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PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHER TRAINEES UPON ONLINE LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

PRÁTICAS E PERSPECTIVAS DOS PROFESSORES ESTAGIÁRIOS NO PROGRAMA ONLINE DE ENSINO DE IDIOMAS

PRÁCTICAS Y PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS PROFESORES PASANTES EN EL PROGRAMA ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS EN LÍNEA

Feryal CUBUKCU¹

ABSTRACT: *Instructional technologies have been used extensively after the spread of COVID19. Council of Higher Education in Turkey closed down all the universities and embarked on online education by issuing a statement that all universities were free to choose the platform they wished to use. This study aims at discovering how online language teacher education programmes yielded emerging patterns and how teacher trainees' perspectives were in relation with these online language teacher education programmes. To reach this aim, 275 teacher trainees at the Department of English Language Teaching participated in the study and semi-structured interviews were held with them. This discussion illuminates critical issues and attitudes of teacher trainees along with the challenges unique to programmes as a future research agenda.*

KEYWORDS: *Teacher trainees. Online education. Merit. Demerit.*

RESUMO: *As tecnologias instrucionais têm sido amplamente utilizadas após a disseminação do COVID19. O Conselho de Ensino Superior da Turquia fechou todas as universidades e iniciou o ensino on-line emitindo uma declaração de que todas as universidades eram livres para escolher a plataforma que desejavam usar. Este estudo tem como objetivo descobrir como os programas de formação de professores de idiomas on-line renderam padrões emergentes e como as perspectivas dos formandos estavam em relação a esses programas de formação de professores de idiomas on-line. Para alcançar esse objetivo, 275 professores estagiários do Departamento de Ensino de Língua Inglesa participaram do estudo e entrevistas semiestruturadas foram realizadas com eles. Esta discussão esclarece questões e atitudes críticas dos formandos, juntamente com os desafios exclusivos dos programas como uma agenda de pesquisa futura.*

PALAVRAS-CLAVE: *Estagiários. Educação on-line. Mérito. Demérito.*

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RESUMEN: Las tecnologías educativas se han utilizado ampliamente después de la propagación de COVID19. El Consejo de Educación Superior en Turquía cerró todas las universidades y se embarcó en la educación en línea al emitir una declaración de que todas las universidades eran libres de elegir la plataforma que deseaban utilizar. Este estudio tiene como objetivo descubrir cómo los programas de formación de profesores de idiomas en línea produjeron patrones emergentes y cómo las perspectivas de los profesores en formación estaban en relación con estos programas de formación de profesores de idiomas en línea. Para alcanzar este objetivo, 275 docentes en formación del Departamento de Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés participaron en el estudio y se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con ellos. Esta discusión ilumina cuestiones críticas y actitudes de los docentes en formación junto con los desafíos únicos de los programas como una futura agenda de investigación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Docentes en formación. Educación en línea. Mérito. Demérito.

Introduction

The expansion of instructional technologies in education has made it possible to learn and teach a second or foreign language online, without recourse to face-to-face teaching. A great deal of information is available on the varying formats and relative efficacy of online language-learning programmes (BLAKE, 2009; HOCKLY, 2015; HUBBARD, 2008; PAWAN *et al.*, 2016; SHIN; KANG, 2018; WHITE, 2014). Technology allows us to simplify our daily work, thus adding more values to our productivity. Teaching and learning is one of the core activities within higher education, such as universities and colleges. Almost every university in the USA now “offers some type of computer online courses and most offer online programs in which all or most of the courses are taken via electronic means with a minimum of face to face real personal contact between instructor and student. There are many instructors and professors who claim that this electronic instruction is the future of teaching and the future of learning” (FAULK, 2011, p. 26). Higher education administrators in Turkey have jumped on the electronic bandwagon and have demanded that all programs of study should start online course offerings after the COVID19 pandemic.

Online Education

Online education has been used extensively in the world, which leads a lot of institutions to apply and adapt instructional technologies in the classes. In addition, digital literacy has been accepted one of the 21st century competencies in education for teachers to possess. Online learning refers to language learning that takes place fully online via the internet, with no face-to-face component, within the context of both formal language courses

and more informal learning scenarios (HOCKLY, 2015). The ease, flexibility and adaptability pave the way for teachers to increasingly employ such online classes and enhance their learning. Technology brings a lot of benefits to online classes such as flexibility, reduced costs, networking, documentation, increased student time, accessibility and self-discipline²:

1. Flexibility: Students have the freedom to access any time they wish to because they are not tied down to a fixed schedule. In a traditional classroom setting, class meeting times are set, and the student has no power over this, forcing them to work their schedules around these dates.

2. Reduced Costs: Online education can cost less due to a variety of reasons. For example, there is no cost for commuting, lunch breaks and refreshments.

3. Networking Opportunities: Online education also provides students with the chance to network with peers across their own city, country, nations or even different continents. This often leads to other opportunities in terms of collaboration with other individuals in the implementation of a project.

4. Documentation: All the information that students need is safely stored in an online database. This includes things like live discussion documents, training materials and emails. This means that if they need something to be clarified, they are able to access these documents fast, saving valuable time.

5. Increased Instructor - Student Time: Students in traditional classrooms may not get the personalized attention they need to have concepts clarified.

6. Access to Expertise: An online college education might give students access to specialized degree courses that may not be available in an easily accessible or local institution of learning. Online classes allow the sharing of expertise that helps more people have access to education that is not readily available in certain geographic locations.

7. Self-discipline and responsibility: It is true that studying online requires more self-motivation and time-management skills, because students will spend a lot of time on their own without someone helping them.

8. Comfortable learning environment: Commercials that feature online students studying in their pajamas only skims the surface of one of the benefits of online education: no physical class sessions. Students listen to lectures and complete assignments sent to them electronically, with no need to fight traffic and leave early for class.

² Available in: <https://www.ccaurora.edu/programs-classes/online-learning/benefits-online-education>. Access in: may 2020.

One of the goals in online education is to provide equal opportunities for all members of the society, however, it is not an easy task to do so (Nash, 2004; Tsai, 2004). Online learning, among all possible approaches, is one solution to provide equal chances or at least curb this gap.

Online education is of two types: known as synchronous and asynchronous (SU *et al.*, 2005). In the first type of learning, the primary participants are the teachers and the learners within the collaboration. Such a situation will simulate a real physical class with students and teachers facing each other so old text-based instruction will fade away and will no longer be of any use (SU *et al.*, 2005; WILLIAMS; PAPROCK; COVINGTON, 1999). The second one, asynchronous, has the instructor leaving “posts to present the material or lessons for the learner to read or use, which in our case it can include leaving a text to be paraphrased or summarized” (MOQADAM TABRIZI, 2018, p. 178) .

Some studies maintain that online courses are very effective for students, with regard to improved linguistic competence, when used over an extended period of time (ISTI'ANAH, 2017; MOLCHANOVA, 2015; YANG *et al.*, 2013) and claim that students also find online courses more instructive, motivating and helpful in terms of gaining proficiency and independence.

Method

Study Group

275 teacher trainees aged between 20-22 studying at the Department of English Language Teaching at a western state university participated in the study during the spring term of 2019-2020 academic year. All their courses were given online due to the mandate of the Council of Higher Education, that was applied after COVID19 pandemic all around Turkey. Their online courses lasted for 9 weeks and at the end of the term, they were asked to fill in the semi-structured forms online after they gave their consent forms. The form had the questions of “are you happy with the online education classes?”, “what are the merits of online education?”, “what are the demerits of online education”, “what is the most challenging aspect?”, “what is the fun aspect?”. The researcher then compared the fall and spring term GPA results of the learners to discover in which term they were more successful.

Data Results

Satisfaction level

Teacher trainees unanimously state that they are not happy with the online classes as they wish to have face-to-face classes where they believe they learn overwhelmingly better. They contend that their online classes do not give them the same amount of satisfaction they have had in classes. Through interaction with their fellow classmates and instructors, their learning level is beyond comparison. There is nobody who says positive things about online education.

St 1: Lots of things are going on at the same time. I have to deal with the distractions of the real world around me such as my family. However, when you are in a real class, it's sacred. No one disturbs you.

St 2: I do not think I am truly making a progress.

St 3: I understand right now what it means to be in class and how privileged we were in classes.

Merits

Time: Time is mentioned as a merit by 200 teacher trainees (72.7 %), mentioning the possibility to watch the videos at their own available time, typically discussing how easy it is to have many chances to watch the videos over and over for topics (64.72 %) and assignments as in Table 1.

Shy personality: Some teacher trainees (25 of them, 9 %) note that they have more relaxed time in online classes as they do not have to join the class discussions and avoid being visible in the public eye.

Table 1 – Merits

Merits	n	%
Time	200 (72.7 %)	34.90
Recycling the videos	178 (64.72 %)	31.06
Less cost	170 (61.81 %)	29.66
Shy personality	25 (9 %)	4.36
Total Items	573	100

Source: elaborated by the author

Teacher trainees are not aware of the model behind online education as Cope and Kalantzis (2007) have proposed in addressing new digital teaching and learning: design, pluralism, synaesthesia, and pedagogy. They do not show any cognition, awareness and recognition to perceive the design of the classes, platform. Plurality component does not see individual or group traits as static, but rather as ever-shifting and developing in complex interaction with the world. The third dimension of new learning, synaesthesia, is the melding of perception between and among visual, aural and textual modalities. Hence, none of these components are visible to teacher trainees.

Demerits

Table 2 showcases the disadvantages of online education in the eyes of 275 teacher trainees.

Table 2 – Demerits

Demerits	n	%
Collaboration	275 (100%)	37.67
Practice	250 (90 %)	34.24
Social interaction	225 (81 %)	30.82
Logistics	30 (10.9 %)	4.10
Total Items	730	100

Source: elaborated by the author

Community building and Collaboration: All teacher trainees state that they miss the interaction between them and teachers, between them and classmates. They also hold that they need support with completing the assignments given on a weekly basis in all the classes in relation with academic writing, regardless of their language backgrounds; this need might be more serious for L2 students who are new to the discourses and genres of English for academic purposes than it is for their English-native-speaking counterparts (SHIN; KANG, 2018, p. 377). Although students can utilize support from their more successful friends who provide face-to-face help to those who live in the same towns neighbourhoods) and/or online, they indicate that they are in need of seeking out more support from the class learning communities.

St 4: Whenever we needed help, there were hundreds in the building to help us including teachers. Now we have nobody.

St 5: All we have is the uploaded videos and google....

St 6: I do not feel I am in a class. Even the teacher looks out of reach...not like the real life.

Practicum: Practicum and field experience in language teacher education provide student teachers with an inevitable opportunity to observe how learning and teaching take place in the real classroom situations, and to gain first-hand experiences in applying textbook knowledge to real teaching situations. When it comes to the provision of practicum and field experience, 90 % of teacher trainees mention that they could not find real life situations and could not empathize with the teachers in real life situations as they could not face the real life situations but only simulated situations.

St 7: We do not encounter real situations...teachers give us possible problems to deal with, but each learner is unique and the coping ways are different.

St 8: Teaching online has nothing to do with teaching in class. We do not see students eye and facial expressions and we cannot see them through.

Social Interaction: The student teachers' diverse cultural backgrounds emphasize a need to challenge the assumption that equal and increased student participation would be possible in online classrooms, when compared with face-to-face classes. 81 % of them believe that this social bonding is amiss in the virtual class.

St 9: Nonverbal cues such as mimes, gestures, facial expressions are the things that stimulated me...but now they are all gone.

St 10: I realize that what teaches us and what gets us going on is the sustenance of the interaction with classmates and teachers.

St 11: Nothing is as inspirational as one look and one word of the teacher given face-to-face.

Logistics: The issue related to technological access is concerned with existing disparities in access to most up-to-date technologies. This access issue warrants a critical examination of the notion of equity in online classes that makes education accessible and affordable to everyone notwithstanding locational constraints, given the digital divide between the technology 'haves' and 'have-nots'. 30 teacher trainees (10.9 %) state that they have constant problems with the online connection due to the places they live, most of whom live in the rural areas.

The worst and fun side

All teacher trainees think the fun part is that they watch the videos synchronously in their casual clothes and even attend classes in bed. The worst part is they cannot learn very well –79.27 %--as they do not have the self-regulated strategies—67.63 %-- and that they cannot find opportunities to socialize with friends-- 63.63 %-- as in Table 3.

Table 3 – The fun and worst aspects

Items	n	%
Relaxed atmosphere such as casual outfits	275	100
Low cost	252	91.6
Higher scores	220	80
Low performance	218	79.27
Lack of interaction	213	77.45
Lack of autonomy	186	67.63
Lack of socialization	175	63.63

Source: elaborated by the author

Spring and fall term GPAs

Teacher trainees' fall and spring term scores show a significant difference to the advantage of online classes although they believe that they have not learned as well as and as much as possible as the t-test result highlights in Table 4. Interestingly enough, the high scores they have obtained in the spring term does not prevent them from believing that despite high grades, they are aware of the fact that they have not learned enough.

Table 4 – Comparison of the scores

	Mean	Std Dev.	P value
Fall Term	2.68	13.26	.00
Spring term	3.25	15.83	

Source: elaborated by the author

Discussion and Conclusion

This research is consistent with others in this area. Some studies have found the similar echoes comparing student opinions of required group work that students in online sections were more resistant and displeased to the online classes (KULES; MCDANIEL, 2010; MARKEN; DICKINSON, 2013; SMITH *et al.*, 2011). Although some studies maintain that technology-based learning gives students more responsibility and enhances their motivation and that technology integration with education has the potential to increase students' motivation (CHUN, 2011; DARASAWANG; REINDERS, 2010; USHIDA, 2005; WARSCHAUER, 1996), this study seems to not yield the similar results.

For synchronous sessions, students need to have a quiet space and computers with strong internet connections to thrive during live class meetings. Moreover, synchronous instruction does not always offer students with special learning needs or disabilities what they need to learn. Some professors who lecture live record their meetings do post them online afterward, with transcripts and other materials, but not all. There has been an exponential increase in using the online platforms, for example, "Zoom usage went up 20-fold. The service does not release education-specific numbers, but there's been an obvious higher ed boom there and on similar platforms, such a Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams"³.

John Dewey is widely considered to be one of the first thinkers in the progressive education movement. Dewey's writing on the continuity of experience contains three elements. First, he believes that experience must lead to growth; second, that it should stimulate creativity or the motivation to learn more; and third, that it must be genuine and situated in the community (DEWEY, 1938, p. 28-39), none of which are shared by teacher trainees in relation with online education. Based on the limitations of the study the following conclusions have been drawn: Teacher trainees show negative opinions and perceptions regarding the use of online courses to train future teachers. A large majority of the teacher trainees do not fully agree that online courses or programs would fully prepare future teachers for conditions that would be faced within the public schools. Specific areas such as classroom management and the social aspects of teaching are not viewed as being positive in terms of online preparation. Other areas such as the theories and principles of teaching are considered as very theoretical not suitable for the applications. Several teacher trainees note that online courses and programs would not be adequate without an abundance of field experiences and student teaching. Teacher trainees of English language education appeared to be very

³ Available in: <https://www.insidehighered>. Access in: may 2020.

concerned that many of the teachers prepared online would possibly not endure the rigors of the classroom without having real classroom experience. Several of them mention that future teachers needed to be taught by mentors in a real classroom setting in order to enhance modeling. Teacher trainees believe that they are open-minded to use innovative techniques but they sound unconvinced that it will prepare teachers for the challenges that teachers face. It is not wrong to say that a lot of things about online teaching will make our face-to-face teaching better.

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