

## UNCOVERING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION: KOSOVO'S EXPERIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the pre-service teachers' experiences with online teaching, but also to uncover the challenges and opportunities for improving the distance education in the future. A qualitative research approach using phenomenology is adapted for the study. The participants were 18 pre-service teachers studying at the different programs of the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education. The interviews were conducted online. The transcripts of interviews were analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis. Five themes were derived from the analysis of the interview data: quality of teaching activities, positive aspects of online teaching, limitations, factors affecting online teaching, and recommendations to improve online teaching and learning in the future. This study proved the importance of pre-service teachers' interest and motivation, but also the faculty lecturers' professional preparedness for online teaching. Findings revealed the inability to relate theory to practice during online teaching as a lack of interaction between the university and the schools. This study is expected to serve as a guide for the expectations of pre-service teachers towards the improvement of distance education in the future.

**Keywords:** Challenges, distance education, online learning, pre-service teacher, Kosovo.

### INTRODUCTION

Kosovo, like many other countries worldwide, have experienced a rapid rate of change in all spheres due to the Covid-19. The pandemic situation has had a major impact on individuals in different ways, including also the teacher education, in particular. Consequently, according to Carrillo & Flores (2020) and Flores & Gago (2020), teacher preparation programs (TPP) start the shift to distance teaching, by providing new models of teaching environments to prepare future teachers. But this process has caused certain challenges that the higher education institutions had to overcome (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Hodges et al. (2020, p.1) emphasize that "well-planned online learning experiences are meaningfully different from courses offered online in response to a crisis or disaster". The concept of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) has been offered as a formally specific term for the forms of teaching delivery in a pressing situation as it was the pandemic. This term has been described as temporary use of remote teaching solutions that will return to that model once the crisis or emergency has ended (Hodges et al., 2020). The prompt closure of educational institutions led to online remote teaching and learning where lecturers were expected to use different technological supplies to ensure the continuity of learning for the pre-service teachers (Alan et al., 2020; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Flores & Gago, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Tarman, 2020).

According to Barbour et al. (2020), even when the pandemic threat will end, higher education institutions should not leave remote teaching and return only to class practices. Singh et al. (2021) suggest that higher education institutions across the world should examine different instructional approaches including online, hybrid, and blended learning methods. Considering that there are different opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of distance education in higher education and the need to use different methods to make lessons more efficient in distance education is increasing, researchers should conduct more studies with pre-

service teachers and faculty lecturers from different departments to understand their experiences with distance education and their suggestions for further improvement (Alan et al., 2020; Batmang et al., 2021; Naah, 2020; Ogbonnaya et al., 2020; Ozudogru, G., 2021). In this process, analyzing distance education provided by TPPs will provide new insight into the mechanisms of establishing the effectiveness and sustainability of the distance teacher education program.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Coping with Online Learning during the Pandemic

The individual's physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being has been affected due to the pandemic situation. Mainly, the emotional responses during pandemics were significantly influenced by specific pandemic-related behavior, with a generally low energy level and dominance of negative feelings (Camacho-Zuniga et al., 2021; Schelhorn et al., 2022). Despite this, the sudden switch to online classes has also been challenging for students and teachers educators. According to Sahu (2020), the situation with pandemics has created a sense of anxiety and panic among students and teachers about what might happen in the future. Students were expected to locate a reliable Wi-Fi connection and find an appropriate space that was private and quiet, while lecturers had to find best practices to keep the class engaged and interested to participate. According to Alan et al. (2020), significant efforts were made to adapt to compulsory distance education practices started with the pandemics, although in some countries there was already a distance education infrastructure. The very fast and dramatic migration of schools to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused concerns at local and international levels regarding the quality of education and students' willingness to cope with the new arising situation (Al Abiky, 2021; Dorsah, 2021). This difficult time with pandemic has enabled the educators, teachers and students to learn how to overcome the array of possible challenges and obstacles (Al Abiky, 2021). Wang et al. (2022, p.1) emphasize that "very low attention was paid to whether students were cognitively and emotionally ready to learn effectively in a virtual environment". A study conducted by Dorsah (2021) investigated the pre-service pre-service teachers' readiness for distance learning showed that readiness for online learning is high. Students showed a lower readiness in dimensions of learner control, computer/internet self-efficacy, and online communication self-efficacy. Yagan (2021) as cited in Basaran & Yalman (2022) found that pre-service teachers' attitudes towards distance education courses during the pandemic were at a low level. This study revealed that students preferred face-to-face education (traditional) rather than online education methods. Al Abiky (2021), Adnan & Anwar (2020), Crawford et al. (2020) and Khlaif et al. (2021), all stated that pre-service teachers were not familiar with online learning therefore they were shocked and had a lot of stress, but it appears that they adapted quickly to the new situation (Almendingen et al., 2021). The situation with the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly increased both lecturers' and pre-service teachers' awareness of the importance of equity in education, and how this can be addressed in the provision of teacher education (Nasri et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Therefore, according to Tarman (2020), understanding the factors that affect students' reactions to online learning during a pandemic should be seen as advices for lecturers to be innovative in learning strategies, but also for policymakers to offer available learning resources in future remote circumstances.

### Remote Teaching Experiences as Indicators to Improve Distance Education

According to Santana et al. (2018), the costs of distance education can be lower than of traditional education, but if it will be correlated with the quality of the teaching provided, than the cost per student can be the same or even higher. Furthermore, these researchers state that a poor-quality program of online education can produce a high dropout rate, due to the smaller number of students present and active in the distance education programs. Sakka (2022) stated that the rapid transition to the online system due to pandemic conditions found both students and universities with a lack of readiness on using these systems. Furthermore, this situation has reflected the lack of experience with distance learning in higher education institutions. A study by Almendingen et al. (2021) found that most of the surveyed pre-service teachers felt that learning outcomes would be harder to achieve due to the sudden shift to online education. These study findings showed that the difficulties that students faced during online teaching were a lack of social

relationships, living situations, poor internet connectivity, and a lack of motivation and effort. Students suggested that the learning outcomes in future online courses could be improved with pre-recorded and streamed lectures, frequent virtual meetings and student response systems. In a study by Naah (2020), the preservice teachers have ranked higher the lecturers who use trial questions and quizzes for assessment. Furthermore, they appreciated the teacher-learner rapport and interactions as cordial, collaborative and done in a form of discussion. According to Alan et al. (2020), the lack of students' planning and self-study skills can prevent their desired efficiency in distance education. The possibility of developing students' independent learning skills and responsibility are considered as advantages of distance education, while a disadvantage is considered the fact that this form of learning has low assessment reliability and can't provide the principle of eligibility for the student (Alan et al., 2020). A study by Ogbonnaya et al. (2020) found that the flexibility of online learning expanded the students' motivation to learn and enabled them to communicate and cooperate constructively with their fellow and lecturers. However, the difficulties that students encountered were slow internet connection, lack of appropriate technology, inability for time management, and family interruptions. Another study by Balbay & Erkan (2021) found that students benefited from online teaching by being able to better regulate their own learning process using the recorded lectures and online materials, but also by receiving regular feedback from instructors about their progress. Hojeij & Baroudi (2021) found that mentor teachers have a significant role in the effectiveness of students' virtual practicum placement, particularly in developing preservice teachers' teaching practices, classroom management skills, and the use of online resources. The lack of teachers' technical skills can negatively affect online learning (Alhumaid, 2019). Gonzalez (2012) and Basaran & Yalman (2022) found that pre-service teachers with little or no computer experience may fear the idea of using computers as part of their teaching practices and this may form strong negative attitudes towards using computers. Similar findings are presented in a study by Razkane et al. (2022), which revealed that pre-service teachers showed a negative attitude towards the COVID-19 online teaching experience. Pre-service teachers reported technical and logistical barriers, which have impacted the good delivery of lessons. Furthermore, pre-service teachers also faced other problems such as inability to establish communication with friends, inability to focus, becoming very passive, unfamiliar with the system (Ozudogru, G., 2021). A study by Sakka (2022) showed that students who prefer more face-to-face instruction reported higher levels of cognitive engagement, learning, and comprehension. But, according to Lomba-Portela et al. (2022), the main challenge in implementing the educational reforms is the resistance of teachers to change. Furthermore, according to Jarab et al. (2022), this resistance to technology may be caused by lack of faculty members technology familiarity. The study conducted by Jarab et al. (2022) found that faculties who received training for online teaching and those who have attended courses as a trainee were more satisfied with distance education. Fallah et al. (2021, p.874) suggested that "there should be some training courses for the teachers to provide them with a realistic view of the environment of online classes and what they should expect". Consequently, more guidance and training on online teaching for lecturers is much needed.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There has been an increase in research regarding the pre-service teachers' experiences with distance learning due to the sudden shift to distance education. Although there is a growing body of research (e.g. Alvarez, 2020; Ogbonnaya et al., 2020, **Ozudogru**, F., 2021; **Ozudogru**, G., 2021; Rahiem, 2020; Razkane et al., 2022; Saribas & **Cetinkaya**, 2021) in the literature focusing on pre-service teachers' experiences with distance learning, none of the studies was found in Kosovar context. However, as the online teaching practices were not common in many countries, particularly in Kosovo, for TPPs and pre-service teachers this was a very unique situation. Thus, this study has been undertaken to not only share pre-service teachers' experiences and challenges, but also to provide valuable recommendations that could be adopted by TPPs in current and future situations with distance education. The challenges and concerns described by pre-service teachers represent the on-year long period of online learning and provide their perspective on this period of time in higher education. This study findings are expected to serve as a guide for expectations of pre-service teachers towards the improvement of the online teaching and learning in the future, but also to encourage lecturers to reconsider new teaching activities and forms of assessment to more effectively post-COVID teacher training.

This study is guided by these research questions:

1. What are pre-service teachers' views on the quality of teaching activities during online teaching?
2. What are pre-service teachers' views on the positive and negative effects of online teaching?
3. What are pre-service teachers' recommendations to improve distance education in the future?

## **METHOD**

### **General Background**

On March 11, 2020, the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" stopped the teaching process, as a protective measure against the coronavirus. Each student is provided with a personalized Google "G-Suite for Education" e-mail, so that they can continue learning online, during the time taken to avoid physical contact. From March 2020 until June 2021, all courses at the Faculty of Education of the University of Prishtina are conducted online. The Google platforms such as Google Meet and Google Classroom are used to conduct the lectures. The courses were conducted with the same teaching schedules including lectures and exercises which lasted from one and a half hours, to more than two hours. The Kosovar faculty lecturers start the planning of first-time online teaching, while according to official statistics regarding online teaching at the Faculty of Education (University of Prishtina, 2022) 26.245 lectures are conducted online from 79 professors, while the average enrollment of online courses was 27 students. For academic staff and pre-service teachers, this was the first time doing education online.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research approach using phenomenology is adapted for the study. The key point for the researcher in a phenomenological study is to try to understand how people experienced a specific phenomenon from each person's own perspective, by entering the inner world of each participant (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The phenomenon in this research is Online Learning due to the Covid-19 crisis.

### **Participants**

The participants were 18 pre-service teachers studying at the bachelor programs of the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education. Initially, 25 pre-service teachers were selected randomly from the faculty data and they were invited through email to contribute to this study by informing them as well about the purpose of the research. The pre-service teachers that accepted to participate voluntarily in this research received the interview questions. Convenience sampling was used in the research. Data about the interviewed pre-service teachers are presented in Table 1. Sixteen (16) participants were female, while two (2) were male. The age of the interview participants ranged from 21 to 26 years old.

**Table 1.** Participants' Background

Participants	Gender	Age	Study program	Year of study
P1	Female	21 years old	Early Childhood	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P2	Female	21 years old	Early Childhood	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P3	Female	22 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P4	Female	24 years old	Pedagogy	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P5	Male	21 years old	Pedagogy	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P6	Female	22 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P7	Female	23 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P8	Female	26 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P9	Female	23 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P10	Male	21 years old	Elementary	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P11	Female	23 years old	Pedagogy	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P12	Female	21 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P13	Female	22 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P14	Female	22 years old	Pedagogy	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P15	Female	21 years old	Pedagogy	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
P16	Female	22 years old	Early Childhood	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P17	Female	23 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year
P18	Female	23 years old	Elementary	4 <sup>th</sup> year

Ten (10) interviewed pre-service teachers were studying at the Elementary Education Program, five (5) students were studying at the Pedagogy Program and three of interviewed students were at the Early Childhood Education Program. Twelve (12) of them were in the fourth year of study, while six (6) pre-service teachers were in the third year of study. The researcher has chosen to interview the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>-year pre-service teachers of three bachelor programs of the Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina because they had previous learning experiences in face-to-face courses, and may offer a better comparison between these two modes of teaching and learning.

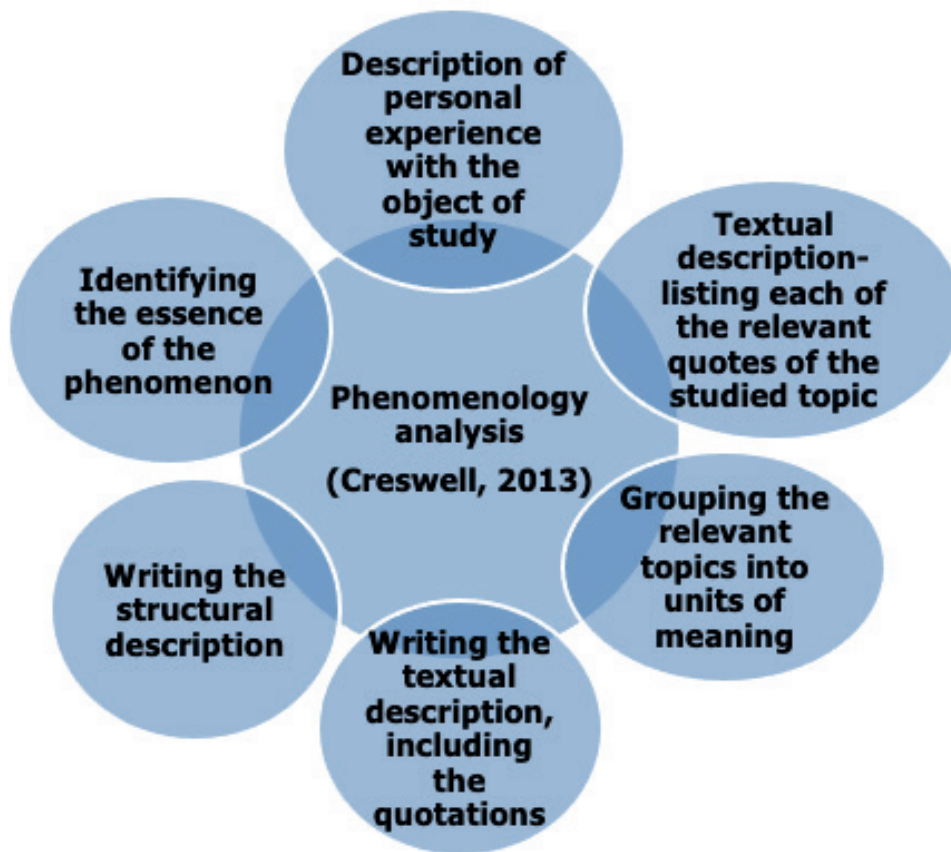
### Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted online. Participants signed the consent form before answering the questions. Participants were informed that the interview is confidential and will only be used for research issues with the guarantee that their identity will not be revealed in any circumstance. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, codes were used (ST1, ST2). In the process of forming interview questions, the relevant literature was used but also the opinion of an expert working in the field of distance education was taken. From 10 interview questions, the questions were rearranged to 7 questions that seemed more suitable for this research. Seven questions were sent via email to 18 participants. Some of the questions that were posed to the participants are: What is your perception of the quality of teaching and learning during the online courses? What is your perception of the methods and techniques used by lecturers? What are the factors affecting the quality of distance learning? How do you think faculty can improve the quality of online education?

The detailed examination of pre-service teachers' personal lived experiences is conducted through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This qualitative approach aims to examine how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The data analysis is conducted following the steps described by Creswell (2013). The steps are presented in Figure 1.

Data analysis consisted of preparation and organizing of data in transcripts. The data were reduced into themes through a careful process of coding and condensing the coding. The resulting codes were organized into sub-themes, which were then collected in main themes. The codes, sub-themes and themes are represented in tables.





**Figure 1.** Phenomenology analysis (Creswell, 2013)

### **The Scale**

The validity and reliability of this qualitative study were established by using the technique of triangulation and respondent validation. To ensure that the research is conducted from multiple perspectives, the same data were analyzed by two faculty colleagues. Constant checking of codings and inter-coder reliability was applied. Furthermore, the initial results were shared with the participants in order to test their accuracy.

### **FINDINGS**

Five themes were derived from the analysis of the interview data. The codes and themes resulting from the interviews are presented in a tabular format, whereas the description of the results is done by providing direct quotes taken from the interviews related to the themes that were identified during the data analysis process. The themes identified and the interpretation of findings are strongly linked to the data themselves and to the current literature.

### **Quality of Teaching Activities**

The literature above clearly states that the rapid digital transformation of educational institutions worldwide due to pandemics has required the redesigning of course delivery and objectives, redesigning the style of assessment, and also an organizational change realized by means of digital technologies. Lecturers and pre-service teachers were forced to rapidly adapt to distance education. According to interviewed participants (see Table 2) online learning has its own effects of positives and negatives.

**Table 2.** Theme 1: Quality of teaching activities

Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Lesson were good and clear; Lesson were well-organized; Lessons were substantive; Professors attempted to create a very attractive and engaging learning environment; Course syllabus is provided;	Positive qualities	Quality of teaching activities
Not very effective; Lesson were mainly presentations by professors; Lessons were boring; Lesson were complicated, hard to understand; Not enough interactions; Realization of the lessons goals- on a superficial level; Hard to concretize teaching; Presentation slides filled with theory; no creativity; Course syllabus is not provided; Not at the same level as face-to-face lessons;	Negative qualities	

For some pre-service teachers, lessons were very clear, substantive, and well-organized. Participants stated that they value the professors' attempt to create an attractive and engaging learning environment. *"Based on the syllabi presented at the beginning of the semester and considering the pandemic situation, I can say that the goals of the lectures have been achieved well (ST 3); "Some professors really tried hard to concretize the teaching with all the tools at their disposal" (ST10).* More interviewed pre-service teachers were opting for face-to-face classes, as they consider the online modality ineffective, restrictive and complicated. Students stated that the lesson was mainly the presentations by lecturers and that they were getting bored as the lack of interactions. *"Not all of us had the opportunity to express ourselves; there were cases when only two students discussed and the others did not have the floor at all" (ST 1); "During the online lectures, the principal "professor-lecturer, student-listener" was followed. There was no interactivity at all" (ST 3).* The results reveal that participants were unable to establish communication with the lecturers and colleagues, but also they lacked the classroom atmosphere. Pre-service teachers and lecturers were caught up being unaccustomed to the system and had to participate with limited opportunities. Results suggest creating an approach that is inclusive and sensitive to pre-service teachers' needs to socialize and remain active during online learning.

### Positive Effects of Online Teaching

Despite the fact that interviewed participants were more opting for face-to-face classes, they consider that online teaching has positive effects on their learning outcomes (see Table 3). Mainly, the positive effects of online teaching were related to their personal and professional development, but also to pedagogical strategies and practices those professors used during online classes. Participants stated that online learning enables them to develop their research skills, critical thinking, and self-discipline. They emphasize that online learning has provided flexibility, comfort, and cost savings. They mostly value the possibility to get familiar with different technologies and platforms that they can use for educational purposes in the teaching profession. *"The best thing about this entire online academic year has been the familiarity with the use of technology and various digital applications like Google Meet and Google Classroom" (ST 3); We are ready to face the same situations in the future; we have gained experience by being introduced to different digital platforms" (ST 8).* Participants stated that online teaching enabled the professors to the usage of different pedagogical methods such as a monologue, dialogue, illustration, demonstration, pictures, drawings, videos, etc. *"Online classes influenced the fact that the teacher must adapt to different situations in order to deliver effective teaching at any time" (ST 7).* Consistently with the literature, the interview results showed that distance learning gives to pre-service teachers and professors more learning options and practical ways to offer and receive

an education. Some of the key advantages of distance education might be the opportunity for students to take and develop some of their transferable skills such as independent working, adaptability, computer and technical skills, digital communication, research skills, and time management.

**Table 3.** Theme 2: Positive effects of online teaching

Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Ability to search; Develop research skills; Development of critical thinking; Comfort; Peer-learning; Self-discipline;	Student-related	Positive effects of online teaching
Acquisition of technological knowledge; Familiarity with different technologies and platforms (Google Meet and Google Classroom, Zoom, Edmodo); Internet access; The opportunity to offer the latest updates in the field of teaching ; E-learning tools; Recording the lesson;	Technology-related	
Modification of techniques by professors; Usage of different methods (monologue, the dialogue, illustration, demonstration, pictures, drawings, videos); Urging conversation, brainstorming, group work; Opportunity to show professionalism	Pedagogical	
Teaching in different conditions; Online lectures as adaption to different situations for effective teaching at any time; Time and cost savings; Flexibility;	Condition- related	

### Limitations of Online Teaching and Learning

According to the findings, there are several challenges associated with online teaching and learning as the physical separation is involved (see Table 4). The speed with which the higher education institutions moved to online instruction was staggering, whereas the faculties support teams were unable to help all faculty members to learn how to implement online learning. As the literature above explains, the need to create strategies to attract students to be focused and engaged is necessary for the effectiveness of online classes. Interviewed pre-service teachers think that most students lacks awareness of the importance of online learning. According to them, this may be one of the reasons why they were uninterested and unengaged in online classes. They emphasize that lectures could be more interesting and attractive if students will turn on their cameras and engage in discussion. Furthermore, they state that professors lacked any strategic plan on how to encourage them to do so. Pre-service teachers emphasize that the assessment was unrealistic and that even they were overloaded with tasks, their assignments were not considered in the final assessment. *“I think that assessment has been the biggest problem that professors may have encountered because observing the students’ work has been more challenging and difficult” (ST 4).* Among others, participants say that the practical part is completely avoided in online classes. According to them, online lectures lacked attractiveness and simpler, clearer content. *“Some professors used only the monologue method, while only some dialogue method, out of six professors only one used different tests and quizzes. Out of twelve lectures, 5-6 were held” (ST 2).* *“Many students have lost the practical part of certain subjects” (ST 8).*



Although negative pre-service teachers' reactions to assessment have been noted, the results provide important information about the quality of pre-service teachers' remote learning experiences and evaluation. Consistently with the literature, the results suggest the need to explore more the assessment strategies that engage learners and authentically evaluate their learning experiences.

**Table 4.** Theme 3: Limitations of online teaching and learning

Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Lack of student engagement; Lack of self-discipline; Lack of opportunities to express; Absence of students in lectures (name appeared); The students did not open the cameras; Lack of motivation and interest; Students' low awareness of the importance of online learning; Aggravated emotional state;	Student-related	Limitations of online teaching and learning
Lack of literature; Unrealistic assessment; Lack of usage of innovative techniques (quizzes, tests, etc.) Difficulties to involve everyone; Overload with tasks; Lack of feedback; Assignments are not considered, only the exam Lack of attractiveness and simpler and clearer content; Assessment was the biggest challenge for teachers; Older professors encountered a lack of knowledge in the use of technology;	Pedagogical issues	
Very low interactivity; Lack of possibility of checking written assignments; Lack of group works; Inability to see students physically; Lack of presence and face-to-face verification of student work; Monotony;	Social- related	
Half the lessons are not held; The practical part is completely avoided; Lack of content that prepares them for the profession; Absence of students due to lack of electricity, non-functioning of technology The use of new techniques was limited	Organizational aspects	

### Factors Affecting Online Teaching and Learning

Although online resources offer many benefits for pre-service teachers, the effectiveness of online teaching and learning are affected by many factors. For most of the interviewed pre-service teachers, the very important factors that can affect the quality of online teaching are related to student interest and commitment, lecturer preparedness, digital skills, but also to organizational issues (see Table 5). Pre-service teachers state that online learning could be more effective if students would be more demanding, dedicated, and concentrated during the lessons. Also, they suggest that students should find the proper environment to listen, by eliminating the elements that cause students' distraction. *"I think that a laptop is a tool that provides better opportunities for attending lectures due to the larger screen area that provides better access to what is presented"* (ST 6); *"Stable internet is very important, even it won't depend on us"* (ST 12). Most of the interviewed pre-service

teachers say that the commitment and work of the students will not be missing if the lecturers show a higher commitment and better management of the learning process. They state that the lecturer should be well prepared for the online classes, have creativity and ingenuity to create a satisfying environment for students, be fair and objective in assessment, and use techniques that engage more students. *“One factor that affects the quality of education and is related to lecturers is the involvement of students in research work” (ST 3); “Professors need good digital skills in order to ensure an effective teaching” (ST 16).* Pre-service teachers also emphasize the importance of incorporating school teachers in online lectures to ensure theory-practice linkages in teacher education. All of these factors can influence the effectiveness of distance and online learning experiences and can serve to inform learning experience design and program development and implementation. The results suggest the policy formation and implementation that focuses on designing and conducting online lectures in TPP.

**Table 5.** Theme 4: Factors affecting online teaching and learning

Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Lack of technological equipment; Bigger commitment; Student interest; Students economic status; Be more demanding; Student dedication and hard work; Maximum concentration during lectures; The proper environment to listen; Eliminating the elements that cause students' distraction ;	Student-related	Factors affecting online teaching and learning
Preparedness for lectures; Having a lecture plan; Being fair and objective in assessment; Use more creative techniques; Engage more students; To appreciate students commitments; Involving students in research work; Have the creativity and ingenuity to create a satisfying environment for students; Good knowledge of the use of technology; Creativity;	Lecturer-related	
Stable internet; Incorporating school teachers in lectures; Cooperation school-faculty during online teaching; Support system from faculty;	Organizational issues	

## Recommendations to Improve Online Teaching and Learning

The recommendations suggested by interviewed pre-service teachers are course-related and faculty-related (see Table 6). They emphasize that guidelines for online teaching and setting the expectations from an online classroom are very necessary. Also, pre-service teachers suggest that professors should provide more projects related to aspects of practice or real-life and encourage the participants to create video lessons. *“Professors should find creative elements so all participants can be active in the discussion and find forms of contemporary online learning work which would also raise the level of quality in online teaching” (ST 15).* Interviewed pre-service teachers recommend that TPP's should invite school teachers in online lectures, but also incorporate mentor teachers in online mentoring. Furthermore, they emphasize that technology and infrastructure should be strengthened and that additional training should be provided for academic

staff. “Some online classes should be provided in cooperation with schools and teachers” (ST 7); “Online teaching demands new pedagogical and digital skills among faculty staff, therefore training should be provided to them” (ST 11). The results showed the necessity of building the online learning system with a friendly and easy-to-use interface of digital tools/technologies and applications such as e-learning platforms and social networking. Furthermore, an important aspect of quality in online learning is the effectiveness of educational experiences that TPPs provide. Compilation of guidelines for online learning and implementation of digital mentoring contributes to pre-service teachers’ and lecturers’ engagement, motivation, and performance.

**Table 6.** Theme 5: Recommendations to improve online teaching and learning

Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Creating an effective online syllabuses; Lecturer should provide the syllabuses; Clear guidelines on students’ assessment; Creating inclusive online classrooms; Setting the clear expectations from students; More projects related to aspects of practice or real life; More discussions; Involvement of all students; Students should be required to open the cameras; Participants to be active in the discussion; Involvement of students to create video lessons; Continues use of technology;	Course-related	Recommendations to improve online teaching and learning
Learning new educational technologies; Technology and infrastructure should be strengthened; Additional training for lecturer; Find creative elements of linking practice and theory; Contemporary forms of online learning; Better cooperation school-faculty; Inviting school teachers in online lectures; Incorporating mentor teachers in online mentoring; Compiling a guide for distance teaching and learning; Compiling a guide for online mentoring;	Faculty-related	

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

To sum up, the results have identified strengths and gaps in delivering online teaching, opportunity areas for improvements in the delivery of instruction, and also pinpointed pre-service teachers’ needs for more qualitative distance learning. This study proved the importance of pre-service teachers’ interest and motivation, but also the lecturers’ professional preparedness for online teaching. It is clear that the unplanned and fast move to online learning, with no training and preparation, has resulted in poor pre-service teachers’ experiences. According to Jin (2022) and Yang & Cornelius (2004), most of the problems that emerge from distance education are related to quality. These researchers state that there is a pressing need for standards for establishing the quality of online education instructions. Furthermore, according to Brown et al. (2015), online teaching and learning can be done with high quality if teachers make the effort to establish close working relationships with their students. Furthermore, knowing that not all students will be active contributors to online activities, the most important concern of professors should be how to maximize their participation. Among others, preparing academic staff and pre-service teachers to use ICT can enable to attract and enrich the student learning experiences (Grove, 2008; Kim, 2020).

Findings revealed the inability to relate theory to practice as a lack of lecturers' technological skills for effective online teaching and a lack of interaction between the TPPs and the schools. Pre-service teachers experienced motivational, pedagogical, technological, and organizational challenges. Despite the fact that online programs have significant positive effects and offer extraordinary accessibility to quality education, there are some limitations that can cause potential problems to the achievement of any online lecture (Sharma, 2020). According to Deveci (2015) and Sheffield et al. (2015, p.1), it's very important for pre-service teachers to understand the value of the online component for professionalism in teaching, but also to "increase their awareness, competence, and confidence regarding teaching online". According to Kearns (2012), the major challenges and affordances exist in assessing student learning in online environments. Furthermore, the study revealed the low efficacy of institutional communications and support. Even the pre-service teachers feel more comfortable with remote instruction, they prefer more face-to-face education. The faculty members had little or no opportunity to amend the course structure or materials before the online learning launched due to the sudden move to distance education (Das & Meredith, 2021). According to the UNESCO report on education at the time of Covid-19 (2020, p.9), "most teachers have not only had to re-plan and adapt education processes-including adjusting methods and curricula, designing materials, and diversifying the media, formats, and platforms". Even the online teaching has been motivated for many years, the pandemic situation has fostered it extensively. Given that they value online learning and suggest continuous use of technology in teacher education, a hybrid approach could be very beneficial for teacher education courses to adopt in the future. Remains concerning whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist in the post-pandemic period, but TPPs in Kosovo should identify additional ways to improve outcomes by adopting hybrid models of instructions. Even though the results represent perceptions of online learning that occur inside the context of a global pandemic, the suggestions offer good practices to make online learning work better for Kosovar academic staff and pre-service teachers in the future. Online learning allows the exploration of finding more flexible ways to learn (Sharma, 2020). According to Okada & Sheehy (2020) and Saribas & Cetinkaya (2021), teacher preparation programs should realize the components that have an impact on pre-service teachers' enjoyment of distance education to enhance their academic performance and retention. Furthermore, Karakaya (2021) suggest that educators should understand the difficulties faced by pre-service teachers and create an inclusive pedagogy approach to respond to learners' need. According to Grove (2008), greater cooperation between teacher preparation programs and cooperating schools is needed so they can learn to teach effectively in digital classrooms. TPPs need to advance their virtual courses, otherwise, they risk decreasing student satisfaction. The findings of this study should inform strategies for future possibilities for using online teaching in Kosovo and modify the modes of instruction in response to the situation. Therefore, it is critical to think ahead so that TPPs can consider challenges that may face in the future. This study is expected to serve as a guide for the expectations of pre-service teachers towards the improvement of online teaching and learning in Kosovo. Comparing the findings of this study with other studies, this study recommends that school/university partnership is important in strengthening online learning and digital mentoring in teacher education programs. With the onset of the pandemic crisis impacting Kosovar pre-service teachers learning experiences, especially in creating theory-practice linkages, TPPs should adopt their online lectures to the pre-service teachers' needs. Online mentoring could be used to help the pre-service teachers to feel more connected with their school mentors. The inclusion of school mentors in designing and organizing online lectures with the university lecturers could make the virtual classroom more interactive and interesting for pre-service teachers. Online lectures require a different skillset to design and deliver, therefore professional support with workshops and training courses available to academic staff and school mentors are very necessary for the enhancement of their digital skills. TPPs should evaluate their effectiveness toward qualitative teaching activities, student performance, and the assessment process.

## **LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study has some limitations too and provides recommendations for further research. This study does not bring the view of lecturers related to their experiences in online teaching. Future research can be directed towards investigating their perspective on the quality of online teaching practices and the need for improvements to enrich the understanding of strategies to improve distance teacher education. Also,

this case can be investigated in other Kosovo universities as well. For future research, preservice teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding distance education should be further examined using mixed-method research designs. Furthermore, different factors that can influence the effectiveness of online teaching were not discussed, therefore future researchers may focus on other aspects. These research findings might provide the lecturers with useful information on how to design their curriculum and instruction for online teaching. Furthermore, lecturers of practicum courses should consider establishing close collaboration with school teachers by inviting them to online classes. Also, an online environment can be used to share pre-service teachers' recorded videos of their teaching practice in a class by maximizing peer-to-peer learning.

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