EXPLORING PRESERVICE ELT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SELF-COMPASSION DURING THEIR TEACHING PRACTICUM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to explore preservice ELT teachers' perceptions of self-compassion during their teaching practicum. The teaching practicum itself is one of the most important challenges that preservice teachers face during their education at the faculty. The teaching practicum means one more step close to being a teacher, so preservice teachers may feel more stressed and anxious than ever during their practicum. Showing compassion for oneself and others may affect life and job satisfaction. Thus, this study focuses on the self-compassion of preservice teachers. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological study design to gain in-depth data on the perceptions of preservice teachers. With purposive convenience sampling, 17 preservice teachers participated in the study. Focus-group interviews and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. The data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. The findings showed that preservice teachers experience mainly three challenges during their teaching practicum: instruction, time and class management. Although the participants tend to show self-compassion through positive self-talk, the findings revealed more themes related to negative self-talk. Thus, it is suggested to raise awareness of the importance of self-compassion during the teaching practicum through short training or activities integrated into the reflective teaching course.

Keywords: Self-compassion, English Teacher Training, Teaching Practicum.

INTRODUCTION

People do not currently live as simply as they did during the time of the hunting and gathering era. People face many challenges in their social and professional lives in the twenty-first century, which frequently leaves them feeling inadequate and depressed. With the evolution of stress, 21st-century citizens experience stress from various environments. This has led to a recent realization that people should learn to treat themselves with the same kindness they behave to others. This may be also the case with English preservice teachers because they focus on their academic development, improving their English, and their career planning for the future and they may worry about being appointed to a school or finding a job at private institutions in addition to their social and financial lives (Topkaya & Meydan,2013). In addition to these, in their last year at faculty, they take the practicum course and experience teaching real students in real schools. For teacher education programs, it is important to present pre-service teachers with the necessary practices before beginning their careers. As education faculties work to create the 21st-century abilities that preservice teachers should have in every subject, preservice teachers are trained to be specialists in problem-solving and aware of technical and pedagogical content, according to Ball et al. (2008). All these may double their stress and anxiety levels; thus, preservice teachers' showing self-compassion to themselves can be one of the ways to reduce the pressure they feel.

While self-compassion is defined as having compassion for oneself, compassion for others is characterized as having suffering, sensitivity, patience, and affection toward them (Condon & Feldman Barret, 2013). According to Neff (2003a), exhibiting self-compassion involves being kind and compassionate toward oneself when facing challenges, acknowledging one's negative emotions, recognizing that they exist, and moving on. People with low levels of self-compassion may experience a gradual increase in their sense of inadequacy, which may have an impact on many shortcomings. The teaching profession might be particularly impacted by this feeling of inadequacy. Researchers have examined self-compassion in instructors (Jennings, 2015; Tarrasch et al, 2020) and prospective teachers (Aydın, 2015; Aydın & Kuzu, 2013; Kasalak, 2020), revealing the significance of self-compassion in teaching. Foreign language teachers may feel twice as incompetent while instructing in their own tongue and another language (Tedick & Walker, 1994). It is believed that teachers' self-care and compassion, especially when teaching a foreign language, will have a favourable impact on the education and training process.

Self-kindness, awareness of shared interests, and mindfulness are the three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion for oneself also develops as a result of the development of these traits. It is obvious that one must learn to be compassionate toward oneself on an individual basis. Teachers who interact with students, teachers, school administrators, and parents for at least eight hours every day should pay particular attention to this. When a teacher is dealing with a challenging circumstance at work, they might not be able to exhibit the same level of empathy and understanding for their children. While the proper attitude toward the student is often emphasized in teacher training, it is rarely emphasized that aspiring instructors should show compassion and empathy. While it is always emphasized in teacher training what kind of an attitude should be displayed towards students, it is quite rare to emphasize that prospective teachers should display a

compassionate and kind attitude towards themselves in their professional lives. However, a teacher who cannot show compassion to himself/herself may have difficulty in coping with these feelings when he/she experiences difficult situations after a while and reflect this to his/her life at school. For this reason, it is important that foreign language teachers and prospective teachers learn to show self-compassion and make practices to develop it. As Neff (2003a) states, self-compassion determines one's attitude towards oneself and others. Self-compassion is very important for teachers because they have an impact on the future of the country by educating many students. In addition, an unhappy teacher cannot raise happy individuals. Gilbert (2015) stated that developing self-compassion contributes to a healthy mental and emotional balance. The necessity of developing self-compassion towards oneself as an individual is a very clear view. Considering these, it can be predicted that when teachers show self-compassion about their profession, they will be able to practice their profession in a healthier way. In addition, in a study conducted with prospective teachers, a relationship was found between self-compassion and satisfaction with life (Kasalak, 2020).

While some studies have been conducted on self-compassion and life satisfaction (Bayram & Bigel, 2008; Kasalak, 2020), others have examined the relationship between self-compassion and physical and mental well-being (Hall, Row, Wuensch, Godley, 2013; Neff, 2009). In some studies, it has been revealed that women show less self-compassion compared to men (Neff, 2003a; Neff, et al., 2005; Neff & McGeehee, 2010; Neff, et al., 2008; Neff & Vonk, 2009) and the reason for this is shown to be that women develop more critical perspectives towards themselves (Bacanlı & Çarkıt, 2020; Leadbeater, Kuperminc et. al,1999; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1999). The studies in the literature focus mostly on the self-compassion of teachers but preservice teachers Chen, 2022; Jennings, 2015; Tarrasch et al, 2020). Thus, research on the self-compassion of preservice teachers seems quite sparse, especially preservice ELT teachers.

Research on a variety of topics, including teachers' professional burnout, levels of job satisfaction, and stress-conflict dynamics, is available in the field of literature. This research aims to improve the education and training process by encouraging a sense of contentment and fulfilment within the teaching profession. It recognizes the need of encouraging self-compassion among educators. For this purpose, this study aims to determine ELT preservice teachers' perceptions of self-compassion during their teaching practicum period. Thus, this study tends to address the following research questions:

1)   What preservice ELT teachers' views on self-compassion during their practicum teaching?
    a.   What are the challenges that preservice ELT teachers experience during their practicum?
    b.   In what ways do preservice ELT teachers show self-compassion during their practicum?

METHOD

Research Design

To be able to explore preservice ELT teachers' perceptions of self-compassion, this study is a qualitative research design. When the focus is on investigating the experiences of people in detail by using research methods like in-

depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations and so forth, qualitative research is preferred (Creswell, 2012; Hennink et al., 2020). More specifically, since this study focuses on exploring the experiences of preservice ELT teachers showing self-compassion during their practicum, phenomenology research is used. Due to subjectivity, the foundation of phenomenology is interpretation based on the individual's own perception and experience. Because persons can only become subjective through experience, and knowledge can be learned (Husserl, 1962). The perceived phenomenon is connected to the experience. These experiences must be recognized, examined, and interpreted, though. Consequently, the goal of phenomenology is not explaining but describing. Events and phenomena are founded on the individual's experience and are described in accordance with their own perspective of phenomenology (Ceylan, 2019; Tekindal, 2021). Therefore, phenomenology is the most appropriate qualitative research design for the aim of this study.

Participants

Fourth-year ELT preservice teachers were the participants of the study. Purposive convenience sampling was employed. 37 fourth-year ELT preservice teachers were reached to be invited to the focused group interviews. However, 18 of them accepted to participate in the focused groups, and one of the participants did not come to the group interview on the interview day.

Data Collection Instruments

In phenomenological design, the most common data collection instruments are interviews. The interview technique is based on the endeavour to capture or develop a mutually understood common meaning between the interviewer and the interviewee (Reinharz, 1992). Therefore, in this study, focused-group and semi-structured interviews were used as data collection tools.

Focus-group Interview

The basis of the focus group interview technique is the use of some pre-written interview questions within the context of a particular subject to elicit specific information and insights from the chosen group of participants using the guidelines. It is a structured group interview technique that is used to gain detailed ideas from the participants. In this type of interview, the participants share their ideas and feelings on a product, service or concept on a specific topic. According to Creswell (2005), at least 4, and most 6 participants could participate in the group interviews. The main point of focus-group interviews is that the participants have the opportunity to state their opinions and/or feelings on the topic by interaction, which helps them to think more thoroughly about the topic (Krueger, 1998).

The focus-group interview is an 8-stage process. These are as follows: (1) reviewing the research purpose according to the method to be used, (2) determining the focus group interview questions appropriate to the aim of the research, (3) organizing the location and how to record the interview, (4) pilot testing of the whole process,

(5) identifying and inviting the participants, (6) considering the group dynamics for each group, (7) identifying the focus group interview facilitator and assistants, (8) organizing and analyzing data (Yıldırım & Şimşek; 2011).

The interview questions were related to their difficult experiences during the practicum. Feedback for the content and accuracy of the questions was received from an expert who also was teaching the practicum course. Another expert participated in the interviews as the reporter who took notes during the interviews. 18 participants volunteered for the interviews, so 3 groups with 6 participants were formed, Group-1, Group-2, and Group-3. For Group-2, one of the participants did not come; thus, this group continued the interview with 5 participants.

At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were informed about the aim of the study and the procedure and then they completed the consent form for the study. The duration of each focus-group interview was 60 minutes (Rabiee, 2004) All the stages were fulfilled for the study, and the focus-group interviews were video recorded and voice recorded in case the voices of the participants in the video recordings would not be clear enough to understand. The focus-group interview program was arranged as in Figure 1.
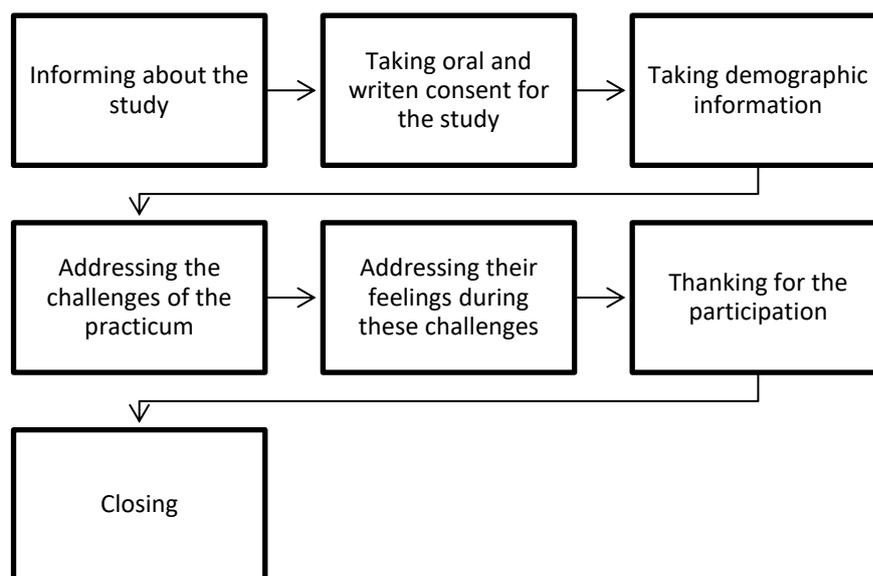

Figure 1. Focus-group Interview Program

Semi-Structured Interviews

For Research Question 1b, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Since RQ1b addresses preservice ELT teachers' reactions towards the challenges of the practicum and whether they show self-compassion to themselves, it was considered that they would discuss their responses in private. The questions of the semi-structured interviews were based on their responses during the focus-group interviews (McGrath et al., 2021; Polit & Beck, 2020). One expert in the field revised the questions, and after editing some minor changes, the questions were used. The researcher invited 9 participants who mentioned the challenges of the practicum in

more detail during the focus-group interviews to the semi-structured interviews for in-depth data collection. However, 6 of them volunteered to participate in the interviews. Patton (2002) states that the number of participants in a semi-structured interview depends on what the study focuses on, what can have credibility and the resources that are available. Creswell (2007) explains that the number of participants can be between 5 to 25. Thus, for the current study, 7 participants could provide the necessary data to address RQ1b.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from both focus-group and semi-structured interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. For the data analysis, Creswell's (2012) qualitative content analysis procedure was utilized. Şimşek and Yıldırım (2011) recommend using content analysis to identify the themes connected to the given topic and organize the resulting material into a coherent and systematic structure.

All the data were initially examined to gain a broad perspective and then the coding was applied for the emerging themes. To ensure coding reliability, two coders were involved in the coding process. 25% of the data were coded by the two coders and the repetitive codes were narrowed down to ensure a reliable coding process. After creating a common coding scheme, each coder coded the data individually. The reliability Kappa coefficient was found as 0.74 in NVivo 12. McHugh (2012; p.279) states that "values ≤ 0 as indicating no agreement and 0.01–0.20 as none to slight, 0.21–0.40 as fair, 0.41– 0.60 as moderate, 0.61–0.80 as substantial, and 0.81–1.00 as almost perfect agreement". Regarding this, it can be stated that the inter-coder reliability for this study is substantial.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1a: What are the challenges that preservice ELT teachers experience during their practicum?

To be able to explore the challenges of the ELT preservice teachers during their practicum, focus-group interviews were conducted. The data analysis revealed that preservice ELT teachers experienced challenges in terms of inside and outside the classroom during the practicum. Figure 2 presents the main theme for the challenges inside the classroom.
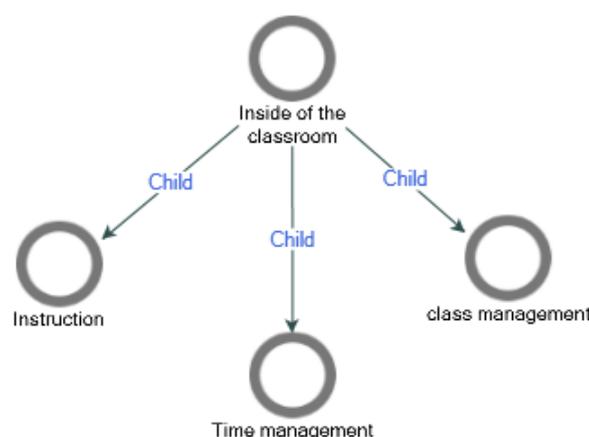

Figure 2. The Challenges during the Practicum

The participants stated challenges related to their instruction, time and class management during their reaching. In terms of instruction, they experience difficulty in giving clear instructions to the students. They usually feel the need to simplify their instruction or switch to Turkish. They think that they lack the necessary knowledge to teach vocabulary and grammar because they did not receive these courses. The ELT program (2018) at the education faculty did not include separate courses for teaching vocabulary and grammar; thus, they had to spend more time on these during their lesson plans. Participant 9 expresses his ideas as following:

> I did not learn how to teach vocabulary but I have to, especially before the reading text we have. The class teacher gives at least 5 words to teach but I haven't learnt that so I have to search a lot and consult my instructor the faculty and the teacher. But all these take too much time. At the end of the day, of course I learnt how to do it but isn't there an easier way than finding it alone? I know that the previous program had those courses, I wish we had too [P9].

P5 added that the materials that they were provided with to teach were limited. Thus, they had difficulty in creating activities from them.

> The class teacher gave a very short reading text from their course book but I had to create main idea questions and comprehension questions and all those questions should not overlap. It is really hard to make out questions from short texts [P5].

In terms of time management, the participants struggled to finish teaching their lesson plan on time because according to them, there were too many activities, but they had only 45 minutes to teach, and this was not enough for all the planned activities P4 and P12 express their ideas as:

> There are three stages with almost 4-6 activities. Sometimes I had to change the activity from group work to pair work because it would take more time in group work and lots of effort to keep the class working on it. And sometimes, I finished the plan earlier than I expected, so I played games with the class until breaktime [P4].

> Our instructor wants us to find interesting and fun activities but all those take too much time in class. I have difficulty in deciding how much time I should allocate to the activities [P12].

Another main theme that emerged from the data was class management. The participants stated that they found providing feedback, motivating the students and managing the activities difficult. They mentioned that it is also hard to get the students' attention and keep it for 45 minutes (Figure 3).
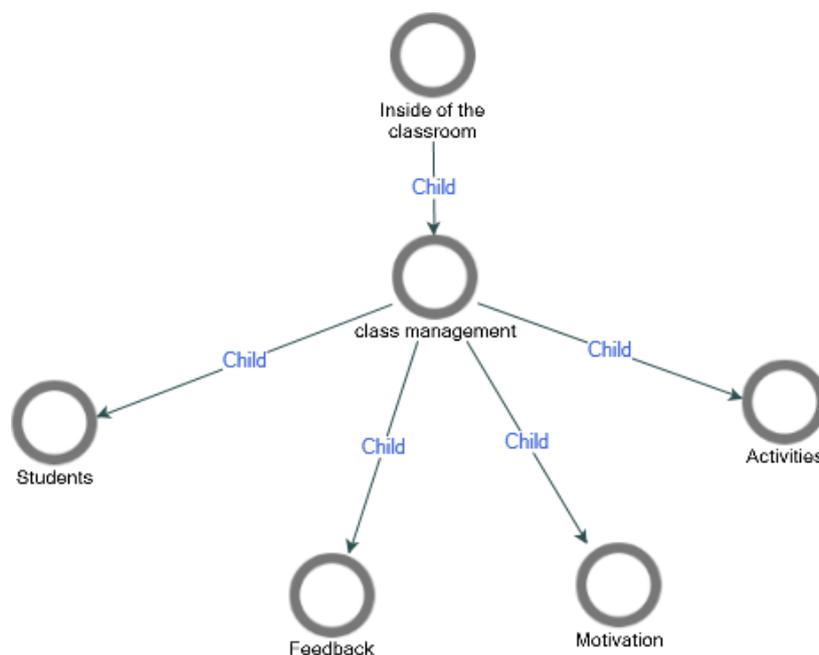
Figure 3. Challenges Related to Class Management

One of the challenges mentioned was the activities. Above P5 mentioned the hardship of preparing reading text activities but also group work activities were discussed frequently in the focus-group interviews.

> When I plan to have group work, I have difficulty giving instructions. The students get always confused and then I find myself explaining the activity in each group one by one. Besides wasting time, I also cannot control the class then. Especially some classes are never appropriate for group work because they get very excited and it takes too much time for them to calm down [P8].

> Our lecturer suggests group work for productive skills because group work gives the chance to speak to all students but I keep on saying I cannot do that the students do not listen to me but she never understands [P5].

Preservice teachers feel forced when they are asked to create fun and interesting activities especially when they are based on interaction among the students. They feel safe with mechanic activities which require minimum communication because of the noise the students make during the activities.
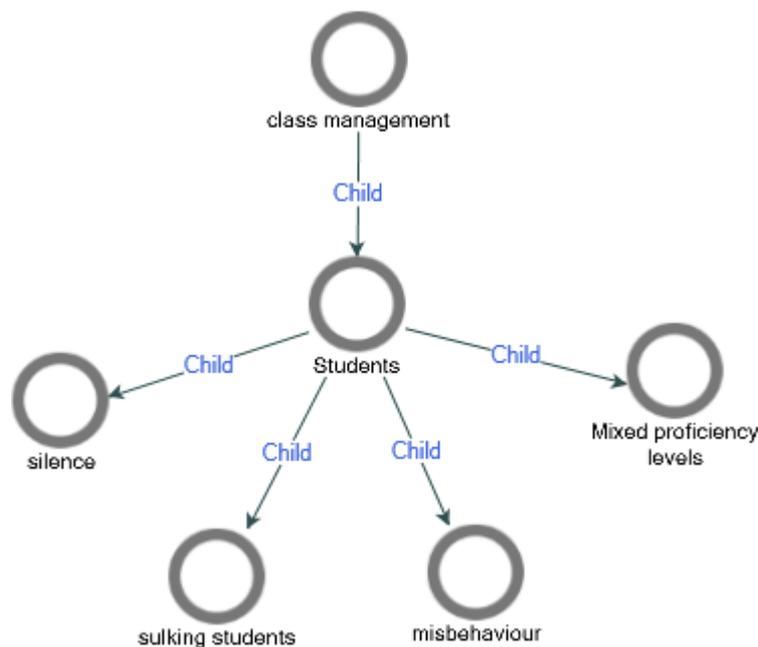
Figure 4. Students as a Challenge

Feedback is another topic they mentioned. They state that sometimes they forget to say "well done" or similar praises to the students. However, they add that this is something they can fix easily. 'Motivation' and the theme 'students' are related in fact. The participants claim that the misbehaving students cause a lot of trouble when they are teaching (Figure 4). They make noise, take the other student's attention and sometimes are very disrespectful. While some of the students never speak, some make a lot of noise, and managing the class with such students cannot be easy. P6 narrated an incident about this theme:

> I was teaching the pre-reading stage so while I was trying to do the activity, the student at the back kept talking and I warned him by going next to him. Then he insulted another student from the next desk, I could not even see when it started but they started to fight. The whole year had only this incident but I literally was frozen and did not know what to do. Thank God the class teacher interfered. At the end of the day, I thought if I had warned him continuously, I would lose control of the class but by ignoring him I lost it anyway. I really felt helpless then [P1].

Although motivating the students was not easy, the participants claimed that some students were so motivated that when they did not give them a word, they would sulk and not speak again. This made them feel sorry and regretful. Thus, the participants think that students themselves are a challenge sometimes while teaching.

Although most of the challenges mentioned were related to in-class situations, they also mentioned the other teachers, administration of the practicum school and cooperative teachers as challenges (Figure 5).
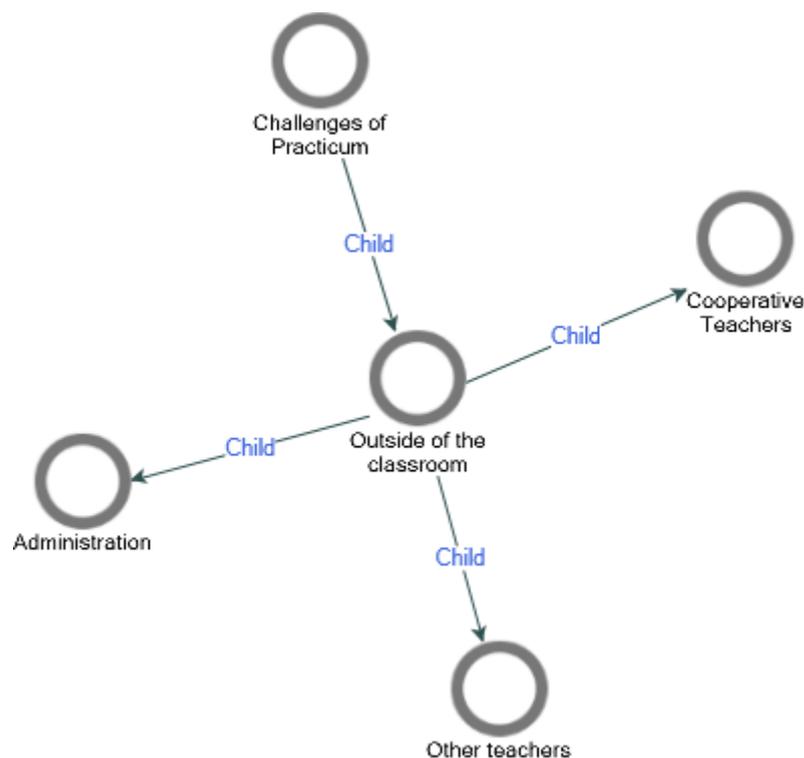
Figure 5. Challenges outside of the Classroom

The participants discussed that sometimes the administration and the other teachers can cause frustration. During the focus-group interview, P7 narrated an event he experienced in the practicum school:

> Our instructor from the faculty warned us not to make photocopies at the practicum school for our own activities so I know that I shouldn't do that. However, our cooperative teacher asked me to make a photocopy of an activity she would do in the class so I went to the teachers' room. While using the photocopy machine, one of the teachers came and warned me not do to. Even I tried to explain she did not listen and shouted at me, then me and my friends (at the same practicum school) were not allowed to enter the teachers' room. I really felt first guilty because the teacher misunderstood me, even worse did not listen to me, but then I thought I did only what I was told to do [P7].

Regarding the cooperative teachers, the participants made clear that it was not personal but related to the methodology and the activities to be carried out in the classroom. P11 explains the situation as follows:

> The class teacher asks usually to follow the activities exactly from the coursebook, when I prepared the lesson plan accordingly, my faculty instructor told me to prepare activities that match the same learning objective. Thus, sometimes I did not know whose word to consider [P11].

The focus-group interviews showed that participants mostly experienced challenges inside the classroom such as instruction, time and class management. They usually emphasized the instruction and student factor in their practicum school as a challenge affecting their teaching.

RQ1b In what ways do the preservice ELT teachers show self-compassion during their practicum?

To be able to explore the ELT preservice teachers' perceptions of self-compassion during their practicum, the preliminary data source was the semi-structured interviews; however, during the focus-group interviews, some of the participants also mentioned how they felt and what they did when facing a challenge. Thus, both data sets were analyzed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' self-compassion.

When the data were analyzed, it was found showing self-compassion was related to the event and with whom they experienced it. The participants tend to show self-compassion when they experience a challenging situation. Figure 6 shows what they do after they face a challenge.
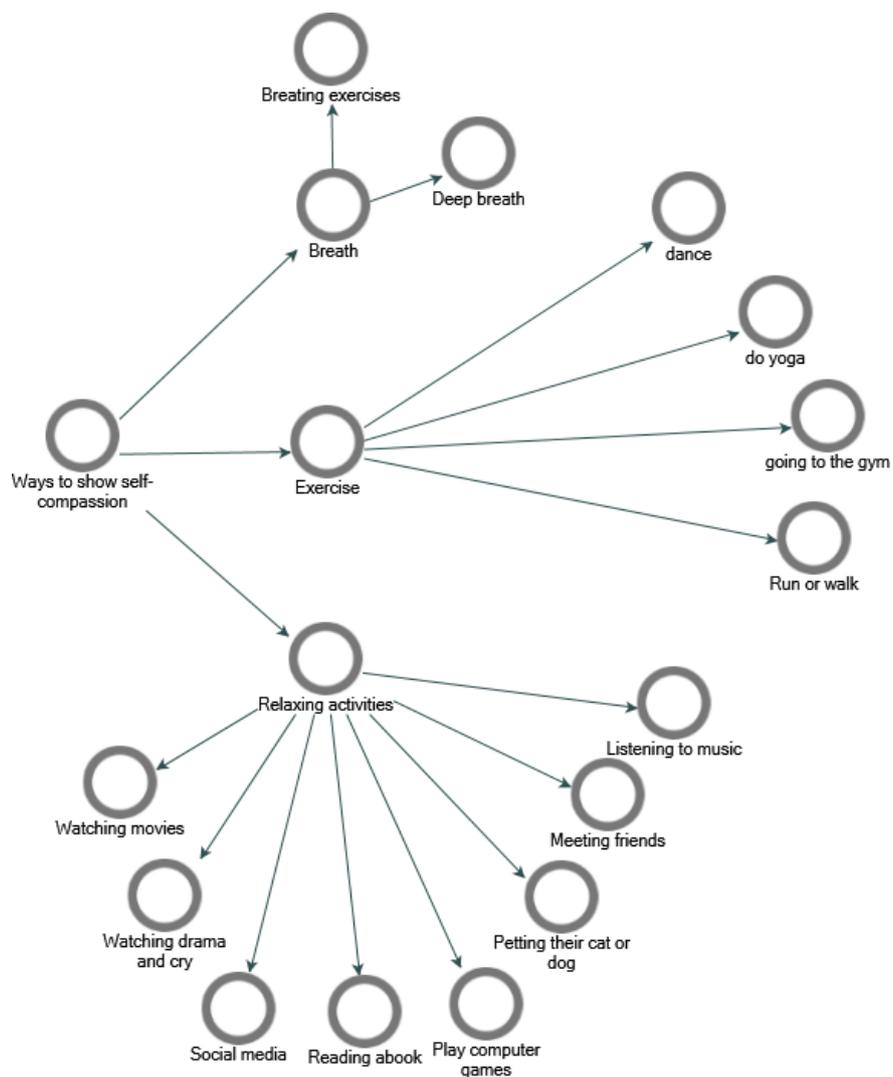

Figure 6. Ways to Show Self-compassion

As it can be observed from Figure 6, there are mainly three ways the participants employ self-compassion after facing a challenge during the practicum. In fact, they stated that they usually take a deep breath just after the challenging event, and try to move on, but then in the evening, they start to overthink the event. This is when they employ exercising and do relaxing activities. One participant (P8) stated that she works on breathing techniques when she feels anxious or stressed:

> I took training on breathing techniques, when I am in the classroom, I just take a deep breath and try to continue but when I am at home, I start to overthink what else I could do, or how stupid I was doing so. When this is the case, I apply the breathing technique. Then I start watching a movie and move on [P8].

The participants told that also preparing the lesson plan can sometimes create a high level of anxiety, and they cannot focus on the plan. Then they prefer again exercising or doing relaxing activities and after calming their mind, they start working on their lesson plans. The most frequently mentioned activity was walking. They prefer walking by listening to music and walking in nature. In the semi-structured interviews, three of the participants shared that crying relaxes them. Sometimes they cry just after the challenging moment, and to be able to cry, they would go to the restrooms in the practicum school. P7 narrates one of her anecdotes as:

> Our faculty instructor came to observe me in the class while teaching. I was very nervous but I felt that I was ready and confident. When I started the autonomy stage in writing, I lost control of the class. Students were to write a postcard in groups. First, I delivered the materials, and as soon as they received them, they did not listen to my instruction. I warned them, I spoke up, and then I started hitting the board like our high school teachers when I think now it was very embarrassing. Then I went near the groups one by one to explain. But the noise in the classroom would not stop. Later, before being able to check the tasks, the bell rang. My throat felt like a thorn inside but I had to stand strong because our instructor was there. I asked whether I could go to the restroom, and she let me and then I cried and relaxed. I was so dumb to do that, the class teachers and our instructor told me to give the instruction and then the material during the feedback session, but I completely forgot it [P7].

Social media is another way the participants choose to relax. They stated that they prefer watching short videos like TikTok or Reels. P14 stated that reading comments on Twitter helps him to focus on other topics. This can be also an example of the 'ignoring' reaction mentioned below in Figure 7.

The participants were asked to share what their reactions were when they face a challenge during the practicum. Figure 7 presents how they react to the moments they feel anxious, stressed or nervous. As can be seen from the figure, the participants did not tend to show self-compassion. They feel regret, talk to themselves ironically and try to overcome the feelings, try to normalize the situation, insult themselves or ignore the whole event.

Only perhaps moving on can be regarded as self-compassion because they come back to the moment now and try not to think about the past or future.
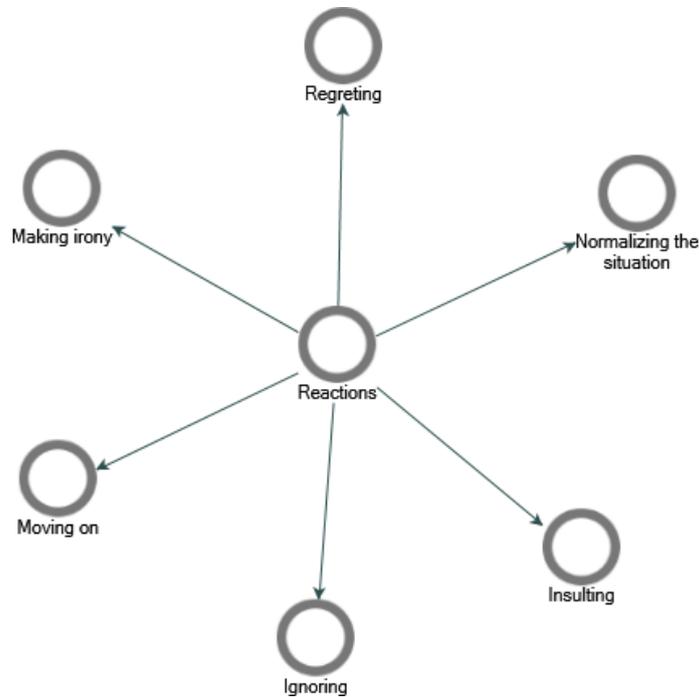

Figure 7. Reactions to Challenging Moments

It was found that the participants regret some of the things they do during the practicum such as switching to Turkish, poor class and time management. When they were asked what they would tell themselves when they feel regretful, they came up with these expressions:

- "You could do much better"
- "I never should have come here"
- "All mistake again"
- "I'm humiliated"
- "Plus one more"
- "I cannot forgive myself"
- "You could do so much better"
- "You shall not pass"

Normalizing the situation is also an option to overcome the negative feeling of the participants of the study. They do this by telling themselves "You're not a machine/ It could happen to anyone/ It can happen also to her (referring to the class teacher)".

Ignoring and trying to forget the challenging situation are other reactions that the participants experience. They state that they try not to think about so they go exercising or doing other activities that relax them. One of the participants stated that he tries to exhaust himself so that he would not think about the challenging moment.

Being ironic is another theme emerging from the data. The participants seem like using positive self-talk, but with the intonation, it can be understood that they mean just the opposite. Some examples could be "Do it again, OK!/Bravo, you messed it up!".

Insulting themselves is another reaction when people make a mistake. The participants used some expressions usually related to their intelligence such as "You moron/idiot/stupid". This negative self-talk can be no evidence of self-compassion. There are also some generalizations used such as "You always fail like this/ Bravo, messed it up again". Especially P7 used such expressions while talking about her teaching which resulted in noise and in an incomplete lesson plan. Also, P1 thought that she could have prevented the student fight in class if she had properly warned the misbehaving students. However, unlike to P7, she added that:

> It is an experience, don't worry P7. Next time you won't let that happen [P7].

Moving on in life after negative self-talk may be regarded as self-compassion because the participant seems aware that it is important to stay in the moment and not judge yourself. Some examples from the data are

- "Relax, it's OK"
- "It will be fine"
- "Hatasız kul olmaz"
- "This, too shall pass"
- "Do better next time"
- "OK, breath, you can be wrong sometimes"

The participants mentioned that positive self-talk and showing self-compassion make them feel better and continue. P5 and P14, and especially P7 emphasized that after taking a breath, it became easier for them to solve the situation or feel better and move on to the next step.

As can be seen from the findings above, preservice ELT teachers experience challenges during their practicum. These challenges can be inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Apart from the environment they experience such situations, it was found that negative themes or negative self-talk appeared more frequently in the data compared to positive self-talk to show self-compassion for the challenges experienced during the practicum.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

This study explores preservice ELT teachers' perceptions of self-compassion during the practicum. The study addresses two research questions related to the challenges that preservice teachers experience and how they react to those challenges regarding self-compassion. By utilizing focus-group interviews and semi-structured interviews, an in-depth analysis of the issue was targeted.

The findings related to the challenges experienced during the practicum revealed that the preservice teachers feel stressed and anxious inside and outside the classroom during the practicum period. The themes that emerged were instruction, class and time management. These findings are in line with the finding of the studies of Kourieos (2019), Mahmoudi (2016), Merç (2010) and Sarıçoban (2010). Similar to these studies, the current study found that lack of field knowledge, student/learner profile, and the nature of the activities cause stress and anxiety in preservice teachers during their teaching practicum. Although these are challenges that can be solved or eliminated, they need time and effort from all the stakeholders. Since teachers work with people, they may always feel the need to show compassion to their students and themselves. Thus, self-compassion may help preservice teachers' approach the challenges they experience during the practicum.

Self-compassion means having compassion for oneself, for others and showing sensitivity, patience, and affection toward them (Condon & Feldman Barret, 2013). According to Neff (2003a), showing self-compassion involves being kind and compassionate toward oneself when facing challenges, acknowledging one's negative emotions, recognizing that they exist, and moving on. There are studies that show a positive relationship between self-compassion and life satisfaction (Açıkgöz, 2019; Barnard & Curry, 2011; Neff et al., 2008; Van Dam et al., 2011). The data revealed that participants who tend to show self-compassion have the motivation to move on. It is significant for the preservice teachers not to stick to the problems but look from the bright side, learn more, practice more and become better teachers.

When the participants were asked how they react when they experience something challenging, three main themes emerged breathing, exercising and doing activities that help them relax. Breathing can be considered a mindful activity which is one of the components of showing self-compassion (Neff, 2003b). The participants stated they work on their breath when something challenging happens in their life and more specifically in the classroom. This may show that they adapt the third component of self-compassion, coming back to the moment with the help of the breath, in other words, they are being mindful. Also exercising or doing relaxing activities can be considered as activities where they show themselves self-care/self-kindness which is also related to self-compassion (Neff, 2003b).

The participants tend to think that a challenging or difficult situation could happen to anyone and they tend to tell this to themselves. The related expressions found in the data show that the participants are aware of common sense. By stating "You're not a machine", they show that being human means they can face challenges,

do mistakes or react negatively towards situations, and these reactions are normal for a human being. This finding overlaps with the third component of self-compassion, awareness of shared interests (Neff, 2003b).

When facing a challenging event or moment, the findings showed that some preservice teachers tried to move on and not overthink the event. This may imply that they are aware of being kind to themselves and acting like this may reduce their stress level. This finding is also in line with Chen's (2022) study. The participants of Chen's study were preschool teachers and the findings showed that the teachers' resilience towards stress was enhanced by self-compassion and they became less self-judgmental.

Although the preservice teachers tend to show self-compassion according to the findings of the study, themes related to negative self-talk emerged more than positive ones. Using negative self-talk may show a low level of self-confidence in the job they are doing during the practicum. This can be also supported by the findings of the focus-group interviews where the participants stated that they had difficulty in transferring theory into practice. The participants tend to underestimate their intelligence when they face a challenge and make mistakes. Such negative talk may decrease their self-esteem and the will to improve more as a teacher. Being a teacher means building relationships with the students, their parents, the administrative staff and other stakeholders in addition to teaching effectively. All these can trigger the stress level of the teachers. While teachers struggle by reducing their stress levels, novice teachers can be even more stressed (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). The current study showed that even at the very beginning of the teaching profession, namely the teaching practicum, preservice teachers experience challenges and they attempt to overcome them mostly by negative self-talk. Self-compassion during the teaching practicum may help the preservice teachers become more motivated and satisfied with their teaching. Consequently, Yang et al. (2016) also emphasize that people who are kind and show self-compassion, have courteous attitudes and approach difficulties with a non-judgmental manner evaluate their lives from a more universal perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Self-compassion in instructors has been studied by some researchers (Jennings, 2015; Tarrasch et al, 2020) and some focused on prospective teachers (Aydın, 2015; Aydın & Kuzu, 2013; Kasalak, 2020), revealing the significance of self-compassion in teaching. Foreign language teachers may feel twice as incompetent while instructing in their own tongue and another language (Tedick & Walker, 1994). Thus, short training on improving self-compassion can be provided in the faculty program/curriculum. In addition, faculty instructors can be supported to contribute to preservice teachers' self-compassion levels. More detailed information and guidance on the teaching practicum can also be beneficial for the preservice teachers to make them feel more confident and motivated for the teaching practicum. The affective and emotional state of mind can be taken into consideration while planning the teaching practicum. Preservice teachers go to their teaching practicum with their peers from the same department; perhaps, for the micro-level teaching part, the preservice teachers can be given the option to select with whom to go to practicum. Going to the teaching practicum with friends that

they feel comfortable can also help them experience more mutual and self-compassion during the practicum. Along with the practicum, the preservice teachers take reflective teaching courses where they discuss the teaching practicum. Emotional and affective activities can be integrated into those courses to help them manage their feelings and teaching during the practicum. Such a practice can also support the implication of Gibbons and Newberry's (2022) study. According to the study of Gibbons and Newberry (2022), there is a need for explicit teaching, practising and promoting self-compassion since self-compassion can have a significant role in preservice and in-service teacher development and resilience in the profession. Curriculum designers and coursebook writers of teacher training courses can integrate activities that help preservice teachers and teachers develop more understanding of the emotional and affective factors of learning and teaching.

Since the aim of this study was to explore the self-compassion perceptions of the preservice ELT teachers, further studies can focus on their self-compassion levels and analyze factors affecting them during the teaching practicum. In the literature, research on the self-compassion of preservice ELT teachers seems sparse, so more studies can be conducted with preservice teachers because they start their profession in their fourth year with the teaching practicum. Self-compassion during the practicum may also shape their future teaching and how they approach themselves emotionally. This study is limited to the specific context of the study and participants. Further study can form their sampling from various universities. Also comparing self-compassion levels of preservice teachers from different fields can also contribute to the literature on teacher training. Anxiety has been seen as a challenge for the practicum, so the relationship between anxiety and self-compassion levels can be investigated.

ETHICAL TEXT

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to the author (s) for any violations that may arise regarding the article.

To ensure ethics in the study, the participants completed a consent form and they were informed that the study was on a voluntary basis, so they could leave when they wanted to without stating a reason. The Ethics Committee Approval was received on 27.12.2022 from Anadolu University Ethics Committee with the 456429-protocol number.

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