

Context of Online Practicum in the light of Pandemics: Prospective Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes

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Abstract:

Saudi institutions were obliged to close their campuses and undertake online learning as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, which began in March, 2020. Teaching practice was difficult to be implemented face-to-face. The present study examines prospective teachers' perceptions towards online practicum during pandemic time. The study followed a quantitative approach of research design. The instrument of the study included a questionnaire which was composed of five parts. The sample included a group of prospective teachers (n= 100) enrolled in the Kindergarten Department, College of Education, Shaqraa University in the academic year 2020-2021. The results of the study revealed that the students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills was high (3.76). Students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum was high (3.85). The students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career was high (3.73). Findings showed that prospective teachers had positive attitudes towards online practicum while their main challenges focused on the internet problems and the competencies in using technology. Furthermore, the findings showed that mentors and university supervisors played an important role in assisting student teachers in improving their teaching abilities, performance, and comprehension of their .practicum

Keywords: COVID 19, online teaching, practicum, teaching practice, teacher training

واقع التدريب العملي عبر الإنترنت في ضوء انتشار الأوبئة: تصورات واتجاهات الطلاب المعلمين

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المستخلص:

اضطرت المؤسسات السعودية لإغلاق حرمها الجامعي والقيام بالتعلم عبر الإنترنت؛ نتيجة لتفشي كوفيد-19 الذي بدأ في مارس 2020، فقد كان من الصعب تنفيذ ممارسة العملية التعليمية حضورياً. والدراسة الحالية تفحص التصورات المحتملة للمعلمين تجاه التدريب العملي على الإنترنت أثناء الجائحة. وجرى اعتماد المنهج الكمي لتصميم البحث. وقد اشتملت أداة الدراسة على استبانة مكونة من خمسة أجزاء، واشتملت العينة على مجموعة من المعلمين المحتملين (ن = 100) المقيدين بقسم رياض الأطفال بكلية التربية جامعة شقراء في العام الدراسي 2020-2021. وأشارت نتائج الدراسة أن تصورات الطلاب تجاه تأثير التدريب العملي عبر الإنترنت على مهاراتهم بلغت (3.76) مرتفعة. وفي حين بلغت تصورات الطلاب تجاه تأثير الإشراف والتقييم من خلال التدريب العملي عبر الإنترنت (3.85) مرتفعة. أما تصورات الطلاب تجاه فوائد التدريب العملي عبر الإنترنت في حياتهم المهنية فبلغت (3.73) مرتفعة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن المعلمين المحتملين لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه التدريب العملي عبر الإنترنت، بينما تركزت تحدياتهم الرئيسية على مشكلات الإنترنت والكفاءات في استخدام التكنولوجيا. علاوة على ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن الموجهين والمشرفين الجامعيين لعبوا دوراً مهماً في مساعدة الطلاب المعلمين في تحسين قدراتهم التدريسية وأدائهم وفهم التدريب العملي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد-19، التدريس عبر الإنترنت، التدريب العملي، ممارسة التدريس، تدريب المعلمين.

Introduction

Teacher education includes a significant amount of teaching practice and often is highly valued by student teachers. Also, it has been seen as a way for teachers training to connect theory and practice. (Allen & Wright,2013). The practicum's principal objective is to give student instructors real-world classroom experience. This is needed for them to improve their teaching abilities and begin collecting experiences that will enrich their professional knowledge (Ulvik, & Smith, 2011). The practicum can be useful if it is conducted inside the classroom face to face under the supervision of experienced instructors. However, the outbreak of COVID 19 had changed the ways of conducted this course and many other courses. The courses were conducted online. According to Moyo (2020), the COVID 19 pandemic forces universities to seek out alternate instructional and evaluation methods that will enable students to continue learning and be assessed on work-related learning. As a result, Initial Teacher Education programmes situated in Higher Education institutions faced a variety of obstacles, the most significant of them was satisfying practicum requirements. As a result, instructors must be flexible and move away from relying entirely on traditional teaching approaches.

Problem of the Study

The Covid-19 epidemic, which was considered the global pandemic that started in March 2020, affected many aspects of life. One of these aspects is education. Schools and universities were closed in many countries all over the world. As a result of the sudden closure of schools and universities, university instructors faced a challenge regarding the evaluating of student instructors who were doing the course teaching practice "practicum". Distance learning affected the traditional methods of putting methodological theory into practice, which prompted the creation and application of new methods and ways of doing so. Teaching Practice in teacher education fostered academic improvement, reflection, and growth. It raised the issue of how teachers' training would be maintained if this time-tested evaluation had not been completed due to the pandemic. Unlike other academic courses that can be accomplished by online or distance education, the practicum which is a hands-on project that must be completed inside a classroom situation presents a unique challenge. Virtual reality technology could provide a viable solution to this problem.

Research Questions:

The current study tries to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills?

Research question 2: What are students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum?

Research question 3: What are students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career?

Research question 4. What are the challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students during times of crisis?

Objectives of the study

The current study aims at identifying prospective teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and challenges towards the current context of practicum during times of pandemics such as the COVID- 19 lock-down phases.

Significance of the study

Practicum involvement is regarded as one of the basic and key elements of Pre-service Teacher Education Programs in colleges of education in Saudi Arabia. It provides student-instructors with the chance to investigate the skills they gained during the theoretical study and put what they've learned into practice (Hamaidi,2014). This research is important as it addresses the perspectives of prospective teachers that are clearly impacted by the excellence of online practicums and the sort of guidance provided during pandemic periods. The study is an attempt to find out the challenges that may face instructors of teaching practice courses conducted online and find solutions to these challenges. Furthermore, the findings of this study may highlight a number of issues and difficulties that student-instructors encountered during COVID-19's lockdown phase. In addition, the study tries to suggest practical solutions that can be used by university instructors in doing and evaluating the practicum online. Finally, the guidelines for future studies mentioned in this study can be beneficial for the researchers in the field of online education.

Theoretical background and related studies

According to Assunção and Gago (2020), the shift from face to face to online learning was abrupt and uncomfortable. This case is common for all higher education curricula and courses, but it is particularly difficult for teacher education. The adaptation process in introductory courses necessitated a focus on resources, ways of communicating with students, pedagogical decisions, and so on. However, in practice-based modules, the

process needed a much more attention on resources, ways of interacting with students, pedagogical decisions, and so on. One of the most prominent barriers to starting teacher education is the practicum. Student instructors were required to cancel their school visits in order to observe their cooperating teachers' activities online. As a result, it is possible to recognize a wide range of practicum interactions. Some face-to-face teaching activities were transferred to online environments in some cases, but there were varied and, in some cases, creative interactions.

Role of Practicum

The fundamental goal of the practicum programme is to provide student instructors with real-world teaching experience. This is necessary for them to improve their teaching abilities and begin accumulating experiences to broaden their professional knowledge. Reading about teaching or seeing others teach, as students have done for years, is not enough. The practicum plays an important role in providing a facilitated transition into the profession. The nature of the first teaching encounters appears to have the greatest effect on retention, and what pre-service encounter during their practicum shapes their perceptions of the field of work.

Most teacher education institutions educate their new teachers for teaching in real classrooms through the practicum, which is a teacher education course unit that includes both theoretical and practical components, according to Barry and King (2002, p. 35) as cited in Qazi et al (2012), "Teaching practise [practicum] affords the chance to apply the principles of teaching and learning that have been conceptually learned during course work,". According to Hamaidi (2014), practice is a tool that helps students engage in meaningful learning activities and interactions by illuminating the teacher's teaching methods. Teachers' success is determined not only by theoretical knowledge, but also by practical experience that gives them with the necessary skills and behaviours to assist them enhance their teaching practices. Pre-service teachers' entry into professional life, professional growth, and student instructors' perceptions of teaching and learning all benefit from practicum experiences. (Qazi et al.,2012). Moreover, Frey (2008) pointed out that the major goal of practicum is to offer participants with exposure and "hands-on" experience. In recent years, numerous distance learning models have been adopted by teacher education to enable teachers to seek additional education and professional growth opportunities. Teacher education programmes have attempted to reach out to teachers by offering courses through a number of methods, including the use of online settings to facilitate the delivery of programmes like practicum and field experience

supervision. Qazi et al. (2012) mentioned that any practicum has two phases: training, which takes place inside the institution of higher education, and school experience, which is regarded as one of the most important experiences for both student instructors and cooperating teachers. They are viewed as an introduction to the teaching profession's background.

To make the shift from traditional learning to online learning as simple as possible, Bao (2020) summarized the main important instructional strategies that help improve students' concentration and engagement. These methods were based on the acceptable significance theory. Students' academic readiness and online learning behaviour should be reflected in the quantity, difficulty, and duration of educational content. The second one is the theory of successful delivery. To ensure efficient delivery of teaching content, it is important to modify the teaching tempo due to the low focus characteristics of online students. The third premise is that of proper support. Faculty and teaching assistants must give students with timely information, such as online video tutoring and email instruction after class. The theory of high-quality participation is the fourth. To increase the degree and scope of student engagement in class, certain steps must be implemented. Finally, there is the idea of preparing a backup plan.

The pandemic has impacted practise preparation in both the field and the classroom (Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020). According to them, practise teaching involves a combination of procedural competences such as information and skills, as well as meta-competencies such as self-awareness and self-reflection. According to Kourgiantakis and Lee (2020, p.762), field education's main goal is to integrate the classroom's theoretical and conceptual contributions with the practical world of the practice setting. Some practice environments have been unable to resume monitoring students as a result of the Coronavirus, while others provided remote learning plans.

Reported perceptions towards the assessment conundrum:

Many studies have been conducted to identify the context of the practicum and teaching practice as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Some of them focused on the challenges facing the implementation of online practicum. Others identified the strategies used and the perceptions of students and teachers towards the online practicum. In his study, Moyo (2020), reported teachers' and educators' views about practical education in the time of the COVID 19 pandemic. They felt that life is full of change, and they should accept it. By embracing and introducing minor, well-considered improvements, people can radically alter their way of doing things. Teachers stated

that it is important for them to go to the students. Moreover, the reaction of teachers who did practicum during the pandemic was measured in Burns et al. (2020). They demonstrated the challenges of integrating an online teaching practicum. They identified the following initial challenges: programme and licence requirements, as well as philosophical disputes among stakeholders on the importance of practicum in teacher education. Also, Bao (2020) conducted a case study of online education at a Peking University. The study found that four high-impact principles for online education: (a) high relevance between online instructional design and student learning, (b) effective delivery of online educational information, (c) appropriate support given to learners by faculty and teaching support staff, and (d) high-quality participation to increase the depth and breadth of participants' education. Similarly, Sasaki et al. (2020) examined the possibilities of a technology-based simulated classroom to complement the practicum experience and reported on numerous issues facing teacher education programmes. Early research suggests that technology-based virtual environments may enhance and support the virtual environment practicum experience, notably during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The methodical practice of students in the Department of Croaticistics who have mandated empirical practice within their university study programme of Croatian Language and Literature at the graduate level was the subject of the study of Šušić (2020). Getting to know instructors' work and actively participating in the teaching process are examples of methodological techniques. The students, among other things, attend pilot mentoring classes, prepare and conduct them, and actively participate in their analysis, all of which are part of the methodical practice. Another study was conducted by Noor et al. (2020) who looked at the perceptions of Pakistani school instructors about their online teaching practices. ten schoolteachers were interviewed via Skype. Teachers faced issues and challenges when delivering online lessons via Google Classroom, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, including high-cost Internet bundles, non-cooperative learners, low student participation, teachers' digital confidence, limited availability of educational resources, lack of ICT knowledge, and poor network infrastructure. Also, Kid and Murray (2020) examined the difficulties that educators faced during online classes and how pedagogies evolved when learning groups were transported to new online spaces using qualitative analysis techniques and principles from spatial geography. This study has global implications in terms of identifying regions where real teacher education might take place, as well as alternative pedagogies and technologies to assist professional development in the absence of a practicum.

The paper by Assunção and Gago (2020) looked at the national, organizational, and

methodological responses to the closing of schools and universities in Portugal in March 2020. It provided a summary and review of the crisis's interventions and reactions, as well as the problems, threats, and possibilities. The paper ended with a discussion of the consequences for teaching and teacher education in such troubled times, with a focus on the role of practice and training within the framework of a practicum as a "true" versus "idealized practice". Similarly, Tartavulea et al. (2020) analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic-related sudden switch to online teaching in 2020. They found that universities and students were quick to adjust to new changes and that a combination of synchronous and asynchronous engagement and evaluation are employed. Hamaidi et al. (2014) investigated the perspectives of student-teachers on practicum interactions and challenges. All student-instructors at the University of Jordan's Faculty of Educational Sciences were included in the report. The results showed that the practicum activities aided the participants in the development of a variety of teaching skills, including student engagement and communication, as well as classroom management skills. There were also some difficulties listed. Gabrielle and Jenniferto (2017) investigated students' perceptions of their online practicum. Teachers and students get together online to talk about topics and challenges relating to the practicum experience. Individual interviews with students and the instructor, as well as student perception surveys, were used to gather data. Four guidelines for using online environments for practicum were identified as a consequence of the review: 1) creating an online existence using various performs and tools; 2) reassuring an attitude shift in an online practicum to promote engagement; 3) supporting problem-solving in digital environments; and 4) support the openness and transparency of technology-enabled learning environments.

The study of Sasaki et al. (2020) explored the feasibility of a technology-based virtual classroom to help Initial Teacher Education students' practicum experience. Early research suggests that technology-based virtual environments could complement and help the Initial Teacher Education practicum experience, particularly now that the Covid-19 pandemic is looming. Also, Frey (2008) examined the influence of an online practicum and see if it could help teachers grow professionally. In comparison to a group of instructors who did not participate in the practicum, quantitative data was used to measure the practicum participants' learning and professional improvement. Three critical components of the online practicum were identified: 1) the use of meaningful learning experiences, 2) collaborative learning groups, and 3) the practicum project structure. During the period of the last two decades, many studies were conducted to examine practicum obstacles and challenges. For example, Mitchell and Delgado (2014),

Yunus et al (2010), Fang and Clarke (2014), Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013), Yasin's (2004), Hammad's (2005), and Al-Ajez and Hallas (2011). Their results yielded different challenges, and they were varied according to the context of each study as follows.

- Students' attitudes toward trainee teachers and language learning, as well as motivation, discipline, and support systems.
- The lack of using different educational methods, and the lack of school administration support for the student-teachers.
- The lack of guidance provided by school principals regarding the school systems, regulations, and participation in the school activities.
- The lack of respect showed from cooperative teachers toward student-instructors.
- Lack of encouragement from the academic supervisors for their work.
- Inadequate help in obtaining textbooks and teacher's manuals.
- There was no appropriate explanation of the practical skills that were required.
- The duration, timing, and methods of practicum.

Methods

The study follows the quantitative approach of research design. The study utilized a questionnaire as a main tool for data collection.

Instruments

A five-item Likert-type scale was used with scores ranging from strongly agree (1), which denoted a highly positive perception, to strongly disagree (5). The aim of the questionnaire was to elicit the perceptions of the prospective teachers towards practicum during the pandemic times. It also aimed at identifying the major challenges that faced the prospective teachers during the pandemic times. The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher and validated by several professionals in General Curricula and Teaching Methods. The questionnaire was composed of five parts: the first one was about demographic background of the participants. The second part consisted of (7) items measuring the students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills. The third part consisted of (5) items measuring students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum. towards supervision during the online practicum. The third part consisted of (8) items measuring the students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career. The fourth part consisted of (8) items measuring the challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students.

Validity and Reliability:

As the questionnaire was designed by the researcher, with some items taken from

Hamaidi et al. (2014), validity of the questionnaire was tested. The questionnaire was evaluated by a panel of six experts in the field of education. Then, the questionnaire was modified according to their recommendations. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, it was applied to a sample of teaching practice students outside the study (no. =29). Cronbach's alpha coefficient, as shown in Table 1, was found to be very reliable ($\alpha = .965$) with the sample of this study.

Table 1 Reliability analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.965	.965	29

Participants

The participants of this study were 100 prospective teachers enrolled in the Department of Kindergarten, College of Education, Shaqra University, in the academic year 2020-2021. All of them were Saudi students.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire was analysed using SPSS. The frequencies, percentage for each category was measured. In this case, the responses were five based on Likert scale. Also, mean, and standard deviation of each item was measured. The items were ordered according to their rank from highest to lowest based on the means of the items. The weighted mean of the items of the survey were categorized into three levels as follows: Low level if the mean ranged from 1 to 2.59, moderate level if the mean ranged from 2.60 to 3.39, and high level if the mean ranged from 3.40 to 5.

Results

To answer the research questions, a descriptive analysis was performed. The first research question was answered based on the items from 1 to 21. The results are shown in Table 2.

Research Question 1

What are students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills?

Table 2. The students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills

no	Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD	rank
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	Practical education developed my skills in positive interaction and communication with students.	17	17	10	10	16	16	14	14	43	43	3.56	1.53	8
2	I learned virtual classroom management skills during field training.	16	16	11	11	12	12	14	14	47	47	3.65	1.53	6
3	The online practicum developed my teaching skills	12	12	11	11	13	13	17	17	47	47	3.76	1.44	5
4	The field training developed communication skills with my female colleagues.	10	10	11	11	6	6	20	20	53	53	3.95	1.39	2
5	The supervising professor encouraged me to ask questions that helped me develop my skills in-field training.	13	13	7	7	9	9	12	12	59	59	3.97	1.46	1
6	The distance learning period developed my technical skills.	16	16	8	8	7	7	16	16	53	53	3.82	1.53	3
7	Distance field training improved the skills necessary for the education process.	10	10	14	14	13	13	11	11	52	52	3.81	1.44	4
8	Remote field training helped improve my classroom management skills	13	13	12	12	21	21	8	8	46	46	3.62	1.48	7
	Total											3.76	1.31	

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of prospective teachers' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills. The weighted mean of the items of this category was high (3.76) with standard deviation (1.31). The highest rank was given to item 5 where 82 % of students agreed that the supervising professor encouraged them to ask questions that helped them develop their skills in-field training. The second highest item was number 4 in which 73% of the students agreed that field training developed communication skills with their female colleagues. The third highest item was number 6 in which 69% of the students agreed that the distance learning period developed their technical skills. The lowest item was item number 1, in which 57% of the students agreed that practical education developed their skills in positive interaction and communication

with students. In sum, the students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills were highly positive.

Research question 2: What are students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum?

Table 3. Students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum

no	Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD	rank
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	The supervising professor showed flexibility, taking into account my needs during the field training.	13	13	9	9	11	11	11	11	56	56	3.88	1.48	3
2	The supervising professor gave me feedback that helped me in the field training.	13	13	7	7	13	13	12	12	55	55	3.89	1.46	2
3	The professor supervising the field training explained to me from the beginning what was expected of her and what was expected of me as a result of the field training.	16	16	6	6	6	6	14	14	58	58	3.92	1.52	1
4	At the appropriate time, the supervising professor provided me with the necessary and appropriate facilities and means in practical education.	13	13	7	7	14	14	17	17	49	49	3.82	1.43	4
5	The methods of evaluating my remote practical training skills were appropriate.	16	16	7	7	11	11	17	17	49	49	3.76	1.51	5
	Total											3.85	1.39	

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum. The weighted mean of the items of this category was high (3.85) with standard deviation (1.39). The highest rank was given to item 3 where 72 % of students agreed that the professor supervising the field training explained to them from the beginning what was expected of her and what was expected of the students as a result of the field training. The second highest item was number 2 in which 67% of the students agreed that the supervising professor gave them feedback that helped them in the field training. The third highest item was number 1 in which 67% of the students agreed that the supervising professor showed flexibility, considering their needs during the field training. The lowest item was item number 5, in which 66% of

the students agreed that the methods of evaluating their remote practical training skills were appropriate. The results of this category indicated that the students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum was positive.

Research question 3: What are students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career?

Table 4: The students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career

no	Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD	rank
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	The field training increased my respect for the school's laws and regulations.	12	12	10	10	12	12	11	11	55	55	3.87	1.46	2
2	Online field training helped me diversify teaching strategies and methods.	12	12	9	9	13	13	11	11	55	55	3.88	1.45	1
3	I learned during distance field training adequate preparation and daily and quarterly planning.	14	14	12	12	12	12	11	11	51	51	3.73	1.52	5
4	Distance field training focuses more on practice than theoretical knowledge	7	7	19	19	21	21	11	11	42	42	3.62	1.37	7
5	I think the remote field training helped me prepare for classes in the real world.	18	18	7	7	18	18	15	15	42	42	3.56	1.52	8
6	Remote field training stimulates interactions and discussions between students.	12	12	13	13	15	15	15	15	45	45	3.68	1.45	6
7	My school platform website/virtual kindergarten classrooms) helped me to get self-training.	17	17	7	7	11	11	14	14	51	51	3.76	1.37	3
8	The remote field training helped to involve the students in the content.	7	7	17	17	16	16	13	13	47	47	3.75	1.54	4
	Total											3.73	1.22	

Table 4 shows descriptive statistics of students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career. The weighted mean of the items of this category was high (3.73) with standard deviation (1.22). The highest rank was given to item 2 where 66 % of students agreed that online field training helped them diversify teaching strategies and methods. The second highest item was number 1 in which 66% of the students agreed that the field training increased their respect for the school's laws and regulations. The third highest item was number 7 in which 65% of the students agreed that their school platform

website/virtual kindergarten classrooms helped them to get self-training. The lowest item was item number 5, in which 57% of the students felt that the remote field training helped them prepare for classes in the real world. The results of this category indicated that the students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career was positive.

Research question 4. What are the challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students during times of crisis?

Table 5. The challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students

no	Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD	Rank
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	Remote field training was an obstacle to creativity in preparing the lesson.	23		19		15		7		36		3.14	1.62	7
2	Internet problems constituted an obstacle to the effective application of distance learning.	12		15		15		18		40		3.59	1.44	1
3	Lack of electronic skills in dealing with computers and the Internet constituted an obstacle to creativity in distance teaching.	11		14		24		19		32		3.47	1.35	2
4	The failure to solve the students' electronic problems constituted an obstacle during the field application.	12		15		24		14		35		3.45	1.40	3
5	The feeling of mistrust in remote electronic transactions was an obstacle during the field application.	15		20		16		16		30		3.32	1.48	5
6	The feeling of not being able to use a new educational system was a hindrance during the remote field application.	16		10		26		12		36		3.42	1.46	4
7	The difficulty in providing the appropriate means for teaching was an obstacle during the remote field application.	14		17		36		8		25		3.13	1.34	8
8	I faced a problem that some students were not serious during online training	22		11		23		9		35		3.24	1.56	6
	Total											3.34	1.168	

Table 5 shows descriptive statistics of challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students. In assessing the difficulties that face prospective teachers

during online practicum, it is shown that item 2 concerning internet problems got the highest rank of agreement with mean (3.59). Lack of electronic skills in dealing with computers and the Internet constituted an obstacle to creativity in distance teaching. This challenge received a high mean of (3.47) with Std. of (1.35). Items 4 concerning failure to solve the students' electronic problems and item 6 concerning the feeling of not being able to use a new educational system formed ranks 3 and 4 with respective means of (3.45) and (3.42) and Std. (1.40) and (1.46) respectively. Item 5 received a moderate mean of (3.32) with Std. (1.48). Item 8 concerning the challenge of students' lack of seriousness during online training received rank 6 with a mean of 3.24 and std. (1.56). As an obstacle to creativity, item 1 received a moderate mean of (3.14) and Std. (1.62). The difficulty in providing the appropriate means for teaching occupied the least rank as an obstacle or challenge of online practicum with means of (3.13) and Std (1.34). The general weighted mean is moderate 3.34 with Std 1.16.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated digital disparities and shown a new impact in terms of support provided by social websites, which are critical for maintaining human connections and public constructs. (Beaunoyer, Dupéré, & Guitton 2020). The practicum practiced online is a virtual class in which a teacher receives field education by applying specialist knowledge to teach in a certain subject area. The current study examines prospective teachers' perceptions towards online practicum as well as challenges that faced them to implement teaching online using means of the internet and technology.

The first research question concerning the students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills. The results indicated that students' perceptions towards the effect of online practicum on their skills were highly positive. They felt that the supervising professor encouraged them to ask questions that helped them develop their skills in-field training.

The second research question concerning the students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum. The results of this question indicated that the students' perceptions towards the effect of supervision and evaluation through online practicum was positive. The participants stated that the professor supervising the field training explained to them from the beginning what was expected of her and what was expected of the students as a result of the field training. This result was supported by Ulvik & Smith (2011) when they stated that these roles

of the supervisors are basic to the good practicum. They reported components of good practice as follows: a good relationship with the mentor (Beck & Kosnik, 2002), emotional support (Zeichner, 2002), cooperating teachers, feedback from mentors (Beck & Kosnik, 2002). and quality of communication and shared understanding of goals (Graham,2006). The student instructors found some assistance in a stimulating and supportive environment, but it is mostly the local mentors who offer them the essential help in terms of practicum organization and feedback. Ibrahim (2021) assured that mentors' function and effectiveness are critical to pre-service teachers' performance throughout their teaching practicum meetings.

The third research question concerning the students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career. The results of this question indicated that the students' perceptions towards the benefits of online practicum on their career was positive. They felt that online field training helped them diversify teaching strategies and methods. They also agreed that the field training increased their respect for the school's laws and regulations. The results indicated that the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards online practicum were high as the greatest number of responses were positive. These results are consistent with the studies of Ibrahim (2021), Tartavulea et al. (2020), Capan and Bedir (2019), Gabrielle and Jenniferto (2017), Hamaidi et al, (2014), Nguyen (2013), Lateh and Muniandy, (2013), Al Sobhani (2012), and Frey (2008). In these studies, the student instructors had positive perceptions of their practicum as a result of the improvement of their teaching skills, interactions, and communication with their students, handling their problems, developing their classroom management skills as well as developing teachers' professional growth and bridging the gap between theory and practice. On the other hand, the results of this study are in contrast with Burns et al. (2020) who found difficulty in implementing online practicum due to constraints such as program and license regulations, as well as theoretical disagreements among professionals on the value of practicum in education systems. Also, the findings of this study are in contrast with Barton (2020), who found that many distant teaching alternatives were viewed negatively by educators, but that certain methods were viewed as more successful by instructors.

The fourth research question concerning challenges that face online practicum for teaching practice students during times of crisis. The results revealed a moderate attitude. Prominent problems included the lack of the internet and the electronic skills using the internet as well as the failure to solve this problem. The results indicated that internet connection was the highest problem followed by lack of electronic skills in dealing with

computers and the Internet constituted an obstacle to creativity in distance teaching. These results are consistent with that of Sasaki and Goff (2020), Noor et. al. (2020).

Understanding the relationship between theory and practice is a key element in achieving the success of the practicum. This understanding leads the student-instructors to use different teaching methods that promote online classes. High means given to responses to items concerning classroom management skills and teaching skills of student instructors are assured by the observation rubrics used in evaluation of sessions throughout the semester. This is supported by Ibrahim (2021, p.98) who clarified the skills evaluated as teaching skills such as ‘the establishment of a suitable learning environment, classroom management, questioning techniques, lesson presentation, time management, verbal/ nonverbal communication, reinforcement, using technology and classroom assessment’.

Using rubric as a benchmark for assessment helps student instructors recognize what was expected of them and contributes to continuous improvement of the online courses’ quality in the program. That’s why students’ instructors showed positive attitude towards the evaluation of their skills.

Instructors may be hesitant to teach remotely, according to Tartavulea et al (2020), especially if other factors, such as a poor infrastructure at home, inadequate hardware at school, or technical challenges with technology-assisted education, aggravate the lack of preparedness. Results of the current study help to form a policy and quality framework for future exceptional cases like the current one of the COVID 19 pandemic. Specifically, that we still suffer the crisis expecting the unexpected closing of educational institutions. The practicum is a significant component in teacher education as it engenders professional transformation, reflection, and growth. So, colleges of education have to benefit from different attitudes and challenges to be prepared for similar situations. This view supports the idea of Moyo (2020) who discussed how can we benefit from the current situation in determining future directions of teacher education. Results of the study advocate the findings of the previous studies such as Ibrahim (2021), Lateh and Muniandy study (2013), Hamaidi et al., (2014), Sasaki et al. (2020), Tartavulea et al (2020).

Conclusions and implications

The current study examined prospective teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards online practicum during the COVID 19 pandemic time as well as the challenges that faced them to implement the online teaching using technology and LMS platform

successfully. Results revealed that the experience of the online practicum was successful despite some challenges summarized in the internet connection problems and the lack of technological support as well as students' demotivation to join the online sessions. In addition, prospective teachers expressed their positive attitudes towards their academic supervisors in the university as they supported and helped them a lot in providing them with the required feedback showing flexibility with them before and after online sessions. They also expressed their satisfaction with the development of their classroom management skills and daily and quarter planning.

Suggestions for future studies

The sudden shift to online teaching in universities around the world did not give the space to prepare and change circumstances that guarantee the success of the online practicum. Further research should be conducted to get a wider view of the online practicum from learners' perceptions and attitudes. Future studies should be conducted to figure out the main obstacles and how to transfer obstacles into advantages that help support and promote the process among both learners and teachers. We need also to replicate the research after being prepared for such situations in the future as we need content preparation as well as focused training for both prospective teachers and academic supervisors in addition to assessment methods employed. Other researchers may investigate opportunities to move to better real classroom contexts in cases of pandemics or other hard conditions, especially in some places in Saudi Arabia where bad weather conditions oblige the educational administrations to cancel school days for safety reasons. Given current tactics, new trends, and ways of teaching, student instructors should be asked about their needs in terms of developing their practicum.

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