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Research Paper

Reshaping Teacher Training: Insights from Pre-Service English Teachers' Online Micro Teaching Experiences

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Abstract

Online teaching is the new normal of today's education especially after the Covid-19 pandemic that impacted the entire world tremendously. Keeping this in mind, it is currently essential to reshape teacher training as suitable to the requirements of the modern education. For this reason, pre-service English teachers should be prepared to teach online after graduation. Therefore, the present qualitative study investigates pre-service English teachers' online micro teaching experiences in teaching writing and reading skills in Turkish context. Data were collected through reflection papers that each pre-service teacher wrote after their micro-teachings and an open-ended questionnaire that they completed at the end of the term and analyzed through content analysis. The findings showed that pre-service teachers experienced certain advantages of online teaching such as using online teaching features and reaching online materials easily. However, they also mentioned certain challenges. They mostly had difficulty in making students attend the lessons and participate it actively. That is why most participants favored virtual classroom teaching compared to online teaching and highlighted that effective online teachers should be able to attract students' attention, use technology effectively, and be patient.

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1. Introduction

Online education, which is an emerging trend of 21 century (Hampel, 2006), is not a new phenomenon. Actually, the history of online education dates back to the 1800s (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). However, its prevalence has increased worldwide with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a consequence of the pandemic, most universities around the world transitioned from traditional face-to-face education to online education (Lynch, 2020). This sudden change in the mode of education posed challenges for both teachers and students. Teachers required to change their materials and teaching methods to suit online education. Furthermore, scholars in the field believed that even after the Covid-19 pandemic, online education would continue to be a part of the "new normal" in education and would not disappear (Al Abiky, 2021; Önal et al., 2022). This assertion was evidenced by the devastating earthquake that affected eleven cities in Turkey in 2023, leading to all universities in the country switching to online education. Given this situation, it is crucial for future teachers to be prepared to teach effectively through online education. Although the current literature includes studies on in-service English teachers' online teaching experiences (Albaqami & Alzahrani, 2022; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Cote & Milliner, 2018), there are few studies that specifically explore pre-service English teachers' online teaching experiences (Çalışkan & Caner, 2022; Liza & Andriyanti, 2020; Önal et al., 2022) especially in the context of micro teaching experiences. Therefore, this case study aims to investigate the online

micro teaching experiences of pre-service English teachers in teaching reading and writing skills.

1.1 Micro teaching and the use of technology

Increasing the quality of teacher education programs has been a crucial topic of investigation in higher education institutions all over the world (Darling-Hammond, 2016). Much of this investigation has focused on preparing pre-service teachers for their profession after graduation (Schleicher, 2011). Microteaching, which integrates both reflective practice and situated teaching, is one strategy to prepare future teachers before graduation (Ledger & Fischetti, 2019). Microteaching enables pre-service teachers to develop a lesson plan and simulate teaching in a classroom setting, receiving real-time feedback and engaging in reflection (Arsal, 2014). Additionally, microteaching assists in connecting theoretical concepts with real-world applications (Grossman, 2005).

Considering the advancements in technology, especially in recent decades, it is essential for teacher education programs should emphasize the importance of integrating technology into their microteaching experiences to better prepare them for teaching after graduation (Ledger & Fischetti, 2019). It is evident that technology will be an integral part of future education, and pre-service teachers should be equipped to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching (Ledger & Fischetti, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted the entire world, has also demonstrated that teachers must be prepared to adapt their traditional teaching methods and materials to online teaching. Therefore, teacher education faculties should ensure that teachers are proficient in using technology and digitally literate upon graduation (Liu, 2012). A study conducted by Önal et al. (2022) suggests that university instructors should allocate more time for microteaching sessions in their courses. This will help pre-service English teachers become more

familiar with using different technological tools and enhance their teaching skills in an online environment.

1.2 Challenges of online teaching in English language teaching

Despite living in the era of technology, teacher education faculties still lack the necessary training to adequately prepare teacher candidates for online teaching and the use of technology in their future teaching professions (Abiky, 2021). The transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to online teaching comes with its own set of problems and challenges (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Previous studies have highlighted the specific challenges that online teaching presents for English teaching practices, particularly in relation to technology-driven pedagogy (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Zou & Li et al., 2021).

In a study conducted by Al Abiky (2021), six main challenges faced by pre-service English teachers during their online teaching sessions were identified. These challenges included teaching at a distance, content delivery, teaching style, student assessment, and capturing students' attention. Additionally, Reyes (2023) investigated the online practicum teaching experiences of ten pre-service EFL teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study concluded that despite the challenges faced by the pre-service EFL teachers, such as technical problems, time management, and student issues, they were able to overcome these challenges and find solutions. Effective communication with mentors and maintaining a positive attitude were key factors in their success. It is essential for teachers to adapt their materials and teaching styles to the online education context in order to be more effective. Furthermore, adequate preparation in advance is crucial for teachers (Mayadas, 2019). In another study, Taghizadeh and Ejtehad (2021) investigated the online instructional use of pre-service English teachers and suggested that teacher educators should allocate more time to prepare teacher

candidates for effectively utilizing online tools in their future professions.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the advantages of online instruction for teaching reading and writing skills?
2. What are the challenges associated with online instruction for teaching reading and writing skills?
3. What is the preferred mode of teaching, online or face-to-face, among pre-service EFL teachers?"
4. What are the ideal characteristics of an effective online English teacher?

2. Methodology

The study was designed as an exploratory case study (Merriam, 2009) with the aim of understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of participants in real-life settings. Case studies have the strength of uncovering the experiences of individuals. Through this qualitative design, the study aimed to understand the experiences of third-grade pre-service EFL teachers in their online microteaching of reading and writing skills.

2.1 Participants

The participants were 22 third-grade pre-service EFL teachers who were selected through convenience sampling from a state university in Turkey. Of the participants, 15 of them were female and seven of them were male. Participants had taken Teaching Language Skill I course on teaching listening and speaking skills in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, during which they conducted microteachings in real classrooms. However, due to an earthquake that affected numerous cities in Türkiye, the participants had to take Teaching Language Skill II course on teaching reading and writing skills online in the second term. Consequently, they conducted their microteachings through online education. All participants had prior experience with online teaching, having performed online teaching at least

two times before this microteaching. The participants all volunteered to participate in the study.

2.2 Data collection

The data were collected in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year as part of the Teaching Language Skill II course, which was conducted through online education. The data collection tools were reflection papers and an open-ended questionnaire. Participants conducted individual microteachings to teach reading and writing skills in an online environment, and they wrote reflection papers after their microteachings. Additionally, at the end of the semester, all participants completed an open-ended questionnaire to reflect on their online microteaching experiences. The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher, and expert opinions were obtained from two professors in the field of English Language Teaching. Required changes were implemented with response to their feedback.

2.3 Data analysis

The data collected through reflection papers and an open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using content analysis, as described by Creswell and Poth (2016) through MAXQDA software. The entire data set was stored in a file and read multiple times to extract codes. Themes were then formulated to refine the data. Figures were created, and quotations were included in the results section to enhance the clarity and comprehensibility of the analysis. Furthermore, member checking was performed to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

3. Results

3.1 Advantages of online instruction for teaching reading and writing skills

Pre-service EFL teachers commented on the advantages of teaching reading and writing skills through online education after their one-semester

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micro-teaching experiences. Most participants mentioned the advantage of online teaching features for these skills, as highlighted in Table 1. They stated that the online teaching features of the system make the work easier for both teachers and students. Several participants specifically emphasized that students' use of multimedia and chat options during online lessons enhances their writing and reading skills. For instance, participant 19 stated, "Using chat during a writing lesson can enhance students' reading and writing skills," and participant 8 mentioned that:

The potential advantage could be multimedia use. This allows both the teacher and the students to explore new ways of communicating, teaching, and learning.

Table 1.*Advantages Of Online Instruction for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills*

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Advantages	using online teaching features	8
	easy access to online materials	5
	preparation for future online teaching	2
	reduced stress levels	2
	time-saving	1

Some participants also expressed that online education allows both teachers and students to access a wide range of materials, and teachers can utilize online resources more effectively. Regarding this advantage, participant 10 mentioned that they could access various free online materials on the internet and incorporate them into their teaching. Furthermore, a few participants recognized the value of online micro-teaching as a preparation for potential future online teaching, and they mentioned that:

It creates an advantage for us to experience teaching online and identify potential problems we may face. This allows us to be better prepared for the future. (Participant 13)

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It was a valuable experience. In the future, whether by choice or necessity, if I need to teach online, I now have a clear idea of the activities I can incorporate into my online classes. (Participant 22)

In addition to these points, some participants believed that online teaching reduces stress for both teachers and students, and it is more time-saving compared to traditional face-to-face teaching. They observed that students and teachers can engage in online teaching in a stress-free and relaxed home environment.

3.2 Challenges of online instruction for teaching reading and writing skills

Participants who engaged in online micro-teaching for reading and writing skills reported encountering various challenges, as indicated in Table 2. The most frequently mentioned difficulty was low student participation. Some participants noted the significant challenge of motivating students to actively engage in the lesson. In response to this issue, participant 9 shared, "Sometimes none of the students want to answer or want to read. That's why we always continue with volunteer students." Additionally, participant 2 expressed the struggle of selecting a student for the reading activity, as many students were unwilling to participate with their cameras and microphone on. Participant 17 also faced a similar challenge and shared their approach to addressing the situation, as evident from their remark.

When I struggled to elicit a response and interaction from students, I attempted to simplify the activity step by step until I obtained engagement, and then I proceeded from that point.

Table 2.*Challenges Associated with Online Instruction for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills*

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Challenges	low student participation	13
	Internet connection problems	7
	low interaction with students	7
	technical problems	4
	reduced concentration	3
	difficulty in capturing students' attention	2

Pre-service EFL teachers also mentioned challenges with the internet connection during their online micro-teaching experiences. They mostly expressed that during the lessons, sometimes because of internet connection problems, they could not conduct an effective lesson. In addition, participants mentioned certain technical problems during the online teachings. For example, participant 11 shared that: "I created a PPTX document and was supposed to convert it to a PDF. However, after converting it, all the answers to my activities were visible. This has been the most demoralizing problem I have faced". Moreover, a few participants added that it was difficult to concentrate on the lesson during online teaching from the perspective of both students and teachers. Participant 22 stated that focusing on the computer screen was very difficult. In addition, participant 3 expressed that sometimes, the home environment was not suitable to concentrate on the lesson as there was too much noise that distract her attention. Lastly, some participants experienced challenges in attracting students' attention. They argued that it was easier to attract students' attention in a real classroom environment.

3.3 Pre-service EFL teachers' preferred mode of teaching

Pre-service EFL teachers were surveyed to gather their preferences regarding the mode of teaching, specifically online or face-to-face, after completing a semester of online micro-teachings for reading and writing skills. The results indicated a clear inclination towards face-to-face teaching

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among the participants (as shown in Table 3). Only a small number of participants expressed a preference for online teaching, citing time-saving benefits and the possibility of flexible scheduling. For instance, participant 7 stated,

I prefer online teaching because it offers greater flexibility in terms of time since you can conduct classes from the comfort of your home. Additionally, it can save your valuable time.

Table 3.

Preferred Mode of Teaching, Online Versus Face-to-Face, Among Pre-Service EFL Teachers

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Online	time saving	2
	flexible scheduling	1
	more effective teaching	11
Face to face	easier interaction with students	7
	equal access to resources	2
	enhanced comfort in teaching	1

Some participants who favored face-to-face teaching believed it to be more effective. They emphasized that being able to see students' faces helped teachers assess their understanding and attentiveness more easily. Moreover, they noted that it was easier to engage students and encourage their active participation in face-to-face settings. Participant 17 expressed this viewpoint, stating,

I prefer face-to-face teaching because it allows me to observe my students' emotions and make better assessments of their understanding of the topic. Moreover, in online lessons, it can be challenging to find volunteers to answer or read aloud since we are in our own homes, where the environment may not always be conducive to attending classes online.

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Furthermore, participants who favored face-to-face teaching highlighted the advantages of interacting with students in a physical classroom environment. They found that communication with students was smoother when everyone was together in a real classroom. Participant 3 stated, "I prefer face-to-face teaching because it enables me to interact directly with my students in a real classroom environment." Additionally, some participants believed that equal access to resources was more manageable in face-to-face teaching since all students were in the same environment with the same opportunities. They also found it more comfortable to use teaching materials and interact with students in face-to-face settings.

3.4 Ideal characteristics of an effective online English teacher

Pre-service English teachers stated their opinions concerning the ideal characteristics of an effective online English teacher (Table 4). The most mentioned characteristics were attracting students' attention, using technology effectively, and being patient. Firstly, some participants believed that grabbing students' attention was important for effective teaching through online education. Therefore, they believed that the teacher should plan the lesson in a way that would not bore students, as can be understood from the quotation of participant 12: "Being able to teach the details without boring students, even if it is online, making the class fun."

Table 4.

Ideal Characteristics of An Effective Online English Teacher

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Ideal characteristics	attracting students' attention	8
	using technology effectively	7
	being patient	6
	being good at communication	3
	choosing suitable materials	3
	being creative	2
	giving feedback	1
	being prepared before the lesson	1

Moreover, pre-service EFL teachers considered that teachers who taught online should be competent in using technology and capable of solving

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potential technical problems. To exemplify, participant 20 stated, "They are innovative, able to use technology well, prepared for technical problems, and able to solve them." Some participants also believed that online teachers should be patient, as it is more challenging to receive immediate feedback from students and the waiting time for students to answer a question might be longer compared to traditional face-to-face learning. For example, participant 3 stated:

The teacher must exhibit patience due to the extended response time in online classes, as they cannot receive immediate feedback from their students.

A few participants highlighted the importance of effective communication skills for online teaching, particularly in engaging students. They emphasized that teachers should possess energy and strong communication abilities to capture students' attention and keep them focused during lessons. Participant 5 specifically mentioned that "The energy and communication skills of teachers are crucial for teaching reading and writing skills, as well as for online education in general, to effectively engage students". Additionally, some participants expressed the view that online English teachers should be capable of selecting appropriate materials to facilitate effective online teaching. This point was exemplified by participant 18 as:

In order to teach reading and writing skills, a good teacher should be able to select reading passages that are interesting to students and suitable for their level. The exercises should also be appropriate for these reading passages, and the teacher should be able to give assignments that involve writing skills.

In relation to this characteristic, participant 1 emphasized the significance of selecting suitable materials for online teaching. The ability to choose

appropriate materials is crucial for an online English teacher to cater to the specific needs of their students. Furthermore, several participants mentioned additional qualities of an ideal online English teacher. They highlighted the importance of creativity, providing feedback to students, and being prepared for lessons in advance. These qualities contribute to creating an engaging and effective online learning environment.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The findings above indicated that pre-service EFL teachers experienced both advantages and challenges during their micro teachings when they teach reading and writing skills in L2. Participants mostly benefited from using online teaching features like chat option. Consistent with the results, Davis et al. (2019) asserted that online teaching enabled teachers to manage an effective communication besides flexibility and easier course management and design. Similarly, Gowda and Ayush (2020) asserted that university students mentioned time and place flexibility as an advantage of online teaching. Moreover, the participants mentioned that reaching digital materials were easier during online teaching. Consistently, Yuhanna et al. (2020) stated that online teaching presents media diversity both for learners and students. Additionally, participants of the present study were also in the opinion that as pre-service EFL teachers they should be ready to teach through online education in the future and through online micro teachings it was easier to reduce their stress levels during teaching and it is also more time saving.

However, the results also illuminated that EFL teachers also experienced certain challenges during their micro teachings. Low student participation was one of the mostly encountered problem during their online micro teachings. They mostly uttered that students were not eager for active participation during online teachings and therefore, there were low interaction during teaching, similar to the findings of Davis et al. (2019).

Moreover, internet connection problems and technical problems were also listed as challenges by participants. Similarly, Reyes (2023) found that pre-service EFL teachers experienced challenges such as technological issues, students' concern like low participation to the lessons, and lack of face-to-face interaction with students. Taking into consideration the advantages and the challenges of their online micro teaching experiences, pre-service EFL teachers mentioned their preferred mode of teaching between online and face to face teaching similar to the study findings Gowda and Ayush (2020). Only a few of them preferred online teaching because of its being time saving and flexible scheduling. Most participants preferred face to face teaching believing that more effective teaching was possible in a real classroom environment and more interaction can be ensured. Contrary to findings, Sun and Zou (2022) found that pre-service EFL teachers were positive towards online teaching even if they mentioned challenges such as the effective use of technology in language teaching.

Participants also shared their opinions concerning the essential characteristics of an online English teacher. They mostly agreed that an ideal online teacher should attract students' attention to the lesson, use technology effectively and be patient. Their ideal teacher characteristics were mostly in parallel to challenges that they faced during their online micro teaching, indicating that they need support to teach more effectively through online education. Supporting the notion of Liu (2012) suggesting that teacher education faculties should prepare teachers to use the technology effectively and being digitally literate after graduation (Liu, 2012). Parallel to findings, the study by Önal et al. (2022) revealed that while pre-service English teachers felt capable of teaching through online education, they expressed a need for support from their teacher education faculty to effectively integrate technology in their future classes. Additionally, they raised concerns

regarding insufficient technological equipment and technical issues that may hinder their online teaching experience.

The results showed that, even though pre-service English teachers experienced certain advantages of teaching remotely in their microteachings, they also faced challenges. This is why they primarily preferred face-to-face teaching over online teaching. Additionally, they mentioned specific characteristics that they believed an effective online teacher should possess. Therefore, it is evident from the results that pre-service English teachers should enhance their teaching and technological competencies to better prepare for potential online teaching roles in their teacher education programs. By doing so, they can acquire the ideal characteristics they mentioned. It will only be possible for student teachers to teach effectively through distance education and benefit from the potential benefits of online teaching if they feel prepared and ready for it.

5. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study has a few limitations. First, the study solely investigated the micro-teaching experiences of pre-service EFL teachers while they were teaching reading and writing skills in L2. It would be beneficial to gather their insights in other online micro-teaching contexts as well. Moreover, the number of participants could be increased to obtain a broader range of opinions regarding their experiences. Additionally, besides reflection papers and open-ended questionnaires, other data collection methods such as observations and interviews could have been employed for data triangulation.

Nevertheless, the study provides valuable information to assist researchers, curriculum designers, and educators in the field in understanding what pre-service EFL teachers consider about their online teaching experiences. Therefore, more studies are encouraged to gain a deeper understanding of the advantages and challenges of online teaching from the

perspective of pre-service EFL teachers. This way, it would be possible to determine what teacher candidates require to better manage online teaching by leveraging the advantages and mitigating the challenges.

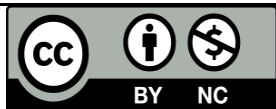
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