

EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE TEACHING-PRACTICUM DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: Despite the importance of teaching practicum in teacher education programs, the outbreak of COVID-19 promotes distance learning which led to online teaching-practicum. This study was intended to investigate EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the practicum and the improvement they perceived during the time period. In this study, a survey design utilizing questionnaire and follow-up interview as the instruments was used. The findings indicated several challenges, but the main problems faced by the majority of pre-service teachers were the limited orientation of the practicum, classroom management, and assessment. The challenges occurred were also related to the lack of supporting facilities and internet. Despite the challenges, this study also found that pre-service teachers still perceived improvement in teaching skills, knowledge, methods, new ideas, and interest in teaching. Their perceptions of online teaching-practicum also contributed to their views on whether online teaching-practicum has prepared them well to be good English teachers or not.

Keywords: *pre-service teacher, teaching practicum, pandemic*

The success of the teaching and learning process depends less on materials and techniques, but more on what goes inside and among those that participate in the classroom (Stevick in Koksall, 2019). It can be interpreted that teachers have to be competent not only in delivering the lessons well but also in creating the atmosphere that can make students engaged in the language learning process. To take the responsibilities, teachers are required to be equipped with teaching experiences before they begin their career as a professional teacher, and one of the ways is by going through teaching practicum, which has been considered "one of the most crucial and influential stages in teacher education" (Trent in Castañeda-Trujillo & Aquirre-Hernandez, 2018). In that period, pre-service teachers put theories and principles of teaching that they have learned in preparation courses into actual practice. The practicum in which the process involves supervised teaching and systematic observation allows them to experience gaining knowledge of how teachers deal with complex tasks in a classroom context (Gebhard, 2009), including dealing with the students. It is important to highlight since students in teacher education should get exposure not only to context-based teaching but also to authentic teaching experience in order to help them develop their practical skills, human relationship, and all necessary elements of teaching efficacy (Ashton in Incecey & Dollar, 2021). It is obvious that teaching practicum provides a variety of experiences to pre-service teachers, especially the opportunity to practice and develop ideas they have acquired in preparation courses.

However, for pre-service teachers that come to this phase, teaching practicum is seen as the most challenging, difficult, and frustrating time of their teacher education program (Ferrier-Kerr; Huang & Waxman in Ersin et. al., 2020). The concerns, according to Hastings (in Gurbuz, 2006), are regarding the school environment, pre-service teachers' roles, relationship with mentors at schools, and the effect of all of these aspects on their teaching performance. Although they have been equipped with experiences in microteaching activities, there must be a difference between expectations and the actual reality of a school environment that is sometimes perceived by pre-service teachers as "a shock" (Stokking et. al. in Gurbuz, 2006). The comparison of microteaching and teaching in a 'real' classroom is only on the surface. Thus, regardless of their preparation before doing the practicum, many of them can still feel the struggle to bridge their expectations to the actual situation.

Despite the importance of conducting teaching practicum for the professional improvement of pre-service teachers, the situation of COVID-19 pandemic makes it impossible to happen in normal settings. In March 2020, The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic Indonesia announced the school closure and that the teaching and learning process had to be carried out online by paying attention to gaps in access and learning facilities at home. Since then, all learning and teaching

activities at schools and higher education have been switched into remote learning where the students continue their study online without face-to-face interaction with their classroom members. This quick transition to full online education in the time of the pandemic, however, creates the risk of decreasing the quality of the courses provided (Alan et. al., 2020). In regards to the teacher education program, the limitations in pandemic time may provide challenges for pre-service teachers during teaching placement that is mainly done from home. Though this learning system may still provide them opportunity to learn theories effectively, it seems that obtaining an improvement in practical skills without practicing in a physical classroom is difficult to optimize. The need for converting the lessons online immediately also seems inadequate compared to the effort made to develop a quality course in a normal situation (Hodges et. al. in Alan et. al., 2020). Though many seminars and training provided insights on how to conduct effective online learning, they seem to be not that easy to apply especially for pre-service teachers who are used to preparing and practicing for a normal classroom.

Previous researches have discussed topics related to the implementation of teaching practicum during the pandemic. A study conducted by Varela and Desiderio (2020) on pre-service teachers' perceptions of COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on teaching experience discovered online learning provided some challenges that influenced the performance of pre-service teachers. These challenges due to the needs for face-to-face teaching experiences in the classroom environment led to the feeling of unaccomplished since the pre-service teachers perceived they were not prepared enough for the future profession. Besides, obstacles faced due to technology also disrupted the teaching practicum. In contrast, another study conducted by Ersin, Atay, and Mede (2020) about boosting pre-service teachers' competence and readiness through an e-practicum system revealed that even though pre-service teachers experienced some problems and that they preferred teaching in physical classrooms, they highlighted the importance of e-practicum and e-mentoring and defined the process as a unique experience. These studies show how pre-service teachers may have different perceptions of their teaching practicum experiences. One may not be satisfied with their teaching experience during this pandemic time because of unaccomplished needs in the difficult situation they could not control, while some others may take it as an opportunity to improve their teaching knowledge and skills in situations that they have not been encountered before.

Although there are numbers of studies conducted to address pre-service teachers' experiences of remote learning during the pandemic, these studies mainly discussed the subjects' point of view as university students, not as pre-service teachers who had done practicum at schools (e.g. Naah, 2020; Ogonnaya et. al., 2020; Naila & Sadida, 2020). Moreover, there are very limited research-based studies related to the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers in teaching practicum during the pandemic that can be found other than the one conducted by Ersin, Atay, and Mede (2020). Thus, reflecting on the aforementioned issues about students' different experiences and perceptions and related previous studies that are still limited, it is important to gain more insights from EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesian EFL context who have experienced the practicum in this pandemic situation. The research question that was intended to be answered in this study is "What are the EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of online teaching-practicum during pandemic?". While two previous studies mentioned previously focused on the impact of school closure on teaching practicum during pandemic (Varela and Desiderio, 2020) and pre-service teachers' perceptions of the alternative to teaching practicum (Ersin et. al., 2020), this research was intended to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of the online teaching practicum in which they were involved, including the perceptions of the implementation of online teaching-practicum and the improvement related to their teaching skills that they perceived after the implementation of the practicum in the crisis time of the pandemic. The description of pre-service teachers' perceptions can contribute as a reference for further studies as well as for related parties in taking decisions on the arrangement of teaching-practicum programs, especially in a post-pandemic situation in Indonesia. The experiences of the pre-service teachers in this study can also help them understand the struggles that may be faced in the future, thereby helping them to provide the pre-service teachers with any possible support. Moreover, the results of this study will complement previous studies and add more perspectives on the related topic by specifically addressing the implementation of teaching practicum in the English Language Teaching study program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

In this study, a survey research design was used to collect the data from the predetermined group of respondents to gain information and insights on their perceptions. The research design is commonly used to describe opinions, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of people within the interest of the researchers (Latief, 2017:126). Besides, it allows the researchers to identify characteristics of the population from the smaller sample and make generalization to the population so that inference about the characteristics can be made (Babbie in Creswell, 2009). Thus, survey design is

considered appropriate for the purpose of investigating pre-service teachers' perceptions of online teaching-practicum.

The participants of the study were English Language Teaching students who had been assigned to have online teaching-practicum in secondary schools in Malang. They had also completed compulsory and elective courses that aimed to prepare them for the teaching practicum, such as Instructional Materials Evaluation, Microteaching, English Curriculum, and Classroom Management. A total of 57 pre-service teachers from the ELT study program in Universitas Negeri Malang became the participants of the study through a convenience sampling procedure. These participants consisted of pre-service teachers teaching at junior high schools (29), senior high schools (17), and vocational high schools (11). During the practicum, these pre-service teachers taught synchronously by utilizing digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, and Zoom. They were guided by mentors from the schools where they were assigned to and were supervised by the lecturers from the ELT study program.

To collect the data, the researchers used an online questionnaire with follow-up interviews to gain more understanding of the subjects' responses, following the suggestion by Yin (in Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) and Latief (2017:126). The researchers arranged a close-ended questionnaire of which some of the items were adapted with modifications from a study on a similar topic by Amankwah, Oti-Agyen, and Sam (2017). That study discussed benefits derived from teaching practice and challenges faced by pre-service teachers, so the questionnaire was divided into two sections with positive statements and negative statements. The negative statements adapted from the questionnaire were modified to positive statements for this current study. The researchers also adapted items from a study by Wambugu (2013) that investigated student teachers' perceptions of teaching practice assessment. The questionnaire was then divided into two parts that aim to elicit participants' perceptions of the implementation of online teaching-practicum and what improvements they perceived from the practicum during the pandemic time. The subjects were to choose one of five-point Likert scale of which the descriptors are (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree. To test the reliability of the 20-item questionnaire, the researchers distributed it to a group of EFL pre-service teachers with similar characteristics. The researchers also asked for feedback from the participants should they found ambiguous items. The reliability test procedure using SPSS showed the result of Cronbach Alpha with .838 scale, meaning that the items are considered adequate (Taber, 2018) to be utilized for the purpose of collecting data.

The online questionnaire was distributed through personal and group chat in WhatsApp. This first data collection stage took three days to get responses from the pre-service teachers that had been contacted. Furthermore, the follow-up individual interview involving 12 pre-service teachers was done at the end of questionnaire data collection using phone calls as the media of the interview. The researchers selected these participants after reviewing their responses to the questionnaire, and we would like to explore possible different explanations behind their responses. The participants voluntarily responded to the invitation to take part in this stage.

The collected data from questionnaire were then analyzed statistically by calculating the percentages from each questionnaire item. This first stage of analysis was followed by the analysis of data resulting from the interview. The interview recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts of follow-up interviews were analyzed by coding relevant keywords and phrases and grouping these codes based on the questionnaire items that they support. The researchers ensured the proper placement by reviewing the interview responses, whether they were parts of the explanation for responses chosen on the questionnaire items.

FINDINGS

Perceptions of the Implementation of Online Teaching-Practicum

The finding of this part firstly discusses pre-service teachers' perceptions of the time period of online teaching-practicum. Most of the students felt that the duration of the practicum was adequate, where a total of one and a half month of teaching was considered enough for more than a half of them (63.2%). Few students (19.3%), however, did not think so since the schools where they taught required them to work on lesson planning longer than the time to complete the preparation should be. "The time for online teaching-practicum was not enough because we need more preparation on the syllabus and lesson plan. I think two or three months of practicum would be enough" (Student 2). In addition, another student also took students' understanding towards the materials into consideration. "The first and the second week of KPL were used for school orientation and preparing the lesson plan. I taught only at the last three weeks, which I think was not enough to deliver materials and make the students understand what they learned because their level of understanding was middle to low" (Student 3). This limited-time perceived by pre-service teachers, as stated by previous researchers, matters (Rust, 2002) as it might affect their professional development, for the duration of the immersion in the real teaching and learning context is a key element in the process of learning to teach (Flores & Gago, 2020). Thus, it is not something surprising for the pre-service teachers who had to prepare and teach in a short period of

time to perceive it inadequate, especially since they also thought about whether what they had prepared and delivered during the limited time was beneficial for the students.

Furthermore, where some participants (33%) see that the preparation from the university and schools through planning and orientation was sufficient, almost half (47%) were not sure. It was either the orientation from the university or campus was very general. "It was in between. The orientation from campus was enough, but the one from school was only given in a meeting with a general introduction to the implementation of the online learning system there" (Student 7). Student 1 also said, "Orientation from university was very general. I had to ask for more information from students who were doing practicum in other schools". The orientation was also considered not really effective as it was given a few days before the online teaching practicum began, and it resulted in students' confusion of what to do before starting their teaching. "The orientation from the university was done very nearly to the time of doing a practicum. Even on the D-day I was still thinking about what I had to do" (Student 11). This issue regarding the orientation might be the result of the swift transition to the current unexpected situation. Ongoing planning including the preparation of online courses, on-the-spot adjustment to online teaching and learning, and familiarization with new technologies was said by researchers (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) as the major factors. Consequently, these pre-service teachers had to experience some time of uncertainty in adjusting to the situation. Asking other people for more explanation, as Student 1 did, may be helpful, but when this is not clear to the individuals involved in the teaching practicum, support for the individual pre-service teacher will be less effective (Brooks; Chapel; Bullough & Draper in Malderez, 2009).

Regarding the teaching and learning process, classroom management was considered the most challenging experience by 64% of the subjects. This current study revealed that the challenges were related to students' characteristics that were mostly passive. The one-way communication made pre-service teachers unable to build relationships with their students effectively, while this relationship is considered as the base of successful teaching and learning process (Black in Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison, 2020). One of them said "It was difficult because most of the time the interaction between me and the students was done in group chat. Although it was a synchronous lesson, I barely got responses from them" (Student 6). Some pre-service teachers even needed to be supported by the mentor during this silent period to link the communication with the students. Student 7 said, "Every time I gave assignments to the students, they left me on read, so my mentor had to ask them to give responses". This was even harder for those using only chat platforms to monitor whether the students understood the instructions and the materials. "I was not able to know whether the students really understood the lessons or not. They did not give any questions related to the materials" (Student 3). A previous study by Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) reported a similar thing where pre-service teachers considered lack of interaction with students as the most negative and challenging aspect during online teaching placement. Although other researchers agree that teaching practicum is the opportunity to acquire more tacit skills of teaching (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005), such as classroom management, the result of this current study shows that the pre-service teachers did not experience classroom management as what it was supposed to be.

This issue even led to the teaching and learning process that was not conducive, and it resulted to the situation for teaching and learning that did not turn out as expected. The questionnaire response shows 35.1% of the participants experienced a non-conducive online classroom setting. Student 2 said, "The teaching practicum was not conducive because students did not give good responses and just be quiet." Furthermore, it is undeniable that another main factor affected this conduciveness was the lack of equipment and internet access needed to support online learning. "Students' limited access to gadgets and internet was the main reason when they came late or missed the lessons, and we as the teachers could not do anything when they said so" (Student 3). Student 4 also told us her experience "During the teaching practicum only a quarter of students who were able to join the Google Meet because they did not have stable internet and some did not have phones." This problem was in line with previous studies (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), where weak signal, limited internet data, and students not owning smartphones were the main problems that affected the teaching and learning process. It can be highlighted from these experiences that the smooth teaching and learning process during remote learning is impossible without students' participation as well as adequate supporting equipment.

Another aspect of the online practicum period that was difficult, according to the questionnaire response, was the assessment. This issue had been addressed by previous researchers (Flores & Gago, 2020) that the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning resulted in challenges not only in teaching methods but also assessment, including the strategies and tools. This research revealed the main cause was the pre-service teachers' inability to monitor students while doing their assignments. It took a long time for them to receive all finished assignments from their students. Many of them had to remind the students several times to submit their works, yet still, they found some students did not do it. Even pre-service teachers who chose "neither agree nor disagree" on the questionnaire reported the

same issue. According to Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), this may be caused by students' laziness, running out of internet quota, unstable internet connection, and not having their own smartphones. Moreover, students also did not do their works sincerely, for lots of them submitted assignments that were the same as other students. This cheating issue obviously made the pre-service teachers frustrated during this stage. "I got really emotionally drained when I found a lot of students sent me the same exact answers. They copied their friends' work, with no changes, with exact typos. When they just used their friends' answers, of course, I felt disappointed. I did not have a good time assessing their work. Once I found two exact answers I feel like pulling my hair out" (Student 6). This problem is similar to the study by Abduh (2021) as she reported that most teachers complained that online assessment allowed students to cheat either from each other or from online sources. In contrast, some participants who felt the assessment stage was not difficult acknowledged the support from their mentors in the assessment process.

Furthermore, 50.9% of the participants did not face any difficulty related to feedback provision to the students. It is the opposite of a previous study by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) that teachers had difficulty in giving feedback in real-time as the impact of late submission from the students and limited time allowed for the synchronous lesson. In this current study, pre-service teachers were helped by the use of WhatsApp. Limited time for each meeting did not prevent them from giving the students necessary feedback. They sent the feedback through personal chat after the class or after checking students' works.

Although the access to the platform used was limited, 57.9% of the participants still felt that the online teaching-practicum allowed them to utilize various instructional media to support teaching and learning. Some schools and mentors allowed pre-service teachers to explore media that can support online learning. "My mentor suggested me to make interesting teaching media. I created quite a lot of media such as PPT, video, module, games, and quizzes" (PST 4). In another case, participants who could not use media effectively explained that it was because of their and their students' unfamiliarity with the technology and media used for online learning. This situation required pre-service teachers not only to prepare for interesting media but also to ensure students' understanding of how to make use of it. "My knowledge about media for online teaching was inadequate. Even when I had prepared various media, the students also had difficulty accessing them because they never used it. I had to help those who were not used to having the media" (PST 9). A similar problem was also found in previous research by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) where many students have low digital literacy and ended up with difficulties in operating applications and platforms used for online learning. Thus, the teachers had to explain step-by-step how to use them correctly.

Teaching practicum also generally provides its challenge particularly in terms of self-confidence for pre-service teachers as supported by the results of the study conducted by Wessels, Trainin, Reeves, Catalano, and Deng (2017) that pre-service teachers were considerably less confident. However, the fact that online teaching-practicum did not serve pre-service teachers the opportunity to have face-to-face meetings with students in real life might mitigate the anxiety experienced by pre-service teachers. As table 2 shows, most of the participants (69.1%) were confident during online teaching practicum. Two participants reported that they were confident during online teaching practicum since they just had to teach in front of a monitor and were not required to meet in person. This is related to anxiety when meeting other people. "I am afraid of speaking in front of many people. I usually forget everything that I want to say when I have to do so, but in online teaching, I didn't have to meet them in person. It gave me the courage to teach, especially because it was my first time teaching" (PST 4). This issue has been discussed in a previous study (Woodcock et al., 2015) where the subjects considered e-learning increased their level of self-efficacy since they were in a psychologically safe environment. Besides, pre-service teachers' sufficient preparation contributed to their confidence during teaching practicum. "I had enough guidance from both supervisor and mentor, which was very helpful. I was also sure that I had created interesting media and I also had mastered the material" (PST 9).

Besides this confidence, the participants also acknowledged the important roles of mentors and supervisors in their teaching practicum. They found that the cooperation with supervisors and mentors was sufficient (68.5% and 84.2% respectively). The students saw this cooperation encouraged them to be motivated and do the best they could despite problems they faced. As what have mentioned in previous interview results, the pre-service teachers appreciated their mentors' guidance and encouragement throughout the practicum period such as in lesson planning, instructional media utilization, assessment process, and classroom management. PST 11 added, "My mentor was really caring. She did not only guide us on how to arrange the lesson plan but also on how to create the assessment scoring, items, etc.". This result is in line with Morrison and Sepulveda-Escobar (2020) where the participants saw the relationship, communication, and care from the mentors and supervisors as the key supportive actors in their online practicum experience. Without good communication

between the pre-service teachers and the mentors, there could be a possibility that the pre-service teachers might not enjoy their teaching and cope with the problems well.

Table 1. Perceptions of the Implementation of Online Teaching-Practicum

No	Statements	Responses		
		Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
1	Adequate duration for online teaching-practicum	63.2	17.5	19.3
2	Sufficient planning for the practicum	63.2	28.1	8.8
3	Sufficient orientation of implementation and roles in the practicum	33.3	47.4	19.3
4	No difficulty in managing the classroom during the practicum.	36.9	14.0	61.4
5	Conducive online teaching and learning process.	42.1	22.8	35.1
6	Ease of using various instructional media during the practicum	57.9	17.5	24.6
7	Sufficient cooperation with the supervisor	68.5	15.8	15.8
8	Sufficient cooperation with the mentor	84.2	7.0	8.8
9	No difficulty in doing assessment during the practicum	38.6	28.1	33.3
10	No difficulty in providing feedback during the practicum	50.9	29.8	19.3
11	Feeling confident during online teaching-practicum.	69.1	27.3	3.6

Improvements Perceived by Pre-Service Teachers

Online teaching practicum makes a distinctive impression on whether interest in teaching has deepened or not. As table 2 displays, most of the participants (45.5%) found that online teaching-practicum has deepened their interest in teaching. Not only because teaching in real life requires practice beforehand, but there is also a desire to provide a better learning experience for their future students. "It's interesting to learn more about how to develop the use of English among students. By doing teaching practicum in this difficult time, I am more interested in finding ways for the children to gain the knowledge they need without giving more burden to them" (PST 5). Another pre-service teacher reported how she found it exciting to build communication with students during the teaching and learning process. "I could see that I have got the utmost enjoyment when interacting with the students" (PST 8). In contrast, 20% of participants who reported that online teaching practicum did not contribute to teaching interest said that teaching methods, activities, and interaction with students were very limited. "I sent the PowerPoint and videos I made to WhatsApp group and that has nothing to do with the interest for teaching but just like giving assignments" (PST 12). The fact that being a teacher is not only about teaching in the classroom is also addressed by the participants. "I think the teaching activities were limited. Meanwhile, the expected teaching practicum is not only about teaching but about school life, academic issues, and technical problems" (PST 10). Regarding this problem, Caires, Almeida, and Viera (in Morrison & Sepulveda-Escobar, 2020) stated that it took a gradual and continuous process of involvement in the educational community and adaptation to the school environment to be integrated into the school ethos, and students who did teaching practicum from home did not get the opportunity. Nevertheless, 34.5% of the total participants chose "neither agree nor disagree". PST 7 stated that "It was my first teaching experience, but I felt that it was not that scary and I tried to interact with students. I even could not wait to prepare media for the following meetings. But again, it was quite a burden to prepare many things in a very short time."

Furthermore, online teaching-practicum was perceived positively by pre-service teachers (65.4%) as it helped them improve their ability in using teaching methods. Some researchers stated that pre-service teachers tended to develop a deep learning approach when they were engaged in a supportive and creative learning environment (Dejene et al., 2018). According to Morrison and Sepulveda-Escobar (2020), online teaching practicum made pre-service teachers work more autonomously since it was up to them to look for strategies to create new learning content. Hence, PST 9 stated "I did not use various methods, but during the online teaching-learning I learned how to adjust methods that facilitate students' characteristics. When I tried using a particular method, I could feel that the students did not pay attention to the lesson, and it would be hard to keep them focused". However,

14.5% of participants reported unimproved ability in using teaching methods, for they were allowed to use only particular platforms. "There was no improvement in methods because platform used was only WhatsApp. The school limited the use of Zoom for once in a month and I did not get that opportunity" (PST 3). Some participants stated that the teaching knowledge and skills that had planned to be developed in this online teaching-practicum were restricted. PST 12 told how teaching methods she had arranged were failed to use because of lack of interaction as the result of limited activities allowed by the school. "The method I planned required direct interaction with students but suddenly all was cancelled". Another student expressed difficulty in improving the teaching method used due to limitations from her mentor. "The mentor did not allow me to use other methods. She allowed me to use only the methods that she usually implemented while teaching. This was such a disadvantage since I could not make use of the teaching scenario that I had prepared for online learning" (PST 1). The problem faced by the participant here can be related to what Korthagen (2001) called 'institutional barriers' that are sometimes hard to deal with. The willingness of teachers, in this case the pre-service teachers, to adapt to new teaching methods needs to involve all staff within the subject or program to agree on the plan.

Despite not being able to teach face-to-face due to pandemic, most of the participants (94.5%) agreed that online teaching practicum helped them to get new ideas on teaching. Online teaching practicum is expected to help pre-service teachers find effective ways to interact with and teach students online. There were various comments toward developing new ideas on teaching in this pandemic time. Some participants perceived the improvement of ideas on various platforms and interactive media that could be utilized to support online learning. "The best part about online teaching practicum is that you can find and explore new things with fun and creative online education platform and services. I encountered so many useful teaching aids like Nearpod and Flipgrid which I think may increase the students and teacher interaction during school from home" (PST 6). Apart from that, online teaching-practicum also required pre-service teachers to find ways that can help them use the appropriate strategies of teaching. "The limited condition made me think about what kind of strategy was suitable in online teaching and succeed to make students understand the lesson well" (PST 10). Besides, another participant realized how essential the teacher-student relationship in the teaching and learning process was. "I realized that maintaining communication with students is vital for online learning. I also learned how using English all the time would lead to misunderstanding between me and the students" (PST 9). These issues had been addressed by previous researchers (Varela and Desiderio, 2020) that teacher education programs were encouraged to view this experience as something that could enhance the use of technological resources and related pedagogical strategies. They explained that this new educational landscape brings new meaning to the concept of digital learners.

Online teaching practicum also influenced the way pre-service teachers see themselves for the future profession where 56.4% of the participants agreed that online teaching practicum has prepared them to be good English teachers. "The practicum has made me prepared enough by giving ideas of how a teacher teaches and how a teacher must have a strong determination to face different characteristics of student" (PST 9). Another student gave her opinion on how her creativity has trained and that it is useful for her future profession as a teacher. "We were developed to be more creative in the online classroom. The ideas had to be out of the box, and this process allowed me to make something creative such as improving strategies and media. This is the first step that prepared me to be a good teacher" (PST 2). On the other hand, 12.7% of participants argued that there were essential elements of teaching that they could not achieve. "There are numbers of aspects to be a good teacher, such as managing the class and building interaction with students. The problem was that I was not able to learn these aspects during the online practicum since the platform used was only WhatsApp. So many things I could not reach to improve myself" (PST 1). In addition, other criteria of a good teacher perceived by the participants and the length of practicum time were also mentioned. "It was absolutely a fruitful teaching experience, but a one and a half month of online teaching practicum was not enough to prepare you to be a teacher. I think a good teacher is someone who is not only capable to educate others but also giving a good example to them morally, ethically, and spiritually" (PST 6). These opinions are in line with the study conducted by Varela and Desiderio (2020) where some participants argue that their teaching practicum was cut short. They were concerned that future employers would not find them fit for a position as a teacher due to the lack of experience in the classroom. Thus, they felt that they were not growing as pre-service teachers.

Apart from that, the rest of the participants (30.9%) had some reasons why they were not sure about this issue. From the interview, one participant acknowledged the importance of the practicum but also explained how their experience might be not relevant to the situation in the future. "Online teaching-practicum had a purpose to prepare us for real teaching, but the preparation and reality were different. We had prepared for offline learning, but then we had to teach online. We practiced online, but there will be a possibility we will teach offline, which means that we lack 'real' teaching experience" (PST 5). She also had the same opinion with PST 6 that they were supposed to accustom the students

with positive attitudes, and it could not be accomplished throughout the online teaching-practicum period. "Through online learning, it was like just giving tasks, while actually, we had to teach the students about attitude".

Table 2. Pre-service Teachers' Perceived Improvements

No	Statements Online teaching-practicum has...	Responses		
		Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
1	deepened my interest in teaching.	45.5	34.5	20
2	equipped me with the necessary teaching skills.	63.6	25.5	10.9
3	helped me improving teaching knowledge.	78.1	16.4	5.5
4	helped me improving the use of teaching methods.	65.4	20.0	14.5
5	developed my lesson-planning skills.	72.7	18.2	9.1
6	established foundation for my future profession.	56.4	29.1	14.5
7	improved my teaching experience.	87.3	9.1	3.5
8	helped me get new ideas on teaching.	94.5	5.5	0
9	prepared me enough to be a good English teacher.	56.4	30.9	12.7

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study revealed perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers of online teaching-practicum during COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show how pre-service teachers had various perceptions of the practicum as they could see it as a challenging process and a process to improve in certain aspects. In the practicum, the pre-service teachers encountered several challenges at the beginning of the program where they were confused about insufficient orientation as the result of the sudden transition to fully online learning. From all aspects regarding the teaching process, classroom management got the most negative responses from pre-service teachers. Limited contact with students due to lack of participation, supporting facilities, internet access, and teaching and learning platform was perceived by many participants in negative ways as it was experienced to be interrelated to other aspects of teaching. In the assessment process, this problem even led to issues of cheating and late submission. With various challenges, however, the pre-service teachers were still confident and motivated by the smooth cooperation with mentors and supervisors. The pre-service teachers also found themselves improved in their skills to adjust to appropriate methods, and they had positive perception towards the practicum as it allowed them to get new ideas on teaching, improve teaching knowledge and teaching experience, and develop lesson-planning skills. Almost half of the pre-service teachers built interest in teaching during the period, leaving some others uncertain. The findings also indicate how some experiences with the practicum implementation were interrelated and finally contributed to pre-service teachers' perceptions of whether the online teaching-practicum established the foundation for their future profession as well as prepared them to be good English teachers. Based on these findings, a further study focusing on specific issues on online learning during pandemic or post-pandemic such as in classroom management and assessment can be conducted. Integrating some practices for online teaching in related preparation courses may be considered by related parties for an unexpected situation in the future as well as preparing students to be more equipped with necessary skills for online teaching and learning.

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