Perceived Effects of Online Practicum on Teaching Experience Post COVID-19: English Language Teachers' Opinions

Erdem Aksoy, Department of English Language Teaching, TED University, Ankara, Turkey, erdem.aksoy@tedu.edu.tr

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Perceived effects of online practicum on teaching experience post COVID-19: English language teachers' opinions

Erdem Aksoy[1]

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ABSTRACT

This original study on the perceived effects of online practicum on teaching experience of pre-service teachers aims to reveal the opinions of newly appointed teachers having completed their practicum online in 2021. This study adopted a qualitative case study method and data were collected through an online survey. Answers to the research questions were analysed by the content analysis method. Newly appointed English language teachers listed technology use, preparation of online materials, and alternative teaching and assessment methods as perceived positive outcomes of online teaching practicum. As for the perceived negative outcomes, these teachers emphasized the inefficiency of classroom management skills, the challenges of attending practicum at various schools and levels, the problems with knowledge and experience in management issues, and ineffectiveness of mentor teachers. Despite the benefits 2021 graduates experienced during online practicum, the schools they were appointed are reported to be unprepared for technology integration and lack flexibility for such an integration. Hence, instead of top-down enforcements, changes in education should be encouraged at the local level.

Since the pandemic started in March 2020, education at schools at all levels has been interrupted worldwide. This led to discussions of the effects of school closures on teacher preparation processes. Pre-service teachers had to complete their practicum online without experiencing the whole school and classroom environment. To Anderson and Stillman (2013), the practicum is the most crucial element in pre-service teacher education. Thus, the effects of COVID-19 school closures need to be examined within the scope of teacher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Turkish Teacher Education During COVID-19

[1] Program of English Language Teaching, TED University, Ankara, Turkey, erdem.aksoy@tedu.edu.tr, Phone number: 0312 585 00 00

Upon declaring the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) closed all K-12 schools on March 16, 2020. Similarly, the Higher Education Council (HEC) issued a directive to close universities for three weeks. At the end of March 2020, HEC announced that universities would be physically closed, and education would continue online. Following the directive of "Procedures and Principles of Online Teaching at Universities" (HEC, 2020), universities could offer online courses together with a limited quota of face-to-face instruction. However, universities decided to offer only online courses, including the practicum. MoNE initiated an online asynchronous information platform, Educational Informatics Network, known as EBA (https://www.eba.gov.tr), and many courses were offered through this platform. Some private schools preferred to use the Zoom video conferencing platform to provide synchronous classes. For the practicum component, pre-service teachers had to join the online courses at K-12 schools, and they received feedback for their online lesson plans. They also had to carry out online microteaching using tech-oriented activities, including Canva, Kahoot, Zoom annotation tools, Padlet, Google Classroom, Google Hangouts, and WebEx. In-person education started at K-12 schools and universities on September 5, 2021. Since the Fall semester of 2021, practicum has been offered in person at K-12 schools. What differs from pre-pandemic instruction is the mask mandate for that school staff and students and the length of classes lasting 40 minutes.

During the pandemic, instruction at the education faculties, including practicum courses, was termed as either of the following: online teaching, remote teaching, remedial teaching, or hybrid teaching. Despite the obligation for immediate educational transformation to online delivery systems, educational institutions are reported to adapt effectively. Thus, leading to an essential educational change, this transformation needs to be analyzed through a theory of change/knowledge to grasp its direction, depth, scope, and effectiveness.

2.2 Change Theory and Educational Change during and post COVID-19

Fullan's (2006) article on change theory outlines standards, assessment, curriculum, and professional development as incomplete theories of action since they neglect classroom environments and school cultures. Figure 1 summarizes Fullan's change theory of action with merit.

As Figure 1 presents, change within an organization or in a broader sense requires motivation, adequate capacity and resources, contextual improvements, reflection, and inquiry, as well as persistence and flexibility, and Fullan (2006), comments that various change initiatives were unsuccessful or did not create the impact that they aimed at in the past as these components were not paid adequate attention. Thus, Fullan's (2006) change theory sets out a salient ground for this study to determine the perceived effects of online practicum, an essential change over practicum implementations, on student teachers' in-person classroom experiences.

Educational change, on the other hand, is defined by initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. According to Baglibel, Samancioglu, and Crow (2018), experimental conditions limit educators and hinder educational change. Educational changes may not be successful when teachers are inclined toward the status quo. On the other hand, as Sakui (2004) asserts, educational reform is mainly driven by external factors. Fullan (1993) states that top-down initiatives need to be more successful.

During and post-COVID, educational change was top-down all over the world. In the Turkish context, the educational process was top-down, including the practicum. MoNE issued regulations through the state directorates of education and enforced all changes to education faculties and K-12 schools.
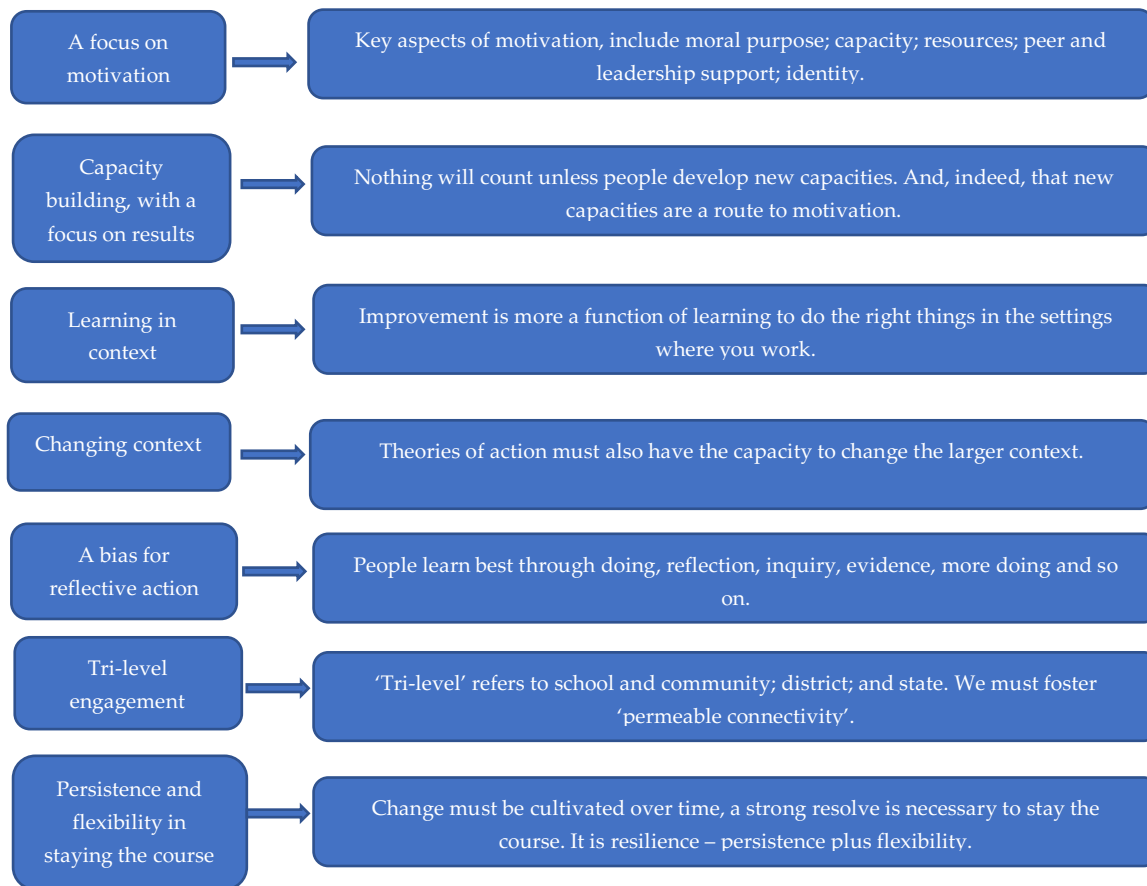
A focus on motivation	→	Key aspects of motivation, include moral purpose; capacity; resources; peer and leadership support; identity.
Capacity building, with a focus on results	→	Nothing will count unless people develop new capacities. And, indeed, that new capacities are a route to motivation.
Learning in context	→	Improvement is more a function of learning to do the right things in the settings where you work.
Changing context	→	Theories of action must also have the capacity to change the larger context.
A bias for reflective action	→	People learn best through doing, reflection, inquiry, evidence, more doing and so on.
Tri-level engagement	→	'Tri-level' refers to school and community; district; and state. We must foster 'permeable connectivity'.
Persistence and flexibility in staying the course	→	Change must be cultivated over time, a strong resolve is necessary to stay the course. It is resilience – persistence plus flexibility.

Figure 1. Fullan's Change Theory of Action with Merit

2.1 Opportunities and Challenges of Online Practicum

In the following section, the results of a few salient studies carried out on the effectiveness of online practicum processes were outlined. Some of these studies reported possible positive effects and contributions to pre-service teacher effectiveness, whereas some reported possible negative consequences. The findings of almost all these studies rely on the potential impact on pre-service teachers during their online practicum courses.

Some of the perceived effects concentrate on using technology in the practicum processes. Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald (2021) report that teacher education programs in the USA had to improve their curricula to use technology more effectively, adding and expanding virtual components. In another study by the writer (Aksoy, 2022), using electronic co-mentoring for practicum during COVID-19 increased student success. All mentees and mentors in this study were engaged in e-co mentoring, which is suggested to support face-to-face mentoring. Thus, a blended practicum was performed where mentees were officially appointed to a mentor face-to-face and an international mentor online. Among other favorable outcomes are flexibility in facing unprecedented situations and using various technological tools (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Ellis, Steadman, and Mao (2020) classify online practices during COVID-19 as sustainable pedagogical innovations with new and creative ways to place pre-service teachers in online classes. Quinn and Paretti (2021) note that pre-service teachers would have competencies of acting flexibly, communicating with parents, and using remote learning in the future. Mason-Williams et al. (2020) point

out the possible positive consequences, such as the transformed roles of new teachers, graduates of 2020-2021, working with small numbers of students through online platforms, and using technology better in their classrooms.

Some studies examined the perceived negative consequences of the online practicum process during COVID-19. Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald's (2021) study reports the concerns of teacher education programs about the new graduates who lack important practicum components and how these new teachers meet the state requirements. The study also concerns 2020-21 graduates who may experience problems during face-to-face teaching. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) also assert that prospective teachers' challenges during the COVID-19 online practicum outweigh the benefits. Researchers highlight the lack of student interaction, collaboration with colleagues, and communication with mentor teachers. In the Russian context, the challenges during the COVID-19 remote teaching at the higher education level are listed as low computer literacy levels, technological infrastructure, and readiness of students and professors for online learning (Almazova et al., 2020). Moser, Wei, and Brenner's study (2021) underline that teachers have been more concerned with students' basic needs during online teaching than their mentors' roles. Another study by Quinn and Paretti (2021) highlights that university supervisors were worried and incapable of using technology, especially for assessment purposes.

2.2 Importance of the Study

Although some studies examine the possible effects of online student practicum on teacher preparation (La Velle et al., 2020), an adaptation of student teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic (Piccolo, Livers & Tipton, 2021) and the effects of online mentoring on student teaching practices during the COVID-19 (Aksoy, 2022), no study is available on the perceived effects of online practicum on the face-to-face teaching experience. Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald (2021) point out the need to investigate the struggles of 2020-21 graduates compared to their previous cohorts. Similarly, Zhu and Liu (2020) call for more research to develop a better post-COVID education. On the other hand, Moser, Wei, and Brenner (2021) indicate that more research is required to observe the possible effects of online teaching on practicum experiences. Thus, this study fills a gap in the literature by analyzing the perceived effects of online practicum on face-to-face teaching implementations of 2020-2021 graduates.

2.3 Aim

Due to COVID-19, pre-service teachers had to complete their practicum courses online during the 2020 spring, 2021 fall and spring semesters. This study aims to reveal the opinions of English language teaching graduates of the 2021 cohort who got their practicum courses online and now work as teachers about their in-class teaching experience. Thus, the opportunities and challenges of the online practicum process were examined based on newly appointed English language teachers' opinions. The research questions in the study are as follows:

1. According to 2021 English language teaching graduates, what opportunities did online teaching provide for their teaching experience?
2. According to 2021 English language teaching graduates, what challenges did online teaching create for their teaching experience?
3. What are the suggestions of 2021 English language teaching graduates about pre-service teaching for the post-COVID period?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative case study method was used in the study. The case is the teaching experiences of 2021 graduated English language teachers once they started working as teachers, and this was explored by collecting their opinions on the perceived opportunities and challenges of online practicum on their teaching. The present study first gathers the opinions and suggestions of these teachers and then analyses the findings to provide an overall picture for the policymakers and faculties of education.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population comprises 49 English language teachers working in 11 state and 38 private schools throughout Turkey. A purposeful sampling method was utilized to determine the participants. Teachers working at private schools were appointed or contracted in September 2021. For teachers working in public schools, the criteria were being 2021 graduates, succeeding in Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) held in September 2021 (MoNE, 2022), and having been appointed to public schools in February 2022. Other criteria for all participants were having enrolled in the online practicum courses and currently working at different schools in Turkey.

The demographics of the participating teachers are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

The demographics of the participating teachers

Variable	Descriptor	*f*	%
Type of school employed	State	11	22
	Private	38	78
Gender	Male	8	16
	Female	41	84
Grade level of work	primary school	20	41
	secondary school	14	29
	high school	15	30
Graduated university	TED University	19	38.8
	Gazi University	9	18.4
	İstanbul Aydın University	8	16.3
	İnönü University	7	14.3
	Aksaray University	6	12.2
Cities that participants are working in	Ankara	16	33
	İstanbul	12	25
	Eskişehir	5	10
	Konya	3	6
	Muğla	2	4
	Çorum	2	4
	Afyon	2	4
	Manisa	2	4
	Adana	1	2
	Bitlis	1	2
	Isparta	1	2
	Gaziantep	1	2
	Aksaray	1	2

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through an online survey with open-ended questions. Answers to research questions were analyzed by the content analysis method. To check the effectiveness of open-ended questions in revealing the opinions of the teachers and managers, experts (faculty members of the English language teaching program) were consulted. The questionnaire was piloted on two teachers for the suitability and comprehensiveness of the questions before the implementation. It was finalized by analyzing the answers received from these teachers.

The questions in the online teacher questionnaire are as follows:

1. What kind of advantages (positive effects) did online teaching practicum have on your teaching experience after you started your teaching job?

2. What kind of disadvantages (challenges) did online teaching practicum bring to your teaching experience after you started your teaching job?

3. What are your suggestions to policymakers and education faculties about student teaching practicum courses and processes for the following periods?

TED University Ethics Committee granted permission to conduct this research. Before the implementation, teachers were emailed about the purpose and content of the study. Afterward, the online survey was e-mailed, and data were collected in February-March 2022. Demographic information was analyzed by descriptive statistics. Research questions were analyzed by the content analysis method. A pattern-coding method was used where the researcher first determined the themes and appropriate codes were placed into them (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

4. Findings

Findings can be presented under three main themes: opportunities that the online teaching practice process brought about for newly appointed English language teachers, challenges that it brought about for newly appointed English language teachers, and their suggestions for policymakers and education faculties for the following practicum processes.

4.1 Opportunities for Online Practicum

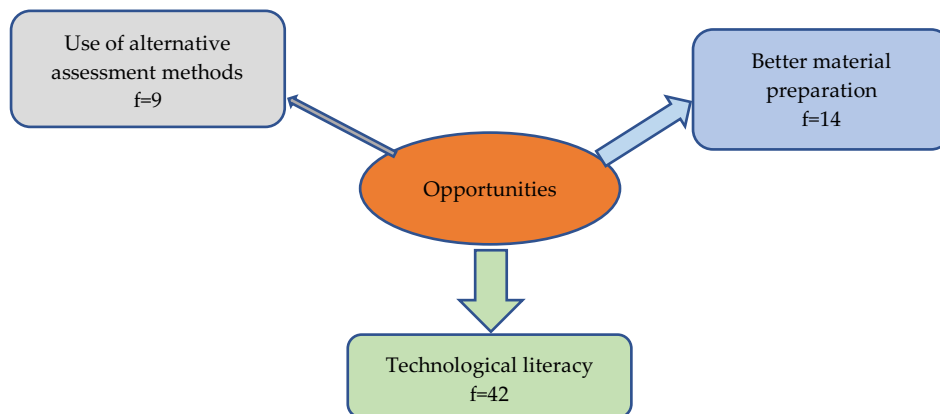Opportunities for online practicum are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Opportunities for Online Practice Teaching

Almost all teachers believe they learned how to use technological software and websites better to prepare materials due to the online teaching process. One teacher commented, "As we got practicum 1 and 2 courses online, we learned how to prepare online materials that matched the needs of students. Thus, I can now prepare many online games and activities that are beneficial and interesting for my students." Teachers remarked that their use of technology during online practicum equipped them with necessary alternatives for teaching methods and assessment. One teacher commented, "Because of online practicum, we had to find and use different teaching methods to attract students into the lesson. For instance, we discovered Zoom breakout rooms to make students work in groups. We also made use of forums in Moodle to increase student interaction. I am now using both of them as part of my lessons in face-to-face teaching." Another teacher pointed out, "We were using Kahoot and Canva to prepare short quizzes for students, and now I am using them as part of my assessment in my classes. They are entertaining for my students and help me save time as it is easy to use them for assessment." Some other teachers reflect that they are digitally literate and even help other teachers to integrate technology into their courses. As one teacher remarked, "I am using technology efficiently in my classes and helping older teachers integrate technology better into their lessons. Our school has some teachers who do not know how to prepare online materials."

4.2 Challenges of Online Practicum

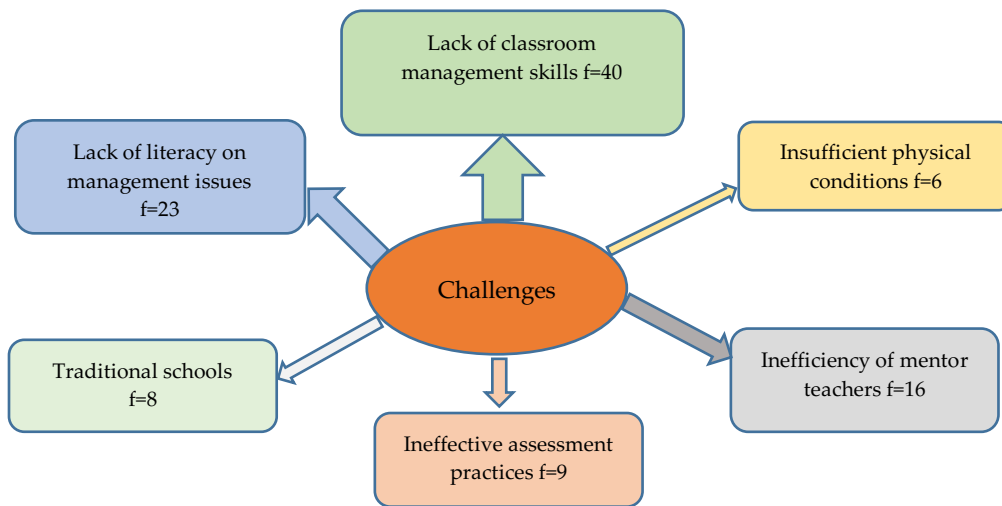The challenges of online practicum are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Challenges of Online Practicum

Most teachers believe they lack the necessary knowledge and skills for classroom management due to online practicum. One teacher, for instance, declared that she did not know how to handle primary school students when they asked for permission to go to the toilet while saying, "Classroom management was a nightmare for me at the beginning of my career. Because we had our practicum courses online during the COVID, we did not face classroom management problems, but I now have serious face-to-face teaching problems. In the first week of face to face period, for instance, a couple of students asked to go to the toilet simultaneously, and I did not know how to respond to them." Another teacher confessed that she had difficulty keeping students silent, saying, "During online teaching, I did not have problems with noise as

the microphones of students were mostly muted, but now in face-to-face teaching, there is a loud noise in the classroom, and I have difficulty keeping students silent." Another teacher complained about her inefficiency in communicating with young students saying, "During online teaching, there was minimum interaction among students, and I did not have to respond to them individually all the time. Age was not my primary concern then, but now I see that it is a critical factor in face-to-face classrooms, and I have difficulty interacting with students at the primary school level."

Teachers admitted that they lacked the necessary knowledge on management issues mainly due to the online practicum. One teacher said, "I had the biggest problem during face-to-face teaching on managerial issues. For instance, I have never seen an official class register book before. I have to fill it in every day now. I have never been to a teacher's room during an online practicum or discussed managerial issues with a principal. All these came up to me as challenges when I started with in-person teaching this year."

Some of the teachers complained about their mentor teachers. One teacher stated, "Our mentor teacher did not know how to use technology effectively and did not encourage us to use innovative teaching methods during online practicum. She believed in teaching the importance of grammar and ignored fundamental skills such as speaking and listening." Another teacher stressed the ineffectiveness of her mentor teacher, saying, "Our mentor teacher mostly spoke in Turkish during classes, and she ignored us as mentees in her online classes. When we had questions about our lesson plans, she did not give constructive feedback as we were a burden for her."

Another negative consequence of online practicum was stated as ineffective assessment practices. Some teachers stated there was confusion over which assessment methods were to be used and how; thus, students quickly passed their courses as there was no assessment at all in some periods.

Some of the teachers stated that there was no alignment between their online practicum processes with actual implementations in classes during face-to-face teaching. One teacher said, "During the online practicum, we tried to increase students' motivation to learn English and developed lots of engaging materials. However, I can see now that schools and experienced teachers have their own traditional 'old school' habits. Experienced teachers in my school tell me not to go outside the box (system), and I feel hopeless in this old school system."

4.3 Suggestions of English Language Teachers for the Practicum

Suggestions for English language teachers for practicum are presented in Figure 4.
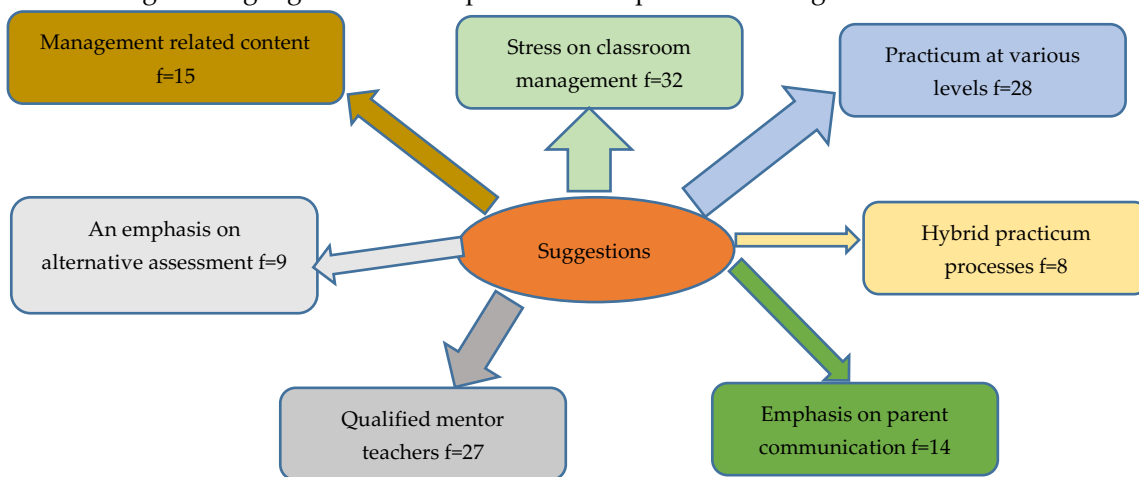

Figure 4. Suggestions of ELT teachers for practicum

Most teachers suggested emphasizing classroom management during practicum, whether online or face-to-face. As one teacher suggested, "There should be a minimum of two courses on classroom management, and pre-service teachers need to learn to be competent in classroom management for each level of learners. For instance, one course could focus on pre-school and primary school students while the other could focus on secondary and high school students."

Many teachers also suggested that practice teaching courses should be offered in different schools and levels for pre-service teachers. One teacher stressed, "I had my practicum courses at the high school level, but during job interviews, I was asked whether I had any experience at primary and secondary schools. High schools are full of experienced teachers, so they offered me a position at the primary school level. I hesitated to accept their offer because I had no experience with young learners. Thus, I strongly suggest pre-service teachers do their practice teachings at different school levels." Another teacher puts forward the challenge that she had since she started teaching at a primary school. "I got my elementary and high school practicum courses, yet I now work at a primary school. This is a great challenge for me as I have difficulty keeping students silent, attracting their attention to class, and keeping them focused on the lesson for 40 minutes. Pre-service teachers should observe primary schools and even kindergartens during their practicum."

Some teachers suggested that education faculties should find and match qualified mentor teachers with mentees. One teacher noted: "The only problem I had during the practicum was my mentor teacher. She was unwilling to help and motivate us, and most times, we were afraid to ask her questions, so it is crucial that faculties of education should carefully select mentor teachers. The mentor teacher, to me, is the most critical factor for student teachers' motivation and success." Another teacher stressed the inefficiency of her mentor teacher, saying, "Our mentor teacher almost always talked in Turkish in her English classes. The lesson was English, but we could hardly hear her speak in English except for listening and speaking activities."

Some other teachers suggested that mentees should be provided with more student-centered activities during their practicum. One teacher noted, "The interaction in our mentor teachers' classes was in one direction from teacher to student. She asked questions to particular students and looked for the correct answers. We never had pair or group work activities, although Zoom had breakout rooms for group work activities." Another teacher pointed out a different problem for methodology, saying, "In our methodology and special teaching courses at our faculty, our professors encouraged us to use more communicative, task-based, and content-based activities. However, our mentor teacher mostly used the traditional grammar translation method or the lexical method in her classes. When we prepared communicative activities for our micro-teaching, she told us not to do them as these activities would spoil students."

Still, other teachers offered that mentees should receive more management-related content and communication patterns with parents during their practicum. One teacher said, "Parents are always in the schools and our classrooms. This is not physical, but they want to interfere with our teaching styles, especially testing methods. I mostly use alternative assessment methods in my English classes, but parents tell me to give more multiple-choice tests to their kids, even at the primary school level. I wish we had courses at our faculty on communicating with parents."

5. Discussion and Suggestions

The present study reports that newly appointed English language teachers who were graduates of 2021 list technology use, preparation of online materials, alternative teaching methods, and assessment methods as opportunities for online practicum. Echoing Kali et al. (2015), using online technologies allows teachers to be flexible in their instruction and better observe and reflect on their practices. First, teachers pointed out

that their use of learning management systems improved, and they were better able to find and adapt various software to meet the online learning needs of their students. In addition, numerous teachers stated that they could better prepare materials online by adapting from various websites and open educational resources. Further, many teachers expressed satisfaction with alternative assessment methods and up-to-date teaching methods they could use during their practicum. To those teachers, online teaching provided an advantage in using various teaching and assessment methods that are not generally used in traditional face-to-face teaching environments. These findings support Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald's (2021) findings about teacher education programs' progress in integrating technology into their curricula. Thus, pre-service teachers seem to benefit from the online technological components of their teacher education remedial programs.

For the challenges of online practicum during the COVID-19, graduates of 2021 emphasized the lack of opportunities to practice classroom management skills as the most negative outcome. Keeping students silent, dealing with young students' physical needs such as feeding and toilet, and effectively communicating with young students were the prime challenges 2021 graduates witnessed in face-to-face teaching environments. Thus, this study supports the findings of Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald's (2021) study that reports teacher education programs' concern about 2020-21 graduates who may lack the necessary knowledge and skills in classroom management. Echoing Flores and Gago (2020), online practicum may not meet pre-service teachers' needs to the full extent. As Pomerance and Walsh (2020) state, practicing classroom management skills for pre-service teachers is salient since they cannot be learned from a written document. The researchers advise using the Classroom Management Standards of classroom management strategies.

Teachers in the study expressed that not being able to conduct their practicum at different schools and various levels of education could have negative consequences. Accordingly, many of these teachers could find jobs at the primary school level, although their practicum concentrated either on elementary or high school levels. With increasing numbers of private schools getting IB and PYP diploma programs, their English lesson hours tremendously increased at lower levels, creating a shortage of English teachers in the lower levels of these private schools. In addition, more experienced English teachers may prefer higher classes, considering classroom management may be easier to handle. Thus, this shortage of English language teachers for the primary and even preschool levels might continue in the short run. Considering this necessity, teachers expressed their challenge in the lower-level classes and noted inconsistencies during their practicum.

Another challenge that these graduates faced was their lack of knowledge and experience in management issues. They confessed that they had never seen a class register book before or been to a teacher's room. Teachers need to be knowledgeable on regulations and instructions issued by MoNE and their rights in schools. They need to know the unwritten rules that regulate the order in the schools. For these managerial issues, teachers with online practicum experience might be disadvantaged as they feel unprepared for official documents, let alone the "hidden" management agenda at schools.

A noticeable negative consequence of online practicum on teachers was specified as the ineffectiveness of mentor teachers. Teachers of this study declared that their mentor teachers were incapable of presenting up-to-date English language teaching methods in their classes, providing effective feedback on lesson plans and micro teachings, and effectively communicating with their mentees. These are the problems with face-to-face mentoring, too (Aksoy, 2020), but during online practicum, they seem to intensify as pre-service teachers had no opportunity to meet their mentor teachers face-to-face.

As for suggestions for 2021 graduated English language teachers, stress on classroom management dominates the others. Having stated lack of classroom management as a challenge of online practicum, teachers in this study suggested having more courses at education faculties on classroom management issues for various levels of learners. Most education faculties today are implementing the 2018 teacher

education curriculum of HEC that offers only one course on classroom management with two national and three ECTS credits. With a two-hour course, it seems inopportune to think that pre-service teachers can efficiently be equipped with all classroom management knowledge and skills to meet the needs of various levels of classes and students. Classroom management courses should be enriched in their scope and offered as two separate courses: one for pre and primary school students and the other for elementary and high school students. In addition, methodology courses such as teaching English language skills I-II should cover classroom management skills, and academics should provide effective feedback on student teachers' demo presentations and micro teachings for classroom management components. In line with Lei and Medwell's study (2021), the critical competencies neglected during online practicum may need to be re-assessed in subsequent teacher education and future studies emphasizing classroom management.

Another underlined suggestion was to provide practicum at different levels to pre-service teachers. Two practicum courses are offered to pre-service teachers in their final year of education faculties. The regulations of MoNE enforce education faculties to conduct both these practicum courses in the same practice school for both semesters. Although there is no written regulation imposing this enactment, provincial directorates of education in charge of teaching practicum at MoNE schools compel coordinators of education faculties to conduct these two courses at the same schools. As few personnel work and regulate these procedures at provincial education directorates, they may adjust their workload and paperwork to improve the teaching practicum processes. However, pre-service teachers will benefit more if they conduct their practicum courses in two different schools at different levels. MoNE is advised to reconsider teaching practicum processes and make necessary investments and adjustments for provincial education directorates. Likewise, education faculties should choose practice schools not because of their proximity to their faculties or academics but because of their quality in effectively mentoring their students.

Many teachers in this study complained about their mentor teachers stating they were inadequate in effectively mentoring their students. Thus, they suggested that education faculties find practice schools with better-qualified mentors. Finding qualified mentors who could provide effective feedback, demonstrate up-to-date teaching methods and alternative assessment techniques, and communicate effectively with mentees is a demanding job worldwide. Simonsen, Luebeck, and Bice (2009) describe how teachers in specific locations struggle to find qualified mentors:

> In many of the state's rural schools, there is only one teacher at each grade level in a given content area. The nearest experienced, content-knowledgeable mentor may be more than 50 miles away. The problem is only compounded when the unique needs of teachers in specific content areas are considered. (p.52)

As Malders (2009) points out, effective mentoring is a difficult skill requiring extensive knowledge and experience. The report by Pomerance and Walsh (2020) states that faculties of education and schools are not paying enough attention to choosing the best mentors, which is the most critical component for student effectiveness. Echoing Zeichner (1996), mentees may be placed in classrooms where the instruction contradicts what they are taught in the colleges leading to a significant problem. The findings of this study support an earlier study in the Turkish context (Aksoy, 2020), in which academics and mentees criticized not observing contemporary teaching methods used by mentors at schools. To meet this demand, education faculties need closer contact with practice schools and eliminate the schools with ineffective mentoring processes. In addition, they should have long-lasting relations with schools having qualified mentors. A better faculty-school cooperation culture may suffice this need. Education faculties could provide in-service training to their practice schools on effective mentoring processes, up-to-date teaching methods, and alternative assessment techniques. Teachers in those practice schools could be invited to the methodology

classes at faculties, and academics could join the English classes of their mentor teachers and even co-teach some classes.

Teachers in the study highlighted the importance of management-related content for pre-service teachers. They offered that they should be better informed and experienced with managerial issues such as their official rights as a teacher, regulations of the MoNE, communication among teachers and with the principal (s), and everyday official documents to be filled in at a school. This could partly be provided at education faculties since most managerial issues are experienced in natural circumstances, and 2021 graduates might be disadvantaged as they completed their practicum online. However, these problems might be a problem in face-to-face mentoring processes too. To meet this need of pre-service teachers, they should be given opportunities to spend more time with school principals and vice principals while dealing with management issues. In actual implementations, pre-service teachers are appointed to mentor teachers, and their knowledge-experience in management issues is limited to that of their mentors. However, as managerial issues form a part of their practicum, they must observe principles and vice principals to be better equipped with the necessary skills.

Another salient recommendation is about blended or hybrid practicum implementations. Some teachers in the study commented that they benefitted from an online practicum in that they learned to be more flexible in instruction, material preparation, and use of technology and had the opportunity to record their micro teachings and their friends. They could watch over many micro teachings and conduct peer assessments efficiently, a process difficult to conduct in crowded face-to-face teaching classes. Thus, teachers in this study offered a blended or hybrid practicum process in the post-COVID process. Çoban and Vardar (2021) suggested that valuable gains of online practica, such as using technology, alternative teaching, and evaluation methods more effectively, should be integrated into the face-to-face practicum. This finding corroborates Choate, Goldhaber, and Theobald (2021), who stated that during post-COVID in face-to-face teaching, online and hybrid models of education and practicum should be used in teacher education. Aksoy's (2022) study also advised the use of electronic collaborative mentoring together with face-to-face mentoring.

As for a change theory or educational change, it could be deduced that the online teaching practicum process did not bring about the productive consequences that otherwise could have if Fullan's (2006) premises for the use of change knowledge and Taylor (2006)'s principles to achieve success and sustainability of change initiatives were actualized. Contextual and cultural norms and pre-conditions played a prominent role in this. Some contextual factors in Turkish seem to hinder the educational change that student teaching during and post-COVID would bring about. First, mentor teachers working at government or private schools have approximately 25 to 30 hours of weekly teaching, and each mentor is responsible for six mentees in a semester; thus, they may see mentees as a burden. In addition, mentor teachers are paid approximately $100 for their service to 6 mentees at the end of a semester. Mentors can generally work with a maximum of two mentees in a class because classes are crowded, and there is no available space. In addition, the in-service training to make teachers certified mentors comprise official and technical components of practicum, not the knowledge and skills required to become better mentors. Mentors in schools are not provided fringe benefits such as a decrease in their weekly course hours. The provincial directorates of education serve limited services as they lack the required personnel and do not allow alternative practicum implementations because of their centralized, top-down organization. Finally, the number of mentees that each mentor is responsible with increased to 6 from 4, and this %50 increase brought an extra burden on the part of mentors. Thus, without considering these contextual factors, thinking about an effective educational change would not be wise.

6. Conclusion

The opinions of 2021 graduated English language teachers who are recruits running face-to-face education in the post-COVID era report that they benefitted from online practicum courses at their education faculties in terms of better technology use, preparation of online materials, and their use of alternative assessment methods. Thus, these opportunities need to be further sustained. On the other hand, teachers stated that they lacked the necessary classroom management skills, knowledge, and experience on managerial issues due to their online practicum. They also considered their mentor teachers ineffective during their online practicum. These are the challenges that should be emphasized during upcoming practicum implementations. To overcome these problems and improve the practicum processes, classroom management could be implemented as two courses at education faculties and should be given prime importance in methodology courses. Pre-service teachers should be allowed to complete their practicum in two different schools with different levels. Education faculties and directorates should focus on finding qualified mentor teachers and ways to keep them in the mentoring system for extended periods. Hybrid practicum processes could also be applied where two mentor teachers could monitor student teachers rather than one. Thus, it is prominent to use the opportunities of online practicum processes while still conducting a face-to-face formal mentoring process in the new normal period, and "flexibility" and "autonomy" will likely be more critical factors in the long run. On the other hand, successful educational change requires participants to welcome new initiatives, and it also depends on contextual factors. It is evident from the teachers' opinions that online teaching practicum was ineffective, especially for experienced teachers who inclined to go on with the status quo. Although the COVID period required a remedial online practicum process, there were chances to use and benefit from those online implementations. 2021 graduates seemed to benefit from those implementations. However, their statement that the schools they started working at are not technologically ready and flexible enough for new implementations reveals that educational change should not be enforced as a top-down process; instead, the transformation should start with the contribution of all stakeholders.

7. Limitations

The results of this study are limited to the opinions of 49 English language teachers who started working as teachers in various districts and schools in Turkey upon their graduation in June 2021. Thus, results cannot be generalizable to the whole population. However, the diverse districts and school types they work at are various and shed important light on the perceived effects of online practicum on pedagogical processes in face-to-face teaching.

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