

## Professional Learning Through Kampus Mengajar : Challenges and Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities experienced by English Student Teachers in the Kampus Mengajar program, by the framework of professional learning. Using the Darling-Hammond's framework of professional learning, this qualitative research employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis in data collection methods. The findings reveal that student teachers experienced various challenges in their professional learning, including classrooms management, environment, emotional and psychological, also collaborative challenges. These challenges often required participants to confront their assumptions, adjust expectations, and develop problem-solving strategies. However there also opportunities provided meaningfully including the opportunities of real word teaching experiences, classroom growth, and professional learning opportunities. This research highlights the importance of context-rich teaching, emphasizing that structured support and reflective practice are critical for maximizing the transformative potential of professional learning initiatives such as Kampus Mengajar

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## INTRODUCTION

MBKM (Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka) as one of the programs launched by the ministry of Education in Indonesia, aims to sharpen the skills of student teachers (ST) as it also support a better environment to foster the growth for the future (Kusumawardani et al., 2024; Rochmiyati et al., 2022; Syamratulangi et al., 2024). Further, it prepared the university students in facing the global change of social, culture, and technology improvements as it become the trigger for universities to develop an innovative learning opportunity. In this context, MBKM becomes the answer of this critical needs for higher education in create a flexible learning environment for the students to choose their personal real-life learning experience (Simatupang & Yuhertiana, 2021). Laga et al. (2021) underscores this flexibility as the starter steps of a better improvement for ST. Align with this perspective, the flexibility of MBKM offers the importance part of meeting the diverse needs of ST as the preparation for the complex modern world.

Baharuddin (2021) underscores MBKM as a program designed to enhance students' mastery of diverse skills and knowledge. By participating to this program, ST are empowered by the experiences which positively impact their personal and professional abilities. As a result, Siregar (2020) highlight the role of MBKM in enhancing the quality of higher education by promoting independent and innovative learning. The evidence shows that both lecturers and students perceive MBKM as beneficial, as it broadens students' learning experiences, increases their readiness, and improves both technical (hard) and interpersonal (soft) skills (Vhalery et al., 2022). However, while these benefits are significant, the program's effectiveness in improving educational quality depends heavily on students' personal creativity and the regulatory support provided by universities. This means that in reaching its full potential, universities have to create a supportive environment that fosters self-directed learning and provides the necessary regulatory support to maximize the programs' impact on ST, which in line to one of the sub-programs launched under "Kampus Mengajar".

### **Kampus Mengajar as Part of MBKM**

Teaching practice during university studies is often perceived as a daunting challenge by many English student teachers (Alghamdy, 2018). This is exacerbated by the changing of learning style from offline into online due to pandemic situation. Problems occur greatly in many aspects of education, such as the learning motivation, distance, and technological gap which leads to troubles (Alfarisy, 2021; Peng et al., 2024). As a result, the initial aim of this program was offering the help for teacher, school, and universities to overcome these challenges (Anwar, 2021). According to the handbook of MBKM (2024), KM (Kampus Mengajar) is a program which gave the chance for give the chance for university students in gaining knowledge outside the class, by becoming a partner of a teacher in learning. Furthermore, by the growth of education, supported by the increased number of KM enthusiast, the goals of KM followed to be improved, as it expected to improve the quality of education.

Based on the Handbook of MBKM, there are several specific goals of KM, such as: (1) Develop analytical thinking and problem solving as they are encouraged

to implement various activities and project. They obligate to implement all aspects such as technology-based learning, innovative teaching, etc (Herlina et al., 2023), (2) Enhance teamwork and leadership skills of ST by giving them the chance to manage and lead diverse students effectively. By the guidance of the school teacher, the participants are charged to manage diverse group of students effectively (Safaringga et al., 2022), (3) Foster creativity and innovation in designing models, method, and strategies, where in some cases ST collaborate with the teachers and lecturers in combining the learning and the latest technology (Risan et al., 2022; Sholihah et al., 2022), (4) Improve interpersonal communication and encourage ST to effectively interact with the stakeholders by assisting them in the online administration interaction (Jannah & Mahardhani, 2022), (5) enhance the teaching skills as they gain the real-life teaching experiences by assisting the teacher in learning process. This assistance including the utilization of technology as it become the most difficult obstacle for those who technologically illiterate (Herlina et al., 2023), and (6) Promote literacy and numeracy skills by implementing variety methodologies, such as reading books, planting trees, numeracy puzzles, etc (Hatumena, 2023). By participating in KM, ST are equipped by necessary skills and knowledge to innovate in their teaching practices (Fayza et al., 2024). These opportunities help them to develop new skills and knowledge, which can growth their professionalism. Moreover, by the positive influences on their personal development and employability skills, which leads to the improved self-confidence, discipline, sense of responsibility, and communication ability (Mustofa et al., 2023). Overall, KM program not only equips ST with essential professional skills but also fosters significant personal growth, ultimately preparing them to be adaptive, confident, and innovative educators who can positively impact the future of education.

### **Professional Learning in Kampus Mengajar Program**

As a stated by Darling-Hammond (2017) that effective Professional Development is an organized PL (PL) which could foster teachers' improvement in methodologies and students' performance. It is a way to support a more complex skill of students which need to be learned for future education era. PL itself is a continuous and purposeful process of growth and transformation, rooted in real-world practice and socially constructed through active engagement in work-related activities (Nguyen et al., 2021; Talebizadeh et al., 2021; Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2019). It is essential to establish a shared vision, foster trust and respect, and provide continuous PL opportunities. When these elements are integrated, they can create a culture of continuous improvement, which leads to teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes. According to Darling-Hammond et al.(2017), effective PL is structured around teachers' learning needs and results in changes in teaching practices. Key influencing factors include content focus, active learning, collaboration, and sustained duration. These are further confirmed by Huijboom (2023), who highlighted the importance of school leadership, the level of teacher collaboration, and environmental support. Chen (2024) expanded on this by identifying four stages of influencing factors: cultural, institutional, group, and individual.

Timperley (2011) emphasized the importance of PL in motivating teachers, improving student learning, promoting engagement, supporting teacher development, and encouraging inquiry and knowledge building. Activities that support these goals include enhancing critical thinking (Lithoxidou & Papadopoulou, 2024), fostering teacher leadership (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022), and implementing mentorship (MacMath et al., 2021). However, the urgency to enhance PL includes creating environments that support knowledge sharing, offer appropriate settings, and encourage participation in workshops and courses (Castillo et al., 2022; Talebizadeh et al., 2021). These activities significantly improve professional growth, as influenced by school leadership (Huang et al., 2024; Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022). For example, Rochaendi (2024) found that the environment fostered by the KM program enriched participants' knowledge and strengthened their competence in student learning and pedagogy. A supportive PL environment is positively correlated with student success.

In the case of ST, PL is essential as it fosters a supportive learning environment, improves instructional practices, and enhances student outcomes. However, its implementation is often hindered by various challenges. Timperley (2011) noted that some of the major barriers include resistance to change, time constraints, lack of leadership support, and the wide variation in teachers' experiences and expertise. In the other side, Karlberg et al. (2022) identified intrinsic challenges such as high stress and tension, health problems, teacher shortages, and low social regard for the profession, all of which contribute to a complex and demanding environment. These challenges highlight the urgent need for more comprehensive and sustainable strategies to support PL.

From an extrinsic perspective, obstacles also arise during adaptation to PL, such as managing student diversity, overcoming technological barriers, and ensuring the availability of adequate support and guidance (Botha & Nel, 2022). Tayag (2020) added four key external challenges as: time overload and conflicts, low levels of trust toward teachers, ranking-related conflicts, and a lack of recognition for the benefits of PL. As a result, many PL initiatives become fragmented, short-term, and disconnected from actual classroom practices, limiting their impact on both teaching and student learning.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sustaining changes in teaching practices is often challenged by systemic issues related to schools, environments, and broader educational structures (Darling-hammond et al., 2017). However, overcoming these barriers is possible through targeted efforts. Opportunities within PL, as highlighted by Darling-Hammond (2017), include offering real-world teaching experiences, developing practical teaching abilities, and ultimately fostering professional growth. Additionally, continuous reflection on teaching performance further supports sustained professional development. These opportunities emphasize the value of mentorship and skills development in shaping ST's PL. They also contribute to enhanced teaching abilities and help refine the personal identity of future educators.

## METHODOLOGY

Considering the urgency of the research, a qualitative approach with phenomenological design employed. This phenomenological design aimed to find the essence of life experienced of the participants (Moustakas, 2010). The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding on the challenges and opportunities of PL gained by ST through the program. Using the framework of Darling-Hammond (2017), the research conducted to the English student program in Yogyakarta, who participated in KM program batch seven. The participants were chosen through Snowball Sampling which allowed the researcher to identify the specific participants needed from the previous one as it become larger (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2012). The source of data was obtained from in-depth Interview as the primary data, and document analysis as the secondary data. The document used was the program report of each ST aiming to gained written perception of the participants.

Furthermore, the researcher use various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness such as: (1) Member check, by sending the raw transcription to the participants to prevent misinterpretation, (2) Code-to-code strategy of analyzing the data to ensure the consistency, (3) Peer-debriefing to prevent bias (Lichtman, 2011), and (4) Cross-case comparison to present the cases related to the findings. Lastly, the data was analyzed with the 6 steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2021). The researcher started with familiarization with the data, generating codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Thematic Analysis effectively captured the diverse and complex experiences of ST, allowing for the emergence of unanticipated themes. This flexibility provided a nuanced understanding of their transformative learning, authentically representing the participants' voices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aiming to answer the question of “What are the challenges and opportunities gained by ST while participating in Kampus Mengajar program” this part will answer the question by focus on the challenges and opportunities experienced by ST within the framework of PL.

### 1. Challenges of Kampus Mengajar related to Professional Learning

According to the analysis of codes and theme, there are 4 main challenges experienced by ST. Those are:

Table 1. There are 4 Main Challenges Experienced by ST

Theme	Name of Theme	Definition of Theme
1	Classroom Management Challenges	Highlighting the difficulties in managing diverse situations of classroom, including the range of student abilities, resistance, and etc.
2	Environmental Challenges	Highlighting external factors in managing the teaching practice, including infrastructure, financial, and time limitation.

3	Emotional and Psychological Challenges	Highlighting emotional difficulties of student teachers during the program, including frustration, peers, and others.
4	Collaborative Challenges	Highlighting the challenges of working teams, including differences in learning style, communication, and teamwork difficulties.

The initial challenge in classroom management found by the participants was the presence of diverse learning abilities among students, which complicated the process of balancing instructional delivery for learners with varying levels of comprehension. This issue was emphasized by P1 and P2, who noted the necessity for ST to exercise their patience in adapting their teaching strategies. Supporting this notion, previous studies by Hilmi et al. (2022), Risan (2022), and Safaringga et al. (2022) identified similar challenges among ST, where they found the low academic abilities of students often prompted innovative instructional adaptations aimed at mitigating the issue.

The complexity of PL was further found by the presence of disengaged students. Both P3 and P5 reported difficulties in managing apathetic learners who demonstrated resistance to authority and limited engagement in learning activities. These findings resonate with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who emphasize that student proficiency is closely linked to effective teaching practices. Nonetheless, repeated exposure to such challenging classroom dynamics appeared to contribute positively to the development of ST's confidence and instructional capacity, suggesting a process of transformative professional growth. Another notable constraint was the limited duration of the program, which, according to P2, inhibited the extent of pedagogical change that could be implemented. This aligns with Tayag (2020), who asserts that PL is inherently a sustained and gradual process, and that short-term programs often force participants to focus on achievable short-term objectives rather than long-lasting improvements. Similarly, Prasetyo (2021) highlighted time allocation as a significant barrier to the progression of ST's PL.

Inadequate infrastructure and funding also posed substantial challenges. Reflections from P1 and P3 pointed to the scarcity of resources as a critical obstacle, a finding by Admiraal et al. (2021) observed that the absence of institutional support often forces ST to engage in creative problem-solving. Interestingly, this lack of support prompted a form of transformative learning, as it encouraged improvisation and the development of contextually relevant teaching solutions. Emotional responses to the challenges of classroom management were prominently reported by P3 and P4. Their experiences of frustration in dealing with student behaviour and maintaining classroom order reflect a common issue among novice teachers. Karlberg and Bezzina (2022) identified similar emotional strain as a component of the demanding nature of the teaching profession. Nonetheless, P5 highlighted the importance of peer and institutional support in navigating these challenges. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) reinforced this point by suggesting the collaborative environments which was not only provide

emotional buffering but also strengthen the capacity for sustained professional engagement and transformation.

Communication challenges also emerged as a recurring theme, particularly in collaborative teaching contexts. Observations from P5 and P3 revealed instances of miscommunication and inconsistent teaching styles, while P4 reported difficulty in adapting traditional teaching methods to new collaborative environments. These challenges highlight the complexity of professional interactions, especially when pedagogical beliefs differ among team members. However, Mustofa et al. (2023) and Fayza et al. (2024) showed contrasting findings, noting that such programs tend to enhance ST's communication and discussion skills over time. Specifically, P4 encountered difficulties in aligning her instructional approach with the existing classroom practices, finding traditional strategies insufficiently effective. While this reflects a common transitional struggle, it contradicts the findings of Risan et al. (2022) and Safaringga et al. (2022), who observed that collaboration with experienced teachers tends to foster creativity and innovation among STs.

In conclusion, the array of challenges faced by STs—from pedagogical adaptation to emotional resilience and collaboration—significantly shaped ST's PL journeys. These experiences not only contributed to the development of adaptive teaching practices and problem-solving skills but also fostered the formation of resilient and flexible professional identities capable of thriving in diverse educational contexts.

## 2. Opportunities of Kampus Mengajar Related to PL

According to the analysis of codes and theme, there are 3 main opportunities experienced by ST. Those are:

Table 2. There are 3 Main Opportunities Experienced by ST

Theme	Name of Theme	Definition of Theme
1	Opportunities of Real-world Experiences	Represent real-life opportunities obtained by ST after participating in <i>Kampus Mengajar</i> , including experiences and critical thinking skills.
2	Opportunities of Classroom Growth	Represent positive opportunities for ST in developing professionalism through improved teaching skills, expanded networks, and their professional growth.
3	PL Opportunities	Represent the availability of <i>Kampus Mengajar</i> in providing positive opportunities for STs in improving their PL.

One of the key opportunities afforded by the KM program is the provision of authentic teaching experiences that immerse ST in real classroom settings. This experiential learning component aligns with the goals of the MBKM initiative, which seeks to enhance ST's competence through hands-on practice (Anwar, 2021). In support of this, Timperley (2011) emphasizes that real-life teaching contexts foster adaptive expertise, enabling teachers to respond effectively to the

complexities of diverse educational environments. As noted by P2, KM presents “the reality of teaching”, a sentiment echoed by Fayza et al. (2024), who found that the motivation to gain practical teaching experience is a driving factor for participation in such programs. Similarly, P4’s reflections on the importance of flexibility in teaching illustrate a growing awareness of how responsiveness to student needs enhances instructional efficacy—an insight also supported by Admiraal et al. (2021), who argue that adaptive capacity is fundamental for PL in dynamic classroom contexts.

Interaction with diverse school communities has also emerged as a vital learning opportunity. Participants such as P1 and P5 reported notable improvements in their social and communication skills. This aligns with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who link teaching effectiveness with strong interpersonal skills, as they play a central role in shaping a teacher’s professional identity. These findings are reinforced by Fayza et al. (2024), who similarly observed significant development in ST’s social abilities following their participation in the program. The classroom context itself offered numerous opportunities to refine instructional skills. P4, for instance, gained valuable experience through direct interaction with students and the implementation of hands-on learning activities. This exposure to varying student needs encouraged the use of personalized teaching strategies and emphasized the necessity of instructional flexibility. Tayag (2020) supports this notion, asserting that early engagement in complex classroom situations enhances future educators’ ability to cater to differentiated learning profiles.

Participation in KM also led to increased self-confidence among ST. P4 reported a shift from theoretical dependency to the application of adaptive teaching strategies, reflecting a deeper engagement with instructional autonomy. These findings are consistent with those of Mustofa et al. (2023), who identified improved self-confidence as a key outcome of the program. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that confidence developed through practical experiences is a cornerstone of effective teaching and professional resilience.

The program further inspired participants to pursue ongoing learning and pedagogical innovation. For example, P1’s focus on differentiated instruction and P2’s interest in student-centered teaching approaches reflect a commitment to self-improvement and innovation in line with Timperley’s (2011) framework for PL. Additionally, P4 and P5 prefer the interactive instructional methods which underscores a proactive effort to increase student engagement and foster meaningful learning experiences.

Finally, the program fostered the development of professional relationships. Participants such as P1 and P3 described positive engagement with the school community, which contributed to the formation of networks that support both career advancement and collaborative opportunities. Admiraal et al. (2021) affirm the importance of such professional relationships in the development of early-career teachers. This element of KM promotes the cultivation of a PL community which asserts that critical reflection and growth are most effective when situated within supportive and collaborative networks.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the Kampus Mengajar program offers a complex yet enriching platform for student teachers' professional learning, marked by a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the participants encountered significant difficulties in managing diverse student abilities, low proficiency levels, apathetic behaviors, and a lack of familiarity with students' individual characteristics. These challenges were compounded by structural issues such as limited time, inadequate facilities, emotional exhaustion, and inconsistencies in collaboration due to differing pedagogical beliefs. Such adversities often caused frustration and required student teachers to confront their own professional limitations and emotional responses. However, through the lens of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, these struggles also became key moments of critical reflection and self-awareness that initiated transformative growth.

On the other hand, the program also presented multiple opportunities that enhanced the professional capacities of the participants. Real-life classroom teaching, as highlighted by many participants, provided a crucial bridge between theory and practice, cultivating adaptive expertise and reflective teaching. The exposure to authentic school environments allowed student teachers to improve their instructional and classroom management skills while also developing soft skills such as communication, flexibility, and confidence. Furthermore, the experience of working in diverse educational settings encouraged innovation in teaching strategies and a commitment to student-centered learning approaches. Positive interactions with school communities not only supported emotional resilience but also opened pathways for professional networking and future career possibilities.

Taken together, these experiences highlight the transformative potential of Kampus Mengajar in developing both the technical competencies and professional identities of future educators. Grounded in the frameworks of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) and professional learning (Timperley, 2011), the program effectively fosters the adaptability, resilience, and continuous improvement essential for sustained teaching excellence in diverse educational contexts.

## FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research is needed on the topic of Professional Learning Through Kampus Mengajar: Challenges and Opportunities to perfect this research and increase insight for readers and writers.

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