Chapter 23
The Challenges and Opportunities of Online Learning for Preservice Teachers During the COVID–19 Pandemic:
Evidence From the U.S. and Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The transition to emergency remote teaching in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up important problems of practice in online education to discussion. Since the start of this global health crisis, several studies have documented online education experiences. The aims of the current study were to examine the online learning experiences of preservice teachers from Turkey and the US. Survey items were designed to collect the perceptions and experiences of online learning from preservice teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs during the 2020-2021 academic year. Statistical data analysis provided insight into participants' views and attitudes toward online learning. Additionally, three open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively. These provided insight into participants' experiences, the challenges they faced, and the advantages of online learning. Findings suggest that preservice teachers prefer face-to-face teaching even though they recognize and appreciate the value of online learning. Findings also have important implications for future research.

INTRODUCTION

More than 1.5 billion students worldwide have been impacted by closures of schools and universities due to the COVID-19 outbreak (UNESCO, 2020). The consequences of the pandemic and associated lockdowns created unforeseen challenges as educators and learners grappled with the need to teach and learn from a distance with little time to prepare for this shift (Osman, 2020). Teacher education coursework moved primarily to web-based platforms and relied on tools delivered through Learning Management Systems (LMS), raising concerns about equity and access (Assunção Flores & Gago, 2020). As universities in both Turkey and the United States, where the authors are currently teaching, shifted to emergency remote teaching in March 2020, faculty grappled with the challenges of how to prepare teachers for an uncertain future. For example, lessons were designed to be taught through video conferencing and relied primarily on web-based tools and resources.

In many ways, the challenges faced by university educators mirrored those experienced by classroom teachers, who struggled to find appropriate resources to support young learners online (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Redesigning face-to-face instruction for distance learning was often difficult for teachers who lacked the tools and pedagogies to design effective lessons or manage the new realities of remote class-room management (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021). Thus, teacher educators around the world considered the impact of emergency remote teaching on future teachers (Hadar, Ergas, Alpert, & Ariav, 2020).

It is important to note that there were unexpected advantages of this rapid shift to remote teaching for teacher education candidates (Ergüleç & Eren, 2021). The wide array of modalities and digital technologies for working and communicating at a distance allowed educators to teach synchronously (i.e., meeting students at the same time), asynchronously (i.e., not having a scheduled time to meet with learning self-directed and self-paced), or in a combination of approaches to stretch instruction across time zones as students and faculty returned to home countries around the world (Ahmed et al., 2021). Remote emergency teaching created space for innovation as teacher educators leveraged available tools and modalities to support preservice teachers (Quezada, Talbot, & Quezada-Parker, 2020). Still, there were many challenges, including widespread reports of screen-related fatigue (Bailenson, 2021) and ongoing technological challenges. Moreover, little is known about the impact and challenges of distance learning on self-learning (Mbiydzenyuy & Silungwe, 2020).

In an attempt to capture the challenges associated with these rapid changes, online education has been described as "emergency remote teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020), and "learning in the time of CO-VID-19" (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Teacher educators around the world have responded to this period of "emergency distance education" by developing strategies to meet the needs of preservice teachers, even as their needs continue to shift (Roman, 2020). While it is clear that both faculty and preservice teachers must take a flexible and responsive stance to confront the unknown challenges of improvised distance education, illness, and future uncertainty (McIntosh & Nenonene, 2020), schools of education and faculty members must provide students with continued, high-quality learning experiences.

For years, researchers have argued that teachers and teacher educators should be prepared with the pedagogies to teach in online and blended environments (Ferdig & Kennedy, 2014), but most of these calls have been ignored (Kennedy & Ferdig, 2018). As a result, teacher educators were not prepared for the rapid transition to online teacher education in the wake of a worldwide lockdown. In some cases, technology experts were called in to design and develop online courses for faculty, many of whom were unable to respond effectively to the sudden shift. The aim was to guide instructors in instructional design processes to ensure that they would not simply transfer face-to-face course materials to virtual

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