Teaching Practicums During the Pandemic in an Initial English Teacher Education Program: The Preservice Teachers' Perspective

Práctica pedagógica durante la pandemia en un programa de formación de profesores de inglés: la perspectiva de profesoras y profesores en formación

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In an initial English teacher education program at a Chilean institution, early and professional practicums were re-invented during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continuity of this process. This study analyzed the context and conditions under which these practicums unfolded and how the process influenced participants' pedagogical and professional knowledge development. Forty-two preservice English language teachers undergoing early and professional practicums online throughout 2020–2021 answered an online questionnaire which was analyzed through descriptive statistics and content analysis. Findings revealed preservice teachers' problems, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges while interacting with pupils, cooperating teachers, and supervisors, as well as the development of some pedagogical and professional knowledge. The findings may serve to make adaptations to increasingly challenging teaching contexts.

Keywords: English language teaching, online remote teaching, practicum, preservice teachers

Las prácticas tempranas y profesionales de un programa de formación inicial de profesores de inglés en una universidad chilena fueron reinventadas durante la pandemia de COVID-19 para dar continuidad al proceso de formación. Este estudio buscó analizar el contexto y las condiciones en que dichas prácticas se desarrollaron y cómo influyeron en el conocimiento pedagógico y profesional de los profesores de inglés en formación. Para ello, 42 participantes que realizaron su práctica pedagógica en el periodo 2020–2021 respondieron una encuesta en línea cuyos datos se analizaron mediante estadística descriptiva y análisis de contenido. Los resultados permitieron identificar problemas, fortalezas, debilidades y desafíos en la interacción de los participantes con estudiantes, profesores colaboradores y supervisores, y el desarrollo parcial de un conocimiento pedagógico y profesional. Los resultados pueden orientar adaptaciones a contextos educativos cada vez más desafiantes.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del inglés, enseñanza remota, práctica pedagógica, profesores en formación

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Introduction

Due to global health concerns, the coronavirus pandemic has forced people to "stay at home," disrupting all social activities, including education. Although this has been beneficial in diminishing the pandemic, it is also costly for countries (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Many countries were unprepared to face such unforeseen circumstances, and, in the area of education, institutions had to quickly resort to distance education to maintain their services (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

According to UNESCO (2020), some of the most harmful effects of school closures due to coronavirus include:

a) Interrupted learning because schools provide essential learning, and when they are closed, students are deprived of opportunities for growth and development;

b) unequal access to digital learning platforms, resulting in some students lacking access to technology or good internet connectivity for continued learning during school closures; and

c) social isolation, since educational institutions promote social activity and human interactions, school closures can deprive youth and children of some social communications and socialization that are essential to learning, development, and creativity.

In this context, teachers had to teach online, and students had to adjust to remote learning. Given that "being a language teacher triggers its own unique challenges resulting from the specificity and the emotional character of foreign-language teaching" (MacIntyre et al., 2020, p. 2), teaching a foreign language is already complex. The transition has posed additional challenges to teachers and learners in countries with no relevant infrastructure to facilitate online education. This digital divide was a big issue, particularly for learners in rural areas, as they often lack the needed facilities and expertise to implement remote teaching and learning. Then, technology emerged as a resource to bridge the educational gaps derived from the unscheduled closure of schools during the pandemic, even though many teachers and students lacked the digital skills to implement online education. All of this added to the usual stressors that have been identified in the work of language teachers (i.e., self-doubt about their language abilities, "coping with the emotional anxiety of learners, heterogeneous proficiency in learner groups, threats to a sense of self and identity, energy-intense teaching methodologies, intercultural components to teaching, and precarious working conditions" (MacIntyre et al., 2020, p. 3).

Because technology has become an intrinsic component of these processes, the rapid move to online teaching imposed by the pandemic has also had an impact on teacher education at universities, particularly on the teaching practicums (Fořtová et al., 2021; Vancell, 2021). The earliest research on initial teacher education has disregarded how virtual teaching practicums can provide opportunities and challenges for preservice teachers to learn how to teach (Clarke, 2013; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). In this article, we analyze the effect of online practicums on a group of preservice teachers from a southern university in Chile. These preservice teachers have six sequential teaching practicums with particular aims, providing them with long and rigorous processes of training and qualification (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and allowing them to engage in reflective practice (Schön, 1987) within their specific contexts (see Table 1).

The practicum fostered by the university program analyzed in this article encourages a reflective approach, as shown in Table 1 (Rosas et al., 2020). Practicum supervision provides guidance and advice on school placement and lesson planning, evaluates preservice teachers' performance in action, and includes feedback that fosters the development of teacher identity and autonomy (Lara-Diaz, 2019). In the current pandemic, the study's preservice

Table 1. Progressive Teaching Practicums

Semester [a]	Practicum mode	Duration	Focus and aims
4 [b]	Observation	One week	Observation of the school and educational context to know the different kinds of schools (public, subsidized, and private)
5	Workshop development	Four weeks	Interdisciplinary workshop in extra-curricular activities (e.g., music, arts, chess). To implement activities according to the needs diagnosed in schools
6	Assistantship	16 weeks	Helping teachers with the preparation of class materials or acting as monitors coaching the pupils during one term. To learn about teachers' duties and tasks
7	Assistantship and sheltered teaching	16 weeks	Assistantship and sheltered teaching. To teach small segments of lessons helping cooperating teachers and making ethnographic notes about their lessons
8	Teaching and research	16 weeks	Teaching a unit, planning an innovation project according to ethnographic notes, and detecting pupils' needs. To design and pilot the instruments used in their innovation projects (pre-test & questionnaires)
9	Implementation of the innovation project	16 weeks	Student-teachers are entirely in charge of a class to implement innovation projects. Analysis and interpretation of data gathered. Reflection about results. Writing of final reports.

[a] Duration of a semester: approximately 16 weeks. [b] Semesters 4, 5, and 6 correspond to early teaching practicums, while Semesters 8 and 9 correspond to professional practicums.

teachers had to adapt to the new remote teaching modality during the practicum process yet develop similar actions to those shown in Table 1. The practicum supervision by university agents also had to be adapted to the new modality. It imposed additional challenges to an already challenging task: coordinating times and access for online visits and feedback sessions afterward, defining the observation focus, and being attentive to the various needs of the preservice teachers as the process unfolded. The participants' family contexts and conditions and the virtualization process impacted their pedagogical and professional knowledge development, giving evidence of various issues emerging from the experience. Given this context, this study sought to identify the conditions and contexts in which early teaching practicum and professional practicum developed to determine the characteristics of the process of virtualization of these practicums in the development of pedagogical and professional knowledge for a group of English preservice teachers and to identify the main strengths, weaknesses, and challenges emerged in the practicums carried out in 2020–2021.

Theoretical Framework

Practicum in Pandemic

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced teachers to adapt to online teaching, imposing unprecedented challenges on teachers, students, and the whole teaching and learning process. Until then, most preservice teachers in Chile attended their school placements according to their timetables and fulfilled their teaching responsibilities for early teaching and professional practicum, as required in their program regulations. Then, COVID-19 emerged, schools closed, and lockdowns became the norm, adding stressors to the already stress-loaded task of teachers. To avoid interrupting the developmental process involved, university teacher education programs in Chile rapidly devised ways to move on. In the case of the English teaching program analyzed in this study, these alternative ways involved preservice teachers in online practicum, and they strived to adapt themselves to the new conditions. To help them move forward, they were instructed in the use of various applications freely available at the time (e.g., Peardeck, Nearpod, Mentimeter, Kahoot, and Quizzes) to implement new approaches to teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the school system, fulfill practicum aims, and succeed in supervision visits.

Practicum Supervision

Practicum supervision involves ongoing development taking place in real-time in a real-world setting (Baird & Mollen, 2019). Supervision is considered both important and valuable; thus, in the context of the pandemic, most university teaching programs in Chile reframed their practicum to give continuity to the whole preservice program and were done online throughout 2020–2021. Given this situation, preservice teachers were supervised online too, which made the process more challenging, particularly in terms of the relationship between supervisors and preservice teachers, as it ended up being more emotionally detached.

Qualities associated with effective supervisors include encouraging preservice teachers' autonomy, being receptive to their ideas, and providing positive and constructive feedback. Supervisors facilitate various learning opportunities, reviewing preservice teachers' work and assessing and evaluating their professional development and performance (Baird & Mollen, 2019), depending on the supervision model adopted. Traditionally, there have been three models: the *nominal model*, which aims to make it evident that supervision is provided; the *prescriptive model*, which views the supervisor as the authority who unveils weaknesses and suggests ways to perform correctly; and the *reflective model*, which sees the supervisor as an activator of reflection *on* actions and *about* actions in the preservice teacher's performance to develop expertise (Bailey, 2006). The first and the second are probably the most traditional models used until the last century. At the same time, the third one is fostered by current constructivist trends in education and is adopted in the program analyzed in this article.

Based on Freeman (1989), Bailey (2006) identifies three options for observing and giving feedback to language teachers: *supervisory*, *non-directive*, and *alternatives*. The first refers to the role of the prescriptive expert, while the second is the non-judgmental guide. Additionally, in the alternatives option, the supervisor's responsibility consists of helping teachers reflect and explain their teaching choices and discuss alternative ways of doing things. While many preservice teachers have positive experiences in supervision, findings suggest that inadequate, ineffective, and even harmful supervisory experiences are relatively common (Ellis et al., 2014; Ladany et al., 2013), as "the practicum continues to be a difficult and unsatisfactory learning experience for many prospective teachers" (Talvitie et al., 2000, p. 87). When asking supervisees to identify qualities

associated with effective supervisors, research has found that the best supervisors encourage autonomy, strengthen the supervisory relationship, and facilitate open discussion, while the most ineffective disregard supervision (Ladany et al., 2013). This is consistent with research in which preservice teachers reported positive as well as negative experiences in their relationship with supervisors (Rosas et al., 2020) and highlighted the quality of the dialogue unfolded as well as its capacity to provoke reflection as major factors during the practicum (Talvitie et al., 2000) and how much it provokes reflection. On the other hand, there is little time for reflection in some programs, which the preservice teachers perceive as a loss (Barahona, 2014).

As stated above, due to the problematic situation faced by all initial teaching education programs in Chile, it was necessary to change in-person classes to online teaching; this modality has been defined as emergency remote teaching by some authors.

Emergency Remote Teaching

According to Díaz-Maggioli (2021), what teachers have been doing during the pandemic is not distance learning, blended learning, or hybrid learning; it is simply emergency remote teaching (ERT), a view shared by various researchers in the field of education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Özüdoğru, 2021; Stephens & Curwood, 2022). This is an abrupt and transitory change in teaching delivery due to unforeseen circumstances. In a way, ERT is a quick-fix solution to a problem; it is not an attempt to reconstruct an entire "ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to teaching and instructional support in a manner that is quick to set up and immediately available during an emergency crisis" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6). This is a way to sustain education in almost all countries (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

ERT has significantly impacted instructors and pupils, regardless of its long-term viability. Existing literature has identified major difficulties in its use,

such as poor online teaching infrastructure, teachers' technological inexperience and knowledge, and the complexity of home working (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Initially, student engagement in school was often sporadic and superficial in these types of sessions. Embarrassed turn-taking on video conferences and artificial use of the chat function for queries initially replaced interactive classroom practice in smaller groups. However, initiatives for increasing student participation in all online communities arose over time. Some of them included expectations for timed student interactions, which had to be communicated; opportunities for sense-making (individually and in groups); extensive and improved scaffolding of learning; and collaborative on and off-line video tasks (Kidd & Murray, 2020).

Even though all official practicum environments were withdrawn, removed, or postponed (Morrison & Sepulveda-Escobar, 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020), as in the context of this study, new types of practicums were developed. This entailed (re)locating and (re)framing learning spaces and practicums to fit the online mode once teacher education programs were relaunched after institutions, teacher educators, and preservice teachers made sense of the situation and confronted it by supporting their students' professional learning.

While various studies suggest the benefits of incorporating a virtual learning platform as an additional or supportive resource for teaching and learning, few have considered them a primary pedagogical device. With the transition to online learning models, these platforms adopted new features to facilitate communication, education, and learning practices. The new centrality of technology has meant that established practices had to evolve, and teachers had to choose or were instructed to take advantage of a combination of synchronous and asynchronous strategies (Stephens & Curwood, 2022). These included using several applications for teaching and learning online; however,

these applications quickly become outdated; hence the problem is not about technology. It is about *pedagogy*. In these circumstances, the key is to mediate learning through technology, not to teach by technology, and keep an excellent pedagogical mindset.

Some studies have recently investigated the effects of ERT and learning processes unfolded from the start of the pandemic in initial teacher education (Díaz-Maggioli, 2021; Özüdoğru, 2021; Pérez-López et al., 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) and in-service teaching (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Some have focused on identifying the multiple challenges arising from school and university shutdowns, while others have examined in-service and preservice teachers' stress and coping strategies. For example, Fořtová et al. (2021) found that preservice teachers were disappointed when numerous programs, online documents, and procedures did not perform as expected due to technological challenges or knowledge gaps that caused malfunctioning (incorrect sharing settings, not saving the most recent version and others). Problems of this type became a source of annoyance for some participants, especially as they felt powerless to change the situation. Good planning was crucial for swiftly avoiding or resolving many situations, even though such planning necessitates expertise and thoroughness. When reflecting on their technology-related teaching experiences, preservice teachers were often aware of the need to plan the technical portion of the lesson better or have an alternative option prepared in case the design initially would not work.

Pedagogical and Professional Knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge is explained below according to two different views about the types of knowledge required for teaching, and professional knowledge is described concerning what it means to be a professional.

Types of Knowledge in Teaching

It is widely recognized that teaching is very demanding and challenging and that teachers must develop and acquire extensive knowledge, expertise, and practice to become professionals. Shulman (1987) identifies seven critical types of knowledge for teachers:

1. *Content knowledge* is the teacher's knowledge of the subject, English, in the case of the program analyzed. This considers the teachers' need to develop their proficiency in English as a foreign language, including mastery of English syntax, phonology, semantics, culture, and others.

2. *General content knowledge* refers to those broad standards and methodologies of classroom administration and organization that go beyond the subject matter.

3. *Curriculum knowledge* considers the full extent of programs designed for teaching the subject, a set of instructional materials for specific circumstances, and curricular options for instruction.

4. *Pedagogical-content knowledge*, that is, the "methodology" used by teachers, includes their knowledge of theories of how languages are learned, approaches, methods, and techniques used in language programs.

5. *Knowledge of learners and their characteristics* addresses different learning styles and strategies, emphasizes learners' central role, and makes teachers aware of the influence of their behavior on their students' learning.

6. *Knowledge of educational contexts* shows how sociocultural and institutional contexts influence learning and teaching: What is acceptable or appropriate in an educational system may not be so in a different educational system, and this is especially true when teachers work in educational contexts different from their own.

7. *Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, values, and philosophical and historical issues*. This is generally not considered necessary in language

teacher preparation programs and is often limited to the historical study of English language teaching methods. However, studying the sociology, philosophy, and history of education should be a significant component of initial teacher education programs generally held in university settings.

Besides the above, Malderez and Wedell (2007) summarize teacher knowledge into three dimensions: knowing about (declarative knowledge), knowing how (procedural knowledge), and knowing to (intuitive knowledge). *Knowing about* is the kind of knowledge that can be verbalized or clarified; it incorporates

> knowledge of the subject to be taught; the way learners are supposed to learn the subject; the positioning of the subject within the wider curriculum and the educational institution, with its culture and rules; the students' backgrounds and needs; and knowledge of strategies for teaching practicum managing one's continuous professional development. (Rosas et al., 2020, p. 71)

Knowing how is composed of abilities or behaviors that instructors must master to be effective within the classroom and the school, including strategies to support the learning of all pupils. *Knowing to* points to the expertise created over time by good teachers that permits them to naturally and instantaneously utilize what they know at the right moment and adequately support their students' learning (Malderez & Wedell, 2007).

Professional Knowledge

The distinction between *being professional* and being *a professional* is highlighted by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). The former is concerned with upholding high standards of behavior and performance, whereas the latter is concerned with how a person is seen and how this affects their self-esteem. Some definitions of what makes a professional include:

- Specialized knowledge, expertise, and professional language

- Shared standards of practice
- Long and rigorous processes of training and qualification . . .
- Autonomy to make informed discretionary judgments
- Working together with other professionals to solve complex cases
- Commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 80)

These definitions stress the need to simultaneously be professional and a professional, that is, "to have status and autonomy and be trusted and able to make informed judgments effectively" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 81). It is generally acknowledged that teaching involves a combination of art, craft, and science (Johnson, 2017), characterizing teaching expertise as knowing what to teach, how to teach it, and what methods to use to teach specific topics, with particular types of students in specific contexts; all of these combine to form the teacher's knowledge base and skills (Shulman, 1986). In order to equip preservice teachers to teach effectively in the classroom, teacher education programs work to strengthen their knowledge, abilities, and personal qualities. Practical fieldwork through the practicum is crucial to accomplish this objective, yet the current context of the pandemic has constrained and added challenges to the development of this professional.

Method

This was a descriptive case study with a mixed-methods design. The study's general objective was to determine the impact of online practicum processes in developing pedagogical and professional knowledge for a group of preservice teachers of English. Given this objective, three research questions were formulated:

1. What were the conditions and contexts in which early teaching and professional practicum developed for a group of English preservice teachers?

2. What characterizes the virtualization process of early and professional teaching practicum in developing pedagogical and professional knowledge for a group of English preservice teachers?

3. What were the main strengths, weaknesses, and challenges identified during the pedagogical practices carried out during the pandemic?

Data Collection

The participants were asked to answer a questionnaire through an online Google Form to collect data. This was specially designed for the research and consisted of two sections. The first section used a Likert scale and included questions to contextualize the survey and focused on the context and conditions of the practicum, the virtualization of the teaching-learning process during the practicum in pandemics, and the development of the participants' professional and pedagogical knowledge. The second part of the questionnaire included three open-ended questions aimed at preservice teachers expanding on some of the ideas in the closed questions and adding information on the interactions through the process with all the intervening agents: cooperating teachers, pupils, and university supervisors. This instrument was validated using experts' judgment before its application. The analysis of the first part of the questionnaire was performed through descriptive statistics aided by SPSS statistical software. The second part was analyzed through content analysis, aided by the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti v.7.5.4.

Participants

A convenience sampling procedure was used to select the participants in this study. Except for one group of subjects who graduated at the end of 2020, all other participants, aged 21 to 25, were still undergoing online progressive practicum experiences at different levels and attending courses simultaneously. For example, 10 participants completed their professional practicum online during the second semester in 2020; 19 were undergoing their professional practicum; and 12 completed their fourth early teaching practicum during the first semester in 2021, totaling 42 participants. Participants were informed about the research aims, agreed to participate voluntarily, and expressed their written consent in a Google Form before answering the questionnaire. Their anonymity was protected by assigning them identification numbers based on practicum level; additionally, all names of schools and educational institutions in which they were placed for the practicum were anonymized. Finally, the questionnaire was available online for three weeks.

Results and Discussion

Conditions and Contexts of the Development of Early Teaching Practicum and Professional Practicum of English Preservice Teachers

Data to answer the first research question were obtained from the first and second parts of the questionnaire. The early teaching and professional practicums developed by the participants took place online in subsidized schools (47.6%), public schools (33.3%), private schools (7.1%), and other institutions (11.9%). The conditions experienced during the pandemic forced most preservice teachers to take up more than one class to fulfill the time required for each practicum, with 50% taking up 2 or 3 classes and 33.3% teaching only one class. They also had to devote more time to lessons than usual, even though lessons were sometimes shorter.

Regarding the contexts and conditions under which the practicum was developed, 57.2% felt that *coping with curricular disturbances due to different social issues and learning difficulties increased their self-confidence*. This relates to the diverse issues Chilean students and citizens have faced since 2019, including

student strikes, social outbursts, and the coronavirus pandemic. These problems caused significant social and political instability, especially the social outburst that created severe disruption at all levels of education and life due to various strikes and riots that interrupted university and school schedules. This meant that the practicum experiences planned for some university levels were shortened or postponed for later, causing great uncertainty among preservice teachers. Nevertheless, 52% of informants felt that their practicum planning was easier despite the complex situations they faced during their university studies because they had more time available.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education issued a plan of subject prioritization for all Chilean schools, which consisted of giving more importance to certain subjects over others during the pandemic. English was maintained in the curriculum, but the lessons were shortened to one hour and sometimes just half an hour in certain schools. Some students from subsidized and public schools had serious difficulties connecting to the internet. On the other hand, private schools seemed not to have connection problems.

Characteristics of Virtualization of Early and Professional Teaching Practicums in the Development of Pedagogical and Professional Knowledge

Data from the third section of the questionnaire helped determine the practicum virtualization's characteristics. According to the participants' responses, 71.4% *had easy internet access*, although some had to ask the university for help to continue teaching online. In response, they were provided with modems, tablets, and laptops through the Students' Support Unit. Throughout the process, these preservice teachers realized that *virtualization does not replicate what is done in person* (90.4%), and thus had to adapt their teaching materials

(worksheets, assessment tasks, video capsules) to the virtual platforms and applications available (Peardeck, Nearpod, Mentimeter). Despite this, 85.7% of the participants answered that virtualization helped develop a collaborative relationship with the cooperating teachers during the virtual meetings because they had to discuss planning and materials and receive feedback.

Concerning the development of pedagogical knowledge, *the virtual programs allowed participants to develop their digital skills in such a way that they improved their use of ICTs, and they were able to select the best ones for their effectiveness in learning* (90.4%). Moreover, they assessed the process positively, with 76.2% expressing that *it was gratifying to note that the planning of their practicum easily "translated" the objectives and class contents into efficient virtual activities for their students, according to the objectives expected in English.*

On the other hand, 83.3% of the participants asserted that *the pandemic made them witness a great educational disruption, understood as social distancing, almost zero inter-student communication, and difficult communication with their students and some cooperating teachers.* Consequently, most agreed that *the pandemic seriously affected their students' interest and performance* (88%). This is consistent with views about the major disadvantages of online education, which include the loss of empathy, contact, emotion, and quality (Cassany, 2021). Although learning online can be very effective, Cassany (2021) claims that learning increases significantly in face-to-face scenarios. Furthermore, 81% noticed that for pupils, *there was unequal access to the internet and virtual learning platforms, which seriously affected their learning achievements.* As a result, 64.2% thought *it was difficult to develop a reliable virtual evaluation system in their practicum*, and it was difficult *to emphasize some activities (e.g., cooperative learning, guided discussion) during the practicum* (80.9%).

Concerning the professional aspects, 88.1% of the participants felt that their practicum performance during 2020–2021 served to demonstrate *the commitment with which they developed their pedagogical duties*, and 88% felt that they were *able to verify that they had developed the necessary attributes to perform or to achieve their set objectives* throughout the program. Finally, they were satisfied with their practicum since *their skills and qualities allowed them to attain achievements and created confidence in their performance* (76.1%).

The results above make it clear that the leap from in-person to online teaching also imposed challenges on these preservice teachers, who could be regarded as digital natives or, in the words of Cassany (2021), "digital residents"; that is, those who have learned online and have internet integrated into their daily lives, mostly in asynchronous ways. This is a characteristic of distance learning to which teachers appear not to be fully accustomed, yet all educators should benefit from updating their knowledge of technology to connect more naturally to the current educational community.

Main Practicum Strengths, Weaknesses, and Challenges During the Pandemic

To identify the main strengths, weaknesses, and challenges faced by these future teachers of English in their practicum during the pandemic, we analyzed the answers to three open-ended questions. We categorized them considering their interactions with cooperating teachers, pupils, and supervisors. The frequency of appearance of each analysis dimension is summarized in Table 2.

We can observe from Table 2 that, in general, the number of weaknesses and challenges was quite similar in terms of frequencies, while the number of strengths appeared slightly higher. The 7th and 9th-semester groups seemed to have more issues relating to the students they taught during the practicum. In the

Table 2. Occurrence of Dimensions Assessed

	7th semester	9th semester	Graduates (2020)	Total	Total dimensions
Weaknesses relating to cooperating teachers	8	14	7	29	
Weaknesses relating to their students	16	11	9	36	74
Weaknesses relating to the supervisors	4	3	2	9	
Social/psychological challenges	3	8	8	19	
Structural-technological challenges	6	16	7	29	73
Pedagogical challenges	5	15	5	25	
Strengths relating to cooperating teachers	4	14	7	25	
Strengths relating to students	4	14	7	25	85
Strengths relating to supervisors	8	13	7	28	

case of those who graduated in 2020, relating to their students at school was not reported as a prevalent issue, possibly because the experience gained throughout the early and progressive practicum contributed positively to that aspect. Comments related to weaknesses with their cooperating teachers were higher among the 9th-semester group, who were undergoing the professional practicum, the last and most comprehensive one, as this involves being totally in charge of teaching the lessons. This group also identified more challenges in the process, particularly regarding structural-technological and pedagogical areas, consistent with exerting more autonomy and control over the whole teaching and learning process. The same group highlighted more strengths in their interactions with all cooperating teachers, students, and supervisors.

In terms of weaknesses, a closer look at the answers given by the participwants allowed us to categorize these, as shown in Table 3.

Concerning the relationships with their cooperating teachers, most preservice teachers complained about the lack of time to communicate and receive feedback. Much of this can be explained by the ERT and learning processes (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) that, in most cases, forced cooperating teachers to duplicate lessons and add additional time to their workload, leaving them with very tight agendas (Cassany, 2021) to fit in feedback sessions for their preservice teachers. Similarly, the preservice teachers from the study also had tight agendas, as the practicum was done amid a series of other courses which ran in parallel with their curriculum. Concerning weaknesses related to their students, the main ones point to the lack of interaction caused by irregular and unstable Internet access, which prevented them from using their cameras and microphones, significantly reducing preservice teachers' interactions with their students (König et al., 2020). Regarding weaknesses with supervisors, they mostly related to time constraints that reduced meeting possibilities and online support, which preservice teachers felt was a significant source of anxiety in some cases. This is because supervision is both essential and valuable (Baird & Mollen, 2019). When supervised online, preservice teachers reported a strong feeling of uncertainty concerning the focus and manner of the supervision, suggesting a preference for more directive supervision (Bailey, 2006).

Table 3. Weaknesses in Interactions With Different Agents of the Practicum

Weaknesses related to their cooperating teachers	Weaknesses related to students	Weaknesses related to supervisors
1. Lack of time and coordination to communicate and give feedback	1. Lack of interaction with students (due to little or no use of camera and microphone)	1. Lack of time to interact and give timely feedback
2. The workload for preservice teachers	2. Students' difficulty connecting to online sessions	2. Lack of timely correction of lesson plans
3. Difficulty using applications or platforms for online teaching for both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers	3. Class interaction patterns limited by online teaching	3. Difficulty in coordinating supervision
	4. Disinterest and lack of student motivation	4. Insufficient practicum meetings to solve doubts
		5. Supervisors are not aware of the different practicum contexts

On the other hand, challenges identified by the preservice teachers in the practicum were categorized into *socio-psychological challenges*, *technological-structural challenges*, and *pedagogical challenges* (see Table 4). The first relates to issues involving personality and social relationships and preservice teachers' pressures concerning them. The second relates to the challenges their degree of expertise imposes when

Table 4. Challenges Identified in the Practicum

Socio-psychological challenges	Technological structural challenges	Pedagogical challenges
1. Ability to adapt to online mode	1. Adapting to online teaching and learning	1. Designing significant quantities of pedagogical/virtual material
2. Flexibility to change	2. Adapting materials to specific schools' formats (e.g., compressing files)	2. Diversifying the use of applications to maintain the students' interest
3. Tolerance to frustration		3. Planning activities for online teaching
4. Overcoming the fear of the unknown (Practicum V)	3. Creating video tutorials	4. Effectively managing class time
5. Controlling emotions to perform well	4. Creating materials for online learning	5. Developing the national curriculum learning outcomes for the English subject
6. Becoming aware that students may have emotional problems affecting their performance	5. Using technological tools in general	6. Prioritizing content for online teaching
	6. Motivating students to learn through ICT	7. Assessing online learning
7. Working as a team with the cooperating teacher, supervisor, and peers in a virtual mode	7. Learning to use new tools/applications for learning	8. Learning to use applications for online teaching
8. Effectively using time in meetings with supervisors and coordinator	8. Being attentive to messages to correct lesson plans (stay permanently connected)	9. Developing autonomous work in online learning
9. Maintaining a pleasant and cordial relationship with the students		10. Developing English language skills, especially oral production
10. Maintaining a cordial relationship with the cooperating teachers		11. Using a variety of language learning strategies
		12. Adapting English use to students' language level.
		13. Adapting teaching materials to online time (60 minutes)
		14. Creating material and activities to encourage students' participation
		15. Meeting practicum and academic demands

using technological tools for teaching and learning. The last category relates to issues concerning the various types of knowledge to be developed by teachers, as described by Shulman (1987).

Regarding the socio-psychological challenges identified, the pandemic added significant stress among the participating preservice teachers (MacIntyre et al., 2020). In this case, the challenges are mostly related to controlling emotions to perform well and maintain a cordial relationship with their learners, the cooperating teachers, and the support they might give the former and receive from the latter. As for technological structural challenges, these highlight the need to learn how to use new applications for teaching and learning and creating materials for the process. Together with this, motivating the learners to learn through technology might appear as a paradox, as these generations are supposed to have grown up surrounded by technology. Perhaps the explanation may be that they use technology primarily for playing or relating to others through social media but not for educational purposes.

Consistently with their capacity as preservice teachers, the category with the highest number of challenges relates to pedagogical issues. Within these, the online modality appeared to permeate at least five challenges related to planning, teaching, and assessing learning. Additionally, adapting the target language (English) to match the circumstances and needs of their students appeared as a significant challenge.

Besides the weaknesses and challenges discussed above, the research participants also identified several strengths in their interactions with their cooperating teachers, students, and university supervisors. These are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Strengths in Interactions With Different Agents of the Practicum

Strengths with cooperating teachers	Strengths with students	Strengths with supervisors
1. Support and guidance in the design of didactic material during early practices	1. Availability of class recordings for students who did not attend lessons or for those in need of reinforcement	1. Training in educational applications to improve online teaching during the practicum
2. Support and guidance in the selection of topics for their students	2. Monitoring student participation and learning through applications (Nearpod, Pear Deck)	2. Existence of standard criteria between supervisors and the practicum coordinator
3. Cooperating teachers valuing the use of applications for online teaching	3. Permanent participation through the microphone and chat between the preservice teacher and students willing to learn	3. Quick and effective communication with supervisors and coordinators
4. Effective communication and interaction through email, video calls, and WhatsApp	4. Good disposition, enthusiasm, and motivation on the part of some students	4. Timely feedback for lesson planning and practicum supervision
5. Fast and effective online feedback	5. Personalized feedback through ICT	5. Advice on ideas and lesson activities

Strengths regarding the interactions with cooperating teachers relate to the support these provided preservice teachers with, especially concerning guidance and support in choosing topics and material design for lessons. In this sense, cooperating teachers valued using applications for teaching and learning, which were mainly new. Strengths relating to the participants' students highlighted the availability of lesson recordings and monitoring possibilities provided by technology and the excellent disposition and participation of some pupils who were always willing to learn. Finally, regarding their supervisors, these preservice teachers valued training in using applications they did not know previously and standard criteria used in supervision. They also valued the advice received to improve online lessons and activities. These findings highlight their preference for the directive supervision option (Bailey, 2006) and their still-developing capacity for autonomous work.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the impact of online practicum in developing pedagogical and professional knowledge for a group of English preservice teachers of English in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtualization process made these preservice teachers fully aware that what is done in person cannot be fully replicated in a virtual environment, as there was little interaction with students, reduced time for online lessons, lower academic requirements, and difficulties in assessing students' learning. Thus, they had to adapt their teaching and teaching material to use several virtual applications to succeed. In this way, virtualization supported their interactions in the practicum process.

Regarding the contexts and conditions in which the practicum happened, respondents felt that successfully managing curricular disturbances caused by various social issues and learning difficulties boosted their self-confidence. The pandemic has demonstrated that the educational community's conditions of uncertainty

(Vancell, 2021) and resource scarcity might affect a teacher's professional competence in the cognitive and affective domains, in their pedagogical choices, and those of other critical actors in the process (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Fořtová et al., 2021).

Regarding pedagogical knowledge development, responses from these preservice teachers indicate the development of at least four kinds of pedagogical knowledge from Shulman's model (1987): general pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, educational context knowledge, and knowledge about students and their characteristics. The discourse in the participants' answers to the open questions showed an incipient development of professional knowledge, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) described, since they used specialized language and appeared to become aware of their capacity and the development of the necessary skills for their future performance.

Three points worth highlighting include that, first, virtuality does not replace face-to-face work. Secondly, it should be clear that this is an instance of ERT, a modality temporarily adopted to cope with the circumstances brought about by the pandemic, but which will not replace in-person education (Acción Educar, 2020; Cassany, 2021; Díaz-Maggioli, 2021). Finally, virtuality opens the way to complement in-person education by offering the possibility of facing an emergency, making third-party knowledge available to us in the cloud, and implementing new teaching-learning methodologies. This has implications for institutions and teacher education programs. One is the need to produce and circulate official documents that acknowledge the possibility of doing the preservice teaching practicum online or in hybrid modalities and provide specific guidelines and suggestions derived from the experience.

This study is limited as it analyzed the preservice teachers' perspective about online practicums in one English teacher education program from a public, regional university in Chile. More research about online replacements for face-to-face practicum in other initial

teacher education programs, especially in the context of ERT and learning, is needed to assess their effectiveness, full potential, and drawbacks. Future research should also consider the perspectives of the other participants in the process (i.e., pupils, cooperating teachers, and supervisors).

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