

Skills for a Changing World: Developing Pre-Service Teachers in the Kampus Mengajar Program

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The quality of teachers in Indonesia that is not yet ideal shows that the existing teacher professionalism programs are not optimal. Therefore, this research aims to find out to what extent The Kampus Mengajar program can be used to improve the pedagogical skills of pre-service teachers to reduce the gap between theory and practice. The data used in this study used open interviews conducted with two school principals, two supervisors, and 23 pre-service teachers who participated in the 5 month Kampus Mengajar program with teaching placements in elementary schools spread throughout Indonesia. The data was analyzed using thematic data analysis techniques. The results of the study show that even though The Kampus Mengajar has challenges in terms of value conversion and administration, the resulting impact is far greater and beneficial for the development of the quality of education. The Kampus Mengajar offers pre-service teachers to innovate in the development of creative, innovative and fun literacy and numeracy learning as well as strengthening technological adaptation. Thus, they are able to become agents of change and strengthen Indonesia in the PISA score.

The inadequate quality of both in-service and pre-service teachers in Indonesia indicates that the existing professional development programs have yet to achieve an optimal state. According to the World Bank, this profession receives low test scores in subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, and general intelligence. Moreover, motivation and dedication to teaching are lacking, often linked to immaturity and insufficient critical thinking abilities. Consequently, teachers in Indonesia are seen as ineffective in fulfilling their role of maintaining and enhancing students' learning abilities. As a result, student learning outcomes in Indonesia fall behind those of neighboring countries. Ministry of Education statistics attribute this inadequacy to the relatively low academic qualifications of teachers. Although various professional development programs and training initiatives have been implemented in Indonesia, they have been deemed ineffective in improving teacher professionalism (M . Zainudin , Ima Isnaini Taufiqur Rohmah 2011).

One of the primary issues related to teacher professionalism involves the disconnect between theoretical and practical knowledge imparted in the classroom. There exists a gap between the components of programs organized by universities and the actual needs of elementary schools (Asrafil Husein La Ede and Maulina 2022). This disparity between theoretical and practical knowledge arises because pre-service teachers are influenced by their personal experiences and opinions about the teaching profession. According to (Kertesz and Downing 2016), this situation often leads to a lack of harmony between universities and elementary schools. The absence of reciprocity results in a mismatch between the preparation of pre-service teachers and the requirements of the profession. Meanwhile, Darling-Hammond emphasizes the discrepancy between the field experiences incorporated into university programs. Although these experiences are included in the curriculum, the planning of time and supervision for both pre-service teachers and their supervisors is often inadequate. Additionally, pre-service teachers are

frequently left to work independently without proper guidance or supervision from the university.

Empirical evidence indicates that field experience serves as an effective alternative for cultivating professionals. It presents a valuable opportunity for pre-service teachers to enhance their skills and develop a sense of personal teaching efficacy post-graduation. These experiences provide pre-service teachers with dedicated spaces for professional learning within the school environment, allowing them to comprehend the daily realities of school life. Field experience facilitates the integration of ideas and theories learned at the university, offering a meaningful and practical teaching skill that is essential for pre-service teachers. According to (Deed, Cox, and Prain 2011), professionalism necessitates finding a balance between theoretical learning at the university and practical experiences in the workplace. They further emphasize the need for meaningful integration of these two experiences to enhance professional outcomes. Pre-service teachers are expected to develop a teaching philosophy that involves applying the theoretical knowledge acquired at university to authentic learning contexts under real-world conditions. Additionally, working with experienced mentors who provide comprehensive and insightful constructive feedback enables teachers to grow. Hence, pre-service teachers require more practical opportunities along their journey to becoming professionals.

The Kampus Mengajar Program is a component of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) or Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus policy, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) to provide practical experience for pre-service teachers (Kuswandono 2013). This policy grants a certain level of autonomy to educational institutions and allows students to choose their preferred program. It offers a broader learning experience and opportunities for in-depth knowledge exploration over three semesters, with two semesters spent off-campus (equivalent to 40 credits, with each credit representing 50 minutes of learning activities and structured independent assignments aligned with curriculum achievement indicators), and one semester in other study programs (equivalent to 20 credits). This includes internships, practical work, teaching assistantships, entrepreneurship, student exchanges, and research initiatives. Furthermore, the program aims to enhance graduates' competencies in both soft and hard skills, preparing them to meet the dynamic needs of the classroom and become better qualified, moral, and ethical future leaders of the nation. Effective leadership requires adequate skills and experience to tackle diverse challenges that lie ahead (Dalle et al. 2021). This policy empowers students to think independently or collaboratively, fostering the development of highly skilled, critical, creative, collaborative, and innovative graduates for the future. The MBKM is expected to stimulate their engagement in learning, allowing college students, including future teachers, to explore their full potential and independently enhance the quality of education. For pre-service teachers specifically, this program aims to bridge the gap between theoretical aspects learned on campus and the practical needs of schools. The existing problem lies in the perceived mismatch between the courses offered by universities and the actual requirements of users, leading to concerns about the competence of graduates from Teacher Training and Education Faculties. Given this research background, the study focuses on how the Kampus Mengajar Program supports pre-service teachers in developing their professionalism and its potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice, making it an intriguing aspect to explore.

The research utilized a qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of

campus teaching programs and to identify themes and theoretical structures that describe the process (Afandi et al. 2019). The data was collected through email conversations and open-ended questionnaire interviews with participants, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The participants were purposively selected from students who were part of a campus teaching program at a university in Yogyakarta. The research procedure involved obtaining permission from the university, conducting email conversations with participants, and conducting in-depth interviews through virtual meetings. The data analysis technique involved manually organizing the data and developing themes through thematic analysis.

The research aimed to explore pre-service teachers' experiences in the campus teaching program and their impact on professionalism. The data analysis revealed four main themes: sharing experiences, receiving experiences, developing professional abilities, and program challenges. Under the theme of sharing experiences, the sub-themes included building motivational and various learning opportunities, helping the school administration, helping teachers adapt to school technology, and developing school programs. The theme of receiving experiences indicated that participants acquired knowledge and skills from the school, with sub-themes including being trusted, obtaining opportunities, and gaining real experiences.

Overall, the research findings highlighted the positive impact of the campus teaching program on pre-service teachers' professionalism. They had the opportunity to share their experiences and skills, help the school administration and teachers adapt to technology, and develop school programs. Additionally, they received valuable experiences and opportunities to learn directly from their teachers, gaining trust and participating in various activities (Syahrial et al. 2019). The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of campus teaching programs in enhancing pre-service teachers' professionalism.

The primary outcomes of this study demonstrate the positive impact of the Kampus Mengajar program on pre-service teachers' professionalism. Through this program, pre-service teachers engage in knowledge-sharing and experiential learning, leading to professional growth. They contribute by creating motivational and diverse learning opportunities, assisting school administrators and colleagues in adapting to technology, and participating in other activities. Additionally, pre-service teachers gain valuable experience as they are entrusted by schools and acquire hands-on experience in various educational programs that they have previously studied theoretically on campus. Overall, the research highlights that the placement of pre-service teachers in schools offers authentic and meaningful experiences, benefiting both the schools and universities involved in the program.

The three-month assignment experience is a valuable opportunity for pre-service teachers to enhance their essential skills. This period focuses on professional learning in the workplace, allowing them to gain insights into the daily realities of school life. Professional experience enables pre-service teachers to align and integrate ideas and theories they have learned at the university. They are expected to develop a teaching philosophy by applying their acquired theoretical knowledge to authentic learning contexts under real-life conditions. Throughout this process, they receive comprehensive and insightful constructive feedback from experienced teachers who serve as mentors. Therefore, it is crucial to provide pre-service teachers with more practical opportunities to further enhance their professionalism.

However, achieving professionalism as a teacher requires a delicate balance between dedicating time to studying various theories learned at the university and engaging in real-world learning contexts. It is essential to meaningfully integrate these two experiences in order to enhance the learning and professional outcomes of prospective teachers. Interestingly, this concept of sharing and receiving experiences is also discussed by Brante, emphasizing the need for a connection between scientific theory and professional practice. Brante describes it as a "dialectic between know-why and know-how, based on a shared platform of science and profession". According to Brante, the collaboration between practitioners and scientists is valuable for both parties, as the quality of models depends on input from both scientific and professional perspectives. In the context of this research, practitioners serve as mentors to the pre-service teachers during their assignments. The *Kampus Mengajar* program provides real and authentic experiences for guiding students, performing administrative tasks, helping colleagues adapt to technology, and engaging in various academic activities. Additionally, pre-service teachers gain trust, opportunities, and best practices from their mentors, gaining insights into the professional world of education. Field supervisors and the theories learned on campus act as the "scientists" in this process. All these elements are encompassed in the exchange of experiences between individuals. It is presumed that the understanding of the subject matter is perceived as a shared perspective involving fundamental causal mechanisms.

The exchange of experiences through the *kampus mengajar* program has proven instrumental in the development of professional competencies. This study highlights that participating teachers have seen significant improvements in their soft and honed skills components. These findings corroborate previous research, emphasizing the positive impact of collaboration and partnerships between schools and universities in enhancing pre-service teachers' professionalism. Mentors play a crucial role in guiding and facilitating the growth of these teachers during their placements. Effective communication and clear delineation of roles are vital for the success of this process, and therefore, mentor selection is based on expertise rather than seniority. In the campus teaching program, tutors, appointed by school principals, provide assistance to participants during their school assignments. Tutors are chosen based on their competence in pedagogic, professional, social, personality, information technology utilization in learning, and school management skills.

Despite the positive outcomes, the *kampus mengajar* program still faces certain managerial challenges, including time management, program socialization, and coordination between organizers. Poor time management often makes it challenging for pre-service teachers to balance their school and campus activities due to conflicting schedules. Additionally, program socialization has not reached its optimal level, resulting in differing perceptions among pre-service teachers, mentors, principals, supervisors, and universities. Therefore, there is a need for improved coordination between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) as the program host, university supervisors, and schools. These challenges align with similar issues encountered in previous field experiences, where the lack of coordination between school mentors and university supervisors hindered substantial support for pre-service teachers.

In general, these findings highlight the pressing need for a robust theoretical framework that establishes stronger connections between the Ministry of Education, universities,

and schools, collectively taking on a more proactive and accountable role in producing competent future teachers. This aligns with the shift towards a post-practical method paradigm, where teachers are no longer seen solely as recipients of theory, but rather as active constructors of knowledge. This pattern also resonates with recent studies advocating for bottom-up professional development, emphasizing the importance of differentiated and contextualized stages that address practical, curious, collegial, and collaborative issues. Such an approach facilitates active learning and skill development for teachers. Dewey's experiential theory supports the creation of meaningful experiences within the teaching profession, enabling pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in university courses and its practical application in the classroom. Theories learned through reading, analysis, lectures, tutorials, and discussions in universities are encountered and implemented in authentic teaching settings to minimize the disparity between theory and practice. The contextual involvement of pre-service teachers plays a vital role in this process. Burns contends that teacher learning should not be seen as a mere translation of knowledge and theory into practice, but rather as an active engagement with new ideas within specific social contexts, activities, and processes. This perspective, often referred to as "practitioner knowledge," serves as the primary source of practice and understanding for teachers. In Indonesia, the field introduction program for pre-service teachers in internships or practice fields was traditionally limited to a short duration of only one month. This program has been criticized for its inability to provide authentic experiences to students due to the limited assignment time, narrow task dimensions, and insufficient supervision from university supervisors at the school. Additionally, certification programs aimed at enhancing teacher professionalism have also been deemed ineffective. As an alternative, the *kampus mengajar* technique offers a solution by introducing pre-service teachers to more challenging real-life school environments, fostering diverse peer collaboration experiences, providing a range of programs, and extending the duration of school assignments.

This research effectively demonstrated how the *kampus mengajar* program offers practical experiences to pre-service teachers, enabling them to enhance their professionalism through shared experiences. Teachers gained valuable insights and skills that helped them guide students, fulfill administrative tasks, support colleagues in adopting technology, develop various academic assignments, and create a conducive learning environment. However, this research did not explore how the *kampus mengajar* program specifically improves the core teaching quality of pre-service teachers, as the focus was primarily on the "assignment" stage. The final stage of the program assessed quality through four crucial activities: self-assessment, peer assessment, and confirmation of completion.

This research study explored the utilization of the *kampus mengajar* program by pre-service teachers as a means of sharing and receiving experiences. Through this reciprocal process, all parties involved in the program were found to benefit. Mentors and school teachers were able to enhance their skills in managerial practices and classroom instruction by sharing their insights and theories. On the other hand, pre-service teachers had the opportunity to immerse themselves in real school life, gaining valuable experience and learning from their mentors.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Firstly, the interviews conducted for this study only involved pre-service teachers, principals, and supervisors who were part of the *kampus mengajar* program. This limited sample may

not fully represent the broader population, thereby impacting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the characteristics of the curriculum implemented in elementary schools may differ from those in other educational levels, which further restricts the generalizability of the research. Furthermore, due to technical constraints, data collection for this study relied solely on interviews, which may have limited the depth and breadth of information obtained. It would be beneficial for future research to employ a variety of data collection techniques to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness.

Moreover, this research did not compare the effectiveness of the *kampus mengajar* program with other existing programs in terms of enhancing pre-service teachers' professional experiences. This presents an opportunity for future studies to explore this aspect from different perspectives and provide a comparative analysis of various teacher training programs. To further advance our understanding, it is crucial to involve a diverse range of participants and employ multiple data collection techniques when investigating how the *kampus mengajar* program contributes to the development of pre-service teachers' professionalism. Conducting further research that compares the effectiveness of the *kampus mengajar* program with other established programs would enable continuous evaluation and improvement of different initiatives by the Ministry of Education.

Additionally, it would be valuable to examine how *kampus mengajar* alumni adapt to the demands of the real working environment, considering potential differences in readiness between alumni and non-alumni teachers. This investigation would shed light on the long-term impact and outcomes of the program on teachers' professional development. In conclusion, while this research study highlighted the benefits of the *kampus mengajar* program in terms of sharing and receiving experiences among pre-service teachers, there are limitations that need to be addressed in future studies. By involving a wider range of participants, employing diverse data collection techniques, and conducting comparative analyses with other programs, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness and its impact on teachers' professional growth. This continuous evaluation and exploration are vital for improving teacher training initiatives and meeting the evolving needs of the education system.

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