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No. 17

RESEARCH PAPERS

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VALUES AND CULTURE

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Pre-service Language Teachers in Their Practicum: an experience in times of pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The teaching practicum is an essential component of teacher preparation programs. This provides pre-service teachers with direct knowledge as they develop their vocations as educators. In addition, it promotes the development of pre-service teachers' teaching knowledge and abilities, including academics and mentor teachers. In early 2020, the Covid 19 pandemic broke out. In western Mexico, this pandemic altered the teaching practicum paradigms of a group of pre-service teachers. The paper describes challenges encountered by a group of Mexican language student-teachers as they transitioned from in-person to online instruction. The selected research methodology is predominantly qualitative. Utilized research methodologies included online surveys and interviews. The findings revealed that participants encountered a number of disadvantages, but they also cited a number of advantages of the online language teaching practicum. In conclusion, online teaching presented an entirely new set of challenges, but participants also discovered numerous benefits.

KEY WORDS:

pre-service, language, teachers, pandemic

RESUMEN

La práctica docente es un componente esencial de los programas de preparación docente. Esto proporciona a los futuros maestros un conocimiento práctico a medida que desarrollan su vocación como educadores. Además, promueve el desarrollo de los conocimientos y habilidades docentes en ellos, incluidos los docentes académicos y mentores. A principios de 2020, estalló la pandemia de Covid 19. Esta, alteró los paradigmas de la práctica docente de un grupo de futuros maestros. El artículo describe los desafíos a los que se enfrentaron un grupo de

docentes de lenguas en formación, en su transición de la enseñanza presencial a la enseñanza en línea. La metodología de investigación seleccionada es cualitativa. Las metodologías de investigación utilizadas incluyeron encuestas y entrevistas en línea. Los hallazgos revelaron algunas desventajas del proceso de transición, pero también citaron una serie de ventajas de la práctica de enseñanza de idiomas en línea. En conclusión, la enseñanza en línea presentó un conjunto completamente nuevo de desafíos, pero los participantes también descubrieron numerosos beneficios.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

pre-servicio, lengua, docentes, pandemia

Introduction

The global education system was driven into disarray as a result of a pandemic that affected everything. The majority of formal learning for students occurs in schools, but closing schools and relocating learning to distance learning has reduced the amount of time students spend learning. Students who lacked access to a digital platform or the motivation to learn independently were at risk of falling behind. Professors at universities were also required to adjust to the new concepts and methods of instruction. The transitions from learning to teaching practice were not comfortable for pre-service teachers. Due to the absence of a previous online-learning approach and a real-world setting in which, to apply their professors' knowledge, they observed a lack of new teaching knowledge in themselves in this new mode.

Participants, pre-service instructors at the University of Colima, are required to take four teaching practice courses as part of the Bachelor of Foreign Language Teaching curriculum. They instruct 30 face-to-face classes to elementary school children per semester. All of this was altered as a result of the pandemic, and the teaching personnel and student-teachers were required to transition to an online environment. This paper discusses the difficulties encountered by a group of instructors as they transitioned their language teaching practicum strategy from in-person to online.

Experiences on distance teaching practicum

Kosar (2021) presents the findings of a study conducted in Turkey, in which 25 pre-service English teachers discuss the influence of their distance teaching practicum on their preparedness for the first year of teaching. Inductive content analysis was utilized to evaluate the data garnered through email surveys. According to the results, pre-service teachers did not believe that the remote teaching practicum enhanced their learning and did not feel prepared for their first year of teaching. In addition, they did not contemplate the possibility that distance learning could replace face-to-face teaching practicum.

Fotova, Sedlakova, and Tma (2021) conducted a study with 63 pupils enrolled in Masaryk University's EFL Master's program for secondary schools. A data set of 120 lesson reflections generated by students concluding their teaching practice through online courses was analyzed using qualitative coding methodologies. The objective was to determine how student-teachers perceive the use of technology in online instruction. The majority of student-teachers normalized technology as a teaching platform, employing technology-specific teaching strategies and classroom activities. This is the case despite constant comparisons between face-to-face and online classrooms and an initial reliance on technological success to determine the success

of a lesson. These results suggest that online teaching and learning should be an integral part of teacher education. Rahmani (2021) in Indonesia investigated how pre-service teachers perceive their teaching experience during the pandemic. This investigation involved 114 seventh-semester English Education Department students. The data was collected via questionnaires and interviews. The results indicated that the online teaching practice program was both beneficial and indecisive. More than fifty percent of participants concurred that the online teaching practice program was beneficial, despite the challenging circumstances they encountered during the practice, especially in providing a variety of teaching strategies and techniques. Consequently, despite the limitations of their execution, teaching practice programs tend to influence effective teaching.

Shinta and Aprilia (2020) discuss how Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers viewed the implementation of the practicum and the changes they observed over time. As data collection techniques, this study employed a survey format with a questionnaire and a follow-up interview. The results revealed multiple issues, including inadequate classroom administration, evaluation, and practicum orientation. The difficulties were also caused by a paucity of internet access and infrastructure. Despite obstacles, pre-service teachers improved their teaching skills, knowledge, approaches, and interest. Their perceptions of the online teaching practicum's quality also affected how well they believed it had prepared them for a vocation as English teachers.

The research problem

The literature review focuses on the obstacles and solutions encountered by pre-service teachers during the pandemic. Literature depicts the numerous obstacles that pre-service teachers had to overcome to complete their online practicum. Teacher educators should prioritize resiliency, the capacity to embrace new challenges, and the ability to face adversity. In this regard, and for the purposes of this study, the research problem focuses on an examination of the situations encountered by a group of Mexican pre-service language instructors during their online practicum. Consequently, the following queries were created as a guide.

Research Question

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, what do a group of pre-service language teachers think about completing their practicum online?

This question is meant to discover the beliefs of pre-service teachers doing their teaching practice online.

Methodology

The chosen research approach is primarily qualitative. "Qualitative research seeks to understand the subject of study through exploration, analysis, and observation of 'persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings, as well as organizational functioning, social movements, and cultural phenomena" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Therefore, it is unlikely that other research methods enable researchers to fathom contextual reality in the same way qualitative methods do (Dornei, 2007). This investigation's primary objective is to determine the student-teachers' perceptions of online teaching practice, so case study was the specific qualitative method employed. Case study is particularly useful when it is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest in its natural real-world context, as is the case here, as the primary objective of this investigation is to

determine the student-teachers' perceptions of online teaching practice.

Online surveys and interviews were among the research methods employed. The purpose of online surveys is to collect information about a research topic from a predetermined group of respondents. This methodology allows us, as researchers, to investigate the beliefs of our participants, who are seventh-semester students at the University of Colima's Faculty of Foreign Languages. Since all responses are collected online, the method has the advantages of being quick and readily accessible for analysis. As the researchers pose the necessary inquiries, the participant's response flexibility grows, making the procedure both reliable and flexible. In addition, participation is greatly simplified because respondents can submit their responses at their most opportune time and location.

Interviews were employed as a complementary method. Interviews can help capture personal information and achieve the objectives of the study. 2003 by Richards Interviews can help elucidate motivations, attitudes, and personal perspectives in a way that surveys and observation cannot. Interviews have the potential to provoke interviewees to freely express their opinions on the topic at hand and to encourage "respondents to develop their own ideas, feelings, insights, expectations, or attitudes, and to do so with greater spontaneity" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 81).

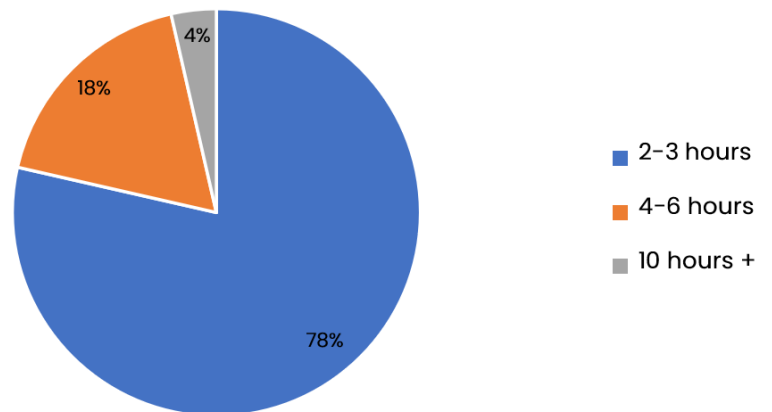
Results

Previous sections have examined how pre-service teachers have handled the circumstance of conducting their practicum online. The research question attempts to address this issue within a Mexican-Western context; therefore, this section clarifies how these results address the aforementioned question.

The findings are substantiated by excerpts from interviews and numerical data. Figure 1 illustrates how many hours per week pre-service teachers spent conducting their practicum online.

78% of student-teachers devoted two to three hours per week to implementing their student teaching practices, 18% four to six hours, and 4% ten hours. As evidenced by the data, the life of pupils during the pandemic was somewhat chaotic and filled with activities, which, according to one participant, made teaching more difficult.

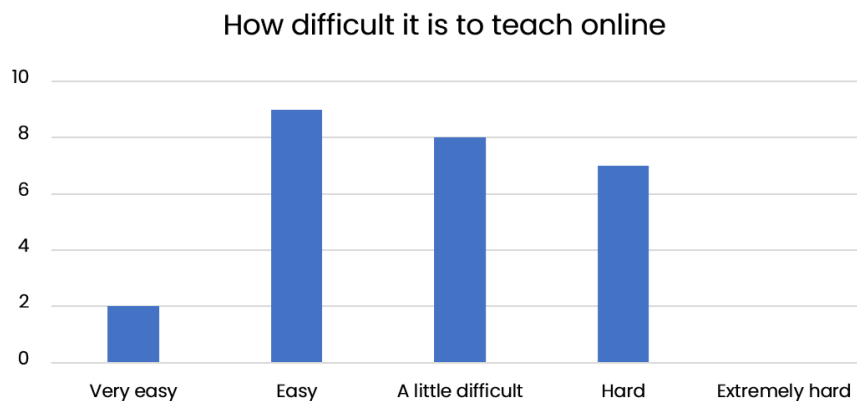
Time devoted to practicum online



I also work, so I must quit my current position to accept this one. I must depart for two hours in order to have an hour to prepare and the remaining hour to register for the class. And this is what makes it complicated. The fact that most of us believe that we're not just committed to school, but that we're also searching for a job or something because we may be economically affected.

Due to the pandemic's effects on education, student-teachers confronted varying degrees of

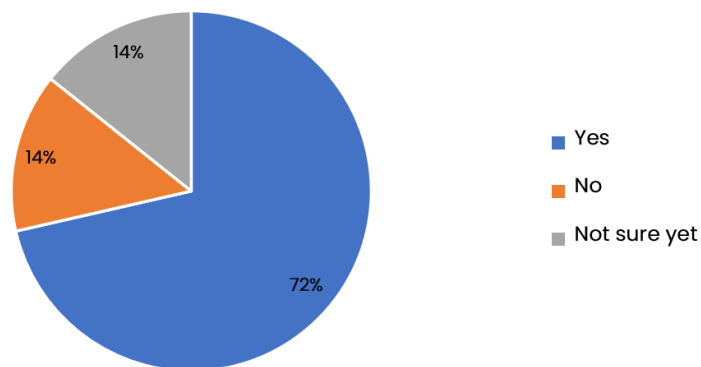
difficulty when teaching online. Figure 2 reveals their perspectives



Concerning the degree of difficulty online teaching presented for the student-teachers, it was discovered that nine students rated the difficulty of their online teaching as simple, eight as somewhat difficult, and seven as difficult. Figure 3 also reveals an important finding regarding their motivation in relation to their practicum.

Demotivation to do teaching practice

Due to the COVID pandemic, 72% of students were demotivated to continue their final semester of teaching practice, while 14% were not and 14% were unsure.

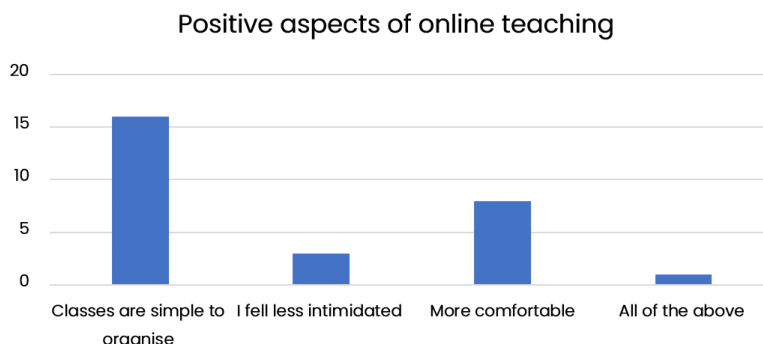


Internal reflections of the student-teachers cast light on the causes of their lack of study motivation. Some professors' lack of attentiveness has caused students to lose interest in their academic pursuits.

In support of the previous claim, the shift from face-to-face to online instruction prompted the demoralization. One of the participants remarked that the pupils had not been exposed to online teaching methodology and were unfamiliar with its application and purpose:

I felt demotivated because I began my studies face-to-face, and now we were not accustomed to this methodology, and we were less familiar with its application and function.

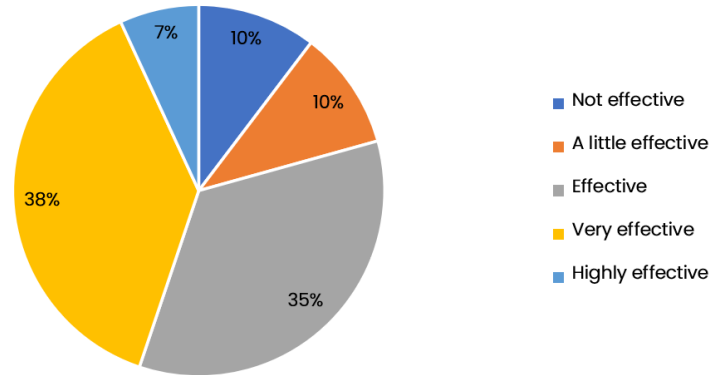
In addition to this, participants also expressed their opinions about the advantages of doing their practicum online. Figure 4 below supports this.



The vast majority, 16, thought that organizing their lessons and material more efficiently would be

accomplished by uploading all of their coursework to an electronic environment. Three of them believed that teaching virtually was less intimidating than in person. One of them agreed with all the possibilities, but the other ten felt more at ease. The majority of student-teachers stayed upbeat because they believe their online instruction is successful. As demonstrated in Figure 5 below.

Success with online teaching practice



The graph above demonstrates that 7% of participants believe their online practicum to be highly effective, 38% believe it to be very effective, 35% believe it to be effective, 10% believe it to be somewhat effective, and 10% believe it to be ineffective.

Although hopeful, pre-service instructors experienced a certain level of disconnection from their professors and their own learning requirements. The participant who brought it up said.

In addition, I believe that such tardy responses and the perceived gap between students' studies and professors' expectations might seriously undermine students' motivation.

Students did not have the same or enough resources to contact their professors as they did prior to the pandemic, which caused the student-teachers to respond slowly. These challenges also caused the student-teachers to move from one teaching method to another without adequate preparation. As indicated in the excerpt that follows.

Considering the perspective of students who lack the resources to contact teachers, which could result in a delayed response. Additionally, teachers may not feel it is their duty to advance the topics and activities in their classrooms along with the students.

Conclusions

According to the earlier findings, the pandemic demotivate several student instructors from completing their last semester of practicum. The pandemic changed the contexts in which curricula was implemented due to the use of platforms and the need to take into account circumstances other than those for which the college program was originally designed, not only because certain knowledge and competencies are more relevant in a pandemic context, but also because certain knowledge and competencies were more relevant.

The pandemic has prompted many organizations to alter their goals and methods of operation, which may have resulted in modifications to practicum project specifications. Students might have to adjust to new goals or come up with alternate solutions.

When it comes to online education, there are a whole new set of difficulties to be overcome (monitoring student engagement, resolving technological problems, facilitating interactive activities, etc.). Several pre-service instructors expressed uncertainty about their capacity to instruct online when the structure of the classes changed from face-to-face to online.

Because of policies to distance students from one another, many practicums now take place remotely, which has benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, remote learning gives students more flexibility and lets them participate in practicums from any location. However, distance learning can be alienating and lack the depth of face-to-face encounters.

Although the foundation knowledge from prior courses and the use of the TICs has a positive impact on their training process, the student-teachers spent between two and three hours putting their student-teaching activities into action for their students. Several student-teachers concurred that it would be simpler for them to plan their classes and material if all of the assignments were uploaded to a website.

If teacher-students had been persuaded that online instruction has higher advantages, they might have been more motivated, especially during the lockdown. Aside from having excellent subject knowledge, advanced computer skills, clear communication, the ability to emotionally connect with students, and other necessary abilities to deal with the demands of online platforms, this mode of instruction also calls for certain teaching practices and abilities.

Remote learning calls for students to develop efficient online communication techniques, such as concise writing and the capacity for remote collaboration. These abilities are beneficial in all job paths and necessary in the current digital era.

Online study sessions are effective because pre-service instructors can go over challenging concepts again at their own pace and skip through more elementary courses. The ability to learn at your own pace and convenience is one of the biggest benefits of online education. This skill may come in handy, particularly during a lockdown. Due to the flexibility of online learning, priorities can be met while balancing personal and professional goals.

The epidemic has brought attention to how crucial resilience is for both people and organizations. By adjusting to new situations and obstacles, practicums give students the chance to build resilience.

Any ideas for additional research or gaps that could broaden the scope of this investigation are still lacking at the conclusion. Additionally, the study's weaknesses were not mentioned. Some of the results require further examination because many are just describing the charts without considering the significance of the data. Finally, always cite the literature and discuss how this work has expanded on and increased our understanding of it.

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- f) **Main findings.** Synthesize, present, interpret and argue the most significant results found.
- g) **Main limitations of the study** (related to the geographical or institutional context or knowledge area where the conclusions or suggestions could be applicable).
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