



Practicum Students' Views on Distance Learning via TV Broadcast for Secondary Schools

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59045/nalans.2023.37>

APA Citation: Genç, B. & Darmaz, V. (2023). Practicum students' views on distance learning via TV broadcast for secondary schools. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 11(23), 336 – 346.

Abstract

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 and early 2020 across the world, many countries turned to distance education platforms. By the beginning of March, 2020 Turkey also started TV classes for almost 18 million students of primary and secondary schools. This study aims to explore the extent to which pre-service English teachers auditing a distance English language course for secondary school students considered that the distance courses had achieved the course objectives, and perceived advantages and disadvantages in distance courses. The participants in the study were 60 pre-service teachers who attended a practicum study for the first five weeks of the 2019-2020 academic year spring semester. Since the classes in primary, secondary, and tertiary education were taught online for the rest of the spring semester, the practicum students were assigned to watch English classes taught on free TV channels which were also broadcast on the internet to let the students watch again at their own pace. The data were collected through three open-ended interview questions. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed data. The results indicate that, although teachers on the course agreed that TV courses were not able to achieve the course objectives, they mentioned advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of distance learning via TV broadcast and offered ways to improve it.

Keywords: distance learning via TV broadcast, COVID-19, secondary school, language teaching

Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus during the early days of 2020 affected nearly all countries in the world and all sectors of the economy. In reaction to this pandemic, one of the developments in

the education sector was the rapid expansion of distance learning activities which had become quite common in the developed parts of the world and which had been in its emergence phase in the developing countries.

Although before the 1950s there had been specialized distance-education institutions that performed teaching activities through TV broadcast which offered dual-mode of teaching whereby some students attended face to face classes and others were taught by distance-education methods. The 70's, 80's and 90's were the years when distance education was carried out by the Anadolu University Open Education Faculty via TV broadcasting in Turkey as well (Bozkurt, 2017). In early 2020, with the outbreak of the coronavirus in Turkey, both The Ministry of Education (MoNE) which is responsible for primary and secondary education and The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) responsible for the supervision of tertiary education in Turkey took actions on distance education all across the nation. In addition to its online teaching portal EBA (Education Informatics Network), The Ministry of Education also started television courses for primary and secondary schools once again.

Considering the technology of the era, it was quite reasonable to try to run the courses from an online platform such as EBA. Because many studies on online education have shown that this type of teaching has many advantages. For example, Koç (2020) investigated lecturers' views on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. The participants in the study were six course instructors of online courses, namely, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform, Turkish Language and Foreign Language, and found that the most frequently mentioned advantage of online learning is the accessibility of education for all students. The most frequently mentioned disadvantage was the lack of teacher-student interaction, students' not participating in classes regularly, and technical problems.

In another study in the Turkish context again Altunay (2019) investigated the views of university students from various majors enrolled in a compulsory online English class. As in the study of Koç, the participants in Altunay's study stated that they were happy with online language learning setting because they liked flexibility of time and place; they, however, suffered from lack of equipment and technical problems.

With a broader perspective than the two studies mentioned above Ozudogru and Hismanoglu (2016) tried to find out the views of freshmen students on foreign language courses delivered via e-learning and they also tried to reveal whether there were any statistically significant differences between students' views in terms of age, gender, time spent on using e-learning system and the faculty they studied at. Their study showed that the students' views on foreign language courses delivered via e-learning were negative and also the students partially agreed with 'instructor attitudes', 'system quality', 'information content quality', 'service quality', and 'supportive issues' dimensions. Yet Aragon, Johnson, and Shaik's study suggests 'that learners can be just as successful in the online environment as they can in the face-to-face environment, regardless of their learning style preferences' (p.243).

Undoubtedly, online education is one of the most common and advantageous distance education methods today. However, the number of people that online education can reach is not as wide as TV broadcasts, as it requires internet infrastructure and a computer. Therefore, in addition to the EBA online education, the Ministry of National Education has also started teaching via TV broadcasting. Because "television, which has an important place in mass communication, has a significant role in distance education with its special position, the way of presentation and qualities peculiar to itself" (Saglik & Ozturk, 2001. p.75). "Television's strengths include the power to engage viewers, to present conceptual information visually, and to show real people doing real things in environments both local and international." (Burns, 2011: p.32). On the other hand, steps on education taken by countries in fighting COVID-19

pandemic have also brought up some issues. One of the most important issues is the rate of success of learners in a distance education course. As Aragon, Johnson, and Shaik (2002) argue distance education, by design, will require students to utilize reflective observation (learning by watching and listening) and abstract conceptualization (learning by thinking) simply. Again, to use concepts from Kolb's theory of experiential learning (1994) it can be argued that the classes taught on TV screens suit best for students with diverging (who prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems) and assimilating (who require good clear explanation rather than a practical opportunity and who are good at understanding wide-ranging information and organizing it in a clear, logical format) learning style students. When considering online education, the one-way interaction of TV broadcasts remains another issue. Whether it's distance learning, e-learning, online learning or learning through TV, distance education is on the way to become the norm of education in all educational stages, primary, secondary and tertiary; therefore, not only officials responsible for developing learning programs but also practitioners in education need to look for an idea to improve teaching-learning activities and to better understand the disadvantages and advantages of distance education. Although distance education via TV is an old method, and considering that it has a widely accepted alternative such as online education today, it still appears as an area that needs to be researched. Since there are some studies on education through TV in the relevant literature, no study has been found in our country about teaching a foreign language through TV except Çalık and Altay's (2021). With its four skills and language areas, English is a subject that requires a lot of detail in its teaching. Consequently, teaching English through TV is an important issue that needs to be examined.

Therefore, to contribute to the current literature in this respect, this study tried to investigate pre-service teachers' views on advantages and disadvantages of learning English via TV broadcast as well as on possible solutions for the problems that students of primary and secondary schools may experience in distance education. For this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the prominent advantages and disadvantages of distance education via TV according to prospective teachers?
2. What are the possible improvements to make distance education classes via TV more efficient?

Method

Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. In addition, the study was designed as a single case study to examine the views of pre-service teachers about the advantages and disadvantages of teaching a foreign language through TV broadcasting. Yin (2009: 14) defines case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Because, the advantage of this method is that, unlike other methods, it provides detail and a deep understanding of the subject under study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

Participants

The 60 participants, senior students of the ELT Department of Inonu University, were selected via purposeful sampling method. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Thus, to achieve the purpose

of the research, all participants were selected from those who were taking the Teaching Practice course during the study.

Data Collection

The data of the study was collected over the ten weeks of distance education which followed the face-to-face education of the spring terms of the 2019-2020 academic year. Over the ten weeks of distance education, the participants were asked to write an online practicum reports answering the two interview questions. The report was to submitted during the 2nd or 3rd week, 4th or 5th week, 6th or 7th week, and 8th or 9th week, respectively. At the beginning of the study, the participants filled out the consent forms letting the researchers to make use of the data they would provide.

Data Analysis

In the present study content analysis is used to analyze the data. The aim of the content analysis is often to summarize, retrieve, and analyze information from documents which is performed through identifying meaningful clusters of information often referred to as themes, concepts, codes, or categories (Armborst, 2017). In Saldana's (2013) hierarchical organization codes attached to certain units of text are the basic units of analysis which are clustered into categories in the second level which are, in turn, clustered into themes in the third level.

As in inferencing, in content analysis there are three main directions: inductive, deductive, and abductive. A deductive approach starts with a theory or hypothesis and leads to the justification or contradiction of the theory or the hypothesis. On the other hand, inductive content analysis is used in cases where there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon. As Krippendorff (2004) reveals through sample scenarios inferences employed in the content analysis are all abductive; deductive and inductive inferences, however, are not central to content analysis. Unlike deduction or induction, abductive inferences proceed across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind to particulars of another kind, which 'are the kinds of inferences of interest to content analysis, where they proceed from texts to the answers to the analyst's question' (p. 36). Reichertz (2009) describes abduction as follows:

[Abduction] is, in every sense, a means of inferencing. It is precisely in this quality of being a 'means-of-inferencing' that we find the secret charm of abduction. On the one hand, it is a logical inference (and thereby reasonable and scientific), and on the other hand, it extends into the realm of profound insight (and therefore generates new knowledge). (p. 4)

So, an abductive thematic content analysis was employed in this study; because the phenomenon under scrutiny in a very recent one and almost no study has been done regarding the views of pre-service English teachers' ideas on TV courses, which seem to flourish in the near future due to the practical considerations.

In coding the data in the first place we used MAXQDA 20.0. Following the researchers' determination of codes in the statements, MAXQDA allowed us to group codes exhibiting similarities among themselves; the software presented the codes in a hierarchical, tree-like, structure so that various levels of codes can be indexed, which in turn are clustered into themes by the researchers.

Findings and Discussion

As mentioned above, abductive content analysis is used to analyze the data. Following Elliott's (2018) method who argues "we have codes at a primary level and categories or themes at a secondary level, which are formed from analysis of codes rather than of data" (p.2852), we processed the written data through the software to find out codes, which are, in turn, subsumed under three themes. Codes and their frequencies can be seen in Figure 1:

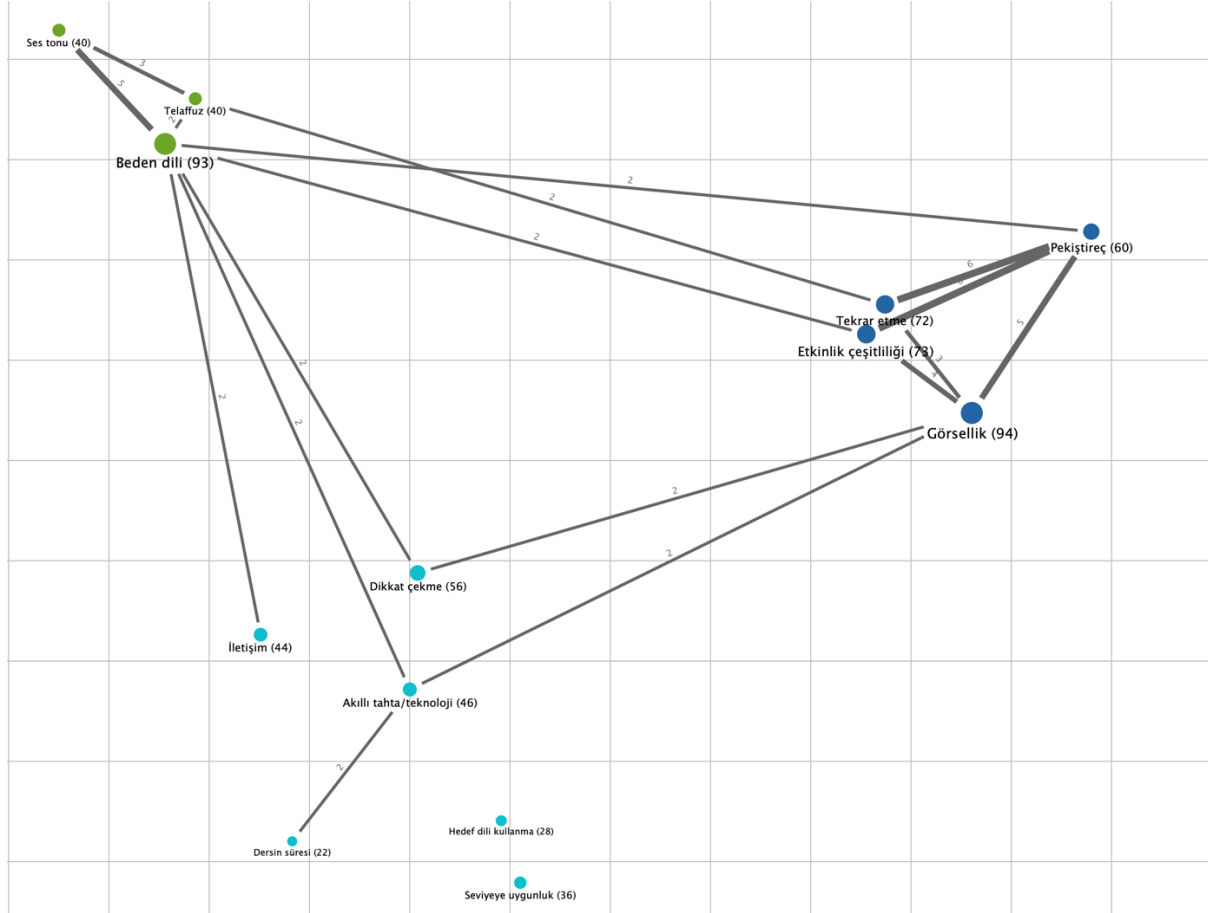


Figure 1. Code Frequency

Thus, regarding the interview questions involving the advantages, disadvantages, and possible improvement areas of distance learning, three themes emerged from the responses given by the participants. The codes and the themes under which those codes are clustered in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Coding of the Responses

Theme	Code	f
Lesson Content	Audio-visual material use	239
	Question/activity diversity	110
	Number of repetitions (vocabulary and subject)	103
	Vocabulary teaching	65
	Suitability to the proficiency level	36
	Authentic material use	34
	Educational game use	32
	Assignment	31
	Teaching of four skills	18
	Subject coverage	17
Teaching Process	Mother tongue-target language use	210
	Lesson's fast coverage	63
	Reinforcement	60
	Drawing attention	56
	Smartboard/technology use	46
	Communication with students	44
	Lesson time	43
Teacher	Body language	121
	Speech	99
	Voice tone	58
	Liveliness	23

As shown in Table 1, the twenty-one codes determined by the researchers of the study were then grouped under three clusters by the software and subsumed under three themes (lesson content, teaching process, and teacher) by the researchers. The widest theme is “Lesson Content” under which ten of the twenty-one codes are subsumed; “Teaching process” covering seven coded and “Teacher” with four codes rank the second and third themes in terms of code number and frequency of the codes, respectively. Eleven of the twenty-one codes that emerged in the reports were grouped under “Lesson Content” theme and with a frequency of number of 685, these eleven codes were accounted for 45% (685 out of 1508) of all codes. With seven codes and 522 frequencies the codes under “Teaching process” accounted for 35% of all codes.

Finally, “Teacher” theme with four codes and 301 frequencies accounted for 20% of all codes.

The checklist developed and used by Çalık and Altay (2021) in their study in which they questioned English lessons through TV has similar codes and three similar themes titled “instructional criteria”, “pedagogical criteria”, and “technical criteria”.

As can be seen in the “Lesson Content” theme section, by far the most favored aspect of distance learning is the availability of audio-visual materials in teaching activities. All the participants of the study mentioned the versatility of audio-visual materials use as compared to face-to-face lessons; however, in some cases, the participants expressed their criticisms based on the opaqueness of the images or the size of the letters and figures on the screen. Below are some verbatim examples from the responses of the participants:

- *The visuals are suitable for the grade level of the students. (S9)*
- *The slides prepared by the teacher were rich in content but the picture were opaque thus the subtitles on the pictures were illegible. (S26)*

Comparing with the high number of drills and other structural exercises common in methods such as the Audio-lingual method or Situational language teaching, the participants in our study emphasized the multi-sensory aspect of questions as yet another advantage of distance learning. Distance learning also allows the teacher to make use of various activity types, which enriches the language learning experience which learners get during lessons. Long ago Martin (1978) drew our attention to the importance of spiraling, i.e., a systematic revisiting of the same material with increasingly broader and deeper explanations and practice in language teaching. Martin also set forth a guideline for employing spiraling in language teaching:

There are two major classes of [grammar] items that can benefit from a spiral approach: 1) the class which is too complex, either syntactically or semantically or both, for easy assimilation, such as the conditionals and the modal auxiliaries; and 2) the class which consists of the integration of syntactic rules and semantic concepts, such as the reporting of speech acts. (p.151)

Another advantageous aspect of distance learning as mentioned by the participants is the facility it provides to the learner and teacher. The participants liked the way the teachers taught vocabulary with the help of various visual help. This was one of the expected positive outcomes of the practicum study in that the practicum students had the immediate experience of observing a proven activity that they could employ in their future careers. However, some of the participants were critical about the number and complexity of the vocabulary: they argue that in some classes students were exposed to too many vocabulary items that seem to be above their proficiency level. They also suggest that the teacher should not dwell on some vocabulary items which appear on the screen. Distance learning makes the learning load heavier by presenting too much knowledge at a given time and if the students are assisted, they needed their efforts to learn the target language will be in vain.

Thus, under the “Lesson Content” theme, the first four codes were mentioned at least more than once by the participants. The other six codes under this theme were mentioned by almost half or less than half of the participants. Accompanying to the ideas on vocabulary teaching was “suitability to the proficiency level” of the lesson content: as seen in Table 1, the participants had a critical view against the suitability of the vocabulary items, grammar items, or the activity type to the proficiency level of the students. The participants claimed that presenting a too heavy learning load at the outset of the lesson would discourage learners and cause loss of motivation thereby leading to an irredeemable failure in language classes.

Unlike the studies of Çalık and Altay (2021) and Özkanal, Yüksel, and Basaran-Uysal (2020), the participants liked the use of authentic materials, games, the assignment, and the

teaching of four skills during the lesson. They, however, argued the drawbacks of those activities and suggested improvement should be carried out to adapt those activities to the needs and proficiency levels of the students. What is more, that the teachers pretended as if they were teaching in real classroom and assigned some class hours only for questions and answer session were criticized by the participants on the ground that assigning whole class hour only for question-and-answer session was boring.

As mentioned above the second theme which accounted for 35% of all code frequencies is the “Teaching process”, to which seven of the twenty-one codes were assigned. Under this theme, the most significant code is the mother tongue use of teachers. As with the dual nature of responses mentioned codes, regarding the target language use or mother tongue use the participants were in favor of using the first in some cases and the latter in other cases. Only few of the participants suggest that the whole lesson should be covered in the target language. Instead, some believe that in explaining some of the key words teacher should not spend time in explaining the word in the target language and simply tell its mother tongue equivalent. Furthermore, some participants also believe that teacher’s explaining the highlights of the lesson covered in their mother tongue will be conducive for learners. In a similar study conducted by Özkanal, Yüksel, and Basaran-Uysal (2020) with 32 teacher candidates during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is emphasized that the language used by the teacher is quite effective on the quality of the courses given in distance education.

As one for the participants drew attention, “That the teacher made use of various activities during the lesson help students with short attention time not to get bored” (S37), technology allows teachers employ several types of activities with just pressing a few keys on the keyboard. These findings are also in line with the findings in the study by Özkanal, Yüksel, and Basaran-Uysal (*ibid*).

One of the most salient drawbacks of distance education is the relatively fewer interaction opportunities and eye contact between the teacher and learners. These two factors, which are generally taken for granted, are of high importance for a lesson to be covered efficiently. The participants mentioned the rich content and fast coverage of lessons as an aspect to be improved in distance education. They suggest the number of students should be reduced to 10-15 and more effective learning management systems that provided more interaction opportunities be used in teaching. With a frequency of 63, this code was reported at least once by all the participants.

The teachers’ provision of reinforcement opportunities to students; performing miscellaneous activities at the outset of the class as warm-up activities and to better get the attention of students; the teachers’ mock feedbacks such as “well done”, “very good” helping to create a real classroom atmosphere and the versatility of technology were the four aspects considered to be advantageous of distance learning. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the study of Özkanal, Yüksel, and Basaran-Uysal (2020), the assigned lesson time was not found to be enough for the lesson content to be covered.

In the last theme of the report labeled “Teacher” we see only four codes and these codes accounted for 20% of all responses. Despite the common expectation that distance learning in which people are seen as bi-dimensional figures and mostly as above the waist parts, the participants still emphasized the role of body language which is limited to hands or arms movements and facial expressions, teachers’ tone of voice in covering the subject; and teachers’ exhibiting more lively and enthusiastic mood. Questioning the teacher under the "instructional criteria" in their work, Çalık and Altay (2021) also emphasize that body language is very effective on the student's understanding of the subject. These four factors are also considered

effective in rendering distance education more interesting and more engaging for students. Below are again some verbatim examples from the participants' responses:

- *The teacher's taught the lesson in such a monotone voice that even though I was auditing the class, I got bored. (S55)*
- *The teacher's pronunciation was such crystal clear that even a five grader could follow the teacher easily. (S46)*

What we see in the discussion so far on the reports of the participants is that there is no mention of student-student interaction. It seems that the participants only focused their attention on the teacher-student interaction and ignored the advantages or disadvantages distance education offer for student-student interaction. Lack of student-student interaction seems to be a default feature of distance education via TV and whereby it escaped from the notice of the participants. Although a few aspects of distance education that need to be improved have been mentioned in this study, one of the major drawbacks of distance education is the peer interaction, which is generally favored and credited for its high potential in teaching activities. A similar finding is emphasized in the studies of Özkanal, Yüksel, and Basaran-Uysal (2020).

Again, another major issue that seems to have escaped from the participants' notice is the role of language learners. As pre-service teachers, they are aware of language teaching methodologies and are offered at least two or three courses on language teaching methodology. When they study language teaching methods, techniques, and approaches one of the key elements in the syllabi of those courses is the role of the language learner. However, in the distance education experience which they attended as practicum students, the participants never stated any ideas regarding the roles of the students and what advantages and disadvantages distance education offer regarding learner roles.

In Turkey, ELT programs offer only one course in assessment to pre-service teachers. Assessment is the third major aspect lacking in the reports of the participants which also hints at a lack of a holistic approach to the teaching. Assessment is always considered as a *sine qua non* (essential) in all teaching activities. That no mention of assessment emerged in the codes could be attributed to the number of assessment courses the participants take during their undergraduate years or their focusing only on teaching methods and techniques. Because as Burns (2011: p.32) states "Seeing is believing; seeing is understanding; and seeing is learning. Teachers benefit when they see other teachers work in new ways ...". Thus, we believe follow-up studies should be performed focusing not only on lesson content, teaching process, and teacher aspect of language teaching but also on peer interaction, learner roles, and assessment.

Conclusion

Not only due to the recent increase in distance learning activities in primary, secondary and tertiary education but also referring to the statement from the official at governmental levels or by professional organizations and also to the ideas of professionals in the teaching profession and laypeople, it would not be an overstatement to say that distance learning will become the norm in the near future even the world countries show a high success in defeating this pandemic.

Even before the outbreak of this pandemic Holmberg (2008) argued that distance education had become quite a common mode of teaching and learning. For example, in Turkey with its one the last regulation amendments in May of 2020, The Council of Higher Education increased the ratio of distance classes from 10% to 40 percent regardless of the conditions brought about the pandemic. This study is yet another effort to improve the distance learning activities, which, as argued above, is on the way to become the common way of learning and

teaching. Three aspects of distance learning with their peculiar advantages and disadvantages were “Lesson Content”, “Teaching process”, and “Teacher”. That the “Lesson content” covered more than half the total codes and almost half of the code frequencies indicates that the stakeholders and practitioners of education will have to assign most of their effort and time to improve the various aspect of the lesson content. However, the teaching process and teacher aspects of distance education also require due attention from the parties involved in education.

In sum, this study showed that pre-service teachers have positive opinions on foreign language teaching through TV broadcasting. While it lacks real student-teacher interaction over other types of distance education, such as online learning, the number of its advantages makes this disadvantage negligible, if necessary. Thus, it is clear that distance education through TV, which has existed for about one hundred years, still maintains its importance and is seen as a serious supporter of face-to-face education together with other distance education methods. We believe the above-mentioned three themes will be the foci of the curricula as new classes will be introduced to educate future generations through distance learning.

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