

## Pre-Service Teachers' Reflective Practice in *Kampus Mengajar* Program (Lesson Learned in Indonesia Primary Schools)

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### ABSTRACT

Reflective practice is a form of transforming professional practice and experience to provide the best for educational stakeholders. For university students, this requires them to critically reflect on the ideas, values, feelings and implicit assumptions that guide problem solving. The purpose of this study is to explore pre-service teachers' experience in teaching English at *Kampus Mengajar* program in the context of teaching English to young learners. This study used a descriptive-qualitative method by conducting interviews involving 3 students of English education department who taught English in 3 different primary schools. The results of this study revealed that through the *Kampus Mengajar* program, pre-service teachers reflected some ideas and challenges in the teaching process. By evaluating the effectiveness of such reflective methods, this research aims to provide in-depth insights into innovative teaching strategies and their impact on students' skills and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Reflective practice, pre-service teacher, Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), *Kampus Mengajar*

## **Introduction**

Primary school students are at the stage where they need to develop. Taking into account the traits that primary school students as young learners (YLS) inherently bring to the classroom, YLS are prepared to enjoy the language, and with the aid of optimal learning, their interest increases (Krashen, 1992 in Yildirim & Doğan, 2010). In this case, teaching is not an easy activity because teaching affects learning and vice versa, it requires a good combination of growth between teachers and learners (Vieira et al., 2022). Including for pre-service teachers who arguably do not have much teaching experience, so in order to acquire "professional knowledge and competence as a teacher", pre-service teachers need to conduct teaching practice (Hascher, et al., 2004, p. 626 in Choi & Park, 2022). Especially if the subject they teach is English, which is the second language in Indonesia. Second language learning in school should be viewed as closely intertwined with cognitive development, learning about the world, and developing as a person (Pinter, 2011). For this reason, the government issued a program called *Kampus Mengajar* for university students as pre-service teachers where they get the opportunity to experience being a teacher in elementary schools. From this program, they can also reflect on how to teach primary school students.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice is a crucial component of the teaching and learning process, as it enables educators to deeply engage with their experiences, critically analyse their practices, and continuously improve their pedagogical approaches (Leshem & Trafford, 2006). The ability to reflect on one's experiences, make meaning of them, and then convert thought into action through a systematic action plan is the core of reflective practices. These practices are essential in making sense of constantly changing variables in the continuously evolving world of education, where teachers must absorb and reflect on their experiences to deliberate on future action. Teachers come from diverse backgrounds and cultures, possess a range of different qualifications, and teach varying curricula using a variety of teaching styles. Similarly, the student population is equally diverse, with varying needs ranging from accelerated learning to special education requirements. In order to effectively implement reflective practice in teaching, educators can utilize various strategies such as journaling, peer observation and feedback, and participation in professional development opportunities. Journaling allows teachers to record their thoughts, experiences, and observations, providing a valuable resource for later reflection and analysis. Peer observation and feedback provide an opportunity for educators to gain insights from their colleagues and implement constructive changes in their teaching methods. Additionally, participating in professional development opportunities, such as

workshops and seminars, enables teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge, fostering continuous improvement in their pedagogical approaches.

### ***Teaching Practicum in the Context of TEYL***

Teaching practice is an activity that aims to support future educators in using the content, culture, general knowledge, information, skills, attitudes, values, and habits they acquire during classroom training effectively, efficiently, and safely, and to advance their own personal and professional development (Hacioglu and Alkan, 1995 in Demirel & Karagedik, 2015). Pre-service teacher education programs require additional real-world experiences in the framework of TEYL (Bekleyen, 2014, Büyükyavuz, 2014 and Tütüniş, 2014 in Ekşi & Gazi, 2015). Demirel & Karagedik (2015) demonstrated based on their research that through teaching practicum, the pre-service teachers' understanding of the obligations of their line of work has grown, and that teaching involves more duties and responsibilities than they had previously realized.

### ***Kampus Mengajar Program***

The *Kampus Mengajar* Program is part of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*). (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) stated that this program provides opportunities for university students to learn outside the study program by becoming teacher partners in developing creative, innovative, and fun learning strategies in primary and secondary education units. By implementing this program, they are encouraged to develop 21st century expertise and skills (analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership, team management, creativity and innovation, interpersonal communication). The *Kampus Mengajar* Program provides a space for university students to apply their skills and knowledge in helping students in primary and secondary education units. This program provides opportunities for university students to actualize their interests, passions, and talents. They are also expected to get space to develop their skills, both hard and soft skills. In addition, they are expected to be an inspiration for students to expand their ideals and insights.

### ***Pre-Service Teacher***

Pre-service teachers, as practitioners of educational reform responsible for developing their students' ability to innovate, should pay attention to the development of their own instructional innovation capability (Avsec & Savec, 2021 in Liu et al., 2023). The goal of enhancing pre-service teachers' instructional innovation capabilities has been promoted and supported by both educational policies and researchers. This has brought new challenges and development opportunities to teacher education in normal colleges and universities, and the fostering of pre-service teachers' instructional innovation

capabilities has become a subject worthy of attention (Chen et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022 in Liu et al., 2023). In this regard, these studies show how important the role of pre-service teachers is for education.

### ***Previous Studies***

There are previous studies on reflective practice in English teaching. The first study conducted by Demir (2015) on reflection of pre-service English teacher education program. The findings shows that student teachers frequently encounter unsuccessful teaching applications in practice schools as a result of the program's practice component, which fails to create suitable conditions for observing successful teachers at various schools. Thus, on the one hand, student teachers and their trainers clearly concur that the program does not provide them with the necessary tools to utilize the target language successfully, nor does it adequately address their requirements. The other study on reflective practice of EFL teachers conducted by Kharlay et al. (2022). According to the findings of this study, experienced teachers may engage in more reflective practice than novice teachers, but they do not develop the ability to reflect comprehensively and systematically. Yet, most teachers are willing to use new strategies and apply them in their teaching. There are little studies on reflective practice in teaching English. Some of the studies above focus on reflective practice in teachers and prospective teachers in teaching English in general. So the researchers are interested in finding out if the teaching of English to young learners is done by pre-service teachers.

### **Methods**

This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive qualitative research design to obtain the results of reflective practice based on the experiences of pre-service teachers who had participated in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. There were 3 participants in this study, 2 female pre-service teachers and 1 male pre-service teacher. They taught in 3 different public primary schools in Bogor. 2 pre-service teachers taught in Bogor regency at 4<sup>th</sup> semester and 1 pre-service teacher taught in Bogor city at 5<sup>th</sup> semester. All three are students from the English Education department at one of the universities in Bogor City. The instrument used in this study was semi-structured interview which the researchers interviewed the participants at different times so that their thoughts would not be interrupted by each other. The first participant was interviewed in 31 May 2024, the second participant was interviewed in 6 June 2024, and the third participant was interviewed in 8 June 2024. The questions asked were 6 questions covering their teaching methods, mistakes in teaching and impression in teaching during the *Kampus Mengajar* program.

## **Findings**

The purpose of this research is to explore pre-service teachers' experience in teaching English at *Kampus Mengajar* program in the context of teaching English to young learners. The findings of this subsection are taken from pre-service teachers' answers in the interview process. Each subsection of this perspective is presented in six points or categorizations, including (1) teaching system, (2) teaching challenges, (3) teaching methods, (4) common mistakes in teaching, and (5) impressions after participating in the *Kampus Mengajar* program.

### ***Teaching System***

In this sub-section, the researchers asked whether the participants taught themselves or were assistant teachers in the classroom. The findings showed that two of the three participants taught themselves during the *Kampus Mengajar* program. This is represented by the following quote:

I taught English alone in class 5. I also occasionally substituted for the English teacher in class 4, as well as for absent teachers in other classes. (PST-2)

Based on the above statement, we can see that this participant not only taught alone and focused on one class, but also sometimes replaced teachers in other classes. In addition, another participant (PST-3) also stated the same thing, as quoted below:

I teach independently in the classroom. (PST-3)

However, another participant (PST-1) stated that during the *Kampus Mengajar* program, she became a teacher's assistant in the classroom. It's just that sometimes there are times when this participant teaches alone or in groups with other *Kampus Mengajar* partner.

I became a teacher's assistant to help guide inclusive students because in this school, the characters of the students are mixed. Sometimes there are teachers who leave their classes for me to take over. If there is a class that has to be taught, I am accompanied by one of my friends to teach. If it's just to supervise the tests, I'm usually alone. (PST-1)

Based on the statements above, the researchers can conclude that the teaching system of the participants are not determined by the *Kampus Mengajar* program, but based on the needs of each school. So that there are participants who taught alone in the

classroom, there are also those who do became teacher assistants because there are inclusive students in it.

### ***Teaching Challenges***

Every job has its own challenges. One of them is teaching. Based on the results of the interviews, the three participants stated the same challenge, namely that students' English language skills were still very low.

Students are still not familiar with English at all. (PST-1)

The area is remote and the students' grasp of English is zero. (PST-2)

Inadequate facilities and students' lack of knowledge about English. (PST-3)

Based on the statements above, it can be concluded that students' English language skills are low due to the remote area, so the facilities provided by the school are inadequate.

### ***Teaching Methods***

As pre-service teachers, they certainly do not have much teaching experience. So in this case, the researchers were interested in knowing what teaching methods they used during their time in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. All three chose to use games to keep all students participating in the class.

Using projectors as learning media and delivering material with quizzes and games. (PST-1)

The methods used are group learning with reference to the conversation book and roleplay. (PST-2)

I use the communicative approach method, which invites students to speak English and also uses educational games. (PST-3)

Every student has different characteristics, so their ability levels also vary. For this reason, the researchers were also interested in finding out how they adapted their teaching to different ability levels to keep them active in the classroom. Each participant had a different method for this.

Using English fun methods so that everyone can participate and keep repeating unfamiliar vocabularies. (PST-1)

The first participant stated that the quiz and game method aims to keep the students actively participating in the class. In addition, the students were also encouraged to keep repeating vocabulary that was unfamiliar to them. On the other hand, the second participant (PST-2) had a different method.

I provide different materials according to each student's ability level. For example, if there is difficult material, I will ask a question to a student who can answer it. If there is easy material, I will also ask a question to students who have a slow understanding. (PST-2)

The participant chose to provide different materials based on the ability level of each student because according to him, so that students can develop together slowly. This is certainly a different way that the third participant (PST-3) did it.

I use the differentiation method, which is giving assignments with varying levels of difficulty to suit the students and providing appreciative feedback. (PST-3)

It is quite similar to what the second participant did, except that the third participant applied it in giving assignments. In addition, the third participant also gave appreciative feedback to each student so that students continued to enjoy learning and actively participate in class.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that all three participants have their own methods of teaching. In addition, they also do not forget about students who need more attention by delivering material that suits them.

### ***Common Mistakes in Teaching***

People who are in the process of learning, of course, are not free from mistakes. It is precisely from those mistakes that one learns to be better. Two out of three participants felt that during the *Kampus Mengajar* program, their mistakes were in giving instructions.

My instructions were not clear enough, so the students did not understand. From these mistakes, I continue to learn from people and ask teachers who have been teaching for a long time how to give correct instructions to students. (PST-2)

My mistake was giving unclear instructions and not being patient in dealing with students who were slow in understanding the material. I improved my attitude by practicing more patience in dealing with students who were slow in learning. (PST-3)

In addition to giving instructions, the second participant also felt that she made mistakes in controlling her emotions. This also happened to the first participant.

I was often too strict with students who couldn't keep quiet and occasionally used old-fashioned methods, such as explaining grammar consisting of subject, verb, object, etc. I only found out that the method was wrong after taking TEYL courses in later semesters. (PST-1)

The first participant also felt that he was wrong in delivering the material which was not suitable for young learners. This participant only found out after studying the TEYL courses.

In this case, it can be concluded that the common mistakes pre-service teachers made are such as giving unclear instructions, lacking emotional control, and materials that are not age-appropriate for young learners.

### ***Impressions after Participating in the Kampus Mengajar Program***

The researchers were interested in finding out what impression they got after participating in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. Both in terms of the benefits provided by the *Kampus Mengajar* and their views after teaching young learners. Two out of three participants felt that the teaching methods used for young learners were very important.

The teacher's personality is very important for the development of primary school students. Through the *Kampus Mengajar*, I came to know how important the teacher's temperament is in teaching. (PST-1)

Primary students need to be given the right methods. I think the role of the teacher is very important to develop the potential of each student. (PST-3)

There were a participant who felt that the *Kampus Mengajar* program could provide benefits for them as university students.

The *Kampus Mengajar* helps improve teaching skills to become a more professional teacher. (PST-2)

Based on the statements above, it can be concluded that the *Kampus Mengajar* program provides a forum for university students to have direct teaching experience in the field. Through this program, they realize the importance of teaching methods that suit the abilities of young learners.



## Discussion

The main objective of this study was to obtain reflections from pre-service teachers who have taught in primary schools in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. The results of this study show that the government gives university students participating in the *Kampus Mengajar* program the freedom to teach individually, in groups, or as teacher assistants in the classroom as long as their goal is to help teachers and schools. It is written in the *Year 7 Kampus Mengajar Program Guidebook* that the obligations of university students during the *Kampus Mengajar* program include "(a) assisting teachers in improving the variety of learning methods related to student literacy and numeracy in the Assignment School; and (b) helping schools implement technology adaptation in the learning process". (Kemendikbudristek, 2024:38).

Because of where they teach in schools with low literacy and numeracy levels (Kemendikbudristek, 2024), this is a challenge for pre-service teachers who have lack experiences in teaching. Based on the results above, all participants stated that students who attend schools in remote areas are not familiar with the English language, which is one of their biggest challenges. Pre-service teachers need to understand the actual social context in which rural students are raised and the students in this area need to get more attention (Ai et al., 2022).

The students' unfamiliarity with English is one of the reasons why their English skills are still very low. For this reason, the participants provided materials while playing games, so that students continued to actively participate in the class and understand the material presented, which of course this method is in accordance with the character of young learners. One of the characteristics of young learners is that they prefer to learn through games (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). In educational setting, the use of games makes learners have fun and feel motivated (Al Neyadi, 2007 in Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022)

Although the participants have a good understanding of how to deal with young learners, of course, as pre-service teachers, they are not free from mistakes. The common mistakes they made were not being clear enough in giving instructions, not being able to control their emotions well, and delivering materials that were not appropriate for the age of the young learners. According to Hashemi & Azizinezhad (2011:2086), Some teacher characteristics that need to be considered in teaching young learners are:

1. Must be energetic and patient.
2. Must love children.
3. Must pay attention to individual differences.
4. Must encourage, encourage, and encourage.
5. Must let children see the beautiful and useful aspects of the language.
6. Must let them love you as the language teacher and the new language as well.
7. Must know the techniques of teaching.

8. Must respect children as human.
9. Must start teaching to children as soon as possible.

Of course, participants learn a lot from these mistakes so that they strive to do better in their future real teaching.

In this case, they became more aware of how important it is to teach young learners the right way after participating in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. Teaching practicum can motivate pre-service teachers to teach and build their professional identity as future teachers (Deng et al., 2018; Gao & Benson, 2012; Lee & Yuan, 2014; Maaranen & Stenberg, 2020; Sinclair, 2008 in Choi & Park, 2022).

Previous research has been conducted by Beshah & Anshu (2024). The researchers were interested in exploring trainees' reflections on their expectations of the training and whether their expectations were met by the training they received. The results showed that some of the courses and/or content were not expected by the teachers before they went to college and had less contribution to teaching in primary schools. Less contribution to teaching in primary schools. There was also a weak correlation between participants' expectations and the training they received. The training was also lacking in terms of practical sessions.

## Conclusion

Overall, our research highlights the teaching experience of university students who participate in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. The *Kampus Mengajar* program provides a platform for them who want to learn to teach, so reflective practice is needed for pre-service teachers so that their teaching skills improve in the future to be practiced in real life. Especially teaching young learners who are very active and cannot be silent. So in addition to learning to teach, pre-service teachers also learn how to control emotions and keep students engaged with the material in class.

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