

A Self-Study on the Challenges a University Supervisor Faced in Online Teaching Practicum and How She Met Them

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ABSTRACT

This self-study explores a university supervisor's experiences of online teaching practicum to seek answers to the questions of what challenges she faced in online teaching practicum and what initiatives she undertook to respond to them. The data collected from the reflective journal she kept during online teaching practicum was subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed that she faced the challenges of avoiding communication breakdown between the mentor teachers and student teachers, the pressing need for strengthening student teachers' motivation, and offering guidance to student teachers as to teaching enjoyable and effective online lessons. The findings also revealed that she conducted continuous negotiations with both the mentor teachers and student teachers to rise to the challenges she faced, which she deemed to have a greater prominence in online teaching practicum in comparison with that in the teaching practicum carried out face-to-face.

KEYWORDS

Mentor teacher, online teaching practicum, self-study, student teacher, teacher educator

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum constitutes a fundamental component of the pre-service teacher education program in that it offers opportunities to the pre-service teacher for experiencing teaching in a real classroom environment (Ellen & Wright, 2014), thereby appealing enormously to them. To what extent the pre-service teacher benefits from teaching practicum is contingent upon a set of factors such as the strength of the relationship between the mentor teacher (Gray et al., 2019), the university supervisor and the pre-service teacher, the amount of support provided to the pre-service teacher by both the mentor teacher and the university supervisor, and the usefulness of the courses they have taken in the department in their teaching practicum. The university supervisor plays a vital role in endorsing the pre-service teacher in making the most of the teaching practicum (Barahona, 2019; Heggen et al., 2018) and in establishing a strong tie between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher.

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Face-to-face teaching practicum requires the university supervisor to supervise the pre-service teacher face-to-face in the placement school and on the campus. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has obliged the initial pre-service English language teacher education program in the context of the study to conduct teaching practicum online, which has compelled the university supervisor to make adaptations to their duties of supervising the pre-service teacher and communicating with the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher. Such a drastic change has brought along a range of challenges for all the parties actively involved in conducting teaching practicum. The university supervisor who is supposed to be the thread connecting the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher to each other needs to shoulder weighty responsibility for helping the student teacher gain rewarding online teaching practicum experiences. I, having been a part of online teaching practicum for the first time, conducted this study with a view to sharing the challenges I faced in my online teaching practicum experiences and the steps I took to rise to them to enhance the effectiveness of online teaching practicum for the pre-service English teacher.

Teaching Practicum

Teaching practicum has a major part in the pre-service teacher education program for preparing pre-service teachers for the teaching profession as a result of giving them a chance to observe real classroom environments and to teach real students (Brown, Myers, & Collins, 2021) and in the formation of their teacher identities (e.g., Yuan, Liu, & Lee, 2019). Teaching practicum can also be alleged to be a period of time embedding invaluable experiences for pre-service teachers and during which there could be changes in their beliefs concerning teaching. For instance, the pre-service teachers who had traditional teaching beliefs and were not willing to integrate technology into teaching began to have positive perceptions regarding technology-centred student teaching following doing their teaching practicums in Han et al.'s (2017) study. Distinct approaches to the use of information communications technology at the placement school and on the campus could impact on pre-service teachers' views about the use of information communications technology in teaching. For example, McGarr and Gavaldon (2018) concluded that different affordances in relation to information communications technology in the initial teacher education program and the practicum school could exert influence on pre-service teachers' perceptions of the use of information communications technology in teaching.

Teaching practice at placement schools is highly valued by pre-service teachers and postulated to be more important than observing mentor teacher's teaching practices and the post-lesson sessions held with them (Chien, 2015). The review of research on teaching practicums conducted by Lawson et al. (2015) revealed that "collaboration with mentor teachers, the link between theory and practice, benefits from teacher educators" were from among the factors deemed to be important to pre-service teachers in teaching practicums (p. 401). Reflecting on teaching practicum experiences could help the mentor teacher and the student teacher gain deeper insights into their teaching practicum experiences. For example, the pre- and in-service English-as-a-foreign teachers in Altalhab et al.'s (2020) research had positive attitudes towards keeping reflective diaries and believed that reflective diaries should be mandatory in the teaching practicum. Dialogic interaction, which was explained to be the co-construction of meaning, was reported in Talbot et al.'s (2018) study as a means through which the university supervisor, the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher could gain insights into each other's conceptions of teaching and learning.

Several factors could influence pre-service teachers' performance in teaching practicum such as pre-service teachers' previous teaching experiences and prior academic achievement (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2018), the extent to which the practicum environment stimulates pre-service teacher learning (Ulvik & Smith, 2011) and their prior schooling experiences (Ye, 2015). Lillejord and Børte (2016) indicated in their study that university and school parts of the pre-service teacher education have their own cultures and their attempts to try to understand each other's culture are likely to positively affect pre-service teacher professional learning in teaching practicum.

There is no single word or expression that could be used to delineate the relationship between any mentor teacher and pre-service teacher as it changes drastically depending on individual experiences. To illustrate, the metaphors used by the pre-service teachers and the mentor teachers for explicating the mentoring relationship were explored in Izadinia's study (2017). The findings obtained from three interviews conducted in two placement schools with the pre-service teachers and the mentor teachers revealed that there was a marked change in the metaphors used by the pre-service teachers in comparison to those produced by the mentor teachers. The changes in the pre-service teachers' metaphors were elucidated addressing the existence of different mentors in two placement schools.

The quality of the conversation between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher could be perceived to be a reflection of the strong relationship between them. The study done by Sheridan and Young (2017) showed that genuine conversation resulted in "surprise learning" not only for the pre-service teacher but also for the mentor teacher. In addition, it was yielded that the opportunities had by the pre-service teacher for bluntly talking about their experiences positively impacts on their self-esteem and confidence. Nevertheless, trying to establish a healthy relationship with the mentor teacher might lead the pre-service teacher to not frankly express their opinions about teachers, students and school. For example, one of the student teacher participants in Trent's (2018) study stated that they abstained from criticizing the teachers and the school for the sake of creating the image that they got along well with the others in the school, which negatively affected their emerging teacher identity.

University Supervisors and Online Mentoring

The relationship between the teacher educator and the pre-service teacher plays a prominent role in the success to be achieved in teaching practicum. For instance, the research by Phillips and Rogers (2020) reported good rapport could be built between the teacher educator and the pre-service teacher providing establishing teacher-student relationship is prioritized rather than attempting to build a friendship. Online mentors are demonstrated to adopt different identities vis-à-vis the ones in face-to-face mentoring. For example, the study by Chan (2020) revealed that the online mentors occasionally acted like a teacher of a student but at times like a friend as an outcome of performing the role of mentoring in a virtual environment.

Teacher educators take distinct approaches to supervising pre-service teachers. To illustrate, the research by Dobrowolska and Balsev (2017) indicated that the conversations the pre-service teachers had with their teacher educators led to professional knowledge construction while the ones in another case did not end in it, which was reported to result from the kind of mentoring strategies employed by the teacher educators. While one of the university supervisors valued the challenging issues confronted by the pre-service teacher and put the emphasis on their thinking processes, the university supervisors of the other pre-service teacher placed the emphasis on the curriculum and institutional expectations rather than inclining their ears to the issues raised by the pre-service teacher.

The findings of the literature review carried out by Ellis et al. (2020) pointed to the features of quality pre-service teacher mentors which could also be referred to expound the features of quality pre-service teacher educators. According to them, "quality PST mentor should: collaborate with the university; develop a disposition and professional knowledge in mentoring; establish an effective relationship with the PST; facilitate the PST's learning; model effective teaching and make connections between theory and practice; provide direction and support, and adopt a progressive mindset and support the PST to nurture a teacher-identity" (p. 10). Communities of practice involving the university supervisor, the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher could be formed in an effort to effectively train pre-service teachers; however, reaching a consensus on the criteria for evaluating pre-service teacher's teaching is essential for effective pre-service teacher training (Escalié & Chaliès, 2016).

Mentoring skills displayed by mentors in mentoring dialogues were yielded to be either providing emotional support or task assistance in the research by Hennissen et al. (2011). The mentor teachers participating in the study by Jaspers Meijer et al. (2014) perceived their roles of functioning as mentors as an additional task whilst they viewed their role of being a teacher as their primary responsibility.

Nevertheless, teacher educators' central role is training pre-service teachers, and therefore, they are supposed to prioritize their role of training pre-service teachers from among their other roles such as that of a researcher.

Self-studies conducted by teacher educators on their supervising practices, in other words reflecting on their mentoring practices, enable them to gain invaluable insights into their mentoring practices (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2012). McDonough (2014) argued in their self-study research that they understood their practices as a mentor better by virtue of reflecting on the tensions they faced. Reflecting on a student teacher's teaching could help the university supervisor enhance their professional learning seeing what lacks in their supervision. For instance, Yagata (2017) noted that reflecting on the post-lesson session they had with the mentee made the university supervisor realize that they did not listen to the mentee as much as they should do, did not have enough knowledge of the mentee's teaching context and were under the influence of her presumptions about teaching and learning.

The review of the related literature unveils that no study has been carried out to date in an effort to explore teacher educators' online mentoring experiences. For this reason, I carried out this self-study to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1- What kind of challenges did I face during online supervising?
- 2- What initiatives did I undertake to respond to the challenges I faced?

METHODOLOGY

The Setting

As is maintained by Loughran (2004), "self-study has become a focal point for those pursuing a better knowledge of their particular practice setting..." (p. 9), and a self-study depends upon a teacher's personal experience (Samaras, 2011). Therefore, I carried out this self-study to investigate the challenges with online supervising I faced and how I rose to them.

In the context of the present study, senior pre-service English teachers take the compulsory Teaching Practicum I course in the fall term of the fourth academic year and Teaching Practicum II course in the spring of the same academic year. The objectives of Teaching Practicum I and II courses are supporting pre-service English teachers in preparing for the teaching profession and offering them a chance to transfer the theoretical knowledge they have gained through the coursework into practice (Ministry of National Education, 2018). This research was conducted when the students were enrolled in Teaching Practicum I course. Before the emergence of the COVID-19 cases in Turkey, Teaching Practicum courses were conducted face-to-face by placing pre-service English teachers into a primary, secondary or high school, done by the Provincial Directorate for National education. However, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring term of 2019/2020 academic year, the mode in which teaching practicum was done changed; that is, face-to-face teaching practicum was replaced by online teaching practicum. Teaching practicum was carried out online in the fall term of the academic year 2020/2021 as well, when this self-study was conducted. I supervised 15 pre-service English teachers, who were placed in a state high school offering education to students from grade 9 to grade 12. Three WhatsApp groups were formed through which the mentor teacher, I, the university supervisor, and the pre-service English teachers communicated with each other. The number of pre-service English teachers to be supervised by each teacher educator is determined by the Department of English Language Teaching that allocates an equal number of pre-service English teachers randomly to teacher educators. There were three mentor teachers in total at the placement school and each five pre-service English teachers were mentored by one mentor teacher. The pre-service English teachers were required to attend to all the online lessons taught by their mentor teachers and to submit the assignments given by me by the due date to successfully pass Teaching Practicum

I course. The pre-service English teachers were not obliged to teach online, yet willing pre-service English teachers were given the opportunity to teach online after negotiating with the mentor teacher. Three pre-service English teachers taught online while the remaining 12 pre-service English teachers did not prefer to teach online. Two of the pre-service English teachers teaching online taught twice whereas the other pre-service English teacher taught three times.

Data Collection Tool and Analysis

Reflective Journal

I kept a reflective journal to take notes of my online supervising experiences and to reflect on them. The journal was the tool for me to look back on my online supervising experiences. Each entry I made into the reflective journal functioned as the evidence of the claims I made about the challenges I encountered and the steps I took to overcome them because according to Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998, pp. 243–244), “The value of self-study depends on the researcher/teacher providing convincing evidence that they know what they claim to know”. Additionally, the reflective journal enabled me to recall my mentoring experiences vividly. I made 36 entries into the journal. I analysed the data gathered from the reflective journal adopting a thematic approach. I coded the data going through a coding process suggested by Creswell (2012). Firstly, I read all the journal entries to gain an overall understanding of them. Then, I began to code the data in the entries. Thereafter, I reread the entries and reviewed the codes I determined to ensure no code was overlooked. Rereading the entries also helped me prevent redundancy of the codes as I grouped similar ones. Afterwards, I developed themes from the codes. I will present extracts taken from the journal entries in the findings section because as is stated by Creswell (2012), “A thematic approach includes extensive discussion about the major themes that arise from analysing a qualitative database. Often, this approach uses extensive quotes and rich details to support the themes” (p. 274).

Findings

I will present the findings under the subheadings indicating the challenges I faced and the initiatives I took to overcome them. Table 1 below illustrates the challenges I faced and the solutions I worked out to respond to them, about which detailed information will be presented separately in the following subsections.

Serving as a Bridge between the Mentor Teacher and the Pre-Service Teachers

The majority of the challenges with serving as a bridge between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teachers are pertinent particularly to the student teachers who practiced online teaching. Though the university supervisor is supposed to establish and improve the communication between the mentor teacher and the student teacher, I jotted down in the journal the tough challenges I faced with establishing a good communication between them, which stemmed from the tensions between

Table 1. The challenges I faced and how I met them

The Challenge I faced	The Initiatives I Took to Overcome Them
Serving as a bridge between the mentor teachers and the pre-service teachers	Constant negotiation with the mentor teachers over the sense of unease between them and the pre-service teachers.
Motivating the pre-service teachers	Having intimate talks with the pre-service teachers to help them understand the precious gains they could reap from experiencing online teaching.
Mentoring the pre-service teachers	Reading about designing engaging online lessons and sharing what is recommended in the literature with the pre-service teachers. Encouraging the pre-service teachers to observe their mentor’s online teaching practices carefully.

the two parties. The analysis of the entries I made subsequent to the online teaching of the student teachers and the feedback I gave on their performance revealed that I had difficulty in mediating the relationship between the student teachers and the mentor teachers. Following is an excerpt illustrating the tensions between the mentor teacher and one of the student teachers following her teaching practice.

Alice (pseudonym) called me today. She said that she talked to her mentor teacher on the phone after her online teaching and could not communicate with her clearly because whenever she tried to explain why she did what she did in the lesson, her mentor teacher did not accept her explanations; instead, told her that she should have taught in a different way. She said that her mentor teacher had traditional views on teaching, which she was against. When she stated her ideas to her mentor teacher, she responded to her that what she recommended to her was how she learnt to teach and was not traditional. She could not get along well with her mentor teacher, which made her feel disappointed.

After talking to the student teacher, I decided to talk to the mentor teacher to maintain the relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher. Below is the entry I made following talking to the mentor teacher.

I talked to the mentor teacher and she said that she was offended when the student teacher told her that her conceptions of effective English language teaching were traditional. She stated that she had had quality pre-service teacher education and attended to several professional development activities organized by the Ministry of National Education. During the talk, I tried to soothe her and told her that the student teacher was a dedicated student teacher and tried to teach the students in an enjoyable way. She said that the lesson could have started with a pre-reading section; then, the text should be given, which was followed by getting students to answer comprehension check questions. I told her that how the pre-specified lesson objectives were accomplished could vary from teacher to teacher. The student teacher had started the lesson with playing a song that was connected to the content of the reading and after having the students read the text, she used comprehension check questions and ended the lesson with a speaking activity. I also requested her to adopt a positive attitude towards the student teacher because she needed to receive encouragement from her. I believe talking to the mentor teacher will lead to a positive change in her attitude towards the student teacher, because before ending the phone call, she said that she would do her best to develop a friendly and good relationship with her.

The student teacher Catherine (pseudonym) noted that she could not get useful and detailed feedback from her mentor teacher. When she asked her mentor teacher to give her feedback on her teaching, she said that the feedback she got from her did not go beyond the short phrases, “it was good” or “you can use your time more efficiently”. The entry I made and gave below is about that issue:

Today Catherine sent me a text message about her concerns over not getting useful feedback from her mentor teacher. She told that after teaching her lesson, she demanded feedback from the mentor teacher, but she only told her that she had liked the lesson and ended the talk. She was not expecting to hear such short statements from the mentor teacher; rather, a detailed explanation about what she liked and did not like in the lesson and needed to improve in her teaching. I must talk to the mentor teacher about this issue because she needs to get useful feedback from the mentor teacher on her online teaching practices to benefit from online teaching practicum.

The following entry in the journal was about the phone call I made with the mentor teacher.

I talked to the mentor teacher to let her know the complaints voiced by the student teacher about not being able to receive feedback from her as detailed as she anticipated. The mentor teacher was pretty understanding and stated she would try to give detailed feedback to her. I believe I did the right thing by talking to her because if the student teacher had talked to her, it might not have been as effective as my talk to the mentor.

Figure 1 I drew in one of the entries illustrates the communication density between I, the student teachers and the mentor teachers.

As seen in Figure 1, there are more arrows in the communication between me and the student teacher and me and the mentor teacher as opposed to the one in the relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher. The explanation I stated under the figure in the entry was on the heavy responsibility I shouldered in online teaching practicum for keeping the channels of communication between the student teachers and the mentor teachers open. I argued:

I functioned like a moderator between the mentor teachers and the student teachers. In face-to-face teaching practicum, there is a more effective relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher. They prefer to solve problems that occur between them on their own in face-to-face teaching practicum, but in online teaching practicum they prefer to resort to the teacher educator to resolve a problem.

Motivating the Pre-Service Teachers

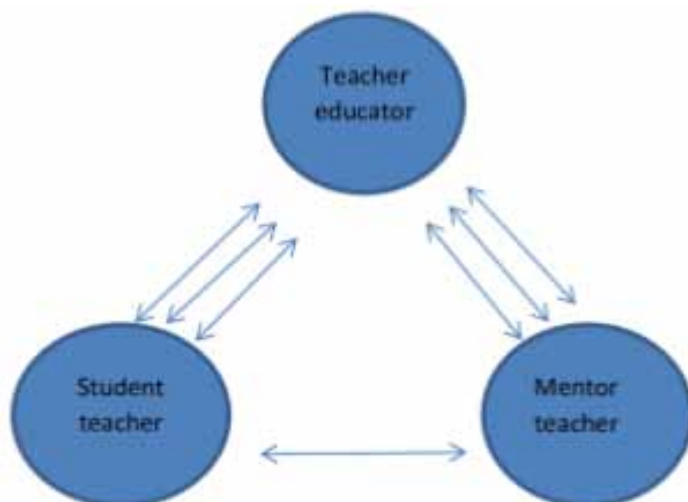
The journal entries revealed that I faced difficult challenges with motivating the student teachers, who were disappointed about losing their chance to do their practicums face-to-face due to the pandemic. The entries in the reflective journal revealed that all the written and oral communication between me and the student teachers was full of the displeasure expressed by them, caused by the online teaching practicum. The entry given below exemplifies how demotivated the student teachers were.

The student teachers are really upset about having to do their teaching practicums online. In the text messages they sent to me, they noted that they waited for teaching practicum for three years but when the time came for doing their teaching practicums, they could not go to their placement schools, teach English to students face-to-face and experience the real classroom environment. I understand their disappointment because I believe teaching by looking into the eyes of students in a real classroom is more effective than teaching in a virtual environment.

In another entry, the researcher noted:

One of the student teachers called me today and said that the online lessons were dull for her as neither the students nor the teacher turned on their cameras. She said not seeing students' facial

Figure 1. The communication density amongst me, the student teachers and the mentor teachers in online teaching practicum



expressions, which she believed were the indicators of students' understandings and/or confusion, demotivated her. She added that she turned on her camera during her teaching, but her mentor and students' cameras were closed, and therefore, felt like teaching darkness. I told her that I would talk to the mentor teacher about this issue. As soon as I ended the phone call, I telephoned the mentor teacher to find a solution to the problem of closed cameras. She told me that she would turn on her camera in the following lessons, yet could not do anything for students' cameras in that she claimed they did not want to turn on their cameras and she could not force them.

I made entries in the reflective journal, elucidating what I did to increase the student teachers' motivation levels. I jotted down "I have contacted the student teachers more this term to keep them motivated as opposed to the student teachers I had supervised in previous years". I also highlighted in the entries the significance of scaffolding the student teachers not to let them feel that they are alone in online teaching practicum. I wrote that I tried to encourage them to make the most of online teaching practicum in that online teaching was highly likely to be a part of the teaching of any subject in the near future and people would start to view it as natural as face-to-face education. In addition, I stated the intimate talks I had with the student teachers helped boost their motivation.

Mentoring the Pre-Service Teachers

I had not experienced online teaching before beginning to teach online as a consequence of the cessation of face-to-face teaching with the outbreak of the pandemic. The student teachers, having been taught how to conduct effective face-to-face teaching in the department, were in quest for ways for effective online teaching in online teaching practicum. The following extract illustrates the challenges of providing support in effective online teaching I confronted and the initiatives I undertook to meet them.

My students are in need of support for learning about how they can teach online effectively. One of the student teachers called me today and asked for advice on how to design fun online English lessons for students. She told me that she had to plan engaging lessons for students and approximately only 8 out of 31 students participated in online lessons. She believed that if she could design interesting lessons, more students would join online lessons. I have been reading about how to design engaging online lessons to make my own lessons appealing to my students and sharing some clues about designing interesting lessons with the student teachers. I have also suggested some articles, which they could read to develop their skills of online teaching. Moreover, I advised the student teachers to observe their mentor teachers' online instructional practices carefully to gain ideas about what works and does not work in online teaching.

As could be understood from the entry, teaching effective online lessons was a topic I personally had to learn about as it was also the first time for me to begin to teach my lessons online. Reviewing the literature on how online teaching can be conducted effectively, I learned a lot about what an online teacher needs to do to make their lessons appealing to students, which I shared with the pre-service teachers during the talks I had with them.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the difficulties I encountered in the process of online teaching practicum and the initiatives I launched to overcome them, which enabled me to understand my supervision practices well, as has been alleged by McDonough and Brandenburg (2012), and McDonough (2014). The challenges I encountered during online teaching practicum involve that of functioning successfully as a mediator between the mentor teachers and the student teachers because I stated in the reflective journal that I needed to perform a more active role in online teaching practicum because I served as a conductor of the communication between the mentor teachers and the student teachers. I noted the mentor teachers and the student teachers needed to contact me to express their ideas about each

other. If the teaching practicum had been conducted face-to-face, the student teachers and the mentor teachers would have had to see each other at the placement school and talk to each other to relieve any tension between them. The findings in relation to the challenges with fixing the communication breakdowns between the mentor teachers and the student teachers show that even though the teacher educator assumes a central role in student teacher's professional knowledge construction as was suggested Dobrowolska and Balsev (2017), I served as a conciliator of the mentor teachers and the student teachers. The initiatives I undertook were predicated on texting and telephoning the mentor teachers and the student teachers to mediate any problem between them. The student teachers and the mentor teachers, rather than attempting to clear up the problems between them, contacted me, which, I believed, rooted in the online teaching practicum.

Student teacher motivation is of high significance in the success they achieve both in face-to-face and online teaching practicum. The findings revealed that the student teachers were disappointed about being obliged to do their practicums online because, as could be understood from the journal entries, they had waited for teaching practicum for three years, yet they couldn't go to their placement school and experience the real classroom environment due to the compulsory online teaching practicum. I tried to increase their motivation levels by talking to them about the paradigm shift in the delivery mode of teaching, in other words, the movement from face-to-face teaching to a combination of face-to-face teaching and online teaching or to exclusively online teaching. The findings also pointed to the issue that turned-off cameras were demotivating because they could not see the facial expressions of the mentor teachers and the students. Conducting detailed negotiations on their online teaching practicum experiences are important for student teachers' professional learning and raising their motivation levels, but more prominence needs to be given to increasing student teachers' motivation levels to help them persevere in online teaching practicum.

Since online English language teaching is a new concept in the state schools in the context of this study, the student teachers needed be endorsed to figure out how they could carry out effective online teaching. The pre-service English language teacher education program does not offer a course specifically aiming to develop pre-service English teachers' online teaching skills. The student teachers had the chance to observe tens of online lessons taught by their mentor teachers and to produce ideas about what works and does not work in online English language teaching. Furthermore, they had taken their own courses at a distance, too, which also helped them come up with some ideas about quality online teaching, which they could adapt and put into action in their online teaching practices. The inadequacy of the direct communication between the mentor teachers and the student teachers seems to reduce the likelihood of gaining information from the mentor teacher about the tactics for conducting effective online teaching. In addition, online teaching was a novel phenomenon for the mentor teachers and they needed training in effective online teaching.

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This self-study examined the challenges I faced in my first experience of online teaching practicum and the actions I took to meet them. The results indicated I faced a number of challenges and made endeavours to respond to them. Online teaching practicum made me bear more responsibility for particularly resolving the tensions between the mentor teachers and the student teachers and preventing the breakdown of communication between them through serving as a conciliator as against the one I had taken over in my prior face-to-face teaching practicum experiences. In addition, I had to rise to the challenges of motivating and mentoring pre-service teachers.

Online teaching practicum is a new phenomenon for all the stakeholders involved in teaching practicum, and hence, it could be thorny for them. Therefore, further studies need to be carried out to investigate not only teacher educators' but also mentor teachers and student teachers' online teaching practicum experiences to improve the quality and effectiveness of online teaching practicum. In view of the profound significance of online teaching practicum in the pre-service teacher education program,

urgent attempts should be made by researchers to scrutinize what is to be done by the stakeholders to convert virtual teaching practicum to a beneficial learning environment for student teachers.

Implications for Pre-Service English Language Teacher Education Program

Even though the implications to be stated in the current study are for the pre-service English language teacher education program, they could be extended to other disciplines. The findings indicate that mentor teachers need to be trained in how to mentor pre-service English teachers in online teaching practicum, which must be carried out by pre-service English teacher educators. Nevertheless, seeing the challenges I faced in online teaching practicum and the difficulties I experienced in producing solutions to them, it is obvious that pre-service English teacher educators need to train themselves in ways to conduct effective online teaching practicum first. They can achieve this by establishing an online platform that will promote the exchange of their opinions as to quality online teaching practicum. Teacher educators may use the knowledge of effective online teaching practicum they would gain on the platform in trainings they would provide to mentor teachers and pre-service teachers. In view of the fact that there is a high probability of conducting teaching practicum in virtual environments in the future, the pre-service English language teacher education program in the context of this study needs to be enriched by adding online English language teaching courses to it so that pre-service English teachers could be prepared for the online teaching practicum offered in the last year of the program. The teacher educator, the mentor teacher and the student teacher can meet on an online platform and/or through video call every week to negotiate their perceptions regarding effective online teaching and to strengthen the relationship between them. In doing so, the teacher educator can devote their energy to supervising the student teacher.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest.

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