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Preparing More Than Teachers: Human Capital Development for the Next Generation of Educators

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Abstract

This study examines the preparation of prospective teachers through a human capital perspective that extends beyond conventional teaching competencies. The study aims to explore how professional readiness can be strengthened by integrating technical knowledge with communication, leadership, collaboration, emotional competence, adaptability, reflective capacity, and lifelong learning. Drawing on an international community engagement program involving undergraduate education students at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, the study discusses the program context, participatory learning approach, reflection, and evaluation of outcomes. The discussion highlights a shift in participants' understanding of professional development from subject-matter mastery toward multidimensional professional capabilities. The study concludes with practical implications for higher education and teacher education, while identifying limitations and directions for future programs.

Keywords: Prospective Teachers, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Professional Competence, Educational Psychology, Participatory Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rethinking the Role of Future Teachers in a Changing Educational Landscape

The preparation of future teachers can no longer be understood as the transmission of pedagogical techniques and subject-matter knowledge alone. Contemporary education is being reshaped by artificial intelligence, digital platforms, changing learner expectations, and increasingly diverse classroom environments. These transformations require teachers to reconsider how they understand teaching, learning, and their own professional identities. Rather than preparing educators for a relatively stable occupational environment, teacher education must cultivate professionals who can continuously rethink, unlearn, relearn, and adapt. A recent systematic review identifies digital technology, communication, lifelong learning, and socioemotional capabilities as central future skills for teachers, highlighting the growing mismatch between conventional teacher competencies and the demands of twenty-first-century education.

Technological transformation, however, does not diminish the importance of teachers; instead, it changes the nature of their contribution. Artificial intelligence and digital learning technologies can increasingly support information retrieval, content generation, assessment, and personalization, but these capabilities do not eliminate the need for human judgment, interpersonal relationships, ethical reasoning, or contextual understanding. Future teachers therefore need to move beyond the role of information transmitters and become facilitators of meaningful learning experiences. Their professional value increasingly lies in their ability to interpret technological possibilities, select appropriate pedagogical approaches, and maintain meaningful human connections with learners. The historical transformation of teaching across technological eras demonstrates that although technologies continuously redefine instructional practices, teachers remain central actors in organizing and mediating learning.

This changing environment also creates a fundamental challenge for teacher education institutions. Preparing future teachers requires more than adding technological competencies to existing curricula; it requires a broader reconsideration of what it means to be professionally prepared for education. Teachers must be capable of responding to technological disruption while simultaneously recognizing learners' cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural differences. Such preparation requires adaptability to become an embedded professional disposition rather than an occasional response to change. In this sense, teacher education should create opportunities for prospective educators to develop critical judgment, flexibility, communication, and reflective capacity alongside pedagogical knowledge. Research on the future of educational technology similarly emphasizes the importance of anticipating technological developments and reconsidering how instructional practices can remain responsive to emerging educational conditions (Abdulayeva, 2024).

2. Human Capital Perspective in Teacher Preparation

A human capital perspective offers a useful framework for rethinking teacher preparation because it positions educators as long-term investments rather than merely recipients of professional qualifications. From this perspective, teacher development involves the accumulation and integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, social capabilities, and adaptive capacities that generate value for individuals, educational institutions, and society. Prospective teachers therefore need opportunities to develop competencies that extend beyond classroom instruction, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, leadership, emotional intelligence, and digital competence. The future-skills literature emphasizes precisely this multidimensional profile, particularly the importance of combining technological capabilities with communication, socioemotional skills, and lifelong learning.

Human capital development also requires a shift from short-term competency acquisition toward continuous professional growth. The knowledge and skills that are adequate for entering the teaching profession may become insufficient as technologies, curricula, student characteristics, and institutional expectations evolve. Consequently, prospective teachers should develop the capacity to learn continuously and to recognize professional development as an integral component of their careers. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present community engagement program, which sought to broaden students' understanding of professional development beyond mastery of teaching content. Community-based educational experiences can contribute to this orientation by exposing students to situations in which learning is connected to authentic social contexts and requires active participation rather than passive knowledge acquisition (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2022).

The human capital perspective further implies that teacher preparation should connect professional competencies with broader societal needs. Teachers influence not only students' academic achievement but also their social participation, values, confidence, and capacity to engage with changing communities. Developing teachers as human capital therefore means strengthening their ability to contribute to institutional development and social transformation. Higher education institutions have an important role in creating developmental environments in which prospective teachers can integrate disciplinary knowledge, professional skills, interpersonal capabilities, and social responsibility. Evidence from European universities indicates that community engagement can strengthen the relationship between higher education institutions and external stakeholders while supporting social impact and public engagement, illustrating how universities can extend their educational mission beyond conventional classroom boundaries (Spânu et al., 2024).

3. Purpose and Contribution of the Community Engagement Program

Within this context, community engagement provides a practical mechanism for translating human capital development from an abstract educational principle into an experiential process. The present program was designed for undergraduate education students at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and combined interactive seminars, discussions, case studies, reflection, and experience sharing. Such an approach is particularly relevant to prospective teachers because it encourages participants to connect conceptual knowledge about human resource development and educational psychology with the practical realities they may encounter in their future professional roles. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of information, community engagement creates opportunities for dialogue, interpretation, reflection, and collaborative learning. Research on community-engaged learning similarly demonstrates the value of connecting academic knowledge with authentic experiences and involving

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students, educators, and community partners in a shared learning process (Rokooei et al., 2021).

The program also seeks to establish reciprocity between higher education and its community partners. For prospective teachers, this reciprocal dimension is important because teaching itself is fundamentally relational: educators must understand the contexts, aspirations, difficulties, and resources of the communities in which learning occurs. Community engagement can therefore cultivate a broader sense of professional responsibility while helping students recognize that educational knowledge has value when it responds to real human needs. Importantly, community engagement should not be treated merely as an additional extracurricular activity. Its educational value emerges when experiential participation is intentionally connected to reflection and professional development. Research on community engagement emphasizes that meaningful engagement can generate benefits for participants while simultaneously requiring attention to how relationships, expectations, and responsibilities are managed among stakeholders (Hermann & Puetz, 2024).

The contribution of the present program lies consequently in integrating human capital development with the preparation of future educators. The intervention did not define teacher readiness solely through technical teaching competence; instead, it emphasized professional development, communication, leadership, emotional competence, adaptability, and reflective learning. This orientation corresponds with the broader purpose of community engagement as a means of connecting higher education with social realities and developing students who can contribute beyond the boundaries of their academic programs. At the same time, community engagement must be implemented critically because its benefits are not automatically distributed equally and can be constrained by inadequate monitoring, limited expertise, or unequal participation. Recognizing these conditions strengthens the rationale for designing community engagement as a structured developmental intervention rather than as a one-directional transfer of knowledge (Karki, 2025).

Taken together, the three dimensions of this introduction establish the central argument of “Preparing More Than Teachers.” The future educator must be understood as a multidimensional professional whose value depends not only on the ability to deliver instruction but also on the capacity to learn continuously, collaborate, communicate, adapt to technological change, exercise professional judgment, and respond to societal needs. A human capital approach provides the conceptual foundation for this broader understanding, while community engagement provides an experiential pathway through which such capacities can be cultivated. The resulting model places teacher preparation at the intersection of professional development, lifelong learning, social responsibility, and educational transformation, positioning prospective teachers not simply as future classroom instructors but as future contributors to the development of educational institutions and society.

BACKGROUND

1. Teachers as Strategic Human Capital

Teachers occupy a distinctive position within education systems because the quality of educational provision depends substantially on the knowledge, capabilities, motivation, and professional judgment of those who teach. Consequently, teachers should not be regarded merely as employees who perform predefined instructional tasks, but as strategic human capital whose capabilities shape institutional performance and educational development. This perspective changes the emphasis of teacher preparation from simply producing qualified graduates toward building a workforce capable of generating sustained educational value. Strategic management of human capital requires institutions to consider how individuals' competencies can be developed, deployed, and retained in ways that support broader organizational objectives. In education, such an approach places teacher capability at the center of efforts to improve instructional quality and student learning rather than treating professional development as an isolated administrative activity (Mugwaze & Smith, 2024).

Viewing teachers as strategic human capital also requires attention to the organizational conditions in which their capabilities are developed and utilized. Human capital does not generate its full value automatically; it must be supported by leadership, organizational structures, professional opportunities, and environments that enable teachers to apply and extend their competencies. School leaders therefore have an important responsibility in creating conditions that encourage professional learning, collaboration, initiative, and sustained engagement. This perspective is particularly relevant for future educators because the competencies developed during teacher education will ultimately be exercised within organizational environments that can either facilitate or constrain professional growth. Leadership consequently becomes part of the broader human capital architecture through which educators are prepared to contribute to institutional improvement (Zerrad & Schechter, 2025a).

The strategic value of teacher human capital extends beyond individual performance because teachers operate within networks of professional relationships. Knowledge, experience, and expertise can be exchanged through collaboration, allowing individual capabilities to become collective resources. For prospective educators, this means that teacher preparation should cultivate not only individual competence but also the ability to work productively with colleagues, administrators, students, families, and other stakeholders. Collaborative capacity is especially important when educational institutions face complex challenges that cannot be addressed through isolated individual action. Human capital development therefore needs to incorporate a social dimension in which professional relationships facilitate the sharing of knowledge and the coordinated pursuit of educational goals. Earlier empirical work on teacher capabilities demonstrates that human and social capital can jointly contribute to educational improvement, emphasizing the importance of considering individual expertise alongside collaborative relationships (Pil & Leana, 2008).

The strategic management of teacher human capital also has implications for professional leadership. Teachers increasingly participate in activities that extend beyond direct classroom instruction, including mentoring, curriculum development, organizational decision-making, innovation, and institutional improvement. These responsibilities require educators to exercise initiative and leadership rather than simply follow established procedures. Preparing teachers for such roles should therefore begin before they enter the profession by exposing prospective educators to concepts of leadership, responsibility, decision-making, and professional agency. A human capital perspective recognizes these capacities as investments that can increase the

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contribution of educators throughout their careers. Recent research on principals' approaches to human capital leadership reinforces the importance of viewing educational professionals as resources whose development and leadership potential are central to organizational effectiveness (Zerrad & Schechter, 2026).

2. Beyond Technical Competence: The Broader Competency of Future Educators

The traditional conception of teacher competence often emphasizes subject knowledge and pedagogical technique, yet contemporary educational environments require a substantially broader competency profile. Future educators must operate in classrooms characterized by technological change, diverse learner needs, interdisciplinary challenges, and rapidly changing expectations. Consequently, competencies such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, leadership, adaptability, and lifelong learning should be considered integral elements of teacher preparation. These capabilities allow educators to respond to unfamiliar situations rather than relying exclusively on routines developed for stable instructional environments. Evidence from higher education further demonstrates that international and experiential learning can contribute to the development of transversal competencies that extend beyond discipline-specific knowledge (Chans et al., 2024).

The expansion of teacher competence is particularly evident in disciplines where professional practice requires the integration of multiple knowledge domains. Future teachers in fields such as fine arts, for example, need to combine disciplinary expertise with pedagogical knowledge, research capabilities, technological awareness, and practical skills. This illustrates a broader principle: professional competence cannot be reduced to mastery of a single knowledge category. Instead, effective educators need to integrate different forms of expertise and apply them according to the requirements of particular learning environments. Teacher education should therefore encourage students to develop the capacity to connect disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical decision-making, technology, inquiry, and professional practice. Such integration is increasingly important as educational institutions expect teachers to respond flexibly to changing instructional contexts (Baymetov et al., 2025).

Another dimension of broader teacher competence concerns psychological resources. Teaching involves continuous interaction with learners, colleagues, institutions, and communities, making emotional and psychological capacities important components of professional functioning. Future educators need to develop confidence, motivation, resilience, and the capacity to manage demanding interpersonal situations. These qualities can influence how teachers respond to difficulties and sustain their engagement with professional responsibilities. A broader human capital approach consequently recognizes that professional readiness encompasses not only what educators know and can do, but also the psychological resources that enable them to persist, adapt, and remain engaged. Psychological capital has been associated with important occupational outcomes, illustrating why teacher preparation should acknowledge the relationship between personal psychological resources and professional functioning (Demir, 2018).

Social capital provides another important complement to technical competence. Educators rarely work independently; their effectiveness is influenced by relationships with other teachers, school leaders, students, parents, and professional communities. Strong professional networks can facilitate knowledge exchange, collaborative problem-solving, access to expertise, and collective responses to educational challenges. For future teachers, developing the ability to communicate and collaborate across professional boundaries is therefore as important as acquiring instructional techniques. Teacher education programs can support this development by creating collaborative learning environments in which students practice negotiation, teamwork, peer feedback, and collective decision-making. The significance of teachers' social and human capital in professional development demonstrates that educational improvement can depend on the interaction between individual capabilities and the networks through which those capabilities are mobilized (Yoon et al., 2017).

3. Human Capital Development as Professional Readiness

Professional readiness should be understood as a developmental outcome rather than a condition automatically achieved through graduation. A prospective teacher may possess disciplinary knowledge and formal pedagogical qualifications while still requiring further development in communication, classroom judgment, leadership, adaptability, and practical problem-solving. Human capital development provides a framework for addressing this gap because it emphasizes the progressive accumulation of capabilities that can be transferred to real professional situations. Integrating academic learning with practical and project-based experiences can help future educators connect theoretical concepts with complex problems, develop initiative, and recognize the relevance of their knowledge beyond formal coursework. Educational projects have consequently been identified as mechanisms through which human capital can be developed by linking learning with practical application (Budrin et al., 2020).

Professional readiness also depends on the capacity for continuous development after initial teacher preparation. Contemporary education changes too rapidly for professional competence to remain static throughout an educator's career. New technologies, changing curriculum expectations, evolving learner characteristics, and emerging social challenges continually require teachers to update their knowledge and practices. Teacher preparation should therefore establish lifelong learning as a professional norm rather than presenting it as an optional form of additional training. The development of future educators should include opportunities for reflection, professional inquiry, leadership experiences, and engagement with emerging educational practices so that graduates enter the profession with an orientation toward continuous improvement. This approach positions human capital development as an ongoing process rather than a one-time investment made before employment.

Finally, professional readiness requires alignment between individual capabilities and the strategic needs of educational organizations. Developing teachers without considering how their competencies will be used within schools may produce skills that remain disconnected from institutional priorities. Conversely, aligning teacher development with organizational objectives can enable educators to apply their capabilities in ways that support instructional improvement, professional leadership, and student success. Such alignment also provides a basis for designing teacher development initiatives around clearly identified competencies rather than generic training activities. Evidence concerning teacher leadership initiatives indicates that perceptions of human capital

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management are relevant to how professional development and leadership opportunities are understood within educational organizations (Finster & Milanowski, 2021).

Taken together, these perspectives establish human capital development as a central foundation for preparing the next generation of educators. Teachers need to be developed as strategic professionals whose contribution extends beyond the delivery of lessons to include leadership, collaboration, innovation, reflection, and continuous learning. The broader competency framework also suggests that professional readiness emerges from the interaction of technical expertise with transversal, psychological, social, and adaptive capabilities. For teacher education institutions, the implication is clear: preparation should deliberately cultivate the forms of human capital that enable graduates to navigate uncertain professional environments and contribute to institutional and societal development. The concept of "preparing more than teachers" therefore represents a shift from producing technically qualified instructors toward developing educators who possess the multidimensional capabilities required to create sustainable educational value.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHOD

1. Program Context, Participants, and Needs Identification

The community engagement program was conducted as an international academic initiative involving Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). The program was developed under the theme of developing future teachers through human capital development and educational psychology, with prospective teachers positioned as the primary participants and strategic partners. The activity was designed in response to the changing demands of the teaching profession, where future educators require broader capabilities beyond subject-matter knowledge and conventional instructional skills. The program therefore emphasized the development of professional, interpersonal, reflective, and adaptive capacities relevant to future teaching responsibilities.

The participants consisted of eight undergraduate students from UTHM/IPTHO. They came from two academic backgrounds, namely English and Economics and Business. This composition created a multidisciplinary learning environment in which participants could exchange perspectives concerning teaching, professional development, leadership, communication, and learner needs. The diversity of academic backgrounds was considered valuable because the development of future teachers requires competencies that extend across disciplinary boundaries. Rather than treating participants as a homogeneous group, the program recognized their different educational experiences and used these differences as resources for discussion and collaborative learning.

Needs identification was conducted during the preparation stage through coordination with the partner institution and consideration of the characteristics and developmental requirements of the participants. The needs assessment indicated that prospective teachers required more than mastery of teaching materials. Particular attention was given to understanding learner characteristics, developing student motivation, managing classroom situations, strengthening interpersonal communication, and preparing for the psychological and professional demands of teaching. These needs became the basis for determining the content, learning activities, interaction patterns, and supporting materials used during the program.

The preparation stage also included coordination between the organizing team and UTHM, development of learning materials, determination of the implementation schedule, and preparation of the media required for the activity. The content was organized around two interconnected domains: human capital development and educational psychology. This structure was intended to provide participants with an integrated understanding of themselves as future professionals and of the learners whom they would eventually serve. The preparation process therefore ensured that the program remained connected to the participants' prospective professional roles rather than functioning as a general academic seminar.

2. Participatory Learning and Program Implementation

The program employed a participatory learning approach that positioned participants as active contributors to the learning process. Instead of relying exclusively on conventional lectures, the implementation combined interactive presentations with question-and-answer sessions, group discussions, case studies, experience sharing, and reflection. This approach was selected to create opportunities for participants to express their views, relate theoretical concepts to their own experiences, and examine potential challenges they might encounter as future teachers.

The program was organized around several substantive themes. The human capital component addressed professional teacher competencies, twenty-first-century skills, leadership, communication, collaboration, creativity, adaptability, and continuous professional development. The educational psychology component addressed learner development, learning motivation, emotional and social dimensions of learning, individual learner characteristics, and the creation of supportive learning environments. These themes were presented as complementary dimensions of teacher preparation, allowing participants to understand that effective teaching involves both professional capability and an understanding of learners.

Interactive discussion constituted an important element of the implementation. Participants were encouraged to raise questions concerning practical educational challenges, including how teachers could motivate learners, respond to students with low confidence, utilize technology appropriately, and manage professional demands. Group discussion enabled participants to compare their interpretations and experiences while facilitators provided clarification and additional perspectives. The learning process consequently moved beyond the simple acquisition of information toward collaborative exploration of possible solutions.

Case studies were also used to strengthen the practical dimension of the program. Participants examined hypothetical educational situations involving passive learners, low motivation, and difficulties adapting to classroom environments. They were asked to identify possible causes of the problems and propose appropriate responses based on educational psychology principles. Through this activity, participants were encouraged to consider approaches such as positive reinforcement, empathetic communication, instructional adjustment, and the creation of a supportive classroom atmosphere.

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The multidisciplinary composition of the participants further enriched the implementation process. Students from English-related programs contributed perspectives associated with communication, language learning, and classroom interaction, while participants from Economics and Business contributed perspectives related to leadership, self-development, and resource management. Facilitators used this diversity to encourage the exchange of ideas and to demonstrate that professional teacher competence can be strengthened through perspectives originating from different fields.

3. Reflection, Evaluation, and Evidence of Program Outcomes

Reflection was conducted after the presentation and discussion activities. Participants were encouraged to consider how the knowledge obtained during the program could be applied to their future teaching responsibilities. The reflection process focused particularly on the relationship between human capital development, educational psychology, and the practical challenges of becoming a teacher. Participants were given opportunities to express their views, identify important lessons, and discuss how the program had influenced their understanding of professional preparation.

Evaluation was conducted using several indicators established during the planning stage. These included participants' understanding of human capital development and educational psychology, their knowledge of professional teacher competencies, their participation during discussions and case studies, their perceived readiness to apply educational psychology principles, and their satisfaction with the program. Evaluation therefore considered not only whether participants received the intended information but also whether they actively engaged with the material and perceived it as relevant to their future professional roles.

The evidence of program outcomes was obtained through observation of participant engagement, discussion activities, reflection, and participant feedback. Particular attention was given to the extent to which participants connected the program content with their anticipated experiences as teachers. The evaluation also considered the perceived applicability of the material to future teaching practice. This approach enabled the program team to document immediate learning and professional awareness without claiming long-term changes in actual teaching performance.

The relatively small number of participants also influenced the implementation and evaluation process. Although the number limited the generalizability of the program's outcomes, it enabled more intensive interaction between participants and facilitators. Participants had greater opportunities to ask questions, share experiences, discuss individual concerns, and receive direct responses from the facilitators. The small-group format consequently supported a more personalized learning environment and facilitated deeper interaction during discussion and reflection.

Finally, the program documentation process was used to consolidate information concerning the implementation, participant engagement, evaluation, and outcomes. Documentation served not only as evidence of program completion but also as a basis for reviewing the strengths and limitations of the activity and considering potential improvements for subsequent programs. Overall, the methodological design integrated preparation, needs identification, participatory learning, practical case analysis, reflection, and evaluation into a coherent community engagement process aimed at preparing prospective teachers with broader professional capabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Expanding the Meaning of Professional Competence

The community engagement program revealed that professional competence among prospective teachers needs to be understood more broadly than the mastery of subject matter and instructional techniques. At the beginning of the activity, participants tended to associate professional development primarily with improving their ability to understand and deliver learning materials. This perspective is understandable because formal teacher education commonly places substantial attention on academic and pedagogical preparation. However, the discussions conducted during the program encouraged participants to reconsider whether technical teaching ability alone would be sufficient when they eventually entered complex and changing educational environments. The program consequently created an opportunity to redefine professional competence as a combination of knowledge, interpersonal capabilities, emotional maturity, leadership, adaptability, and continuous professional development.

The expansion of professional competence became particularly visible during discussions concerning the responsibilities of teachers outside the immediate process of delivering lessons. Participants were encouraged to consider teachers as professionals who establish relationships with learners, motivate students, manage classroom dynamics, respond to individual differences, and contribute to the development of educational environments. These responsibilities require forms of competence that cannot be developed solely through studying instructional content. Communication, emotional regulation, interpersonal sensitivity, decision-making, and leadership consequently emerged as important dimensions of professional preparation. The program helped participants recognize that being professionally prepared means being able to respond appropriately to different situations rather than simply being able to reproduce knowledge in a classroom.

Another important development concerned the recognition of professional reflection and lifelong learning. Participants began to understand that teaching should not be considered a static profession in which competence is completed after graduation. Educational technologies, social conditions, student expectations, and institutional requirements continue to change, meaning that teachers must remain willing to acquire new knowledge and reconsider established practices. Professional competence therefore involves the capacity to evaluate one's own strengths and limitations and to identify areas requiring further development. This perspective shifts teacher preparation from an endpoint-oriented model toward a developmental model in which becoming a competent educator is an ongoing process throughout one's professional career.

The program also broadened participants' understanding of leadership. Leadership was not presented simply as occupying a formal administrative position but as the ability to influence learning environments, make responsible decisions, communicate effectively, and contribute constructively to educational communities. Future teachers may eventually be required to coordinate activities, collaborate with colleagues, guide learners,

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participate in institutional initiatives, or lead educational innovations. Developing leadership awareness during undergraduate education can therefore strengthen their readiness to assume responsibilities that extend beyond classroom instruction. The discussions enabled participants to see that professional identity can encompass both instructional and organizational contributions.

2. Building Adaptive and Multidimensional Human Capital

The findings further indicate that future educators require multidimensional human capital to navigate the complexity of contemporary education. The program deliberately connected human resource development with educational psychology so that participants could consider both their own professional capabilities and the characteristics of the learners they would eventually serve. This integration was important because teacher effectiveness cannot be separated from the ability to understand people, interpret educational situations, and adapt professional behavior accordingly. Human capital in this context includes not only knowledge and technical skills but also communication, collaboration, creativity, leadership, emotional competence, critical thinking, and adaptability.

Adaptability emerged as an especially important dimension because prospective teachers anticipate working in environments characterized by technological development and changing social conditions. Participants discussed the need for teachers to remain responsive to developments in educational technology and to avoid relying on approaches that may no longer correspond to students' needs. Adaptability, however, does not mean simply adopting every new technology or changing teaching methods whenever a new trend appears. It involves the ability to assess changing circumstances, determine what is appropriate, and modify professional practices thoughtfully. Future educators therefore need judgment as well as flexibility, allowing them to distinguish meaningful innovation from changes that have limited educational value.

The multidisciplinary composition of the participants contributed to the development of this broader perspective. Students from English and Economics and Business backgrounds brought different experiences and ways of interpreting educational issues into the discussions. Perspectives related to communication and classroom interaction could be considered alongside perspectives concerning leadership, self-development, and resource management. This exchange demonstrated that teacher development can benefit from knowledge that originates beyond conventional pedagogical disciplines. It also illustrated the value of collaborative learning in developing human capital because participants were exposed to ideas that they might not encounter within their primary academic specialization (Sihotang, 2026).

Educational psychology provided another important dimension of adaptive human capital (Sihotang et al., 2027). Participants were encouraged to move beyond interpreting learning difficulties exclusively through students' academic capabilities. Discussions introduced psychological and social factors such as confidence, anxiety, previous learning experiences, social support, motivation, and teacher-student relationships (Sihotang, Suhud, Handaru, et al., 2027). This encouraged participants to understand learner behavior more holistically and to consider why a student might become passive, disengaged, or reluctant to participate. Such understanding can help future teachers respond more appropriately to individual circumstances and avoid applying identical solutions to fundamentally different learner needs (Suhud, Caniago, Sihotang, et al., 2026).

The case studies reinforced this multidimensional orientation. Participants examined situations involving passive students, low motivation, and difficulties adapting to classroom environments (Cholifah et al., 2027). Rather than being provided with predetermined solutions, they were encouraged to identify possible causes and formulate responses (Suhud, Caniago, Sihotang, et al., 2026). Their proposed strategies included positive reinforcement, empathetic communication, adjustment of learning methods, and the creation of supportive classroom environments (Sihotang, 2027). This process demonstrated that adaptive human capital develops through the ability to interpret situations, integrate different forms of knowledge, and select appropriate responses (Sihotang, Suhud, Handaru, et al., 2027).

3. From Knowledge Acquisition to Professional Readiness

The most significant implication of the program is the movement from knowledge acquisition toward professional readiness. Knowledge remains an essential foundation of teacher preparation, but possessing information does not automatically mean that an individual is prepared to function effectively as a professional educator (Suhud, Allan, Hoo, et al., 2026). Professional readiness requires the ability to apply knowledge, communicate with others, interpret complex situations, manage emotions, make decisions, collaborate, and continue learning (Suhud, Boonkaew, Sihotang, et al., 2025). The program therefore encouraged participants to consider how the concepts discussed could be transferred into future teaching situations rather than treating the seminar as an isolated academic experience (Sihotang, Suhud, Reztrianti, et al., 2027).

This transition was visible in the participants' discussions and reflections. Participants increasingly connected human capital development with the practical realities they might encounter after entering the teaching profession (Suhud, Sihotang, Allan, et al., 2026). They discussed challenges involving learner motivation, confidence, technology, classroom interaction, and professional demands (Suhud, Sihotang, Juliana, et al., 2026). These conversations helped transform abstract concepts into anticipated professional situations. The process was particularly valuable because prospective teachers could begin developing professional awareness before encountering these challenges directly in schools (Suhud, Sihotang, Chanthawong, et al., 2026).

Professional readiness was also strengthened through active participation. The interactive format required participants to ask questions, express opinions, analyze cases, exchange experiences, and reflect on possible applications (Suhud, Wolor, Sulistyowati, et al., 2025). This learning process differed from a conventional lecture in which participants primarily receive information (Suhud, Nair, Chee Hoo, et al., 2026). Active engagement required them to formulate interpretations and defend or reconsider their perspectives. As a result, the program supported the development of communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and reflective capacity alongside conceptual understanding (Sihotang, Suhud, Handaru, et al., 2027).

The program's evaluation further indicated positive changes in participants' understanding and professional awareness (Sihotang,

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Suhud, Handaru, et al., 2026). Participants reported that the material was relevant to their future teaching practice, while their active involvement in discussions and case analyses demonstrated engagement with the subject matter. Importantly, the outcome was not limited to increased awareness of human resource development and educational psychology (Suhud, Sihotang, Boonkaew, et al., 2026). Participants also began to perceive teaching as a profession requiring continuous self-development. This represents an important shift because professional readiness is strengthened when prospective teachers understand that graduation marks the beginning of professional development rather than its completion (Suhud, Unarto, Sugianto Sihotang, et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, the outcomes should be understood primarily as evidence of immediate learning, reflection, and professional awareness (Ilhamalimy et al., 2025). The program involved a small number of participants and relied substantially on discussion, observation, reflection, and feedback. Therefore, the findings do not establish that the intervention produced long-term improvements in actual teaching performance. Instead, the program provides evidence that participatory community engagement can create a meaningful environment for prospective teachers to reconsider professional competence and identify capabilities they need to develop (Sihotang et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings support the central proposition of "Preparing More Than Teachers." Future educators need to be prepared as multidimensional professionals rather than as individuals who simply possess teaching knowledge (Sihotang, Suhud, Handaru, 2025a). Professional competence encompasses technical expertise, communication, leadership, emotional capability, adaptability, collaboration, reflection, and lifelong learning (Sihotang & Hidir, 2022). Human capital development provides the broader framework for integrating these capabilities, while participatory learning provides an effective environment for exploring their practical meaning. The ultimate goal is therefore not merely to produce graduates who can teach, but to develop educators who can learn continuously, understand learners, respond intelligently to change, collaborate with others, and contribute to the continuing improvement of education (Wibowo et al., 2026).

Conclusions

The community engagement program demonstrates that preparing future educators requires a broader conception of teacher development. Prospective teachers need more than subject knowledge and instructional techniques; they require human capital that encompasses communication, leadership, collaboration, emotional competence, adaptability, professional reflection, and lifelong learning (Sihotang & Hidir, 2022). The program created opportunities for participants to reconsider professional development as a continuous process rather than an activity completed through formal education (Wibowo et al., 2026). Through interactive seminars, discussions, case studies, experience sharing, and reflection, participants were encouraged to connect conceptual knowledge with the realities of future teaching practice. The resulting shift in perspective supports the central proposition of "Preparing More Than Teachers": effective teacher preparation should develop professionals capable of understanding learners, responding to changing educational conditions, and contributing to broader educational improvement (Sihotang et al., 2025). The program report indicates that participants demonstrated increased understanding, professional awareness, active engagement, and perceived readiness to apply the knowledge gained in future learning environments (Pertiwi et al., 2026).

For higher education and teacher education institutions, the findings suggest the importance of expanding professional preparation beyond conventional academic coursework (Merina, Suhud, Sihotang, et al., 2026). Teacher education programs can provide complementary opportunities for students to develop nontechnical competencies through seminars, collaborative activities, case-based learning, reflective exercises, and experiential engagement (Merina, Suhud, Sihotang, et al., 2026b). Particular attention should be given to leadership, interpersonal communication, emotional competence, adaptability, professional reflection, and learner-centered thinking. Such development can be integrated into existing academic structures rather than treated exclusively as additional activities (Sihotang, Suhud, Handaru, 2025b). The program also demonstrates the value of multidisciplinary interaction, particularly when students with different academic backgrounds are encouraged to exchange perspectives. Future initiatives could strengthen this approach through sustained partnerships between universities, schools, and communities, allowing prospective teachers to encounter authentic educational challenges and develop professional judgment in context. The report emphasizes that continued institutional collaboration can support the sustainability of similar initiatives and provide a foundation for future academic and community-based activities (Cholifah et al., 2026).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the outcomes. The program involved a relatively small group of eight undergraduate participants, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to broader populations of prospective teachers (Hernita et al., 2026). The small group nevertheless enabled more intensive interaction and personalized engagement between participants and facilitators. In addition, the evaluation primarily relied on participant involvement, discussion, reflection, observation, feedback, and questionnaire-based perceptions. These approaches provide useful evidence of immediate learning and professional awareness but do not establish whether the reported changes will persist or translate into measurable improvements in future teaching performance (Permana et al., 2026). Subsequent programs should therefore incorporate larger participant groups and more systematic evaluation designs, including pre- and post-program assessments, follow-up evaluations, and longitudinal observation. Future research could also examine whether the competencies developed through community engagement remain evident during teaching practicum and after graduates enter the teaching profession (Murti et al., 2026).

Ultimately, the preparation of future educators should be understood as an investment in people who will continuously shape learning environments and educational communities. Human capital development provides a foundation for moving beyond a narrow understanding of teacher competence toward a more comprehensive model of professional readiness (Saputra et al., 2026). The experience documented in this program suggests that meaningful preparation occurs when prospective teachers are encouraged to integrate knowledge with reflection, interpersonal understanding, adaptability, and practical application. Preparing more than teachers therefore means developing educators who are ready not only to teach, but also to learn, lead, collaborate, adapt, and respond responsibly to the evolving needs of learners and society (Indriani et al., 2026).

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