Teacher Education in Turkey in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Experiences of the Pre-Service Teachers about the Online Teaching Practice

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyse the experience of the pre-service teachers about teaching practice courses delivered through distance education during the Covid-19 process. The study is designed as an interpretive research. The participants of the study were selected through the convenience sampling technique. The participants are 72 pre-service teachers attending the pedagogical formation program at Afyon Kocatepe University during the academic year 2020-2021. The data of the study were collected using a questionnaired with seven open-ended items which was developed by the authors. The data collected were examined through the descriptive analysis. The findings of the study indicate that pre-service teachers define distance education educationally and spatially as the teaching practice course given through distance education. They stated that they improved themselves in terms of professional and technological environment and that they liked the feature of screen sharing in the process. They also added that they mostly used the question-answer method in the course. In addition, it is found that teachers should include further methods to ensure active participation of students during the online courses. The participants reported some problems mostly caused by the students, and they offered various suggestions for the solution of these problems.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 virus, which emerged in Wuhan, China at the end of December 2019 and at the beginning of January 2020, has affected the whole world. In order to reduce deaths and reduce the rate of progression of the virus, countries have taken some measures. In line with these measures, face-to-face education could not be carried out in educational institutions and distance education systems became widespread. The concept of distance education refers to the efforts that enable individuals who are geographically far away to reach education (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011). However, it is a concept that develops as the technology used develops, in other words, that technology plays a decisive role (Bozkurt, 2017). Distance education does not require the teacher and learner to come together and eliminates the time and transportation fees spent to come together in the same place and time, as well as preventing health problems as in the Covid-19 global pandemic (Davis, Gought & Taylor, 2019). Therefore distance education activities have started to be implemented at all levels of education in Turkey as well as in many countries. With the transition to distance education in universities, university students have started to take both theoretical and applied courses using online methods. In addition to the distance education at the education faculties, the teaching practice courses that are carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education have also been conducted through the distance education systems. Therefore, the pre-service teachers participated in the online lecturing processes via the communication network programs of the Ministry of National Education within the framework of the teaching practice courses. This course is planned for 12 weeks. They joined the observation of the teaching process for three weeks. Then as stated in the Directive Regarding the Teaching Practice to be performed by the Pre-service Teachers in Education Institutions affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, they carried out the teaching processes in a way to cover all the duties and responsibilities required by the teaching profession. Teaching practice courses are carried out in the schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education with a focus on practice and aim to provide pre-service teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes about the teaching profession. For this reason, these courses are extremely important in terms of teacher training. The teaching practice courses are the most remarkable experience for a trainee in a teacher preparation program (Krause, Douglas, Lynch & Kesselring, 2018). Research suggests that these courses play a decisive role in the early professional development of the pre-service teachers (Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012). The importance of teaching practice at schools in pre-service teacher training programs is widely recognized. Throughout Europe, there is a trend towards the remodeling of the Initial Teacher Education to enable pre-service teachers to learn in school settings, to be able to deliver courses, to spend more time at schools and to receive much stronger support in courses (Kidd & Murray, 2020).

There are some studies on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education. These studies mostly deal with the views of the pre-service and in-service teachers, parents and students about the distance education activities and the problems they come across in the process (Assante, & Candel, 2020; İmamoğlu & İmamoğlu, 2020; Karakuş, Ucuzsatar, Karacaoğlu, Esendemir, & Bayraktar, 2020; Kaynar, Kurnaz, Doğrukök, & Barışık, 2020). However, the experience of the pre-service teachers in the online courses on teaching practice has not been much studied. As stated above, these courses are very crucial for all pre-service teachers. The starting point of the study is to reveal the potentially changing experience of the pre-service teachers as a result of the distance education concerning the teaching practice courses. The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding teaching practice courses conducted through distance education in the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is designed using the basic interpretative research design, which examines how people interpret their experiences and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Merriam, 2002), and the aim of the study is to uncover the opinions of pre-service teachers about their experiences concerning the teaching practice course which was delivered through distance education during Covid-19.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the study are 72 pre-service teachers attending pedagogical formation courses at Afyon Kocatepe University during the academic year of 2020-2021. Of them 45 were female and 27 male. They were chosen using the convenience sampling which is one of the non-random sampling techniques. When using the convenience sampling technique, the potential participants are asked whether they are eligible to participate for the study or a sample of individuals who are easy to access is formed (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2015).

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

In the study, a questionnaire form consisting of seven open-ended items was employed in order to understand the experiences of the pre-service teachers about the teaching practice courses which was delivered through the distance education process. During the development of the questionnaire, the relevant studies were reviewed to find suitable items. The draft questionnaire form was examined by two specialists in order to ensure internal validity. Based on the feedback the necessary corrections were made, and the questionnaire was finalized.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were examined using the descriptive analysis. The goal of the descriptive analysis is to present the interpretations of the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The questionnaire forms administered were coded and each response was read. In order to establish the reliability of the study the data were analysed separately by the authors and mutually agreed and disagreed points were discussed. Additionally based on the answers, the themes were organized, and an interview coding key was developed. An expert reviewed the interview texts and interview coding key. The markings made by the authors and the expert on the interview coding key were compared. The reliability coefficient was found using the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and it was found to be 90.2%.

Based on the responses of the participants themes and subthemes were developed for each item. In the discussion of these themes and subthemes direct quotations from the reports of the participants are given with the codes assigned to the participants.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The findings indicate that the views of the pre-service teachers about the teaching practice course that they took through distance education are grouped under seven themes which contain some subthemes. It is seen that there are five themes about the teaching practice course during the distance education. Table 1 shows the views of the participants about the distance education.

Table 1. *Views of the Participants about the Distance Education*

Distance education	Frequency
Educational dimension	91
Student-centered	32
Continuation of teaching and learning process	23
Not productive courses	10
Equal opportunity	7
Equal provision of education	5
Supporting the life-long learning	5
Using varied teaching materials	3
Increased student responsibility	3
Being an interesting teaching medium	3
Spatial dimension	80
Being independent of time and space	39
Easy access	27
Addressing higher number of students	14
Technological dimension	45
Courses based on technology	29
Being a virtual setting	12
Improving the ability to employ technology	4
Economical dimension	18
Being economical	16
Time saving	2
Affective dimension	7
Lack of communication	4
Less interactional	2
Not being able to reflect the emotions	1

As can be seen in Table 1 the views of the participants about the distance education produce five themes, namely educational dimension, spatial dimension, technological dimension, economical dimension and affective dimension. However, the most frequently emphasized dimension is that of educational in which the participants stressed the points of distance education such as being student-centered, continuation of teaching and learning process, Not productive courses, equal opportunity and the support for life-long education. For instance, some participants emphasized the student-centered dimension of the distance education as follows: *"Distance education is student-centered. The students have an opportunity to follow the lessons later whenever they want. Because they may have not been available during class time, or there can be problems with Internet access."* (P8); "*The main feature of this process is that education is provided in a student-centered manner. The system has achieved its aim both in terms of continuing education and with the feature of providing the students with an opportunity to watch the lessons again."* (P44). Some other participants emphasized the continuation of education through this medium as follows: "*It is possible to say that distance education is important in terms of not stopping education."* (P7). *"Individuals continue their education through distance education."* (P9).

There are some participants who stated that courses through distance education are not productive: "*I think it is more effective to deliver courses in a face to face manner and to interact in education."* (P21); "*I think distance education is not as effective as face-to-face education.…*" (P63). One of the participants stated that teaching practice courses given through distance education are not useful for them: "*Although distance education is a good system, it cannot replace face-to-face communication. This complicates the experience that we as pre-service teachers will get*." (P59).

It is seen that the pre-service teachers also emphasized the spatial dimension of distance education in terms of being independent from time and place, being easily accessible and providing access to a wider audience. One of these participants stated "*Students can study in any environment*

where the internet is provided, regardless of time and place." (P72). Another participant reported both being independent of time and space as well as being easily accessible as follows: "*Distance education, which does not require teachers and students to come to another place from where they are, is a method that provides interactive communication through information technologies.*" (P17).

In addition, it is also found that the pre-service teachers defined distance education as a lesson conducted in a virtual environment by using technological tools and emphasized the technological aspect of this type of education in terms of developing the ability of individuals to use technology effectively. Some of the related reports by the participants are as follows: "*distance education is a method that provides interactive communication through information technologies.*" (P17); "*It allows the teacher to deliver the lessons a little more technologically.*" (P42).

The pre-service teachers tried to define the distance education in terms of affective outcomes by stating that there is little communication and interaction with students and that emotions are not reflected in distance education courses. The related statements of the participants are given as follows: "*Distance education is actually a one-sided form of communication where emotions are not reflected in the lessons. Communication is incomplete and broken*." (P16) and "*Students have problems in understanding the topics because they cannot be in constant communication with us. This is the disadvantage of distance education.*" (P72).

Table 2 presents the views of the participants about the contributions of the teaching practice course delivered through distance education.

Table 2. *Contributions of the Teaching Practice Course Delivered through Distance Education to the Pre-Service Teachers*

Contributions of the teaching practice course to the pre-service teachers	f
Improvement of teaching profession	66
Communicative skills of students	25
Active participation by the students	10
Improvement of lecturing style	15
Improvement of teaching style	7
Improvement of material development	5
Developing different ideas	4
Using technology	61
Improvement of technology use	35
Learning about distance education	18
Having experience on distance education	5
Recognition of the necessity of updating information on technology	3
Improvement of self-confidence	57
Being able to deliver courses easily	33
Establishment of self confidence	24

As can be seen in Table 2 the of the participants about the contributions of the teaching practice course delivered through distance education are grouped under three categories: professional development, the use of technology and self-confidence.

The pre-service teachers stated that the teaching practice course through distance education contributed their professional skills. They argued that even their effective communication skills with students improved, that they carried out activities to ensure active participation of the students in the lessons, that their lecturing skills were improved and learned about the effective learning and teaching process. They also added that their material development skills increased. Concerning communication skills one of the participants stated "*I learned how to communicate with our students.*" (P56). In regard to the improvement of lecturing style one participant argued "*While lecturing, I made statements in such a way that the students were not bored as much as possible and for this purpose, I ensure that the*

students participate in the lesson through the using examples from daily life." (P64) and "*It contributed to me on how to ensure the tone of voice and active participation during the lecture.*" (P6). Reporting various contributions of the course one participant, P48, stated "*First of all, I think this course has contributed a lot to me professionally. I can say that I learned about many things such as what to do and what not to do during a lecture, proper attitude towards the student, well-adjusted tone of voice and the ways to keep students active in the lesson.*"

The participants reported that the teaching practice course delivered through the distance education contributed their use of technology. The majority of them stated that the courses through the distance education improved their skills to use technology. Some of the related direct quotations are as follows: "*On this occasion, we learned more quickly the necessary process we need to use while lecturing through distance education.*" (P56) and "*Through the distance education system, I learned to control many things at the same time while lecturing. Compared to a regular classroom environment, distance lecturing has greatly contributed to my learning how to motivate students in distance education lessons, both by controlling the participation of students, controlling the duration of classes and creating virtual classes for class participation.*" (P64).

Some of them also stated that the distance education courses contributed to their teaching skills. They stated that thanks to the teaching practice lesson, they were able to lecture more comfortably over time, and their self-confidence in lecturing improved. The related direct quotations are given as follows: "*..I started teaching more comfortably and really started to feel myself like a real teacher. It has been a great experience for me.*" (P32) and *"Over time, my excitement diminished with my experience and I gradually gained experience. Over time, my self-confidence also increased and I started lecturing more comfortably."* (P57).

Table 3 presents the views of the participants about the positive dimension concerning the teaching practice courses through distance education.

Table 3. *Views of the participants about the positive dimension concerning the teaching practice courses through distance education*

Positive dimensions	f
System /Technology	51
Screen sharing	17
Efficient use of technology	10
Using audio visual materials in the courses	10
Presentations with visuals	6
Being easy	6
Time management	2
Affective	35
Less exciting	14
More comfortable lecture environment	9
As serious as face-to-face courses	5
Comfortable for students	4
Not liking online courses	3
Teaching and learning process	15
Easier classroom management	4
Answering the questions one by one	4
Using activities to improve student participation	4
Reaccessing the course materials	3

Table 3 shows that for the participants there are three majot groups of positive dimensions of the online courses: system/technology, affective and teaching-learning process.

The participants mostly liked system-related characteristics of the distance education such as screen sharing, the efficient use of technology, the use of the audio-visual materials in the courses and supporting the presentations with visuals. The related reports of the participants are as follows: "*I liked the screen sharing feature the most. Thanks to this feature, I was able to easily reflect my presentation about the topics to my students during my courses and have them watch videos.*" (P17). The other related direct quotations are as follows: *"While lecturing, we had the opportunity to benefit from photographs, pictures and images.*" (P64) and "*I think the lesson is actually delivered more efficiently due to the more active use of different visuals, activities and animations, thanks to distance education."* (P66).

They also praised the affective dimensions of the distance education. They stated that they were less excited during the courses, lectured more comfortably, the education was serious as face-to-face education, and the students were more comfortable during the distance education process. The related reports are given as follows: "*When we are going to teach in face-to-face education, maybe too much excitement, stress, etc. I could have experienced situations, but I experienced these feelings in a reduced form in distance education.*" (P4) and "*It enabled me to create a more stress-free and self-confident environment during the lessons as I taught during the internship in distance education. I can say that the stress and difficulties I would have in face-to-face education decreased a little during this process."* (P4). The reports of the participants stressing that these courses were also serious as face-to-face courses are as follows: *"I liked the teaching practice course via distance education as it provides an effective lesson just like in the classroom thanks to the zoom program."* (P48) and *"I can say that distance education provides a more serious educational environment by creating the feeling of being at a school with distance education."* (P57).

The participants also emphasized that the classroom management is much easier in the learning and teaching process in distance education, that students answer each of the questions and can easily access course documents and that they can develop different activities. The related direct quotations are as follows: "*Some of the negative situations experienced in classrooms spontaneously disappeared in the distance education. For example, the students did not joke or fight with each other during the lessons. Thus, classroom management became easy."* (P70).

Table 4 shows the activities used by the participants in the teaching practice course given through the distance education.

Table 4. Activities used by the Participants in the Teaching Practice Course Given through the Distance Education

Activities by the pre-service teachers	f
Teaching and learning process	*106*
Question-answer sessions	44
Watching videos	19
Presentations with visuals	16
Examples from daily life	8
Listening to poems	7
Using various materials	6
Digital activities	4
Listening to music	2
Communication skills	15
Fun lessons	6
Motivation	3
Cheerfulness	3
Effective use of voice tone	3
Assessment	3
Using conventional student assessment methods	3

As can be seen in Table 4 the activities used by the participants in the distance teaching practice course are grouped into three themes: teaching and learning processes, communication skills and assessment. It is found that the participants mostly used question-answer sessions. It is also found that they had students watch videos, used presentations supported by visuals and developed a connection between mathematics and daily life. Some of the participants reported that they developed materials and employed digital activities. In addition, poem performances and music were also used as teaching activities. The related reports by the participants are given as follows: "*In my lectures, I first used materials suitable for the learning process in order to attract the students' attention to the lesson.*" (P5)*;* "*I designed different materials regarding the learning outcomes using colored cardboard. I attempt to attract the students' attention using the visual materials.*" (P21); "*I take care to prepare interesting slides. I add cartoons or images to the slides.*" (P12); "*I wanted my students to read poems. I also read poems at the beginning of the courses or added poems to my presentations to attract their attention.*" (P22); "*..With the animated quiz contest covering the content of the lesson, I prevented students from leaving the lesson and refreshed their knowledge in an entertaining manner*." (P57).

Concerning the communication skills the participants argued that they delivered the courses in an interesting way not to make the courses boring, motivated the students, were cheerful and used their voice tone in an effective way. The related direct quotation is given as follows: "*While lecturing, our diction, speaking style, tone of voice and way of addressing rather than gestures and gestures attract more attention when we consider the situation we are in. I think that the lessons in the form of cheerful and mutual conversation are more attractive and useful for both parties.*" (P14).

Very few participants reported that thy used the conventional student assessment methods. The reports of the participants in this regard are as follows: "*I enable students to answer the items by organizing activities such as tests and matching exercises.*" (P18) and "*At the end of the lesson, I prepared many activities in the form of puzzles, fill in the blanks exercises, multiple choice items and question-answer sessions.*" (P20).

Table 5 presents the tasks of the pre-service teachers in the teaching practice course delivered via distance education. As can be seen in Table 5 the tasks of the pre-service teachers in the teaching practice course delivered via distance education are grouped into three themes: roles related to the teaching and learning process, the use of materials and communication skills.

The participants particularly mentioned various roles of teachers in regard to the learning and teaching process. The necessary steps to ensure the active participation of students in the lessons are seen as the most important task. In order to ensure the participation of the student in the lesson, the most expressed points are that the teachers should deliver the lessons to attract the attention of the students, constantly ask questions during the lessons, provide clear and entertaining lectures and do activities. The related direct quotations are as follows: "*The teachers' tone of voice and active expression are very important for an effective teaching ... Another task is to activate the students. An effective teaching environment can be created by giving every student a voice or using auxiliary materials that may be of their interest.*" (P6) and "*I think we should deliver the lessons by asking questions to the students and making them active participants of the courses.*" (P10). In addition, the participants also stated that teachers should evaluate student progress, give them homework, and be able to manage time efficiently.

Table 5. *Tasks of the pre-Service Teachers in the Teaching Practice Course Delivered via Distance Education*

Tasks	f
Roles related to the teaching-learning process	112
Active participation of the students	27
attracting the attention of the students	22
Asking questions and discussion	14
Clear lecturing	11
Fun lecturing	8
Activities	8
Assessments	6
Assignments	6
Time management	4
Using correct voice tone	2
Giving feedback	2
Less assignments	2
Use of materials	60
Use of digital and rich materials	18
Completing the preparation before the courses	15
Using interesting materials	14
Having knowledge on technology	13
Communication skills	51
Continuous communication	17
Being interested in students (friendly / warm / understanding)	16
Motivating students	11
Empathy	4
Being aware of the individual differences	3

Concerning the material use they stated that the tasks included the use of digital, interesting and rich materials, completion of the preparation before the course and having information on technology. The related reports are as follows: "*In order to attract student attention different materials should be employed.*" (P58) and "*We should use different materials such as animation and activities that will increase student' interest in the lesson.*" (P66). The other direct quotation in this regard is as follows: *"The teacher needs to be prepared very well and make preparations in the distance education system before the lesson. The material needs to be abundant because the student may be bored and become uninterested in the course."* (P51).

In regard to the theme of communication skills, the participants stated characteristics such as teachers' effective communication with students, being interested and understanding, motivating them, empathizing with them, and paying attention to individual differences. For instance, one participant, P7, reported the following: "*The teachers should not just teach. They should understand the students. Because this difficult process is not easy, so the information given to the students should be simple and understandable as well as motivating speeches should be made...*"

Table 6 show the frequency of the views of the participants concerning the problems they experienced in the teaching practice courses delivered via distance education. Table 6 shows that the problems expressed by the participants experienced during the teaching practice courses are grouped into four categories: problems related to students and themselves, system and home environment.

Table 6. *Problems the Participants Experienced in the Teaching Practice Courses Delivered via Distance Education*

Problems	f
Student-related problems	*71*
Not active participation	28
Closing videos and microphones	11
Not attending classes	10
Student apathy and unwillingness	7
Not having microphones	5
Students' not coming to class on time	4
Not doing homework	3
Lack of Internet connection	3
Problems related to pre-service teachers	33
Internet connection	14
Lack of computer	6
Lack of eye contact	6
Difficulty related to Covid 19	2
Not seeing all students	2
Lack of microphone	2
Insufficient knowledge on technology	1
System-related problems	31
Voice interruptions	17
Not being competent concerning the program (zoom)	5
Use of foreign language in the program	3
Problems in logging into the program	3
Not using the program in an efficient way (due to teachers' occupation with course)	2
Time constraints in the program	1
Problems related to home environment	5
Noise	5

As can be seen in Table 6 the most frequently expressed problems are related to the students: students' not actively participation in the class, having their cameras turned off, not coming to the class / not being able to come to the class and student indifference / reluctance. In addition, the other problems are as follows: some students do not have microphones, do not enter the class on time, do not do homework and internet connections. The related reports are given as follows: "*In contrast to the regular classrooms and school environment, students have more excuses and avoidance of lessons in distance education. The student we asked questions is leaving the lesson for fear of not being able to answer the question.*" (P7); "*Sometimes I had to teach only one student and sometimes to ourselves.*" (P29) and "*Most of the students either wake up or sleep during class time or they are tired because of working in the field. Some students, on the other hand, had the internet problem, unfortunately, and therefore, they cannot answer the questions we asked to them; we had problems on the internet due to the infrastructure and the places they were in.*" (P64).

The pre-service teachers also stated that they had problems with the internet connection; they did not have computers and microphones and remarked that they had the problems caused by the system. The other problems are stated as the lack of eye contact with students and experiencing hard Covid 19 illness. For instance, one participant, P38, reported "*When I was going to start my full lecture process, I got the Covid-19 and it was a bit heavy, I do not think it was not very efficient because I could not fully recover.*"

Among the system-related problems mentioned include the interruption of the voices of both students and pre-service teachers during the lesson, not understanding the distance education

program used, having problems in entering into the problem and not being able to use the program effectively and insufficient time provided by the program. One participant, P25, stated "*I had a voice problem originating from my computer while lecturing. I could not do that lesson and had to postpone it.*"

A few participants also stated that they experienced the problem due to the home environment being noisy during the lesson. The views of the participant P69 are as follows: "*The home environment was not appropriate for lecturing.*"

The suggestions of the participants are given in Table 7 concerning the teaching practice course delivered via the distance education.

Table 7. *Suggestions of the Participants about the Teaching Practice Course Delivered via the Distance Education*

Suggestions	Frequency
Technology	109
Widespread Internet connection	20
Technological devices	19
Free Internet service	17
Faster Internet connection	16
System capacity	14
Information about technology	9
Open videos	7
Reaccessing the courses missed	5
Free use of videos and microphones	2

The participants offered suggestions addressing the technological dimensions. Those who had limited access to technological resources in the distance education process mostly made suggestions on this issue. Their suggestions include the expansion of the internet network, increase of its speed and making it free, provision of the technological equipment support, and having higher capacity distance education system. Some of the related reports by the participants are as follows: "*No student has the same condition in distance education. There should be no internet connection problems, and free internet service should be provided. Students and teachers in need should be provided with equipment such as computers and tablets, and the internet infrastructure should be improved*." (P49) and "*Providing adequate infrastructure as a priority will eliminate technological problems.*" (P50).

Some participants, on the other hand, argued that students should not be forced to turn on their videos during the online courses. The related direct quotations are given as follows:

" ..*Students whose environment is suitable should be asked to turn on their cameras. Thus, lessons can be given as in face-to-face education, and teaching may become more efficient.*" (P65) and "*Since the family environment is not the same for everyone while listening to the lesson. Therefore, teachers should not oblige students to turn on their videos.*" (P16).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, it is aimed to reveal the experiences of the pre-service teachers regarding the teaching practice courses conducted through distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic process based on their views. This study is significant in that it systematically evaluates the effectiveness of this course and helps to develop contingency plans for similar situations in the future. Dyment and Downing (2020) point out that there are many studies on online teacher training (pre-service) before the pandemic as a result of their systematic review of the studies carried out between 2012 and 2017 on online pre-service teacher education.

However, they recommend conducting more research on the effectiveness of online teacher training using a more strategic, consistent and collaborative approach. Velle, Newman, Montgomery and Hyatt (2020) provided examples showing that distance education practices are beneficial in the training of future teachers and make a serious assessment of how theory and new forms of practice can be combined more successfully in the future.

The findings of the study indicate that the participants correctly define distance education with conceptually different dimensions. In addition, it is seen that they have positive opinions about the distance education stating that it is the most appropriate education during the pandemic period. They expressed the educational, spatial, technological, economic and emotional dimensions of distance education. They mostly emphasized the educational aspect of distance education, and stated that distance education is student-centered, enabling the education to continue, providing equal opportunities and supporting lifelong learning. The previous findings also show that pre-service teachers generally offer correct concepts about the distance education (Kırtak Ad, 2020), and they reported that although there are some problems, distance education is the most appropriate choice during the pandemic period (Mohalik & Sahoo, 2020; Halitoğlu, 2021). There are participants who also explain distance education with its spatial dimension in terms of being independent from time and place, being easily accessible and providing access to a wider audience. By removing the space and time limitations, distance education has ensured that education is carried out from anywhere with Internet access (Djalilova, 2020) and the lessons are recorded which can be followed by students later at an available time, and the students are in a position to manage themselves (Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj & Sethi 2020). In addition, the pre-service teachers discussed the technological dimension of distance education in terms of improving their ability to use technology effectively. Few of the participants tried to define distance education with its emotional dimension, stating that there was little communication and interaction with students and that emotions were not reflected in online courses. In some studies, the communication and interaction aspects of distance education have been emphasized. For example, Altun Ekiz (2020) found that university students are not satisfied with limited interaction in distance education processes. Demirbilek (2021) concluded that university students complained about communication issues during the distance education process.

According to the views of the participants, the teaching practice course given through distance education contributed to them mostly in terms of professional skills, technological skills and self-confidence. It is found that the participants improved in establishing effective communication with students, creating an effective learning-teaching process and developing materials. In addition, almost all of them emphasized that their skills and self-confidence improved in distance education programs over time. As a positive result of the pandemic process, the pre-service teachers learned how to teach in an online teaching setting which is a valuable and needed skill in today's world. The pre-service teachers cooperated with the counselors in this regard. Although teaching is done through video and audio conferencing, it has a significant impact on the development of the pre-service teachers' professional skills. As many participants stated in the online course evaluation questionnaires, their identity as teachers and their self-efficacy as future teachers have improved (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). In the study conducted by Altuntaş, Başaran, Özeke & Yılmaz (2020), the undergraduate students stated that they found distance education useful during the pandemic process as it technically improved their skills. During this extraordinary period, many pre-service teachers

wanted to learn something from their counselors. There are a number of options such as choosing to learn / develop first-hand skills that they were not expected to use in the previous teaching practice lessons. These include: communicating with and encouraging and supporting students virtually; developing relationships with students in a virtual environment and learning new online digital platforms (Nuland, Mandzuk, Petrick & Cooper, 2020). However, in some studies, it is also reported that distance education processes cause pre-service teachers to improve themselves and therefore, they feel themselves inadequate in the fields of professional development (Eti & Karaduman, 2020; Lema, García, Martín & Calvo, 2020).

In regard to the distance education teaching practice lesson, the pre-service teachers stated that they liked features such as screen sharing, using technology effectively, using audio-visual elements in the learning teaching process, and supporting the presentations with visuals. They stated that they were less excited in the teaching practice lesson in distance education that they lectured more comfortably, that the education was serious as it is face-to-face, and that the students were also more comfortable. In the research by Koç (2020), pre-service teachers stated that students felt more comfortable in distance education lessons and expressed themselves better in asking and answering questions.

Concerning the activities of the participants in the teaching practice courses delivered via distance education, it is found that the pre-service teachers mostly used the question-answer method in the teaching and learning processes, employed videos related to the subject matter, included visual elements in their presentations, and provided examples about the topics by establishing connections between topics and daily life. In addition, some pre-service teachers stated that they developed materials and included digital applications in the lessons. In the study conducted by Koç (2020) the pre-service teachers mostly used visual and technology-based content such as slides, videos, short films and animation in the teaching practice course. It is found that the participants focus on the materials that they would use to teach the course content regardless of the distance education processes in the distance education activities employed in the emergencies. However, they might have employed the distance education processes in such cases. The lack of necessary technical and professional knowledge can be cited as the reason for it. Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guardia and Koole (2020) stress the necessity of the studies related to infrastructure aimed at improving the learner-teacher interaction in distance education processes. Jackson and Jones (2019) emphasize that distance education is significantly different from face-to-face education practice and therefore, requires different types of teacher training. They recommend that in teacher training programs there should be more content related to distance education and learning. These may include the management of the online classrooms, converting teaching environment into an online environment, motivating students, and online teaching designs.

The participants considered their basic teaching roles in the distance education process as material usage, communication skills, personal characteristics and the knowledge of subject matter. The participants particularly stated that teachers have many roles in learning and teaching processes of the distance education. For them the most important task is to ensure that students participate actively in the lesson, especially during the live lessons. In order to ensure student participation in the courses, the teachers should teach the courses in a way that attracts the attention of the students, constantly asking questions during the lessons, making a clear, understandable and entertaining narration and activities. The

participants reported the tasks of teachers in the process such as using the most digital / rich, interesting materials in the lessons, logging in before the lesson and completing the preparations, and having the technology knowledge. Toprakçı and Ersoy (2008) also argue that in regard to the distance learning, the role of the teacher concerning the material development has changed, and material development has become a joint task of both the teachers and the content developers.

The pre-service teachers stated that they experienced problems arising from the students, themselves, the system and the course environment in the teaching practice course which was delivered through the distance education. It is found that the most common problem in distance education for them is the problems caused by students as follows: students do not actively participate in the classes, the videos of the students are turned off, the students do not attend the classes, and they are indifferent and unwilling to take part in the courses. Distance education significantly limits the communication between students and teachers (Başaran, Doğan, Karaoğlu & Şahin, 2020; Demirbilek, 2021; Djalilova, 2020; Ünal & Bulunuz, 2020). It is reported that student attendance to the courses in distance education is at lower levels (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020; Flores & Gago, 2020; Genç, 2020). Moorhouse (2020) states that a small number of students attend classes which are delivered through the distance education and that unlike face-to-face class sessions, students rarely speak and prefer the text chat function instead.

In addition, the participants also reported other system-related problems such as students' lack of microphones, not attending the class on time, not doing homework and disconnection of internet. They stated that they had problems with the internet connection, that they did not have computers and microphones, which they considered as the problems caused by the system. The finding of the present study that one of the major problems is related to the Internet problems has also been reported in previous studies (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020; Flores & Gago, 2020; Hebebci, Bertiz & Alan, 2020; Karakuş et. al. 2020; Koç, 2020; Mohalik & Sahoo, 2020; Ünal & Bulunuz, 2020).

Participants offered several suggestions such as expanding the Internet network, increasing the speed of the Internet and making the Internet free, providing technological tools and equipment support, and increasing the capacity of the distance education system used. The finding that distance education should be much more influential and high-quality is consistent with the previous findings (Gewin, 2020; Koç, 2020). In this study, the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding the teaching practice courses, which has an important place in teacher training, through distance education are uncovered. The findings obtained from the study show that distance education has many contributions to pre-service teachers' gaining experience on teaching. However, given that the pre-service teachers employed the teaching methods and techniques that have been used in regular courses, they should be given on which teaching methods and techniques can be used for effective use of distance education and how to use these methods and techniques in the teacher training programs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Both the first and second authors contributed equally to all processes such as data collection, analysis, interpretation, discussion and revision.

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