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## Learning to Teach: A Case Study of Student Teachers' Practicum and Policy Recommendations

Urip Sulistiyo  
*Jambi University*

Amirul Mukminin  
*Jambi University, amirul.mukminin@unja.ac.id*

Kemas Abdurrahman  
*Jambi University*

Eddy Haryanto  
*Jambi University*

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## Learning to Teach: A Case Study of Student Teachers' Practicum and Policy Recommendations

### Abstract

This qualitative case study was conducted to gather information on the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. Information was gathered from five recent teacher graduates, five beginner teachers, five school principals, and five teacher educators on their perceptions of English Foreign Language Teacher Education Program (EFLTEP) graduates as beginner teachers. This qualitative study employed a background survey, document analyses and interviews for data collection. Document analyses were used to examine the aims and content of the English teacher education program and official Indonesian English teacher education curriculum and policies. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the main data from graduates and collect information from the beginner teachers. Interviews with principals and teacher educators were used to obtain further data and evidence about the beginner teachers' knowledge and preparedness to teach. We organized our analysis, findings, and discussion around the implementation of teaching practicum. The analyses of the documents and texts revealed that major themes related to (1) the standards for implementing the teaching practicum in the program, (2) quality of the teaching practicum, (3) duration of the teaching practicum, (4) the roles of mentor teachers and teacher educators, and (5) selecting school partners for the student teacher practicum. Particularly, the findings indicated that teaching practicum projects undertaken during the program provided suitable but limited experience for student teachers to translate their knowledge learnt at university into the real practice of teaching at school levels. For future improvement of the program, the role of supervising teachers and teacher educators in assisting student teachers during the teaching practicum project should be a priority. The organisation and management of school–university partnerships for schools taking part in the teaching practicum require attention to maximise benefits to student teachers.

### Keywords

Indonesian Student Teachers, Teacher Education, Educational Policy, Qualitative Case Study

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## Learning to Teach: A Case Study of Student Teachers' Practicum and Policy Recommendations

Urip Sulistiyo, Amirul Mukminin, Kemas Abdurrahman, and Eddy Haryanto  
Jambi University, Indonesia

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*This qualitative case study was conducted to gather information on the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. Information was gathered from five recent teacher graduates, five beginner teachers, five school principals, and five teacher educators on their perceptions of English Foreign Language Teacher Education Program (EFLTEP) graduates as beginner teachers. This qualitative study employed a background survey, document analyses and interviews for data collection. Document analyses were used to examine the aims and content of the English teacher education program and official Indonesian English teacher education curriculum and policies. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the main data from graduates and collect information from the beginner teachers. Interviews with principals and teacher educators were used to obtain further data and evidence about the beginner teachers' knowledge and preparedness to teach. We organized our analysis, findings, and discussion around the implementation of teaching practicum. The analyses of the documents and texts revealed that major themes related to (1) the standards for implementing the teaching practicum in the program, (2) quality of the teaching practicum, (3) duration of the teaching practicum, (4) the roles of mentor teachers and teacher educators, and (5) selecting school partners for the student teacher practicum. Particularly, the findings indicated that teaching practicum projects undertaken during the program provided suitable but limited experience for student teachers to translate their knowledge learnt at university into the real practice of teaching at school levels. For future improvement of the program, the role of supervising teachers and teacher educators in assisting student teachers during the teaching practicum project should be a priority. The organisation and management of school–university partnerships for schools taking part in the teaching practicum require attention to maximise benefits to student teachers. Keywords: Indonesian Student Teachers, Teacher Education, Educational Policy, Qualitative Case Study*

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Learning to teach is a multifaceted process (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Hence, teacher education programs around the globe are prepared to develop professional and quality teachers to encounter teaching challenges in the classrooms. Particularly, teacher education programs are intended to develop student teachers' knowledge, skills, and characters in order to prepare them to educate students effectively and professionally at schools (Sulistiyo, Mukminin, & Yanto, 2016; Mukminin, Kamil, Muazza, & Haryanto, 2017; Mukminin, Rohayati, Putra, Habibi, & Aina, 2017). To achieve the purposes of teacher education programs, the academic programs of the teacher education should include an important element such as school or centre-based practicum experiences which will facilitate student teachers to experience what it means to be a teacher within an academic context under the guidance of school teachers and teacher educators from the university as Zeichner (2010)

pointed out that the teaching practicum is one of the most critical components of teacher education that affects the quality of teachers.

Field experience in teaching or student teaching practice is an important part of teacher preparation programs (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Field experience is described in a range of ways, including teaching practice, student teaching, practice teaching, practicum and internship (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Wickramasinghe, 2004). The implementation of teaching practicum is important to bridge the gap between what student teachers have learnt in the program and the reality of teaching practice in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Literature on teaching practicum in Indonesian and international contexts which was relevant to this study was used in order to frame a broader discussion of how graduates of the Teacher Education Program (TEP) of Jambi University experienced teaching practicum during their preparation program. For example, a study conducted by Riesky (2013) in an Indonesian context investigating how EFL student teachers managed teaching difficulties during their teaching practicum. It concluded that teacher educators and supervising teachers needed to pay more attention to improving the quality of their supervision. Student teachers required adequate guidance in their teaching practicum. Improving quality time working with student teachers, and commitment were critically important. Further, the quantity and quality of courses on specific issues—such as how to effectively manage students with different characteristics—needed to be redesigned in the curriculum, particularly in the teacher education program courses, in terms of basic pedagogical knowledge and skills. Another interesting study was done by Goh and Matthews (2011) examining student teachers' experiences during their teaching practicum in a Malaysian context. They examined the concerns and experiences of 14 Malaysian student teachers during their practicum through a reflective journal, in which they documented their teaching concerns and confidence to teach. Goh and Matthews (2011) recommended that teacher educators endeavoured to recognise the issues that student teachers experienced during their teaching practicum. Goh and Matthews (2011) recommended that, in order to integrate the theoretical aspects learnt at university with the practical reality of the classroom, specific strategies were needed to help student teachers gain more benefits from the practicum experience. One strategy is to establish effective partnerships between schools and universities (Graham & Thornley, 2000), where the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching are taught and implemented. The quality of the teaching practicum will be enhanced if schools and universities work together to prepare for the practicum (Loughran, 2007). Goh and Matthews (2011) pointed out that teacher preparation courses had to be more aligned with actual school settings and environments. In addition, there should be a systematic way for teacher educators to periodically review course content to ensure that problem areas are included in the curriculum.

In addition, Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) conducted a study on the place of teaching practicum in pre-service teacher education from student teachers' perspectives. The main findings of this study showed that the practicum was highly regarded by a large majority of students; however, the students also attached importance to the more theoretical aspects of their education. According to Smith and Lev-Ari (2005), the theoretical aspects of teacher education include knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of pedagogic and didactics, and the ability to handle diversity. The student teachers recognised that there was an essential core body of knowledge important for them as pre-service teachers to acquire at teacher education institutions. Additionally, Mtika (2011) conducted a study related to the implementation of teaching practicum in Malawi. The data from the interviews with four trainee teachers and one supervisor revealed that, during the teaching practicum, some trainee teachers had greater workloads than anticipated. The roles and tasks for trainee teachers created role ambiguity because they were not yet qualified as teachers. Another finding was that there was no support from cooperating teachers due to a new policy at the college, and this created problems for the

trainee teachers when they encountered difficult teaching situations, such as managing large classes, because they had little support and guidance. In terms of developing pedagogical understandings and practices, the trainee teachers practised their pedagogical knowledge by imitating their mentor teacher in the classroom. The class size and lack of teaching and learning resources created multiple complexities for the trainee teachers to conduct lessons as part of learning to teach. Another study conducted by Wickramasinghe (2004) investigated how a group of pre-service teachers in Sri Lanka changed their understanding of effective teaching during a 20-day student teaching period in their teacher preparation program. The study participants were 12 students preparing for teaching secondary mathematics and science. This case study employed the use of concept maps about effective teaching, and used structured interviews as a qualitative method. It found that the student teachers needed more 'school life' experience to integrate their knowledge into practice. It also found that it was important for student teachers' reflective understanding about teaching to be developed during their teaching practice. Several weaknesses in student teachers' pedagogical standpoints were also found. The student teachers were focused more on teaching as a concept, rather than on student learning. Wickramasinghe (2004) argued that the teacher preparation program needed to further develop student teachers' understanding of learners' needs before they entered teaching practice. Dunn et al. (2000) conducted a study investigating student teachers' perceptions of teaching practicum in an Australian context. The study sought to compare and contrast the perceptions of final year student teachers from three undergraduate field experience programs at the Queensland University of Technology. The findings of the study revealed that teaching practicum built team membership and actualising in the professional role. Practicum was viewed as a way to make contacts for the participants' future career as beginning teachers. Some participants commented that the field experience was an opportunity to determine whether theory was applicable in a practical situation, while others felt it enabled them to develop and confirm their own personal approach to practice. A student whose experience was particularly stressful suggested that the practical component was a test to determine correct or incorrect career choice.

However, while a substantial number of literature have addressed the importance of student teachers' practicum experience as academic programs of the teacher education from other countries, studies focusing on Indonesian EFL student teachers' practicum experience have been comparatively limited. Investigating the quality of EFL student teachers in Indonesian schools in terms of their experience during teaching practicum seems to be significant for the following reasons as it will provide important information for developing and improving the EFLTEP, particularly at the research site. Stakeholders such as school principals, teacher educators, department heads, dean of college of education, and local governments need such information. In response to this, the aim of this inquiry was to gather information on the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university in, Jambi, Indonesia. This inquiry focused on the implementation of teaching practicum by looking at how stakeholders perceived its implementation in providing student teachers with practical skills and knowledge needed to teach in school settings and some possible policy implications to improve its quality. To achieve the aim of this study, the guiding research question for this study was: How do the stakeholders perceive the implementation of teaching practicum during student teachers' preparation program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university in, Jambi, Indonesia?

## The Context of the Study

Indonesia is the largest archipelago country in the world, consisting of more than 17,000 islands, with a total area of 1.9 million km<sup>2</sup>. As one of the world's largest and most diverse countries, Indonesia has a great number of challenges, including its efforts to improve the quality of teaching in schools (Luschei & Zubaidah, 2012). The country's overall teaching quality is hindered by limited teaching resources, poor infrastructure, and low quality teacher education that struggles to prepare teachers to work at primary and secondary levels (Luciana, 2006; Riesky, 2013). In response to the increasingly demanding roles required of English teachers in Indonesia, the efficacy of EFLTEPs—as the formal institutional preparation for English language teachers—is critical. In Indonesia, teacher education programs are based on the 2006 national curriculum, which provides national courses in linguistics and pedagogical base knowledge. However, each teacher education program has the authority to design and develop its own curriculum to meet the required standards of teacher quality for local needs. Therefore, it is not unusual for teacher education programs to have different and unique features. According to Zeichner and Conclin (2005), there are frequent distinctions evident among different teacher education programs in their approaches to preparing student teachers to enter the teaching profession. This is reflected in aspects such as the structure of the programs, admission requirements, curricular emphases, conceptual orientations to teaching and learning, focus on what teachers need to know, and the process of learning to teach. At least three primary obstacles to English teacher education programs in Indonesia can be drawn from Luciana's (2006) study: the varying degree of qualifications and competence, the curriculum for implementing teaching practicum, and low levels of support from the schools when apprenticeship of student teachers occurs.

What drives us to this topic? Rossman and Rallis (1998) write that personal biography shapes the study in important ways. Instead of pretending to be objective, a qualitative researcher is better off stating who he is and what assumptions drive the research. Patton (1990) suggested that the qualitative report should incorporate information on the researcher, describing his or her experience and training, personal connections to the participants and topic being studied, and the perspectives that he brings to the subject. The first, second, third, and fourth authors are faculty members at the research site and involved in teaching student teachers in teacher education programs. For making sure that our data were not bias, we included one researcher (the third author) from outside the English teacher education program. The third author is the faculty member of the college of education, but he does not involve in teaching the English teacher education program and had no prior relationship to our participants. Before collecting the data, we introduced our researcher from outside to our participants as he was involved in the interview process and data analysis. Our research interest mostly focused on teacher education and educational policy. English education program is one of the teacher education programs at the research site and EFL student teachers' practicum experience is part of our research interest. We decided to do research on student teachers' practicum experience because we wanted to examine the connection between what they learn at university and what they encounter during teaching practice and in real situations. We wanted to do this study as an attempt to provide information for policy makers at university and faculty level to improve the quality of the teaching practicum in order to help student teachers succeed in becoming quality future teachers.

## Methodology of Research

### *Design*

This qualitative case study inquiry was intended to report on research conducted in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. As this study focused on one EFL teacher education program, a qualitative case study was adopted (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998) to gather information about the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program. Creswell (2007) and Merriam (1998) argued that of the five qualitative traditions (biography, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study) case study was one of the traditions appropriate for studying an understudied topic regarding a person, a program, an institution, a process, a group, and a policy. Therefore, in our study, the case study design was selected as the appropriate research strategy to gather information about the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia.

### *Data collection and participants*

To collect the data, this study drew upon a background survey, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. In this study, the document analysis was taken from teaching practicum guidelines. These kinds of documents were intended to gain a comprehensive overview of the teaching practicum program. To get these documents, although the access was not difficult, we still asked permission from the dean. With the letter from the dean, we contacted the coordinator of the program at the university to get the documents. The primary data source for this qualitative case study was the transcribed semi-structured interviews. Interview is a preferred data collection way if a researcher wants to explore past experiences, which are impossible to happen again (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Mukminin, 2012a, 2012b). All interviews were conducted at a time nominated by the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian language, which was transcribed and then translated into English. For each participant, each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio recorded. To recruit the participants of this study which was not easy, we distributed an invitation letter to every partner school, recent graduate participants, beginner teachers, teacher educators, and school principals involving in the student teachers' teaching practicum. We finally obtained five recent graduate participants, five beginner teachers, five teacher educators, and five school principals who were willing to participate in this study. All participants completed the background survey. The survey was used to gather information about our participants' characteristics. In this study, school principal participants (we coded them with SP) were five participants (four males and one female) from five different schools. Their ages ranged between 40 and 50 years old. Their experience ranged from 10 to 20 years and their position as principals ranged from 3 to 15 years. Next, beginning teacher participants (we coded them with BT) were also five participants (three females and two males). Their ages ranged between 24 and 30 years old. Their teaching experiences were from 1 to 2 years. We also included teacher educator participants (we coded them with TE) consisted of two males and three females. The range of their ages was between 33 and 43 years old. Their teaching experiences were between 8 and 12 years. We also included five recent graduate participants (we coded them with RG) consisting of two males and three females. Their ages were between 23 and 24 years old. All of them just completed their program.

### *Ethical considerations*

Although in Indonesia, we do not have such as IRB approval process, we masked the names of people, places, and the research site through the use of pseudonyms for the participants, places, and research site to protect the rights of human participants. Additionally, before we collected the data, we informed our participants about the purpose of the study and how interview process would take place. We also convinced our participants that their participation was totally voluntary and their statements would be treated confidentially. Additionally, they had rights not to answer the interview questions or to stop their participations in our study anytime they wanted.

### *Data analysis*

The background survey data were analyzed descriptively. The document of the teaching practicum guidelines was analyzed in order to gain the comprehensive overview of the teaching practicum program. In this study, the *Teaching Practicum Guidance Book* (2009) was used to examine the standards for implementing the teaching practicum in the program. This document was examined carefully to consider the teaching practicum in terms of its definition, aims and principles. This document also describes the roles of those who are involving in student teachers' practicum. The interviews data were first prepared by transcribing the audiotaped interviews. We put the data into computer files and file folders after transcribing the raw data into texts. The second was that we immersed ourselves in the details, getting a sense of the interviews data as a whole before we broke them into several parts (Mukminin, 2012b). This was done in order to "obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell, 2007, p. 191). Third, data were then coded, organized into categories, and analyzed for emergent themes (Creswell, 2007). Johnson and Christensen (2008) stated, "Coding is a process of marking segments of data (usually text data) with symbols, descriptive words, or categories" (p. 534, as cited in Mukminin, 2012b). In our study, we established interim codes (e.g., duration, practicum, school partner, quality, or roles) based on previous research, our research question, and topics from our interviews before analyzing the data. These interim codes helped us develop inductive codes and final themes for which we used participants' words or terms. Next, we used within-case (one participant) and cross-case displays (among participants) (Miles & Huberman 1994, as cited in Mukminin, 2012b) consisting of thematic conceptual ordered displays. We did this in order to (1) spread interviews data so as to find every significant statement relevant to the codes that we set to see the patterns and themes, and to deepen our understanding of our data among the cases (participants) and (2) to remove or reduce repetitive data. We finally used major themes from the data analysis including quality of the teaching practicum, duration of the teaching practicum, the roles of mentor teachers and teacher educators, and selecting school partners for the student teacher practicum, which would be presented in our finding part.

### *Trustworthiness*

We completed the following steps to deal with the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300, as cited in Mukminin, 2012a; Mukminin, et al., 2015) of our study or to verify the accuracy of data, findings, and interpretations. First, member checks were used in order to get participants' feedback on the accuracy and credibility of the data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions. In the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314), this is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility." In this study we returned interview data to our participants (i.e., transcribed interviews were sent to our participants asking them to provide

feedback on the accuracy of interview conversations). Next, we triangulated data through multiple interviews with four kinds of participants including five recent graduate participants, five beginner teachers, five teacher educators, and five school principals. Last, we provided rich and thick descriptions (Merriam, 1998) and narratives from participants including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.

## Findings and Discussion

The aim of this qualitative case study inquiry was conducted to gather information about the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. The findings in this study are presented into two parts. The first part describes the picture of the standards for implementing the teaching practicum in the program. The second part demonstrates four salient themes: (1) quality of the teaching practicum, (2) duration of the teaching practicum, (3) the roles of mentor teachers and teacher educators, and (4) selecting school partners for the student teacher practicum.

### *The standards for implementing the teaching practicum*

In order to describe findings regarding teaching practicum in the EFLTEP in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia, the *Teaching Practicum Guidance Book* (2009) was used to examine the standards for implementing the teaching practicum in the program. This document was examined carefully to consider the teaching practicum in terms of its definition, aims and principles. This document also describes the roles of teacher educators and supervising teachers in the practicum. The following table summarises the relevant content in this guidance book.

**Table 1. The Teaching Practicum Guideline**

Domains	Elaboration
Aims	The teaching practicum is to ensure student teachers will be able to understand and be familiar with the school environment and its academic and social atmosphere, understand and implement teaching skills into practice, and obtain useful and meaningful experience in relation to their teaching practice.
Principles	The teaching practicum is a collaborative project undertaken by the Teaching Practicum Unit (TPU), Department of Culture and Education (DoCE) and participating schools. Student teachers' teaching practicum is under supervision of qualified teacher educators and mentor teachers in a collaborative and clinical manner. The teaching practicum is compulsory and cannot be replaced by other courses, such as Microteaching or Peer Teaching. This is because student teachers need to be equipped with adequate experience working in schools before they graduate from the teacher education program. The teaching practicum is conducted in block placements, in which student teachers spend the whole semester in schools (for approximately 16 weeks).
The roles of teacher	Most teaching practicums occur in schools under the supervision of teacher educators and mentor teachers. Teacher educators are qualified teaching

Domains	Elaboration
educators and mentor teachers	<p>staff responsible for helping and facilitating student teachers during their teaching practice in a school. In doing this, a teacher educator has the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work collaboratively with school principals and supervising teachers to ensure the student teachers' practicum runs successfully</li> <li>• help and facilitate student teachers to design their teaching material before undertaking teaching practice in the classroom</li> <li>• supervise and assess student teachers' performance during their teaching practice</li> <li>• give feedback and a final score on the student teachers' observation report and self-reflection report as the final assignment of their teaching practicum program.</li> </ul> <p>Mentor teachers have the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work collaboratively with teacher educators and school principals to ensure student teachers' teaching practicum runs successfully</li> <li>• introduce student teachers to the school environment—such as to students, school staff and school administration—and its teaching atmosphere</li> <li>• help and supervise student teachers in undertaking teaching practice in classrooms on a daily basis</li> <li>• discuss problems found during teaching supervision with teacher educators and school principals to seek solutions</li> <li>• assess student teachers' performance during their teaching practice, and give feedback and a final score on their observation report and self-reflection report as the final assignment of their teaching practicum program</li> </ul>

The teaching practicum is one of the required subjects that student teachers must complete in order to have adequate opportunity to practise what they have learnt during their course work in real school classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The teaching practicum is one of the core components of the EFLTEP in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. It is generally regarded that the teaching practicum is one of the most important and challenging aspects of teacher education programs because it provides relevant practical experience for prospective teachers (Ramsey, 2000).

### *Quality of the teaching practicum*

The data from the interviews showed that the beginner teachers perceived the teaching practicum as helpful in enabling them to implement what they had learnt during the program into the real world of school teaching practice. For example, BT#1 reflected,

During teaching practicum, I got experience in teaching in front of students, delivering subject matter, managing the classroom, and conducting assessment. In other words, it was the place to implement what I had learnt in the program about school practice. It was the time to bring theories into practice.

This comment showed that BT#1 felt that, during the teaching practicum, she experienced activities that enabled her to bring the theories of practice into action in the classroom. She realised that the teaching practicum was an opportunity for her to practise the teaching skills that had been learnt theoretically during the program's courses. Moreover, another beginner teacher (BT#2) learnt new things in relation to teaching preparation. BT#2 reflected,

There are some new things that I got from the teaching practicum, such as how to design a lesson plan, construct test instruments and prepare teaching devices. Actually, I learnt such things in the program, but what I have got during practicum was slightly different and more recent advice.

The interesting point in BT#2's comments is that what student teachers learnt in the program may not be up to date with what they found occurring in actual school practice. The latest versions of teaching tools, such as lesson plans, seemed to be active in schools, while the universities seemed to have been left behind. According to Martinez and Mackay (2002), it is not unusual for student teachers to consider the theory learnt in universities as not being relevant to the realities of classroom practice. The university is often considered a different place to the school in terms of theory and the instruments of teaching. When the question about the benefits of having teaching practicum was asked of the EFL recent graduates, they responded in a similar way by stating that the teaching practicum was very important in helping them implement what they had learnt from the program in the real practice of schooling. For example, RG#1 expressed,

Teaching practicum is the most important step in becoming an English teacher. During the teaching practice in school, I had a lot of experience, such as how to face student misbehaviour, deliver the subject content of English and do some school stuff. I had opportunity to bring the theories I learnt at university into my practice in school.

While the quality of the teaching practicum program was perceived as good by the EFLTEP's pre-service teachers, there are some critical issues that need to be addressed about implementing the teaching practicum in the (school) field. RG#3 stated that the teaching practicum was an essential step during her journey as a student teacher in the EFLTEP. However, she faced some challenges during her practicum, particularly in dealing with teaching large classes, where there were approximately 40 students in one room. In the words of RG#3,

During teaching practicum, I have got an unforgettable experience in my teaching practice in the classroom. Based on what I learnt in university—that ideally a language teacher will teach for maximum 20 students in classroom—what I have experienced is different, as I had to teach more than 40 students in one class. It was a very big challenge for me.

Another mixed reaction to the practicum was given by RG#4, who stated that, overall, the quality of the teaching practicum was good, yet there were some features that could be better implemented in the future. RG#4 reported,

For the six months, I did teaching practicum [and] I got a wide range of experience that helped me to understand how to be an effective teacher. But I found some weaknesses in the teaching practicum project, such as low

frequency of teacher educators' visits when student teachers are practising teaching in classroom, and less cooperative supervising teachers, both which make a difficult time when being alone in a new place.

There are at least two important insights to be drawn from RG#3 and RG#4's statements—namely, the significance of teaching large classes, and the importance of the roles of supervising teachers and teacher educators. Large classes are a significant issue for pre-service teachers teaching EFL during their teaching practicum (Shamim, 2007, 2012). Moreover, the existing roles of supervising teachers and teacher educators are not always effective in helping pre-service teachers gain adequate experience to teach English. Supervising teachers have important roles to facilitate student teachers with adequate supervision so they develop their teaching skills during their placement. They have responsibilities to assist in the growth and development of teacher candidates by modelling effective instruction, providing opportunities to practise teaching, and evaluating teacher candidates' performance across multiple domains (Allsopp, DeMarrie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006). In addition, according to Mtika (2011), the interaction among student teachers, mentor teachers and teacher educators is very important for the professional identity development of student teachers while on teaching placements. To do so, better relationships between teacher educators and supervising teachers need to be established, based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's expertise, needs and perspectives. This better relationship could lead to more effective roles in assisting student teachers through their overall development in the teaching practicum. In order to further consider how the EFLTEP can provide the necessary time and quality in experience for student teachers during their practicum, the following section discusses what occurs during the teaching practicum in terms of the amount of time spent in schools, and the roles played by teacher educators and their supervising (mentor) teachers.

#### *Duration of the teaching practicum*

The responses from the interviews conducted in this study suggested that the student teachers perceived that they needed more time in schools to have adequate opportunity to turn their knowledge base into practice. BT#4 felt strongly that the teaching practicum was not meeting expectations. She reported,

I only have a small chance to practise my teaching as it only lasts for one semester, to cover all aspects of teaching practicum, such as microteaching preparation, observation and practice itself. It would be better if teaching practicum was not only in one school, but was in two or more schools.

Another beginner teacher (BT#2) said that the duration of the teaching practicum should be increased, and that some unrelated courses—such as poetry and KKN (a field project)—should be eliminated from the EFLTEP. He reflected,

For students in the EFL teacher education program, they do not need poetry or field project subjects as a requirement in their candidatures because the length of teaching practicum is more important. Doing teaching practicum in one semester is not adequate. The more practice I had, the better I felt prepared.

A similar comment was made by BT#2 about the need for an extension of the teaching practicum. She expressed her thought,

In my opinion, teaching practicum is more important than field project. As student teachers, we are required to have more experience in teaching practice, such as preparing lesson plans, managing classroom and doing tests.

Moreover, BT#1 reported,

Before teaching in a school, I was prepared with microteaching, but it was not adequate to face various challenges regarding teaching practice. I think the length of teaching practicum needs to be extended for another one semester to better prepare prospective English teachers to be ready for teaching profession.

Aside from the length of the teaching practicum, microteaching during the teaching practicum was also considered inadequate for preparing the student teachers to have the skills they needed to teach in the practicum. RG#3 stated that the microteaching prerequisite project—which was taken before the student teachers conducted their teaching practicum—was not effective because it did not focus on how to teach English to students, and only prepared student teachers for general issues in teaching. For example, RG#3 reported,

In microteaching, we learnt general issues of teaching, but not specifically about how to teach English to students. At the first week, EFL pre-service teachers are grouped with other discipline pre-service teachers, such as science pre-service teachers and mathematics pre-service teachers, to work collaboratively to complete the tasks assigned during microteaching. At the second week, we are grouped based on discipline subject matter and have opportunity to practise teaching in front of colleagues. I hope that microteaching becomes prerequisite courses, not only the short training taken before pre-service teachers conduct their teaching practicum.

It is not only the length of time and microteaching project that need to be reconsidered, but also the choice of schools that partner with the university for the practicum program. BT#4 suggested that the practicum needs to occur in more than one school to gain a wider experience practising teaching skills. BT#4 stated that,

In terms of time and place, I think the teaching practicum must have an adequate length of time so that student teachers have more time for practice. Moreover, doing teaching practicum in more than one school was better in terms of gaining a wide range of experience that student teachers need to have.

Regarding the duration of the teaching practicum, 4 out of 5 EFLTEP's graduates interviewed requested an extension to the duration of the practicum to give them adequate opportunity to work with children and other teachers in schools. However, RG#4 was a dissenting voice, who considered that a six-month teaching practicum was adequate to allow her to implement the theories of teaching into practice. RG#4 stated,

Six months of teaching practice is adequate since I need one month to do observation and get familiar with school environment and the rest to spend on doing teaching practice under the supervision and guidance from a teacher educator and supervising teacher.

The period considered adequate for EFL pre-service teachers to conduct teaching practicum can vary from one teacher education program to another, and the time needed will often depend on each individual per-service teacher's specific needs. However, the quality of the teaching practicum is often seen as the significant factor contributing to a successful teaching practicum (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Thus, the length of the teaching practicum needs careful thought, given that the duration is not the only crucial issue—the quality also needs more attention (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). In a traditional approach, teaching practicum often occurs during the final year of the program, which results in student teachers' professional experience being a culmination of their study rather than the starting point of a new learning process. There are two questions in relation to the timing of the teaching practicum: (1) How much time is considered adequate and, (2) when the practicum should ideally be undertaken.

First, student teachers need time to become familiar with school environments (Freeman & Richards, 2002) and, in order to practise their teaching skills; they need a realistic period to use their full repertoire of skills and face challenges that they can reflect on as a way to refine their teaching. This can be done by adopting a practical view of the demands of teaching that recognises the realities of classroom life and allows adequate time for student teachers to prepare to cope with those realities (Yan & He, 2010). Providing opportunities to link field experience to practice for student teachers requires a significant and strategically located commitment of time (Le Cornu & White, 2000). Second, according to Yan and He (2010), student teachers need more opportunities to undertake teaching practicum during several semesters throughout the four-year program, rather than only once in the final year of the program. This will give student teachers more awareness of their responsibilities in teaching. If it is only undertaken in the final year of the program, student teachers may have forgotten parts of their theory by the time they undertake their practicum (Brady, Segal, Bamford, & Deer, 1998). Similar to Brady et al. (1998), Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, and Cornu (2007) pointed out that there have been changes to teaching practicum in Australia and other countries to meet the needs of student teachers' learning. This transition in ideas about what constitutes an effective teaching practicum is based on the notion that, when student teachers are teaching at the same time that they are learning about teaching, the practicum will successfully involve student teachers as simultaneously being both teachers and learners.

### *The roles of mentor teachers and teacher educators*

In order to achieve a quality teaching practicum, both teacher educators and supervising teachers have important roles to play. The findings of this study show that the existing roles played by teaching mentors and teacher educators during the practicum are not enabling a fully satisfactory teaching practice experience for student teachers. A beginner teacher (BT#2) presented this view about the roles played by mentor teachers and teacher educators, for example,

Ideally, teacher educators should visit regularly the school where student teachers are doing practicum to see the progress that student teachers make. What I experienced was far less than ideal. My teacher educators only visited me twice, firstly at the beginning of teaching practicum and then at the assessment of teaching practicum. Fortunately, my mentor teacher was very helpful and gave me some knowledge about teaching and how to manage students in classroom.

However, BT#2's experience was better than that of other beginner teachers during their teaching practicum. For example, BT#4 received minimal input from the teacher educator,

During my teaching practicum, my teacher educator only visited me once, at the end of the program in assessment time, at the time we are assessed by the supervising teacher and teacher educator on our teaching performance.

While BT#5 also received minimal input from the teacher educator, they made more use of the mentor teachers:

Frankly speaking, the role of teacher educator was less than the role of supervising teacher during my teaching practicum. If I had problems regarding my practice, I always went to the supervising teachers asking for solutions.

BT#1 experienced much the same:

The role of the teacher educator during my teaching practicum was not adequate in terms of his visit. Sometimes, when I had something to ask, he was not there to help. Fortunately, my supervising teacher was always available to help.

However, it is not only teacher educators who do not meet student expectations. Sometimes, supervising teachers do not fulfil the roles that students need. For example, BT#4 reported,

As a student teacher who is doing teaching practicum, I hoped that my supervising teachers would help me much during my teaching in the classroom, but I felt that I had less support from my supervising teacher. When I had problems, such as how to deal with students' behaviour, my supervising teacher seems to be reluctant to discuss it with me and find the solution how to handle it. Consequently, I have to find the way out to solve it by myself.

BT#4 also reflected that the infrequency of their teacher educator's visits to the school was one of the teaching practicum program's weaknesses, and that this should be addressed to improve the quality of the program. She reported,

The teacher educator seems not to care about his role in my teaching practicum. He only came to visit my practice of teaching once in whole semester in my last assessment of my teaching practicum. He came only to assess my performance of teaching in front of the children in the classroom—that was in my last episode in doing the teaching practicum.

When the same question was asked of the EFLTEP recent graduates, most had also experienced insufficient guidance from their teacher educators and supervising teachers. In the words of RG#2,

My teacher educator only visited three times during the six-month teaching practicum, and he did not come at the time I had final practice assessment teaching in classroom. My supervising teacher also did not adequately help me, so I did not know exactly what my weaknesses were during my teaching practice.

This was frequently reported. For example, RG#3 similarly stated,

The teacher educator came to visit me three times during my teaching practicum. If I had difficulty regarding my pedagogical practice, I usually discussed it with my mentor teacher, but this was not adequate since I also needed some feedback from the teacher educator regarding my teaching practice.

These recent graduates' perceptions about the roles of supervising teachers (mentor teachers) and teacher educators resonated with the findings of a study by Ssentamu-Namubiru (2010), which indicated that the frequency of visits by teacher educators was often considered inadequate. Meanwhile, despite this observation, according to Allsopp et al. (2006), university supervisors or teacher educators are required to be at school at least one to 1.5 days per week. Conversely, and to emphasise the point, when the roles of the teacher educators and mentor teachers were performed well, the student teachers commented positively about the effect of this on their teaching practicum. As BT#3 said, when the teacher educators played their role properly during the teaching practicum, and visited the student teacher regularly, it was very helpful,

My teacher educator visits me once a week and I think it is adequate, so that whenever I came across with problems in teaching, I will ask help from both my teacher educator and mentor teachers. Both of them are very helpful in supporting me doing my teaching practicum and I have some good experiences on how to be a good teacher in the future.

In addition to what BT#3 said, RG#1 revealed a similar opinion, where she felt that, during the teaching practicum, the teacher educator had adequately played their role:

When I did my teaching practice in the classroom, I got some feedback from my teacher educator so I will improve my teaching for the next performance.

RG#1 also said that her supervising teacher helped her prepare before going to the classroom:

She always gives feedback on my teaching practice. She also involves student teachers under her supervision when doing assessment of the students' progress.

Clearly, the interaction between the student teachers and their supervising teachers is an important part of the teaching practicum. According to Mtika (2011), the interaction between student teachers, supervising teachers and teacher educators is crucial to the professional growth of student teachers during teaching practicums. To do so, better relationships between teacher educators and mentor teachers need to be established based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's expertise, needs and perspectives. This better relationship will lead to effective roles that will assist student teachers during their practicum.

### *Selecting school partners for the student teacher practicum*

Another important part of the teaching practicum program is selecting school partners to provide locations for student teachers to practise their skills and develop their expertise. The choice of participating schools is important to ensure student teachers attain the useful experience they need. Through its Teaching Practicum Unit (TPU), the EFLTEP at Jambi University selects schools based on the mutual decisions of the TPU and DoCE at the municipal level, which has the authority to decide which schools are available for student teachers'

teaching practicum. However, the process of partner selection is not without criticism. When the school principals were asked how to select participating schools to be involved in the practicum project, they revealed that they were never involved in deciding which schools were going to participate. Before the student teachers come to the participating schools, the principals simply received a letter from the TPU and DoCE explaining that their school was selected to be a partner for the practicum project. An interview with a school principal (SP#2) revealed,

Jambi University did not carefully select school partners in the teaching practicum project. The selection tends to be based on the distance between schools and campus and not on the quality of participating schools. They [the TPU and DoCE] never invite us to discuss the merits of the selection.

This response suggests that the selection of school placement is based on easy access to managing the program. However, SP#2 stated that the quality of school partners is an important aspect that the TPU and DoCE must consider. According to Patrick (2013), high competition among teacher education institutions to find school partners is often that the reason for placement of student teachers in schools is willing to take student teachers. Although high competition among institutions was not the case at Jambi University, the familiarity and school willingness seems to be relevant. A similar response was given by another school principal (SP#3), who stated in the interview that he was informed by official letter from the TPU and DoCE that the teaching practicum project would be held at his school. He then chose senior teachers to be the supervising teachers working with the student teachers during their teaching practice. He said that, after he received the letter informing him about the teaching practicum project, he selected these supervising teachers based on their seniority alone. When SP#3 was asked further about how he selected his supervising teachers, he said,

After receiving the official letter from TPU, I am informed how many student teachers will undertake this project and how many supervising teachers are needed from available staff in my school. Then, selection will be based on their seniority and their availability at the moment the teaching practicum takes place.

Supervision from senior teachers during the teaching practicum is important to ensure that student teachers receive the experience needed to link the theory and practice of teaching in a comprehensive process. However, it seems that school principals' methods of selecting supervising teachers are questionable in terms of the quality of the process. In a traditional approach to teaching practicum, Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that cooperating teachers or supervising teachers were selected with no regard for the quality or type of practice in which they engaged. Rather, the choice was often based on seniority, favouritism or the notion that it was one teacher's turn to assist. These do not seem to be appropriate grounds for these choices, given the importance of the practicum experience for the successful preparation of new teachers. The document analysis of this research indicated that the selection of participating schools was made by the head of the DoCE, who appointed schools under his authority, as proposed by the TPU (Teaching Practicum Guidance Book, 2009). In this case, the schools that were to participate in the practicum project were not involved in making the decision. This kind of decision, with schools as a passive party, has often created problems for schools in preparing to be part of the teaching practicum. In this partnership, there is less interaction between the university, the DoCE and the schools in terms of the roles of the parties involved. Around the world, in comparison to traditional teacher education programs, contemporary programs have built relationships with school partners to ensure that the teaching practicum

for student teachers is successful via work with expert teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This newer relationship style is based on a reciprocal partnership, in which teacher educators and schools' supervising teachers support each other to help student teachers obtain the experience needed from a strong teaching practicum project. This relationship seeks to provide opportunities that enable both parties to benefit from being involved in the practicum program. Partnerships between schools and universities are a necessary part of teacher education programs that seek to produce high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The program provides the theoretical knowledge and the schools provide practical experience for student teachers. The necessary mutual collaboration between universities and schools involves planning, developing and implementing the teaching practicum together (Loughran, 2007). Darling-Hammond (2006) further stated that the supervising teachers who work with the teacher educators should be selected from successful teachers and mentors—not only because they can offer their classrooms for student teachers' practicum, but also because of their deep expertise and willingness to share their knowledge systematically with a new colleague. By selecting supervising teachers in this manner, it is hoped that student teachers will be able to learn to teach more effectively.

### **Implications for Teacher Education Policy**

This qualitative case study inquiry was conducted to gather information about the implementation of teaching practicum in order to improve the quality of the program in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. However, our small sample size may not be representative of all teacher education practicum programs across the country and generalizability of our findings to others should be cautioned. The findings from this study would suggest that significant improvements can be made to the implementation of the teaching practicum carried out by the EFLTEP in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. The duration and scheduling of the practicum, the extent and nature of the assistance from teacher educators and supervising teachers to student teachers practising and developing teaching skills, and the weak relationship between the university and practicum schools are problems that need to be taken into account in developing a better teaching practicum for the EFLTEP.

The following are recommendations for improving the role, function, and performance of the EFLTEP practicum in an English teacher education program at a state-owned university, Jambi, Indonesia. Careful research-informed thought is needed about how much time student teachers need to spend in schools, and about the best timing of practicum placements over the four years, to ensure that it serves its purpose in the program. Student teachers need more time than they currently have to become professionally familiar with school environments and to practise their teaching skills (Le, 2004; Pham, 2001). This need to be driven by a view that teaching practicum is essential in preparing student teachers to recognise the realities of classroom life and how to cope with those realities. It has been argued here that providing opportunities to link field experience to practice requires a lengthy commitment of time by the program and the students (Le Cornu & White, 2000). More opportunities are needed for the EFLTEP student teachers to have teaching practicum conducted over several semesters throughout the four-year program rather than only once in the final year of the program. It is needed to build an evolving and coherent awareness of professional responsibility in student teachers throughout the program. The amount of micro-teaching and teaching practicum in teacher education programs in Indonesia is currently insufficient (Madya, 2003) and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This transition in thinking about teaching practicum is based on evidence from research literature that demonstrates that student teachers should be practising teaching at the same time as they are learning about the theory of teaching. So, the

practicum and the courses that support it must be redesigned to ensure that student teachers are simultaneously learners and pre-service teachers. This has not been the case at Jambi or with Indonesian universities generally. More placement visits to schools provide more opportunities to become familiar with school environments and routines, to observe, and to learn from experienced teachers.

The recommendations made from this study are that longer practicum placements are needed to provide more time for teaching practice in schools. Secondly, it is recommended that school practicums take place in several semesters during the candidature. These recommendations for longer time and better scheduling of practicum are aimed at addressing the overall quality and effectiveness of teaching practicum. Insufficient assistance from both teacher educators and mentor teachers can be addressed by reformulating the roles they play in assisting student teachers to practise their teaching knowledge and skills when placed in school settings. This could be done through establishing different, closer relationships between university and schools, and through better integration of theory and practice components of selected supportive courses in the program. This would include ensuring that teacher educators visit student teachers in schools during practicum to observe their teaching and give meaningful feedback (about theory and practice integration) on their performance (White, 2009). Mentor teachers need to give more assistance to student teachers, especially in classroom management and curriculum delivery techniques (Sinclair, 2006). In doing so, the mentor teachers will also be able to help student teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice. The development of teaching skills and professional competencies can also be supported through ongoing discussion, feedback, and support programs that involve teacher educators, mentor teachers, and student teachers working together. To initiate this, a first step is to establish good communication and mutual respect between teacher educators and mentor teachers (through establishing a closer relationship between university and schools).

Establishing better school-university partnerships is also an effective way to deal with problems regarding the choice of school partners for teaching practicum. In doing so, the university needs to dismantle hierarchical legacies and initiate new partnerships with schools based on a desire to work with schools as equal partners. This will not happen unless good communication between university and schools informs the teaching practicum program. In order to maximize the roles of both parties in supporting teaching practicum program, there should be supervisory workshops to train teacher educators and mentor teachers in their roles and to provide a forum to share knowledge between universities and schools. In order to make partnerships effective, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the practicum are clearly defined and understood by both parties. Openness and mutual respect must be encouraged to create an effective shared responsibility for ongoing collaboration. Having strong and effective partnerships between schools and universities benefits both parties. For the university, it enables teacher education programs to have qualified and well informed school partners for student teachers' school placements, thus resolving the current problems linked to the selection of participating schools. Next, the practicum expectations of pre-service teachers, the program's practicum goals, and the roles of teacher educators and supervising teachers will all be clearly stated and coordinated. It will then be easier to ensure that preparations are complete and organized prior to the teaching practicum. Collaborative practices in the practicum will lead to knowledge sharing between schools and universities, with supervising teachers from schools being able to update their theory about teaching skills and university teaching staff getting direct access to rich information about current practice dilemmas and problems faced by schools.

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#### Author Note

Dr. Urip Sulistiyo is a faculty member at Faculty of Education, Jambi University, Indonesia. He holds a PhD in education from RMIT in 2016. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [usulis2012@gmail.com](mailto:usulis2012@gmail.com)

Amirul Mukminin is a faculty member at Faculty of Education, Jambi University, Indonesia. He holds a PhD from Florida State University, USA in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and MS in educational sciences from Groningen University, the Netherlands. He received a Fulbright scholarship to pursue his PhD and an Erasmus Mundus postdoctoral researcher, University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He also received a 2016 Fulbright Senior Research award. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [amirmuk06@gmail.com](mailto:amirmuk06@gmail.com)

Dr. Kemas Abdurrahman is a faculty member at Faculty of Education, Jambi University, Indonesia.

Dr. Eddy Haryanto is a faculty member at Faculty of Education, Jambi University, Indonesia. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [eharyanto@gmail.com](mailto:eharyanto@gmail.com).

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