SUGGESTING AN ONLINE PRACTICUM MODEL ON AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEARNING GAINS IN AN EFL REMOTE TEACHING PRACTICE COURSE: ONLINE, PRACTICUM, MODEL ETCEtera[1]

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Abstract: *Despite the growing popularity of online teaching especially following the COVID-19, the research addressing online language teacher education (OLTE) is still scarce. As another contribution to the narrow OLTE literature, the current study explores a semester-long online practicum experience with a particular focus on the learning gains student teachers (STs) made. Adopting a qualitative orientation, we collected data from 14 STs and 4 school-based mentor teachers (SMTs). In addition, the field observation notes of the university-based teacher educator (UTE), who is also the first author, enriched the data sources. Based on all the participants' assessment and reflections, the learning gains were delineated. The results demonstrated that the procedures implemented in the course produced striking improvements in STs' online language teaching skills, thus they were formed into a model titled 'Online, Practicum, Model ETCEtera' to design an online practicum course in pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs. The model requires a close coordination between faculties of education and practice schools. It involves a repeated cycle of ETCE, i.e., exploration, teaching, collaboration, and evaluation. Throughout the whole process, the STs are involved in constant observation and reflection, which altogether lead to favourable learning outcomes.*

Keywords: *Online practicum, online language teacher education, practicum model*

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1. The study presented here is based on Ali İlya's PhD dissertation, which was supervised by Ayşegül Daloğlu.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology has been echoed by an equal increase in the use of technology for instructional purposes both in face-to-face and distance settings, and thus led to growing popularity of terms such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Even two decades ago it was self-evident that technology is not supplementary but rather it is essential (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). However, only 56% of the teachers who responded to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) from 48 countries stated that they received training on ICT in their formal teacher education programs (OECD, 2018). Many other studies also pointed to the inadequacies in teacher training on CALL (Hubbard, 2008; Kessler, 2006). When it is noted that it is not technology but teachers themselves that act as agents of change (Fisher, 2006), the need for concentrating more on training teachers on CALL is getting more apparent.

Distance learning poses further challenges to language teachers as 'teaching online requires teachers to adopt a different mindset' (Canals & Granena, 2020, p. 105). Distance education in various forms has been reported to gain popularity (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Güler, 2020; Hampel & Stickler, 2005). However, the results of the public consultation study conducted in 2020 by the European Commission with 2351 participants who were involved in the field of education from all European countries revealed that 60% of the respondents had not experienced distance education prior to the COVID-19 but 95% expressed their belief that the COVID-19 marked a point of no return regarding the use of technology in education. Although online teaching practices are in a rapidly rising trend, they '[have] not been matched with an increase in teacher training for language teachers beyond the technical and software-specific skills' (Compton, 2009, p. 73-74).

It has repeatedly been reported in the previous research that the teachers' habits of using technology for instructional purposes are constructed during their pre-service teacher education years (Batane & Ngwako, 2017; Kay, 2006; Lawrence & Tar, 2018). Thus, as indicated in the National Educational Technology Plan by the US Department of Education (2017, p. 35), 'effective use of technology is not an optional add-on or a skill that we simply can expect teachers to pick up once they get into the classroom.' Notwithstanding this reality, many pre-service teacher education programs address technology competence in standalone courses (Foulger *et al.*, 2012) but it was also reported that such isolated components are not effective in the long run (Kay, 2006). Therefore, as Enochsson and Rizza (2009, p. 8) claimed, 'it is important that student teachers [STs] have the possibility to see and experience pedagogical integration of ICT in the classroom during internship, both looking at good examples and being able to learn by doing themselves.' However, as noted earlier, both practice and

research in the area of online language teacher education (OLTE), and especially in online practicum, have still remained scarce (Enochsson & Rizza, 2009; Karam *et al*., 2020; Shin & Kang, 2018). To fill this gap, this study primarily investigates the learning gains in an online practicum course offered in an EFL pre-service teacher education program in Türkiye from the perspectives of STs, school-based mentor teachers (SMTs), and the university-based teacher educator (UTE), and suggests an online practicum model.

Literature review

Hampel (2009, p. 36) identified teacher education as a newly growing theme in CALL research and addressed two fundamental questions: 'what skills do language tutors require when teaching online and how can these skills be developed through training?' Accordingly, the literature review is presented under these two sub-titles: online language teaching and teacher education for online teaching.

Online language teaching skills

Bennett and Marsh (2002) claimed that teaching online necessitates competencies that are beyond technical skills. They classified the competencies in two groups: a) identifying the similarities and differences between face-to-face and online teaching, and b) specifying 'strategies and techniques to facilitate online learning and help students exploit the advantages in relation to both independent and collaborative learning' (Bennett & Marsh, 2002, p. 16). Even though they pointed out the competencies for teaching online in a broad form, they did not offer a framework. The first known framework formulated for online language teaching skills belongs to Hampel and Stickler (2005, p. 316), who asserted that 'simply listing the skills required for online tutoring would not do justice to the complexity of the training and development needed.' Hampel and Stickler (2005) designed their model in the form of a pyramid that consists of seven levels from the broadest skills to particular styles that inspire creativity: basic ICT competence (1), specific technical competence for the software (2), dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium (3), online socialization (4), facilitating communicative competence (5), creativity and choice (6), and own style (7). The authors claimed that the previous stage is a prerequisite for the next one, and tutors are expected to reach the ultimate level of creating their own style upon a successful completion of the former stages. Hampel and Stickler (2005) also called attention to the marked differences between online teaching and its counterpart in terms of classroom interaction, classroom management, use of body language, and exploitation of materials, and they claimed that their model was built on these differences.

The model was revisited by Stickler and Hampel (2015) who grouped the seven competency levels in the original model into four, in a similar pyramid form. In the updated pyramid, the basic ICT competencies are marked as prerequisites rather than first-level skills. They are followed by specific technical competencies and skills in managing the affordances and limitations of online settings. The second level of competencies address strategies facilitating online socialization and development of communicative competence. The third level includes 'creativity, choice and own style' (Stickler & Hampel, 2015, p. 66). Throughout the levels, learners and tutors negotiate online spaces to acquire netiquette.

Compton (2009) proposed another framework. It was structured around three levels of expertise (i.e., novice, proficient, and expert teacher), associated with three groups of skills (i.e., technology, pedagogy, and evaluation in online language teaching). The skills in Compton's (2009) framework are not presented hierarchically but rather they could be developed either individually or concurrently. Basic ICT skills are similarly identified as prerequisites, and the other skills are constructed upon them at three levels moving from 'usage' to 'choice' and then to 'creativity.' Compton (2009, p. 92) also warns that 'language teacher education should include technology, methodology, and evaluation courses that focus solely on online language teaching issues because online language teaching is very different from traditional language teaching.' Compton (2009) pointed to the ineffectiveness of treating ICT skills as divorced from the content and pedagogy knowledge. The recent research exploring teachers or instructors' distance language teaching experience in different contexts have provided empirical evidence for Compton's (2009) arguments (Marek, Chew & Wu, 2021; Şener, Ertem & Meç, 2020; Taghizadeh & Ejtehadi, 2021). They pointed to the challenges experienced by different groups of teachers or instructors due to the distinctive nature of online teaching, such as maintaining interaction or exploiting digital resources. The major implication was the absolute need for special training and experience. The role of experience and training in favourable outcomes has also been reported in other studies (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Conrad, 2004; Kessler, 2006).

Teacher education for online teaching

Research studies on OLTE have illuminated the practice with valuable implications and insights (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Canals & Granena, 2020; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Guichon, 2009; Güler, 2020; Hauck & Stickler, 2006; İlya & Daloğlu, 2023; Levy, Wang & Chen, 2009; Shin & Kang, 2018; Stickler, Hampel & Emke, 2020). A review of these research studies highlights several qualities that characterize an effective OLTE as involving experiential learning, fostering reflection both at individual and group levels, building an online social community, associating the content

with the trainees' prior experience, acknowledging both cognitive and affective domains, and targeting technology and pedagogy skills in a combined way. For instance, Ernest *et al.* (2013) evaluated a small-scale professional development program piloted at two different universities and the results underlined the role of experiential learning and collaboration. Similarly, Comas-Quinn (2011), in another evaluation study, pointed to the significance of experiential and collaborative learning that aimed to construct an online teacher identity as a whole.

In a recent study, Canals and Granena (2020) concluded that participatory and experiential learning produced positive results. They also demonstrated that self-reflection and co-construction of knowledge supported teachers' acquisition of online teaching skills. The authors also revealed the value of social learning, scaffolding, the use of interactive tools and video for various purposes in an effective OLTE. Güler (2020), as a contribution to the value of social learning, described the fruitful environment created through discussions among the members and stressed the fundamental role of community building in online settings for positive outcomes. Regarding the role of reflection and discussion on the trainees' online teaching implementations, Pawan (2003) states that online settings have an advantage over face-to-face environments as all acts of interactions and discussions can be recorded. Observations as the sources of input for reflection and discussion are also worth attention, and their role was elaborated in the previous research (Elmendorf & Song, 2015; Hauck & Stickler, 2006).

Wang, Chen, and Levy (2010, p. 778) proposed an e-teacher training model based on the previously explored characterizing qualities of effective OLTE. The Practice, Reflection, and Collaboration (PRC) model addressed 'the professional/skill developments of the trainees in an authentic learning and teaching context' in a holistic manner. The model consists of two stages: platform training and practice teaching, which altogether lead to professional and personal development by means of reflection and collaboration. It was emphasized by the authors that the model was specifically designed to go beyond the transmission of knowledge and skills to build a professional e-teacher identity in a supportive environment. Wang, Chen, and Levy (2010) mention the lack of modelling between the two stages as a limitation to their study, so an e-teacher training model that also involves observations and modelling was suggested as an improvement for their framework.

Despite such studies addressing OLTE, the literature on OLTE is still limited especially on online practicum and field experience (Karam *et al.*, 2020; Shin & Kang, 2018). However, especially with the forced move to the online modality upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, many contexts experienced remote forms of practicum. The studies have also revealed that stakeholders in

many contexts were not prepared for online teaching, and they were severely challenged (Assunçao Flores & Gago, 2020; Robinson & Rusznyak, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Despite the challenges, it was also noted that the forced conditions created opportunities, and it was turned into valuable experience in terms of the development of online teaching skills (Ersin, Atay & Mede, 2020; İlya & Daloğlu, 2023; Kidd & Murray, 2020). Based on the unexpected and unwanted processes, it was concluded that online components need to get integrated into regular practices, and teacher education programs need to revise the prevailing programs to increase STs' readiness for online teaching (Güngör, 2022).

Significance and aim of the study

Especially following the COVID-19 crisis, pre-service teacher education programs act with three concerns: a fresh interest in integrating distance education components into regular programs, compensating for the deficiencies in the teachers' competencies having graduated during the pandemic without field experience, and identifying the needs of modern teachers and raising mentors and choosing practice schools accordingly (Choate, Goldhaber & Theobald, 2021). The current study serves the purpose of providing data for redesigning practicum courses in pre-service teacher education programs through the proposal of a model based on a qualitative inquiry into lived experiences of STs, SMTs, and the UTE in a particular EFL pre-service teacher education program within the framework of the Updated Skills Pyramid by Stickler and Hampel (2015).

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the STs' learning gains in an online practicum as perceived by the STs themselves, SMTs, and the UTE?

2. What are the factors underlying the learning gains?

Method

Context

The research was conducted in an online practicum course offered in the last year of a four-year undergraduate BA program in English Language Teaching (ELT) at a large-scale, state university in Türkiye. The practicum was implemented in two primary settings: the university of which the STs and the UTE were members and the practice schools, where the SMTs worked and STs attended online classes for observation and teaching. STs are required to earn 240 ECTS credits for graduation. They complete all the compulsory courses before their fourth year. Although STs have the opportunity to practice teaching both in

simulated and authentic settings in the third and fourth years, the theory or practice of online instruction is not a component of the curriculum. However, due to the school closures upon the COVID-19, the practicum courses were offered online for the first time, and the data for this study were collected in the Fall term of 2020-2021 academic year.

The practicum course has two theoretical and six practice hours. Each ST was assigned to a SMT and spent six practice hours either to observe online settings or to perform their teaching practices. Two theoretical hours were defined as seminar and managed by the UTE, who is also the first author. Three or four STs were assigned to one SMT. There were three practice schools, two of which were state schools while the third one was a private school. One of the practice schools was a high school and the other two were middle schools.

Participants

There were three groups of participants; STs, SMTs, and the UTE. The UTE was also a researcher in this study. In line with the nature of qualitative inquiry, the STs and SMTs were chosen using the maximum variation sampling strategy as a purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2007).

Fourteen STs participated in the study and they constituted the primary group of participants. While six STs were male, eight STs were female. As academic success could be a determinant of learning outcomes, variety in terms of the STs' grade point averages (GPAs) was also maintained. Three STs with a low GPA (below 2.5), three STs with a high GPA (above 3.00), and eight STs with an average GPA (between 2.5 and 3.00) took part in the study. GPAs were out of 4.00. The ages of the STs ranged between 21 and 24. An equal distribution regarding the school type was also maintained, and accordingly seven STs completed practicum at a state school while the other half was assigned to a private school. While three STs attended a high school, eleven STs attended middle schools.

The STs were assigned to four different SMTs working at the three practice schools. All the SMTs held a Master of Arts (MA) degree in a relevant field. One of the SMTs was male while the other three were female. They had experience in teaching English from four to thirteen years. They had one or two years of experience in providing mentorship.

All the STs and SMTs were informed about the research at the beginning of the semester in an online meeting. They signed an informed consent form that also guaranteed the data would remain confidential and they were free to withdraw at any time.

The UTE has been teaching undergraduate courses in an ELT department for almost ten years. He had six years of mentorship experience. He has background in ELT.

Data collection instruments

Weekly reflective journals

Each ST was asked to write a reflective journal every week based on the observations and teaching implementations. In total, every ST submitted 11 reflective journals through Google Classroom. They were encouraged to write in the freest way possible. The STs were provided with certain prompts with a notification that they were completely free to include anything else relevant to their experience.

Weekly online focus group discussions

The STs were divided into two to form two focus groups. Groups were heterogenous in terms of GPAs to promote scaffolding among STs and homogenous in terms of the practice schools attended to provide common substance for group discussions. Online focus group discussions were held to gain a deeper insight into the journal data.

Audio recordings

The STs were asked to reflect on their teaching implementations right after each performance in the form of audio recording. The STs were provided with prompts to stimulate their reflection. The UTE also recorded audio observation notes to take notes and provide feedback.

Open-ended surveys

Two online open-ended surveys were designed, one for STs and another for SMTs to ask them to evaluate the practicum and delineate the learning outcomes. The surveys consist of three sections. In the first section, the participants were asked to present some demographic information, in the second section they were requested to reflect on the online practicum experience, and in the third section the participants shared their suggestions for potential improvements in the course in the long run.

Semi-structured online interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to reveal the thought processes underlying the answers in SMTs' open-ended surveys. The SMTs' answers in the surveys were delineated here to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. The interviewees were chosen based on the distinct points of view revealed in the surveys. Four interviews were conducted and each one lasted around 30 minutes. The interviews were all online. The surveys and interview protocols were generated by the researchers upon expert opinions and piloting

procedures. The experts consisted of academics both from the field of ELT to consult on the content and from the field of Turkish Language for language editing.

Procedure

The procedure employed in the study can be grouped into three phases: pre-teaching, while teaching, and post-teaching. In total, every ST had four online teaching implementations. The procedures are detailed in Figure 1.

Data analysis

The audio data were transcribed verbatim and all the written qualitative data were first organized and labelled. The data sources were associated with the research questions. The Data Analysis Spiral suggested by Creswell (2007) was employed. As the title suggests, the model requires the researcher to go forward and backward constantly to rethink on the findings to make a meaningful sense of them. Reading and memoing were followed by describing, classifying, and interpreting, and they led to the stage of representing and visualizing the data. We used the levels of skills in the Updated Skills Pyramid (Stickler & Hampel, 2015) as the main categories. Emerging codes that matched constituted sub-categories, which came together under one of the three categories, each of which represents a level in the Pyramid. We did not report the counts of codes in order not to 'convey a quantitative orientation of magnitude and frequency contrary to qualitative research' (Creswell, 2007, p. 152), and what participants meant with the same code was significantly different depending on the contexts, so counting would misguide readers. Relevant quotes from the participants were frequently used to represent their voice and illustrate an emerging code or sub-category. Moreover, the results were supported with constant references to the STs' teaching implementations to help readers better appreciate the findings.

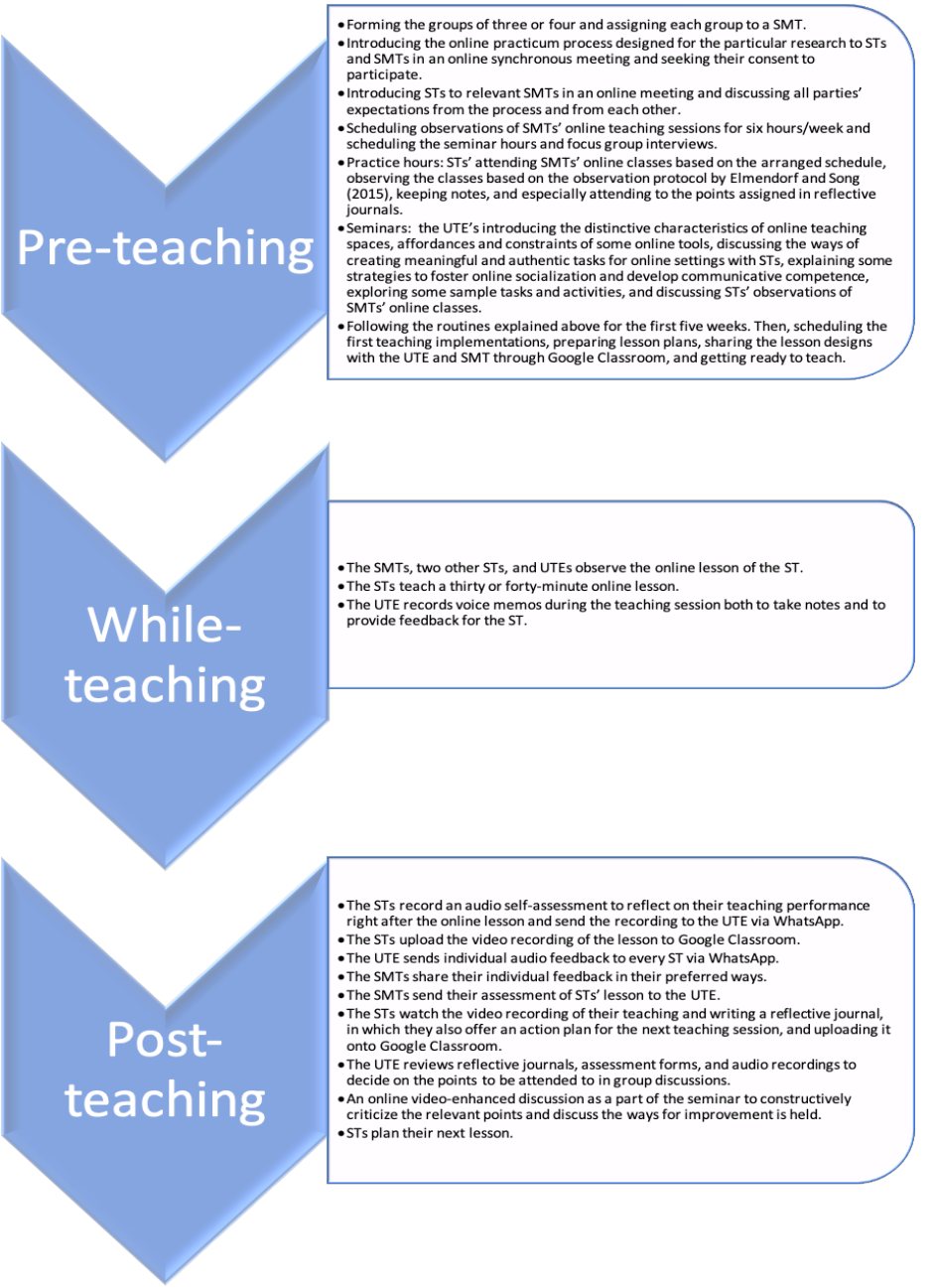

Figure 1. Procedures followed throughout the online practicum process

Results

As the main goal of this study was to explore the learning gains, and since a learning gain is broadly defined as 'distance travelled' (McGrath *et al.*, 2015, p. xi), the results of the qualitative analyses are presented to reflect the developmental process.

STs' perceived readiness before experiencing online teaching

Through the first reflective journals and focus-group discussion, the STs' initial perceived readiness was explored. Thirteen out of 14 STs stated that they did not feel ready for online teaching. The most commonly repeated identifications were 'unconfident, insecure, prejudiced, scared.' Table 1 presents the seven codes that explain 13 STs' attributions for unreadiness.

Table 1.
Thirteen STs' attributions for perceived unreadiness

STs' did not feel ready due to lack of…
training on distance education
confidence
knowledge to tackle unexpected technical problems
experience
support of body language
technology competence
interest in technology

It is apparent that STs sought *training on distance education*. They suffered from lack of *confidence* resulting from the unfamiliarity with online spaces. Almost all STs stated that they did not *experience* online instructional settings even for synchronous learning before, so they were afraid of teaching. Some STs pointed to the lack of *support of body language* as a limitation of online teaching. It was also revealed that perceived *technology competence* and *interest in technology* positively affected the STs' readiness. The following extract from ST7 illustrates the role of technology competence in perceived readiness:

> [2]Unfortunately, I don't trust myself in teaching online because of my lack of confidence in using technological tools. I am afraid of not being able to deal with any problems that may occur while teaching and any interruptions of my class. (ST7)

One ST felt ready in the very beginning and attributed his readiness to *technology knowledge:*

2. The extracts were not edited to maintain their authenticity.

> A teacher must know well how to use a computer to be efficient in distance education. I think I am good at using computers and using any program on a computer. If I do not know how to use a program, I know how to learn, therefore I think, I can teach students via computer. (ST4)

When the STs were asked to think retrospectively at the end of the term, the same ST confessed how mistaken he was at the beginning in the last focus group discussion:

> At first, I thought that I am good at technology, have computer skills, so online education would be easier for me but I have realized that it was not so. When I compare my first implementation with the last one, I can easily see the improvement. (ST4)

STs' development from the first to the last online teaching session

STs' learning gains are reported based on Stickler and Hampel's (2015) Updated Skills Pyramid. The role of basic ICT competencies, which are defined as the prerequisites, has already been revealed as technology was reported to be a primary determinant of perceived un/readiness, thus the STs' development in the following three stages, each of which constitutes a main category, are delineated below. The emerging sub-categories and codes are presented in Figure 2.

Level 1: Matching pedagogies and technologies

Doing meaningful activities, another sub-category of learning gains could be traced in the STs' performances. At first, they did mechanical drills including fill-in-the-gap, matching, true/false activities that were purely language-focused. However, they could generate meaningful activities towards the end. Many STs were able to *create authenticity*, *contextualize* activities, *identify the needs*, and *address different styles*. They were asking students to give suggestions to problems of real people introduced through the screenshots of WhatsApp group conversations or solve a problem by using hints to save a character. ST1, as an example, discussed the ways of staying safe online in the last teaching implementation. The topic was quite meaningful for the students as the COVID accelerated the use of the Internet. However, the same ST designed mechanical activities around Japanese and Chinese cuisine in the first teaching implementation, and students showed no interest in the topic. The excerpts below manifest the STs' and the SMTs' perspectives in their own words:

> The strength of the implementation was that it was unique. It was also quite interactive, the lesson revolved around the students' choices and ideas. … Also, the Instagram account that they were going to create could be a fan page or personal page. This was also determined by students. (ST3)

> The STs' adaptation was so fast once you modelled them how to create meaningful activities, I saw that they need to understand the mentality. (SMT2)

The third sub-category was **managing time properly**. The duration of class sessions was shortened in online teaching, and it initially posed a serious challenge. The STs felt under time pressure, and in order to abide by their lesson plan, they acted mechanically. Almost none of the STs could cover all activities in the earlier teaching implementations, even some STs could not move on to the main activities. SMT4 wrote the following about time management:

> Time pressure on the STs can make the natural speaking process boring. While the aim of the course is to communicate, it turned into implementing the lesson plan. (SMT4)

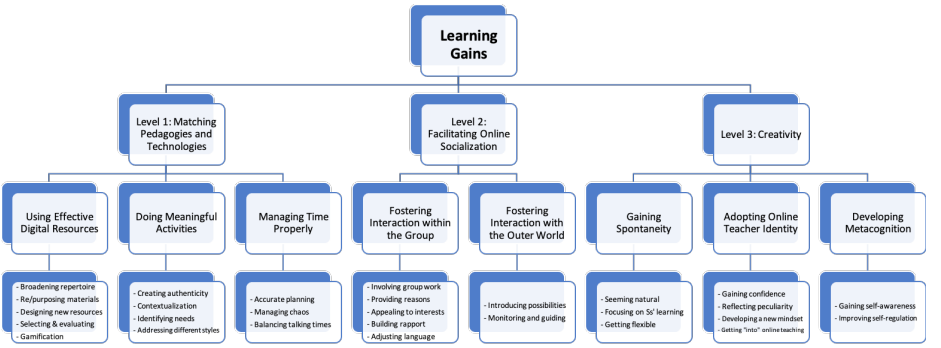

Figure 2. Emerging categories, sub-categories, and codes for the learning gains

The STs also frequently mentioned the problem of time management following their initial teaching practices. The following quote embodies the STs' perspectives.

> When the students told me that the class was over, I felt really down and the very first thing I thought of was the fact that I failed. I have never ever failed to manage the time this much. (ST8)

Many STs learnt how to manage the time after they understood the differences between face-to-face and online contexts and designed their classes accordingly. They developed skills in *accurate planning*, *managing chaos*, and *balancing the talking times* of teacher and students.

Level 2: Facilitating online socialization

The STs' learning gains at Level 2, which covers the skills in facilitating communicative competence and online socialization, created two sub-categories, i.e., **fostering interaction within the group** and **fostering interaction with the outer world**. In the first sub-category, from the first to the last teaching implementations, the STs made the greatest progress. In the beginning, the STs' classes lacked interaction, the performing ST was dominating the class discourse. In ST1's first teaching implementation, for instance, he showed a

picture of 'ramen[3]' on a slide and asked the students to name it. Both students' unfamiliarity with the Japanese culture and their lack of interest fuelled their silence. In some classes, the students' webcams and microphones were turned off and it had an adverse effect as well. In time, they began *involving group work*, *providing reasons to interact*, *appealing to interests*, and *adjusting language* according to the target profile. They also *built rapport* with students. To illustrate, ST3, in the fourth implementation, involved the students to create a fan page for Jim-in Park, which appeals to the students' interests very much as a theme. In another implementation, ST10 created a problem scenario, in which students were required to give directions based on available clues to find a lost boy to help a hypothetical character. The students collaborated as a whole group and interacted well. Some other STs created small groups on Zoom in breakout rooms and monitored the students' discussions. The following excerpt demonstrates the learning gains in this sub-category, in the STs' own words:

> My thoughts changed in some areas, for example, I thought that students would not participate in class activities but I observed that they were participating. I believe the reason is the quality of the teacher and her rapport with the students. (ST12)

SMTs also mentioned the STs' developed skills in fostering communication within the group.

> Knowing the students significantly improved classroom interactions. STs could design activities for different types of learners or tailor the contents according to their interests or deal with the constraints of some web-conferencing tools (e.g., creating separate links for group works on Google Meet) in time. (SMT2)

Fostering interaction with the outer world was the second sub-category. The STs *introduced the possibilities* of interacting with the outer world, and *monitored and guided* students. ST2, for example, created a context on Vedat Milor, who is a Turkish culinary guru. She introduced a famous controversy initiated by Vedat Milor at international level around 'menemen[4],' a Turkish dish, focusing on whether 'menemen' should be cooked with or without onion, and ST2 asked the students to visit YouTube to share their preference as a comment under the video. Many other similar tasks fostered the students' interaction. ST2 wrote the following to reflect her own perspective about this activity:

> I did a good job implementing this [technology] because I used technology in an authentic context like Twitter and YouTube to support their [students] learning. (ST2)

3. A Japanese meat or fish soup containing noodles.

4. It is a Turkish style omelet. Eggs scrambled with tomatoes and green peppers.

Level 3: Creativity

The learning gains under this category created three sub-categories, the first of which was **gaining spontaneity**. At the beginning, the STs were trying to plan each and every minute of their class and acting as if they were implementors of lesson plans. They were so self-focused that they even ignored the students' learnings at times. As STs depended so much on previously studied or even memorized instructions, they could not illustrate the original use of English, which also hindered the students' creativity. SMT4 commented on the STs' initial lack of spontaneity:

> They felt under pressure and they tried to follow the lesson plan minute by minute. For instance, the STs previously told it to me. Student made a joke but s/he laughed at it very quickly in an apparently mechanical form and moved on. (SMT4)

However, in time, STs learned to a considerable degree how to *seem natural*, *focus on the students' learning*, and *get flexible*. ST3 wrote the following about it:

> I began to prepare more flexible lesson plans, which gave me more freedom and I could steer the lesson depending on the students' answers. This way I felt more like a teacher than someone just reading through a lesson plan. (ST3)

Adopting online teacher identity emerged as the second sub-category here. It was apparent in the first teaching performances that STs tried to copy the practices of face-to-face settings, they were quite unfamiliar with the etiquette of online spaces and repetitive, and moreover they lacked energy as they could not get into the right mood. However, they covered distance and *gained confidence*, *reflected peculiarity*, *developed a new mindset*, and *got 'into' online teaching*. For instance, some STs designed materials with their own photos, which also inspired the students' creativity. The following extracts from STs are illustrative of the gains:

> Throughout the course I have learned how to be an online teacher. (ST4)

> At first, I could not see myself as a teacher but in time I started to adopt teacher identity. (ST7)

SMTs also pointed to the progress that STs made in their comments. For instance, SMT3 mentioned how confident the STs got in time, in addition to other areas in the following extract:

> After each implementation they felt more confident, created better contexts, and managed time and class in a more effective way. (SMT3)

The last sub-category was **developing metacognition**, which produced two codes; *gaining self-awareness* and *improving self-regulation*. At the beginning of the term, the STs could not do an accurate assessment of their and their peers' online teaching performances. It was obvious both in their reflections and comments in seminars. The ST5's following comment embodies the STs' initial lack of self-awareness:

> Although I watched the video recording of my teaching implementation twice, I cannot confidently say 'my problems are these!' (ST5)

Their self-reflection and feedback on teaching performances revealed that the STs went miles in terms of developing metacognition throughout the term. Initial broad and amateur comments were gradually evolved into professional and detailed ones:

> As my awareness is growing, I wondered more, I wanted to know more. We discussed in the meetings so much that I began to discuss with myself while planning my classes, I gained such a habit and I am sure it will help me in my professional life as well. (ST10)

It was also mentioned by the SMTs and the extract below exemplifies their perspective:

> I can confidently say that they showed impressive progress. Classroom management, teacher attitude, lesson preparation, and all other attributes improved greatly. They are much more aware. (SMT1)

Factors underlying the STs' learning gains

Both SMTs and STs expressed their satisfaction with the attainments of the online practicum course. They were asked to reflect on the reasons for the improvement, and Table 2 presents the emerging codes.

Table 2.
Reasons for STs' improvement in online teaching skills

Concrete feedback
Getting informed about the digital resources
Gaining experience
Seeing good examples
Group meetings
Getting to know the students and their needs
Not being assigned a topic by the SMT
Making a better sense of the UTE's expectations
Bridging the gap between theory and practice
Self-study
Observations
Peer feedback
Learning from mistakes

ST10's following words are illustrative of the emerging codes. As noted here, the STs mainly attributed their improvement to *concrete feedback* based on an exploration of the video recordings of online lessons. It was also revealed that the process introduced the distinctive nature of the online modality to them, including *digital resources* and the *students' changing needs*. Moreover, *observations*, the *peers' feedback*, and *learning from mistake*s were among the leading reasons.

> In the very beginning, I was not successful in online teaching, and I did not know what to do. However, it has changed in time thanks to feedback session and my effort. For instance, we have learned how to integrate digital tools into activities in various ways, and we had a chance to see what our weaknesses in teaching in general sense. I think the reasons are that we had lots of meetings, and we received feedback from our instructor. We had also many discussions with our group. Many ideas were created, and we helped each other. (ST10)

As exemplified in SMT8's following words, the SMTs also agreed with the STs on the progress, and they similarly attributed the improvement primarily to feedback and to the STs' acquaintance with the facilities available in the online mode.

> The last implementations were the best ones. In time, pre-service teachers improved themselves. Learning the use of tools made a big difference. Knowing the students and possibilities also made them more successful while planning the lessons and maintaining the classroom management. (ST8)

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the STs' learning gains along with the underlying reasons and suggest a model for online practicum. The results provided strong empirical evidence that STs need 'to adopt a different mindset' (Canals & Granena, 2020, p. 105) to teach online and one cannot assume that experience in face-to-face teaching leads to positive outcomes in online settings as well (Compton, 2009). Despite three years of training on teaching methodology and experience in face-to-face teaching in micro teaching implementations, the STs – except one – clearly expressed their perceived unreadiness for an online practicum in the beginning. One ST, who felt ready to teach online owing to his perceived technology competence, stated at the end of the course that he had been mistaken. The STs attributed their unreadiness mainly to lack of training and experience in online teaching. Thus, one may conclude that the STs' positive attitude or perceived readiness could primarily be explained through training, prior experience, or technology competence as previously yielded (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Kessler, 2006; Marek, Chew & Wu, 2021).

In the initial teaching implementations, STs simply tried to adapt the traditional practices from face-to-face teaching to the online medium. In other words,

they 'still use[d] the technology in predominantly 'old' ways, adapting new tools to their traditional teaching style' (Stickler & Hampel, 2015, p. 65). They perpetuated mechanical drills on some so-called new technological tools and it was proved that such endeavours did not produce desirable outcomes. In time, the STs evolved from the traditional practitioners of online teaching to novice creative online teachers, as a result of constant observations, exploration, repeated teaching implementations, reflection, feedback from the UTE and SMTs, discussions, collaboration, and evaluation. In other words, as also evidenced by Ernest *et al.* (2013), experiential learning in situated contexts led to favourable attainments. The STs acquired precious learning gains at all the levels of the Skills Pyramid (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Stickler & Hampel, 2015). First, they discovered the affordances of online tools and learned the ways of dealing with their constraints. They also explored online materials and learned how to design and exploit meaningful activities in online spaces. Then, they developed skills in fostering online socialization and developing the students' communicative competence in authentic contexts through small and whole group work activities, guidance for students to use online platforms to communicate, and appropriate online lesson plans devised in accordance with the target profile. Towards the end, they replaced repetitive activities with more original ones that manifested their growing creativity and developing online teacher identity. It was observed that the STs' creativity fostered the students' creativity through modelling. At the end of the process, the STs, SMTs, and the UTE all agreed that the practicum was quite fruitful for all parties, especially for the STs. The results consolidated the previously confirmed role of practice, reflection, and collaboration (Wang, Chen & Levy, 2010). The contribution of using videos for reflection and web-conferencing was once again manifested in the current study (Karam *et al.*, 2020). Based on the inquiry into the reasons for the STs' progress, the exploration of the learning gains, and feedback on the procedures followed within the study, an online practicum model was generated.

A suggested model: Online, practicum, Model ETCEtera

The model constitutes unity as represented through the closed square consisting of two dotted and two solid lines. Each solid line stands for one primary group of stakeholders that physically exist, i.e., faculty of education (FED) and practice school while the dotted lines symbolize the online social community constructed together. The whole practicum process is managed in close coordination between the practice school and FED. As displayed through the equal-length vertical and horizontal axes, the roles of both parties are proportional, which denotes that SMTs and UTEs equally share responsibilities for guiding STs throughout the process. The stakeholders (STs, SMTs, and UTEs) altogether act with the online social community, in which they complete all the processes. The

STs begin the online practicum period at the pivot of the coordination between practice school and FED. The distance between the two wavy lines represents the STs' outlook. In the beginning, the STs' outlook is narrow, and as they proceed, it gets broader as represented through the two wavy lines between the horizontal and vertical axes. The two lines were wavy as STs have ups and downs throughout the process based on the lesson observations and reflections that are integral to the whole maturation process. Observations involve both the SMTs' online classes, their own and the peers' teaching implementations, and any other objects (e.g. synchronous video-enhanced feedback sessions, sample tasks and materials etc.), while reflections similarly are on every stage including teaching performances, the SMTs' modelling, feedback, and learning outcomes. Between the constant wavy lines of reflection and observation, STs are involved in a cycle of E.T.C.E. First, STs EXPLORE the online settings, interaction tools, digital materials, affordances, and constraints within the borders of the online social community. Then, STs TEACH in authentic contexts. In the third stage, STs gain a deeper understanding of their teaching in COLLABORATION with peers, UTEs, and SMTs both in one-to-one and group interactions. Lastly, STs EVALUATE the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching performances and turn to the beginning to repeat the process to improve the quality of their online teaching performance. Model ETCEtera is an acronym for the four-stage implementation cycle. The cycle may involve other dimensions as implied in its title, i.e. etcetera, based on the unique nature of each and every context. The model mainly aims to cultivate 'reflective practitioners' (Schon, 1983).

The Model primarily depends on the STs' complete active involvement. Three core elements of the Community of Inquiry Model define the nature of required involvement (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 1999). The input provided through explorations of the observations and digested through constant reflection help STs maintain cognitive presence as the first of the three elements. Upon personal implications of the reflection and observation, the STs are required to take the responsibility of designing online lessons and teach them in authentic contexts, which promotes teaching presence as the second element. The collaboration and evaluation stages in the situated learning environment serve the social presence as the third element in the Community of Inquiry Model as all the stakeholders support each other's development in an online social group.

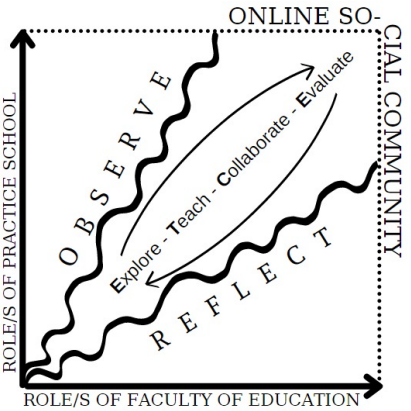

Figure 3. Visual representation of Online, Practicum, Model ETCEtera

Conclusion

The unexpected shift to the online modality forced all the stakeholders; however, the difficulties were especially felt in the applied courses. As one of such courses, the Practicum was carried out online during the lockdown period of the COVID-19. To handle the difficulties a Practicum course was designed within the current study and STs' learning gains were delineated. Based on a close exploration of the learning gains and factors underlying the gains an online practicum model was proposed to improve the quality of such courses that will most likely be essential components of regular teacher education programs. It was primarily concluded that online teaching is significantly different from its face-to-face counterpart, and it requires special practice. It was revealed that desirable improvements can be achieved in STs' readiness for online teaching through close collaboration between faculties of education and practice schools. The STs need to be encouraged to explore the peculiar aspects of the online medium, teach online lessons, collaborate both with the peers and the mentors, and evaluate all the former steps to make decisions for improvement. The suggested cycle should be supported with constant reflection and observation throughout the whole process. In the particular context of the study favourable outcomes were achieved; however, it needs to be noted that as this is a qualitative inquiry, the results are not generalizable for other contexts. The model should be tested in other settings and the outcomes should be reobserved. In addition, as the first author was also the UTE in the current study, it might have harmed the objective interpretation of the findings although all the precautions were taken. Lastly, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown period, when the whole world experienced unprecedented times and was severely affected, hence the results should be tested in regular times as well. Despite such limitations, we believe that the Online, Practicum, Model ETCEtera has the potential to guide the future practices in the process of redesigning the Practicum courses to add online components.

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