

# A Portrait of EFL Students' Experiences in an Internship Program: A Case Study

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**Abstract**—Internship is one of the examples of experiential learning. Students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are obliged to complete an internship in order to fulfil the requirements of their Bachelor of Education. This study aims to report on the findings of a qualitative investigation through a case study on the implementation of an experiential learning program; internships. Using Kolb's experiential learning theory, this study portrays students' experiences from their participation of the internship program. A case study was employed in the research by involving three participants of EFL learners who are currently in their third-year of study at one private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In addition, data were gathered through a one-on-one interview and students' reflective reports. The findings show that students had varied experiences starting from elementary, junior high, and senior high school level. The most meaningful experiences are designing a detailed step-to-step lesson plan, attracting students' interest in learning, facing exciting students, knowing that the students understand the lesson, and giving grades to students. While the most challenging experiences in the internship program are: determining the learning steps in writing lesson plans, designing interesting and contextualized teaching materials, socializing with the homeroom teachers, and dealing with unclear instructions from the teacher.

**Keywords**—*experiential learning, internship, reflections*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research on an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context in Indonesia has long been focused on the exposure of classroom-based learning activities. Classroom in this context refers to the teaching and learning process that merely takes place inside the classroom with teachers being at the center of the process. These classroom activities, in some cases can be very boring and may foster negative attitudes among students towards the learning process. For example, in the classroom, students are required to listen to teachers' explanations monotonously and takes notes. They are also requested to sit in class and work on exercises or tasks. This is in line with Wurdinger and Allison [1], who argued that nowadays, college students write notes of what their lecturers say and then recall this information until they are able to memorize it for tests. Thus, reinforcing the concept of a teacher-centered approach, rather than a more student-centered one.

Although the alternative approach of student-centered learning is well-known among teachers, the approach seems to be lacking when applied to an Indonesian context with diverse characteristics of students. This might be caused by

the conventional teacher-centered method which has been applied over centuries as experienced by the researcher. In addition, through the researcher's observation during the practice of some experiential learning programs, teachers are not at the center of the learning process. In addition, some teachers complained about the SCL implementation and did not like to execute it in the class due to the high demand from the school principal about the final national exam. Thus, teachers will only drill students to work on test exercises on a daily basis. Therefore, to vary the process of teaching and learning, the development of experiential learning then began.

This notion of experiential learning refers to learning subject matter by experiencing it. It incorporates theory and field practice in a real-world experience. According to Eyler [2], "students link experience with theory and, thereby, deepen their understanding and ability to use what they know" (p. 26). Many researchers have conducted studies on experiential learning, especially on the advantages of using the technique [3], however, studies to investigate whether or not students are gaining experiences from experiential learning are lacking. Therefore, there is a need to reveal this phenomenon. To address this issue, the current study aims at finding what experiences gained by students doing the experiential learning activity.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Experiential Learning Program

At the English Language Education Department (ELED) of a private university in Yogyakarta, there are several programs that can be categorized into experiential learning programs to support Kuh [4], who argued that some experiential learning examples can fall under undergraduate research, studying abroad, service learning, internships, learning communities, and capstone courses. Ambrose and Poklop [5] also argued, "experiential learning provides authentic, real-world practice through the situations students find themselves in (and in which they see the consequences of their or others' actions) and the employer's authentic, real-world feedback that promotes further learning" (p. 56). By learning in this manner, students are expected to gain not only knowledge (theory), but also practical work in the real field of their major. Similarly, K. Hawtrey [6] argued, "experiential learning activities also offer a greater chance for students making the link between their studies and their personal goals, such as career or personal skill development" (p. 145).

### *B. The Role of Experience in Learning*

Doing an internship at schools for students (pre-service teachers) is believed to have many advantages. The students will be exposed to various situations about school life that they might face when they later become teachers. Furthermore, students can have chances to share each other's experiences too during the internship program. These advantages reinforce V. Kohonen, R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen, & J. Lehtovaara [7] notion that experiences play an important role in the experiential learning program.

### *C. Foundation of Experiential Learning*

When discussing experiential learning, it cannot be separated from D. Kolb's [8] theory which mentioned that individual experience provides the life, texture, and emotional individual significance to abstract concepts. While Dewey [9] believed that learning occurred when students are actually doing it, he also added that the situation in the learning process needs to be adjusted like in the concrete environment. In line with Dewey, Lewin as cited in C. Kreber [10] argued that learning is best encouraged in a situation where there is pressure between prompt, real experience and analytic separation and reflection. While Smith [11] argued that it is a kind of learning where students gain and implement insight, skills, and affections in a direct situation someone's self-concept is a social item that is formed step by step through communication with its surroundings. From the aforementioned theories of experiential learning, it can be summarized that experiential learning requires learners to do and experience things that they expect to master. In other words, experiential learning is a way where learning only happens when the person is doing it, not just thinking about it.

### *D. Previous Study on Experiential Learning*

An expanding interest in the study of experiential learning is proven by a recent article publication. A study by C. P. D'abate, M. A. Youndt, & K. E. Wenzel [12] entitled "Making the Most of an Internship: An Empirical Study of Internship Satisfaction", involved 261 students enrolled in the Department of Business and Management at a college in the northeastern United States by using a survey. The aim of the previous study was to measure the students' satisfactions on the internship program. The satisfaction was measured by knowing the characteristics of the job (task significance and feedback), characteristics of work environment (learning opportunities, supervisor support, and organizational satisfaction). From the result of the study, it shows that students have high levels of satisfaction of the internship program. This study is significant for the current research and it also has differences for example: the design of the study, the focus of the study and the setting of the study.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a case study to conduct this research. This design was used to show a thorough description of a phenomenon [13], which was a student doing the internship program, within its context. The present research is guided under two research questions namely: what are the students' experiences in joining the internships program and how do they reflect on the program?

### *A. Research Context and Participants*

This research project was undertaken at the English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Every year, the department recruits approximately 200 students to be trained as future teachers with a title of Bachelor of Education when they graduate. One of the department's graduate profiles is to be English teachers at schools.

To support the goal, the department has designed a series of internship programs: Internship I, Internship II, Internship III, and Internship IV (based on the 2016 curriculum). In the first and second internships, the focus is on school observations in elementary schools and junior high schools where students are taken to schools and are guided by the English teachers of those schools. Students are required to observe the daily activities that occur at the school, from classroom activities to the library, teacher's room, canteen, administration office, laboratory, and school clinic. The third internship focuses on making the teaching instruments (including the lesson plan and teaching materials). While Internship IV gives an opportunity for students to implement the teaching instruments that they have made in the previous internship (teaching practice).

Out of four batches in the department, batch 2016 was selected for the purpose of data collection. Students of batch 2016 have completed Internship I, II, III and they are currently doing internship IV, with some having already completed it. Three students were involved in the research and each of them were asked to sign a consent form to make sure they were willing to voluntarily do an interview and allow their reflective journals to be used as the data in this research. The participants speak at least three languages: Indonesian, English, and one local language such as Javanese or Sundanese. Their age ranges from 21 to 22 years old. One participant was randomly taken from each class resulting in a total of three participants, and all their names were written pseudonymously in the article. They are Agung, Garin, and Ratna.

### *B. Data Collection and Analysis*

Using a standardized, semi-structured interview guideline, the researcher asked participants to describe their experiences from the internships they have done and what they have gained from the program. This included their most meaningful and most challenging encounters, as well as any experiences that had never been faced prior to the internship program. The researcher conducted one-to-one interviews with each of the three participants. The interviews used Indonesian language to ease the participants in expressing their thoughts and sharing their experiences deeply. During the interview, the conversations between the interviewer and the participants were taped. In addition to the data collection, participants were asked to give a copy of their reflective reports that they submitted to their supervisor (lecturer) as part of the internship report.

After the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the data and started coding the data. To measure the credibility of this research, triangulation was applied which means using "varied data sources in a study" [14]. The data includes the interviews and reflective reports. In analyzing the data, the researcher used the Stage Model of Qualitative Content Analysis by R. D. Hancock, & B.

Algozzine [13]. First, after retrieving all the data, the researcher identified the research questions then read through the interview data and determined criteria to sort data chunks, ending with organising the data into various categories.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the results of the interviews and reflective reports, a variety of experiences were encountered by participants while on their internship programs. These experiences are classified into three segments, namely the experiences that occurred at the Elementary School, Junior High School, and Senior High School levels.

##### *A. Students' Internship Experiences at Elementary School*

Elementary Schools are the first places for every student in the department to do their internship program. The schools chosen by the department are Islamic private schools which begin their lessons at 7am and finish by 3pm. English lessons at elementary schools are not obligatory, yet the schools still provide them. Therefore, the internships at elementary schools are not exclusively focused on English, but also teaching in general. At this level, participants' experiences included performing administrative tasks, discussing the nature of children, observing teachers' teaching style, as well as participating in buddy programs.

1) *Doing Administrative Work.* One experience that the interned students obtained was actually not primarily related to their study at university. This was especially evident when assigned to do practical experience in administrative work that they would otherwise not receive on campus. For example, managing letters received and sent by the school, arranging books at the library, and assisting the staff at the school clinic. This finding was proven by the participants, Garin stated "my friends and I were told to complete the administrative jobs like organizing the in and out letters received and sent by the school". In addition, Ratna stated, "at the internship, I wandered around the school area to find out about the school activities. I once was placed at the library and the school clinic". From these statements, we can see that the interned students performed tasks that they might never experience on campus such as "measuring the height of the students and weighing them when placed at the school clinic or sometimes ... at the library arranging books." (Ratna).

Those activities are not actually included in the curriculum of the department. However, when performing the internship program, the participants are able to experience them. Since the department is preparing students to be future teachers, students are expected to have known duties and responsibilities of teachers at their workplace (school).

2) *Observing Teachers' Teaching Style.* At the elementary level, the interned students were not required to teach, however they were requested to do observations on the teaching style of particular teachers. This was aimed at exposing them to actual classroom experience. The interns were seated at the back of the classrooms and observed what the teachers were doing during the teaching and learning process, starting from opening the lesson, explaining the materials, assigning the class activities, and closing. This was evident in Ratna's comments when she expressed that "Lesson plan was not (done) yet in this phase, we were assigned to see how the elementary school teachers teach in the classroom."

3) *Buddy Program.* Another experience gained during the internship program was the opportunity to be the elementary school students' buddy or companion. In the internship program, the schoolteachers are happy to have the interned students since they (the teachers) are assisted. One of the ideas of the teachers was to request the interned students to be a 'buddy' for students who needed more time to understand lessons in the classroom. The teacher would ask the interned student to sit next to the student who needed help. Ratna said, "I was asked by the homeroom teachers to accompany students, especially those who need more time to understand lessons from the teacher. This sort of experience will only be obtained if students are situated in a real context like at schools.

##### *B. Students' Internship Experience at Junior High Schools*

At this level, the interned students are obliged to do an internship called Teaching and Learning Observation. Students are coached by the schoolteachers to design lesson plans. Again, the interned students do not have to teach the class. Their experiences in writing lesson plans are related to the schoolteachers, namely: having a caring teacher is a blessing, teachers' feedbacks do not give significant effects, and I had a useless time in the internship.

1) *Having a caring teacher is a blessing.* In an internship program, the existence of the schoolteachers is much appreciated. This level of internship demands the assistance of teachers because interned students rely on the process of the internship through teachers' preparation and explanations. Teachers are scheduled to inform students about the applied curriculum, to guide students in designing the lesson plan and to create the teaching materials. Some teachers have done what they are supposed to do, they are very caring towards the interned students. Garin mentioned, "when I did the internship in the junior high school, I could feel that the schoolteachers were really impressive, they helped us in understanding the materials they shared". Not only assisting in terms of academic matters, teachers were considered very comforting especially on the first day of the internship, when students had a difficult situation adapting to the new environment, yet, the teachers were very friendly and welcomed the students well.

2) *Teachers' feedbacks do not give significant effects.* Although some teachers have been acknowledged by the participants to have a caring character, there are times when the teachers are not appreciated too. This happened when teachers were not doing things they were obliged to do. For example, in guiding the interned students to design lesson plans, teachers are supposed to give thorough feedback. However, Ratna stated that "when I had to consult with my supervisor, he did not give comprehensive feedback on the content, yet, he was more concerned on the mechanics of the writing." Teachers only care about the use of comma and period. Ratna expected that the teachers should have given more constructive feedback on the content of the assignment, however, the teachers only responded on the mechanics of the assignment. That is why, students feel that there is no significant effect even though the internship was over. This finding supports D'abate, Youndt, and Wenzel [12] who measured internship satisfaction from the students' point of view. In one of their findings, it was mentioned that teachers' feedback influenced the students' satisfaction. If teachers do

not really give proper feedback, students will not gain pleasant experiences in the internship program.

3) *I had a useless time at the internship.* In this phase of the internship, interned students definitely need the schoolteachers' time to give them explanation on how to make a lesson plan. Regardless of how busy the teachers are, they still need to fulfill their responsibility with the students. What happened to these students was because the schoolteacher only gave a copy of the lesson plan to everyone and never once did he discuss it. As a result, the product of the lesson plan was not satisfying. Ratna admitted that "this internship was the only useless internship I had ever participated in". It was useless since the interned students felt like they did not learn anything from the program.

### C. Students' Internship Experiences at Senior High Schools

In this internship, interned students are conducting it twice, during both the odd and even semester. The odd semester was called School Observation (the activities dealt with coaching, making lesson plans, and designing teaching materials). From the interview, the students' experiences were revealed as follows: busy teachers annoy me, failed in time management, confusing materials given by the teachers. In the even semester, interned students are scheduled to teach in the classroom.

1) *Busy teachers annoy me.* This experience was felt by Garin and Ratna. They highlighted that schoolteachers who had become civil servants still had to teach at two different schools to fulfill their teaching hours. It is true that a government teacher has to teach 24 teaching hours per week and if at one school this teacher cannot make the 24 hours, he or she is advised to teach at another school. With this situation, teachers are forced to be busy at all times and they might not be able to perform other responsibilities including supervising the internship program. "When I had the internship at one of the senior high schools in Yogyakarta, at first I thought it was fun, yet, it turned out to be irritating because the teacher rarely stayed at school" (Garin). In addition to this, the time of their internship in that school became very long.

2) *When practice teaching, failing in time management.* In semester six, the internship program was teaching practice. This means that the interned students who once participated in the previous internship, had already initiated with a lesson plan. One of the participants was given a chance to perform the teaching practice in the beginning. He had prepared everything for his very first test of teaching. Unfortunately, he ran out of time in the teaching practice so that the recap and assignment part which were stated on the lesson plan had to be dismissed. It was proven by Agung, "This was my first time in teaching a class of 38 students and I failed in managing the time."

3) *Getting materials from teachers means more research to do.* In the first week of the third internship period, the schoolteacher distributed his copy of lesson plans to all the interned students. This is expected to help teachers and students aware of using materials correctly. Unfortunately, the materials given by the teacher was not explained in detail. As a result, interned students found it difficult. Garin stated, "in this school, the teacher gave the less comprehensive explanation about making lesson plans". Consequently, interned students had to struggle to find materials to complete

the lesson plans. When interviewed, the participant had a kind of negative sense about the example of the lesson plan the schoolteacher gave him. He thought, it was only a copy-paste lesson plan from others or the internet. (Garin).

### D. The most Meaningful Experiences during the Internship Program

Internship program was aimed to provide students (especially teacher candidate), with the real context situation so that students could imagine and feel how it looks like to work as a teacher in the future. By bringing students to the real context and exposed them with the responsibilities, it is believed it will give them knowledge and description of their future career. In addition, this program is expected to give meaningful experiences for the interned students. From those experiences mentioned in the interview, here are lists of meaningful experiences felt by the participants of this research.

1) *Designing a detailed step-to-step lesson plan.* Two out of four internships done by the participants were all focused on the design of lesson plans. Agung used to think that making lesson plans were quite easy. He never thought that the steps done to make a good lesson plan was hard. "One competency standard in a lesson plan can be developed into several steps to achieve the goal of the lesson." (Agung). This has to be done in detail because a lesson plan is like a scenario in a roleplay, through lesson planning, it can describe how successful the preparation of teaching learning is.

In addition to that, the process of writing lesson plans was admitted as a meaningful experience by participants of this research because it has to combine theory and practices. This means that before writing a lesson plan, teachers have to have knowledge in the field such as knowing the learners' profiles, learning style, and even facilities provided in the classrooms. After knowing that, the foundation knowledge of writing lesson plans needs to be included as well. (Agung).

2) *Attracting students' interest in learning.* After writing the lesson plan, the interned students were given time to execute the lesson plan in a real classroom. Before they conducted the lesson, they already had this thought of how to make students interested in learning English with them. Therefore, they wrote the ideas on the lesson plan. Garin mentioned, "things that is meaningful to me was when I had to do a class and I had to get all the students' attention." He added, "since I love cartoon movie characters, I used this character in my presentation, I also created a video for teaching this topic."

This finding supports C. Chou's [15] finding which stated that teaching different level students require different methods. If teachers teach a lower grade class, the way she talked to the students cannot be the same way as using long sentences and words unfamiliar to them as the students can become bored. Chou suggested to use story, poster, speech bubbles, and the like to attract the students' interest in learning.

3) *Facing the exciting students.* When I had to do the teaching practice, I think I was lucky because I had most of the nicest students in my class. Furthermore, there were few students in my class too. If the students are very nice, I believe that the teachers' job will be easier. In addition, this finding was evidenced by Ratna. In the interview, she stated that she

was very excited to know that the students were more excited in joining the class. The students were given activities like using Kahoot and Voki in the classroom. As a result, students were very enthusiastic in learning and this enthusiasm stays in the participants' memory.

4) *Knowing that the students understand the lesson.* In teaching practice, as beginners, interned students may feel intimidated especially if the schoolteacher is there observing. Thus, the interned students had to prepare very well before the teaching practice. Ratna mentioned that she included several technological-based materials in her teaching and when she found out that her students understood with her teaching, she thought it is part of meaningful experience.

5) *Giving grades to students.* Not only teaching in the classroom, interned students are also given spaces to do grading on students' workbooks. With this, the students can now experience being a real teacher starting from designing lesson plans, teaching the lesson plans, and evaluating. Agung stated that "when giving assignments to students using workbooks, I have to complete marking the book and then I gave grade/score and I input the score in the system myself."

#### *E. The most Challenging Experiences in the Internship Program*

After knowing the meaningful experiences obtained during the internship programs, interned students also experienced challenges during the program. The challenging experiences are explained as follow.

1) *Determining the learning steps in writing lesson plans.* Writing lesson plans is not always easy for interned students. One participant even proposed to simplify the process of making lesson plan. As Garin said, "making lesson plan in Indonesia can be categorized into a complicated process, whereas it can be simplified actually". The challenging part of writing lesson plans occurred in deciding what to put in the learning steps. Agung confirmed that the hardest part to write a lesson plan was the learning steps, whether the teachers want to have discovery learning for example, or any others.

2) *Designing interesting and contextualized teaching materials.* When teaching English to EFL learners, teachers need to design materials which is not only beautiful in look but also contextual in practice. This refers to teaching English to young learners and young adults using interesting and contextual materials. Ratna mentioned, "I used video on YouTube, and I created PowerPoint presentation to teach students and those things are actually quite challenging". It is true that being a teacher is a quite demanding job. Before teaching teachers need to prepare materials, and they cannot just be ordinary ones, yet, teachers have to think how to attract students so that they like the topics that are delivered as well as it relating to their daily life.

3) *Socializing with the homeroom teachers.* Before the first day the internship program started, students have been coached by the field lecturer in campus about rules and regulations of participating the internship program. Since these students will be working with third parties, namely school stakeholders (teachers, principals, staff), therefore students need to adjust their culture to the culture at schools. An easy example is about clothing. The interned students cannot go to school wearing outfits they normally wear at campus. They have to resemble what a teacher looks like in

terms of dressing. This will ease them to socialize with the people at schools. Some conditions mention by the participants of this research, "some teachers seem to underestimate interned students. This might be caused by students' behavior and attitude which do not match with the culture of the school." (Garin).

4) *Dealing with unclear instructions from the teacher.* Another challenging experience was experienced by Agung. He stated that the schoolteacher once assigned the interned students to write a lesson plan. Generally, writing a lesson plan has to follow some particular rules especially the lesson plan designed for the public schools. They often have specific terminologies such as: content standard, basic competence, learning outcomes, in which the interned students might not have prior knowledge in making ones. Therefore, as teachers who have understood and been familiar with it, they should explain this lesson plan making step by step to avoid confusion.

This teacher did not really know what he was doing, however, he still had to tell the students to do something. Due to this situation, teachers were instructed to deal with the approach in the lesson plan, while students focused on the method in the lesson plan

#### V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To sum up, interned students experienced many new things during their internship time. The experiences happened in each of the school levels will benefit the future interned students. Meanwhile, the meaningful and challenging experiences can be shared to students before they do the internship programs. From the findings, the researcher can draw implications, namely for lecturers of the department who become field lecturers should evaluate their job descriptions. In addition, some courses related to teaching skills have to be updated to be linked with the needs for students. For example, the introductions of HOTS (high order thinking skills) or the introduction of genre and its generic structure as well as language features. By having this, it is expected that the interned students will face fewer challenging experiences and have more meaningful experiences. This could lead to the students' dream career as teachers in the future. In addition, the findings have implications for readiness of the curriculum especially related to the internship arrangements and implementations.

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