

EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENT TEACHING PRACTICUM IN TURKEY THROUGH EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Turkish early childhood pre-service teachers had to follow their student teaching practicum courses through emergency remote teaching on the online platform available to them during COVID-19 pandemic like in most countries. The pre-service teachers were experimenting with this new form of student teaching practicum by building up new knowledge and experiences without being present in the school context and having no interaction with the children. This study aims to analyse early childhood education pre-service teachers' experiences of emergency remote teaching (ERT) during COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkey and explore how these experiences shape their professional development to meet the quality standards and preschool teacher competencies. Doing a content analysis of the codes through a qualitative data analysis software program (NVivo 12) and making a constant comparison between codes and categories, three themes as a result of this study after doing a content analysis of the data, have emerged: (1) Early childhood education pre-service teachers' practices in ERT supported only certain competencies. (2) With its natural structure of distance education, ERT restrained pre-service teachers' field experiences to enable them to gain the necessary competencies and qualifications for early childhood education (3) the pre-service teachers perceived ERT as insufficient for their placement experiences. There is a need for a regulation on how the practice in teacher education should be done in ERT since pre-service teachers' field placements have a crucial role in their training and there is a missing gap for practice during distance education.

Keywords: *Early childhood education, emergency remote teaching, COVID-19 pandemic, preservice teachers*

Introduction

Preschools for children are not just an ordinary learning environment where education is given in a certain period, but also educational institutions that offer young children an educational atmosphere equipped with rich materials (Atiles et al., 2021). It is almost impossible to provide these opportunities with distance education and this issue has become one of the most prominent problems globally since The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). All countries started to take necessary measures by declaring a national pandemic which has changed people's daily life dramatically. It has also changed education and schooling with its stakeholders such as teachers, children, students, and parents. Children were affected both physically and psychologically by the closure of schools and entire cities (Pascal et al., 2020; Szente, 2020). To reduce the adverse impact of the pandemic and to carry on educational activities, the countries sought various solutions for this change. There were two options: the first one was to suspend ongoing education and close down all schools to get ready for online education for an uncertain period. The second option was to shift traditional, face-to-face education to ERT (Emergency Remote Teaching) through an online mode of delivery. In Turkey, the total duration of school closures caused

by COVID-19 has been 49 weeks since the pandemic began (UNESCO, 2020). The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) which regulates tertiary education in Turkey had taken certain measures for COVID-19 during the first wave of lockdowns (March-July 2020). All Turkish universities which had distance/online education capacity migrated to ERT on March 23rd, 2020. On the one hand, educators had to rethink everything related to all educational activities such as course materials, assignments, requirements, and students' class attendance. On the other hand, the students had to migrate the online distance education urgently from their regular order. First of all, they had to return to their homes from their dormitories and housing. In chaos, panic, anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty, they were locked in the news from their universities (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Eventually, many countries applied emergency remote teaching to their educational services for all students.

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and Learning

ERT is a temporary change of teaching method from face-to-face continuing education to another model (online platform) in a crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). The courses offered through “distance education” should not be considered the same as ERT courses converted to online in case of a crisis. The whole program regarding the courses given in distance education has been planned down to the last detail. The students who enrol in a distance learning course have their preparation and dedication according to distance learning requirements and necessities. Each student has already set up the necessary infrastructure (computer, the internet, etc.) and each is orientated on the online platform to be used for distance education. Through the syllabus of the courses, the students know beforehand what content and responsibilities they will encounter during the process. Heirdsfield et al. (2007) found out that online learning and teaching supported early childhood teacher education students and it did not create any barriers to their learning. At the same time, they argued that technology could not replace the human factor in university education.

Different from distance education, there is an unusual situation in ERT, and it can be considered an approach within the standard teaching system. In the design of education and training programs, the ERT approach should be considered as a plan B that can be used in crises. Researchers initially reacted to study mostly on the issue of how the pandemic impacts education, more specifically student learning and online teaching by addressing the advantages and disadvantages of ERT (Abu Talib et al., 2021).

Most college students including early childhood pre-service teachers could follow their courses in distance education on the online platform available to them. Unlike face-to-face education, online distance learning has some advantages and disadvantages for them. In their study, Shim and Lee (2020) found that college students were satisfied with ERT due to the comfortable educational environment, time utilization, smooth interaction, social distancing, easy access to course resources, and academic achievement. They were dissatisfied with ERT due to network instability, unilateral interactions, constraints on practice or experiments, constraints on assignments and group works, and unprepared class design. For example, some students complained that they had problems attending classes at home and that they could not create a suitable learning environment because other family members they lived with disturbed them during the lesson (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Not all students have negotiated the challenge successfully that they faced during the pandemic. In their quantitative research, Aguilera-Hermida, et al. (2021) studied how the university students perceived the abrupt migration to emergency remote teaching in four different countries (Mexico, Peru, Turkey, and the USA) by looking at the students' perceptions regarding relationships of different variables including attitude, affect, motivation, behavioural control, and cognitive engagement. They found that there is a strong relationship between

self-efficacy and cognitive engagement. The students with a higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves successfully with online learning difficulties. Similar to college students' cases, ERT put an enormous burden on parents' shoulders since they were also involved in ERT to technically support their children's participation in distance lessons (Stites et al., 2021; Yıldırım, 2021). They were worried about their children's exams, homework, and school tasks assigned through online education (Lau & Lee, 2020). They believed that the exams did not assess properly the students' learning and homework was not followed promptly for useful feedback (Mısırlı & Ergulec, 2021). They were highly concerned about the increased screen time which was the main tool for the education and socialization of children. These concerns, advantages, and disadvantages have also impacted directly early childhood pre-service teachers' training and placement during the Pandemic.

It should be noted here that teacher education has a very important role in developing effective teachers and well-trained teachers are needed for effective and qualified education (Ammentorp & Madden, 2014). The teacher education programs not only change the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of pre-service teachers but also improve their teaching skills with practical experience in the field (Dorfman et al., 2006). Many countries give more importance to field practice in teacher training programs in order to increase the quality of education. For example, in the USA, as the NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) report argues, teacher preparation should "transform into programs that are purely clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses" (NCATE, 2010, p. ii).

Early childhood student field placement or practicum is an important part of teacher training or initial teacher education, and it has a pivotal role in the provision of quality teacher education (Kidd & Murray, 2020). The pre-service teachers can practice their knowledge and they have a chance to improve their teaching skills through the practicum (Dorfman et al., 2006). During these early practices, they get feedback from both mentor teachers and supervisor faculty members and enrich their teaching skills and professional learning. The more the pre-service teachers stay in the field and do hands-on, face-to-face activities with the children, the more they will gain professional teaching skills. Even some distance education programs require a certain duration of field experience for teaching credentials (For example, a distance education program requires 90-day professional experience in an early childhood education setting) (the Queensland University of Technology, n.d.).

With the pandemic, the practicum in a school setting for preservice teachers evolved into a new form. It disappeared as a "practicum vacuum" or "disembodied placement" as in England (Kidd & Murray, 2020; p543). Instead of practicum in school contexts, "new forms of practice" were attached to the online platform. This new form of practicum was moved to a new space. Now teacher educators need to adjust themselves to this new form. The online learning space led to the development of basic pedagogical principles in different disembodied spaces. Teacher educators have had a new dilemma to solve even after the pandemic (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Shim & Lee, 2020).

Stephens and Curward (2021) studied how teacher educators negotiate an immediate shift to ERT during tumultuous conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. According to teacher educators, the transition to emergency remote teaching was so fast and sudden that it affected the quality of their seminars. They were unprepared to use online platforms for ERT (Trust & Whalen, 2020). They state that these platforms offered by the universities are insufficient to provide teacher values and pedagogy. They might be powerful tools, but not for education and training (Stephens & Curward, 2021). There are limitations in teaching essential content and values in teacher education.

Something is missing in teaching without interacting and without touching hearts. It is necessary to teach the course by building up personal connections on the online platform. Most of the time, the pre-service teachers in ERT log into the system but do not turn on their

cameras, which makes the synchronous lesson asynchronous (Stephens & Curward, 2021). A study in Chile investigating how teaching practice with ERT takes place has shown that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher candidates perform their practice synchronously and asynchronously. The pre-service teachers answered the students' questions in the 45-minute synchronous lessons and gave them feedback. In asynchronous lessons, pre-service teachers prepared short videos, handouts, and worksheets on related topics for students and sent them via email (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). The pre-service teachers were experimenting with this new form of practicum by building up new knowledge and experiences. However, they were not present in the school context, and they had a lack of direct interaction with the students. This embodied practicum has increased their anxiety and decreased their motivations (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Missing practicum causes preservice teachers to be deprived of a very critical step for their education and professional development (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Like many other higher education students, early childhood teacher education students are also faced with this dilemma in the most important period when they need to practice (Alan, 2021; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Murphy, 2020).

The early childhood teacher education program in Turkey has been designed according to the Turkish Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education teachers in Turkey (See Table 1). The teachers are expected to be competent in both knowledge (about child growth and development, family involvement, assessment) and practice (about communication, creativity and aesthetics, and school and community partnership). They need to build strong professional development (Ministry of National Education, n.d.).

Table 1

The Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Teachers in Turkey (Code List of The Study)

| Domains (Categories) | Competencies (Codes) | Competency Indicators (Sub-Codes) |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1) Child growth and development | Program planning | Activity planning |
| | | Child base planning |
| | Learning environment | Indoor and outdoor activities |
| | | Learning centres |
| | Educational materials | Outdoor learning environment |
| | | Child appropriate materials |
| | | Safe materials |
| | Carrying out educational activities | Rich classroom materials for activities |
| | | Child safety |
| | | Time management |
| | | Meet individual needs |
| | | Including all children |
| | | Supportive teaching |
| | Children's enjoyment | |
| The effective transition between activities | | |
| Multiple teaching methods | | |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2) Family involvement | Communicating with families | Building communication with families Using different communication tools |
| | Carrying out family involvement | Planning parent education activities Implementing and evaluating family involvement |
| 3) Assessment | Curriculum assessing | Daily assessment Monthly assessment |
| | Ongoing measurement of child progress | Multiple child assessment tools Standard and non-standard measurements for children |
| 4) Communication | Active listening to children | Eye contact with children Enough time for listening to each child |
| | | Role model to children for active listening |
| | Empathy with children | Awareness of other feelings Role model to children for empathy skills |
| | | Using gestures and body language Communicate through various methods |
| | Using information technologies in daily life | Introducing IT to children Using IT with children |
| 5) Creativity and aesthetic | Researching, discovering, and generating alternative solutions | Encouraging children's creative thinking Guiding children to discover and investigate |
| | | Support children's imaginations Promoting children's unique products |
| | Aesthetic sensibility | Arranging children's learning environment aesthetically Using art instruments in the learning environment |
| | | Appreciating the aesthetic of children |
| 6) School and community partnership | Child involvement in cultural festivals | |
| | Planning and participating in cultural festivals | |
| | School partnership with community | |
| 7) Professional development | Determining | Self-assessment Seeking carrier opportunities Improving professional identity |

The content of the teacher education program should be especially considered for a more qualified student field experience. The more compatible the teacher education program and the teacher's placement in the field, the more qualified preservice teachers will develop. For example, ongoing and assessment-based field experiences support preservice teachers' assessment competencies (Dorfman et al., 2006). Thus, these competencies should be taken into account in the implementation of the teaching program designed according to teacher competencies. Pre-service teachers' perspectives toward emergency remote teaching and experiences with struggles and satisfaction they have encountered during this period are also important to create a strong teacher training program. In the Turkish context, The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) regulated ongoing teaching for different age levels through various distanced education solutions including the internet platforms and national TV channels (TRT EBA TV). On the one

hand, MoNE streamed pedagogical television programs for preschool children. On the other hand, MoNE required the preschool teachers to do 2-hour-online activities daily with the kids by using Zoom, the internet platform. All participating pre-service teachers in this study did their placement in public preschools and they were subject to the above regulations.

Research Problem

Early childhood education teachers in Turkey are trained in education colleges of universities. Pre-service teachers are entitled to receive a teaching diploma upon completion of 4 years of university education. The curriculum of early childhood education teacher education programs is determined by CoHE and implemented by university colleges (CoHE a, n.d). This program is updated and changed from time to time (CoHE b, n.d). Pre-service teachers graduate from this program after earning a total of 141 credits (professional knowledge-50, general culture-27, field education-64). In their senior year, they have to take a teaching practice course in both the fall and spring semesters. This course has two components: a class component and a field component that requires working with children (between 3 to 6 years old). Pre-service teachers practice 6 hours a day each week under the guidance of a mentor teacher in a preschool education institution. Then, pre-service teachers discuss their activities under the supervision of a university advisor for two hours a week.

With this study, it is aimed to analyse the pre-service teachers' experiences with ERT. The main research question of this study is how early childhood student teaching practicum in Turkey builds the pre-service teachers' professional development to meet the Turkish Teaching Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education (TTCCECE) (Table 1) through emergency remote teaching. It is important to reveal these experiences to directly impact future teachers' quality of experience in teaching in the training program.

The sub-questions of the research are:

1. Which early childhood education teacher competencies were included in the pre-service teachers' practices through ERT?
2. Which early childhood education teacher competencies were included in the pre-service teachers' activity plans they designed?
3. What did the pre-service teachers do to contribute to their professional development according to the early childhood education teacher competencies?
4. How did Turkish early childhood pre-service teachers perceive ERT in their teaching practice?

Many countries have aimed to carry out teacher training in the most qualified way during the pandemic process. Each country has tried to find a remedy with different approaches, according to their own conditions, against the disadvantages of the pandemic crisis. The experiences gained from different applications will be very valuable in case of a possible crisis that may be experienced next. Therefore, the results of this study will help other countries in the international context on their way out of the crisis.

In current studies, the researchers looked at the views of pre-service teachers (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020), the teachers (Alan, 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2020) and the university teacher educators (Kidd & Murray, 2020) regarding ERT process during COVID-19 pandemic. However, this study examined early childhood preservice teachers' activity plans they designed and the lesson videos they made during the ERT process in addition to their views. The use of different data sources is very important and unique for the in-depth study of this case with a multifaceted perspective. For example, this study scrutinized the synchronous and asynchronous lesson videos of preservice teachers separately, which would shed light on the complexity of the student teaching practicum in the ERT process.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted through an instrumental case study approach which is a qualitative research design to provide insight into issues of early childhood students' teaching practicum (Stake, 1995). The general purpose of this study is to understand how ERT during the pandemic affects early childhood pre-service teachers' student teaching practicum, how ERT contributes to the pre-service teachers' teaching competencies, and what meaning the pre-service teachers attributed to online teaching activities. For this purpose, the study was carried out with 10 early childhood preservice teachers in Turkey. The duration of the study was six months starting from April 2021 to September 2021.

Participants

The participants of the research were 10 final year students who were studying at an early childhood teacher education program in a state university in Turkey. These students attended online courses and did their student teaching practicum through emergency remote teaching during the pandemic. In the first stage of the data collection process, 61 volunteer pre-service teachers participated in the 18-question open-ended questionnaire developed by the researchers. In the second stage, activity plans and lesson videos were requested from these 61 pre-service teachers, and 26 students responded. At the last stage, 10 pre-service teachers (2 males and 8 females) formed the study group. The participants were selected from volunteer pre-service teachers who agreed to openly share their experiences. Pre-service teachers' names were anonymized throughout the presentation of findings.

Procedures

In the study, different data collection methods including open-ended questionnaires, observation, and document analysis were used. These multiple, three sets of data were provided doing data triangulation and making data comparisons on our issue (McMillan, 2004). The first part of the data is derived from an open-ended online questionnaire that was applied through web-based applications. The questionnaire is an appropriate way to reach out to participants during pandemic conditions and it has the potential to provide fast and high-quality data to researchers (Creswell, 2009; James, 2007; Meho, 2006). The questionnaire consisted of two parts that aimed to examine pre-service teachers' demographic information and their views on teaching practice at ERT. The 18-question open-ended questionnaire was submitted to the approval of the ethics committee after receiving expert opinion. The approved form was prepared on the web and answered by the pre-service teachers online. After the questionnaire, activity plans and lesson videos prepared by the pre-service teachers participating in the study in ERT were requested. The second data collection method was to examine the synchronous and asynchronous practice records of pre-service teachers. In this context, we requested video recordings of synchronous and asynchronous lessons from each of the pre-service teachers. 20 asynchronous lesson videos with an average duration of 15 minutes, a total of 254.5 minutes, and 10 synchronous application videos with an average duration of 30 minutes, a total of 285.6 minutes were examined. While it is aimed to obtain detailed and versatile data on the practices of pre-service teachers with video recordings, investigators tried to benefit from the features of reflecting gestures and interpersonal interaction. Multiple viewings, re-watchability and post-event analysis of the videos provided support during the data collection process in pandemic conditions (Griffin, 2019). The last method of data collection was examining pre-service

teachers' daily activity plans. Each teacher was asked to share 2 daily training plans designed and implemented for teaching practice in ERT in order to triangulate the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and application videos (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008).

Data Analysis

Three sets of data were analysed through a content analysis research technique and this analysis was done with a qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 12. The process started with separating and categorizing data that focus on and ignore the dense data set (Creswell, 2013). All the data is transferred to the software program and then, both transcribed and visual data are coded on the software program. Structural coding enables us to make the dense data into smaller useful categories according to the similarities, differences, and relationships of the data set used (Saldana, 2009). The codebook of the study was created based on Teaching Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education (See Table 1) determined by the MoNE before we started the analysis. The coding process was carried out with 19 codes and 43 subcodes under 7 categories in our codebook. Close connections were maintained between categories (codes) and the data, and the data was compared and coded in the same way to develop a theoretical elaboration by doing the constant comparison. Eventually, the themes that emerged from the comparisons reached out.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Before the study for internal validity/credibility, expert opinion was obtained for the data collection tool and voluntary participation of the participants was ensured. Data triangulation was also performed using multiple data sources. Coding reliability was provided for consistency and intercoder reliability was checked through the NVivo 12 program. In order to ensure coding reliability, we aimed to eliminate the individuality of the researcher by recoding the study data by two of the authors. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that there should be at least 80% consistency between coders for coding reliability and the internal consistency of the study. Both researchers coded the data separately on the NVivo 12 program and after the simultaneous coding, the coder reliability was checked through the program twice. Since there were some disagreements at the first check, two researchers analysed the data together, resolved any disputes on codes, and modified codes as necessary. They eventually came to a consensus with their coding. After the second check, the intercoder agreement was 97.5% and the coding process was consistent. Ethical approval was obtained from the researchers' University Human Research Ethics Committee to access and interview participant pre-service teachers. The participants were assured to have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and their names have remained anonymous.

Research Results

During the ERT process, the pre-service teachers were responsible for planning and implementing some of these plans for children remotely, both synchronously and asynchronously. We analysed the data obtained from these practices and the open-ended questionnaires to answer the question of what preschool teacher competency domains are effective in ERT placement. There are 7 competency domains of the core competencies for early childhood education teachers in Turkey (Table 2). These are *child growth and development, family involvement, assessment, communication, creativity and aesthetics, school and community partnership, and professional development.*

Table 2
Codes Distribution According to Preschool Teacher Competencies During student teaching practicum in ERT

| | Open-ended questionnaire | Asynchronous practices | Synchronous practices | Activity plans |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1- Child growth and development | 102 | 99 | 104 | 48 |
| 2- Family involvement | 28 | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| 3- Assessment | 21 | 11 | 6 | 16 |
| 4- Communication | 44 | 33 | 32 | 16 |
| 5- Creativity and aesthetic | 2 | 37 | 24 | 19 |
| 6- School and community partnership | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 7- Professional development | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In Table 2, it is seen that ERT is mainly effective in the competency field of child growth and development. The pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of this comprehensive competency domain by expressing more opinions in the child growth and development competency domain than the ones in other domains. They have given more place to child growth and development in their synchronous-asynchronous practices and activity plans they have prepared compared to other competence domains.

In the open-ended questionnaire, the pre-service teachers emphasized that family involvement is important and beneficial for early childhood education. Likewise, they included this competence domain in their activity plans, but they rarely included the implications related to this competence domain in their synchronous-asynchronous practice. The limited number of codes obtained from the data related to the assessment competence domain shows the limited effect of ERT on this domain. The pre-service teachers gave significant place to the competency field of communication in their synchronous-asynchronous practices and activity plans, and they emphasized that this field is important in communication with children and parents in the open-ended questionnaire. While the pre-service teachers included a significant amount of space for the competencies of creativity and aesthetics in asynchronous-synchronous implementations and activity plans, they expressed rarely these competency domains in their opinions. There are not any codes in the school and community partnership competency domain. This result can show that the ERT was not effective in this competency domain. Although the pre-service teachers did not show any performance in their practices and their plans, they expressed their views on professional development in the open-ended questionnaires.

The competency domain of child growth and development includes certain competencies regarding program planning, designing a learning environment, using appropriate educational materials, and carrying out educational activities (Table 3).

Table 3
Competency Domain of Child Growth and Development

| | Opinions | | Practices | |
|---|----------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | | Synchronous | Asynchronous | |
| | | | Individual practice videos | Activity plans |
| Program Planning | 44 | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| Activity planning | 27 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Child base planning | 17 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Indoor and outdoor activities | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Learning Environment | 9 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Learning centres | 9 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Outdoor learning environment | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Educational Materials | 12 | 14 | 14 | 7 |
| Child appropriate materials | 6 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| Safe materials | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Rich classroom materials for activities | 3 | 9 | 10 | 6 |
| Carrying Out Educational Activities | 37 | 86 | 72 | 34 |
| Child safety | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Time management | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Meet individual needs | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Including all children | 6 | 20 | 13 | 2 |
| Supportive teaching | 7 | 21 | 19 | 6 |
| Children's enjoyment | 1 | 13 | 13 | 10 |
| The effective transition between activities | 0 | 11 | 16 | 6 |
| Multiple teaching methods | 11 | 15 | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 102 | 104 | 99 | 48 |

The pre-service teachers have planned their educational activities according to the children's developmental level. They emphasized the importance of learning centres in children's classrooms as learning environments. They included various activities for outdoor learning environments in synchronous and asynchronous implementations. Again, they emphasized the importance of child-friendly and safe educational materials regarding this competence domain, and they used materials suitable for children in synchronous-asynchronous implementations. In their synchronous and asynchronous implementations, enriched classroom materials were meticulously included by the pre-service teachers. However, the child safety was not taken part in the implementation of educational activities in their ERT placement. The pre-service teachers expressed their views on the importance of teacher's competencies on time management, children's individuality, participation of all children in activities, and supportive teaching.

However, they used more competencies of including all children, supportive teaching, children's enjoyment, and effective transition in both synchronous and asynchronous implications. As a result, the pre-service teachers show a great amount of performance on the competencies of including all children, supportive teaching, an effective transition between activities, and children's enjoyment of the ERT process. They show a limited amount of performance on the competencies of time management, child safety, learning centres, and indoor and outdoor activities. They expressed a significant number of views on these competencies, albeit they show a very limited degree of performance on the competencies of activity planning and child base planning.

The competency domain of professional development includes self-assessment, seeking carrier opportunities, and improving professional identity. Through the ERT process, the pre-service teachers did not include any activities regarding competencies on seeking career opportunities and improving professional identity in their activities.

Table 4
Competency Domain of Professional Development

| | Opinions | | Practices | |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | | Synchronous | Asynchronous | |
| | | | Individual practice videos | Activity plans |
| Determining | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Self-assessment | 35 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Seeking carrier opportunities | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Improving professional identity | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

They expressed their views on self-assessment and evaluated themselves regarding planning and implementation. They expressed their views on the issues of the limitations and the potential of professional development. It has been indicated from the data that the pre-service teachers have certain ideas on how they improve their teaching skills, some expectations of how they will become teachers, and vivid plans regarding the professional development competency domain since they have discussed these issues in their other courses. However, they had not reflected any of these competencies in their implementations.

Berna, one of the pre-service teachers, expressed her opinion about the "Professional development" category as follows:

"I also feel incomplete in classroom management. Even in the online environment, I have problems responding to the requests, speeches, and questions of children. I think that this problem will be more common when I start teaching face to face. I need to develop my teaching skills."

Consequently, the pre-service teachers expressed their opinions on the competencies of self-assessment and improving professional identity, however, they did not show any performance on the competencies of self-assessment, seeking carrier opportunities, and improving professional identity in the ERT process.

The competency domain of school and community partnership has three competencies which are child involvement in cultural festivals, planning and participating in cultural festivals, and school partnership with the community.

Table 5
Competency Domain of School and Community Partnership

| | Opinions | | Practices | |
|--|----------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | | Synchronous | Asynchronous | |
| | | | Individual practice videos | Activity plans |
| Child involvement in cultural festivals | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Planning and participating in cultural festivals | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| School partnership with community | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |

Through the ERT process, the competence domain of school and community partnership has the least number of codes. This reveals that the ERT has a very limited impact on this competency domain.

Turkish early childhood education pre-service teachers' perception of ERT in their teaching practice

The pre-service teachers state that ERT has negative effects on their professional skills. All of the pre-service teachers stated that the teaching practice at ERT has had a negative impact on the processes of getting to know the children and communicating with them. Elif, one of the pre-service teachers, expresses this situation as follows:

"I think that we are lacking in classroom management and that it also affects the achievement of the purpose of the activities since the interaction is not fully achieved. I think that being face-to-face will enable me to improve myself in classroom management, the chance to observe whether the activities are applicable, and most importantly, the sincere relationship we will establish with the children will increase my interest and passion for the teaching profession. "

The majority of pre-service teachers also state that they were deficient in gaining classroom management skills, and they felt that this disembodied practicum negatively affected their ability to respond to children's needs properly and to intervene practically in different situations in a preschool classroom. At the same time, they emphasized that the disembodied practicum decreased their professional passion and interest. Fatma used the following statements about the process:

"I think I am inadequate in classroom management. If it was face-to-face, it would be more beneficial as I would take an active role in the process. I would have the opportunity to observe what I should and should not do. When I was appointed in the future, I would have a wealth of knowledge and experience, which would have contributed to me. "

Most of the pre-service teachers stated that the teaching practice process in ERT only contributes to the ability to plan educational activities and write an activity plan and actively use web-based applications. Ali expresses the contribution of teaching practice at ERT as follows:

"It contributed to my improvement in activity planning. I can literally say that I learned how to write an event plan. "

Another pre-service teacher, Derya, expressed her contribution to ERT, unlike the other candidates in the study group, as follows:

"I have attended many conferences on distance education. When there was face-to-face education, it was very costly to bring well-trained people to the university, but thanks to distance education, I was able to attend such training very easily. "

The pre-service teachers stated that the field placement they did without being in the same environment with the children was a missing part of their teacher training. Without face-to-face interactions with the children in a classroom, they underlined that they would not be able to be a good role models for the children in their language and social development.

Discussion

During the Pandemic, early childhood education pre-service teachers continued their training through ERT, and they did their field placements away from classroom experiences and without face-to-face practices, they could have done with children. This disembodied placement, which did not include potential situations in the school and classroom environment, has given them limited experiences. Like other studies, this study has also revealed that this limited experience causes a lost practice process and may cause a lack of professional skills and competencies in pre-service teachers (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Stephens & Curward, 2021). As a result of this study after doing a content analysis of the data, three themes have emerged: (1) Early childhood education pre-service teachers' practices in ERT supported only certain competencies. (2) With its natural structure of distance education, ERT restrained pre-service teachers' field experiences to enable them to gain the necessary competencies and qualifications for early childhood education (3) the pre-service teachers perceived ERT as insufficient for their placement experiences.

Firstly, the aim of the student placement in ERT focused primarily on ensuring that distance education was used in the fastest and most appropriate way to pursue courses. Although online learning or distance education would not create any barriers for early childhood education pre-service teachers (Heirdsfield et al., 2007), ERT, which is different from typical distance education, caused a gap in student placement that certain teacher competencies were regarded, and some others were ignored in ERT. Among seven competency domains, *child growth and development, communication, creativity, and aesthetics* were taken into account by the pre-service teachers. However, *school and community partnership* and *professional development* competency domains were not embodied in the student placement practices. The field placement course in teacher education is considered a process that aims to provide pre-service teachers with a real classroom experience, enabling them to learn by observing and encountering crises (Ammentorp & Madden, 2014; Dorfman et al., 2006). It is expected that pre-service teachers will be able to demonstrate their professional competencies of pre-school teachers with the education they receive. However, this study shows that pre-service teachers in ERT pre-service teachers were not active in all of the professional competency domains during their placement performance such as planning, asynchronous and synchronous practices.

Secondly, the majority of the pre-service teachers emphasized that this disembodied placement process, which did not include face-to-face practice with children, provided very limited professional support for them and that they did not feel to be ready for their profession. For example, the pre-service teachers considered that they were lack of professional skills in classroom management and interaction with children. These deficiencies were eventually reflected in their asynchronous and synchronous lessons. It has also been revealed by studies on synchronous and asynchronous activities. The pre-service teachers had experienced a completely new placement process and this process negatively affected their professional skills and development (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Due to the nature of ERT such as a sort of distance education, the pre-service teachers had experienced some difficulties affecting their placement practices. For example, they had to get their practices done on the screen, which was totally different from the way it should have been. They were expected to actively implement the activities they planned, following the pre-school education program (National preschool curriculum by MoNE) while carrying out these jobs, each of which required different expertise in themselves. How they would conduct the process and how they would behave in front of the camera created a new kind of stress and anxiety in all pre-service teachers (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Many of the pre-service teachers in ERT experience disadvantages in terms of access to technology, educational environment, and online educational tools (Shim & Lee, 2020). These disadvantages forced pre-service teachers to improve themselves at different points. In the open-ended questionnaire, pre-service teachers stated that they had improved themselves a lot in technology and computer applications in order to carry out the practices. However, they did not have any opportunities to merge this improvement with the prominence and development of teaching professional skills in ERT. As in other countries and even in some distance teacher training programs, the Turkish Early Childhood Education Program, which is a national curriculum for state preschools, has been prepared to be implemented face-to-face with the children in early childhood education classrooms. The activity plans according to the program are designed to be used for hands-on learning and face-to-face interaction with the children individually or as a group. In their teaching practice at ERT, the pre-service teachers were expected to carry out the same practices by using the online platform, but this expectation has not been accomplished without social interaction, social play, and interactive play with educational materials in the classroom. Therefore, the pre-service teachers missed qualified student field experiences which were essential aspects of their training (Dorfman et al., 2006).

Thirdly, the study showed that the pre-service teachers perceived ERT as insufficient for their placement experiences since they could not fulfil to gain quality teaching competencies. They hold a very low level of positive perception about doing their field placement through ERT. Considering the strong relationship between self-efficacy and cognitive engagement in the ERT education process (Aguilera-Hermida et. al., 2021), this low-level positive attitude toward ERT can probably cause reluctance to challenge themselves successfully with online learning difficulties and eventually give rise to certain constraints of their teacher training practices such as feeling unable to plan for children and to manage a preschool classroom. Pre-service teachers were also unprepared and not ready for this new form of education (Trust & Whalen, 2020). This new form of education, ERT, and technology could have been used in the best interest of the pre-service teachers, but this was not always the case. For example, this study also revealed that the family involvement, which is one of the important domains of core competencies of early childhood education, has not been reflected adequately in pre-service teachers' field placement practices during ERT although the family involvement in ERT was higher than it was before the pandemic. In this new form of educational practice, the families were at the centre of ongoing education by supporting their children's technological struggles and organizing the children's educational settings with stressful, anxious, and uncertain feelings (Stites et. al. 2021; Yıldırım,

2021). Without any collaboration with them, it is difficult for educators to ensure the success of ERT. Thus, the absence of family involvement competencies in the student placement might leave a vast professional gap in the pre-service teachers' training.

Conclusions and Implications

ERT provides a good opportunity to continue education by using technology in crises. Different from distance education, ERT had been a remedy during the pandemic for the abrupt change in the delivery mode of education from the traditional classroom to online education. This sudden change had caused many other problems in education including teacher education, specifically pre-service teachers' field placement. This case study is important in terms of understanding how the student placement process in a teacher education program takes place in ERT and the problems that the pre-service teachers encounter. This study clearly shows in which competence domains student placement in ERT is effective and in which competence domains it is not. While early childhood education pre-service teachers are active in content knowledge-based competencies such as planning, development, and communication with children in the ERT process; they could not be active in practical knowledge competencies such as family involvement, professional development, and observation-based evaluation. Moreover, pre-service teachers believed that they were not ready for ERT, and they considered that they were inadequate about the problems encountered during the process.

This study revealed that there is a need for a regulation on how the field placement for pre-service teachers should be done in any emergency circumstances through ERT since it is not surprising anymore for the world to face a new outbreak, natural disaster, or something else. During the ERT process, online field placement practices should be organized to fulfil all competencies and qualifications in order to increase the quality of student placement. There should be close attention to competencies that might be left out or disregarded by ERT. For example, academic supervisors in colleges and mentor teachers or practicum could prepare extra activities or content for the pre-service teachers related to left out core competencies such as *learning centres* and *meeting individual needs*. The pre-service teachers would not have any chance to organize or decorate a learning centre with educational toys and materials, but their mentor teachers can share their experiences on how to organize a learning centre and how to consider the developmentally appropriate materials. ERT should aim to support pre-service teachers' field placement to get ready for their profession by covering all competency domains including school and community partnership and professional development. This holistic approach will ensure a high-quality teacher training program. Eventually, this regulation will help pre-service teachers support their professional competencies during the ERT process without causing any further worry or reservation about their field placement.

This study points out there should be certain regulations for teachers on how a preschool education program can be implemented in the case of an emergency. It is important to have a backup plan so that preschool activities designed for face-to-face practice can be adapted to ERT and implemented effectively. The planned education and the educational platform to be used must be suitable for young children and the necessity of an education process with smooth transitions and a rich communication environment in the pre-school period should be considered in ERT planning.

Declaration of Interest

Authors declare no competing interest.

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