

# Exploring Distance Education Possibilities in English Language Teacher Education Programs

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## Abstract

Distance education (DE) emerged as an alternative within teacher education programs worldwide due to mandatory school closures during the recent pandemic. The question of whether it can be a strong mode of instruction for educational institutions and teacher training, however, remains open. There is a lack of research addressing which courses are best suited for online delivery and which are more appropriate for face-to-face instruction. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining pre-service English teachers' views, informed by their experiences during two semesters of mandatory online education and addressed the following research question: Which courses in the ELT program do pre-service English teachers perceive as more suitable for distance education, and what are the observed trends across different years of study? The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design conducted within an English language teacher education program at the Faculty of Education of a state university in Istanbul. Participants in their second, third, and fourth years were asked to review a list of 100 courses and indicate those they would prefer to take online. Frequency analyses showed that the pre-service teachers did not exhibit a strong preference for DE mode within the program. The most favored course for online delivery was selected by 39% of participants. Moreover, courses considered as having greater potential for DE tended to belong to the General Cultural Knowledge and Vocational Content Knowledge modules rather than the Field Knowledge module and compulsory courses in general. Preferences based on years of study are also reported. The findings suggest various implications to provide guidance for teacher education programs and curriculum designers in making informed decisions about the integration and optimization of online education.

**Keywords:** ELT curriculum, distance teacher education, field knowledge courses, general cultural knowledge courses, vocational content knowledge courses

## İngilizce Öğretmenliği Lisans Programlarında Uzaktan Eğitimle Verilebilecek Derslerin Belirlenmesi

### Özet

Uzaktan eğitim, pandemi döneminde yaşanan zorunlu okul kapanmaları nedeniyle dünya genelinde öğretmen yetiştirme programlarında güçlü bir alternatif olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak, uzaktan eğitimin, eğitim kurumları ve öğretmen eğitimi için etkili bir yöntem olup olamayacağı sorusu hâlâ tartışılmaktadır. Hangi derslerin çevrimiçi verilmeye uygun olduğu ve hangilerinin yüz yüze yürütülmesinin daha uygun olduğu konusunda yapılan araştırmaların yetersiz olduğu görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, bu eksikliği gidermeyi amaçlayarak, iki dönemlik zorunlu çevrimiçi eğitim deneyimlerinden edindikleri görüşlere dayanarak İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının fikirlerini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın araştırma soruları şöyledir: İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarına göre İngilizce öğretmenliği programındaki hangi dersler uzaktan eğitime daha uygundur; ve öğrenim yıllarına göre adayların görüşleri nasıl bir eğilim göstermektedir? Araştırma, İstanbul'daki bir devlet üniversitesinin Eğitim Fakültesinde yürütülen İngilizce Öğretmenliği lisans programında, betimsel kesitsel tarama deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. İkinci, üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinden 100

dersin yer aldığı bir listeyi incelemeleri ve hangi dersleri çevrimiçi olarak almak isteyeceklerini belirtmeleri istenmiştir. Frekans analizleri, öğretmen adaylarının program genelinde uzaktan eğitim moduna yönelik güçlü bir istek göstermediklerini ortaya koymuştur. Çevrimiçi yürütülmesi en çok tercih edilen ders, katılımcıların %39'u tarafından seçilmiştir. Ayrıca, uzaktan eğitim için daha uygun görülen derslerin, genel olarak zorunlu derslerden ve Alan Bilgisi modülünden ziyade Genel Kültür Bilgisi ve Mesleki Alan Bilgisi modüllerine ait olduğu belirlenmiştir. Çalışmada, sınıf düzeyine göre tercih farklılıklarına da yer verilmiştir. Bulgular, çevrimiçi eğitimin entegrasyonu ve en uygun şekilde uygulanmasına yönelik karar alma aşamalarında öğretmen yetiştirme programları ve müfredat tasarımcılarına yardımcı olacak çeşitli öneriler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** ELT müfredatı, uzaktan öğretmen eğitimi, alan bilgisi dersleri, genel kültür bilgisi dersleri, mesleki alan bilgisi dersleri.

## 1. Distance Education in Teacher Education Programs

The primary goal of English Language Teaching (ELT) programs is to train English teachers who are not only proficient in English but also competent in teaching. To achieve this successfully, ELT departments are designed to offer theoretical and practical courses that equip future language teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective language instruction (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006). The quality of these programs significantly influences not only the competence of future language teachers, but also the overall effectiveness of the education system. Given this influence, the training of pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) must be carefully planned, systematically implemented, and regularly evaluated to ensure quality, identify areas for improvement, and tailor the curriculum to better meet the evolving needs of teacher candidates (Coşkun & Daloğlu, 2010; Köksal & Ulum, 2018).

A crucial element in designing and implementing curricula for future foreign language teachers is conducting a thorough needs analysis of pre-service teachers. This approach ensures that the curriculum matches their preferences and adequately prepares them for their teaching careers. Therefore, involving pre-service teachers as primary stakeholders in the evaluation process is of utmost importance (Mirici et al., 2022; Nabi Ranjbari et al., 2020). The ability of teacher education curricula to efficiently prepare pre-service teachers to meet professional requirements is a worldwide concern. Numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate the adequacy of recent teacher education programs in various countries, including Brazil (Luz, 2018), Iceland (Johannsdottir, 2016), India (Nabi Ranjbari et al., 2020), Indonesia (Sunggingwati et al., 2023), South Africa (Mphahlele & Jikpamu, 2021) and Türkiye (Demir, 2015; Sürücü-Şen & İpek, 2020). These studies explore the extent to which EFL student teachers perceive their programs as helping them build the necessary knowledge and skills. A general concern in these studies is the insufficiency of practice teaching opportunities (Seferoglu, 2006) and disconnect between the theoretical and practical components of the program (Karimi et al., 2021).

Another issue is the lack of sufficient training in information and communication technologies, as participants frequently expressed a need for more technology-related courses. For example, in Mirici et al.'s (2022) study, Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL claimed that their program failed to train digitally literate teachers. Similarly, South Korean pre-service teachers in Park and Yi's (2022) study emphasized the importance of technology-assisted language teaching methodology and called for more micro-teaching opportunities during their training. The post-pandemic situation has further highlighted areas of teacher education that need attention. In Mirici et al.'s (2022) study, pre-service teachers frequently mentioned the need for courses on distance language teaching and material development for online education. However, this demand for online-focused training did not recur in many other studies, despite the shift towards and challenges with online education during the pandemic.

### 1.1. Distance Education in Teacher Education Programs

As a result of mandatory school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, DE emerged as a strong alternative in teacher education programs worldwide. Various studies conducted during and after the pandemic explored experiences and perspectives of stakeholders in ELT programs regarding DE (e.g., Baker, 2021; Türegün-Çoban & Kuyumcu-Vardar, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Yang et al. (2021) examined the online feedback experiences of graduate degree students in Hong Kong, focusing on the relationship

between feedback and professional learning during the pandemic, demonstrating both opportunities and challenges. Similarly, Çamlıbel-Acar & Eveyik-Aydın (2022) and Önal (2022) found that Turkish pre-service English language teachers were satisfied in certain ways and unsatisfied in other ways with online education. A major strength of DE was perceived to be its flexibility, enabling learners to access recorded lessons at their convenience, an aspect many participants appreciated for the comfort and autonomy it provided. However, most participants expressed dissatisfaction, perceiving DE as instructionally inadequate. They reported challenges such as technical issues, limited access to infrastructure, and a lack of meaningful interaction, all of which contributed to reduced motivation and engagement. In the study by Türegün-Çoban and Kuyumcu-Vardar (2021), pre-service teachers of ELT reported minimal difficulties with theoretical courses but significant problems with the teaching practicum in the DE setting and voiced a need for DE training for both learners and instructors. Atmaca (2023) also investigated Turkish pre-service English teachers' views on DE, reflecting its usefulness in improving technological literacy skills and theoretical issues, but its inappropriateness for practical courses such as teaching practicum and community service. Lee (2022) identified problems of pre-service English teachers taking an Information and Communication Technologies course during the pandemic and found that while the training was perceived as very beneficial, participants faced several challenges when teaching, such as keeping students motivated and online mentoring. Similarly, Ortiz-García and López-Urbina's (2024) qualitative case study of undergraduate students in a distance learning English teacher education program in Colombia, reported difficulties in research contexts and time management, mismatches between research topics and curricula, and confusion arising from limited instructor feedback and guidance. These studies collectively show that mandatory DE during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced not only education systems, but also prospective teachers' perceptions and practices of their training, with differing degrees of success across theoretical and practical aspects.

## 1.2 Mode of Instructional Delivery in Teacher Education

After the recent pandemic, the world quickly returned to traditional models of learning and teaching, but the question about whether DE can be a strong mode for educational institutions in general, and teacher training specifically, continues. Although this issue seems to have gained attention recently, DE has been of interest to researchers for decades. Carrillo and Flores's (2020) comprehensive review of literature on online teaching and learning in the context of teacher education covers years between 2000 and 2020. Their findings identified the most recurrent topics, with many papers exploring the impact of online learning programs on the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes, particularly areas such as interaction, online communities, and teacher competence. Similarly, Dymont and Downing's (2020) systematic review of the literature on online initial teacher education between the years 2012 and 2017 discovered that experiences of pre-service teachers with online teacher education was a major focus area. Their review revealed themes like the role of technology and tools, student characteristics and experiences, instructor perspectives, and the use of online means in specific areas. Castro and Tumibay (2021) further explored the efficacy of online learning in teacher education, identifying studies on comparisons between online and traditional face-to-face environments and the factors influencing online education outcomes.

In comparing online and face-to-face education, many studies found results favoring the latter (Akkoyunlu & Soyly, 2008; Faulk & King, 2013; Stricklin & Tingle, 2016). These studies suggest that online education may not be well-suited for teacher education. For instance, Faulk and King (2013) studied teachers' perceptions and found that most participants were skeptical about the effectiveness of online courses in fully preparing teachers, especially in areas like classroom management, addressing student diversity, supporting special needs and dealing with social issues. While they accepted that online courses might be suitable for teaching theoretical information, pedagogy and methodology, they emphasized the importance of field experiences, like student teaching or real classroom interactions, for adequately preparing teachers for practical challenges. Building on these concerns, Thompson et al. (2013) conducted a case study investigating the learning experiences of three pre-service teachers preparing for middle school teaching who chose online education themselves but were unsuccessful and ultimately repeated the course in a face-to-face mode. Results showed that personal life challenges interfered with the students' ability to self-regulate their learning, which was further complicated by the limitations of online education. In contrast, the face-to-face setting provided these students with greater structure and support, thus helping their self-regulation, leading the researchers to conclude that online education may not be effective for all types of learners.

Hurlbut (2018) compared a face-to-face course for prospective teachers with its online section in terms of student grades, responses, perceptions and participation. It was seen that students were satisfied and successful in the online course but had slightly higher scores in the traditional class. Additionally, students who described themselves as comfortable with virtual learning environments tended to perform better in the online course, suggesting that individual learner differences significantly affect the effectiveness of online education. A study conducted during the pandemic by Gherheș et al. (2021) examined the perceptions of Romanian university students in upper and lower levels, regarding face-to-face and e-learning, as well as their desire to return to traditional education. The findings indicate a strong preference for face-to-face learning, predominantly among participants who had received their education online. Similarly, Boyko et al. (2021) explored pre-service teachers' views in Ukraine, asking which form of learning was better for them. Before experiencing online education, participants were equally open to online and face-to-face learning options. However, after the experience, more than half expressed a preference for traditional face-to-face learning. Koşar (2022) investigated the synchronous and asynchronous DE experiences of pre-service English teachers and whether their preferences changed based on their year of study. The results show a clear tendency toward either face-to-face education or a combination of synchronous DE with face-to-face learning. Participants found asynchronous DE insufficient for effective teacher preparation, while their preferences did not vary significantly across different years of study.

There is also research evidence supporting the effectiveness of online learning in teacher education (El-Deghaidy & Nouby, 2008; Means et al., 2013). Neuhauser (2002) conducted a comparative study of an online asynchronous course and its face-to-face section. While the online section achieved higher average scores, the difference was not statistically significant. In terms of perceptions, nearly all of the online students perceived their course as equally or more effective than the face-to-face version. Similarly, a study by Narh-Kert (2021) conducted during the pandemic with pre-service teachers in Ghana, found that participants viewed DE programs as equally efficient as traditional, in-person methods for training pre-service teachers. Several studies highlight the role of blended learning and flipped classroom models (Bishop & Verleger, 2013), showing preference for combining online and face-to-face learning within courses. Students who preferred blended learning often were aware of the advantages of both modalities. However, individual student characteristics also played a role in influencing their attitudes on this matter (Paechter & Maier, 2010; Smidt et al., 2014).

Sivakumar (2019) further explored this topic through an experimental study with prospective teachers in India, comparing the effectiveness of blended learning and traditional lecture methods. While the lecture group had significant gains in learning outcomes, the blended learning group achieved even greater improvements. Analyzing the perspectives of Chinese EFL teachers in the post-pandemic context, Gao and Cui (2024) emphasized the need for teacher education to complement traditional classroom teaching with online resources. They noted that attitudes toward online education are closely related to teachers' beliefs and need to be addressed in future teacher training programs. In the pursuit of effectively integrating different means in teacher education, researchers have examined various aspects of online systems. For instance, Kurubacak (2000) investigated the potential of web-based online education, while Chisholm et al. (2019) focused on digital feedback. Szabo and Schwartz (2011) studied the use of online discussion forums as a supplementary instructional method in a face-to-face course, aiming to enhance undergraduate pre-service teachers' critical thinking skills. Similarly, Williamson et al. (2015) introduced the use of online reflective tools in teacher education courses. Their study revealed that these tools not only improved the quality and ease of students' writing but also provided a sense of encouragement and engagement among learners.

Based on the review of literature, it can be said that previous studies demonstrated the need for more technology-related courses in teacher education programs, alongside a general belief that online methods alone were not enough to fully prepare teachers. Moreover, certain learner, instructor or course characteristics were viewed to be more conducive to online education. As Zhao and Watterston (2021) suggest, educational programs need to be reviewed and revised to address key questions, such as who benefits most from online education, in what areas, and for what purposes. Therefore, rather than advocating for either mode, discussing the needs of individual learners and the requirements of specific courses seems to be a wiser approach. This paper seeks to investigate which courses may be best suited for online provision and which may be better taught in a face-to-face setting, contributing to a more fruitful teacher education

framework. The urgent adoption of DE during the pandemic created a unique and valuable opportunity to reevaluate traditional methods and explore innovative approaches in teacher education.

Although there was initial fear about education remaining predominantly online post-pandemic, a quick shift back to traditional face-to-face teaching followed. Nevertheless, critical questions were raised, such as Can teacher education be effectively conducted online? Should certain courses be offered online, while others remain face-to-face? As Valeeva and Kalimullin (2021) observed, “we must make a decision-whether we will continue to actively use digital learning to improve the learning of future teachers, and not consider it as a temporary measure, or as a secondary replacement for traditional approaches.” (p. 9). Despite this growing interest, the literature reveals a clear gap: no studies have identified which courses in language teacher education programs are appropriate for online delivery and which are better suited to face-to-face formats. Therefore, the present paper aims to address this gap by examining pre-service English teachers’ views on the suitability of certain courses for online delivery within English teacher training programs, informed by their experiences from two semesters of mandatory online education. With input from trainees’ insights, this research seeks to contribute to the development of an effective and sustainable English teacher training curriculum. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: 1. Which courses in the ELT program do pre-service English teachers perceive as more suitable for distance education, and what are the observed trends across different years of study?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

The data used in this article was collected as part of a broad-scale study investigating various relationships between DE and teacher education. One part of the dataset was used in our earlier published work that focused on prospective EFL teachers’ and teacher trainers’ views on and experiences with mandatory DE (Çamlıbel-Acar & Eveyik-Aydın, 2022). The data analysed in the present study, on the other hand, has not been used anywhere else previously and is concerned with a distinct research question. It employs a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which refers to collecting data from a particular population at a certain point in time for understanding their characteristics, behaviours or opinions (Creswell, 2015). Although the focus is on a single language teacher education program within a specific setting, the findings are expected to offer valuable insights applicable to similar programs under comparable conditions throughout the world, mainly because EFL teacher education programs typically share common components and characteristics. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to the global topic of language teacher education.

### **2.2. Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted within the English language teacher education program at the faculty of education of a state university in Istanbul, which enrolls about 600-650 teacher candidates. To gain admission to faculties of education in Türkiye, students must complete high school education and pass the national transition-to-higher-education exam. Based on the scores received in the exam and students’ preferred area of study, they are placed into specific teacher education departments that provide four years of training for future language teachers. The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) governs higher education in Türkiye, also establishing the curriculum and determining the courses in teacher training programs. Since the country’s foundation, teacher education has undergone many reforms (Baris & Hasan, 2019), with the recent update of the curriculum being in 2018. In 2020, CoHE granted individual universities the authority to make minor revisions to their curricula (Okumuş & Daloğlu, 2024), allowing EFL teacher education departments freedom to change their programs to some extent, which lasted until 2022.

The current program at the university where this study was conducted uses a curriculum consisting of three modules: Vocational Content Knowledge (VCK), Field Knowledge (FK) and General Cultural Knowledge (GCK) modules. VCK module involves pedagogical courses offered by the faculty of education while FK module consists of English- and language education-related courses offered by the English language teacher training department. GCK module involves courses on general cultural studies offered by any relevant department of the university. Each module comprises multiple courses, with ELT-specific courses

accounting for 40%, education courses 35%, and general culture courses 25% of the curriculum. Before and after the pandemic, all courses in the program have been delivered full-time through face-to-face instruction, with the exception of four compulsory courses offered via DE (Modern Turkish History I and II, and Turkish Language I and II). The program did not provide any other online or hybrid learning environments. The study participants are 123 pre-service teachers, predominantly between the ages of 19 and 21, selected through voluntary-response sampling. Among them, 85 were female, and 38 were male. Regarding their academic year of study within the program, 39 (32%) were sophomores, 68 (55%) were juniors, and 16 (13%) were seniors. Freshmen were not included in the study because of their limited exposure to the program.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The study was undertaken after participants had completed two semesters of mandatory DE due to Covid-19 pandemic. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were collected through a questionnaire that included open- and closed-ended items. Initially, an item pool of open and closed-ended questions was created based on previous literature on DE and course modality preferences. The draft instrument was then reviewed by three experts in teacher education and educational technologies to ensure content validity. Following expert feedback, necessary revisions were made, and the questionnaire was piloted with a group of ten pre-service teachers for its clarity and comprehensibility. Following the necessary revisions informed by the pilot study and approval from the Ethics Board, the questionnaire was administered to 200 participants along with a letter of informed consent. A total of 123 responses were received, with a return rate of 62%. For the purposes of this article, only the section of the questionnaire focusing on participants' preferences for online courses was used. In this section, participants were asked to review a list of courses and mark the ones they would prefer to take online rather than face-to-face, if given the opportunity. The list included the names of 100 courses offered in the program, each with a checkbox for participants to mark. Part of the list including several courses was added to Appendix. Of the 100 courses, 24 belonged to GCK, 36 to VCK and 40 to FK categories, according to the categorization in the program. Data analysis was done through calculating frequency counts of markings for each course, which were then converted into percentages by year of study as well as overall. The courses were subsequently ordered from the most frequently cited to the least frequently cited based on participants' preferences for DE.

### 3. Findings

Results revealed that there was not a strong consensus on a single course, but there was a distribution of preferences across the 100 courses. In general, pre-service teachers did not exhibit a strong preference for DE; in fact, even courses considered most suitable for it did not exceed 39% of the population. It was seen that the first 15 courses marked as most suitable for DE and selected with frequencies ranging from 24% to 39% fall under the GCK and the VCK modules as shown in Table 1. Notably, none of those frequently marked courses belong to the FK module. This finding suggests that pre-service teachers prefer their field-related courses to be delivered in face-to-face settings rather than through DE, more so than other course modules. Table 1 also shows the confidence intervals calculated for these most frequently selected courses. Although the exact proportions may vary in the larger population, the confidence intervals indicate moderate levels of certainty regarding participants' preferences for DE.

For example, the proportion of students preferring Modern Turkish History II to be offered online was 39%, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 31% to 47%. Similarly, other highly preferred courses, such as Modern Turkish History I and History of Turkish Education, showed estimated preference rates between 30% and 45%. In contrast, courses with lower online preference rates, such as Information Technologies ( $p = .24$ ,  $CI \approx .18, .32$ ) and Philosophy of Education ( $p = .26$ ,  $CI \approx .19, .34$ ), indicate less support for online delivery, reflecting participants' more reserved approach to integrating DE in these components of the curriculum.

**Table 1.**  
*Courses Marked as Most Suitable for DE*

Module	Course Titles	N=123	p (%)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Higher
GCK	Modern Turkish History II	48	39	.31	.47
GCK	Modern Turkish History I	46	37	.40	.45
VCK	History of Turkish Education	45	37	.29	.45
GCK	Turkish Language I	45	37	.29	.45
GCK	Turkish Language II	42	34	.27	.42
VCK	Turkish Education System and School Management	42	34	.27	.42
VCK	Measurement and Evaluation in Education	39	32	.24	.40
VCK	Educational Technologies	38	31	.24	.39
VCK	Moral Values and Ethics in Education	38	31	.24	.39
VCK	Classroom Management	37	30	.23	.38
VCK	Educational Psychology	37	30	.23	.38
VCK	Introduction to Education	35	28	.21	.36
VCK	Research Methods in Education	33	27	.20	.35
VCK	Philosophy of Education	32	26	.19	.34
GCK	Information Technologies	30	24	.18	.32

GCK: General Cultural Knowledge    VCK: Vocational Content Knowledge    FK: Field Knowledge

On the other hand, among the 15 courses identified as least suitable for DE, selected by only 5% to 7% of 123 pre-service teachers, eight were from the FK module (*Pragmatics and Language Teaching*, *Integrated Skills in ELT*, *Drama in ELT*, *English in Mass Communication*, *Listening and Pronunciation II*, *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, *Classroom-Based Evaluation Methods*, and *Listening and Pronunciation I*), four fell under the VCK category (*Learning Environments Outside the Classroom*, *Drama in Education*, *Sustainable Development and Education* and *Personalization and Adaptation of Teaching*), and three belonged to the GCK category (*Community Service*, *Vocational English* and *Turkish Music*). Regarding preferences in terms of modules, results for the 40 FK courses are presented in Table 2, for the 36 VCK courses in Table 3, and for the 24 GCK courses in Table 4. In each table below the elective courses are highlighted and shown with an (\*), while the non-asterisk ones are compulsory.

### **Field Knowledge Courses**

According to Table 2, FK module courses identified as having the most potential for DE were *Approaches to English Language Learning and Teaching*, and *Translation* each at 21% (n=26), *Teaching English Language Skills II* at 20% (n=25), *Teaching English to Young Learners II* at 20% (n=24), and *English Literature I* at 19% (n=23).

The highly preferred courses for DE, all of which are compulsory, were selected by only 19% to 21% of all participants, indicating a relatively low online preference. On the other hand, the percentage of online preference for elective courses was even lower ranging from 13% (*Teaching English Word Knowledge*) to 6% (*Pragmatics and Language Teaching*). These findings suggest that an overwhelming majority of pre-service teachers preferred the ELT-related courses of the program, especially the elective ones, to be delivered face-to-face. Table 2 also shows that courses with higher frequencies consistently revealed narrower confidence intervals positioned toward the upper end of the preference scale, suggesting a stronger and more reliable preference for DE among pre-service teachers. The top-ranked courses such as *Approaches to English Language Learning and Teaching* and *Translation* each had 26 (21%) participants preferring DE, with confidence intervals of approximately .14,.28 indicating that at least one in seven and potentially up to one in four pre-service teachers in the population would choose these courses online. Mid-

range courses, such as *Teaching English through Literature I*, *Reading Skills II*, and *Instructional Technology and Material Design in ELT* ( $p = .12$ ,  $CI \approx .08$ , 21 each) displayed wider and lower-bound intervals, suggesting more moderate and less uniform preferences. In contrast, courses with the lowest DE preference including *Drama in ELT*, *Integrated Skills in ELT*, *English in Mass Communication*, and *Pragmatics and Language Teaching* showed frequencies at or below .07, with lower bounds approaching .03. These intervals indicate that only a small minority of pre-service teachers consistently viewed these courses as appropriate for an online format.

**Table 2.**  
*Online Preference Rate for Field Knowledge Courses*

	Course Titles	2nd year PST** N=39 n (p)	3rd year PST N=68 n (p)	4th year PST N=16 n (p)	Total PST N= 123 n (p)	CI 95% ( $\approx$ )
1	Approaches to English Language Learning and Teaching	9 (23)	10 (15)	7 (44)	26 (21)	.14, .28
2	Translation	3 (8)	12 (18)	11 (69)	26 (21)	.14, .28
3	Teaching English Language Skills II	4 (10)	15 (22)	6 (38)	25 (20)	.13, .27
4	Teaching English to Young Learners II	5 (13)	14 (21)	5 (31)	24 (20)	.13, .27
5	English Literature I	6 (15)	9 (13)	8 (50)	23 (19)	.12, .26
6	Teaching English through Literature II	2 (5)	14 (21)	5 (31)	21 (17)	.10, .24
7	English Literature II	7 (18)	7 (10)	6 (38)	20 (16)	.10, .23
8	Language Acquisition	6 (15)	8 (12)	6 (50)	20 (16)	.10, .23
9	Linguistics I	2 (5)	8 (12)	9 (56)	19 (15)	.09, .22
10	Linguistics II	5 (13)	6 (9)	7 (44)	18 (15)	.08, .21
11	Teaching English to Young Learners I	5 (13)	8 (12)	5 (31)	18 (15)	.08, .21
12	Teaching English Language Skills I	4 (10)	8 (12)	6 (38)	18 (15)	.08, .21
13	Lesson and Course Planning in ELT	4 (10)	11 (16)	3 (19)	18 (15)	.08, .21
14	Writing Skills II	2 (5)	8 (12)	7 (44)	17 (14)	.09, .22
15	Teaching English through Literature I	1 (3)	10 (15)	5 (31)	16 (13)	.08, .21
16	Reading Skills II	3 (8)	6 (9)	7 (4)	16 (13)	.08, .21
17	Testing and Evaluation in ELT	1 (3)	10 (15)	5 (31)	16 (13)	.08, .21
18	Instructional Technologies and Material Design in ELT	3 (8)	7 (10)	6 (38)	16 (13)	.08, .21
19	Teaching English Word Knowledge*	4 (10)	6 (9)	6 (38)	16 (13)	.08, .21
20	Curriculum Design in ELT	6 (15)	6 (9)	3 (19)	15 (12)	.07, .19
21	Writing Skills I	3 (8)	7 (10)	5 (31)	15 (12)	.07, .19
22	World Englishes and Cultures*	1 (3)	13 (19)	1 (6)	15 (12)	.07, .19
23	Coursebook/Material Evaluation in ELT*	3 (8)	8 (12)	4 (25)	15 (12)	.07, .19
24	Teaching Practice I	5 (13)	6 (9)	3 (19)	14 (11)	.06, .17
25	Classroom Discourse/Language Analysis	2 (5)	7 (10)	4 (25)	13 (11)	.05, .16
26	Reading Skills I	1 (3)	6 (9)	5 (31)	12 (10)	.05, .16
27	Teaching Practice II	3 (8)	7 (10)	2 (13)	12 (10)	.05, .16
28	New Approaches in ELT*	1 (3)	9 (13)	2 (13)	12 (10)	.05, .16
29	Oral Communication Skills II	2 (5)	5 (7)	4 (25)	11 (9)	.05, .15
30	The Structure of English	1 (3)	5 (7)	5 (31)	11 (9)	.05, .15
31	Oral Communication Skills I	1 (3)	6 (9)	4 (25)	11 (9)	.05, .15
32	Critical Reading and Writing*	4 (10)	5 (7)	1 (6)	10 (8)	.04, .14
33	Listening and Pronunciation I	1 (3)	4 (6)	4 (25)	9 (7)	.03, .13



34	Classroom-Based Evaluation Methods*	4 (10)	4 (6)	1 (6)	9 (7)	.03, .13
35	Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*	2 (5)	6 (9)	1 (6)	9 (7)	.03, .13
36	Listening and Pronunciation II	1 (3)	3 (4)	4 (25)	8 (7)	.03, .12
37	English in Mass Communication*	1 (3)	6 (9)	1 (6)	8 (7)	.03, .12
38	Integrated Skills in ELT*	2 (5)	5 (7)	1 (6)	8 (7)	.03, .12
39	Drama in ELT*	1 (3)	5 (7)	2 (13)	8 (7)	.03, .12
40	Pragmatics and Language Teaching*	1 (3)	5 (7)	1 (6)	7 (6)	.03, .11

\*Elective courses

\*\*Pre-service teachers

The distribution of online preference rates across year levels in FK courses reveals a partially upward pattern. Second-year pre-service teachers consistently reported the lowest preference levels (typically 15%-3% except for a few courses), while third-year pre-service teachers showed moderate increases (approximately 22%-7%). On the other hand, fourth-year participants exhibited higher proportions in many courses (eg. Translation, English Literature I, Linguistics I, and Writing Skills I) reaching 69%–31% indicating a rise in perceived online suitability. Although this trend is not uniform across all FK courses, the higher fourth-year rates show increased acceptance of DE among senior students.

### *Vocational Content Knowledge Courses*

As for the VCK courses, Table 3 reveals a higher percentage of online preference among pre-service teachers for the courses in this module. Among these, History of Turkish Education, Turkish Educational System and School Management, and Measurement and Evaluation in Education were preferred to be taken online by 37% (n=45), 34% (n=42), and 32% (n=39) of the participants, respectively. These were followed by Educational Technologies and Moral Values and Ethics in Education, each preferred by 31%. The percentages of online preference for compulsory VCK courses were higher, ranging from 37% to 15%, compared to that of the elective courses in this module, which ranged from 17% (Open and Distance Learning and Child Psychology) to 6% (Drama in Education and Learning Environments Outside the Classroom). This finding aligns with preferences for FK courses previously shown in Table 2. Besides, unsurprisingly, Drama in Education emerged as one of the least preferred courses for online delivery. Only 6% of all participants indicated that they would choose to take this course in a DE format, and the 95% confidence interval .03,.11 further supports the stability of this finding. The upper bound (.11) remains low compared to the other FK and VCK courses as well, confirming that Drama in Education is consistently viewed as a course requiring high interaction, active participation, and performance, features that students believe are best supported through face-to-face instruction.

**Table 3.**

*Online Preference Rate for Vocational Content Knowledge Courses*

Course Titles	2nd year	3rd year	4th	Total	CI 95% (≈)
	PST** N=39 n (p)	PST N=68 n (p)	year PST N=16 n (p)	PST N= 123 n (p)	
1 History of Turkish Education	11 (28)	26 (38)	8 (50)	45 (37)	.29, .46
2 Turkish Educational System and School Management	4 (10)	30 (44)	8 (50)	42 (34)	.27, .43
3 Measurement and Evaluation in Education	7 (18)	24 (35)	8 (50)	39 (32)	.24, .40
4 Educational Technologies	13 (33)	17 (25)	8 (50)	38 (31)	.24, .39
5 Moral Values and Ethics in Education	7 (18)	30 (44)	1 (6)	38 (31)	.24, .39
6 Classroom Management	3 (8)	26 (38)	8 (50)	37 (30)	.23, .38
7 Educational Psychology	6 (15)	22 (32)	9 (56)	37 (30)	.23, .38
8 Introduction to Education	6 (15)	23 (32)	6 (56)	35 (28)	.21, .36
9 Research Methods in Education	8 (21)	17 (25)	8 (50)	33 (27)	.20, .35

10	Philosophy of Education	5 (13)	26 (38)	1 (6)	32 (26)	.19, .34
11	Principles and Methods of Instruction	8 (21)	14 (21)	7 (44)	29 (24)	.17, .31
12	Educational Sociology	3 (8)	24 (35)	1 (6)	28 (23)	.17, .31
13	Guidance in Schools	4 (10)	11 (16)	7 (44)	22 (18)	.12, .26
14	Open and Distance Learning*	6 (15)	15 (22)	0 (0)	21 (17)	.11, .24
15	Child Psychology*	3 (8)	18 (26)	0 (0)	21 (17)	.11, .24
16	Special Education and Inclusion	3 (8)	10 (15)	6 (38)	19 (15)	.10, .22
17	Learning Difficulties*	4 (10)	14 (21)	0 (0)	18 (15)	.09, .21
18	History of Education*	3 (8)	14 (21)	0 (0)	17 (14)	.08, .20
19	Project Preparation in Education*	3 (8)	14 (21)	0 (0)	17 (14)	.08, .20
20	Micro-teaching*	3 (8)	13 (19)	0 (0)	16 (13)	.08, .21
21	Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder*	2 (5)	13 (19)	0 (0)	15 (12)	.07, .19
22	Education Law*	2 (5)	13 (19)	0 (0)	15 (12)	.07, .19
23	Character and Value Education*	3 (8)	11 (16)	0 (0)	14 (11)	.06, .17
24	Curriculum Development in Education*	1 (3)	12 (18)	0 (0)	13 (11)	.06, .17
25	Adult Education and Lifelong Learning*	2 (5)	11 (16)	0 (0)	13 (11)	.06, .17
26	Comparative Education*	2 (5)	6 (9)	4 (25)	12 (10)	.05, .16
27	Educational Anthropology*	1 (3)	9 (13)	0 (0)	10 (8)	.04, .14
28	Extra-curricular Activities in Education*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
29	Critical and Analytical Thinking*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
30	Inclusive Education*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
31	Personalization and Adaptation of Teaching*	2 (5)	7 (10)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
32	Museum Education*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
33	Education of Children in Hospitals*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
34	Sustainable Development and Education*	2 (5)	6 (9)	0 (0)	8 (7)	.03, .13
35	Drama in Education*	0 (0)	6 (9)	1 (6)	7 (6)	.03, .11
36	Learning Environments Outside the Classroom*	1 (3)	6 (9)	0 (0)	7 (6)	.03, .11

\*Elective courses      \*\*Pre-service teachers

Table 3 reveals a pattern in fourth-year students' DE preferences. For several core pedagogical courses such as *History of Turkish Education*, *Classroom Management*, *Educational Psychology*, and *Measurement and Evaluation*, seniors report the highest online preference levels (50–56%), surpassing both second- and third-year pre-service teachers. However, the same group shows zero online preference for many elective VCK courses (e.g., *Open and Distance Learning*, *Child Psychology*, *Learning Difficulties*, *History of Education*).

### **General Cultural Knowledge Courses**

The GCK courses identified as most suitable for DE were also compulsory courses. Modern Turkish History II, Modern Turkish History I, and Turkish Language I showed relatively high online preference rates ( $p = .37-.39$ ), with confidence intervals extending up to .45–.48, indicating stable support for online delivery (Table 4). Turkish Language II and Information Technologies were selected by 34% ( $n=42$ ) and 24% ( $n=30$ ) of all participants, respectively. Turkish language and history courses were compulsory for all university students, not only for ELT students, and were first offered via DE a few years before the

pandemic. This prior exposure may explain why pre-service teachers are more inclined to consider them as most suitable for online delivery.

**Table 4.**  
*Online Preference Rate for General Cultural Knowledge Courses*

Rank by Preference	Course Titles	2nd year PST** N=39 n (p)	3rd year PST N=68 n (p)	4th year PSTs N=16 n (p)	Total PST N= 123 n (p)	CI 95% ( $\approx$ )
1	Modern Turkish History II	12 (31)	27 (40)	9 (56)	48 (39)	.31, .48
2	Modern Turkish History I	11 (28)	26 (38)	9 (56)	46 (37)	.29, .46
3	Turkish Language I	12 (31)	26 (38)	7 (44)	45 (37)	.29, .45
4	Turkish Language II	11 (28)	23 (34)	8 (50)	42 (34)	.27, .43
5	Information Technologies	4 (10)	18 (26)	8 (50)	30 (24)	.18, .32
6	Culture and Language*	5 (13)	12 (18)	6 (38)	23 (19)	.12, .26
7	Language and Society*	4 (10)	15 (22)	2 (13)	21 (17)	.11, .24
8	Diet and Health*	2 (5)	17 (25)	0 (0)	19 (15)	.10, .22
9	Career Planning and Development*	3 (8)	15 (22)	0 (0)	18 (15)	.09, .21
10	Foreign Language	3 (8)	6 (9)	9 (56)	18 (15)	.09, .21
11	Addiction and Fighting Substance Abuse*	3 (8)	14 (21)	0 (0)	17 (14)	.08, .20
12	Media Literacy*	2 (5)	14 (21)	0 (0)	16 (13)	.08, .21
13	History of Turkish Art*	1 (3)	14 (21)	0 (0)	15 (12)	.07, .19
14	Ethics in Science and Research*	3 (8)	12 (18)	0 (0)	15 (12)	.07, .19
15	Human Relations and Communication*	2 (5)	12 (18)	0 (0)	14 (11)	.06, .18
16	Art and Aesthetics*	3 (8)	11 (16)	0 (0)	14 (11)	.06, .18
17	History and Philosophy of Science*	2 (5)	11 (16)	0 (0)	13 (11)	.06, .17
18	Human Rights and Democracy Education*	2 (5)	11 (16)	0 (0)	13 (11)	.06, .17.
19	Turkish Sign Language*	3 (8)	9 (13)	0 (0)	12 (10)	.05, .16
20	Economy and Entrepreneurship*	1 (3)	10 (15)	0 (0)	11 (9)	.05, .15
21	Turkish Cultural Geography*	1 (3)	9 (13)	0 (0)	10 (8)	.04, .14
22	Turkish Music*	1 (3)	8 (12)	0 (0)	9 (7)	.03, .13
23	Community Service	1 (3)	3 (4)	3 (19)	7 (6)	.03, .11
24	Vocational English*	2 (5)	4 (6)	0 (0)	6 (5)	.02, .10

\*Elective courses

\*\*Pre-service teachers

Table 4 also shows that elective courses like Community Service and Vocational English received very low online preference ( $p \leq .06$ ), with confidence intervals concentrated between .02 and .11, suggesting limited suitability for online formats. This finding is not surprising given the nature of this compulsory course, which similar to the Teaching Practice requires off-campus visits to institutions as part of their community engagement. In other words, Community Service requires physical presence and authentic social interaction which cannot be meaningfully replicated in a virtual environment, which explains the very low preference

rate ( $p = .06$ ,  $CI \approx .03, .11$ ). As a result, students overwhelmingly viewed face-to-face instruction as essential for achieving the intended learning outcomes of this course.

Overall, the analysis of the three modules revealed that within each category, pre-service teachers considered compulsory courses more suitable for DE. Elective courses consistently ranked lower, suggesting they were perceived as less appropriate for DE. In sum, in the FK module, online preference percentages ranged from 21% to 7% for compulsory courses and from 13% to 6% for electives. In the VCK category, online preferences ranged from 37% to 15% for compulsory courses and from 17% to 6% for electives. For GCK courses, online preferences ranged from 39% to 6% for compulsory courses and from 19% to 5% for electives. These findings suggest that pre-service teachers were more open to the idea of taking essential, compulsory courses online, but preferred face-to-face learning for elective courses, possibly valuing the flexible and personally engaging nature of face-to-face learning for courses of their own choosing. Finally, there was an observable trend of DE preference increasing with each academic year for compulsory courses. Although no statistical comparisons between groups were performed, this is an exploratory finding that remains uncertain. Several explanations, however, can be proposed. For example, as seniors approach graduation, they may require more flexible learning options to be able to accommodate practicum duties, employment, or preparation for postgraduate studies. Additionally, as experienced learners, seniors may feel more confident in their ability to manage independent learning and thus may be more willing to adopt convenient learning options as they transition into professional roles.

#### 4. Discussion

The focus of this study was to determine the courses that, from the perspective of pre-service teachers, had potential for online delivery. Limited research exists on course-specific suitability for DE in language teacher education programs, thus the present study addressed that gap by examining pre-service EFL teachers' views based on their experiences with mandatory online learning, aiming to inform an effective and sustainable curriculum. The study showed that DE mode was not a highly preferred way of conducting courses in the English teacher education program. This suggests a general preference among pre-service teachers for face-to-face courses, which they find more appropriate for their training. This result concurs with Gherheş et al. (2021), who found a higher preference for face-to-face learning among participants who had experienced e-learning. Pre-service teachers possibly view physically attending university courses as a means to more vividly experience school contexts, which will be their future workplaces. Through these experiences, they may also feel more connected to lessons and instructors, whom they will take as role models for their own professional career. Pre-service teachers' strong inclination for face-to-face instruction in the present study is also echoed in previous research indicating that online education is often viewed as inadequate for teacher education, particularly in field-related components (e.g., Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2008; Faulk & King, 2013; Stricklin & Tingle, 2016).

The tendency that GCK courses were considered most suitable for DE, followed by VCK courses, and lastly FK courses, may partly be explained by participants' experiences in the department regarding the nature of course delivery. While GCK and VCK courses often include more didactic content delivery and conventional exams, FK courses include experiential and application-based instruction alongside lectures. The current study's observation that GCK and VCK courses were more often seen as DE-appropriate aligns with Atmaca (2023), Önal (2022) and Türegün-Çoban and Kuyumcu-Vardar's (2021) conclusions that applied components such as practicum and classroom-based tasks are perceived as less effective in distance formats. They reinforce the current study's conclusion that FK courses, which typically involve hands-on teaching, are better delivered face-to-face. The nature of the FK courses frequently expects pre-service teachers to prepare and present activities that require creativity, decision-making, and language production, with assessments typically including open-ended items that align with these tasks. Managing such practical components can be perceived as challenging in online learning environments.

We should also emphasize that within the FK module there are relatively more theory-dominant (e.g., Language Acquisition) and more practice-oriented (e.g., Oral Communication Skills) courses selected for DE, indicating that theory or practice aspect may not be a determining factor for participants' choices. These courses were the ones offered by instructors who reported effectively utilizing the DE platform for their courses during the pandemic. Therefore, in accordance with Boyko et al. (2021), it is possible to say that the instructor's approach to and methodological engagement with DE as well as pre-service teachers'

prior experiences with DE in a specific course may shape their preferences. With regard to prior experiences, GCK courses delivered online before the pandemic were in fact perceived as most suitable for online delivery. Beyond perceptions of content suitability, this may be due to participants' familiarity with the DE format in these courses. This confirms studies showing that pre-service teachers' satisfaction with online education varied and was influenced by prior experience and quality of instructional design (Çamlıbel-Acar & Eveyik-Aydın, 2022; Cubukcu, 2021; Karafil & İlbay, 2024).

The study also showed that compulsory courses were more frequently favored for DE, across all modules. Although both compulsory and elective courses involve structured designs, and theoretical as well as practical content, it is interesting that compulsory courses were seen as more suitable for online delivery, while there was a tendency to favor face-to-face learning for elective courses. This is an original contribution of the present study not explicitly addressed in previous research. One possible explanation is that pre-service teachers may find the compulsory courses to be more demanding, with the added pressure of presenting to a live audience, hence wanting to avoid the stress by having the course at a distance. In contrast, since elective courses are based on their own choices, they might feel more comfortable, empowered, and personally invested, making face-to-face participation less intimidating. This finding encourages further exploration, potentially connecting with the idea in Dymont and Downing (2020) that student characteristics and motivations influence how DE is experienced.

Finally, the descriptive results regarding academic years suggest that students' preference for DE increased gradually with each academic year in compulsory courses. However, because no statistical comparisons were conducted across year groups, this trend cannot be interpreted as a reliable difference and should be viewed as a preliminary observation. The existing literature on this issue is quite limited, but it appears to contradict Koşar's (2022) findings, which reported no differences in relation to year of study.

## 5. Conclusion

This article shed light on pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of which courses in their program of study are most suitable for DE. Exploring the perspectives of pre-service teachers with firsthand experience of mandatory DE is crucial for determining online courses. By understanding the perceived and reported effectiveness of different instructional formats, institutions can easily adapt their curriculum to meet the specific requirements of courses in case of future situations. Since student engagement, motivation and success can vary depending on the mode of delivery, identifying which courses benefit from online learning and which do not is essential for institutional preparedness in the event of sudden and unforeseen transitions to DE. Finally, involving pre-service teachers in curriculum evaluation helps ensure that teacher education programs remain relevant, flexible, and aligned with the changing needs of future educators.

## 6. Educational Implications

Findings of this study offer practical and pedagogical implications that provide valuable guidance for teacher education programs, curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers. In situations requiring a switch to online education, such as emergencies, staff shortages, facility limitations or even financial constraints, priority can be given to courses considered suitable for DE by the stakeholders. According to the preferences of pre-service EFL teachers in the teacher training program examined, FK courses are mainly expected to be delivered face to face. In contrast, some VCK and GCK courses, particularly the compulsory ones, can be offered more comfortably through DE. The GCK courses identified by participants as most suitable for DE were *Modern Turkish History I*, *Modern Turkish History II*, *Turkish Language I*, *Turkish Language II*, and *Information Technologies*, while the VCK courses considered most appropriate were *History of Turkish Education*, *Turkish Educational System and School Management*, *Measurement and Evaluation in Education*, *Educational Technologies*, *Moral Values and Ethics in Education*, *Classroom Management*, *Educational Psychology*, *Introduction to Education*, *Research Methods in Education*, and *Philosophy of Education*. Teacher education institutions and higher education curriculum designers may take these findings into account when revising their programs to address the specific requirements of future circumstances.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research Implications

Certain limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, it was conducted within one EFL teacher education program, which limits its applicability to other teacher education programs. Future research on this issue may involve participants from other EFL programs as well as teacher-trainers for a broader perspective. Second, participants were not asked to explain their reasons for marking courses. Further studies will be beneficial to investigate pre-service teachers' reasons regarding what factors influence their decisions. In addition, due to the unequal number of students in different years of study, statistical comparisons could not be made. Future research could explore statistically significant changes by year of study in the program.

Furthermore, at the time of data collection for the current study, some students had experienced a subset of the courses when responding to the survey, while others had not yet taken certain courses. This may have influenced their preferences. Future investigations could address this issue by collecting data from students who have completed all courses in the curriculum. Finally, the findings reflect post-pandemic views influenced by emergency DE, which may not directly represent perceptions of long-term DE models. Looking beyond emergency remote teaching in future studies would help distinguish opinions based on crisis situations from those formed through regular situations.

### Note on ethical issues

We confirm that ethical approval to conduct the present study was obtained from Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences, Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date of approval: April 5, 2021 / Document issue number: 2021/3-44)

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

### Funding

There is no funding for this study.

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## Appendix

### Sample Items from the Questionnaire

Which course(s) would you prefer to have through online means instead of face to face if you had the option to continue your ELT degree in the form of distant education? (Please tick all that apply)

1	Introduction to Education
2	Educational Sociology
3	Educational Psychology
4	Philosophy of Education
5	Foreign Language I
6	Foreign Language II
...	
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