# Exploring the role of an IBT-based Informal teaching practice at an edutainment centre on pre-service English language teachers

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## Abstract

The field experience in teacher education programs is limited to the formal teaching at assigned schools. However, there is a need for opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice teaching in other learning contexts. This multiple instrumental case study explored the role of an Inquiry-based Teaching-based informal teaching practice at an edutainment center on a group of 23 pre-service English language teachers. The data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, retrospective reflection papers and focus group interview. Findings showed that pre-service English language teachers gained valuable insights into different ways of managing the classroom and sustaining interaction with children. Furthermore, they increased their teacher awareness and became more autonomous teachers. The findings of this study have implications for teacher education program designers and teacher educators seeking to enhance the field experience of pre-service teachers.

**Keywords:** Informal teaching practice, Edutainment center, Pre-service English language teachers, Inquiry-based teaching

## Introduction

Pre-service teacher education programs equip student teachers with knowledge of content and students (KCS) and knowledge of content and teaching (KCT). While KCS refers to the knowledge that combines knowing about students and knowing about the field, KCT is the knowledge that combines knowing about teaching and knowing about the subject field. Student teachers' need for professional field experience, in which they can apply the learned teaching practices, is often neglected. Several studies put forward that pre-service teachers' field experiences should not be limited to the formal and traditional school setting, rather it must transcend to various teaching and learning contexts (Barchuk et al., 2015; Harkins & Barchuk, 2015). Thus, partnerships between teacher education programs and non-traditional learning/teaching institutions should be formed (Metz, 2005). Such opportunities can help pre-service English language teachers (PETs hereafter) grasp a better understanding of how teaching and learning take place (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). It can also be beneficial for pre-service teachers to experience how teaching takes place at non-traditional learning settings (Brayko, 2012; Harkins &

Barchuk, 2015). Besides, the need for such field experiences and partnership opportunities between institutions and teacher education programs pave the way for pre-service teachers to gain a wider perspective into teaching (Hamilton & Margot, 2019; Metz, 2005). This opportunity for pre-service teachers prepares them for "complex teaching practices" in their future careers (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89). In contrast to formal teaching environments that typically utilize lecturing as the primary method of delivery, informal teaching approaches prioritize student-centered methods of instruction. Inquiry-based teaching (IBT hereafter) is an approach focusing on problem-solving, critical and creative thinking in which students are in active involvement with question formulation and resolution. Although the literature has extensive research on PETs' formal practicum experiences, no study to date has examined pre-service English language teachers' IBT practice at a theme-based edutainment center. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the role of IBT-based informal teaching practice at an edutainment center on PETs.

## Literature review

### Pre-service teacher learning

Initial teacher education (ITE) programs provide student teachers with "essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes" needed for the teaching profession (Aydın & Ok, 2019, p. 1). The most significant component of teacher education programs is the practicum experience (Aydın & Ok, 2019). Pre-service teachers, as one of the requirements of the ITE, embark on real teaching experience in pre-assigned practicum schools (Aydın & Ok, 2019). This practicum experience is conducted within the parties of cooperating schools' administration, teacher educators at the university, and mentor/supervisor teachers (Mutlu, 2014). To specify, during the fourth year, pre-service teachers observe lessons, teachers, students, and the school environment in the fall semester followed by an in-class teaching practice in the following semester. Thus, in essence, the practicum experience lasts for two semesters consisting of observation and teaching practice.

ITE programs do not seem to effectively prepare student teachers for the real classroom dynamics (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Several reasons such as the feeling of unpreparedness, incompetency as well as the pressure of being assessed in a formal manner negatively affect candidate teachers' experiences (Merç, 2011). In a study conducted with 607 Australian pre-service teachers just completing their practicums, several concerns like classroom management, time management, and anxiety of being observed were surfaced (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000).

### Informal learning/teaching contexts

Many ITE programs across the globe place their student teachers in the formal schools in which they work together with mentor teachers and students (Burn & Mutton, 2015). Teacher educators and ITE programs should take the responsibility to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary resources and accurate guidance for them to evolve into a competent teacher (Bennett, 2013). In order to become so, it is required not to limit yourself to four walls of the classroom (Anderson & Olsen, 2006) as learning is a dynamic process that cannot be the hegemony of a single context such as formal classrooms (Flavell, 1987). It is suggested that teacher educators arrange non-traditional

teaching opportunities for student teachers in order to help them connect theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

The related literature reflects that possibly early and various teaching experiences in different contexts are of vital importance for the success of ITE programs (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Teacher education programs should not only include formal practicum experience but also various educational teaching contexts in which pre-service teachers can find the opportunity to practice their theoretical knowledge (Anderson & Olsen, 2006). Bruner (1996) underlines that learning to teach takes place across various contexts without the confinements of school-based classrooms. As given above, ITE programs realized the need for collaboration between universities and informal learning settings (McIntyre & Hagger, 1992). Correspondingly, Brayko (2012) also indicated that pre-service teachers should experience different settings from traditional K-12 classrooms. Thus, partnerships between pre-service ITE programs and informal education institutions are needed for a better preparation of future teachers (Metz, 2005). This suggests that informal learning contexts are advantageous thanks to their "hands-on, student-centered, and activity-based pedagogy" (Anderson & Olsen, 2006, p. 342). Practice in the informal environments provides teachers with the opportunity to build their understanding of teaching and learning as beginners while they learn through experience in the profession (Hamilton & Margot, 2019).

### Affordances of informal learning/teaching Contexts

These field-based experiences help pre-service teachers to gain experience and learn from the actual setting (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). The primary advantage of such programs is the application of theoretical knowledge into practice (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Such partnerships are formed with diverse purposes such as building a connection between student teachers and organizations, providing them with an opportunity to practice the theoretical knowledge and get to know young learners, understanding different learning settings, and placing them at a place where learning occurs (McDonald et al., 2014). This teaching partnership has connections to social constructivism which favors the idea of knowledge being constructed through social interactions with others as well as the environment (McDonald et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Pre-service teachers in this study are taking part in a field teaching program in which they are the active agents who build knowledge through "constructing their own understanding and through meaning-making" (Chu et al., 2018, p. 9) as purposeful involvement in informal contexts presents a valuable opportunity to observe and practice teaching (Hamilton & Margot, 2019).

Informal teaching placements present several opportunities in which pre-service teachers can put pedagogy and various teaching methods into practice (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). Bennett (2013) conducted a case study in which eight pre-service teachers tutored children in writing from various backgrounds. The results revealed field experience's contribution to pre-service teachers' development of "deeper understandings about culturally responsive pedagogy, one-on-one student–teacher interaction and scaffolding critical reflection" (Bennett, 2013, p. 371).

It should also be noted that pre-service teachers report positive attitudes towards informal teaching placements (Wade & Yarbrough, 1997), and these field experiences provide student teachers a smooth transition from being student to teacher (Ball & Cohen, 1999). During such experiences, pre-service teachers improve their self-confidence, pedagogical understanding, and teaching practices (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). Another study investigated pre-service teachers' community-based field experience in a non-school environment which provided the participants with "expanded and varied opportunities" in addition to experiencing various teaching techniques (Hamilton & Margot, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, inquiry-based field experiences were found to lead to an "increase in personal agency beliefs" (Bhattacharyya et al., 2009) which stands for an individual's capability to come up with actions for a given purpose.

### Inquiry-based teaching

Learning is fundamentally a product of deep thinking "inspired by questions" (Lee, 2014, p. 1237). Inquiry-based learning is a student-centered approach that focuses on critical thinking, problem-solving and creative thinking in which the learner is in active involvement with the question formulation and addressing a problem (Chu et al., 2018). In the traditional teaching methods, knowledge is transmitted to students in a direct way whereas in IBT, the teacher takes well advantage of questioning as a tool for not knowledge transmission but knowledge emerging from questions (Lee, 2014). The focus of the lesson is directed by the questions asked by the students. Questioning strategy, the main component of IBT, was proven to be very effective (Sun, 2012). Lee (2014) sees the inquiry-based technique as a form of questioning that can be used in the foreign language teaching context in which questions are posed to bring about personal reflections. IBT environment in foreign language learning classrooms is very advantageous as they improve language accuracy, diminish errors (Youbin, 2014), increase the classroom participation, improve critical and creative thinking (Şeker & Kömür, 2008), and makes them the seekers of new knowledge. IBT draws attention, brings up meaningful communication, improves intellectual capacity, contributes to cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Lee, 2014).

The need for informal teaching practices is extensively mentioned for PETs for many reasons. However, the literature lacks research regarding the role of informal teaching practices at edutainment centers on PETs. Thus, this study tries to fill this gap by exploring the role of IBT-based informal teaching practice at an edutainment center on PETs. Accordingly, the current study is driven by the research question:

1.  What is the role of IBT-based informal teaching practice at an edutainment on pre-service English language teachers?

## Methodology

### Research design

This study adopted multiple instrumental case study design for an in-depth exploration of a group of individuals (Creswell et al., 2007). The rationale for selecting qualitative

research design in this study was to reach an in-depth understanding of the role of IBT-based informal teaching program on PETs.

### Research context

In a joint teaching voluntary program with world-famous publishing company, 23 PETs worked as station chiefs at various stations at Kidzania. Kidzania is a world-famous informal edutainment center, and it is part of an expanding global edutainment venue with nearly 30 locations worldwide.

In this theme-based edutainment center, there are more than 50 activity stations such as gas station, car rental, archaeology museum, gym, bank, science, chemistry lab, biscuit factory, art studio, aviation academy, patty restaurant, candy factory, car service, career center, fashion house, chocolate factory, clock tower, construction site, crime scene investigation, culinary school, dental clinic, department store, driving academy, earthquake simulation center, handcrafts studio, hospital, ice-cream factory, jewelry design studio, traditional doner shop, and many more.

In these stations, children role-play the job-related duties under the supervision of a trained workstation chief who was, in this study, a PET participant. Receiving an orientation on IBT practice at Kidzania, station chiefs worked children through the steps of occupational practices such as cooking, surgery, and perfume production factory through the target language, English. To exemplify, children visiting cooking stations were required to prepare the dough, choose the flavor, mix them, and put them in the oven.

### Participants

Selected through volunteer sampling, participants in this qualitative study were 23 Turkish senior PETs enrolled at a foundation university in Istanbul during the fall semester of 2019–2020 academic years. Gender distribution was moderately balanced with 13 of the participants being female and 10 being male, with a mean age of 23. Participants were in their last year of teacher education program and active mentees at the formal practicum K12 schools.

### Data collection

The qualitative data were collected after the project had taken place. Initially, an invitation mail was sent to the volunteer PETs who took part in the project. Besides receiving university's ethical committee approval, the data collection adhered to informed consent protocols, and participants were made aware of how the data would be used in accordance with the ethical principles put forward by the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL, 2016) and British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). The data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, retrospective reflection papers and focus group interview.

### One-on-one semi-structured interviews

In-depth one-on-one interviews in semi-structural design were used to gain a deeper insight into their experiences at Kidzania. These interviews were conducted with six participants. The participants were informed about the research purpose and were asked to

sign the informed consent form. The interviews taking 15 min in length were conducted in their native language to prevent a possible language barrier. A sample prompt for this was as follows: How was the IBT-based teaching experience at an edutainment center for you?

### Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews provide a collective view emerging out of the interaction between participants. By employing a focus group interview, the researchers of this study aimed to create a discussion environment in which various lived experiences accompanied by their reflections are brought to the surface. A sample prompt for this was as follows: Did you face any challenges, and if so, how did you overcome them?

### Retrospective reaction papers

Participants were asked to write retrospective reaction papers (Schön, 1983) related to their experiences at Kidzania. The retrospective reaction can be defined as "a conscious, collaborative effort to systematically re-examine a process in order to learn from it" (Krogstie, 2009, p. 418). With this data collection method, the researchers of the study aimed to gain more conscious and well-thought manifestation of their experiences. The following question was our prompt for this data collection instrument: Considering your IBT-based informal teaching practice, how would you reflect on your instructional attainments?

### Data analysis

The current study did not have a pre-existing framework or themes; thus, inductive content analysis was adopted, and data were analyzed in a bottom-up way. The qualitative data consisting of semi-structured interviews, retrospective reaction papers and focus group interview were carefully read and transcribed using intelligent verbatim transcription technique. The data were inductively coded in the style of the grounded theory approach to data analysis. Open, axial, and selective coding was employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researchers elicited data-driven codes using MAXQDA 2020 and constantly discussed the emerging codes to ensure inter-coder reliability. The initial open coding stage helped to realize the common words and phrases during the reading of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Then, these 214 initial codes were integrated into abstract concepts via axial coding. The concepts were themed under four categories which were subdivided into two or three sub-themes. Expert opinion regarding the codes and the themes was taken after which minor modifications were made. Instead of coming up with generalizable issues, we aimed to present the participants' voices through thick description through the data.

### Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria were employed in regard to the qualitative research paradigm. For ensuring credibility, one of the elements of trustworthiness, the data were collected over a period of three months aiming for prolonged engagement (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Before and after the implementation, the researchers were in close contact with PETs; thus, leading

to rapport and trust. Thereafter, the triangulation of data was ensured by collecting data with three different data collection techniques and at three different time points (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To increase credibility by providing an external check on our research, an experienced researcher was called to probe into the authors' thinking around all parts of the research process; thus, bringing about peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Peer scrutiny criteria was also fulfilled as the findings were presented in an online qualitative research course and a great deal of feedback was received from the other PhD candidates not to mention the professor himself. To increase the credibility of the data, member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) was adopted; henceforth, the researchers restated and summarized interviewees' points to be validated by them.

Setting and the research context along with the key characteristics of the participants were described in detail to ensure the criterion of transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The qualitative study procedures including data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation followed in this study were neatly described to ensure the criterion of dependability which refers to the processes followed in a qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Data were analyzed and findings were presented objectively without any researcher bias. Thus, to fulfil the principle of conformability, we strictly followed the steps of qualitative research methodology with a great emphasis on trustworthiness by receiving expert opinions, applying prolonged engagement, data triangulation, peer debriefing, peer scrutiny and member checking.

## Findings

Our data analysis revealed four main themes of the role of IBT-based informal teaching practice at an edutainment center on PETs (Table 1). Extracts from the participants' statements provide evidence for these emerging themes.

### I learned how to manage the classroom

A key theme we identified was related to PETs' participants' management skills, which we called "I learned how to manage classroom" They reported acquiring several management-related gains such as classroom management, crisis management, and time management.

**Table 1** Major themes with their sub-themes as regards the role of the program on pre-service English language teachers

| I learned how to manage the classroom | I learned to sustain interaction with children | I felt more autonomous | I increased my awareness |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overcoming class distractions | Asking good questions | Challenging myself as a teacher | Interactivity in class |
| Overcoming unpredictable incidents | Giving verbal feedback | Questioning my teacher roles | Relationships with students |
| | Recasting correction | Rethinking my perceptions of teaching | Use of mother tongue |

*Overcoming class distractions.* PETs encountered many unexpected situations helping them to develop these management-related skills. One participant highlighted an example of how a class can distract from the topic by saying:

> *With this method, students go out of the topic. That is the real language. It lets us get to know the students better. It takes us to other topics as well. Our topic was about baby care however, the topic went to other directions . . . It was fun. I had unexpected moments, unexpected answers . . . We become the moderator; the teacher manages the process.*

It seems that PETs were not anxious about the way classroom distractions and moreover, they were effectively managing the process.

In addition to classroom management, PETs, owing to the nature of the edutainment environment, had time constraints; to clarify, there were groups of children coming in every 15 min. This situation provided them with the skill of time-management. Relating to that, one participant described:

> *Children were coming in and out every fifteen minutes and at that point, I need to manage the time very effectively. I learned it by experiencing it over and over again. I have devised micro and macro plans. As for the micro plan, I planned my questions and instructions. I also needed a macro plan because I did not have the chance to perform the micro plan because of changing dynamics. My macro plan was to create value for children and make them happy.*

This implies that the fast-moving nature of this informal teaching experience provided the participants with time management skills over time.

*Overcoming unpredictable incidents.* PETs encountered various unpredictable incidents occurring in the sessions. Regarding this, one pointed out:

> *There were some students who would try to misbehave just for the attention. However, as we showed them that their opinions matter to us, and they do not need to act out for attention, the misbehaving would decrease, and students would leave with a smile on their faces.*

PETs in this example effectively managed the crisis they encountered and more importantly, they did that by creating a bond with the students leading to smiles on their faces.

PETs reported unpredictable technical problems occurring in a few stations that impeded the process. Regarding this, she says:

> *On the second day, a technical problem happened. A metal object got stuck in the machine and children started to freak out and I began to look for ways to fix the situation. This was one of the most terrible situations that you may have encountered here but somehow, we overcame it, and I thought that in a classroom, there may be so many uninvited things so as a teacher, I must be confident and cold-blooded, and I must learn to how to handle this kind of situations which is so important thing for every aspect of life.*

This quotation shows that PETs reported having dealt with the unpredicted incidents occurring at the site, and they were also aware of the fact that these incidents could take place in every aspect of life including formal teaching practices.

Participants developed a series of management-related skills such as crisis management, classroom management, and time management skills all of which are of paramount importance in formal teaching practice as well. Furthermore, their perceptions of management before and after the change are consistent with the apparent progress they made. All in all, they seem to have learned how to overcome class distractions and unpredictable incidents.

### I learned to sustain interaction with children

Another emerging theme was PETs' high level of interaction with children during the program. Accordingly, we called this theme "I learned to sustain interaction with children" as it focuses on the instructional practices with children such as asking questions, giving feedback, and recasting correction.

*Asking good questions.* Owing to the program's inquiry-based method feature, the participants reported gaining greater skill in teacher questioning in terms of differentiated questioning, improvised questioning, and creative questioning. The program was reported to contribute to teachers' questioning skills, and the participants argued becoming skilled inquirers as they were able to come up with related questions on the spot. Participants developed such a natural skill for questioning that one of them illustrated *"I was not getting to the lesson because of asking questions over and over again."* This shows that the PETs were skillfully inducing questions on the spot. Besides, they attached importance to asking questions that stimulate students' thinking. One participant explained: *"I asked more creative questions to make children think and I did not completely follow the script."* Similarly, another participant reported: "*I asked interrogative questions to make them think.*" In addition to creative questions, PETs underlined those questions should also be authentic, and one described: "*What I observed is that children when they are asked real questions that signal our curiosity, give related and meaningful responses. Purposive questions... emerging out of curiosity...*" This shows that the PETs made observations regarding teacher questions and applied the observed techniques into their instruction; to clarify, they asked meaningful questions that show curiosity towards children's thoughts.

PETs are well aware of the importance of teacher questions. To point out, they did not ask the identical questions to every student; rather, they got to know their students and personalized their questions. One mentioned: *"I also learned how to lead vary the question and I tried to provide diversity in my questions."* Similarly, another participant explained: "*Questions are vital. We start with asking questions to get to know them [students] and their background... then we ask questions that are related to them.*" It seems that PETs developed an understanding of differentiated questioning, and they asked relatable and differentiated questions to children. Equally important, a participant made a noteworthy discovery regarding questioning and told:

> *We are asking the questions then we are waiting for the answer; however, this is a very active area. Teachers should not be passive at that interval when waiting for a response from children. Constant attention is needed, we sometimes break off. . .*

> *. This is one of the things that I put into my pocket. I've learned a lot regarding the nature of asking questions. An effective teacher should manage the area in-between.*

This shows that not only did the participants become aware of the importance of questioning and employ questioning strategies, but they also made context-related discoveries regarding teacher questioning.

*Giving verbal feedback.* The participating PETs found themselves answering to various questions coming from the children at the site. These questions were not always related to the topic being covered. However, PETs always found a way to sustain interaction with students. One participant said: "*I also learned how to lead the remarks; vary the question.*" This demonstrates how PETs were guiding the incoming responses and posing somewhat more pertinent questions to include them in the discussion. Correspondingly, one participant gave an impressive analogy about giving feedback by saying:

> *It is like a football game; they pass the ball to me, and I turn that pass into a good assist. They should be the ones who score the goal. They should taste the victory, and they should be remembered as the scorers so that they can continue to learn. Learning a language is a matter of process; and I cannot be product oriented.*

Another example of sustaining interaction by giving feedback is evident in a participant's utterances who said:

> *When I see the hints of trying in them, I would help them by giving more clues about the answer in the disguise of another question. That was so fun to do for me and the student. The process would be full of questions, opinions, and interaction.*

This demonstrates that PETs' feedbacks were intentionally designed to bring about more language production by students. Furthermore, they are aware of the importance of verbal feedback in students' production. In conclusion, findings imply that PETs were aware of the importance of feedback and able to sustain the interaction with children by giving feedback or a hint that led to more language production/exchange.

*Recasting correction* PETs reported that some children were talking out of topic or making mistakes and no intervention was made owing to the idea that it was the *real language use.* This shows that the pre-service teachers refrained from correcting the students' mistakes, a common practice associated with the traditional teacher role. Moreover, they perceived language as a tool, rather than something to be learned. One participant asserted: "*Language should be used as a tool just like we did [in the program], and children didn't care about English.*" This shows that instead of presenting the knowledge about the language, PETs perceive teaching as a rule-free exploration of language by saying: "*We can only ensure learning if we provide freedom.*"

In conclusion, the aforementioned findings demonstrate that this experience provided PETs with advanced questioning skills and paved the way for exploration of questions.

## I felt more autonomous

PETs transformed into more autonomous teachers owing to the demanding requirements of method and context; thus, we named this theme as "I felt more autonomous" as this aspect reflects participants' developing autonomy.

*Challenging myself as a teacher* As stated before, PETs were to follow a script during the session. During the focus group interview, 15 out of 16 participants noted that they gave up the script that they were obliged to use because of its limitation and excessive informative content. They also reported that they did not depend on the script after a while, and they directed the session in accordance with the needs and interests of the target group present in that session. Regarding this, one participant indicated:

> *With the given script, we had a direction to go to. Then we took control and decided on our own script, we enabled students to take their own responsibilities on their learning process.*

PETs were not content with the fixed script and felt the power to take the matter into their own hands by leaving the script partially or completely, thus leading to developed autonomy. They also uttered that they felt more autonomous after leaving the script.

Prior to the program, PETs claimed that they had doubts about their capacity to teach. Their utterances demonstrated that they had low self-efficacy regarding the upcoming experience and moreover, they did not have familiarity with the IBT method. Concerning this, one of the participants commented: "*I have not heard or read about IBT secondly, even though I had theoretical knowledge of how to teach English young learners, I had no chance to practice in real life.*" However, following the experience, they asserted that they were actually able to hook the students they were teaching and one of them added: "*I was able to effectively channel my message across.*" This shows that the participants challenged themselves as teachers and succeeded through this program.

*Questioning my teacher roles* PETs questioned their teacher roles, and their understanding of teacher concept changed. They did not see teaching as a means of transmitting the knowledge or following some pre-determined steps; instead, they questioned the typical teacher role and when needed, they took on various roles regarding teachers' affective, instructional, and facilitator aspects. In order to engage students in the process, PETs needed to change their roles. This is exemplified by a participant: "*When they started to get bored, we let them eat the fruits on the stand, and we encouraged them to eat, and this led to active participation afterward.*" This shows that PETs acted up as if they were one of the children, and this led to the active participation of that student.

Regarding changing teacher roles, a participant explained: "*When the environment is provided, it is enough. Game and English are intertwined in an environment... An environment of play should be provided*" This implies that PETs realized that a teacher's role is also to create a game environment for their students. Another participant underlines the importance of the teachers' environment creation by saying: "*Effective teachers can give every student a chance to participate in the session by choosing the right questions and most importantly by creating a safe environment*" This implies that PETs assume it is the teacher's role to create a safe environment for students. To clarify, she further explains:

> *What I deduced from this experience was that an effective and efficient teacher should create suitable conditions, ask suitable questions, and when students were not pressurized, and most importantly when they have fun, the learning will take place and they will communicate with us in the target language.*

These findings imply that participants continually questioned their teacher roles, and they perceived teaching as something beyond the traditional reflections.

*Rethinking my perceptions of teaching* The participants perceived teaching as a means of moderating the learning process in which they step back from the center of the lesson. Regarding this, one described: "*We become a moderator and manage the process. We should not have limits and should not be at the center. A teacher should step back and take on the role of the moderator.*" PETs also rethought their perceptions of teaching by referring to how children learn; and one said: "*They [children] were learning by living.*"

In conclusion, this experience helped PETs to challenge themselves as a teacher, question their teacher roles and rethink their perceptions of teaching; thus, transforming them into more autonomous teachers.

### I increased my awareness

There were reports of increase in the PETs' awareness regarding interactivity in class, relationship with students, and use of mother tongue; thus, we called this theme "I increased my awareness."

*Interactivity in class.* This experience helped PETs to increase their awareness regarding interactivity in class as they observed various types of interactions among students. The participants put forward that children were warning each other about the mother language use, giving peer-feedback, helping each other to understand the instruction, simplifying the instruction for their friends to comprehend, and encouraging others to speak English, the mandatory medium of communication. To specify, one of the participants explained:

> *The students were helping each other and guiding each other in the group . . . giving peer-feedback. One's English was really good, and he served as a facilitator . . . He took leadership and simplified what I said.*

Similarly, another participant added: "*Some students would cooperate with each other to understand us. They would talk in pairs to translate our words and give answers to us.*" This shows that PETs witnessed various interaction instances, and they were tolerant towards these naturally occurring interactions.

In their own interactions with children, one of PETs noticed weakness and said:

> *I noticed another weakness in my teaching. I was not waiting enough time for them to answer. I was so excited with a brand new popped-up question that I forgot to be calm and patient, so I tried to stay calm and patient for their answers.*

This shows that the participant, after noticing a perceived weakness, showed self-regulation; to clarify, she reminded herself to stay calm and patient while waiting for answers from students. This shows that participants increased their awareness in regard to interaction.

*Relationships with students* PETs also developed an awareness towards their relationship with students. They highlighted the need for relieving the children, making them feel safe and happy in the session. They hold the view that children's feelings and ideas need to be attached importance to, and an emotional connection must be constructed. About this emotional connection, one stated: "*When you understand how they are feeling*

*and act accordingly, they disclose themselves and this makes the conversation smoother."* With that in mind, they believe that students should not feel lonely and excluded in the class. Regarding this, a participant explained: "*We wanted to make children happy, and we took emotions as our guide, and we didn't let them feel outcast.*" On top of that, they argued that teachers should also know how to have fun with them and accordingly, one remarked: "*I was in the pilot station, and I had fun with children, and this reflected on children they had great fun, and an effective teacher should know how to have fun with children.*" A major leap in teachers' relationship with their students was apparent owing to the fact that at the start of the program they were afraid as one noted: "*I was afraid because I had never been this close with children before.*" However, their awareness toward relationships with students changed positively and at the end of the program, one of PETs added: "*As I enjoyed every second, I spent with them, I started to feel like a good teacher.*"

*Use of mother tongue* PETs' awareness regarding the use of mother tongue by children was observed to have changed. Participants indicated their initial intolerance towards the use of the mother tongue by students in the EFL context. However, their perceptions towards the use of L1 was observed to evolve completely in the end. Even though the use of native language was forbidden, PETs sometimes needed to let children code-switch to their native language to get their messages clearly received by peers. One of the participants highlighted this with a very vivid explanation by saying:

> Children tried to communicate among themselves. They were trying to solve what was being instructed. We let translanguaging practices, they were free to talk in their native language as well. If I were asked whether I would allow L1 last year, I'd definitely say NO and I'd stress that only the target language should be spoken in the class. Now I say both are cool.

This shows that the participating PETs' awareness regarding students' translanguaging increased as well.

## Discussion and conclusion

Not only educators but also pre-service teachers perceive teaching practice as the most significant component of ITE programs (Aydın & Ok, 2019; Zeichner, 1990). Pre-service teachers' teaching experiences should not be limited to four walls of a traditional classroom and instead, it should transcend to various teaching contexts (Barchuk et al., 2015; Brayko, 2012; Bruner, 1996; Harkins & Barchuk, 2015). Thus, we formed a partnership with a non-traditional learning/teaching institution as it was suggested by Metz (2005). The rationale behind this was to create a third space (Bhabha, 1990) that can help pre-service teachers experience teaching at non-traditional learning contexts (Harkins & Barchuk, 2015), gain a wider perspective into teaching and grasp a better understanding of how teaching/learning take place in such environments (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). IBT-based informal teaching practices can help PETs be better informed about their management and interaction practices along with gaining autonomy and increased awareness. We observed that the process of teaching at an informal teaching edutainment context made the participants more

aware of management-related skills, the way interaction is sustained, the importance of teacher autonomy, and their understanding of themselves.

Pre-service teachers, regarding formal teaching practices, complain about the feeling of unpreparedness, the pressure of being assessed, and the perceived incompetency (Merç, 2011). On the other hand, in the informal teaching experience of our study, the pre-service teachers were trained before the implementation and there was no pressure of assessment during the process; thus, pre-service teachers' aforementioned concerns can be resolved with such complementary practices embedded into ITE programs. Pre-service teachers also report practicum-related concerns such as classroom management, time management, and anxiety of being observed (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000). However, with the experience provided in the current study, our PETs seem to have developed classroom management, time management, and crisis management skills.

Such experiences have the potential to improve pre-service teachers' pedagogical understanding (Hamilton & Margot, 2019). IBT, on the other hand, helps to create a student-centered environment in which questions are used as tools for meaning making (Lee, 2004). As a result of our IBT-based informal teaching practice, our participants learned to sustain interaction with students by asking good questions, giving feedback, and recasting corrections as the IBT method required. They did not completely follow the prescribed script; instead, they developed several instructional techniques and made meaning out of their experiences that can be regarded as a sign of developed teacher autonomy. To specify, they were creating links between theory and practice and overcoming context-related constraints by altering their beliefs and practices (Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017). In a similar vein, Carlson (2018) found that informal teaching experiences helped student teachers to reflect on their practices and make meaning of these practices, thus, leading to more developed autonomy. This experience also helped pre-service teachers to increase their awareness regarding interactivity, relationships with students, use of mother tongue, and learners' abilities. Researchers in the field also claim that such experiences enrich pre-service teachers' understanding and awareness regarding the specifics of how learning and teaching occur beyond traditional contexts (Brayko, 2012; Harkins & Barchuk, 2015). Our participants, in the same fashion, enriched their understanding and awareness of learning and teaching in the informal edutainment context.

In addition to formal teaching practices provided at the end of ITE programs, teacher educators need to provide opportunities for PETs to practice their teaching at informal teaching contexts which could help them to gain several skills. Given the opportunity to do so, PETs can reveal and work on their weaknesses that they have noticed during the process; thus, paving way for professional development. Partnerships between institutions take place quite often but generally "they are not written about" (Carlson, 2018, p. 3); thus, this partnership can inform the future practices based on informal teaching. Such experiences have the potential to be "a springboard to develop insightful and progressive educational thought" (Baker, 2014, p. 63). Similar experiences can be set up by organizing progressive educational partnerships between universities and informal learning environments (Baker, 2014; McKinnon & Lamberts, 2014).

**Limitations and further research**

As this was a one-time project, we were not able to observe long-term insights stemming from prolonged engagement. Participants' experiences were significantly related to the profile of children whose selection and elaboration were out of our reach. Also, the findings may not be applicable to other pre-service (language) teachers in other countries owing to the contextual nature of the current study. The data come from a single group of participants, PSETs; perspectives of teacher educators in charge could also provide deeper insights into the phenomena.

Further research can investigate informal teaching experiences of prospective teachers in other majors. Also, other subfields of SLA such as motivation, engagement, autonomy, interaction and willingness to participate can be studied. In terms of teacher education, questioning strategies, feedback practices, classroom management and conflict resolution in informal teaching environments can be explored.

## Appendix

**Interview Protocol for Semi-Structured One-on-One Interviews**

Name: _____          Gender: _____

Age:_____          Assigned Role at the Center: _____

**Researchers**: Our chat will be taped and then verbatim transcribed. This eliminates the need for hasty notetaking and enables me to accurately recall what was stated. The text will be scrubbed of any identifying information, and the audio will be stored in a safe place. In order to keep track of items to follow up on without interrupting you, I could make some notes as I go along. The interview should last an hour and is entirely optional; you are free to leave at any time. *Before we start, do you have any questions for me?*

**Researchers define the research aim and elaborates on the interview process:** We want to talk in-depth about your experience with the IBT-based teaching methodology employed at the entertainment center today. The conversation will help me better comprehend your viewpoints about our study. There is no right or wrong answer; instead, I'm interested in hearing about your personal ideas, which I anticipate will differ from those of others. What do you mean by that? is just one of the many inquiries I'll ask to comprehend your viewpoint. I will purposely leave extended gaps following my questions because these kinds of inquiries can be a little awkward and may call for you to consider what you've gone through. Please take your time and let me know if you require any clarification.

*Semi-Structured One-on-One Interview Questions*

- How was the IBT-based teaching experience at an edutainment center for you?

*Prompts: Academically, instructional-wise, giving feedback, asking questions*

- How would you describe your relationship with the children at the site?

*Prompts: Any specific example?*

- How would you describe the interplay between the setting and methodology employed?

*Prompts: Any specific case/scene?*

- What guided your inquiry-based questions in the process?

**Interview Protocol for Focus Group Interviews**

**Researchers**: Greeting and introduction to the purpose of meeting.

**Researchers**: Our group chat will be taped and then verbatim transcribed. This eliminates the need for hasty notetaking and enables me to accurately recall what was stated. The text will be scrubbed of any identifying information, and the audio will be stored in a safe place. In order to keep track of items to follow up on without interrupting you, I could make some notes as I go along. The interview should last an hour and is entirely optional; you are free to leave at any time. *Before we start, do you have any questions for me?*

**Researchers define the research aim and elaborates on the interview process**: We want to talk in-depth about your experience with the IBT-based teaching methodology employed at the entertainment center today. The conversation will help me better comprehend your viewpoints about our study. There is no right or wrong answer; instead, I'm interested in hearing about your personal ideas, which I anticipate will differ from those of others. What do you mean by that? is just one of the many inquiries I'll ask to comprehend your viewpoint. I will purposely leave extended gaps following my questions because these kinds of inquiries can be a little awkward and may call for you to consider what you've gone through. Please take your time and let me know if you require any clarification.

*Focus Group Interview Questions*

- Did you face any challenges, and if so, how did you overcome them?
- What was the role of the setting in your IBT-based practices?
- What were some differences between the formal and this informal teaching practice?
- How was the informal learning environment?
- How did it feel to teach at such a setting?

After these questions are asked and answers are gathered, participants are asked if there is anything else they'd want to add.

**Retrospective Reaction Paper Instructions**

Name: _____          Gender: _____

Age: _____          Assigned Role at the Center: _____

1. Write about your experience with IBT -based teaching method at the edutainment center.
2. What role did this experience play in your teaching practices?

3. Considering your IBT-based informal teaching practice, how would you reflect on your instructional attainments?

## Declarations

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## Publisher's Note