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From motivation to practice: A qualitative study of university students' strategies and expectations in Indonesia's teaching campus program for elementary schools

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Abstract

The Teaching Campus Program (TCP), a strategic initiative under Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning) policy, aims to enhance students' pedagogical skills while supporting educational equity by placing university students in under-resourced schools. This study explores TCP students' motivations, implementation plans, and expectations. The method employed in this study was a qualitative design. Using qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with six students drawing on purposive sampling, the study applied three-step analysis model: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed strong motivations in enhancing educational quality in Indonesia through their planning on some innovative methods such as gamification for promoting literacy and numeracy activities. In addition, they expected to enhance student engagement and school performance. To ensure the sustainability of the program, it is recommended that TCP initiatives be institutionalized through strategic partnerships between universities and schools, and supported by national education policies that integrate TCP into teacher training frameworks and school improvement agendas.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning) policy has been introduced and implemented since 2020 as part of Indonesian government's effort to revolutionize the country's higher education system. This program emphasizes flexibility, allowing students to gain practical experience and creates innovative learning through initiatives like the *Program Kampus Mengajar* (Teaching Campus Program) (Ismail et al., 2024). The Teaching Campus Program (TCP) as part of Indonesia's Emancipated Learning initiative represents a paradigm shift in higher education, promoting hands-on, experiential learning by placing university students in teaching roles within local communities and schools. Various studies have examined the evolution and impact of this program (Sinaga et al., 2023; Sumani et al., 2022). The historical roots of the

TCP date back to educational reform movements that emphasized the need for practical experiences alongside theoretical learning. In the Indonesian context, this program aligns with the government's broader agenda to democratize education and close educational gaps in rural and underserved areas (Rahman, 2019). Thus, as a key component of this reform, TCP encourages university students to actively take part in the education sector, especially by engaging with schools in underdeveloped regions. This initiative reflects the national priority of improving education quality through hands-on student involvement.

Several definitions and concepts have emerged regarding the program's objectives and outcomes. According to Jamilah et al. (2023), TCP is designed to bridge theory and practice by immersing university students in the teaching environment, allowing them to apply their academic learning. TCP places a strong emphasis on experiential learning, in which students assist in the development of reading and numeracy in elementary and secondary schools while also acquiring real-world teaching experience (Apoko et al., 2025).

Scholars debate the efficacy of the TCP in educational circles. A quantitative analysis by Ramdani et al. (2023), using surveys, highlighted improvements in student engagement and teaching skills. In comparison, a qualitative study by Indriani & Holisah (2022) based on interviews with program participants demonstrated a positive impact on the quality of education in realizing the learning outcomes as the targets such as numeracy, literacy, and technology, and these successes were supported with competent human resources and good collaboration with the schools. Despite the successes, challenges remain, including a lack of coordination and clear communication between stakeholders, which led to confusion among students and schools, uneven targeting of schools, inadequate support for the program, and credit conversion (Ramadansur et al., 2024). Comparative studies in similar contexts, such as in Yogyakarta region, reflect similar challenges, indicating that time management, program socialization, and coordination with schools can significantly influence the success of the program in promoting both educational quality and students' professional development (Suyatno et al., 2023).

Regarding motivation behind the TCP, from the perspective of participating students, it often revolves around the desire to gain field-based teaching and promote a deeper understanding of educational issues. According to survey-based research conducted by Rodgers et al. (2014), students with intrinsic motivation at Purdue University, USA were found to be more likely to give more effective feedback rather than those with extrinsic motivation. While their study is based in the U.S., the findings are highly relevant to the Indonesian context. Like the students studied by Rodgers et al., Indonesian TCP participants often report a desire to contribute meaningfully to society and to perform their competencies in real educational environments. In another study, 12 participants from five different universities were interviewed on

graduate teaching assistants (GTA) program, and the results showed that training, previous experiences, appointment structure, students, and teaching colleagues were factors that increased their motivations in the quality of teaching (Kajfez & Matusovich, 2017). Additionally, the prospect of career enhancement and gaining valuable skills that are transferable to future employment and self-quality development has also been identified as a significant motivator (Akmalina & Prastyo, 2023).

Similarly, expectations from the program, however, vary significantly based on the students' backgrounds and future aspirations. For instance, a study by Liu (2022), using a quantitative analysis through a structural equation modelling approach found that the undergraduate students expected to improve the roles and the performance of GTA program, and this program was recommended to be helpful for any other curricula. Research conducted in another region of Indonesia, where university students participated in TCP batch 2, revealed that they expected to acquire professional competences of teachers, mainly in soft skills and the ability to sufficient teaching experiences (Hidayat & Patmisari, 2023). In contrast, a study by Ramdani et al. (2023), using a qualitative approach, identified issues such as lack of students' abilities in terms of utilizing technology, and this requires more intensive assistance and creativity and innovation in creating fun and useful learning media. Despite this challenge, successful stories from another region indicate that students were able to meet their expectations of actualizing their

interests and desires as well as expanding the ideas and insights (Tampubolon & Simamora, 2023).

Although extensive studies on the Emancipated Learning framework have explored its impact on student learning outcomes and institutional flexibility (Apoko et al., 2023; Oktapiani et al., 2022), few studies examine, particularly from the students' perspectives in the TCP. Existing literature has largely centered on curriculum development and faculty perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding the motivations, plans of student participants, and their expectations in the field-based program.

Given this gap, the present study aims to explore the perspectives of students involved in the TCP, with a specific focus on their motivations, plans for program implementation, and expectations. Understanding these aspects is crucial as student engagement plays a critical role in the success of educational programs (Widia et al., 2024). Furthermore, examining students' perspectives offers valuable insights into how practical teaching experiences influence their professional growth and contributions to educational development. The findings of this current study are expected to inform future iterations of the TCP and contribute to broader discussions on how experiential learning initiatives under the Emancipated Learning framework can be optimized to enhance both student and school outcomes. Thus, the primary research questions guiding this study are as follows:

(1) What is the student's motivation on the Teaching Campus Program?

(2) What are students' plans for implementing the Teaching Campus Program in their assigned schools?

(3) What expectations do students have regarding their participation in the program?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design which aims to describe qualitative data by providing detailed understanding of participants' intentions or attitudes or behaviours on teaching campus program (TCP) at schools (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants of this study were six university students (three female students and three male students) who had been purposely selected to represent the diverse universities and the academic levels. There were two assignment schools, state elementary schools in South Jakarta, provided by the team of TCP, ministry of education, culture, research and technology, Indonesia.

Regarding TCP design, the program lasts over four months. Those who join this program are mostly awarded an equivalency of 20 credits. A group of university students consisting 3-6 members, nationally selected, is assigned in one school for literacy and numeracy activities for collaborative action plans. Each group is guided by one lecturer who is also selected through administrative selection and online written test. Within four months, the students in an assigned school do some activities such as assisting the teachers in the classroom for some games to promote students' literacy and the aspects of their numeracy. In addition, the university students provide a kind of

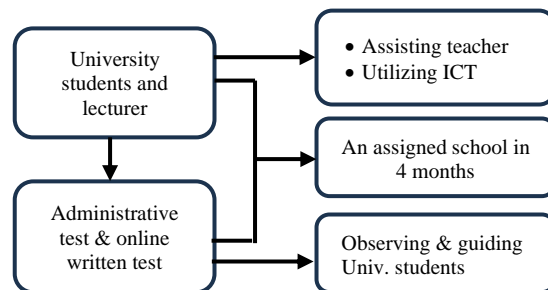training on digital-based learning media to the school teachers.

Figure 1. *TCP design*

As this research design was qualitative, a semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data from the participants. Each student was interviewed within 10-15 minutes regarding their motivations, planning, and expectations from the TCP. For data analysis, this study used a three step analysis developed by Miles et al. (2014) that includes data condensation, data display, and data verification and conclusion. In the data condensation stage, all the interview recordings from six participants (3F/3M; semester 5-7) were transcribed verbatim. The data were then manually coded using a multi-stage thematic coding process. Open coding was conducted to identify recurring keywords from the transcripts such as career growth, community impact, real-world experience, and commitment to education. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the researcher and a school teacher independently coded all transcripts. Any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through collaborative review until consensus was reached. The unnecessary data such as off-topic statements, repetitive phrases, or irrelevant digressions were excluded. Only data segments that directly addressed

participants' motivation, implementation strategies and expectations were retained for further analysis. In the data display stage, the condensed data were organized into thematic matrices and visual tables to enable comparisons across the participants. This helped to identify both common patterns and individual variations.

In the final stage of drawing and verifying conclusions, the themes were interpreted in relation to the study's research questions and were triangulated with relevant literature. To enhance the trustworthiness of the interpretations, member checking was conducted with selected participants who reviewed and validated key findings related to their responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Motivation in Teaching Campus Program

Participants in the Teaching Campus Program (TCP) indicated that they were driven by a strong motivation to advance their careers, gain real-world experience, and make significant contributions to the quality of education in Indonesia. More specifically, as a student from Indonesian language major, participant 3 emphasizes the chance to expand perspectives, hone teaching abilities, and adjust to varied student needs. Participant 4 views the program as a way to evaluate and apply academic knowledge while adding to the improvement of Indonesian education quality, having been inspired by peers and lecturers. Similarly, participant 6 highlights the importance of concentrating on obtaining practical experience in elementary schooling. These responses,

taken as a whole, show a desire to improve pedagogical proficiency and have a beneficial effect on both schools and students. The responses' excerpts are shown below.

(R3): *"I would develop my teaching skills and broaden my horizons in the world of education. As a student majoring in Indonesian language, I feel that this program provides a unique opportunity to plunge directly into the real world of education. In addition, I also want to strengthen my competence in facing future challenges, especially in adapting to various conditions and needs of students".*

(R4): *"I myself was motivated to join the Teaching Campus program as I got information from my lecturers and friends who had participated in the program. I wanted to test my ability to apply the knowledge I had learned during college, especially in the context of education and teaching. I also see this program as a great opportunity to develop my skills, help schools, and contribute to improving the quality of education in Indonesia".*

(R6): *"I want to increase my teaching experiences, especially in school interactions in the field of elementary school education".*

Students' Plans in Implementing Teaching Campus Program at School

The students' plans for implementing the TCP in schools reflect a strategic, adaptive, and collaborative approach. Respondent 1 emphasizes initial project planning, with adjustments based on school surveys and observations. In order to make learning more interesting for primary school students, respondent 2 focuses on developing innovative approaches to teaching numeracy and incorporating technology. With a thorough

strategy, respondent 3 plans to analyze the needs of the school, create work programs that are relevant, work in collaboration with teachers, and track success through regular evaluations. The significance of documenting actions and modifying the program as needed to guarantee optimal outcomes is also emphasized by this respondent. When taken as a whole, these plans show that preparedness and adaptability to fit the needs of every school environment are priorities. Below are the excerpts from the respondents.

(R1): *"After attending the debriefing, we in group outline the project plan first. When we have surveyed and observed the school, there may be some projects that will be added by adjusting to the school environment".*

(R2): *"I would like to create a method of learning numeracy literacy and with the development of technology in the process of learning or playing in elementary schools so that students are not quickly bored and also more interested in learning".*

(R3): *"I would analyze school needs, design relevant work programs, and collaborate with teachers and school staff to ensure smooth implementation. I will carry out the activities as scheduled, monitor student progress, and conduct periodic evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the program. In addition, I will document each activity and make progress reports, as well as adapt and innovate according to the conditions in the field so that the program runs optimally".*

Students' Expectation from Teaching Campus Program

The university students taking part in the TCP have high expectations, which indicate that they want to have a positive influence on the school environment and acquire useful experience at the same time. Respondent 1 anticipates a friendly learning environment and unhindered work program implementation. In an effort to have a long-lasting effect on the caliber of education provided by the school, respondent 4 highlights the application of acquired knowledge to increase student enthusiasm and literacy while strengthening personal soft skills. Meanwhile, respondent 5 shares the goal of using teamwork to bring about long-lasting improvements for teachers, students, and the school environment as a whole. All in all, these responses show a common optimism about the teaching campus initiative's ability to improve education both now and down the road. The excerpts from the responders are described below.

(R1): *"My expectation is that we are all well received by the school environment, the principal, teachers, and students. All the work programs that we have planned can be implemented with no interference and can run smoothly".*

(R4): *"I hope that through this Teaching Campus program, I can implement the knowledge and skills I have learned to help improve students' enthusiasm for learning at the assignment school. In addition, I want to continue to develop my personal soft skills and contribute to improving the quality of learning. I hope that students will be more motivated and have better literacy, so that they can become the next generation that is smart and ready to compete. I also hope to have a sustainable impact on schools, teachers and students to advance education".*

(R5): *"Hopefully the work program that has been carried out by me and my friends*

can have a good impact on the school both for students, teachers and the school environment and the work program can be sustainable in the assignment school".

The results of this study align well with Kolb's theory, forming a conceptual framework to interpret participants' perspectives of TCP that emphasizes experiential learning and professional growth in teacher education. Respondent 3's focus on adapting to student needs aligns with Kolb's (2014) concrete experience stage where practical, hands-on experience in real-world contexts is essential for developing teaching skills and adapting to the dynamic nature of classrooms. The students' motivations, particularly their desire for professional growth and the application of academic knowledge, align with these theories. Participants' interests in adapting to diverse student needs and their emphasis on testing academic knowledge reflect this experiential model. Moreover, the literature supports the idea that field-based programs contribute to increased teacher confidence and competence, which aligns with students' goal of gaining more practical experiences of teaching in elementary education as stated by Wahyuni & Saleh (2023).

The students' implementation plans or strategies for TCP demonstrate a proactive and context-sensitive orientation toward educational support, underlining the importance of planning, innovation, and adaptability in diverse school settings. Their strategies that range from initial project planning, school needs analysis, collaboration with educators, and periodic evaluations indicate a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic challenges in primary education. For instance, the integration of technology and creative approaches to numeracy instruction highlights an effort to address engagement and learning outcomes among young learners. Such readiness to adapt based on situational observations aligns with the principles of responsive teaching and contextually grounded educational interventions (Burns, 2009). Moreover, the emphasis on collaborative work and ongoing evaluation reflects best practices in service-learning and experiential teacher education, which stress the value of reflective practice and school-based partnership for sustainable impact (Anderson & Lee, 2015).

Regarding the expectations, university students expressed a hope for long-term, sustainable program as Alhusni et al. (2023) argue that this TCP has benefits for schools, students, and teachers in the long run, and this requires ongoing support and follow-up activities. Therefore, to achieve TCP's sustainability, policymakers should consider mentorship frameworks for participants, school needs assessments prior to placement, and longitudinal tracking of outcomes. In addition, the participants expected that their own learning skills and competences could anticipate the students at schools to be more motivated in reading literacy and numeracy as well as their disciplines. This current study aligns with a finding demonstrating to engage the students to instill the characters of reading, cooperation, and disciplined characters (Suardi & Nur, 2022).

However, critics argue that while experiential learning programs like the TCP can be beneficial, they may also present some challenges. Studies highlight that teachers are often ill-prepared for the complex realities of teaching, such as program socialization in schools, classroom management, adapting to diverse student needs, and balancing administrative tasks (Indriani & Holisah, 2022). This current study found that these challenges were noted by one participant, who anticipated adjustments to their plans based on the school environment. This reflects concerns in the literature that without adequate mentorship or support, students may struggle to implement their work programs effectively. While the comprehensive planning approach was also described in this study, it may not fully account for unpredictable classroom dynamics, which could hinder program success.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, the participants' focus on literacy interventions suggests TCP can enhance foundational skills though long-term impact requires further study. The participants are driven by motivations such as using academic knowledge, advancing one's career, and desire to improve student learning. Their implementation plans exhibit a strategic approach, with a focus on integrating innovative teaching strategies, collaborating with educators, and assessing the needs of the school. They also state that they expect to achieve long-term improvements in educational quality,

promote a friendly school climate, and boost student motivation and literacy.

Although the TCP is in line with theories of experiential learning that emphasize the advantages of practical experience in real-world situations, it is important to be aware of any obstacles. Challenges include managing a classroom, accommodating different student requirements, and striking a balance between administrative duties could arise for participants. To mitigate challenges, the Ministry must integrate mentorship into TCP's core design and fund longitudinal impact studies. For example, structured mentorship could pair TCP participants with experienced teachers for weekly reflections. Additionally, training modules on classroom management should precede school placements.

While these findings offer valuable insights into how the TCP shapes participants' engagement and learning, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study involved a small sample of six participants, and data were drawn exclusively from urban university students in Jakarta. As such, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of participants from rural or remote regions, where the availability of resources, school infrastructure, and local support systems may significantly differ.

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