STAIRS
English Language Education Journal

Student Teachers Readiness and Challenges for Internship Program: A Survey on English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Jakarta

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Abstract

For students majoring in education, the teaching internship program is mandatory. Along with employing the Kurikulum Merdeka in schools, student teachers must also prepare to use it through the teaching internship program. This study aims to investigate student teachers' readiness and challenges for the teaching internship program. This study employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to achieve its objectives. In all, 40 English Language Education Study Program student teachers batch 2020 at Universitas Negeri Jakarta completed questionnaires and participated in Focused Group Discussions focusing on their readiness and challenges based on key teaching competences, enabling competences, professional conduct, and personality. The research uncovered student teachers level of readiness and challenges in 'administration', 'methodology: knowledge and skills', 'assessment', and 'lesson and course preparation' to Kurikulum Merdeka as 'developing readiness' and 'mostly challenging'. However, they perceived 'approaching readiness' and views them as 'mostly not challenging' aspects as in 'digital media implementation,' 'professional behavior', 'personality', and 'intercultural skills'. Because prior studies did not cover these areas all at once, the knowledge obtained through this research study applies locally.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on educational aspects in Indonesia. Schools closed, and all learning activities shifted to an online setting. There are 3 possible negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indonesia's education: (1) a decrease in learning achievement; (2) student dropout; and (3) violence in children and external risks (Direktorat SMP - Kementrian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi RI, 2021). According to World Bank projection, implementing online classes for only four months could have a 25-point impact on the Program for

STAIRS
English Language Education Journal

International Students Assessment or PISA's reading score (Yarrow, Masood, & Afkar, 2020) and if the online classes are extended, they will contribute an additional 11 points minus to PISA's score (Afkar & Yarrow, 2021).

To cope with that, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Education of Indonesia since 2021 conducted several studies for further education regulation to minimize the negative impact caused by COVID-19. The studies show that there is both short-term and long-term regulation. The short-term regulation focuses on the accessibility and simplification of the emergency curriculum, learning modules, and teaching materials (Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan, 2021). Corresponding to that, the ministry set up a new curriculum structure that focuses on essential competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and character building for long-term regulation. The curriculum should be flexible and adaptable for teachers and schools (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan (BSKAP) Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022). In February 2022 "Kurikulum Merdeka," was launched and applied to schools that were involved in the "Sekolah Penggerak" program. Late in March 2022, the Circular of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 3 of 2022, concerning Adjustments to the Implementation of Joint Decrees of Four Ministers regarding Guidelines for Organizing Learning During the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic, this was issued and marked as the starting point for limited face-to-face learning (Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022).

In institutes of teacher education, pre-service teachers are supervised and guided by their lecturers during their studies. Not only receive pedagogical courses offered by the study program, but they must also acquire teaching experience in the classroom before getting their bachelor's degree (Wiggan, Pass, & Gadd, 2020). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these pre-service teachers have a limited opportunity to observe real-life teaching before beginning their teaching internship program in their third year. They have been spending a lot of time in pedagogical courses offered, but research shows that pre-service teachers still feel unready for actual teaching experience (Astutik, Setiawan, & Anam, 2022). Thus, Teacher education programs should support and recognize pre-service teachers' motivations for a successful teaching profession (Ayuningtyas & Santosa, 2024).

While there have been studies investigating the readiness of prospective teachers to teach online, there is a lack of research specifically exploring the readiness and challenges faced by students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) when participating in internship programs. Existing literature primarily focuses on the general readiness of prospective teachers or addresses specific aspects of online teaching, disregarding the unique characteristics and needs of English language education students. Therefore, a research gap exists regarding student readiness and challenges specific to the English Language Education Study Program at UNJ in the context of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka during internship programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative research technique to achieve the specified objective. Research methods employed in this study are surveys and Focused Group Interviews. A Focused Group

Discussion includes a certain topic in which the researcher is eager to discover the answer from the respondent, but questions are open-ended and might not be posed in precisely the same manner or the same sequence to each respondent. The researcher used two table analyses for the student teachers' readiness and challenges Likert-scale 4-point questionnaire modified from European Profiling Grid and based on Permendiknas No. 16 Thn 2007. Researchers also developed a Focused Group Discussions protocol, developed from student teachers' responses to the questionnaire. Respondents of this study are 40 students of the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages of Arts, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, batch 2020. The data were collected through an online questionnaire to analyze student teachers' readiness and challenges before facing the internship program. A Focused Group Discussion with five selected respondents was conducted to cross-check the data obtained from the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings
Student Teachers Readiness in the Internship Program

Based on Table 1 below, students are evaluated based on their readiness in various competencies before taking the internship program. The data shows that they have different levels of readiness across different categories.

Table 1: Student Teacher's Readiness in the Internship Program

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	MEAN	%	INTERPRETATION
Key Teaching Competences (M=2,84 or 59,50%)	Methodology: Knowledge and Skills	2,82	70,60%	Developing Readiness
	Assessment	2,67	66,90%	Developing Readiness
	Lesson and course planning	2,87	71,90%	Developing Readiness
	Interaction management and monitoring	3,02	75,60%	Approaching Readiness
Enabling Competences (M=3,29 or 80,80%)	Intercultural competence	3,62	90,60%	Approaching Readiness
	Language awareness	3,07	76,90%	Approaching Readiness
	Digital Media	3,18	76,60%	Approaching Readiness
Professionalism (M=3,15 or 77,50%)	Professional Conduct	3,32	83,10%	Approaching Readiness
	Administration	2,98	71,90%	Developing Readiness
Personality		3,31	83,00%	Approaching Readiness

Students' readiness related to Key Teaching Competencies indicates a moderate level of readiness. Student teachers feel they have a decent understanding of how to manage classroom interactions (M = 3,02), lessons, and course planning (M = 2,87). However, they feel unprepared for the things related to the teaching methodologies, this also includes how deep their understanding of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (M = 2,82) and how they conduct the assessment based on *Kurikulum Merdeka* (M = 2,67). Their unpreparedness for the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is confirmed through a Focused Group Discussion result.

STAIRS

English Language Education Journal

> *"I am not ready yet because the lecturers and courses in our study program have not extensively discussed Kurikulum Merdeka. We must learn on our own."* (Student 3)
> *"The limited opportunities for direct classroom observation make me feel less prepared to teach."* (Student 5)

They also indicate their unreadiness to formulate and effectively implement assessments based on Kurikulum Merdeka.

> *"The assessments in Kurikulum Merdeka are diverse, unlike the Kurikulum 2013 Revisi. However, we still need to learn about the assessments and how to formulate them since they haven't been discussed in our courses."* (Student 4)

However, Enabling Competencies such as intercultural competence, language awareness, and digital media show a relatively higher level of readiness. This indicates that students and teachers possess a stronger foundation in these aspects. They seem to have a good understanding of cultural diversity and how to incorporate it into their teaching practices (M = 3,62). Additionally, they demonstrate an awareness of language teaching-related issues (M = 3,07) and can use digital media tools for educational purposes (M = 3,18). Also, based on Focused Group Discussions, students showed a positive reaction while conducting a class with diverse students,

> "*I will maintain a neutral attitude when dealing with a diverse classroom because our country is diverse, and it is not new for me to be tolerant of cultural differences."* (Student 1)

readiness to selectively choose digital media tools to teach,

> *"The technologies I plan to use in my upcoming teaching internship are various. I will use Quiziz, Kahoot!, or Quizlet for assessments. I also intend to incorporate games into my teaching activities."* (Student 3)
> *"I want to use audio in teaching because, for me, listening is fun, but it is rarely touched upon in school activities. To prevent boredom, I will occasionally use films and videos."* (Student 5)

and aware of language teaching-related issues

> *"I will group the students according to their learning styles, and then I will ask for feedback from the students regarding the teaching methods I have used. From there, I can evaluate the effectiveness of my teaching and formulate better teaching approaches in the future."* (Student 1)

In terms of professionalism, they understand the importance of conducting themselves professionally and adhering to ethical standards (M = 3,32). However, the mean score for administration (M = 2,98) indicates a need for further development in administrative tasks, indicating that student teachers may require additional training in this area. Portrayed through the Focused Group Discussions result, they also projected positive behavior toward the school community as a part of their professionalism.

> *I will be friendly, request feedback on teaching activities from mentor teachers, and socialize well outside of teaching hours to establish positive relationships with the school community."* (Student 2)

Fadhilah, F.S., Mayuni, I., Lasito. (2024). Student Teachers Readiness and Challenges for Internship Program: A Survey on English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. *STAIRS: English Language Education Journal, 5(1), 35-46.*

But on the other side, they also claim that they should discover more about teaching administration and that they should prepare correlates with Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in their destinated school.

> *I am not aware of the specific teaching administration preparations required for Kurikulum Merdeka, aside from the lesson plans (RPP). However, I can find the required documents on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM).* (Student 3)

For the personality category, the mean score suggests a higher level of readiness (M = 3,31). This indicates that students and teachers possess the personal qualities and characteristics necessary for effective teaching. They exhibit traits such as being friendly, approachable, and maintaining appropriate boundaries with their students.

> *"Being a teacher means that we are looked up to and imitated by students, so I must be a good example and provide positive role modeling for them."* (Student 1)

Student Teachers Challenges in the Internship Program

Finding out what difficulties students in the English Language Education Study Program Batch 2020 would have prior to taking part in the teaching internship program was the aim of the first research question. The findings of the internship program's teacher preparedness survey are shown below.

Table 2: Student Teachers Challenges in the Internship Program

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	MEAN	%	INTERPRETATION
Key Teaching Competencies (M= 2,83 or 71,50%)	Methodology: Knowledge and Skills	2,95	73,80%	Mostly Challenging
	Assessment	2,65	66,30%	Mostly Challenging
	Lesson and course planning	2,80	70%	Mostly Challenging
	Interaction management and monitoring	2,95	73,80%	Mostly Challenging
Enabling Competencies (M=3,02 or 76,30%)	Intercultural competence	3,02	75,60%	Mostly not Challenging
	Language awareness	3,00	75%	Mostly not Challenging
	Digital Media	3,06	76,70%	Mostly not Challenging
Professionalism (M= 3,02 or 75,60%)	Professional Conduct	3,12	78,10%	Mostly not Challenging
	Administration	2,92	73,10%	MostlyChallenging
Personality		3,31	82,80%	Mostly not Challenging

Based on the data, students face certain challenges in developing their teaching competencies before the internship program. In terms of key teaching competencies, students find methodology (M = 2,95), assessment (M = 2,65), lesson and course planning (M = 2,80), and interaction management and monitoring (M = 2,95) to be challenging areas. These competencies receive scores below 3, indicating that students feel they need further improvement and support in these aspects of teaching. Supported by their testimonies during the Focused Group Discussions on the challenges to implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* and planning the lesson and course,

> *".. the integration of the 6Cs and Profil Pelajar Pancasila in teaching. That's quite challenging to me."* (Student 3)

STAIRS

English Language Education Journal

> *"… the Capaian Pembelajaran in Kurikulum Merdeka is still too broad to be specified, unlike KI-KD (Kompetensi Inti dan Kompetensi Dasar) in Kurikulum 2013 Revisi as well formulating the assessment. So, I find it quite challenging in lesson planning."* (Student 2)

as well as formulating and handling the assessment.

> *"… I don't know the specific forms of assessment, assessment indicators, or how to create and conduct assessments in accordance with Kurikulum Merdeka."* (Student 3)

On the other hand, enabling competencies such as intercultural competence, language awareness, and digital media receive scores around or above 3, suggesting that students may not perceive them as significant challenges. They demonstrate a relatively stronger foundation in these competencies, indicating that they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate cultural diversity (M = 3,02), address language teaching-related issues (M = 3,00), and utilize digital media tools in their teaching practices (M =3,06). Based on the input provided by participants in the Focused Group Discussions, students find it easy to deal with students with diverse cultural backgrounds,

> *"…it is not new for me to be tolerant of cultural differences. So, I am positive that I can handle it."* (Student 1)

language teaching-related issues, and

> *"I have to observe the students' preferences in language learning before integrating various teaching methods in the classroom and it's also based on my experience in microteaching courses."* (Student 2)

able to design and utilize digital media tools in language learning.

> *"In the classroom, I can use PowerPoint to deliver my lesson, use audio such as songs or podcasts, and videos. I also want to equip students with the ability to learn independently using e-books."* (Student 4)

In terms of professionalism, students feel reasonably confident in their ability to exhibit professional conduct (M = 3,12). However, the administration competence presents a slight challenge (M = 2.92). Considering the opinions exchanged during the focused group sessions, they claimed that it's not that hard to be professional with the school's community,

> *"Since I am accustomed to interacting and working with older individuals, I will certainly communicate well with my colleagues at the school. Politeness is necessary to foster positive relationships with colleagues. I find it easy to be professional."* (Student 5)

but students may need further development and training in administrative tasks to effectively handle administrative responsibilities and procedures.

> *"I am not aware of the specific teaching/school administration preparations required for Kurikulum Merdeka, aside from the lesson plans (RPP). However, I can find the required documents on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM)"* (Student 1)

Finally, students have the personality traits necessary for effective teaching, as evidenced by the mean personality score of 3.31 or 82,8%. This may indicate that they are quite at ease forming

effective interactions with their students and upholding appropriate boundaries with reference. However, students also claimed that they still need to prepare themselves mentally to face the teaching internship program in the future based on the feedback gathered during the Focused Group Discussions.

"I will continue learning and increasing my self-confidence in teaching…" (Student 3)

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to examine students' readiness to take part in a teaching internship program and to examine the challenges that were mentioned. The following summarizes the key findings. From the result of students' readiness, student teachers reflected that they are most ready in terms of showing a positive trait (M = 3,31), professional conduct towards the school community (M = 3,32), and intercultural competence (M = 3,62). Conveyed by the student's teacher, they are ready to ask and give feedback to their colleagues as well as to other schools' communities. This positive trait is associated with Dixon et al. (2012) research findings that feedback from experienced people to less experienced is highly essential. It could also increase Student Teachers professional efficacy and motivation (Lee & Yuan, 2014) (Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aelterman, 2012). A discovery found in this study is student teachers believe it's not particularly difficult to teach children from different cultural backgrounds (M = 3,62). It is a contrast to a study conducted by Wong, et. al. (2016) where students in EFL programs have difficulty adjusting to the differences as well as comprehending and acclimating to a culture that is opposed to their own. They also claimed that they're quite ready to monitor and manage classroom interaction in a classroom situation with varied students' abilities, interests, and learning styles (M = 3.02). This finding is opposite from Rowan and Townend's study (2016) where the pre-service teacher feels less prepared to accommodate learning with the diversity of students' abilities.

Student Teacher's readiness in language awareness (M = 3,07) and incorporating digital media into learning (M = 3,18) are moderate. Supported by the previous courses they take; Student Teachers are confident and find it easy to incorporate digital media into learning. Parallels to that, Han et al. (2017) reported that the ability to integrate technology in class significantly improved pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in teaching. Voogt and McKenney (2017) further provide advice concerning the necessity of enhancing the use of technology in teacher preparation to assist teacher candidates' TPACK in early literacy. Students' readiness for technology implementation is associated with the availability of technology resources and TPACK-related courses, parallel to a study conducted by Tiba & Condy (2021). This contributes a positive finding to the teaching internship program in which student teachers will take part. Student teachers have a fair understanding of TPACK and hopefully, they will be effective educators (Pazilah, Hashim, & M., 2021).

On the other side, they agree that they still need more time to prepare themselves in incorporating Kurikulum Merdeka into their lesson and course planning (M = 2,87), assessment (2,67), teaching administration (M = 2,98), as well as their fundamental knowledge and skills on Kurikulum Merdeka methodology (M = 2,82). This finding correlates to the findings discovered by Kabilan, et. al. (2020) when students don't feel prepared to generate curriculum-based learning materials that are adequate and suitable. Corresponds to that, research conducted by Yuan (2017) also

STAIRS
English Language Education Journal

confirms that student teachers are struggling with curriculum appropriation such as pedagogy-related issues and materials development and use.

Another study also finds a significant incapability to formulate an engaging lesson plan (Gan, 2013). However, few student teachers evoke their tendency to learn and their ability to develop 'curricular thinking' which connects students' needs and interests to disciplinary concepts and the development of critical skills (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 211). Student Teachers view the ability to develop and present appropriate teaching aids as crucial to the success of learning, which resonance with Rahayuningsih's findings (2016) and also becomes the primary responsibility of the teacher, in a similar manner to Evans's research findings (1998).

Student teachers in this research also express their unreadiness to participate in a teaching internship program since they had minimum exposure to an actual school and classroom situation, they believe that their experience in school as students does not contribute much to their background knowledge, skills, and readiness to teach. This corresponds to a finding from a study conducted by Astutik et al. (2022) which shows Student Teachers' unreadiness to real-life teaching and unidentified teaching intentions although they have been studying for a long time.

From the result of student teachers' challenges before participating in the internship program, most student teachers consider that personality (M = 3,31), professionalism (M = 3,12), intercultural competence (M = 3,02), language awareness (M = 3,00), and integrate digital media into learning activity (M = 3,06) are not significant challenges for them before participating in the internship program. However, the student's teacher testifies their concerns in formulating the appropriate assessment (M = 2,65), doing the administration works (M = 2,92), and planning the course and lesson (M = 2,95), skills and knowledge related to teaching methodology (M = 2,95), and interaction management and monitoring (M = 2,95).

In terms of implementing teaching methodology, both knowledge and skills and interaction management and monitoring seem to be the most challenging things captured by Student Teachers. This finding resonates with qualitative research taken out in Indonesia (Ragawanti, 2015) and a study carried out in the US that indicated a knowledge gap in pre-service teachers' understanding of classroom management (Poznanski, Hart, & Cramer, 2018). Student teachers believe that teaching administration work is one of the challenges them to do and it is parallel to Tutyandari's (2022) findings in her research.

On the other side, effective digital media integration into learning appears to be a seamless challenge to student teachers as a result of sufficient technology knowledge and training during their study since it is considered an essential component (Howard, Tondeur, Ma, & Yang, 2021). Supported by a finding from Singh & Kasim (2019) which portrayed a language teacher with adequate technological knowledge may use technology effectively in the classroom. This finding is also opposite to some research carried out by Gyaase et al. (2019), Lie et al. (2020), and Syamdianita and Cahyono (2021) which mention that teachers faced challenges because while having a high level of technical knowledge, there was a low level of effective technology utilization.

From the discussions elaborated above, we can reckon that our student teachers are not prepared for teaching internship programs, as Ingvarson et al (2007) find that student teachers considered well-prepared are typically defined as those who have sufficient understanding of the relevant subjects and

the learning styles of their students, as well as the skills to assess their capacity to learn and create effective lesson plans. Supported by the idea that teaching preparedness is task-specific or competency-based, based on a study conducted by Turner et al (2004). It also correlates to Abdullah's discovery (2017) that student teachers felt more prepared in professional practices and attitudes, but for professional knowledge (pedagogically), they still felt unprepared. Their unreadiness later becomes a challenge to deal with before participating in a teaching internship program.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study aimed to assess students' readiness and challenges for the teaching internship program, focusing on Kurikulum Merdeka's implementation in Indonesia. Results showed that students perceived the lowest level of readiness in developing and conducting assessments, lesson planning, administration, and methodology. However, they were confident in managing interaction, handling culturally diverse classrooms, teaching language, implementing digital media, and showing positive personality and professional conduct. The findings provide valuable insights into the readiness of students for teaching internship programs and shed light on Indonesia's curriculum.

It is highly recommended that the outcome of this study be used as a guide for students and teachers to evaluate their readiness to participate in teaching internship programs as well as to navigate the challenges that might appear due to their unreadiness. Based on the results and discussions, student teachers need to discover more about the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka along with its teaching administration and assessment procedures. Moreover, the researcher recommends that the English Language Education study program at Universitas Negeri Jakarta can also provide student teachers with adequate real-classroom experience before participating in a teaching internship program and upgrading the teaching quality for courses related to the key teaching competencies. The student itself should also be open to the recent changes and educational issues in Indonesia. It is also highly required for the students to revive and actively participate in several discussion forums related to educational issues, updates, and any insight related to the curriculum implementation. Besides that, The Ministry of Education or the Republic of Indonesia should take a certain part in the socialization of Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation, for example, by creating a bridging course on recent curriculum implementation. Student teachers need adequate, comprehensive, intensive guidance, and credible resources to help schools and in-service teachers implement Kurikulum Merdeka effectively. Future research may identify factors that influence teachers' unreadiness in teaching internship programs and alternative strategies to support student teachers' readiness.

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44

STAIRS
English Language Education Journal

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45

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