

A Study of the Stressors Preservice Teachers from an
East Tennessee Education Program Have Faced During COVID-19

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to look into the stressors that preservice teachers, specifically from a teacher education program in East Tennessee, have faced due to the COVID-19 virus and how they handled it. The chosen participants of this study will be interviewed about their own personal experiences and elaborate on stressors that range from technology to working with parents during virtual or in-person learning. Overall, the results revealed that preservice teachers mainly had issues with either helping families navigate technology or dealing with technology themselves. Also, the results showed that these educators had not very many issues with obtaining their teaching license. Further research is recommended to learn more about how to cope with this virus while in a school setting.

Keywords: COVID-19, Preservice Teachers, Virtual Learning, In-Person Learning, Technology

 IRB Decision Testing Exempt C

It looks like your study is exempt from IRB approval. You should have your study approved by the highest person in the department or area overseeing the targeted participants. For example, a campus-wide survey should be approved by the President, a student or faculty survey should be approved by the Academic Dean, and a survey specific to a certain major should be approved by the Area Chair. [Refer to 45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(5\)](#) However, you should carefully review all procedures and questions to ensure that anonymity is protected especially in the case of institutional surveys where questions such as age, race and gender could be used to identify participants even if they are not asked for their names.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The year 2020 was abnormal in the fact that the COVID-19 virus emerged and education will most likely never be the same. When such an event occurs, no one is quite sure how to approach the issues beginning to rise because of it. The only real disastrous events that teachers have dealt with in the classroom in the past go along with natural disasters, other diseases, etc. In fact, “studies of the impact of events like earthquakes, arson and meningitis outbreaks point to the necessity of disaster preparedness predicated on clearly defined roles, priorities, and use of resources” (Martinez & Broemmel, p. 111). While being prepared for such events is essential, it is hard to be prepared for something you never expected to happen. Most of the time guesswork is used to deal with these new issues or the process of trial and error. Nevertheless, technology was a great help in keeping teachers and families connected. However, that does not mean it was easy to keep students engaged and continually doing their work without being in the presence of their teachers. Preservice teachers and classroom teachers have had to work together to conquer many challenges that came up because of COVID-19, even if most teachers did not have a preservice teacher to assist them. Consequently, technology has not solved all the stressors that these teachers faced. In fact, some students did not have the resources to join in online learning. Unless schools provided the resources for them, these students had to stick to work on paper or they had to go to school in-person. These issues and more were pushed onto educators, therefore thrust onto preservice teachers as well, and the way they had to deal with them varied from school to school. As a result, preservice teachers entering this field in 2020 had to experience a shaky start to their choice of a career.

Statement of the Problem

There is not much information about managing classrooms in this new environment as it is very new and even medical professionals were struggling to understand COVID-19 as a whole. Preservice and new teachers were put in this unfamiliar situation without any purposed solutions. Specifically for preservice teachers, this seemed like an inopportune time to be entering the teaching field. A great amount of what they had been taught in their teacher preparation courses had to be altered to fit everything that had changed. However, their placements still had to be completed during such an unusual time. Without very much information on how to teach during a global pandemic, teachers had no answers and had to come up with their own methods on the spot.

Purpose of the Study

Since all of this anxiety with COVID-19 is brand new, preservice teachers need to gather information and find answers to manage a school year like the one they experienced before they gained their license to teach. No one is quite sure what future school years will look like, but it will most likely be very different from pre-pandemic conditions. This study will look into the stressors that preservice teachers, specifically from a teacher education program in East Tennessee, faced and how they handled it. Whether the stressors involved technology, parents, etc., these preservice teachers will shed light on their own personal experience and how they plan to continue in this new era of education.

Significance of the Study

The COVID-19 virus is a new and unexpected addition to the world of education. There are many people who worry about the effects this virus will have on students in the future. This pandemic is still currently happening and education is still like it has never been before. The goal of this study is to shine some light on what stressors these preservice teachers have faced and,

hopefully, it will be able to help teachers now and in the future continue to cope with school either in-person or online during COVID-19.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do preservice teachers feel about how the pandemic was handled by their school/district during their time at their placement?

RQ 2: What have been the major stressors that preservice teachers have faced during this pandemic?

RQ 3: How was the process to obtain a teaching license affected by COVID-19?

RQ 4: How have these teachers handled using technology? Was it hard to get used to or easy?

Limitations

- 1) The study will be conducted from the view of preservice teachers who attended the specific teacher education program and will not reflect every preservice teacher's experience of COVID-19.
- 2) The participants' answers will remain anonymous and some information given may not be included to keep the participant protected.

Overview of the Study

This research study is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction and includes the problem being researched, significance of the study, the purpose of the study, and the limitations. The second chapter includes the review of literature related to the study. The third chapter covers the methodology of how the research was gathered. In chapter four, the findings of the study are analyzed, and chapter five is the summary of the findings related to the study that includes conclusions and recommendations for future research related to this topic.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

The year 2020 has been a whirlwind of emotions and desperate actions to ensure that students are still receiving the instruction they need during this pandemic. However, teachers have faced many new challenges and stressors during this time that they never thought to be prepared for. These problems span from issues with technology to making sure that less privileged students are still on task. Not only have teachers in the United States had to scramble to find solutions to issues brought up by COVID-19, but teachers all around the world are facing similar problems. This review will cover all of this and more to show how much stress has been added to educators' lives.

Teacher Preparedness for the Shutdown

Back in the spring of 2020, schools began to shut down all over the United States due to the outbreak of coronavirus. An article titled "COVID-19 and School Closures" talks about these school closings along with schools around the world. "School closures were not limited to the US. By mid-April, 192 countries had closed schools, affecting more than 90% (nearly 1.6 billion) of the world's students" (Donohue et al, 2020, p. 845). Teachers, in reality, were not alone in their concerns and complete confusion of COVID-19. Teachers all around the globe were experiencing similar issues and no one was sure when this pandemic would come to end. Not only was the worry of the virus being spread to students in their minds, but teachers were also heavily concerned with their own family or even their own health. Many teachers, according to an article called "COVID-19 Is Creating a School Personnel Crisis," are considered vulnerable in contracting the coronavirus. The actual statistics are that "at least 18 percent, or nearly

646,000, of all public and private school teachers are older than age 55” (Bailey & Schurz, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, these teachers, who are more likely than younger teachers to get COVID-19, have to be extra careful and may prefer to work from home until the virus simmers down.

COVID-19 has definitely been something that educators never expected to deal with in their career. When schools first closed down, online learning went from weeks to months and teachers had many challenges coming their way (Trybus, 2020, p. 6). Teachers could not pinpoint or have a precise date of in-person return, so they had to make due with whatever technology tools they had for online learning. No one really knew what to do. According to an article called “Learning to Walk All Over Again: Insights From Some International School Educators and School Leaders in South, Southeast and East Asia During the COVID Crisis,” teachers had to create lessons in a whole new way and, as the title suggests, teachers ended up “learning how to walk all over again, while simultaneously showing the way to others in this new world reality” (Stasel, 2020, p. 97). As hard as it has been, teachers have been pushing to keep instruction as top quality as possible.

Since students and teachers were not in the same room, teachers were still trying to create lessons that would be engaging. An article titled “COVID-19 School Closure-Related Changes to the Professional Life of a K–12 Teacher” talked about this very issue and how difficult it was to create instruction for all students. More specifically, it states, “Confined to working from home, with existing lesson plans no longer adequate, challenged to quickly learn new technologies and removed from students themselves, many teachers experienced the single most traumatic and transformative event of the modern era” (Kaden, 2020, p. 1). It seemed like teachers were scrambling for the right strategies and lessons to teach. No previous school year could prepare

them for what was in store. Most teachers' initial reactions to the shutdown involved panic and rush (Kim & Asbury, 2020, p. 1070). Teachers who had never used technology for instruction had to quickly adapt and begin using it full time.

Teacher Inexperience with Technology

With the onset of COVID-19, teachers had to immediately switch their instruction to online format in the snap of a finger. According to an article titled "Teachers as Students: Adapting to Online Methods of Instruction and Assessment in the Age of COVID-19," not every teacher was as open and flexible to online instruction due to the fact that they were not accustomed to this sort of format. More specifically, it states "that regardless of comfort level, teachers had no choice but to plunge head-first into the pool of technology. Some teachers were already comfortable with the use of technology, while others rarely used online teaching tools to direct student learning in the traditional face-to-face classroom" (Nasr, 2020, p.169). Although technology has been a lifesaver for teachers during this unexpected pandemic, there are still teachers who never became familiar with technology and never planned on using it for instruction on a daily basis. Now, the only choice is technology and plans have had to drastically change. However, if teachers who are struggling take the time to master certain technology tools, this pandemic can bring their teaching methods into the twenty-first century.

When used in the appropriate way, technology can be proven very useful for students, especially concerning their need to socialize with those their own age. Rather than just assigning online tasks and nothing else, the article called "Teaching, Technology, and Teacher Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stories from the Field" encourages teachers to incorporate video conferencing in their daily online structure. It has always been very crucial for students to work and discuss in groups about what they are learning, and this article advocates that this

remain true even in remote learning. It even says, “Pedagogical practices, such as breakout sessions, where students can chat in groups with the teacher moving from group to group using tools such as Zoom or Skype can allow for more collaborative opportunities, thereby enhancing teacher presence” (Ferdig et al, 2020, p. 94). Although students will not be face-to-face, academic discussions can still occur online and be just as effective as if they were in-person. Of course, this is something teachers and students will have to get used to, but this pandemic is pushing educators to take that risk and venture into things they are unfamiliar with. Utilizing the proper technology tools, with the right knowledge of these tools, can change the game when it comes to online learning. To make this type of learning as realistic as in-person instruction, not only will discussions need to be prioritized but also teacher-student feedback.

As expected when it comes to distance learning, connecting with students has never been so difficult to do. An important part of any instruction has always been giving specific feedback to students, and the article “COVID-19 disruption an opportunity to rethink assessment” supports nothing less. More specifically, the article states, “A key component of formative assessment is feedback — ongoing communication between teacher and student about significant learning goals. Its primary purpose is to improve learning” (Bennett, 2020, p. 3). During remote learning thus far, teachers have not only focused all of their attention into connecting with their students but they have also had to think about how they are going to effectively instruct in this new sort of setting. How are they going to pass on information and assess students? How will they provide feedback? All of these questions, and more, have caused major stress for educators and technology can play a role in reducing that stress. However, it is important to note that when a teacher and their students are not physically together, giving purposeful feedback can become very hard and more time-consuming. According to an article called “Online Lessons During

COVID-19,” teachers need to prepare themselves and anticipate that virtual learning will take up more of their time (Igra, 2020). Nonetheless, if teachers become more educated on technology and how to use it, all of this anxiety surrounding instruction can be lessened.

Teachers' Struggle to Connect with Students

Before schools shut down, disparities between students' financial backgrounds already affected their involvement in learning. Similarly, now that school is happening during a pandemic and more online than ever, there are still these inequalities but in a different way. According to an article titled “Inequalities in home learning and schools,” students who come from various backgrounds are spending different amounts of time on their home learning during this pandemic. In fact, it states that “children eligible for free school meals, those with lower-educated parents and those in single parent families will spend less time in home learning than their peers” (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020, p. 23). This might be due to the fact that these students may not receive assistance with their work at home, but in any case they are not getting the right amount of instruction per day. Another reason these students may not be able to get as much help or instruction during this time of online learning is because they do not have the proper resources. The article “COVID-19 and social mobility impact brief #1: school shutdown” brings up this very fact and how it will affect these students in the long run. The article says that “not all students will have equal access to this online provision, and without additional action, this risks further opening-up already existing attainment gaps, with the impacts felt the most by those from the poorest backgrounds” (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020, p. 2). No one is quite sure how this pandemic will affect the future, but it will most likely not affect these students in a positive way if they are not in-person for school. However, teachers are still working very hard to ensure that

all students are engaged and receiving the supplies they need to succeed. These problems, though they may be similar, are being handled in different ways from people all around the world.

Teachers Around the World

Although it may seem to educators like they were alone during the shutdown, schools all around the world were experiencing the same issues. In reality, “more than 1.5 billion enrolled students of all ages from all around the globe experienced interruption of education which equals nearly 90% of the global student population” (Bozkurt et al, 2020, p.1). COVID-19 hit a lot of countries unexpectedly and most were scrambling to find solutions. Most countries quickly decided to use online applications to connect with their students, but not all countries chose this option. According to an article titled “How are countries addressing the Covid-19 challenges in education? A snapshot of policy measures,” many countries (such as France, Mexico, Argentina, etc.) decided to use television to deliver learning content (Chang & Yano, 2020, par. 3). All in all, teachers around the world used technology of all kinds to deliver their lessons to their students in an engaging way.

Though most of the responsibility of instruction was put on teachers, in some countries the parents were a big part of online learning. While teachers would still create tasks for the students, some parents were anticipated to be a big part in their child’s education, bigger than they have been used to. For example, in Germany “parents were expected to implement these tasks and instructions” (Klapproth, 2020, p. 2) and they did not feel prepared for any of this at all. With all the sudden changes that COVID-19 pushed on teachers and parents, no one was immediately ready to take on all of this responsibility.

Teachers' Concerns about Students and their own Families

While teachers are worried about their students' well-being during this pandemic, they are also worried about their own family and even their own health. One teacher wrote, "These are troubling times. A pandemic has swept the world with accompanying death and fear" (Koerner, 2020, p. 172). It is not completely absurd to be scared during this time. A pandemic was the furthest thing from everyone's mind. With all of this happening around people, education may be the least of their concerns.

Most teachers' instincts are to put their students' needs above their own. However, if they are vulnerable to COVID-19, they may need to put themselves first for once. According to an article titled "Supporting the Mental Health of Preservice Teachers in COVID-19 through Trauma-Informed Educational Practices and Adaptive Formative Assessment Tools," throughout this time teachers have spent less and less time talking and worrying about self-care (Roman, 2020, p. 474). While it may be difficult to put their own needs above others, when a pandemic is thrown in the mix it should be one of their main concerns should be to take care of themselves.

Teachers' Uncertainties about the Future

Though teachers, and practically everyone dealing with this pandemic, have strived for circumstances to go back to "normal," it is still not the right time to do just that. It is anyone's instinct to go back to the methods that were, in the past, successful. However, according to an article called "COVID-19 and the Ongoing Problem of Educational Efficiency," teachers need to realize that "educational efficiency asks us to return, quickly, to our previous habits and practices, rather than towards perhaps developing new ones" (Mindzak, 2020, p. 20). Since this is a new era of education that has never been encountered before, methods may need to be altered to fit the changes the world has been facing. While no one can predict the future, it is

assumed that students from lower socioeconomic statuses will hurt the most from this pandemic. Students who are not receiving all the help they need during distance learning are already hurting when it comes to their academics. In fact, the outcomes of students losing in-person learning, which could also involve higher dropout rates, "are not likely to be temporary shocks easily erased in the next academic year" (Dorn et al, 2020, p. 6). As with any big event that has happened in our country's past, none of this will be fixed in the snap of a finger. Teachers need to be ready to deal with the repercussions of this pandemic for longer than they might hope.

Conclusion

No one can be sure how this pandemic will play out, but teachers can try to find creative solutions to problems they are facing. Teachers, because of this pandemic, have had to adapt to instruction being mainly delivered online and not seeing their students in person. It seems very hard to stay positive when students are struggling to stay engaged and teachers are straining to communicate with students and parents, but if educators work together then they can fix these problems in a better manner than if they were fixing it alone.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview

In order to answer the research questions of this study, personal interviews with several preservice teachers needs to be done. These teachers will not only be asked about these broad, overarching questions, but other more detailed questions will be asked as well. The participants of this study will be kept anonymous and will be interviewed independently, rather than in a group. This will give these participants an opportunity to elaborate on their own experiences. Since these interviews are taking place during a pandemic, they will most likely be held over Zoom or some other online platform.

Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected via personal interviews of current and former undergraduate/graduate students of the teacher education program. Students interviewed will include those who have completed at least one semester of student teaching or internship within a school. Participants will be interviewed one-on-one with the researcher in either a physical setting or online. The interviewer (i.e. the researcher) will employ open-ended and semi-structured questions for all activities. The combination of both types of questions will allow interviewees to share their perceptions from a wide range of considerations; the end goal is to allow participants to share their thoughts and perspectives on COVID-19 and education. Each session will be audio-recorded, and a transcription process will be employed to accurately detail, in word form, each interview session. In addition, the interviewer will script notes during personal interviews; written notes and transcribed notes will be compared to ensure the accuracy

of each session.

Population

Participants of the study will include current or former student teachers/interns from the teacher education program who were placed in a school in either spring of 2020 or fall of 2020. These participants will range from graduate or undergraduate student teachers or interns during either the semester of spring 2020 or fall 2020. Some may already have finished their requirements and are currently teaching, but they will have to reflect on their experience when they were a preservice teacher. Teachers chosen will have been placed in a variety of schools with different socioeconomic backgrounds, school districts, and so on. All teachers chosen will have been placed in a public school. Participant selection for one-on-one interviews will consist of former classmates of the researcher and other considerations for selection will involve the grade level and school district in which they were placed. A total of 3 participants will be selected. The general age of participants will be college-aged or mid to late 20s. To access participants' emails and other contact information, the researcher will get participants to fill out a form where they will be assured that their information will not be shared publicly.

Procedure

This study will employ a qualitative research approach with emphasis on participants' personal experiences. More specifically, the participants of this study (i.e. current and former student teachers/interns) will be interviewed personally using a semi-structured interview in a one to one format. Interviewees will participate in approximately one-hour interviews. Collected data will be recorded on a MacBook Air 11" and iPhone 8 (owned by the researcher) that is password protected, and scripted notes will be stored in a safe location within the researcher's home. Each interview session will be conducted either in-person or via Zoom (or another form of

video chatting). Privacy for personal interviews will be ensured by utilizing remote areas designated as special meeting areas and restricted access to the online platform. If it is not possible to meet in-person, Zoom will be used to conduct and record each interview session.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do preservice teachers feel about how the pandemic was handled by their school/district during their time at their placement?

RQ 2: What have been the major stressors that preservice teachers have faced during this pandemic?

RQ 3: How was the process to obtain a teaching license affected by COVID-19?

RQ 4: How have these teachers handled using technology? Was it hard to get used to or easy?

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Overview

The purpose of this study was to look into the stressors that preservice teachers, specifically from a teacher education program in East Tennessee, faced and how they handled it. The research questions for this study ranged from asking these preservice teachers about their feelings/anxieties towards COVID-19, technology, students and their families, etc. This study was conducted using an online format, Zoom, and participants did not have to meet in-person to give their input. Data for this study using personal interviews with current or former students in the teacher education program. Teachers were asked questions about their experience in internship or student teaching during either the onset of COVID-19 (Spring 2020) or when schools returned back to school virtually or in-person (Fall 2020). This chapter describes the collection of the data, research questions, results of the study, and a general summary.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from three former/current students at a teacher education program in East Tennessee. Each of these participants are/will be licensed to teach elementary grades. All of these participants were Caucasian and all were female as well. One of the participants has already graduated from the undergraduate program, which means she had her student teaching in Spring 2020. The other two participants are currently Master of Education students at the university and had their internship during Fall 2020. The former student teacher, during Spring 2020, had half of a semester with fifth grade and the other half with Kindergarten. While the two interns, during Fall 2020, had a whole semester with fifth grade and with first grade respectively. The demographics of these participants are displayed in Table 1. The

participants in this research study were interviewed independently over Zoom for approximately one hour apiece. The researcher completed each interview, documenting the sessions via video and voice recordings. After all data was collected, the researcher used an inductive analysis approach to analyze responses from the participants to determine common patterns or themes, while also looking for key words and phrases.

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Participants*

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	3	100%
<i>Total Participants</i>	3	100%
Grade Level		
Kindergarten	1	25%
First Grade	1	25%
Fifth Grade	2	50%
<i>Total Placements</i>	4	100%
Student Status		
Undergraduate (Former)	1	33.3%
Graduate (Current)	2	66.6%
<i>Total Participants</i>	3	100%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	3	100%
<i>Total Participants</i>	3	100%

Study Results

Research Question 1: How do preservice teachers feel about how the pandemic was handled by their school/district during their time at their placement?

Preservice teacher responses to this question are presented in Table 2. There were three themes that emerged from the responses of participants when asked about this research question. These themes included: shutdown (during Spring 2020), hybrid schedule (during Fall 2020), and quarantine (during Fall 2020). The theme of hybrid schedule had the most responses (two), while the themes of shutdown and quarantine had the fewest responses (one).

Table 2: *Responses to Research Question 1*

Themes	Number of Responses	Key Words and Phrases
Shutdown (Spring 2020)	1	<p>Felt like chaos because nobody knew what to do</p> <p>The stress was insane</p> <p>Every plan I had was changed</p> <p>Trying to find a normal</p> <p>It was shut down for a week, then two weeks, then a month</p>
Hybrid Schedule (Fall 2020)	2	<p>Learning curves</p> <p>Had a routine going and did not want to go back to all online</p> <p>Virtual day in the middle of the week (day to not be around students, plan, and catch up)</p> <p>Administrators were actually trying to be there for teachers</p> <p>Didn't know what to expect</p>

Quarantine (Fall 2020)	1	Hard on school because they were needing teachers Tried to adapt
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Research Question 2: What have been the major stressors that preservice teachers have faced during this pandemic?

Preservice teacher responses to this question are presented in Table 3. There were four themes that emerged from the responses of participants when asked about this research question. These themes included: technology, families of students, students' well-being, and sending work home. The themes of technology and families of students had the most responses (three), while the theme of sending work home had the fewest responses (one).

Table 3: *Responses to Research Question 2*

Themes	Number of Responses	Key Words and Phrases
Technology	3	School internet connection was spotty Difficulty with curriculum online textbook (hard to navigate for students) Students were always talking over each other Not inclusive to everyone because not everyone had access to devices
Families of students	3	Technology questions Keeping their child accountable Misusing technology given to them

		They just wanted to do the work for their child*
		They didn't know how to follow directions
Students' well-being	2	School is their place of refuge
		I just wanted to love on my kids and make sure they were doing okay
Sending work home	1	Packet planning is not comprehensive for Kindergarteners and first graders
		Students were already significantly behind
		Packets got lost, left on the bus, left at home, etc.

Note: *Indicates a response that was given by multiple participants.

Research Question 3: How was the process to obtain a teaching license affected by COVID-19?

Preservice teacher responses to this question are presented in Table 4. There were two themes that emerged from the responses of participants when asked about this research question. These themes included: completed all requirements and postponed. The theme of completed all requirements had the most responses (two), while the theme of postponed had the fewest responses (one).

Table 4: Responses to Research Question 3

Themes	Number of Responses	Key Words and Phrases
Completed all requirements	2	<i>Spring 2020:</i> Had already filmed for EdTPA before everything shut down I had to roll with what I had

		<i>Fall 2020:</i> Good timing
		Finished before getting quarantined the next week
Postponed	1	Chose to hold off
		I was not built for online school
		Low energy

Research Question 4: How have these teachers handled using technology? Was it hard to get used to or easy?

Preservice teacher responses to this question are presented in Table 5. There were three themes that emerged from the responses of participants when asked about this research question. These themes included: fully virtual (Spring 2020), using previous knowledge (Fall 2020), and little to no use of technology. All themes for this question had the same amount of responses (one).

Table 5: Responses to Research Question 4

Themes	Number of Responses	Key Words and Phrases
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Fully virtual (Spring 2020)	1	<p>Canvas was kid-friendly</p> <p>I had seen Canvas for four years as a student, but it was hard to use it from a teacher's standpoint</p> <p>Had to make sure everyone was on task</p> <p>It was hard to make online lessons engaging</p>
Using previous knowledge (Fall 2020)	1	Students were already familiar with certain technology tools used in Spring 2020 (ex. Google Classroom)
Little to no use of technology	1	Not enough devices to give out to younger grades

Summary

After analyzing the responses to each research question, it has become clear that the participants of this study had vastly different experiences with COVID-19 while teaching. The initial shutdown of schools and later returning to schools in the fall created a messy and confusing environment, whether that be when instruction was done in-person or online. Because of all this, plenty of stress fell over onto these preservice teachers along with their mentors. This stress spanned from difficulties with technology to problems with the families of students. Anxiety seemed to surround everything now that a pandemic was blocking circumstances from returning back to normal. Even obtaining a teaching license was made a little harder, although most of the participants had already completed all of their requirements. Basically, these preservice teachers felt that a great deal was thrown at them and they had to scramble to master using technology when it was the only form of communication with their students. The next

chapter will take a closer look at the research data and the research literature from chapter two in order to examine the findings of the study, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter V

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to look into the stressors that preservice teachers, specifically from a teacher education program in East Tennessee, faced and how they handled it. The literature review supported this research as it found that teachers all around the world struggled with COVID-19, technology, and connecting with students. This chapter contains a summary and interpretation of the findings, limitations, recommendations for future research, and final conclusions.

Summary of the Findings

The main goal of this study was to answer four overarching research questions. The first of these questions was: “How do preservice teachers feel about how the pandemic was handled by their school/district during their time at their placement?” When participants were asked about this, three themes emerged within their answers. The first theme focused on the initial shutdown of schools during the spring of 2020, since one of the participants did their student teaching during that semester. From the results gathered surrounding this theme, it was evident that when COVID-19 first surfaced and shut down schools with no warning, there was chaos and no one really knew what to do. Plans were drastically changed, and there was a definite need for answers during such an uncertain time. The second theme focused on a hybrid schedule used during the fall of 2020, since two of the participants did their internship during that semester. From the results gathered for this theme, it was apparent that this kind of schedule was new and difficult for teachers to adapt to. It seemed like this schedule was working for these particular participants and their classes, but they were still unsure of when they may be shut down if COVID-19 cases began to rise. The third theme focused on one participant’s time in quarantine

during the fall of 2020. From the results, it was clear that losing teachers who became exposed to the virus was very difficult for the remaining teachers at school. There seemed to be a constant need for teachers to be in-person and those in quarantine had to adapt to complicating, unfamiliar circumstances.

The second research question was: “What have been the major stressors that preservice teachers have faced during this pandemic?” When participants were asked about stressors, four themes emerged from their answers. The first theme surrounded the use of technology and the difficulties that came with it. For participants who endured virtual learning, the internet at their school seemed to have a bad connection most of the time. Also, students were not using proper etiquette while joining a video call for the whole class because they would be constantly talking over each other. One participant of the study even mentioned how their class did not have access to devices. Therefore, when they were not in-person for school, they had to solely rely on sending work home in the form of paper packets. The second theme focused on how families of students caused these teachers more stress, during virtual learning especially. These families would have a great amount of questions about how to use the technology sent home to them, and they would even misuse these devices by going on social media rather than keeping their child accountable with their work. In fact, a few of the participants mentioned how it was evident that parents/guardians of some of the students were doing the work for them. Of course, it was difficult to know for sure if students were actually completing the work themselves when teachers are not right there with them. The third theme involved a couple of participants worrying about the well-being of their students. These young students could not fully grasp why they could not be physically there with their teachers since school is some of the students' place of refuge. Basically, the participants of this study who mentioned this fear for their students'

well-being just wanted them to be safe and sound. The fourth theme focused on one participant's anxieties when it came to sending work home due to lack of access to devices. Since students missed a relatively big portion of their previous grade, they were already behind when going back to school in the fall of 2020. Packets, according to one of the participants, were not really comprehensive for these young students. These packets were not really a true form of instruction and mainly kept students occupied while they were not physically in school. Also, it was frequent that these packets ended up getting lost when they were sent home or when they were being brought back to school (ex. lost on the bus).

The third research question was: "How was the process to obtain a teaching license affected by COVID-19?" When participants were asked about this, two themes appeared within their answers. The first theme indicated that the majority of participants had already completed all the requirements needed to get their teaching license (ex. filming instruction, collecting student work samples, etc.) before either the school shutting down during the onset of the pandemic or the week before being quarantined. Essentially, these participants were thankful for having such good timing when working on getting the license they will need to go into the career they want to pursue. The second theme involved how one participant ended up deciding to postpone completing her requirements for a teaching license. The main reason behind this decision was the fact that the participant did not feel equipped to do school online and had very low energy because of all the stress that came with virtual learning.

The fourth and final research question was: "How have these teachers handled using technology? Was it hard to get used to or easy?" When participants were asked about technology, three themes were shown in their answers. The first theme involved participants who dealt with school being fully virtual for a short period of time. One participant mentioned using

Canvas for their students and how this resource was kid-friendly. However, the participant struggled to go from using Canvas as a student in college to using it as an instructor for elementary-aged students. Also, while school was completely virtual, several participants expressed how difficult it was to keep all students on task and to make online lessons engaging. The second theme surrounded the fact that some students had to use previous knowledge of certain websites/apps. Students had first been exposed to virtual learning in the spring of 2020, so when they returned to school in the fall they came across some of the same technology used in the previous semester. Therefore, students were already familiar with these resources and did not need as much assistance with it. The third theme centered around the fact that one participant had little to no use of technology during their placement. The school this participant was assigned at did not have enough devices for younger grades to use. As a result, this participant had to send work home using paper packets and only used technology to communicate with the families.

Interpretation of Findings

As stated in chapter one, the goal of this study was to determine the stressors that preservice teachers have faced because of COVID-19 and how they handled it. We can conclude that not every preservice teacher's experience was the same and that they felt they did not do their best while teaching during the pandemic. In reality, "the COVID-19 pandemic posed educators in a unique position as students themselves; students of online teaching" (Nasr, 2020, p. 168). The participants of this study especially felt as if a great amount of what they had learned about being an effective educator had to be overlooked and restructured. As seen from the review of literature, we can see how some teachers (and preservice teachers) had other major concerns that affected their instruction virtually or in-person. This includes having concerns about their own family's health, completing requirements to obtain teaching license, etc. Not

knowing when school was supposed to return in the spring of 2020 was yet another concern that was given to teachers, and this even coincides with one of the participants of this study who also mentioned this concern. These teachers also had to learn a completely different way to create and distribute instruction to students who were not in their presence. It is important to note that “teaching online lessons is a whole new world, and it is important to be patient with yourself” (Igra, 2020). Becoming accustomed to an entirely new way of teaching students takes time and effort to create the same sort of instruction once applied to in-person education. While the instruction was different than it had ever been, teachers still tried to provide students with the best education possible considering everything going on. This is comparable to when one of the participants in this study mentioned how going into quarantine forced them to adapt. Since going into quarantine is a quick decision and can alter plans very rapidly, these teachers were forced to create lessons in an unfamiliar way and they were given no choice but to adjust when exposed to COVID-19. As shown from the review of literature, it is made clear that some veteran teachers were rather uncomfortable with the use of technology in place of regular instruction due to the fact that they were not used to school completely online. This is similar to the fact that one of the participants in this study felt they were not equipped for online school, even if this participant was younger in comparison to veteran teachers and had been exposed to this sort of technology for the majority of their life. While the literature review mentions teachers from around the world, this study cannot compare or contrast with experiences of teachers from a whole different country since it narrowly documented encounters of preservice teachers from one Tennessee education program.

Limitations of the Study

- 1) This study was conducted from the perspective of preservice teachers who attended a specific teacher education program in Tennessee and does not reflect every preservice teacher's experience of COVID-19.
- 2) The participants' answers will remain anonymous and some information given will not be included to keep the participant protected.

Recommendations

- 1) Future research of this topic should include a larger group of participants from across the country or even from across the world if possible.
- 2) Future research could also follow these preservice teachers as they become licensed and enter the teaching field, especially if the pandemic has continued.
- 3) If and when the pandemic comes to an end, future research should investigate how different education looks and how COVID-19 has affected the aftermath.

Conclusions

Since the pandemic is still currently happening, this research is very relevant to teachers (and preservice teachers) right now. According to the study, preservice teachers had many different opinions and experiences while being in their placement during a pandemic. Technology seemed to be the biggest stressor that these teachers faced, even if they used a website or app that they have used in the past. It is clear that transitioning from in-person to fully online was difficult to adjust to. Before COVID-19 caused schools to shut down, these classrooms occasionally used technology, rather than primarily when forced to go to an online format only. However, these teachers appeared to work through these anxieties surrounding technology, especially with the help from their mentor teachers. On the other hand, teachers still

have a great amount more to learn about COVID-19 and how schools can educate students during a time where health needs to be prioritized. Although we are only a little over a year into this pandemic, there have been plenty of experiences that have taught educators what to do and what not to do while teaching virtually or in-person. While we cannot say with full certainty how this pandemic will affect education in the future, we can familiarize ourselves with these new circumstances and become prepared for such events more than ever before.

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