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**FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: FIFTH-SEMESTER STAI MEMPAWAH  
STUDENTS TEACHING ENGLISH AT SDN 04 MEMPAWAH TIMUR**

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***Abstract***

*This study examines the impact of practical teaching experience on the teaching skills and confidence of fifth-semester students at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Mempawah, who taught English at Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN) 04 Mempawah Timur. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research explores how hands-on classroom experience enhances pre-service teachers' professional growth. The findings indicate that student teachers experienced a significant increase in confidence, improved lesson planning skills, and a deeper understanding of the realities of teaching English to young learners. Practical teaching opportunities allowed them to apply theoretical knowledge, refine classroom management techniques, and develop engaging instructional strategies.*

*However, challenges such as initial anxiety and the need for further pedagogical refinement were noted. The study highlights the importance of integrating real-world teaching practice into teacher education programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Future research should explore long-term effects on teacher development and the impact of different instructional contexts on pre-service teacher preparation.*

**Keywords:** *Pre-Service Teachers, English Language Teaching, Practical Teaching Experience, Teacher Confidence, Lesson Planning.*

**A. Introduction**

Effective teacher education is based on the relationship between theory and practice. In addition to having an understanding of educational psychology, pedagogical theories, and subject matter content, future educators also need to be able to apply their knowledge to effective teaching practices. Pre-service teachers may feel unprepared, overburdened, and finally unsure of serving every one of students they teach if theory and practice do not match (Darling-Hammond 2006). In order to close this gap and give pre-service teachers the tools they need to succeed in actual classroom environments, teacher education programs must place a high priority on providing them with relevant chances.

In order to develop pre-service teachers' competence and confidence, practical experience is essential. Although theoretical training gives students a strong foundation in information, potential teachers really improve their talents through hands-on experience. Pre-service teachers can manage the environment of the classroom, try out various teaching methods, and get insightful feedback from experienced educators through opportunities like student teaching, area job opportunities and microteaching (Korthagen, 2004). Through these experiences, pre-service teachers develop a feeling of self-esteem and get the confidence they must overcome the challenges of their job as educators. In particular, hands-on experiences help students learn critical skills, including lesson preparation, classroom management, assessment, and being able to adapt education to each student's unique requirements.

This study takes place within the context of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Mempawah, an institution dedicated to providing quality Islamic higher education in the Mempawah Regency. STAI Mempawah's teacher education program is designed to equip future educators with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to excel as English language teachers in Indonesian schools. The program emphasizes a balanced curriculum that integrates theoretical coursework with practical experiences, aiming to produce graduates who are both knowledgeable and effective practitioners. Key goals of the program include fostering a deep understanding of ELT methodologies, developing strong pedagogical skills, and instilling a commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth. One unique feature of the program is its emphasis on community engagement, the integration of Islamic values in education, and the use of innovative teaching methods to enhance learning outcomes.

As part of their practical training, fifth-semester students at STAI Mempawah were given the opportunity to teach English at Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN) 04 Mempawah Timur. SDN 04 Mempawah Timur is a public elementary school located in Mempawah Timur District, Mempawah Regency, West Kalimantan. The school was established on January 1, 1970, based on the Establishment Decree issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the learning process, a total of 103 students receive guidance from educators who are competent in their fields. In

2025, SDN 04 Mempawah Timur has a total of 103 students, consisting of 52 male students and 51 female students. Thus, the number of male students is slightly higher than that of female students. The school was selected as a placement site due to its proximity to STAI Mempawah, making it convenient for student teachers to commute. Additionally, the school has demonstrated a strong willingness to collaborate with the teacher education program, fostering a supportive environment for aspiring educators. Furthermore, the presence of experienced mentor teachers provides valuable guidance and professional development opportunities for student teachers, ensuring a meaningful and effective teaching practice experience. This collaboration provided the STAI Mempawah students with a valuable opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in a supportive and authentic classroom environment.

Based on the background above, the research focuses on one research question which is “How did teaching English at SDN 04 Mempawah Timur change the teaching skills and confidence of the STAI Mempawah students?”.

To find out how the STAI Mempawah students’ skills and confidence in teaching changed after they taught English at SDN 04 Mempawah Timur.

## **B. Research Methods**

This study employed a case study design and a qualitative research approach to investigate how teaching English at SDN 04 Mempawah Timur impacts the confidence and teaching abilities of fifth-semester students at STAI Mempawah. The rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach stems from its emphasis on understanding human experiences in natural settings, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the student teachers' perspectives, emotions, and challenges (Creswell & Poth 2018). By focusing on real-world teaching situations, this approach facilitates a rich, contextualized understanding of how theoretical knowledge is translated into practice.

A case study design was chosen due to its effectiveness in providing a detailed and holistic examination of a specific group of student teachers within a particular educational setting (Stake 1995; Yin 2018). Case studies are especially useful for capturing the complexity of real-life experiences, making them ideal for exploring the interactions, challenges, and growth that occur when student teachers

transition from academic learning to practical teaching. This methodology allows for an in-depth analysis of their developmental journey, providing valuable insights into their evolving confidence, teaching strategies, and ability to manage a classroom.

The case study framework also enables a nuanced investigation into the professional development of student teachers, revealing the challenges they encounter and the strategies they employ to overcome them. By examining their lived experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the transformative impact of hands-on teaching practice. Furthermore, this approach facilitates the identification of specific factors that support or hinder the professional growth of pre-service teachers, offering potential implications for teacher education programs.

### **C. Discussion**

This study aimed to explore how the experience of teaching English at SDN 04 Mempawah Timur influenced the teaching skills and confidence of fifth-semester students from STAI Mempawah. The findings indicate that the practical teaching experience significantly enhanced the student teachers' confidence, deepened their understanding of primary English teaching, and improved their foundational lesson planning skills.

#### **1. Increased Confidence in Teaching**

One of the most significant findings was the notable increase in confidence reported by student teachers following their teaching experience. Initially, many students expressed feelings of nervousness, uncertainty, and self-doubt regarding their ability to manage a classroom and deliver effective lessons. However, as they gained more hands-on experience, their self-assurance grew considerably.

This aligns with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which posits that mastery experiences play a crucial role in shaping individuals' self-efficacy beliefs. By directly engaging in classroom instruction, student teachers were able to experience personal achievements that reinforced their belief in their teaching abilities. Their confidence increased as they successfully managed students, delivered lessons, and observed the positive impact of their teaching on young learners.

The phenomenon of “teacher shock,” often observed among novice educators (Veenman 1984), was evident in some student teachers as they encountered the realities of classroom dynamics. The initial exposure to real-world teaching challenges, including managing student behavior, adjusting lesson plans, and maintaining student engagement, proved to be a critical phase in their professional development. However, despite these initial difficulties, the majority of student teachers reported a positive transformation in their confidence levels over time (Ryan 1986). This highlights the resilience and adaptability of pre-service teachers when provided with structured, hands-on teaching experiences.

Future research could further explore the specific strategies that helped these student teachers build confidence and manage classroom challenges effectively. Understanding these mechanisms could inform the development of teacher training programs that better equip students for real-world teaching.

## **2. Understanding the Realities of Teaching English to Young Learners**

Beyond confidence-building, the study also found that student teachers gained a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the realities of teaching English to young learners. This aligns with the principles of experiential learning (Kolb 1984), which emphasize the importance of direct experience and reflective observation in the learning process (Beard & Wilson 2006).

By actively engaging with primary school students, student teachers moved beyond theoretical knowledge and developed a greater appreciation for the complexities of language instruction at the elementary level. They learned to adapt their teaching strategies in response to students' needs, manage diverse learning paces, and create engaging classroom environments.

This hands-on experience reinforced key pedagogical concepts such as classroom management (Marzano 2003), material adaptation for young learners (Tomlinson 2001), and interactive teaching techniques. By directly applying these concepts, student teachers gained practical insights that would have been difficult to attain through theoretical coursework alone.

Moreover, the ability to adjust instructional methods based on real-time student responses proved to be a valuable skill. Many student teachers reported

that they had initially struggled with engaging young learners but gradually learned to incorporate interactive elements such as storytelling, visual aids, and movement-based activities to maintain student interest and participation. This finding aligns with research on student-centered learning approaches, which emphasize the importance of active engagement in primary education (Slavin 2006).

### **3. Development of Lesson Planning Skills**

Another critical finding was the improvement in student teachers' ability to develop lesson plans. Despite initial struggles with structuring lessons effectively, their ability to create and implement lesson plans improved significantly over time. This growth suggests that their teacher education program provides a strong foundation in lesson design principles (Wiggins & McTighe 2005).

The development of lesson planning skills is closely related to pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman 1986), which involves the ability to translate subject matter knowledge into instructional strategies appropriate for young learners. The findings indicate that even with limited experience, student teachers were able to construct meaningful lessons that engaged students and facilitated learning.

As they continued practicing, they refined their lesson planning techniques, incorporating clearer learning objectives, structured activities, and appropriate assessments. With further guidance and practice, these pre-service teachers are likely to enhance their instructional strategies, integrate diverse teaching methods, and develop more sophisticated lesson plans tailored to students' needs.

### **4. Practical Application of Teaching Strategies**

The students' ability to successfully implement icebreakers and interactive teaching techniques further highlights the effectiveness of integrating practical strategies into teacher education curricula (Darling-Hammond 2006). The ability to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world teaching situations is a critical component of effective teacher preparation (Kagan 1992).

By incorporating interactive elements such as games, storytelling, and visual aids, student teachers discovered that their young learners were more

engaged and receptive to English lessons. This underscores the importance of exposure to diverse teaching methodologies during teacher training, as it equips pre-service teachers with a repertoire of instructional techniques that they can adapt to different classroom situations.

Overall, this study highlights the transformative impact of practical teaching experience on student teachers' confidence, understanding of primary English teaching, and lesson planning abilities. The findings emphasize the need for more hands-on teaching opportunities in teacher education programs, ensuring that pre-service teachers are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of classroom instruction and develop into competent, confident educators.

### **5. Limitations**

While these findings offer valuable insights into the impact of practical teaching experience on pre-service teachers, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study.

- a. **Limited Sample Size:** The small sample size and the specific context of SDN 04 Mempawah Timur limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations and settings (Campbell & Stanley 1963). Future research with a larger, more diverse sample may yield broader insights into the impact of practical teaching experiences.
- b. **Focus on Vocabulary Instruction:** The study primarily examined the teaching of vocabulary, which is only one aspect of English language instruction. While vocabulary is essential for young learners, future studies should explore how pre-service teachers handle other components of language teaching, such as grammar, reading comprehension, and writing skills (Celce-Murcia & Hilles 1988).
- c. **Reliance on Self-Reports:** The study relied on student self-reports as a primary data source, which introduces the potential for bias (Nisbett & Wilson 1977). While interviews and observations helped triangulate findings, incorporating additional assessment tools, such as student performance evaluations and mentor teacher feedback, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pre-service teachers' development.

## **6. Implications and Future Research**

The findings of this study have several important implications for teacher education programs.

- a. **Emphasizing Practical Experience:** These results underscore the need to provide pre-service teachers with ample opportunities for practical teaching experience in real-world classroom settings (Zeichner 2010). Programs that incorporate hands-on teaching practice alongside theoretical coursework may better prepare future educators for the realities of the profession.
- b. **Strengthening Theory-to-Practice Connections:** The study highlights the importance of curricula that explicitly connect theory to practice and equip students with practical strategies for classroom management, lesson planning, and engaging young learners (Ball & Forzani 2009). Faculty members should design coursework that incorporates more field-based learning experiences and reflective assignments.
- c. **Providing Ongoing Support and Mentorship:** The results suggest the need for ongoing support and mentorship for novice teachers as they transition into the profession (Wong 2004). Establishing mentoring programs or peer collaboration initiatives may help pre-service teachers navigate classroom challenges more effectively.

## **7. Directions for Future Research**

Future research should explore the long-term impact of practical teaching experiences on teacher effectiveness and retention (Ingersoll 2001). It would also be valuable to investigate the specific strategies that pre-service teachers use to overcome challenges and build their confidence in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2001). Additionally, future studies could examine the impact of different types of practical teaching experiences (e.g., different classroom settings, different age groups) on pre-service teacher development (Allen, et al., 2011).

By expanding the scope of research on teacher preparation, scholars and educators can work together to improve training programs, ensuring that new teachers enter the classroom with the skills, confidence, and knowledge necessary to be successful educators.



#### **D. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this case study provides evidence that practical teaching experience can have a positive impact on the teaching skills and confidence of pre-service teachers. By providing opportunities for students to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting, teacher education programs can better prepare them for the challenges and rewards of the teaching profession. While this study has limitations, it offers valuable insights that can inform teacher education practices and contribute to the ongoing effort to improve the quality of English language teaching for young learners.

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