



## From Theory to Practice: EFL Student Teachers' Teaching Experiences in "Kampus Mengajar" Program

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**Abstract** This study explores the EFL student teachers (STs) experiences during the "Kampus Mengajar" program, focusing on their transition from theoretical knowledge to practical classroom application. Using a qualitative approach, this research collected data through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and personal reflection. Findings show that STs' participation in "Kampus Mengajar" enriched their competencies in lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional strategies based on student needs. Moreover, the program fostered confidence, reflective practice, and problem-solving skills, bridging the gap between university coursework and real-world teaching. Thus, this study provides important insights of experiential learning in teacher education and suggests that structured teaching placements like "Kampus Mengajar" are essential for preparing competent and reflective EFL educators.

**Keywords:** EFL student; Experiential Learning; Kampus Mengajar;

**Abstrak** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengalaman calon guru bahasa Inggris dalam program "Kampus Mengajar", dengan fokus pada transisi mereka dari pengetahuan teoretis ke penerapan praktis di kelas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen, dan jurnal refleksi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi calon guru dalam "Kampus Mengajar" memperkaya kompetensi calon guru dalam perencanaan pembelajaran, manajemen kelas, dan strategi pengajaran berdasarkan kebutuhan siswa. Lebih lanjut, program ini menumbuhkan kepercayaan diri, praktik reflektif, dan keterampilan memecahkan masalah, menjembatani kesenjangan antara perkuliahan universitas dan pengajaran di dunia nyata. Dengan demikian, studi ini memberikan wawasan penting tentang pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman dalam pendidikan guru dan menunjukkan bahwa penempatan mengajar terstruktur seperti "Teaching Campuses" sangat penting untuk mempersiapkan pendidik EFL yang kompeten dan reflektif.

**Kata Kunci:** Mahasiswa EFL; Pembelajaran Eksperiensial; Kampus Mengajar;

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a crucial role in preparing students to become competent educators in the future. One crucial aspect is field experience. In this regard, the government is encouraging students to participate in one of the flagship programs of the Freedom to Learn Program – Merdeka Campus or “Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka” (MBKM), such as the teaching campus (KM) program. The role of the KM (Teaching Campus program) in developing student teachers' teaching competencies is considered crucial. This program not only provides knowledge of the material being taught but also introduces effective teaching methodologies and provides hands-on teaching experience (Anandha & Susanto, 2023; Wahyuningsih, 2022). Constructivist learning theory indicates that student teachers can develop their own knowledge through practical experience and reflection (Fauziah, et al., Suwanti et al., (2022). Within this framework, the *Kampus Mengajar* program provides opportunities for student teachers to learn through direct teaching experience, which aligns with constructivist principles. This is particularly true that practical knowledge during practicums, the co-construction of teacher knowledge and attention from a mentor (an expert) to a student teacher leads to richer experiences in creating an environment of trust and nurturing the reciprocal dialogue and genuine professionalism (Tiainen, & Lutovac, 2022).

Research on the influence and effectiveness of *Kampus Mengajar* program on student teachers' teaching competencies is highly relevant in the current context of higher education. Facing the demands of increasingly dynamic educational paradigms, it is crucial to understand how *Kampus Mengajar* programs can prepare student teachers to face the challenges of future educators. Factors such as curriculum, teaching methods, mentor teachers' support (Windsor et al., 2020), and practical experience all play a role in shaping student teachers' teaching competencies (Hasanuddin, Mayong & Usman, 2022). Student teachers' engagements in teaching practices led to growth in their capacity to reflect on and improve their teaching practice. This technique demonstrates how pre-service teachers can integrate into a community of practice and obtain a greater awareness of its norms, practices, and relationships. This kind of program can help future educators improve their professional development, adjust classroom practices, and understand the practice architectures that influence them. Therefore, this study aims

to explore in depth the role of *Kampus Mengajar* programs in improving student teachers' teaching experiences and competencies.

Previous research has highlighted the effectiveness of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program in improving the teaching competencies of student teachers. Anandha & Susanto (2023); Hardian, & Makhfuz, (2022) found that participation in the program was associated with significant improvements in teaching skills and understanding of student needs. This finding is supported by other studies conducted by Fauziah et al., (2025) and Wahyuningsih (2022), which identified key factors influencing the effectiveness of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program, including support from teacher mentors, reflection on teaching experiences, and opportunities to collaborate with fellow student teachers. With respect to learning to teach and teaching practicum experiences in initial teacher education, several authors have emphasized that teaching practicum provides opportunities for practicing teaching skills and self-development as a means of strengthening practical knowledge acquisition (Manurung, 2022; Tiainen, & Lutovac, 2022). However, obstacles and challenges persist during the implementation of learning in the field. Eleven weeks of *Kampus Mengajar* are considered insufficient to produce meaningful changes in schools to create independent students and teachers (Lestari, Fatonah & Halim; Safaringga, Lestari & Aeni, 2022). Therefore, teachers need to have a variety of alternative options for implementing learning. Thus, this study aims to deepen understanding of the role of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program in preparing quality teachers through an approach based on previous findings.

Research on the role of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program in developing student teaching competency has important implications for curriculum development and teaching practices in higher education. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for higher education institutions to improve the effectiveness of their teacher education programs, so that students can be better prepared and more competent in facing future teaching tasks. Although several studies have examined experiential learning programs or school-based field experiences, research specifically focusing on the *Kampus Mengajar* Program (Anwar, 2021; Fauziah, 2025), especially its direct contribution to strengthening teaching competencies and the contextual factors affecting its success remains limited. Existing studies tend to emphasize program implementation and outcomes at the school level, with insufficient attention to how the program shapes pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills, and professional identity formation among prospective teachers. This gap highlights the

need for a more systematic investigation into the program's effectiveness within the broader teacher education framework.

This study aims to: (1) examine the extent to which the Kampus Mengajar Program contributes to strengthening the teaching competency of prospective teachers; and (2) identify the factors that influence the effectiveness of the Kampus Mengajar Program in improving the teaching competency of prospective teacher students. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to advancing the field of higher education and preparing a generation of high-quality educators.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the *Kampus Mengajar* program in shaping students' teaching competencies. Creswell's (2009) qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the experiences and perceptions of alumni of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. A case study was chosen as the research design because it allows for in-depth investigation of complex and contextual phenomena. This aligns with the research objective of understanding the role of the *Kampus Mengajar* program in shaping student teachers' teaching competencies. The case study also allows for rich data collection and allows researchers to gain a holistic understanding of the research topic.

The participants in this study were eight (8) students of the English Language Education Study Program at one of private university in Aceh who had participated in the *Kampus Mengajar* program Batch 6, 2023. The participants in this study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program who had taken part in the Kampus Mengajar Program. Their ages ranged from approximately 20 to 27 years old, representing students in their mid-to-late academic years. In terms of gender distribution, the sample included both male and female students, with a higher representation of female participants, reflecting the typical gender dynamics in teacher education programs. Most participants were in their 3th to 4th year, indicating that they had completed essential pedagogical coursework prior to joining Kampus Mengajar. This academic background provided them with foundational theoretical knowledge, which was then applied during their field experience in schools. Additionally, participants varied in their prior teaching-related experiences some had

minimal exposure to classroom teaching, but all of them had been involved in microteaching activities.

They were placed in six different schools. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that they had relevant and diverse experiences in the *Kampus Mengajar* program. The research participants were provided with comprehensive information regarding the objectives, procedures, and potential risks involved, and they gave their voluntary consent before participating in this study. The author guarantees the confidentiality of the identity and personal data of participants by disguised the names of respondents (such as Respondent A, Respondent B, etc.). The researcher is committed to only using the collected information for research purposes and will not disclose it to other parties without written permission.

In this study, data were obtained from in-depth interviews with participants and document analysis in the form of photographs related to the campus teaching program, such as interactions with mentor teachers, classroom learning activities, and reflection processes with field supervisors (DPL) and related parties.

The analysis was conducted inductively through a process of coding and categorizing qualitative data. Data from interviews, documents, and personal reflection were analyzed to identify key themes related to the role of campus teaching programs in developing students' teaching competencies. Thematic analysis, as used by Clarke & Braun (2013), is an appropriate data analysis method in this context, which allows researchers to extract meaning from qualitative data and identify emerging patterns.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

From the analysis of interview, document analysis, and personal reflection, several key findings can be identified, including: (1) the benefits of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program and (2) the challenges in the *Kampus Mengajar* Program.

### ***The benefits of the Kampus Mengajar Program***

#### ***1. Strengthening Teaching Competence***

Student teachers reported significant benefits from the *Kampus Mengajar* Program in strengthening their teaching competencies. They stated that the program helped them plan and deliver lesson materials more effectively. "With this program, I actually stood in front of the class with the material I had prepared. This gave me a sense of the duties and responsibilities of a teacher" (Respondent A).

Continued with Respondent B who stated that:

*The "Kampus Mengajar" program is very helpful in understanding the duties and responsibilities of a teacher in the future. "Kampus Mengajar" provides us (student teachers) with the opportunity to try their hand at teaching, not just teaching a single subject but also providing opportunities to become part of school administration and library management.*

Respondent D added that the *Kampus Mengajar* program was able to help the respondent provide learning media that made students interested and not bored in learning and was even able to control students who had never been through before.

## *2. Adjusting Teaching Approach*

Additionally, hands-on classroom experience allows them to better understand individual student needs and tailor their teaching approaches. Respondent A reported;

*I think the most important thing I gained from the Campus Teaching Program was the experience I gained in cultivating patience when dealing with young students. I also developed quick thinking skills to handle unexpected situations in the classroom.*

One respondent who partnered with a senior high school (SMP) said that the situation at the junior high school level was similar. He felt the benefits of the field experience from the *Kampus Mengajar* program.

*The campus teaching program has been very helpful in understanding the duties and responsibilities of a teacher. It allows me to see and learn firsthand what a teacher's responsibilities are. They share many stories about their experiences dealing with diverse student personalities. I also learn these lessons when I enter the classroom and interact with students directly. (Respondent E)*

From these interview data, it is clear that the primary benefits perceived by respondents were improved ability to plan and deliver lesson materials, as well as a deeper understanding of student needs. Direct involvement in classroom teaching helped them experience firsthand how to apply the learning theories they learned in real-world contexts. This suggests that the Campus Teaching Program can be effective in enhancing student teachers' practical skills and conceptual understanding in everyday teaching contexts.

From document data, it found that participants were seen using a student-centered learning approach by facilitating group discussions, which can increase student engagement and strengthen conceptual understanding. Figure 1 shows that the student teachers actively engaged in direct interactions with students in the classroom.





**Figure 1. The participants are interacting with students in the class, they are having a group discussion**

In the figure 2, it shows that the student teachers play the role of primary instructor at the front of the class. They appear to be using visual media (a whiteboard) to support their presentations. This demonstrates the student teachers' ability to effectively deliver subject matter and utilize available learning aids.



**Figure 2. A student teacher is giving a presentation in front of the class with mentor teachers, her colleagues and students**

These photos demonstrate that the *Kampus Mengajar* Program provides student teachers with hands-on classroom experience, a crucial aspect of developing teaching competency. The use of diverse learning methods, such as group discussions and presentations, demonstrates that student teachers have developed diverse teaching skills throughout the program. These photos provide a visual representation of how student

teachers interact with students and facilitate learning, an important indicator of their teaching abilities.

### *The challenges in the Kampus Mengajar Program*

Despite the perceived benefits, student teachers also faced several challenges during the *Kampus Mengajar* Program. From the interview and personal reflection data, the main challenges for student teachers were time management and dealing with unexpected classroom situations. They felt stressed when faced with situations that required quick adjustments in classroom management. Respondent D once said: "I faced challenges in managing my time between preparing to teach, completing coursework, and participating in extracurricular activities. Sometimes, it felt very tiring."

Respondent D added, "I feel stressed when faced with unexpected classroom situations. For example, when students are unresponsive or there are disruptions in class, I find it difficult to handle the situation." This quote from Respondent D illustrates feelings of stress and difficulty in dealing with unexpected classroom situations, such as when students are unresponsive or disruptions occur in class. This theme highlights the challenges respondents face in managing their classrooms and addressing problems that arise during the learning process. This indicates the need for more effective support and strategies to help student teachers manage stress and cope with unexpected situations in the classroom.

The experiences of respondents who dropped out and were hospitalized due to fatigue and poor physical condition highlight the importance of paying attention to the health and well-being of program participants. Respondent B shared, "The activities in this program are very busy, both in terms of program planning and physical activities in the field. I once dropped out and was hospitalized because I was too exhausted and physically unfit." This theme highlights the need for better time management and activity planning, as well as expanded health and wellness support for program participants to prevent fatigue and serious health problems.

Interview data indicates that student teachers face several challenges during the *Kampus Mengajar* Program, such as time management and coping with unexpected classroom situations. This demonstrates that the program not only provides benefits but also presents challenges that student teachers must overcome. This highlights the need



for adequate support and guidance throughout the program to help students overcome these obstacles and maximize the benefits of their learning experience (Anandha & Susanto, 2023).

These findings have important implications for the field of teacher preparation, particularly within the context of experiential learning models such as the Kampus Mengajar Program. The results of this study demonstrate that participation in Kampus Mengajar significantly enhances student teachers' teaching competencies, especially in the areas of practical classroom skills, adaptability, and understanding of learners' needs. This is consistent with previous research showing that authentic school-based experiences help prospective teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice (Manurung, 2022; Wahyuningsih, 2022). Through daily classroom interactions, student teachers gain firsthand exposure to diverse student characteristics, classroom challenges, and real-time instructional decision-making competencies that are often difficult to achieve through coursework alone.

However, the findings also indicate that the extent of competency development depends heavily on the level of support and scaffolding provided by higher education institutions. While the program offers valuable opportunities for experiential learning, student teachers often face difficulties related to time management, classroom management, assessment practices, and adapting instructional strategies to heterogeneous learners. Without adequate mentoring and institutional guidance, these challenges may limit the potential impact of the program. Thus, higher education institutions play a crucial role not only in preparing students prior to deployment but also in offering continuous support during the placement period.

Moreover, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening the reflective dimensions of the *Kampus Mengajar* experience. Many participants reported that reflective activities such as writing weekly journals, participating in reflection meetings, or receiving feedback from supervisors were instrumental in helping them make sense of their teaching experiences and identify areas for improvement. This aligns with theories of reflective practice, which suggest that learning becomes more meaningful when prospective teachers engage in structured reflection that connects classroom experiences with pedagogical concepts (Rué et al., 2013; Fauziah et al., 2025). To maximize program impact, institutions could incorporate formalized reflective learning components, such as guided reflection prompts, peer dialogue sessions, and reflective teaching portfolios.

These findings contribute to a larger discussion on the role of experiential learning in teacher education. The evidence suggests that well-structured field experiences like *Kampus Mengajar* can accelerate the development of teaching competencies, support the formation of professional identity, and foster a sense of social responsibility among future educators. However, the success of such programs hinges on strong institutional support, thoughtful program design, and ongoing evaluation. By understanding both the benefits and challenges of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program, higher education institutions can refine their approaches to preparing a highly qualified, reflective, and resilient generation of teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The *Kampus Mengajar* Program provides significant benefits in improving the teaching competencies of student teachers. Student teachers reported improvements in practical skills such as planning and delivering lesson materials, as well as a deeper understanding of student needs. However, they also faced challenges in time management and coping with unexpected classroom situations. The implication of these findings is the importance of supporting and strengthening the *Kampus Mengajar* Program as part of effective teacher preparation. Higher education institutions need to provide adequate support and guidance to student teachers during the *Kampus Mengajar* Program. This includes training in time management, classroom management, and strategies to overcome challenges they may encounter. The curriculum design of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program needs to take into account the needs and challenges of student teachers. Integrating reflective learning and time management training can be an essential part of the curriculum to ensure holistic preparation. Continuously evaluating and improving the design and implementation of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program is crucial. This includes gathering feedback from student teachers and teacher mentors at partner schools to identify areas for improvement and periodically revise the program. By implementing these steps, higher education institutions can maximize the benefits of the *Kampus Mengajar* Program in preparing qualified teachers to face the complex challenges of modern education. This is expected to contribute to improving the overall quality of education and creating a positive impact on society.

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