Developing Professional Skills through Mentorship Program for EFL Students in Indonesia

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Abstract. Professional skills must be developed among university students to provide them with opportunities to compete in the real world. This study aims to investigate how professional skill development can be done to English and Literature Department students through mentorship program. Twenty-four students were involved in four different fields such as Digital Literature, News Casting/News Reporting, Prose Writing, and Digital Teaching Media. The research began with collecting students' needs. Communicating with lecturers of relevant subjects, the twenty-four students were selected. Then, four mentors were chosen and assigned. Next, a technical meeting was done before the students joined a group. After that, the mentoring sessions were held for five 100-minute meetings in the following scenario: (1) brainstorming and idea filtering, (2) outlining or planning the product, (3) product drafting, (4) product reviewing and revising, and (5) finishing. All group activities were closely monitored. One best student of each group was selected by the mentor. In the last stage, an evaluation of the program was done.

Keywords: professional skills, development, mentoring

1 Introduction

The current independent curriculum of higher education provides opportunities for students to learn a variety of knowledge and skills based on their interests and needs. Students are allowed to take subjects in other study programs both within and outside their universities. They should also be facilitated to take part in social or humanitarian programs. In addition, higher education institutions through their departments and study programs are expected to invite experts and professionals or practitioners to train students skills that are required in industries. This implies that educational institutions must be able to identify what competences and skills that their graduates need to have.

It is unavoidable that university graduates need to be equipped with industrial skills which are of high requirement for their future jobs. [1]Makarim (2022) in the news released in *detik.com* emphasizes the importance of collaboration between lecturer and practitioner to generate innovations or case study in the learning process. Such collaboration will provide students with opportunity to gain practical experience of current industrial practices. This program will also ultimately help industries find new talents whom they might hire. The ministry of education and culture has, in fact, prepared praktisimengajar.id, a hub to connect lecturers and practitioners.

According to the [2]Decree of Educational and Culture Minister number 3/M/202, there are

eight indicators such as graduates getting proper jobs, students' involvement in off-campus experiences, lecturers' off-campus activities, visiting practitioners, socially impactful or internationally recognized products of lecturers, study programs having a collaboration with world-class partners, collaborative and participative classes, and internationally standardized study programs. As the decree states one of the key performance indicators of higher education institution is the involvement of practitioners from the industries. It can be said that practitioners are those professionals who have been devoted their life to a certain field or job. What they do might be different from what students learn in their courses because practitioners often work by the procedure created by their organizations or companies or by themselves while students learn how to do things based on research studies. This is what makes it necessary to bring practitioners into classrooms. Another factor is that sometimes there can be a disconnection between what students learn in classrooms with what they are assigned to do at their jobs. [3]Gummesson (2002) clearly states that there can be a gap between textbooks (which might be used in the classrooms) with the realities in the daily life. He adds there is a theoretical confusion in which theories cannot adequately explain certain phenomena which cannot be related with one another.

English and Literature Department has a lot of alumni who work in different fields such as television industries, literature writers, technology, teaching industries, etc. With this fact, the department can then build a network to facilitate students to learn from them. Besides learning the necessary skills students may also` be inspired by those alumni who have been able to compete in the real world. This is a good tool to let students learn since it can reduce pressure among them. Students' motivation can also be boosted up when no psychological hindrances appear.

One of the models that can be applied in giving advocacy for the students is mentorship program. [4]Sumodiningrat (1997) points out that mentorship program is carried out because there is a gap between those who provide mentoring program and those who act as mentees. He adds a mentorship program has a dual purpose, namely:

a. to be a facilitator in relation to gearing up motivation of, opportunities for, and support from the mentees. In this role, the mentor acts as a mediator and negotiator and organizes and utilizes existing resources.

b. to be an educator, which means that the mentor actively gives positive and directive thoughts on the basis of his knowledge and experience as well as exchanges ideas with the mentees. He also serves to raise awareness, share information, and carries out trainings.

Mentorship program will have a significant impact on the students since it allows them to get guidance and technical directions in what is being trained. A research conducted by Ismail, Abdullah, and Francis (2009)[5] prove that there is an individual improvement if a mentoring program is given. Therefore, this article presents how the stages of a mentorship program can be developed to train industrial skills of the students of English Education and English Literature by involving practitioners who are alumni of both study programs. The fields covered are Digital Literature, News Casting/News Reporting, Prose Writing, and Digital Teaching Media.

2 Methodology

The method used in the research is Research and Development. The method is usually applied to produce products and test their effectiveness. (Sugiono, 2010)[6]. The research was done at the English and Literature Department from May 18th to July 8th, 2022 through online system. The mentor and mentees were free to use either Zoom or Google Meet video conference. Twenty-four students of English Education and English Literature Study Programs and four practitioners were involved. The research began with collecting students' needs and technical meeting. The mentoring sessions were done in five 100-minutes meeting which took the following steps: (1) brainstorming and idea filtering, (2) outlining or planning the product, (3) product drafting, (4) product reviewing and revising, and (5) finishing. All the session were closely monitored by the research team and also lecturers of relevant subjects.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Students needs

Students needs analysis basically captured what students thought about the importance of the knowledge and skill related to the field they were going to follow and their needs for practitioners. The questionnaires were related to the fields of Digital Literature, News Casting/News Reporting, Prose Writing, and Digital Teaching Media. The results of the analysis can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Students' needs analysis

No.	Field	Importance of the field		Needs for practitioner	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1	Digital Literature	90.5%	9.5%	89.7%	10.3%
2	News Casting/News Reporting	83.84%	16.16%	94.08%	5.02%
3	Prose Writing	88.56%	11.44%	86.76	13.24%
4	Digital Teaching Media	95.17%	4.83%	89.7%	10.3%

Table 1 indicates that majority of the students believed that the field they were going to follow was important. All the fields obtained above 80% of students' agreement. It can be said that the fields which had been determined by the researchers were very relevant and suitable with the backgrounds of the students. Meanwhile, in the aspect of needs for practitioners the percentages of agreement were also high. News Casting/News Reporting field which gained the lowest percentage in terms of importance obtained 94.08% of agreement in the needs for practitioner. In conclusion, positive responses were given by the respondents to the aspects asked in the questionnaire.

Having collected the data of students' needs, the research proceeded to opening communication with practitioners who would become the mentors. Professional digital literature writer, experienced journalist, acknowledged prose writer, and google-certified teacher were invited and agreed to give trainings to the selected participants.

A technical meeting was held prior to the running of the mentorship program. The selected participants, mentors, and lecturers of Prose Appreciation, Digital Literature, Creative and Innovative Communication, and Technology in ELT courses. Guideline and schedule of the mentorship program were distributed and discussed. To make sure the program would run well, Whatsapp group for each field of training was created in which participants, mentor, and research team were invited.

3.2 Mentorship Session

As previously stated the mentorship session was conducted in five 100-minute meetings. The five meetings followed such steps as (1) brainstorming and idea filtering, (2) outlining or planning the product, (3) product drafting, (4) product reviewing and revising, and (5) finishing. Prose writing training was directed to participants who took the course Prose Appreciation, News Casting/News Reporting to Creative and Innovative Communication, Digital Literature to Digital Literature course, and Digital Teaching Media to Technology in ELT. There were 6 participants in each field of training.

In the first meeting, the mentor and mentees did a brainstorming or generating ideas. In this stage, the mentor presented the nature of the field, opened a discussion, and brainstormed with the students to collect ideas of what they would produce at the end of the training. Therefore, the materials explained by the mentor stimulated students to think and share what they thought would be best to achieve and produce. The results of this stage showed that Digital Literature group decided to produce video and graphic arts, News Casting/News Reporting would produce videos of news reading and news reporting by exposing issues related to students' daily life. Prose Writing group decided to produce imaginative writing works, and Digital Teaching Media group agreed to produce a brochure-like leaflet that presented motivational message and teaching media which utilized digital technology.

In the second session, the idea that had been agreed upon was then outlined systematically. For example, mentees in news casting/news reporting group wrote a draft of news he or she would read or report. This outlining stage allowed students to present their ideas in front of the mentor and the other mentees. Suggestions and recommendations were given to improve the draft.

In the third meeting, the outline which had been designed became the base for the product creating. The outline was already developed into more details and contained necessary elements. For example, the Prose Writing Group began to have a clear flow of what would the end product be like. Therefore, the mentees were then ready to begin the production process.

The mentor and mentees proceeded to the next session in which they discussed and reviewed the product draft. Each draft was given suggestions for revisions. Since the digital aspect was highlighted, all mentees were recommended to improve their products so that they would fulfill the aspects of digitally friendly and aesthetic in addition to the aspect of content.

In the last stage, the revised products were again presented by the mentees to get further comments and suggestions. Even though, this was the last meeting with the mentor, the mentees were instructed to revise the product for submission. This finishing stage gave opportunity to mentees to make final touches of their product. After the mentees submitted their products, mentor of each group selected the best product. The research team then announced the results and gave rewards in a special meeting.

An overall evaluation was made after the program was completed. 60% of the mentees

thought the program really helped them to improve their skills in the field, whereas 40% found it a bit difficult since the mentoring was done online. Therefore, some mentees expected that such mentoring program can be conducted in offline mode. Some also suggested there should be more meetings and mentees should be given freedom to choose any field they are interested in.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusions

The followings are two conclusions drawn from the stages of the research: Students believed that the fields offered were very relevant and needed by them to improve their professional and industrial skills especially when they finish their studies from the university. They also need training and mentorship program guided by professionals or practitioners in a less formal atmosphere. The mentorship model is developed through the stages of brainstorming, outlining or product drafting, product designing, reviewing and revising, and product finishing. To run the training program smoothly, the schedule should be made based on the agreement between the mentor and mentees to have a flexibility although a close monitoring should still be done.

4.2 Suggestions

Some suggestions can be given in relation to what has been resulted from the research such as: Bringing practitioners to campus were highly needed to improve students' competence and industrial skills in order to support their competitiveness. Thus, policy makers must give a special attention to it. Lecturers must collaborate with practitioners, especially those who are graduates of their study programs or departments. It will bring a good impact on network building and provide wider opportunities for the lecturers themselves and the students. Other researchers can conduct a research study to develop a better and more comprehensive mentorship program model so that there can be more alternatives that can be implemented.

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