

Online Learning at Secondary Schools: Listening to Pre-Service Teachers In Their Teaching Practices

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Abstract. Coronavirus has altered how students are educated and teachers conduct themselves in the classroom. The changes have compelled educators to shift their primary focus to remote learning or online instruction. Teachers are expected to innovate and digitize learning to address the current situation. This study explores pre-service teachers' perceptions of online learning at secondary schools within an EFL context. The study interviewed five pre-service teachers who had completed teaching practicum at secondary schools as part of their education. The findings indicated that online learning encourages pre-service teachers to access resources from various sources, exercise their creativity by searching for something different, expand their knowledge, and teach with greater flexibility. Although the study discovered positive attitudes toward online learning, these pre-service teachers encountered difficulties implementing it, including a lack of discipline, slow responses, technical difficulties, and an insufficient internet connection. The study emphasizes how online education encourages pre-service teachers to be more creative in their material selection and professional development. They should, however, ensure that their practice is effective and efficient in reaching out to students.

Keywords: Teachers' perceptions, pre-service teachers, online learning, teaching practicum, EFL classrooms

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, technology has altered almost every aspect of people's lives, such as education, business, politics, and social life, to the point where they cannot be separated from technology. Technology is even more critical during the Covid-19 outbreak. Individuals are compelled to stay home and avoid crowds for their safety. The pandemic has also shifted the educational system from face-to-face instruction to remote or online instruction. Many teachers made this transition on short notice, with little or no planning and prior experience teaching online. However, they must do so to continue educating the students. They cannot simply remain silent in the face of a new situation.

In responding to the transition to remote teaching, teachers must be familiar with effective pedagogy to provide students with the best possible learning experience in this new environment (Orlov et al., 2021). Technology knowledge and skill become essential for the professionalization of teachers in remote learning (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Spoel et al., 2020). Teachers have to change their usual teaching styles and reinvent themselves in the virtual sphere; to do this, they have to cope with digital skills (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020). They may spend considerable time at the computer when teaching online. However, they must also find a way to motivate their students to learn, create new learning materials, and take the initiative to involve students in classroom activities (Huber & Helm, 2020). Another thing that teachers should consider is the awareness of the ethical constraints associated with using online applications (e.g., Zoom) in terms of privacy protection and data collection (Pedaste & Kasemets, 2021). Additionally, it is critical to determine whether the transition to remote learning disproportionately harmed specific groups of students to provide them with additional support (Huber & Helm, 2020).

What Huber and Helm described at the outset is an ideal prerequisite for online teaching, but few teachers possess the necessary skills or are aware of it. For instance, a study by Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020) revealed that novice teachers struggled to transition their practices to an online platform and remain unsure how to plan a day's teaching effectively. Banerjee and Waxman (2017, cited in Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020) found that teachers are not adequately prepared to integrate technology into the classroom. This reflects that some teachers are not ready for the instant change of teaching environment to remote learning. This current study includes pre-service teachers, also referred to as novice teachers. They may face similar challenges to teachers in Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer's study, such as a lack of knowledge and experience with digital tools for learning. This study aims to identify pre-service teachers' experience in conducting online learning. Their inexperience and lack of professional strength in education may pose difficulties in their online practices.

Nowadays, most teachers are digitally literate (Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010) and can integrate digital teaching techniques into their practices (Coyle et al., 2010). However, some scholars believe that teachers must continue to develop their ability to integrate technology effectively and meaningfully into their practices (Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Teachers should adopt a 'receptive attitude' toward technological advancement and 'lifelong learning when it comes to technology adoption (Blignaut & Els. 2010, cited in Spoel et al., 2020). There are numerous ways to increase the interest level of learning through technology. For instance, teachers can teach online using social media and learning management systems (LMS). The most frequently used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Soundcloud. LMS is another method for facilitating online learning with students, LMS is a broad term that refers to a variety of systems that manage and enable students and teachers to access online learning services (Paulsen, 2003). In this case, the LMS enables students to communicate and interact with their teachers collaboratively to complete the learning process. Teachers can use a variety of LMSs for online learning, including Schoology, Moodle, TelEduc, BlackBoard, WebCT, and Edmodo. However, successfully translating what is taught in a face-to-face classroom to an online environment is not

easy: it requires creativity and meticulous instructional planning (Rochyani, 2002). Their willingness to incorporate technology into classroom practices depends on their belief that technology can enhance the differentiation, student motivation, and efficiency (Higgins et al., 2019).

This paper will discuss pre-service teachers' experiences with online learning in their classroom practices. As part of their education, these five teachers are required to complete a teaching practicum at one of the university's cooperating schools. The pre-service teachers who participated in this study have completed the practicum. The purpose of this study is to elicit their perspectives on the use of online learning in their teaching practices and the challenges they may encounter when conducting online learning. Understanding the online format used by these five pre-service teachers may provide information to other EFL teachers about how to teach and interact with their students in a remote setting.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of online learning during their teaching practicum. Five pre-service teachers were interviewed. They study at the English Teaching Department and are required to complete a teaching practicum at one of the university's cooperating schools as part of their education. Teaching practicum courses are designed primarily to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice their teaching skills. Pre-service teachers must complete pedagogical skills courses prior to beginning their teaching practicum. They can strengthen their teaching development skills by participating in a teaching practicum. Investigating the perceptions of online learning through a qualitative design is appropriate because we can obtain detailed information about how they conduct online learning and the difficulties they may encounter. This approach helps gain insight into participants' opinions and underlying reasoning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2014).

As mentioned, this study interviewed five pre-service teachers who had all completed their teaching practicum. They were chosen based on recommendations from the teachers supervising their practicum. We include only pre-service teachers who completed online teaching as part of their practicum. As a point of reference, not all schools utilize online instruction. Some schools combine online and offline instruction, depending on the agreement and school policy. We contacted all pre-service teachers who were recommended and five participants agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted online via WhatsApp at mutually agreed upon times.

Data collection

Prior to the interview, we explained the research's purpose, the interview process, and data management to the participants. Additionally, participants can withdraw from the interview without providing an explanation. To ensure the data collection was valid, we consulted the interview guideline with someone who could provide the best feedback on the instrument and check whether the questions raised aligned with the research objectives as well as their clarity. Individual semi-structured interviews are conducted to elicit information about their experiences

with online learning. The interview questions are primarily open-ended in nature in order to elicit participants' perspectives and opinions. This data collection method is advantageous for qualitative research because it provides historical context and gives the researcher control over the line of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews are also a natural and socially acceptable method of collecting qualitative data in a variety of situations and focusing on a variety of topics in order to obtain detailed information (Zhang, 2010). The interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and were recorded with the participant's consent. The interviews with five pre-service teachers were structured in the same way and focused on the same fundamental areas – for example, how they conduct online learning, the challenges they face when teaching online, the preparation they should make, and how they overcome the challenges.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using Flick's coding techniques and thematic analysis (2014). It began by transcribing all interview data and reading through all transcripts to familiarize itself with the content of the interview. While reading the transcripts, we highlighted several significant points, most notably those related to the research questions. It was a recursive process in which we read the data multiple times to comprehend and make sense of it. The coding process was inductive, but there was also a deductive component, in which we drew on theory and previous research. We approached the analysis similarly to 'swimming in the literature.' We read through all interview transcripts and developed preliminary coding schemes. The initial code served as a guide for coding to additional transcripts. We grouped similar codes together and added additional codes to a new category. After agreeing on a final coding scheme, it was refined – we followed the same procedure to define recurring themes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Regarding pre-service teachers' perception of online learning, the results of interview analysis indicated that conducting online learning in their practicum encourages them to access resources from a variety of sources, exercises their creativity, expands their knowledge and digital skills as well as allows for flexibility in teaching (see Table 1.1.).

Table 1.1. Perception of online learning

Online learning use

- Encourage accessing resources
- Exercise creativity

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- Expand knowledge & digital skills
 - Teach with greater flexibility
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Teachers believed that using online learning encourages them to access materials from various resources. They need to access resources on the internet to find suitable materials in their classroom practices. As there are abundant materials available on the internet, they could not simply use any materials they found on the internet. They are required to consider the student's needs. In this case, the teachers' role is essential in selecting appropriate material for the students. Another reason to embrace online learning is that using online learning exercise teachers' creativity. What participating teachers mean is that when they prepare materials for online teaching, they should find ways to perform effective teaching. For example, teachers may use a video maker to create a video submitted on YouTube. This suggests that teachers can expand their creativity through the use of technology.

The third highlighted use of online learning was that it might boost knowledge and understanding for both students and teachers. As indicated in the following quotations, two teachers believed online learning may benefit students and teachers. This implies that both students and teachers may look for English resources. They might use a platform they are already familiar with, such as Google, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc. Teacher 5 further stated that through online learning, students realized that the functionality of social media platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and others could be used to expand their knowledge. The last point for using online learning was its flexibility. Teachers could manage their instructional time and jobs flexibly. In this case, the teacher may control their teaching time without attending school. Both teachers and students were not required to attend school and could complete their studies at home.

Table 1.2. Challenges of online learning

Challenges in conducting online learning

- Uninteresting learning process
 - Lack of discipline
 - Slow responses
 - Technical difficulties
 - Insufficient internet connection
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Although the result of this study identified positive aspects of online learning, these pre-service teachers have problems integrating the online learning, such as uninteresting learning process, lack of discipline, slow responses, technical difficulties, and poor internet connection. One of the issues that students frequently confront in online learning is boredom, which results in poor learning motivation, laziness, and low levels of student accomplishment. Many students were late when

online learning began; as a result, teachers should sacrifice their time to wait. Some students become less disciplined in their learning process due to these issues. Teachers should be more creative to make the learning process more participatory. The data indicated that most pre-service teachers face the issue of dealing with disobedient pupils who were late with assignments, as expressed in the following quotation.

The challenge is having slow responses from the students, particularly when submitting their assignments. We have to wait very long for their responses (Teacher 1)

Another issue mentioned is the application's difficulty in use. Teacher 1 said that some students were still unsure how to use the e-learning platform. As a result, the teacher was compelled to explain in private to students with difficulties via personal chat (e.g., WhatsApp). This finding indicates that online learning necessitates students being able to use applications they may not have previously used, and they need to adapt to the new situation. Some students are still finding it difficult to acclimatize to and use technology. The last problem is a poor internet connection. Some students stated that online learning was challenging since their home internet connection was unstable. They said that they had limited capacity to buy internet quota packages, particularly for students from middle- and lower-income families.

Discussion

This research found four benefits of online learning: encouraging teachers to access resources, exercising creativity, expanding knowledge and digital abilities, and teaching more flexibly. These four aspects assist teachers in growing as individuals, which is helpful to their work. For example, online learning encourages teachers to use numerous Internet resources. In this situation, they may assume that the internet provides a wealth of information for their teaching and aids them in their work as educators. Online learning makes it easier for teachers to access information and communicate with students (Ishlaiwa, 2016). As a result, using online learning makes it easier for teachers to find resources for their online classes and share them with students as learning resources.

These participating teachers appear to be aware of the need to develop and improve their online learning techniques by improving their abilities and creating online preparation plans. To do so, they should continue to learn, one of which is through reading and searching for resources on the internet. Online learning may not inherently make teachers more creative. However, it drives them to look for other resources to adapt to new situations they may not have encountered previously (Sun et al., 2020). Teachers can increase their pedagogical and content knowledge by reading and learning from the sources they use to support their teaching.

Another advantage of online learning is that it makes it easier for teachers to schedule time for teaching and other tasks. Teachers might control their classroom time without having to go to school. As a result, teachers can complete online learning at their pace. Because of its flexibility in imparting education and accessing resources and information, e-learning has grown in favor as

an alternative to face-to-face learning (Bakia et al., 2012). According to Hjeltnes et al.'s study, online learning can help with cost savings, efficiency, long-term education, and learning ease (2004). This research backs up Bakia et al. and Hjeltnes et al.'s findings about the flexibility of online learning for teachers, the ease of finding appropriate materials, and the cost savings of going to school.

Online learning has its own set of difficulties. This study discovered that online learning could make it difficult for students to focus on their studies since they spend so much time looking at a computer or smartphone screen while learning. The study found that students tend to check in and submit assignments late in online learning. This finding supports Setyawan's research, which found that students often slow adapting to online learning (2020). This makes it difficult for teachers to directly assess students' abilities and progress. Teachers can contact students who have not submitted assignments or who have not engaged in online classes to address the problem. Teachers may also need to motivate their students by rewarding those who finish homework ahead of schedule. Apart from that, students who failed to turn in homework may have their names written down and announced to the class.

Teachers should be able to establish a compelling online learning environment for their students to avoid boredom, in addition to dealing with their students' indiscipline. This study found that some teachers still have trouble making online learning interactive. According to Levin, most online learning is done through texts, and making it interactive is challenging (Levin, 1997). Teachers can interact with their students first in this scenario, for example, by establishing good communication before beginning the class. Another issue noted is that some students are unsure how to use the app, and teachers should explain it to them individually. Teachers should demonstrate to their students how to use online platforms step by step to use them outside the classroom (Cakrawati, 2017). When dealing with this issue, teachers should explain how to use the program before utilizing it to reduce the application's unfamiliarity, as not all students understand how to use it.

4. CONCLUSION

Pre-service teachers believe that implementing online learning in their practicum motivates them to acquire information from various sources, develops their creativity, expands their knowledge and digital abilities, and allows for flexibility in teaching. Each learning activity is carefully planned, and pre-service teachers appear to learn as they work towards their learning objectives. They can build and create their learning activities by taking advantage of internet resources and information access. There appears to be a need for teachers to examine online resources for their classes cautiously. They cannot just use it as is; adaptation and modification are required to meet the need of the students. Apart from the benefits of online learning for their professional development, these pre-service teachers face challenges in incorporating it into their teaching practises, such as a lack of interest in the learning process, a lack of discipline, slow responses, technical difficulties, and a poor internet connection. Other EFL teachers may have similar problems, and they should be aware of them and know how to deal with them.

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