

PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS TOWARD TEACHING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRAK: Studi ini mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris terhadap Program Asisten Pengajaran, khususnya berfokus pada peluang dan tantangan selama praktik mengajar yang dialami. Studi ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan empat mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris yang telah berpartisipasi dalam program tersebut. Partisipan dipilih menggunakan purposive sampling, dan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa umumnya memandang program tersebut secara positif karena memberikan pengalaman mengajar otentik yang membantu menjembatani pengetahuan teoritis dan praktik kelas. Program ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kompetensi pedagogis, keterampilan komunikasi, kemampuan manajemen kelas, kepercayaan diri profesional, dan kesiapan sebagai calon guru. Selain itu, mahasiswa memperoleh pengalaman belajar yang berharga melalui keterlibatan langsung dalam pengajaran di kelas, implementasi strategi pengajaran, dan praktik reflektif. Namun, partisipan juga menghadapi beberapa tantangan, khususnya dalam manajemen kelas, menjaga keterlibatan siswa, dan menangani karakteristik siswa yang beragam. Terlepas dari kesulitan-kesulitan ini, tantangan tersebut mendorong mahasiswa untuk menjadi lebih adaptif, reflektif, dan kreatif dalam mengelola kegiatan pembelajaran. Secara keseluruhan, Program Asisten Pengajaran memainkan peran penting dalam mendukung pertumbuhan profesional mahasiswa dan kesiapan mengajar dalam konteks pendidikan yang otentik.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Kelas, Pembelajaran Eksperimental, Kompetensi Profesional, Kesiapan Guru, Program Bantuan Pengajaran.

ABSTRACT: This study explored English Education students' perceptions toward the Teaching Assistance Programme, particularly focusing on the opportunities and challenges experienced during teaching practice. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving four English Education students who had participated in the programme. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students generally perceived the programme positively because it provided authentic teaching experiences that helped bridge theoretical knowledge and classroom practice. The programme contributed to the development of pedagogical competence, communication skills, classroom management abilities, professional confidence, and readiness as future teachers. In addition, students

gained valuable learning experiences through direct involvement in classroom instruction, implementation of teaching strategies, and reflective practices. However, participants also encountered several challenges, particularly in classroom management, maintaining student engagement, and handling diverse student characteristics. Despite these difficulties, the challenges encouraged students to become more adaptive, reflective, and creative in managing instructional activities. Overall, the Teaching Assistance Programme played an important role in supporting students' professional growth and teaching readiness within authentic educational contexts.

Keywords: *Classroom Management, Experiential Learning, Professional Competence, Teacher Readiness, Teaching Assistance Program.*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, teaching assistance programs, commonly implemented through teaching practicum or school-based teaching practice, are regarded as fundamental components of teacher education because they provide preservice teachers with opportunities to engage directly in real classroom contexts and to integrate university-based learning with professional teaching experiences (Abdillah & Fithriani, 2023). Through continuous field experience, teaching practice serves as a learning process that supports the development of teaching competencies and professional readiness, as well as the ability to bridge theoretical knowledge with classroom practice, where practice is understood as a source of knowledge creation that allows for reflection back on theory (Hendriwanto, 2021). Consequently, international literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of understanding pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and professional preparedness during field experiences as part of teacher education development (Flores & Swennen, 2020)

In the Indonesian context, teaching practicum programs provide English language education students with opportunities to engage directly in school environments and gain authentic teaching experiences that support their professional development as future teachers (Usman et al., 2021). From a school implementation perspective, the presence of university students as teaching assistants has been deemed beneficial in quality supporting classroom instruction and improving teaching quality (Hamdi et al., 2025). These benefits can also be reflected in increased student engagement and the introduction of interactive learning activities, demonstrating the growing role of university students in Indonesian schools. However, despite these opportunities, English education students in

Indonesia also face challenges such as limited instructional resources, difficulties in classroom management, and insufficient preparation when implementing lesson plans, which influence their perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching assistant programs (Abdillah & Fithriani, 2023).

Previous research has indicated that teaching assistance programs offer valuable opportunities for English language education students to develop professional competencies through authentic classroom experiences (Massod et al., 2022). Furthermore, they said that these programs also help students overcome common challenges encountered during their teaching practicum. Field experience has been shown to positively influence the readiness and interest of prospective teachers, one example of which is the Teaching Assistance Program, which allows students to be directly involved in learning activities at school (Aryani et al., 2023). Although they specifically examined field experience practices (or in Indonesia, it is called PPL, *Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan*), their findings are applicable to Teaching Assistant Programs (known in Indonesia as *Asistensi Mengajar* (AM)), a flagship program for pre-service teachers involving a one-semester teaching assignment in support of the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) initiative, as both provide direct teaching experiences that foster student preparedness. The study also highlighted challenges frequently faced by preservice teachers during teaching practice, including difficulties managing diverse student abilities and challenges in applying theoretical knowledge in practical classroom settings. This is consistent with previous findings indicating that preservice teachers often encounter obstacles related to classroom management and student interactions during teaching practicum, which can affect their perceptions of program effectiveness (Dube et al., 2023).

Conceptually, perception is a cognitive process that involves organizing and interpreting information so that individuals can give meaning to experiences and form impressions and assessments of an object or program (Nisa et al., 2023). In the context of a teaching assistant program, student perceptions reflect assessments of the benefits, effectiveness, and learning experiences during teaching practice. Opportunities in teaching are understood as opportunities to develop professional competencies gained through direct involvement in real-life learning situations, including opportunities to apply pedagogical knowledge, manage classrooms, and reflect on teaching practices

within diverse classroom dynamics (Qadir et al., 2020). Meanwhile, challenges in teaching are defined as various obstacles inherently accompanying the learning process, such as limited resources and classroom management demands, which serve as reflective experiences to encourage improvements in the quality of learning (Fitri & Daulay, 2024). Thus, in a teaching assistant program, opportunities and challenges are interconnected because through the process of facing these challenges, students have the opportunity to develop stronger professional skills and enrich their perceptions of the program's value and effectiveness.

Previous studies have examined the teaching practices and experiences of prospective teachers and teacher training in teacher education programs, for example by Adebola (2022), but the focus of that study was only on the perceptions of English Language Education students in junior high schools, not senior high schools as the focus of this study. Some studies also highlight the challenges faced by prospective EFL teachers during program implementation (Alsadi & Silman, 2023). while other studies emphasize opportunities, such as improving professional skills, real-world classroom experience, and developing creative learning strategies. The opportunities provided by the Teaching Campus program for prospective English teachers include: (1) gaining direct teaching experience, (2) developing professional and personal skills, and (3) contributing to improving the quality of education in remote, border, and underdeveloped (3T) schools. Although the literature has discussed opportunities and challenges separately, there has been no research that comprehensively combines these two aspects from the perspective of high school English Education students. Therefore, this study is needed to comprehensively explore students' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of the Teacher Assistant program in Indonesia.

Based on these research gaps, this study attempts to bridge the gap by focusing on the perceptions of English Language Education students as prospective teachers in the Teaching Assistant program, while simultaneously examining the opportunities and challenges they experience during their field experiences, which in the context of teacher education are understood as two interrelated and influential aspects of the development of prospective teachers' professional competencies (Ghufron, 2024). Unlike previous studies that tend to emphasize aspects of readiness or challenges separately, this study offers a more comprehensive perspective by delving into students' direct experiences in

the Indonesian educational context. Therefore, this study aims to explore indepth English Language Education students' perceptions of the Teaching Assistant program, particularly regarding the opportunities and challenges that contribute to the development of their professional competencies as prospective English teachers.

Based on the background above, the research questions of this study are:

1. How do English Education students perceive the Teaching Assistance Program they participated in?
2. What benefits or learning experiences do students gain from participating in the Teaching Assistant Program?
3. 3, What challenges do students face during the Teaching Assistant Program?.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach because it aimed to understand students' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations within their social context (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A qualitative approach aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of educational phenomena from the perspectives of participants. Consistent with this, Creswell & Poth (2018) states that qualitative research was used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to a social or educational phenomenon.

Furthermore, this study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to describe English Language Education students' perceptions of the Teaching Assistant Program, specifically regarding the opportunities and challenges they experienced during the program. A qualitative descriptive design was employed because this study did not aim to test hypotheses or examine relationships between variables, but rather to provide a comprehensive description of students' experiences and perspectives (Kim et al., 2017). Therefore, this design was considered the most relevant and consistent with the research objectives and research problem formulation.

Participants

objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences rather than to produce statistically generalizable findings. The selected participants had direct experience with the Teaching Assistant Program and provided rich, detailed information relevant to the research objectives.

The inclusion criteria for participants were as follows: (1) being registered students in the In this study, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews, which use a set of English Language Education Study Program, (2) having participated in the Teaching Assistant Program, (3) having completed at least one semester in the program, (4) having direct teaching experience in a classroom or school setting as part of the program, (5) actively participating in program activities, and (6) being willing to share their experiences regarding the opportunities and challenges encountered during the program. Participants were recruited through direct face-to-face communication. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of their voluntary participation, assured of the confidentiality of their information, and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. These procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants (Dar & Shaalgoji, 2022).

Data Collection Method

Data collection techniques were a crucial step in qualitative research because they aimed to obtain data relevant to the research focus and objectives. In this study, data were collected through interviews as the primary technique. Interviews were chosen because they allowed researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon being studied (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were used because they employed predetermined questions while allowing flexibility to explore participants' responses in greater depth (Kallio et al., 2016). The use of semi-structured interviews also enabled the researcher to adapt to the interview situation and probe participants' perspectives in greater depth.

The type of interviews was semi-structured, providing guidance for directed questions while also providing flexibility for researchers to explore perceptions in depth based on participant responses during the interview process (Namey et al., 2022). The interviews aimed to explore English Language Education students' perceptions of the Teaching Assistant Program, specifically regarding the opportunities and challenges they experienced.

Interviews were conducted on campus, as it is a familiar and comfortable environment for participants, encouraging openness in sharing information and

supporting the validity of the data obtained (Braun et al., 2019). Each interview lasted 10–20 minutes to ensure that the information obtained remained focused without causing participant fatigue. This duration was selected because interviews that are too long can cause participant fatigue and reduce the validity of the information obtained.

The entire interview process was recorded using a voice recorder on the researcher's mobile phone, with the participant's informed consent. The recorded data were stored securely on the researcher's device and were only accessible to the researcher to maintain confidentiality. All collected data were used solely for research purposes and managed in accordance with ethical research principles, particularly regarding informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participant privacy and data security (Race & Vidal-hall, 2019).

Data Analysis Method

In this study, data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis based on (Braun et al., 2019). Thematic analysis was selected because it allowed the researcher to identify key patterns and themes in English Language Education students' perceptions of the Teaching Assistantship Program, including the opportunities and challenges they experienced during the program. This analysis also aligns with the research objective of understanding participants' experiences and perceptions in depth.

The data analysis process followed six systematic steps proposed by (Braun et al., 2019) beginning with data transcription and ending with the preparation of a thematic report. The following sections describe how each phase was implemented in this study.

1. Transcription and familiarization with the data

The first step is to transcribe the interviews verbatim, writing down the entire conversation exactly as the participants said it. Once the transcription was complete, the researcher reread the entire transcript several times to understand the context, nuances, and participants' experiences of the Teaching Assistance program. This step ensured the researcher was fully familiar with the data before coding.

2. Coding the data

Once the transcripts are understood, researchers highlight important sections of the data and assign them codes. Codes are short labels that describe the main idea of each data segment. Examples of codes identified in this study included teaching

experience, classroom management, communication skills, student engagement, professional development, and teaching challenges.

3. Finding themes

The codes created were then grouped into broader themes that reflected significant patterns in the data. In this study, three main themes emerged: Positive Perceptions of the Teaching Assistance Program, Learning Experiences during the Program, and Challenges during the Teaching Assistance Program. These themes illustrated important aspects of students' perceptions and experiences throughout the program.

4. Reviewing themes

The researcher then reviews the themes that emerged to ensure their relevance and consistency with the original data. Some themes may be merged, divided, or deleted if they are not strong enough.

5. Defining and naming themes

Once the final themes were determined, each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its central meaning. The final themes were Positive Perceptions of the Teaching Assistance Program, Learning Experiences during the Program, and Challenges during the Teaching Assistance Program.

6. Compiling the report

The final step is to compile a research report that connects the themes to the research questions. Direct quotes from participants are included to support the analysis and provide an authentic picture of student perceptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview data, three major themes emerged that illustrate students' experiences during the Teaching Assistance Programme: (1) positive perceptions of the teaching assistance programme, (2) learning experiences and professional development, and (3) challenges encountered during programme implementation. These themes demonstrate how students interpreted and reflected upon their teaching practice experiences within authentic school-based learning contexts.

1. Positive Perceptions of the Teaching Assistance Programme

All participants expressed positive perceptions of the Teaching Assistance Programme. The programme was regarded not merely as an academic requirement, but also as a meaningful experience that enabled students to gain a more authentic understanding of the educational environment. Participants explained that the programme served as a bridge between pedagogical theories acquired at university and practical teaching experiences in schools.

a. Programme Benefits

Students perceived the Teaching Assistance Programme as an important experience that enabled them to understand the realities of education more directly. The programme was considered an effective medium for connecting theoretical knowledge gained during university study with practical classroom teaching. P1 explained that the programme enhanced preparedness as a prospective teacher by providing direct experience in the teaching and learning process. Similarly, P2 stated that direct involvement in classroom activities helped develop a deeper understanding of how learning takes place in practice.

“This programme became a bridge between theory and practice; it helped prepare me to become a teacher.” (P1)

“I was directly involved in the educational environment and understood how classroom learning actually occurs.” (P2)

Furthermore, teaching practice experiences helped students recognise the importance of lesson preparation and student engagement during learning activities. P3 explained that teaching involves not only delivering content, but also actively engaging students in the learning process.

“I became more aware of the importance of lesson preparation; teaching is not simply explaining material, but also involving students actively.” (P3)

Meanwhile, P4 viewed the programme as an experience that provided a realistic understanding of teachers’ professional responsibilities within schools.

“I gained direct insight into education and understood the responsibilities of teachers.” (P4)

These findings suggest that the Teaching Assistance Programme provided authentic experiences that enabled students to understand instructional processes, teaching practices, and the professional responsibilities of teachers within real school settings.

b. Development of Pedagogical and Professional Competencies

The Teaching Assistance Programme also contributed to the development of students' pedagogical and professional competencies as prospective teachers. Through direct involvement in classroom instruction, students began to understand classroom management, improve communication skills, and deliver learning materials more effectively. P1 explained that the programme enhanced communication skills and classroom management abilities during instructional activities. Likewise, P2 stated that teaching practice improved teaching skills and the ability to explain lesson content effectively.

“It improved my communication skills and strengthened my classroom management abilities.” (P1)

“It enhanced my teaching skills, my ability to explain lesson content, and my classroom management.” (P2)

In addition, students became increasingly aware of the importance of lesson planning prior to teaching. P3 explained that the programme helped develop an understanding of instructional planning, including sequencing learning materials and preparing exercises for students.

“I learned how to plan lessons, organise material sequences, and prepare student exercises.” (P3)

Similarly, P4 stated that the programme enhanced communication skills, collaboration with teachers, and teaching competence during practical experiences.

“It improved my communication skills, collaboration with teachers, and teaching abilities.” (P4)

These findings indicate that direct participation in the Teaching Assistance Programme supported the development of pedagogical and professional competencies necessary for prospective teachers.

c. Formation of Professional Identity and Readiness as Future Teachers

The Teaching Assistance Programme not only improved teaching competence, but also contributed to the formation of students' professional identity and readiness as future educators. Teaching practice experiences increased students' confidence and deepened their understanding of teachers' roles and responsibilities. P1 explained that the experience enhanced self-confidence and strengthened commitment towards pursuing a teaching career. Similarly, P2 stated that the programme improved mental and professional preparedness while increasing motivation to become a professional teacher.

2. Learning Experiences during the Programme

The second theme highlights how the Teaching Assistance Programme provided valuable learning experiences that enabled students to understand instructional processes through direct involvement in schools. These experiences allowed students to comprehend classroom dynamics, implement teaching strategies, and reflect upon their teaching abilities.

"I became more confident, mentally prepared, and more certain about my decision to become a teacher." (P1)

"I felt more mentally and professionally prepared and increasingly motivated to become a professional teacher." (P2)

Moreover, practical teaching experiences prepared students to face real classroom situations. P3 explained that the programme increased readiness to deal with various classroom situations during instruction. Likewise, P4 stated that the programme provided a broader understanding of teachers' roles and improved the ability to address classroom challenges.

"I became more prepared to manage classrooms and deal with various teaching situations." (P3)

“I understood the broader role of teachers, became more prepared for real situations, and learned how to solve classroom problems.” (P4)

These findings demonstrate that the Teaching Assistance Programme contributed not only to the development of teaching competence, but also to students’ mental preparedness, professional readiness, and professional identity as future educators.

a. Learning through Direct Involvement in Teaching and Learning Activities

All participants explained that the Teaching Assistance Programme provided opportunities for direct involvement in school-based instructional activities. These experiences helped students understand teaching processes, student interactions, and classroom dynamics in authentic educational settings. P1 explained that teaching practice enabled direct observation of how teachers delivered lesson content. Similarly, P2 stated that interacting directly with students facilitated understanding of diverse student characteristics during learning activities.

“I was directly involved in classroom learning, teaching practice, and observing how teachers explained lessons.” (P1)

“Interacting with students helped me understand their different characteristics.” (P2)

These experiences also enabled students to understand teachers’ roles in managing classroom learning. P3 stated that the programme allowed genuine experience of functioning as a teacher, while P4 explained that participation in various school activities provided broader insight into educational environments.

“I genuinely experienced the role of a teacher and managed classroom instruction.” (P3)

“I was directly involved in school activities and assisted students during learning.” (P4)

These findings indicate that direct involvement in schools provided contextual learning experiences that enabled students to understand the realities of classroom teaching more comprehensively.

b. Experiences in Implementing Teaching Strategies and Methods

Students gained experience in implementing various teaching strategies and methods throughout teaching practice. These experiences helped students recognise the importance of creativity and flexibility in instruction in order to accommodate students' classroom needs. P1 explained that teaching practice involved applying instructional methods learned at university while recognising the importance of flexible and student-centred approaches. Similarly, P2 stated that communicative and active learning methods, including discussions and question-and-answer activities, were implemented during teaching practice.

"I applied teaching methods learned at university and realised that teachers must be flexible and creative by using student-centred learning." (P1)

"I used communicative methods and active learning approaches through discussion and question-and-answer sessions." (P2)

In addition, students recognised the importance of instructional strategies that encourage student participation. P3 explained that instructional media and learning activities were used to increase student engagement during lessons. Similarly, P4 stated that discussion and question-and-answer methods facilitated both student participation and effective delivery of lesson content.

"I used audio media and asked students to participate actively in front of the class." (P3)

"I used discussion and question-and-answer methods to support lesson delivery." (P4)

These findings suggest that teaching practice experiences enabled students to understand that effective instruction requires flexible, creative, and student-oriented strategies adapted to classroom conditions.

c. Self-Reflection and Continuous Professional Development

In addition to gaining teaching experience, students also engaged in self-reflection throughout the Teaching Assistance Programme. Teaching practice encouraged students to recognise personal limitations and the importance of continuous professional development. P1 explained that the experience motivated

continuous self-evaluation and improvement of teaching abilities. Similarly, P2 stated that feedback from supervising teachers helped identify personal weaknesses and improve teaching competence.

“I continuously evaluated myself, searched for ways to improve, and kept learning.” (P1)

“Feedback from supervising teachers helped me recognise my weaknesses and improve my teaching skills.” (P2)

Furthermore, practical experiences became a basis for evaluating and improving instructional processes. P3 explained that teaching practice enabled identification of weaknesses in the teaching methods employed. Meanwhile, P4 regarded the experience as a valuable learning process that supported personal development and adaptability within school environments.

“I identified weaknesses in my teaching methods and used them as evaluation for improvement.” (P3)

“It became a learning process for self-development and improving adaptability.” (P4)

These findings demonstrate that the Teaching Assistance Programme supported the development of reflective abilities that are essential for professional growth among prospective teachers.

3. Challenges during the Teaching Assistance Programme

Although the Teaching Assistance Programme provided many positive experiences, students also encountered several challenges during teaching practice. The most frequently reported challenges related to classroom management, maintaining students’ attention, and encouraging active student participation during lessons.

a. Challenges in Classroom Management

All participants acknowledged that real classroom teaching was considerably more complex than theoretical learning at university. Students experienced difficulties in maintaining a conducive classroom environment during instruction. P1 explained that maintaining students’ attention and focus during lessons was

challenging. Similar experiences were reported by P2 and P3, who encountered disruptive classroom conditions and difficulties controlling students.

“Students became noisy and unfocused, making it difficult to maintain their attention.” (P1)

“The classroom was noisy and difficult to manage; students sometimes refused to listen.” (P2)

“Students were difficult to control, and the classroom atmosphere was not conducive to learning.” (P3)

Likewise, P4 experienced difficulties in maintaining students’ concentration throughout lessons.

“Students lacked focus, and it was difficult to maintain a conducive classroom environment.” (P4)

These findings indicate that classroom management constituted one of the primary challenges encountered during teaching practice.

b. Challenges in Enhancing Student Engagement

In addition to classroom management difficulties, students also faced challenges in increasing student engagement during learning activities. Participants recognised that not all students participated actively in lessons, thereby requiring instructional strategies capable of enhancing participation and motivation. P1 explained difficulties in encouraging all students to participate actively during lessons. Similarly, P2 reported challenges associated with students’ low learning motivation.

“It was difficult to make all students participate actively; only a few students were engaged.” (P1)

“Students were less active and lacked motivation, making classroom engagement difficult.” (P2)

Furthermore, P3 explained that some students paid limited attention during lessons. Meanwhile, P4 experienced difficulties in maintaining student engagement and encouraging less active students to participate.

“Some students paid little attention during lessons.” (P3)

“It was challenging to maintain student engagement and encourage passive students to participate.” (P4)

These findings demonstrate that creating learning environments that actively engage all students represented a complex challenge for participants during teaching practice.

c. Efforts to Overcome Teaching Challenges

Despite encountering various challenges during teaching practice, students attempted to identify strategies to overcome instructional difficulties. These experiences encouraged students to continue learning, adapting, and improving their teaching abilities. P1 explained that more interactive learning activities and educational games were implemented to increase students’ attention and participation during lessons.

“I tried to make lessons more interactive by using games during instruction.” (P1)

Furthermore, P2 stated that teaching practice helped identify personal weaknesses and motivated continuous improvement in teaching competence.

“I recognised my weaknesses and continued learning to improve myself.” (P2)

Meanwhile, P4 explained efforts to create more effective learning environments and adapt teaching practices to students’ needs.

“I attempted to create more effective learning experiences and adapt instruction to students’ needs.” (P4)

These findings suggest that the challenges encountered during the Teaching Assistance Programme became an essential part of students' professional learning processes. Through these experiences, students learned to adapt, engage in self-evaluation, and develop more effective instructional strategies as prospective teachers.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Teaching Assistance Programmer provided meaningful and transformative learning experiences for English Education students, particularly in developing pedagogical competence, communication skills, professional readiness, reflective awareness, and teaching adaptability. Participants generally perceived the programmed positively because it enabled them to experience authentic classroom situations and connect pedagogical theories learned at university with practical teaching experiences in schools. These findings strongly align with David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation (Brandhuber et al., 2022; Kolb, 1984). Through direct involvement in classroom teaching, students were able to transform theoretical understanding into professional knowledge and practical teaching competence. The programmed therefore functioned not only as an academic requirement but also as a professional learning environment that shaped students' understanding of teaching realities and educational responsibilities. Through direct involvement in classroom teaching, students were able to transform theoretical understanding into professional knowledge and practical teaching competence. The programmer therefore functioned not only as an academic requirement but also as a professional learning environment that shaped students' understanding of teaching realities and educational responsibilities.

The positive perceptions expressed by participants indicate that the Teaching Assistance Programmer successfully bridged the gap between theory and practice. Students explained that classroom teaching experiences allowed them to understand instructional processes, classroom dynamics, student behaviors, and teachers' professional responsibilities more realistically. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of field-based teaching experiences for

preservice teachers. (Ghufron, 2024). found that teaching internship programmers provide valuable opportunities for preservice English teachers to apply pedagogical knowledge and gain practical teaching experience in authentic educational contexts. Similarly, Ulfah & Yuliani (2024) reported that students participating in educational practice programmers perceived direct teaching experience as highly beneficial for strengthening teaching readiness and professional understanding. The findings of the present study reinforce the idea that experiential engagement within real school environments enables preservice teachers to move beyond theoretical understanding toward professional competence and contextual awareness.

The findings also reveal that the Teaching Assistance Programmer contributed significantly to the development of pedagogical and professional competencies. Participants reported improvements in lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, communication skills, and collaboration with supervising teachers. These findings support Massod et al., (2022), who argued that teaching practicum experiences play an essential role in developing teaching competence because they expose preservice teachers to authentic instructional challenges and responsibilities. Likewise, Yuan & Lee, (2016) found that practical teaching experiences enhance students' teaching confidence, instructional preparation, and classroom interaction skills. Through repeated interaction with students and teachers, participants in this study gradually learned how to organize instructional activities, explain lesson materials effectively, and manage classroom learning more confidently.

The development of communication competence also emerged as an important aspect of students' professional growth during the programmed. Participants explained that direct interaction with students and teachers improved their ability to communicate clearly, confidently, and adaptively in classroom settings. These findings strongly align with Hargie (2011), perspective that effective communication competence is developed through interpersonal interaction and communicative experience in social and professional contexts. Communication in educational settings requires not only the ability to deliver information but also the capacity to build interaction, encourage participation, and respond appropriately to diverse classroom situations. In line with this perspective, Arianti et al., (2025) found that participation in the Kampus Mengajar Program enhanced students' verbal and nonverbal communication skills, adaptability, confidence, and

respectful interaction with various audiences in school settings. Similarly, participants in the present study demonstrated increased confidence in classroom communication, improved interaction with students, and stronger ability to adapt communication strategies according to classroom conditions and students' needs.

Another important finding concerns the formation of students' professional identity and readiness as future teachers. Participants explained that the programme strengthened their confidence, increased their motivation to pursue teaching careers, and improved their mental preparedness for professional responsibilities. This finding supports Nguyen (2017), argument that teaching practicum experiences play a central role in shaping teacher identity because they allow preservice teachers to experience the realities, responsibilities, and emotional dimensions of teaching directly. These findings are consistent with Yuan & Lee (2016), who explained that authentic teaching experiences contribute to the development of professional confidence and pedagogical awareness among EFL student teachers. In the present study, participants began to perceive teaching not merely as an academic task but as a professional responsibility that requires commitment, adaptability, communication skills, and continuous learning.

The second major theme of this study highlights the importance of direct involvement in classroom learning processes as a source of contextual and experiential learning. Participants explained that classroom interaction and participation in school activities enabled them to understand diverse student characteristics, instructional interactions, and classroom realities more comprehensively. These findings strongly reflect Kolb (1984) experiential learning cycle, in which concrete experience becomes the basis for reflection, conceptual understanding, and future action. Through direct teaching practice, students learned to understand classroom situations not theoretically but through lived experience and active participation. Such experiences enabled participants to recognise that teaching is a dynamic and complex activity requiring flexibility, responsiveness, and situational decision-making.

The findings related to teaching strategies and instructional methods further demonstrate that students learned the importance of flexible, communicative, and student-centered learning approaches. Participants applied discussions, question-and-answer sessions, instructional media, and interactive classroom activities to encourage student engagement during lessons. These findings are consistent with Yuan & Lee (2016), who

emphasized that teaching practice and authentic teaching experiences help preservice and early-career teachers develop instructional competence and adapt teaching strategies in classroom instruction. Participants gradually realized that successful instruction depends not only on content knowledge but also on the ability to adapt teaching methods according to classroom conditions and students' participation levels. This finding also supports Arianti et al., (2025) who found that field-based teaching experiences strengthen students' ability to communicate interactively and empathetically with learners from different backgrounds and learning characteristics.

This finding aligns with studies emphasizing that reflective practice through structured evaluation of practical teaching experiences is essential for preservice teacher professional development because it enables them to critically examine their classroom teaching experiences, including instructional strategies, classroom interaction, and teaching effectiveness. Through this reflective process, preservice teachers are able to continuously improve their instructional practices and develop greater professional competence in response to real classroom experiences. The findings also indicate that participants encountered significant challenges during teaching practice, particularly related to classroom management and student engagement. Students experienced difficulties maintaining classroom order, sustaining students' attention, and encouraging active participation during instructional activities. These findings are consistent with previous studies identifying classroom management as one of the greatest challenges faced by preservice teachers during teaching practicum. (Qadir et al., 2020), found that preservice teachers often struggle to manage disruptive classroom behaviour and maintain conducive learning environments during practical teaching experiences. Similarly, Wiediantin et al., (2023) reported that EFL preservice teachers participating in teaching assistance programmed frequently encounter difficulties controlling classrooms and encouraging student participation. The present study reinforces the understanding that real classroom situations are often more complex than theoretical classroom management concepts introduced at university.

Challenges related to student engagement also emerged prominently in the findings. Participants explained that some students lacked motivation, participated passively, or showed limited attention during lessons. Similar findings were reported by Ahmed, (2023) who found that low student participation and motivational problems constitute

major instructional difficulties for preservice teachers during classroom teaching. These challenges indicate that effective teaching requires not only pedagogical competence but also communication skills, interpersonal sensitivity, creativity, and adaptability. In this context, Arianti et al., (2025), emphasized that communication competence involves the ability to communicate respectfully, empathetically, and appropriately according to audience characteristics and social situations. Participants in the present study gradually recognised that motivating students and maintaining classroom engagement require interactive communication, emotional awareness, and supportive teacher-student relationships.

In addition to pedagogical and communication challenges, the findings also reflect the complexity of adapting instruction according to diverse classroom needs and student characteristics. Participants explained that they needed to adjust teaching approaches, classroom interaction, and learning activities continuously during instructional practice. This finding can also be connected to Syahriani (2024) argument that meaningful learning occurs when instructional experiences encourage adaptation, reflection, collaboration, and active participation within authentic educational contexts. She further emphasized that instructional support should be responsive to learners' needs and developmental conditions. In the present study, participants learned that effective teaching cannot rely solely on theoretical methods but must involve situational adaptation, reflective thinking, and flexible instructional decision-making based on classroom realities.

Despite encountering various difficulties during teaching practice, participants demonstrated efforts to overcome instructional challenges through adaptation, reflection, and creativity. Students attempted to use interactive activities, educational games, communicative approaches, and more engaging instructional strategies to improve classroom participation and learning effectiveness. These findings support Schön & DeSantictis (1983) concept of reflective practice, which explains that professional competence develops through reflection-in-action during authentic professional experiences. Through repeated interaction with classroom challenges, participants learned how to evaluate instructional problems, modify teaching approaches, and improve communication with students. Consequently, challenges experienced during the Teaching Assistance Programmer became valuable opportunities for experiential learning and professional development rather than barriers to teaching competence.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the Teaching Assistance Programme served as a meaningful professional learning environment that supported students' pedagogical competence, communication skills, reflective awareness, adaptability, and professional identity formation. The programmer enabled participants to experience authentic classroom realities while simultaneously encouraging continuous learning, self-evaluation, and professional growth. The findings also indicate that teaching competence develops not only through theoretical instruction but also through direct engagement with real educational situations, classroom challenges, and social interaction within school environments. At the same time, the challenges encountered by participants highlight the importance of stronger mentoring, communication training, classroom management preparation, and reflective practice within teacher education programs. Therefore, this study contributes to the broader understanding that opportunities and challenges experienced during teaching assistance programmers collectively shape the professional development and teaching readiness of prospective teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study explored English Education students' perceptions toward the Teaching Assistance Programmer, particularly the opportunities and challenges experienced during teaching practice. The findings revealed that students generally perceived the programmer positively because it provided authentic teaching experiences that helped them connect theoretical knowledge with real classroom practice. Through direct involvement in school activities, participants developed pedagogical competence, communication skills, classroom management abilities, professional confidence, and readiness as future teachers.

The study also found that the programmer encouraged reflective practice and professional growth, as students learned to evaluate their teaching performance and adapt instructional strategies according to classroom conditions and students' needs. However, participants also faced several challenges, particularly in classroom management, maintaining student engagement, and handling diverse student behaviors. Despite these difficulties, the challenges became valuable learning experiences that supported students' adaptability and professional development.

This study highlights the importance of authentic teaching experiences in preparing prospective teachers for real educational settings. However, this study was limited by the

small number of participants and the focus on one university context. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve participants from different universities and educational settings and to use additional data collection methods, such as classroom observations and reflective journals, to provide broader insights into the effectiveness of Teaching Assistance Programmers.

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