



Contextualizing Work-Integrated Learning in Higher Education: Global Trends and Islamic Education Evaluation

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Abstract

The gap between graduates' competencies and labor market demands has driven the adoption of Work-Integrated Learning as a bridge between academic knowledge and professional practice. Within Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy, the Teaching Assistance Program embodies this approach, yet its integration with Islamic education perspectives remains underexplored. This article discusses global trends in Work-Integrated Learning, evaluates the extent to which the Teaching Assistance Program fulfills essential principles, and proposes a conceptual framework relevant to Islamic higher education. Using a qualitative content analysis of 75 accredited international and national journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, data were examined thematically through Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Findings reveal three major trends: i) expansion from workplace-based to non-workplace models; ii) integration into teacher education through teaching practicums; and iii) digitalization in the post-pandemic era. The Teaching Assistance Program substantively aligns with Work-Integrated Learning principles but requires reinforcement in authentic assessment, structured supervision, and pedagogical reflection. The study contributes to competency-based curriculum development for teacher education in Indonesia, offering implications for Islamic higher education in strengthening professional competencies, pedagogical skills, and ethical values rooted in Quranic traditions.

INTRODUCTION

The gap between the competencies of college graduates and the demands of the workplace has long been a concern in higher education literature (Billett, 2009). Data from the Global Employability Survey in 2023 shows that more than 40% of employers in the Asia Pacific region report that college graduates are not professionally prepared to enter the workforce (Jackson & Cook, 2023). In Indonesia, a similar situation is reflected in the relatively high unemployment rate among educated people, with the Central Statistics Agency recording that unemployment among diploma and bachelor's graduates reached more than 15% of the national unemployment rate in 2023.

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This fact confirms that the higher education system requires fundamental reform, not only in terms of knowledge-based curricula but also in terms of integrating real-world work experiences into learning design.

Work-Integrated Learning emerged as a pedagogical response to these challenges and is now one of the most widely studied approaches in international higher education literature. Billett, (2009) defined Work-Integrated Learning as a pedagogical practice that facilitates student learning by meaningfully connecting academic experiences with workplace experiences. Since then, countries such as Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and European countries have developed diverse institutional frameworks for Work-Integrated Learning, encompassing cooperative education, internships, practicums, service learning, and project-based industry collaboration (Ferns et al., 2025). In Indonesia, the formal implementation of Work-Integrated Learning can be identified in the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy, which provides space for students to study off-campus, including through the Teaching Assistance program in educational institutions. Although this program has been running since 2020, systematic studies integrating global Work-Integrated Learning perspectives with evaluations of Teaching Assistance programs are still very limited in Indonesian academic literature.

This research aims to address three interrelated issues. First, to map global trends in Work-Integrated Learning in higher education based on an analysis of international and national literature. Second, to evaluate the extent to which the Teaching Assistance program within the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) framework meets the globally recognized criteria and essential principles of Work-Integrated Learning. Third, to formulate a direction for developing a conceptual framework for Work-Integrated Learning-Teaching Assistance as a contribution to higher education curriculum policy, particularly for education study programs in Indonesia.

The main argument put forward in this article is that the Teaching Assistance program in the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) is a form of contextual Work-Integrated Learning for Indonesian higher education, particularly in the realm of teacher education. However, its implementation has not been fully articulated within a comprehensive Work-Integrated Learning framework. If the Teaching Assistance program is designed and evaluated using globally standardized Work-Integrated Learning principles, the quality of the student learning experience is expected to improve significantly, ultimately impacting graduates' job readiness and professional competence (Ferns et al., 2025; Jackson & Dean, 2023).

Based on a search of the Scopus database for studies on Contextualizing Work-Integrated Learning in Higher Education, 726 documents were found from 2016 to 2026. This analysis clearly shows that no studies have been found related to Contextualizing Work-Integrated Learning in Higher Education: Global Trends and Islamic Education Evaluation. Below is a visualization of the VOSviewer bibliometric analysis based on the themes of Work-Integrated Learning, Higher Education, and Islamic Education.

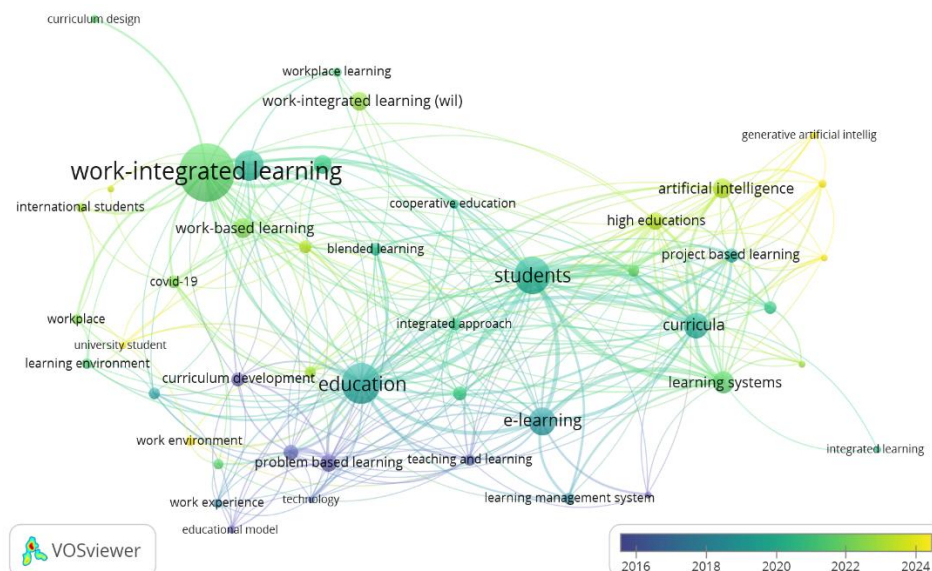


Fig 1. VOSviewer visualization analysis regarding the integration of work, higher education, and Islamic education, based on the Scopus database

Most research on Work-Integrated Learning still focuses on industrial/business and healthcare contexts, while Work-Integrated Learning in the realm of teacher education through teaching assistance mechanisms remains largely understudied (Winslade et al., 2023). Work-Integrated Learning research in Indonesia is generally descriptive-evaluative, focusing on the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in general, without explicitly framing the Teaching Assistance program within a standardized global Work-Integrated Learning theoretical framework. This creates a conceptual gap between field practice and international Work-Integrated Learning principles.

This research offers novelty in three aspects: theoretically developing a conceptual framework of Work-Integrated Learning-Teaching Assistance that integrates global Work-Integrated Learning principles with the specific context of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) in Indonesia; methodologically applying a layered thematic analysis to 75 reputable journal articles from the 2020–2025 period that is more up-to-date than previous studies; and practically formulating concrete policy implications for curriculum designers and managers of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program.

This research is expected to contribute to the development of Work-Integrated Learning theory in the context of teacher education in Southeast Asia, while also providing practical references for universities in designing, implementing, and evaluating Teaching Assistantship programs as a form of quality Work-Integrated Learning. A review of the Work-Integrated Learning literature in the last decade shows very rapid development, both in thematic coverage and methodological depth. Ferns et al., (2025), in their compendium, identified more than 500 Work-Integrated Learning articles published between 2010 and 2022 in internationally reputable journals, with the focus of research shifting from mere model descriptions to impact evaluation and theoretical framework development. In general, the Work-Integrated Learning literature can be mapped into three main clusters: i) research focusing on the relationship between Work-Integrated Learning and student employability; ii) research examining the curriculum design and pedagogy of Work-Integrated Learning; and iii) research investigating the experiences of multi-stakeholders in Work-Integrated Learning, including students, lecturers, industry mentors, and institutions. The most widely studied relationship between variables is the

relationship between Work-Integrated Learning participation and increased work readiness, which consistently shows a positive correlation across various disciplinary and national contexts (Jackson & Dean, 2023; Milne & Mullin, 2025). However, research specifically examining Work-Integrated Learning in the context of teacher education and teaching assistantships remains relatively limited, representing a significant gap in the literature.

The first dominant research group in the Work-Integrated Learning literature is survey-based evaluative studies that measure the impact of Work-Integrated Learning on students' employability and job readiness. Jackson & Dean, (2023) conducted a nationwide study in Australia with a sample of 76,261 university graduate respondents and found that all three types of Work-Integrated Learning (workplace-based, non-workplace, and global Work-Integrated Learning) significantly improved students' perceptions of their employability, albeit by varying magnitudes. A similar study by Mariska, (2024) in Indonesia, within the context of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM), showed that students participating in teaching assistantships simultaneously improved their communication skills, teaching skills, and understanding of the material, contributing to their job readiness. The strength of this research group is its ability to generate empirical generalizations based on large data sets, but its weakness lies in its inability to explain the causal mechanisms behind the relationship between Work-Integrated Learning and employability in depth (Curto-Reverte et al., 2025).

A second significant body of research in the Work-Integrated Learning literature is qualitative studies exploring the experiences and perceptions of students and stakeholders in Work-Integrated Learning programs. Milne & Mullin, (2025) conducted a study of 240 sociology students enrolled in a Work-Integrated Learning program across seven different courses, finding key themes including the relevance of the experience, the challenges of teamwork, and the value of interpersonal communication. In the context of teacher education, Lindberg, (2022) identified three important dimensions of Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education: supervisor support for professional identity development, variety of teaching modalities, and collaboration between academic lecturers and field supervisors. In Indonesia, Firdausi & Christanti, (2024) case study of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance program at Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) found that the program provided insight and a sense of responsibility as prospective educators, as well as enhancing professional skills in management and the learning process.

A third increasingly relevant research group is systematic studies in the form of Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs) and meta-analyses that attempt to synthesize findings across Work-Integrated Learning studies. Curto-Reverte et al., (2025) in a systematic review for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), identified the critical role of Work-Integrated Learning in addressing the needs of the changing labor market and found that Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle framework remains the dominant theoretical foundation for the implementation of Work-Integrated Learning in Europe. Ferns et al., (2025), in the third edition of the international handbook *Work-Integrated Learning*, formulated an inclusive definition of Work-Integrated Learning that transcends workplace-based boundaries, namely curriculum design that embraces Work-Integrated Learning pedagogy in partnership with external stakeholders. In the Indonesian context, Yanuarsari, (2022), through descriptive research in private universities, found that strong leadership and institutional commitment are determinants of the successful implementation

of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program, including Teaching Assistance.

An evaluation of previous studies reveals several fundamental shortcomings that justify the novelty of this research. First, most research on Work-Integrated Learning still focuses on industrial/business and healthcare contexts, while Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education through teaching assistance mechanisms remains largely understudied (Winslade et al., 2023). Second, research on Work-Integrated Learning in Indonesia is generally descriptive-evaluative, focusing on the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in general, without explicitly framing the Teaching Assistance program within a standardized global Work-Integrated Learning theoretical framework. Third, almost no research comprehensively analyzes the three core elements of Work-Integrated Learning curriculum integration, experiential authenticity, and pedagogical reflection simultaneously within the context of the Indonesian Teaching Assistance program. Fourth, research addressing the challenges of scalability and accessibility of Work-Integrated Learning in the institutionally diverse context of Indonesian higher education remains very limited (Pham et al., 2022; Vu, 2022). The fundamental difference between this study and previous studies lies in the effort to explicitly integrate the global Work-Integrated Learning framework with the evaluation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance program through a comprehensive and up-to-date Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design with an inductive-deductive thematic analysis approach (Anidar et al., 2026; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2018; 2026; Kassymova et al., 2025). A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was chosen for its ability to produce a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis of knowledge from a large corpus of literature (Ferns & Arsenault, 2023). The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) protocol followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which encompass four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, a search was conducted using a standardized search string that included the keywords: Work-Integrated Learning, teaching practicum, teaching assistance, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), experiential learning, work-based learning, and teacher education. The thematic analysis used the Braun and Clarke (2006) model modified for the needs of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This involved open coding each article, followed by grouping the codes into themes that reflected global and local trends in Work-Integrated Learning. The validity of the analysis is guaranteed through a process of triangulation of sources between international and national literature.

The data sources for this research comprise three main categories. First, reputable international journals indexed by Scopus and Web of Science, including the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL), Higher Education Research & Development, Teaching in Higher Education, Studies in Higher Education, and the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education. The electronic databases used for the search were Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar as a complement. Second, national journals accredited by SINTA 1 include journals from the higher education cluster such as the Journal of Education and Learning, the Journal of Education, and the

Journal of Educational Sciences. Third, national journals accredited by SINTA 2 include journals discussing Independent Learning on an Independent Campus (MBKM), education, and innovative learning, including the Journal of Paedagogy, the Journal of Community Service. All data sources were selected based on thematic relevance determined through a step-by-step selection of titles, abstracts, and full texts. Articles not available in Indonesian or English were excluded from the analysis.

Data collection techniques were carried out through three sequential and complementary procedures. First, a systematic search in electronic databases. Second, a multi-layer screening consisting of: i) level 1 selection based on titles and abstracts; ii) level 2 selection based on thematic feasibility through full-text reading; and iii) level 3 selection based on methodological quality criteria such as clarity of research questions, method accuracy, and validity of findings. Third, structured data extraction using a matrix table that records publication identity (author, year, title, journal, DOI), research type (quantitative, qualitative, mixed, SLR), main variables or themes, analysis methods, key findings, and relevance to the research objectives. All extracted data were then coded and organized into Mendeley reference management software.

Data analysis was conducted through three integrated stages. The first stage was a bibliometric analysis that examined the temporal, geographic, and thematic distribution of included articles to map global Work-Integrated Learning trends (Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026; Hamdi & Desvia, 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025). This included mapping topic frequencies, identifying the most productive journals, and visualizing citation networks. The second stage was a thematic analysis using a modified Braun and Clarke approach, in which themes were identified through an open, axial, and selective coding process. Each article was coded based on the aspect of Work-Integrated Learning discussed (curriculum design, assessment, reflection, supervision, or work readiness) and grouped into themes that reflected dominant trends. The third stage was a comparative analysis between international literature findings and the empirical conditions of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance program in Indonesia, using the Work-Integrated Learning evaluation framework developed by (Ferns et al., 2025), which encompasses three main elements: curriculum integration, authenticity of experience, and pedagogical reflection. Trustworthiness of the analysis is ensured through audit trails, peer debriefing, and member checking of data interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Expanding the Work-Integrated Learning Model Towards Work-Integrated Learning Outside the Workplace

The first study identified the trend of expanding Work-Integrated Learning models from workplace-based to non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning as a dominant trend in the global literature from 2020–2025. Of the 75 articles analyzed, 38 (50.7%) explicitly discussed the diversification of Work-Integrated Learning models, with a strong emphasis on enhancing Work-Integrated Learning models that do not require physical presence in conventional industrial workplaces. This trend was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced higher education institutions worldwide to seek more flexible and inclusive Work-Integrated Learning alternatives. Non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning includes forms such as remote industrial projects, simulated work environments, industry-based academic competitions, independent study, and teaching practicums, all of which meet the core criteria

of Work-Integrated Learning: integrating theory and practice in authentic contexts, although not always in conventional industrial environments (Ferns et al., 2025; Irwin & Perkins, 2021).

Data supporting these findings are obtained from various primary sources within the literature corpus. Jackson & Dean, (2023), analyzing Australian national survey data (n=76,261), showed that three types of Work-Integrated Learning (workplace-based, non-workplace, and global) all positively contributed to perceived employability, with non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning showing a significant impact on postgraduate programs. The Ministry of Education and Culture's (2020) *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Guidelines explicitly list eight forms of off-campus learning, with Teaching Assistantships, Humanitarian Projects, and Independent Studies representing non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning variants adapted to the Indonesian context. Milne & Mullin, (2025) reported that 78% of 240 sociology students rated their Work-Integrated Learning experience as relevant and highly valuable despite being conducted in a non-placement classroom format. Quantitative data from Yanuarsari, (2022) in Indonesian private universities showed that 58.21% of students chose Internship as an option for *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM), while Teaching Assistance was the second most significant choice.

The diversification of Work-Integrated Learning models is not merely a post-pandemic emergency adaptation, but rather a paradigmatic shift that reflects a broader understanding of what constitutes meaningful work experience in higher education. The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance Program substantially meets the criteria for non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning because: i) students engage in authentic tasks relevant to their educational field of study; ii) there is the involvement of external partners (schools) as host organizations equivalent to the role of employers in conventional Work-Integrated Learning; iii) there is a supervision mechanism by teachers and supervising lecturers; and iv) the program is designed to produce measurable learning outcomes related to professional pedagogical competencies (Campbell et al., 2019; Ferns et al., 2025). In terms of policy, the implication of these findings is that universities in Indonesia need to immediately develop institutional policies that explicitly recognize the Teaching Assistantship program as a form of Work-Integrated Learning within a competency-based curriculum framework, including the development of institutional Work-Integrated Learning guidelines that adapt international standards (CEWIL Canada, ACEN Australia, IJWIL), the development of a Work-Integrated Learning accreditation system equivalent to internships or co-ops, the formation of university-school consortia, and the allocation of resources for the capacity development of Work-Integrated Learning supervisors (Curto-Reverte et al., 2025; Ferns et al., 2025).

Work-Integrated Learning in Teacher Education

The results of the second study indicate that Work-Integrated Learning in the context of teacher education has unique characteristics and requires a different evaluation framework than Work-Integrated Learning in industry or business. Of the 75 articles analyzed, 22 (29.3%) specifically discussed Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education or teacher professional development, with a trend of increasing academic attention to this topic since 2022. The distinctive characteristics of Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education include: the existence of a supervision triad involving a supervising lecturer, a mentor teacher, and students simultaneously; a strong reflexive nature because teaching practicum inherently requires students to reflect on their teaching

practices continuously; and the dual role of students who act as both learners and educators (novice teachers) (Aglazor, 2017; Winslade et al., 2023).

Lindberg, (2022), in a systematic review published in nursing, identified three key themes analogous to Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education: supervisor support, variety of teaching modalities, and collaboration between academics and practitioners; this pattern is consistent with findings in teacher education that the quality of supervision is the strongest predictor of Work-Integrated Learning success. Desinta et al., (2026) on the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance Program for vocational students found that this program effectively developed students' TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) skills. Firdausi & Christanti, (2024) reported that student Teaching Assistance participants experienced significant improvements in their sense of professional responsibility, classroom management skills, and teaching confidence, all essential outcomes of Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education.

These findings underscore the importance of developing a Work-Integrated Learning framework specific to teacher education in Indonesia, integrating four key components: a curriculum design that explicitly links pedagogical theory courses with field experiences; a tripartite supervision system that assigns clear roles to supervising lecturers, mentor teachers, and students; a pedagogical reflection portfolio that documents the development of teachers' professional identities; and authentic assessments that measure teaching competency in real-world contexts. Although the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance program has been running for five years since the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy was issued, the lack of an explicit Work-Integrated Learning theoretical framework in the program design has led many program implementers to focus more on administrative aspects than on the quality of the student learning experience (Ferns et al., 2025). Comparisons with developed countries show that the similarities lie in the tripartite university–school–student partnership with supervision as a critical component, while the striking differences lie in the level of formalization and standardization: in Australia, the Work-Integrated Learning program is regulated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) with strict national standards; in Canada, CEWIL Canada sets the definition and criteria for Work-Integrated Learning that apply across institutions; while in Indonesia the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Assistance remains highly decentralized without explicit national Work-Integrated Learning standards, although its credit load (equivalent to 20 credits/semester) is comparable to or even exceeds many international Work-Integrated Learning programs (Desinta et al., 2026; Restiningtyas et al., 2022).

Post-Pandemic Work-Integrated Learning Digitalization

The third study identified digitalization as a transformative trend in post-pandemic Work-Integrated Learning, with direct implications for the Teaching Assistance program in Indonesia. Of the 75 articles analyzed, 19 (25.3%) explicitly discussed virtual Work-Integrated Learning, e-WIL, or the integration of digital technology into Work-Integrated Learning implementation, with a significant surge in publications in the 2021–2023 period due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual Work-Integrated Learning encompasses remote work placements facilitated by digital platforms, project-based virtual collaboration with industry partners, and work environment simulations based on augmented reality and artificial intelligence. In the context of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance, this digitalization trend manifests itself in the form of online and offline learning (hybrid teaching), the

development of digital learning media by students, and the use of platforms such as Google Classroom, Moodle, and various other Learning Management Systems (LMS) in partner schools (Hasani, 2024; Pham et al., 2022).

Hasani, (2024), who studied the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in improving digital literacy of Vocational High School students through Teaching Assistance, found that student involvement in teaching technology-based content significantly improved students' digital literacy while strengthening their own technological competencies, reflecting the principle of reciprocal learning in Work-Integrated Learning. Reports on the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) from various universities indicate that student Teaching Assistance participants are increasingly being asked to develop digital learning media and content as contributions to partner schools, marking a shift from simply assisting with teaching to contributing to the digital transformation of schools. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards and the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) guidelines provide flexibility for universities to develop Teaching Assistance models that integrate digital competencies, in line with the global digital Work-Integrated Learning trend.

The digitalization of Work-Integrated Learning is not simply about shifting physical experiences to virtual platforms, but rather about developing digital competencies as an inherent part of professional work readiness in the Industry 4.0 era. In the context of Teaching Assistance, this means programs need to explicitly integrate digital competency development into their learning outcomes, not just as a learning instrument, but as a substantive competency that is evaluated. This trend also opens up opportunities for Teaching Assistance to be implemented in a hybrid format, where students can contribute virtually to schools in remote areas (3T) without having to be physically present, thereby expanding the program's reach and inclusion. However, this also presents new challenges related to the quality of virtual supervision, the authenticity of online experiences, and unequal access to digital infrastructure across Indonesia, which need to be anticipated in future Teaching Assistance program policy design (Irwin & Perkins, 2021; Milne & Mullin, 2025).

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Assistance program is substantively a local manifestation of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) relevant to the Indonesian higher education context. The three research findings collectively illustrate that Teaching Assistance meets the criteria for non-workplace Work-Integrated Learning because it involves authentic work experiences in educational institutions as partners; has specific characteristics as Work-Integrated Learning in teacher education that distinguish it from industrial Work-Integrated Learning models; and has the potential to develop as digital Work-Integrated Learning responsive to the needs of technology-based educational transformation. However, this study also identifies a significant gap between the potential of Teaching Assistance as high-quality Work-Integrated Learning and the reality of its varied implementation, particularly in three aspects: the weakness of an authentic assessment framework that measures Work-Integrated Learning competencies holistically; inconsistencies in the quality of supervision across institutions and regions; and the lack of structured pedagogical reflection mechanisms in the Teaching Assistance program curriculum at the majority of Indonesian higher education institutions.

The interpretation of the meaning contained in the overall results of this study reveals an interesting paradox in the development of Work-Integrated

Learning in Indonesia: the country has one of the largest de facto Work-Integrated Learning programs in the world through *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM), yet it has not fully utilized its transformative potential due to a lack of appropriate conceptual framing. The Teaching Assistance Program has successfully placed tens of thousands of students in schools across Indonesia each year, creating authentic learning opportunities on a massive scale that even surpasses many Work-Integrated Learning programs in developed countries. The deeper meaning of this finding is that contextualizing Work-Integrated Learning is not simply the adoption of foreign terminology, but rather the process of giving richer pedagogical meaning to existing practices, so that stakeholders students, lecturers, mentor teachers, and policymakers can understand and manage the program with a clearer orientation toward the quality of the learning experience and the development of professional competencies (Billett, 2021; Ferns et al., 2025).

As a critical reflection, this study acknowledges that the Work-Integrated Learning framework used to evaluate the Teaching Assistantship program was developed primarily in the context of English-speaking countries with higher education infrastructures different from Indonesia. Therefore, the contextualization of Work-Integrated Learning should not be a complete transplantation of a foreign model, but rather a critical adaptation that maintains the universal elements of Work-Integrated Learning (integration, authenticity, reflection) while integrating local wisdom and specific Indonesian conditions, such as the disparity in the quality of partner schools, limited access to technology in the 3T areas, and the diversity of learning cultures. Concrete policy recommendations proposed by this study to the Ministry of Education and Culture and universities include: the development of National Work-Integrated Learning Standards - Teaching Assistantship that integrate global Work-Integrated Learning principles with local contexts; the development of a digital platform for real-time monitoring and evaluation of the quality of Work-Integrated Learning experiences; the development of a community of Work-Integrated Learning practitioners among supervising lecturers and mentor teachers across institutions; and providing incentives for partner schools that play an active role as host organizations for high-quality Work-Integrated Learning (Hasani, 2024; Pham et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the Teaching Assistance Program within the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) framework represents a contextual and high-potential form of Work-Integrated Learning for Indonesian higher education, particularly teacher education programs. By mapping global trends expansion toward non-workplace models, strengthening within teacher education, and digitalization the study shows their direct relevance to program development, which already fulfills core principles of authentic work experience, tripartite collaboration, and professional competency growth, though requiring improvement in authentic assessment, structured supervision, and systematic pedagogical reflection. The originality of this article lies in formulating a conceptual framework that integrates international Work-Integrated Learning standards with Indonesia's specific context and Islamic education perspectives, thereby offering a normative model for curriculum designers, program managers, and policymakers. Its implications extend to competency-based curriculum development and the advancement of Islamic higher education, where professional skills, pedagogical capacity, and ethical values rooted in Quranic traditions and

Islamic educational philosophy can be systematically strengthened through structured Work-Integrated Learning practices.

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