Reevaluating teaching readiness: Bridging the competency gap among prospective English teachers in Indonesia

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Article Info

Abstract

The teacher education system in Indonesia faces significant challenges in producing professional and competent educators. Despite a structured curriculum and professional development programs, a gap persists between graduates' competencies and job market expectations. This study aims to assess English Education students' readiness to meet teaching standards and examines disparities between institutional goals and graduates' actual capabilities. Using a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, data were collected via a Likert-scale survey of 66 final-year students and in-depth interviews with principals, senior teachers, and students. The findings reveal that only 39.4% of students feel confident in speaking English, and 50% consider themselves capable of managing classrooms, although 81.9% demonstrated strong competencies in using technology. These competency gaps highlight the need for improved practical experiences, such as higher-quality and longer internship programs. Furthermore, the curriculum should prioritize speaking skills, cross-cultural understanding, and innovative pedagogical strategies to prepare teachers who are creative, adaptable, and ready to face the challenges of modern education. This study underscores the importance of strengthening collaboration between universities and educational institutions to shape professional educators capable of advancing national education quality.

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INTRODUCTION

The pathway to becoming a professional teacher in Indonesia is characterized not merely by formal educational qualifications but by a systemic contradiction in how teacher competence is cultivated. Although teacher candidates are required to complete an undergraduate degree in education, many of them still lack adequate pedagogical preparedness upon graduation. To address this, the government mandates participation in the Teacher Professional Education program (PPG), a training that ideally should be included within the teacher education curriculum itself. Paradoxically, this program is also open to graduates from non-education backgrounds, blurring the distinction between those who have undergone four years of pedagogical training and those who have not. Therefore, this situation raises critical concerns regarding the coherence and efficacy of existing teacher education programs, as prospective teachers are seemingly required to repeat foundational steps that should have already been part of their academic formation.

Ironically, the teacher education system in Indonesia presents a big challenge in producing competent and professional educators today (Ferdina et al., 2024). PPG is a solution offered by the government to increase the level of professionalism of teachers in teaching (Nika & Rahayu, 2024). However, in reality, with the existence of a teacher professional program (PPG) that is open to graduates from various scientific fields, concerns arise regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the teacher education curriculum at the undergraduate level. This creates a gap in competence between teacher education graduates and pure science graduates who take intensive pedagogical training through PPG. This situation raises fundamental questions about how this system can ensure that graduates are truly prepared to meet the needs of the education world, especially in the field of the English language Education department.

In the English language education program, students are expected to be able to master grammar, vocabulary, speaking skills, and cultural understanding, as well as be able to provide a good education (Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020). However, this high demand is often contrary to the reality, where graduates of the English Education program as actors in transferring English knowledge to students often do not meet the expectations of formal educational institutions where they work. As revealed by Suharno et al.(2020), many university graduates are not ready to face the world of work. Based on the initial exploration conducted by the researchers in October 2024, only 29.2% of English Education graduates feel ready to become teachers, and only 4% feel very ready. This shows the gap between job market expectations and graduate competencies is still a major challenge that needs to be addressed immediately.

The December 2024 exploration with principals and teachers revealed that formal education institutions expect English graduates to possess creativity and uniqueness in teaching—an essential marker of professional readiness. One of the respondents said that the key to language is practice. Moreover, primary schools need creative teachers because they can use a variety of approaches and variations in learning, which in turn can increase students' creativity through imagination, games, and fun activities (Inayah & Febriani, 2022). Additionally, students become more interested in and easier to learn English by fun learning methods (Nabilah Mokhtar et al., 2023). At the intermediate level, one of the respondents said that other important things to master are pedagogic skills and class management. This is very important so that teachers do not only present the material but also ensure that the material is distributed properly. Unfortunately, Preliminary interviews with several teachers and school principals during the pilot study suggest that a noticeable number of new English teachers at the elementary and secondary levels may not yet meet the qualifications of professional teachers. This is based on their unpreparedness in handling the class, lack of ability to understand basic English material, especially in terms of speaking and listening, and lack of teachers' motivation to explore creative and interactive learning.

One of the factors to students' lack of ability in basic English skills, particularly speaking and listening, is the limitation of effective learning time in the university curriculum. For example, at one of the universities in Sidoarjo, a speaking class is given for 4 semesters with 3 credits per semester. At another university in Surabaya, students only take speaking class within 3 semesters with an allocation of 3 credits per semester. Not only that, at another university, the speaking class is even merged with the listening class for a total of 3 semesters. This shows that students have very limited time to practice formal speaking in class so the opportunity to practice speaking skills in real contexts is very minimal. Outside of the classroom, students tend to use Indonesian in their daily communication, which further limits their ability to practice English actively. In fact, they will be the educators who will convey knowledge to students.

On the other hand, in the ever-evolving digital era, professional teacher standards are becoming increasingly important to ensure optimal quality of education. According to Sulaiman and Ismail (2020), teachers not only function as knowledge transmitters, but also as facilitators who can guide students in facing the challenges of the modern world. Sulaiman and Ismail (2020) also stated that professional teacher standards include several important aspects such as pedagogical competence, digital skills, critical thinking skills, leadership, collaboration, and continuous professional development which must involve lifelong learning to develop their knowledge and skills. In addition, professional teachers in this era are required to be adaptive and responsive to rapid changes in the world of education (Riswanto & Mulyanti, 2024). They must be able to recognize the unique characteristics of each student and tailor their teaching approach to the existing social and cultural context. Self-development through training and further education is also the key for teachers to stay relevant to the development of science and technology (Ainayya Husna et al., 2023). Thus, the role of the teacher is not only limited to teaching but also includes motivation and inspiration for students to reach their best potential (Bardach & Klassen, 2021), especially in the context of English teachers, where teachers should focus more on speaking skills or direct practice than on the theory they have. Although many previous studies have emphasized the ideal competencies expected from professional teachers in the digital era, only a few have examined how English education students perceive their own readiness to meet these institutional standards. In addition, there is still a lack of research that empirically compares institutional expectations with the actual readiness of prospective teachers. Therefore, this research is questioning how far English education students perceive themselves as prepared to meet the teaching readiness standards required by educational institutions and what is the gap between industry expectations and the factual readiness of English education students in teaching skills.

METHODS
Research Design and Subject

The method used in this study is a mixed method in order to provide more comprehensive understanding of the readiness of English education students to enter the workplace in formal educational institutions. This study used a sequential explanatory mix method where quantitative data were taken as the initial stage because of its effective ability to measure phenomena objectively. Furthermore, in the second stage, the research switched to a qualitative method with a case study approach, which aimed to dig deeper into the expectations of formal education institutions for English Education graduates and how students perceive their teaching ability. This research was conducted due to the discovery of a phenomenon where the majority of graduates from the English Education Program lack sufficient professional skills to meet the needs of the education industry. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the gap between industry expectations and the factual readiness of English Education students in teaching skills.

Table 1. Informants' Data

No	Name	Position	Teaching time	Specialties
1.	NL	Principal	21 years	Educational Management
2.	HF	Teacher	10 years	Educational Management
3.	JA	Teacher	10 years	English
4.	MW	Teacher	13 years	English
5.	IK	Teacher	8 years	English
6.	VT	Pre Service Teacher	-	English
7.	AF	Pre Service Teacher	-	English
8.	RT	Pre Service Teacher	-	English
9.	UR	Pre Service Teacher	-	English

This research involved 75 informants who were coming from various universities in Indonesia. They were from the same major, English Education Department. 66 students from various campuses in Indonesia participated in filling out the survey while A total of 9 informants consisted of 1 principal, 4 teachers, and 4 pre-service teachers from English Language Education

Department participated in providing detailed information about the expectations of formal institutions for English Language education graduates and the reality of teaching readiness through interview (see Table 1).

The Likert scale-based questionnaire was used as an instrument to measure the percentage of students' readiness in teaching, providing a clear picture of their readiness level. The instrument was constructed based on the following 6 aspects:

Table 2. Six Aspects for Five-Point Likert Scale Questionnaire

No	Important Aspects	Question Number
1.	Students' English Ability	1-4
2.	Pedagogic Competence	5-9
3.	Technology Competence	10-13
4.	Cross-Cultural Understanding	14-16
5.	The Role of Institutions in Preparing Graduates	17-21
6.	The Ideal Profile of English Teacher	22-25

Each aspect was represented by a set of items aimed at measuring the students' readiness in various domains related to teaching competencies (Arikunto et al., 2023).

For the qualitative data, in depth interview using a semi structured format was used to dig deeper information. The researcher used fifteen main questions which were developed based on the objectives of the study. Ten questions were used to interview the pre service teachers and five questions were used to interview the principals and teachers at school

Data Collection Procedure

The research was conducted within 4 months from September until December 2024. In the first step, the researcher carried out a quantitative data collection procedure by surveying through the distribution of questionnaire on Google forms to find out the value of respondents' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions which are assessed based on the scale in each question. In the next stage, the researcher conducted an interview with the pre-service teachers, the principals and the teachers.

Data Analysis

After collecting data, the researcher also analyzed the data. The quantitative data were visualized in a table that shows the percentage of the answers. This was chosen since the percentage table provides a clear and easily understandable depiction of the distribution of students' responses, making it easier to interpret the data objectively. In qualitative data, after conducting interviews with 9 informants, the audio recordings of the interview results were then transcribed. After the transcript had been carried out, the data were then familiarized to understand and explore them thoroughly. For the next step, the researcher organized the data, labels, and codes to sort out the data that were relevant to the focus of the research. Researchers then also focused on determining the main patterns and ideas in the data that had gone through the coding process. The last step in the data analysis process was to interpret and present the data. All these steps were chosen to obtain more structured, organized, and in-depth data.

Data Validity and Reliability

In this study, data validation was carried out to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings obtained from quantitative and qualitative approaches. At the quantitative step, data validation was achieved through a reliability test using Croanbach's alpha test. The calculation of the test carried out methodically is shown in Table 3.

The results of the test conducted by the researcher through Microsoft Excel showed that Croanbach's Alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.9183$. According to the reliability classification of the question above, the degree of reliability of the instrument is in the very high category. Thus, the instruments used are very good and can be trusted as a data collection tool and research can be continued to the next stage.

Table 3. Croanbach's Alpha Test Result

Croanbach's Alpha Score	0.91834
Standard	0.6
Information	Reliable

The validity of the Likert scale questionnaire was also carried out by checking with experts, namely lecturers who are experts at English education language and curriculum and instructional design. The reliability test ensured the consistency of the measurement results, while the validity test aimed to evaluate the extent to which the questionnaire measures aspects that are relevant to student's readiness to teach. For qualitative data, member checking was used as a validation strategy. In this step, the results of the interview transcript and initial interpretation were relayed back to the interviewees to ensure that the findings were related to their experiences and views. Member checking not only increased confidence in the results of the study but also allowed correction or clarification if there was a misinterpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
This chapter presents the research findings based on two main objectives: First is to explore how English education students perceive their readiness to meet the teaching standards required by educational institutions, and second is to identify the gap between industry expectations and the actual readiness of English education students.

Pre-service Teachers' Perception of Their Own Teaching Readiness
To understand students' self-perceived readiness, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used, with responses categorized as Positive (4-5), Neutral (3), and Negative (1-2). The summarized results are presented Table 4.

For English Language Proficiency, positive responses range from 39.4% to 43%, neutral responses from 42.4% to 51.5%, and negative responses from 6.1% to 13.6%. Specifically, fluency and confidence in speaking received 39.4% positive, 48.5% neutral, and 12.1% negative. The ability to write teaching materials had 42.5% positive, 48.5% neutral, and 9.1% negative. Also, frequency of reading English sources showed 43% positive, 42.4% neutral, and 13.6% negative. Moreover, the ability to understand and teach English orally and in writing had 42.4% positive, 51.5% neutral, and 6.1% negative. This shows that even though the respondents are being prepared to become English teachers, there is still doubt about their language abilities, which should be the foundation of their profession. This concern is echoed in the interview data. UR, a student, reflected, *"I am fairly confident in grammar, but not in listening and speaking because I lack practice. For listening and speaking, I feel like I'm lacking confidence."* Meanwhile, AF stated, *"My confidence in grammar is still relatively low because grammar is the hardest part of everything. For speaking, I still don't fully understand speaking."* Additionally, RV mentioned, *"For me, I trust my reading skills more than speaking."* In contrast, VT expressed strong confidence in speaking but showed a misunderstanding of grammatical importance, *"the most confident one is probably speaking. I'm very confident in speaking. But for writing, grammar is a must. Speaking must not use grammar. So, it is easier for me to speak since we don't have to use grammar for speaking"* These statements suggest that while students may feel confident in certain skills, their perception of what constitutes professional English teaching remains inconsistent with institutional expectations.

In pedagogic competence, positive responses range from 48.5% to 63.2%, neutral from 31.8% to 47%, and negative from 3% to 7.6%. While the importance of pedagogic skills had 63.2% positive, 31.8% neutral, and 3% negative, teaching strategies understanding received 48.5% positive, 47% neutral, and 4.5% negative. Furthermore, designing learning plans showed 50% positive, 45.5% neutral, and 4.5% negative. Also, the ability to provide evaluation and feedback had 60.6% positive, 34.8% neutral, and 4.5% negative. Align with this, readiness to handle classroom challenges received 50% positive, 42.4% neutral, and 7.6% negative showing the need for stronger practical teaching experience. Moreover, several students add within interview that they were not fully prepared to handle real classroom challenges. RT, a student, supported this concern by stating *"Perhaps, during my two months of PLP (Teaching Practice), there wasn't a single lesson plan at all and also*

honestly, when I was teaching, someone said to me 'Miss, could you please speak a bit louder?' since I explain the lesson with the low voice" Additionally, AF shared*, "during my teaching practice, I had some challenges. I often felt nervous and blanked out."* VT also highlighted the difficulty of managing large classes though usually regular class consists of 30 – 40 students, *"one class had around 32 to 36 students. It was very difficult to calm them down."* These responses underline the urgent need for more comprehensive and reflective practicum experiences.

Table 4. The Five-Point Scale Survey Result

No	Questions	Responses (%)		
		Positive (4-5)	Neutral (3)	Negative (1-2)
	English Language Proficiency	**41,8%**	**47.7%**	**10.5%**
1.	Fluency and confidence in speaking.	39.4%	48.5%	12.1%
2.	Ability to write teaching materials.	42.5%	48.5%	9.1%
3.	Frequency of reading English sources for improvement.	43%	42.4%	13.6%
4.	Ability to understand and teach English orally and in writing.	42.4%	51.5%	6.1%
	Pedagogic Competence	**54,5%**	**40.3%**	**5%**
5.	Importance of pedagogic skills	63.2%	31.8%	3%
6.	Teaching strategies understanding	48.5%	47%	4.5%
7.	Designing learning plan	50%	45.5%	4.5%
8.	Ability to provide evaluation and feedback.	60.6%	34.8%	4.5%
9.	Readiness to handle classroom's challenges	50%	42.4%	7.6%
	Technology Mastery	**77%**	**21%**	**2%**
10.	Comfort in using digital tools for teaching.	81.9%	16.7%	1.5%
11.	Ability to modify digital media to be engaging.	68.1%	27.3%	4.5%
12.	Importance of technology in English learning.	83.4%	15.2%	1.5%
13.	Frequency of using technology for self-learning	75.8%	24.2%	0%
	Cross-Cultural Understanding	**55%**	**41.5%**	**3.5%**
14.	Ability to integrate cross-cultural values.	43.9%	51.5%	4.5%
15.	Understanding of English cultures.	53%	42.4%	4.5%
16.	Importance of intercultural skills for teachers.	68.2%	30.3%	1.5%
	The Role of Higher Education in Preparing Graduates	**63.6%**	**32.1%**	**4.4%**
17.	Relevance of coursework to teaching demands.	65.2%	34.8%	0%
18.	Sufficiency of practical teaching experience.	51.5%	36.4%	12.1%
19.	Need for university collaboration with schools.	80.3%	19.7%	0%
20.	Assessment of training or internships.	57.6%	34.8%	7.6%
21.	University support for teaching in the 5.0 era.	63.6%	34.8%	1.5%
	Ideal Profile of English Teacher	**80.7%**	**18.2%**	**1.1%**
22.	In-depth language and cultural knowledge.	74.2%	22.7%	3%
23.	Integration of technology in teaching.	81.8%	16.7%	1.5%
24.	High adaptability to technological changes.	81.8%	18.2%	0%
25.	Importance of creativity for engaging Gen Z.	84.8%	15.2%	0%

Technological competence is one of the other key strengths of a teacher as well as new graduates nowadays. In this aspect, positive responses were the highest, ranging from 68.1% to 83.4%, neutral from 15.2% to 27.3%, and negative from 0% to 4.5%. students also felt comfortable using digital tools for teaching which had 81.9% positive responses, 16.7% neutral, and 1.5% negative responses. Also, the ability to modify digital media reached 68.1% positive, 27.3% neutral, and 4.5% negative. Mostly students agreed with the importance of technology in English learning which showed 83.4% positive, 15.2% neutral, and 1.5% negative. Moreover, frequency of using technology for self-learning had 75.8% positive and 24.2% neutral, with no negative responses. It indicates the ability of pre-service teacher in adapting technology. Moreover, the interview data show that most students and novice teachers feel comfortable using technology in teaching. RT

remarked, *"Insya Allah, I can manage the technology. I usually use quizzes."* It is related to UR's statement that said *"I use TikTok and Instagram to explore the latest teaching trends."* While VT said, *"I use the icebreaking that I looked for on YouTube to make the teaching method more enjoyable."* A teacher also acknowledged that the younger generation becomes more familiar with technology and has significant potential to leverage digital tools in enhancing learning. As JA stated, *"Teachers must be aware of and understand how to use technology in teaching."* Although students are capable of using various applications, they often lack the skills to choose the most appropriate tools for specific learning needs. *RT* admitted, *"There are so many applications, sometimes we don't know which one to choose."* VT added *"I am able to use technology in teaching when I conducted PLP. But sometimes I don't know many applications and which one is suitable for my students. Perhaps if I learn it more I will know more."*

Cross-cultural understanding has become one of the essential skills recognized as crucial in English language teaching. In the context of learning that is increasingly influenced by global trends, future teachers show how they integrate various sources of inspiration to develop their teaching methods. In the category of cross-cultural understanding, positive responses ranged from 43.9% to 68.2%, while neutral responses fell between 30.3% and 51.5%, and negative responses remained low, from 1.5% to 4.5%. Specifically, the ability to integrate cross-cultural values received 43.9% positive responses, 51.5% neutral, and 4.5% negative. Similarly, understanding of English cultures gained 53% positive, 42.4% neutral, and 4.5% negative responses. Moreover, the importance of intercultural skills for teachers was rated the highest in this category, with 68.2% positive, 30.3% neutral, and only 1.5% negative responses. Moreover, in interview data, RT said, "I mix my method in teaching with the way American teachers teach. Most Americans in class use technology methods like presentations." which shows the influence of foreign teaching systems in shaping her teaching approach. UK also shared that she actively learns through global digital media, saying, "I learn through social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok. Sometimes there are words or expressions I don't understand. I look for their meanings a lot there." indicating her independent effort to understand language and expressions from other cultural contexts. In a similar enthusiasm, VT explained how she tries to adjust her teaching approach by searching for ideas on digital platforms, "In the end, I keep trying to look for ideas on social media, especially TikTok. How to make it fun for the kids, so they enjoy the learning and obey us." showing how technology and global practices can shape how future teachers understand and adapt to the increasingly diverse characters of their students. Most students realize the need for cross-cultural understanding, but deep understanding is still rare among them. As mostly Z Generation, pre-service teachers tend to gain cross-cultural understanding through social media like YouTube and TikTok, which offer short video content.

The Gap Between Industry Expectations and Actual Readiness

While 80.3% of respondents agreed that collaboration between universities and schools is essential in preparing teaching graduates, only 51.5% felt their practical teaching experience was sufficient. Interview data reinforce this concern. RT admitted, "Perhaps, during my two months of PLP (Teaching Practice), there wasn't a single lesson plan at all" indicating a lack of fundamental instructional training. Similarly, AF and VT described feeling nervous, unprepared, and overwhelmed by real classroom dynamics. AF stated that she often blanked out during her teaching practice, while VT noted, "one class had around 32 to 36 students. It was very difficult to calm them down." These firsthand accounts suggest that many pre-service teachers lacked not only time but also structured guidance to fully internalize what it means to manage a class and deliver instruction effectively. On the contrary, NL, the principal, argued, "In my opinion, the proposal for internships must be implemented properly. It should not just be a formality, and the duration should also be extended. Students are required to achieve competence through this activity." JA, a senior teacher, stated, "Public speaking skill is essential, because no matter how good they are at English, if they don't have the ability to present the material, the material won't reach the students." HF also added "The first essential competency that I believe is pedagogy because teachers must understand learning theories and the principles of educational instruction as preparation for their future roles." The interview narratives consistently reflected that the internship system, while essential, is often rushed, superficial, or disconnected from real teaching challenges.

Communication skills and professional identity were consistently highlighted by industry professionals as core attributes expected from future teachers. 74.2% agreed that the professional English teacher must have deep language and cultural knowledge. JA also added that *"Teachers should be role models, even on social media"* suggesting that professionalism extends beyond classroom

instruction and into personal conduct. Moreover, NL, a school principal, stated, *"The most important competency is communication, as well as being skilled at interacting with students both inside and outside the classroom. Especially for language teachers, communication skills are very important so that the material can be conveyed effectively."* This statement reflects the view that a language teacher is more than just someone who delivers content. They act as a facilitator of meaning who must be able to convey ideas effectively through interaction that is full of empathy and clarity. However, the student responses reveal a contrasting reality. AF admitted feeling extreme nervousness during teaching practice, which often led to mental blocks and ineffective classroom delivery. RT also noted being asked by a student to raise her voice, indicating struggles with classroom presence and vocal projection, key elements of effective communication. On the contrary, according to students' perspectives about the role of higher education in preparing graduates, positive responses ranged from 51.5% to 80.3%, while neutral responses varied between 19.7% and 36.4%, and negative responses remained relatively low, ranging from 0% to 12.1%. Specifically, the relevance of coursework to teaching demands received 65.2% positive responses, 34.8% neutral, and no negative responses. These instances demonstrate that while students may possess theoretical knowledge, they often lack the practical confidence and interpersonal awareness to convey their message clearly and assertively in a real teaching setting.

Creativity and adaptability were among the most highly rated qualities in the survey, with 84.8% of respondents acknowledging the importance of creativity in teaching Generation Z students and 81.8% agreeing on the need for high adaptability to technological change. These high scores reflect an awareness of the dynamic nature of teaching in modern classrooms, particularly in digital learning environments. However, qualitative data revealed that while students recognized these qualities as important, their application was often limited or superficial. VT noted, "I am able to use technology in teaching when I conducted PLP. But sometimes I don't know many applications and which one is suitable for my students. Perhaps if I learn it more I will know more," showing a reliance on digital content without critical assessment of its pedagogical value. Similarly, UR shared that she used TikTok and Instagram to stay updated with teaching trends, but lacked confidence in selecting tools that matched learning objectives. RT also added that "There are so many applications, sometimes we don't know which one to choose." HF, an experienced teacher, highlighted the importance of merging technology with creativity, stating, "Teachers must be able to combine the learning process with technology. Moreover, universities need to create creative teachers who are technology literate and able to utilize innovative media." MW also added "The biggest challenge is changing children's mindset about considering English as a difficult skill to be fun skill to be learned." She added "New graduates must have good quality in education, both in terms of material and personal appeal." This indicates a professional expectation that future teachers not only use technology but do so in innovative and learner-centered ways.

Conceptual understanding of what it means to be a teacher encompasses not just knowledge and skill, but also attitude, values, and reflective capacity. Survey data under the category "Ideal Teacher Profile" shows exceptionally high positive responses such as 84.8% for creativity in teaching Gen Z, 81.8% for adaptability to tech changes, and 74.2% for in-depth language and cultural knowledge. These figures suggest that students conceptually value comprehensive and future-oriented teacher profiles. Moreover, IK, an experienced educator, commented "the teacher's soul is more important than the teacher himself. This teacher's soul that many teachers do not have becomes the most vital component in teachers' qualification." She also added "A teacher must be one step ahead of his students. Mastery of the material is the important key to be successfully teaching." This shows that intellectual competence remains an important requirement that supports the teacher's authority in front of the students. However, interview data from students' perspectives reveal partial or fragmented understandings of this professional identity. VT remarked, "Speaking must not use grammar, so it is easier for me to speak," a statement that reflects a surface-level view of language teaching and a lack of awareness about pedagogical expectations. In addition, JA considered "Good teachers are someone who are able to master four basic skills of English before teaching. Not only that, they must be ready to face students with various abilities, from low intelligence to very high intelligence as well." She added "English teachers should be role models in their use of language, even on social media. So that students will be more motivated to learn English." In the digital era, a teacher's digital presence reflects their professional integrity, which can indirectly influence students' motivation and attitude toward the language. However, such views were not consistently reflected across the student category.

Discussion

The results of this research show a significant gap between the skills of future English educators and the requirements set by educational institutions, especially regarding language proficiency, teaching skills, and emotional preparedness for classroom management. A critical concern is the students' lack of confidence in their English-speaking skills. Even after completing multiple semesters of speaking courses, many still perceive themselves as unready to utilize English actively in teaching scenarios. Some students feel more confident in reading and writing, but they struggle with speaking and listening. In fact, some students think that grammar is not needed for speaking, which goes against the basic principles of language teaching. This implies that the teaching methods used may not adequately support the growth of relevant and practical communicative competence (Br Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020).

Furthermore, classroom instruction often focuses on structured tasks, such as scripted dialogues or isolated speaking exercises, which may not reflect the dynamic and unpredictable nature of real classroom interactions. As a result, students may become proficient in controlled environments but still struggle to apply their language skills in spontaneous and authentic teaching contexts. Moreover, limited opportunities for real-life practice, such as microteaching or teaching internships, may further hinder their confidence and readiness. Regarding pedagogical competence, students typically recognize the significance of teaching skills and offering feedback. However, they frequently face difficulties with lesson planning and classroom management. This is supported by interview data expressing certain students failed to develop lesson plans during their practicum. The disparity between theoretical coursework and the practicalities of classroom teaching indicates that practical components have not been thoroughly incorporated into the curriculum, as highlighted in modern pedagogical frameworks (Rachmajanti et al., 2021). The professional identity of students seems to be insufficiently developed. Certain responses from interviews indicate conceptual misconceptions, such as the belief that grammar is irrelevant in spoken English. This suggests a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the role of English teachers as facilitators of communication and cultural exchange. These observations strengthen the notion that a crisis in professional identity persists as a significant concern, consistent with the perspectives of Kuswandono (2022) and Widodo et al. (2020) who argue that the formation of professional identity is intrinsically linked to reflection, practical involvement, and the meaningful construction of the teaching profession.

Regarding technological proficiency, although numerous students express a degree of comfort with digital tools, this familiarity has not yet evolved into innovative teaching practices. Their engagement with technology often remains superficial and technical, lacking the necessary conceptual depth and creativity to create transformative learning experiences (Selfa-Sastre et al., 2022). In the current digital age, educators are anticipated to not only utilize digital tools but also to craft and execute significant learning experiences through their application (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020). At present, cross-cultural understanding, which ought to be a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, is still not given adequate emphasis. Unfortunately, students' understanding of culture is often symbolic or surface-level. Some imitate teaching methods from American teachers or look for inspiration on social media without having a strong theoretical background. Their reliance on short videos as a source of cultural knowledge shows that their intercultural understanding is still shallow. Instead of learning cultural values in a critical way, students tend to copy styles and techniques without understanding the deeper meanings behind them. This gap is particularly concerning, given that intercultural competence is essential for fostering global awareness, ethical sensitivity, and communication across diverse identities and social backgrounds (Nafisah et al., 2024).

In addition, the limited duration of teaching practicums, and their frequent treatment as mere formalities, have further hindered students' professional growth. Interviews with school principals and experienced teachers highlight that practical fieldwork should not be reduced to a technical exercise but serve as a vital space for developing professionalism, responsibility, and critical reflection. This supports McKay and Sappa (2020) assertion that teacher identity formation must occur within authentic, sustained teaching environments. Therefore, teacher education should not be confined to mastery of content and method, but must also cover affective, reflective, and contextual dimensions. According to Shulman's (1987) pedagogical framework, teaching readiness requires the integration of content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and an understanding of learners'

characteristics and sociocultural contexts (Shahrebabaki, & Oslund, 2024). In light of these findings, there is a pressing need to transform teacher education curricula to prioritize practice-based learning, English speaking skill, reflective engagement, and the sustained development of professional identity.

Because of these problems, English teacher education programs need to improve their curriculum and teaching methods. There should be a better balance between learning theory in class and practicing real teaching in schools. Students need more chances to improve English skill especially in speaking and to do teaching practice, receive helpful feedback, as well as reflect on their experience (Syaifa et al., 2022). Syaifa et al. (2022) emphasizes speaking classes should also focus more on real communication, not just grammar tests or memorized dialogues. Teacher education curricula must move beyond simply transmitting knowledge. They should be reoriented toward creating sustained, dialogic spaces where students can continuously question, reconstruct, and affirm their roles as educators. Including reflective activities, collaborative lesson planning, peer teaching, and guided teaching practicums can help shape a more coherent and resilient professional identity. In doing so, future English teachers will be better prepared not only with technical competencies, but also with the self-awareness and adaptability required to meet the dynamic demands of 21st-century classrooms. In addition, managing their emotions and being confident when they are in front of a class are very important skills (Burić et al., 2020). If these changes are not made, future English teachers may continue to feel unprepared and unsure about their role. This could affect the quality of English education in schools.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that there is a clear gap between what universities expect from English education students and what these students are truly ready for when they enter the real teaching world. Although many students are comfortable using technology, most of them still struggle with speaking English, managing classrooms, and creating good lesson plans. This means that their training at university is not fully preparing them for the challenges they will face as teachers. Many students do not yet have a strong sense of being a teacher. Their understanding of what it means to be a professional educator is still unclear. This is not only the students' fault, but also a sign that the education system needs to change. The current curriculum often focuses too much on theory and not enough on real-life teaching practice. Internship programs are too short, and speaking classes often do not give enough chances to practice real communication. Therefore, this study suggests that English teacher education needs to change its focus. Universities should offer more real teaching experiences, longer internships, and more speaking practice. Students should also have more chances to reflect, learn how to be creative in teaching, and grow their confidence. A good teacher is not just someone who knows English well, but someone who can communicate clearly, inspire students, and adapt to different classroom situations. If these improvements are made, future English teachers will be better prepared, not just with skills, but with a strong sense of purpose and identity. This will help improve the quality of English education in schools and support students in learning English in a more effective and enjoyable way.

For future research, it is recommended to include participants from other majors beyond English education. This broader approach may help determine whether the issue of job readiness is specific to language education or reflective of a wider concern within Indonesia's higher education system. Cross-disciplinary comparisons could provide valuable insights into how universities can enhance graduate preparation for professional environments. Additionally, future studies may benefit from longitudinal tracking to assess how perceptions of readiness evolve with real-world teaching experience. In short, being a teacher requires more than academic success. It demands continuous self-development, real teaching experience, and a strong sense of purpose. These are the keys to becoming truly ready for the classroom.

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