participants in our study coped well with conversion to online teaching practicum as they felt proud, motivated, and hopeful, which is another finding of our study. It is possible to state that they regained their “professional self-adequacy” (Karagöz-Dilek & Balçıklı, 2023) by coping well with the negative emotions of the online teaching practicum. In other words, the online teaching practicum was effective with all its challenges for the pre-service English teachers

despite some negative perspectives regarding its effectiveness in online settings (Atmaca, 2023).

## 6. Implications and Recommendations for Future Studies

Based on its findings, this study offers several important implications for second language teacher education programmes. First, the study enabled pre-service EFL teachers to explore and articulate their ideal, feared, and developing teacher selves by systematically reflecting on their emotions, experiences, and thoughts related to the online teaching practicum. Incorporating structured reflective practices—such as guided reflective journals—into teacher education curricula may help student teachers engage more consciously in negotiating their possible selves, thereby fostering professional self-awareness and identity development.

Second, the findings revealed that student teachers encountered significant challenges during the online teaching practicum, particularly in the context of an emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges highlight the need for second language teacher education programmes to better prepare prospective teachers for unexpected transitions to online instruction. In line with the results of this study, such preparation should explicitly address the development of competencies related to online pedagogy, including (a) regulating emotions in online teaching contexts, (b) fostering student participation in virtual English classrooms, (c) eliciting learner ideas and responses online, (d) promoting spontaneous student–student interaction, (e) adjusting teacher talk for online delivery, (f) managing instructional time effectively in virtual environments, and (g) enhancing technological competence. Embedding these components into teacher education curricula may contribute to more resilient and adaptable language teachers capable of responding to future educational disruptions.

Finally, this study demonstrated that metaphor analysis can serve as a powerful methodological and pedagogical tool for uncovering pre-service EFL teachers’ implicit emotions, beliefs, and experiences related to online education—

dimensions that may be difficult to access through more direct questioning. Greater emphasis on metaphor-based reflection in language teacher education could provide student teachers with alternative ways to express and make sense of complex emotional and professional experiences.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The data were collected exclusively through written sources, including reflective journals and open-ended responses. While these data yielded rich and meaningful insights, the inclusion of semi-structured interviews could have offered deeper and more nuanced understandings of participants' experiences and identity negotiations. In addition, the study involved a relatively small sample of eight pre-service EFL teachers, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts or populations.

Future research may build on the present study by adopting a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to develop a more comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' emotional experiences and possible selves during an online teaching practicum. Comparative studies examining online, hybrid, and face-to-face practicum formats could further illuminate how

different instructional contexts shape the development and negotiation of student teachers' possible selves. Moreover, cross-cultural investigations would be particularly valuable in exploring how sociocultural and institutional factors influence pre-service EFL teachers' identity construction and emotional experiences in online education and teaching practicum settings.

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The authors share responsibility for publication and declare the absence of conflicts of interest.

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