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Opportunities and challenges of EFL preservice teachers in online teaching

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ABSTRACT

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency which is a global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, all countries around the world are starting to adapt their life with digital transformation. Schools across the world were forced to shift to fully online teaching and learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. EFL pre-service teachers were also required to modify teaching practicum to accommodate ongoing changes in both classrooms and higher education. To fill this void, this study aims to investigate the opportunities and challenges of EFL pre-service teachers in online teaching during teaching practicum. This study was carried out through two different data collection methods: Reviewed EFL pre-service teacher's daily journal during online teaching and semi-structured interview. Additionally, the researcher used narrative inquiry to examine the challenges and opportunities of EFL pre-service teachers in online teaching concerning their complex experiences. Thematic analysis was used in the data collecting and analysis. The interview was divided into four thematic analysis which included inductive coding and resulted in a list of emergent themes, placement activities, an opportunity for experimentation, shortcomings of the online teaching placement, and supportive agents. This study suggest to EFL pre-service teachers and parents working together.



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Introduction

In the beginning of 2020, the world is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a consequence of the whole educational system in this country has collapsed during large-scale social restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*) or social distancing. Schools across the world were forced to shift to fully online teaching and learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Howard, Tondeur, Siddi & Scherer, 2020). According to Williamson, Eynon, and Potter (2020) as cited in Yandell (2020) moving to teach online is not like moving to a different classroom. It is not the same activities conducted in different circumstances; it involves working through a whole new set of challenges that are as much pedagogic as they are technological. Teaching practicum is a critical point of teacher education where practice and experience are placed together to offer

opportunities for EFL pre-service teachers to improve their learning and key components in educating them to be successful teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The online school makes pre-service teachers redefine what education should be able to provide at any time and any place. There are more teachers, particularly EFL pre-service teachers, who still don't know what to do in this situation and what challenges and opportunities they were concerned about during online learning and online learning readiness EFL pre-service teachers could possess.

According to Gurley (2018), pre-service teachers, many of whom had never taught online afterward, were supposed to redesign their curricula to assist their students in a completely virtual environment. This necessitated a complete change in pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, as well as the implementation of a variety of innovative technologies. It is reasonable to say that teacher education programs could never have prepared for this unexpected situation because most of pre-service teachers did not receive online micro teaching and assessment. As stated earlier, online learning differs from teaching face-to-face teaching because of the separation by distance and time. Misperception could happen sometimes between pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and students. For instance, not all student's assessments could be assessed collectively by online learning and EFL pre-service teachers should be able to make another plan and another way to collect student's assessments. In other cases, mentor teachers not allowing EFL pre-service teachers to utilize another platform aside from what schools usually use and let EFL pre-service teachers explore their way.

Based on the daily journal that EFL pre-service teachers submit during online teaching, three of five preservice teachers struggled with the teaching platform that they used because of device limitations. Not all students have smartphones with storage sufficient. EFL pre-service teachers only give the students practice and assignments under compulsion in order that students are still learning day by day. In another case, two of five EFL pre-service teachers have a class with passive students. Every time EFL pre-service teachers give an assignment, less than half of the students collect the assignment and when EFL pre-service teachers make an interact in a *WhatsApp* group students just read and leave the messages without reply or answer.

Enlightened from this study, issues of challenges and opportunities of EFL Pre-service teachers in online learning will continue to be at the forefront of research on teacher education. While emerging innovations have created new opportunities for teaching and learning, they have also increased the pressure on teachers to learn how to incorporate these emerging innovations into their online learning (Robinson & Lanchem, 2003). These conditions make EFL teachers, particularly EFL pre-service teachers, put more effort into online learning. To fill this gap, this research will be useful to know their challenges and opportunities with the situation during teaching EFL in online learning and construct online learning. Then, the results will help EFL pre-service teachers in teaching online.

Method

A qualitative approach can be used to describe the experiences of a person or group of people (Polkinghorne, 2005). The researcher used narrative inquiry to examine the challenges and opportunities of EFL pre-service teachers in online teaching concerning their complex experiences. The theory behind narrative inquiry is that stories are obtained as a method of better understanding experience as it is experienced and conveyed through research and literature (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Participants' journals and interviews are used as data sources in narrative inquiry (usually unstructured). The participant was guided to reflect on their experiences teaching English over time and the participant's perspective in various challenges and opportunities of teaching online. The results of the interviews are presented in a narrative writing and the answers from each pre-service teacher will be explained one by one. Interaction with participants and their remote teaching experiences, EFL pre-service teachers' experiences were represented, evaluated, and interpreted.

This study focuses on conducting interviews with preservice teachers who had teaching practice between the periods of August-September 2020. Interviews are not carried out to pre-service teachers of all subjects, but only to EFL pre-service teachers. These participants are selected from EFL pre-service teachers' daily journals based on their relation to the research topic, as well as to the objectives of this research which are mentioned in Chapter 1. All participants were contacted via *WhatsApp* and asked to complete an interview, participants could choose online or offline interviews based on their condition. Participants' answers the interview concerned on the opportunities and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in an online teaching system. So that the results of the research are not too scattered and packed into the objectives of the study. A convenience

sampling procedure was used to select 5 preservice teachers from 234 EFL pre-service teachers' daily journal selection.

In order to collect necessary data this study used two different data collection methods: The writer reviewed EFL pre-service teacher's daily journal during online teaching and semi-structured interview. Pre-service teachers appealed to complete daily journals in order to arranged their final report.

Narrative inquiry includes not only the collecting of stories but also the analysis of those stories (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). The first part in analyzed EFL Pre-service teachers' journal aimed at collecting background information, such as their experience in teaching. Then, their placement and their role in it. Thirdly, in order to examine the participants' opinions about the process, such as the work with their cooperating teacher and university supervisor.

Thematic analysis was used in the data collecting and analysis. Identifying, analyzing, and interpreting meaning from what the participant stated during data collection is the focus of this thematic analysis (Riesman, 2003). Based on Escobar & Morrison (2020), the interview was divided into four thematic analysis which included inductive coding and resulted in a list of emergent themes, as shown in Table 1. The viewpoints provided by EFL pre-service teachers in the two data collecting instruments were assessed to examine how this online teaching placement during COVID-19 was viewed as an opportunity (or not) for their teacher education learning process.

Table 1 <Online Teaching Placement during COVID-19>

Theme	Interpretation
Placement activities	Description of the roles and activities undertaken by the student during the time of school closure
An opportunity for experimentation	Positive aspects that preservice teachers took from the online teaching placement
Shortcomings of the online teaching placement	Challenges teacher candidates faced during the online experience and negative aspects that arose from the remote placement
Supportive agents	Description of the role of the cooperating teacher and university supervisor during this online experience

The beginning of the writer and participants' meeting started from the supervisor's recommendation to reviewed EFL pre-service teachers' daily journals during online teaching. The four participants were related to the topic and had the right to be the participants in this study. Furthermore, the writer contacted four participants and set up an appointment after some consideration of our schedules. The first online interview was conducted by zoom meeting platform because of the coronavirus outbreak worldwide, the interview scheduled 40 minutes for each participant as zoom meeting duration. Since this was a friend-to-friend interview the writer did small talk to make participants enjoy and be more open to express their experiences during the interview session. At the same time, the writer prepared the interview questions. Prior to the interview, the writer asked permission to the participant to do meeting recording during the ongoing interview by zoom. Since there some data required for further clarity, the follow up interview was conducted in other day by zoom meeting continuously. During the analysis processes, the writer required some clarifications from participants. The following example of translated transcription of the interview sessions.

Results and Discussions

Placement Activities

This section contains background information on the EFL pre-service teacher remote teaching placement, including where and how they did it. 2 participants did their placement in a school located in an urban area while 2 other participants located in a regency area. Only one pre-service teacher worked in a semiprivate school and three in a state school. However, due to the unpredictable conditions that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, the roles and activities that EFL pre-service teachers undertook inside these educational environments were extremely different. According to Hockly and Clandfield (2010), there is hardware components you will need to get started with online teaching that put the foundation together for your online teaching.

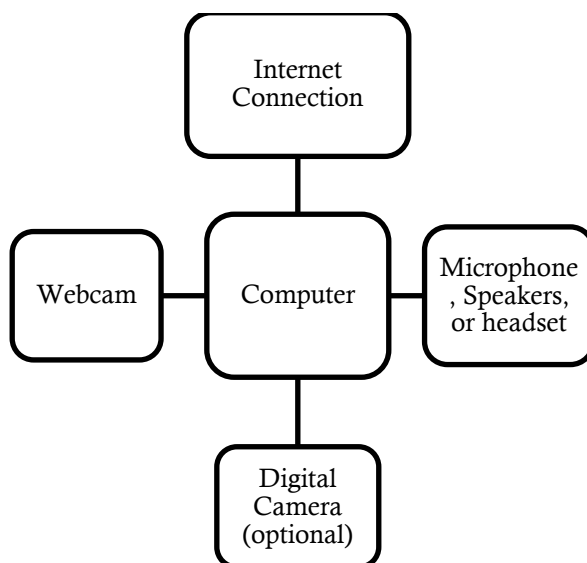


Figure 1 <Hardware Components to get Started Online Teaching>

EFL pre-service teachers could use a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone as tools to help them started online teaching. All participants used a smartphone as well because nowadays smartphones come with all of the elements in digital transformation in an educational context including a webcam (camera), microphone, and speakers. Comply with internet connection is an important thing that EFL pre-service teachers need when EFL pre-service teachers started online teaching, especially if they are going to utilize audio and video in their online teaching.

An overview of what EFL pre-service teachers did during their online teaching experience has been summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 <Pre-service Teachers did During Their Online Teaching Experience Result>

	Synchronous			Asynchronous		
	Zoom	Google Meet	Video Call	Google Classroom	Whatsapp	Youtube
Participant 1					✓	✓
Participant 2					✓	✓
Participant 3	✓			✓		
Participant 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

As Table 3 shows, two participants EFL pre-service teachers worked synchronously, using platforms such as Zoom or Google meet, while two others had a mixture of activities between sending work via Whatsapp or through other online platforms and meeting with their students online to clarify doubts, giving feedback on students' learning process and giving instructions for the weekly work. As mentioned by participant 1.

“Inviting students to be active is already difficult, sometimes answering group messages also know they usually just exchange stickers, it's normal for students when getting a pre-service teacher.” (male, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

The other 2 participants stated that most of their teaching was asynchronous through creating short video clips about specific content and the production of handouts and worksheets that were later sent to Whatsapp to the students or uploaded to the Google Classroom or sent it back to the Whatsapp. According to Valtonen et al (2013) Pre-service teachers' readiness to use ICT for teaching and learning, along with their perception of the pedagogical value of various ICT applications, are influenced by their conceptions of learning. Participant 3 declared,

"It turns out that using zoom was also ineffective because my mentor teachers who formerly knew the student background, not all of them had internet quotas and technological circumscription. Many such problems arose and I finally decided to send material through Google classroom as a procedure from school" (male, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

As participant 3 declared, the enactment of zoom-mediated instruction or learning is ineffective due to quotas and technological circumstances. It is suitable with Azhari and Fajri (2021) that students' families' financial circumstances do not assist online teachings, such as a lack of income to acquire internet data and a lack of devices to facilitate distance learning (such as a smartphone and a computer). A similar situation was experienced by participant 2 too.

"I invited students to use zoom, but the problem is that students' handphones didn't support using the zoom application, which has large storage. So, they prefer to use WhatsApp. While on WhatsApp I am confused about how to convey the material. It must be more difficult." (female, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021).

In some situations, students lacked the necessary equipment because they didn't have a laptop or tablet, and even have they were asked to share it with other family members (Flores & Gago, 2020). Finally, one participant, participant 4, was either doing any teaching or confusing what platform that she used. Instead, this pre-service teacher was using various kinds of platforms for their student and trying to adapt to this condition without imposing on the students. Participant 4 stated that:

"The creativity of a pre-service teacher in a setting which teaching strategy is better or more suitable for this class or this student so that the class is not saturated and more focused on following the lesson so that the material being taught is conveyed well." (female, 21 years, interview 26 June 2021)

An Opportunity for Experimentation

The unexpected, sudden, and forced shift from face-to-face to online teaching situation that the COVID-19 pandemic came in after the educational institutions, Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020 seen the situation as an opportunity to improve education or even a "revolution" that must be sustained, others are more hesitant and doubt its ramifications in terms of social justice and equality. Obviously, challenges of educational inequity and exclusion gained far more apparent and essential during and after COVID. The participants identified three main topics as beneficial characteristics of this new challenge based on the interpretation of the findings from the two instruments. First, the important skill when you teaching is communication skill. With communication skills, pre-service teacher could manage the class well. Participant 2 stated that

"I was able to know "Oh, here's an easy way to explain so that it is easier for students to understand the material I convey." The problem is that I have difficulty communicating, so I can learn to speak correctly to my students. And explain the material correctly and students understand." (female, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

EFL pre-service teachers were given a variety of options and methods to continue their formative process, which had ramifications for their professional knowledge development (Flores and Gago, 2020). As participant 2 stated, the difference between face-to-face and online teaching is how the material is conveyed. In face-to-face teaching, EFL pre-service teachers could observe the students directly while in online teaching EFL pre-service teachers didn't know which students pay heed to material and who don't. Communication in online teaching was also difficult because of the limits in internet access and tools. According to Flores and Gago 2020. In certain cases, pre-service teachers frequently asked students to explain the task they had to do in order to determine whether they had understood it. In other situations, students would request pre-service teachers make the purpose and circumscription of the activities to be completed explicit. Considering there are so much miss understood and communication during online teaching. Creative and critical thinking, problem solving, communication and teamwork, learning and information literacy, and distance learning are all aspects of skills (Valtonen et al, 2014) that pre-service teachers need in online teaching. Participant 3 also stated that

In my opinion, skills development offered when online teaching, we can manage the class in other ways, meaning that when we are in a WhatsApp group or other online platform, the class management is different, with technology we can improve our class management skills and of course also skills in class.

Furthermore, Escobar & Morrison (2020) stated that the aspect pre-service teachers had to learn how to work with technology and platforms they were unfamiliar with, in order to prepare teaching materials and conduct synchronous lessons was the most contextualized learning experience the participants recognized during this online teaching. In the interview, participant 2 pointed out

“Before Pre-service teachers’ introduction to school environment (*Pengenalan Lingkungan Persekolahan*) I had experienced what it was like to online learning on campus, at least I understood the technology. In beginning, I only used a student account, then I learned via YouTube how to use the Learning Management System (LMS) but with a teacher account. How to input questions, how to entering grades, so when students work on tasks from one of the platforms used, they will understand and not be confused anymore.” (female, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

It proved that online teaching has encouraged EFL pre-service teachers to get out of their comfort zone and need to improve in the learning of new technologies. Considering that all participants agreed to value of opportunity that this online teaching placement provided to discover and learn how to work with different online platforms, Given the most important thing it represented throughout this experience. EFL pre-service teachers also didn’t provide a difficult task or homework for students considering too many tasks are given by other teachers. Participant 4 also highlighted this point that

“We can focus more on developing various online teaching platforms so that online teaching is not too saturated” (female, 21 years, interview 7 July 2021)

Creativity and critical thinking influence the way pre- service online teaching As a result of the requirements to conduct virtual classes, EFL pre-service teachers have to come up with new concepts and methods to gain confidence with learner (Escobar & Morrison, 2020). According to (Eyles, 2018; Valtonen et al., 2015), teachers’ confidence will increase as a result of their professional development, it will include a variety of training and personal experiences in the implementation of learning; this would have a good impact on teachers’ teaching methods while implementing learning. EFL pre-service teachers also recognized the ability to adapt to an unpredictable situation, overcome emergent challenges, comprehend the experience, and interpret the educational repercussions of the pandemic in a positive interpretation.

Finally, Pre-service teachers also recognized the ability to adapt to an unpredictable situation, overcome emergent challenges, comprehend the experience, and interpret the educational repercussions of the pandemic in a positive interpretation.

Shortcomings of the Online Teaching Placement

Based on the interview, several challenges are identified in the EFL pre-service teachers teaching placement during online teaching. One of the biggest challenges of this experience was not being able to interact directly with students. According to Flores and Gago (2020), in terms of pre-service teacher education, one of the most significant challenges is the practicum. Pre-service teachers were forced to cancel their visits to schools and instead follow the activities of their cooperating teachers online. Deficiency of emotional connection between pre-service teachers and students due to lack of teaching hours. so there was no feeling of teaching. As conveyed by participant 1

“In my opinion, situations like this (Pandemic) are less effective for teaching, because we cannot directly teach students and we only provide tasks and materials, there are no challenges such as face-to-face learning where students can immediately respond.” (male, 22 years, 26 June 2021)

In addition, the participant showed a lack of field experience. EFL pre-service teacher learning process was affected since they were unable to implement the classroom management skills they had learned throughout their teaching program into practice because of the situation. According to Escobar and Morrison (2020), In this final teaching placement, the teacher education knowledge and skills that were supposed to be developed were insufficient. Another participant provided a similar perspective. He is technologically capable and knowledgeable. However, in the current circumstances, participant 3 also encountered difficulty in implementing online teaching. Participant 3 highlighted

“The first time I taught online I used a Zoom meeting to get acquainted and also introduce English, which turned out to be less than half of the students in the lesson. Students prefer interaction in Google classroom because there are only materials and assignments, whether it's video or in written form. They just need to learn independently and collect the assignment. Sometimes they are also still lazy to collect so we have to give more time as long as students collect the assignment” (male, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

Considered to current circumstances, another challenge that pre-service teachers faced during online teaching was a distraction because of work from home in the household. Some of the participants' house is in the wayside, they reported that many vehicles go by when teaching preparation and delivery took place. This is related to Kazanjian and Choi (2016) stated that pre-service teachers should be offered a space to develop a relationship and reflect on what they have done in online teaching, also build creativity in their teaching experience. Participant 2 stated

“Family conditions support online teaching, sometimes I get distracted by passing vehicles because the house is on the side of the road, then at home, there are also many people who work so it's noisy” (female, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021)

For this reason, this new teaching setting was more tiring than face-to-face teaching. EFL Pre-service teacher also reorganized their work hours because many students contacted in outwards of work hours, so they have more time spent on the screen. Not to mention a technical error to handle.

Supportive Agents

This study discovered that teachers desperately require specific guidelines and technical instructions for the application of distance learning supplied by the government as a reference in learning during the COVID-19 epidemic. Considering many pre-service teachers' unpreparedness in implementing online teaching and learn independently by existing facilities. However, EFL pre-service teachers took the opportunities to keep learning under the forced situation with guidance from supervisors and cooperating teachers. As participant 4 stated

“all of the cooperating teachers are active, they want to help in managing learning strategies or work together in overcoming students who have problems in online learning” (female, 21 years, interview 7 July 2021)

Participant 4, who actively online teaching with synchronous learning was very helpful by guidance from cooperating teachers and supervisor. According to Escobar & Marrison (2020), School cooperating teachers are crucial supportive actors in the pre-service teacher's process, and participants discussed the relationship, interaction, and support they received from them. Despite cooperating teachers also had to adapt to these unforeseen circumstances and learn a new teaching strategy, however cooperating teacher who knowing well the background of the students still shared how to deal with a variety of students with EFL pre-service teachers, as confirmed by participant 1

“Cooperating teacher helps to check the lesson plan, check the students' assignments, also oversees in the first week the students are active or not. For example, if any student has not done an assignment, the cooperating teacher asks the other student for help to contact their friend to immediately do the assignment.” (male, 22 years, interview 26 June 2021).

Conclusions

The unexpected closure of school and were forced to shift to fully online teaching and learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Howard, Tondeur, Siddi & Scherer, 2020) caused EFL pre-service teachers to be unprepared for online teaching. The purpose of this study was to learn more about pre-service teachers perceptions on the opportunities and challenges they faced during online teaching. During the COVID-19 outbreak, EFL pre-service teachers' confidence in implementing online learning was generally low, and this was intimately connected to the pre-service teachers' preparedness to teaching online, which was directly related to their abilities to use technology and online teaching platforms. The results indicate that, despite the opportunity to learn and explore new technology, the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers outweighed the opportunities in the long run.

The implementation of remote teaching during the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia, which was done through online teaching by teachers, faced throughout a variety of challenges (Azhari & Fajri, 2021) considering their lack of prior experience in the field of virtual education, as well as their teacher education program's lack of preparedness. According to Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), with several available theories and models, online education is deeply fountainhead in adequate planning and designs of instructions, but the migration process face-to-face teaching to online teaching is questioned because these processes witnessed the absence of proper planning, design, and development of online instructional programs due to the pandemic.

These findings should be considered when designing and forecasting new online field experiences to ensure that EFL pre-service teachers receive the required support in all of the areas that need to be developed during a teaching placement. ITE programs should be aware that addressing this unprecedented situation without the proper preparation, support, and supervision from higher education institutions may have a severe influence on the learning process of pre-service teachers. Offering online teaching placements without thorough planning could have negative consequences for pre-service teachers and their willingness to stay in the profession, which is something that needs to be looked into further.

“Considerable efforts and programs are made to guarantee that students keep learning from home, given the strong commitment of pre-service teachers and education administrators at schools.” (Azhari & Fajri, 2020).

Regardless of the national context of each country and educational context has a focus, it is helpful to consider these virtual education can build a great remote teaching and opportunities in education development among students. Nonetheless, since the growing issue of education financial spending in online teaching context, further studies are suggested to EFL pre-service teachers and parents working together to encourage students to learn and create connecting points for students in rural places who do not have access to the internet.

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