

EXPLORING LANGUAGE BARRIERS DURING INTERNATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICUM IN THAILAND: PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' VOICES

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of international teaching practicum exists to accommodate globalization in improving the quality of teaching internationally. However, the phenomenon of global teaching practicum, which has been investigated in many studies, earlier research, raises a number of significant barriers. Hence, this research aims to investigate the barriers faced by the Indonesian pre-service teachers during their teaching abroad program in Thailand. Qualitative research method were chosen in this study in order to obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon of international teaching practice through the interview with three Indonesian pre-service teachers. The findings revealed that Indonesian pre-service teachers discovered and faced several major barriers in the practicum for teaching abroad program in Thailand. The toughest challenge experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers is the language barrier. In addition, the response given by residents and the school environment to the language barriers experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers was very good. Utilizing how students facilitate communication between Indonesian pre-service teachers and other students, and how in-service teachers offer advice and continue to assist Indonesian pre-service teachers in overcoming language barriers throughout the program.

Key words: *Pre-service Teachers, Language Barriers, International Internship, International Teaching Practice, Teachers' Experience.*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of using English in the society internationally has increased over time. This phenomenon occurs due to the increase of global interaction among people who speak different languages. In many Southeast Asian countries, English is learned as a foreign language not English as a second language, forcing English pre-service teachers to attend English language teacher education or training, which are mostly held in their home countries. To build teachers' motivation and professional development, pre-service teachers need to

attend English language training. Therefore, this is a challenge for pre-service English educators.

During the English Language Teaching Education (ELTE) program, pre-service teachers are required to take teaching internships. Manasikana stated that the teaching internship program aims to improve pre-service teachers' teaching skills and other relevant skills, such as knowledge and experience (Manasikana & Hartono, 2021). Moreover, through teaching internships, pre-service teachers also have opportunities and experience the art of teaching in a real classroom environment. Further, teaching internship programs also help pre-service teachers to form responsible characteristics .

The phenomenon of international teaching practice in Indonesia has resulted in global interactions with other countries and partners aimed at establishing collaboration. Xiaochi as cited by Auni, the international teaching internship itself is being implemented for a month to let the Indonesian pre-service teachers gain the international teaching experience (Auni et al., 2022). Therefore, Auni also stated that the international teaching practice beneficially in providing international teaching experience and to give the Indonesian pre-service teachers space in exploring cultural diversity. In addition, by having international teaching practice experience may help the future teachers stand out in the international job market (Di Pietro, n.d.).

Nieto as cited by Chasanah, experiences involving cross-cultural immersion is a successful strategy to support future teachers develop a broader and more international perspective (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022). Therefore, the existence of an international program can help pre-service teachers to internationalize English-speaking culture, such as international internships. Moreover, international internship programs can provide references to pre-service English teachers about international culture through cross-cultural experiences.

Nevertheless, international teaching internship has caused many preservice teachers to cope with language differences. This language barrier have potential to lead to misunderstandings that result in conflict, irritation, physical assault, hurt feelings, and the loss of time, effort, money, and human lives (Abuarqoub, 2019).

Language barriers refers to an obstacle in communicating caused by the use of a different language (K.M., 2021). Language barriers is also defined as limited use of words to exchange information but lack of language proficiency in communication. Dynamics at work are impacted by language barriers (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). Miscommunication in multicultural teams can hinder creativity and collaboration. These gaps can be filled by fostering open communication and creating a common understanding. Several factors causing language barriers are caused by different linguistic backgrounds, limited language proficiency, and cultural differences. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), language barriers are caused by differences in teacher-student language backgrounds, differences in teacher-student language proficiency, and teacher-student bilingualism.

Indonesian pre-service teachers have been involved in the community of English pre-service teachers, known as English as Second Language (ESL), such as in Malaysia (Hashimah, 2008). A research on Indonesian pre-service English teachers who had experience teaching practice abroad in Malaysian ESL schools (Liskinasih et al., 2020). The results of this study indicate that during teaching practice, pre-service teachers encounter four barriers including students' characteristic, students' language, classroom management, culture shock. Other qualitative study conducted with the aim of informing the experience of international teaching practice in Thailand (Auliya et al., 2020). The results of this study show three reflections consisting of teaching strategies, classroom management and the socio-culture dimension. The researcher stated that these three reflections were a challenge in carrying out international teaching practices in Thailand.

Another study has been conducted by Nuraeni (2019) using a qualitative research method which aims to find out the problems of six pre-service English teachers who have carried out international teaching practices in Thailand. Six pre-service teachers stated that the most important challenges in carrying out international teaching practices were differences in language, classroom management, lack of confidence, lack of teaching experience, and cultural

differences. Thus, the most frequent barriers faced by pre-service teachers who practice international teaching is the language barrier (Nuraeni & Yulia, 2019).

Previous research stated that there are several major problems faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers when carrying out teaching practice abroad in Thailand (Nuraeni & Yulia, 2019). By conducting interviews with six Indonesian pre-service teachers, this research revealed several problems in facing the difficulties of teaching in Thailand. These problems are described as follows, (1) difficulties in communicating with primary learners due to differences in language and cultural backgrounds, (2) due to language barriers, Indonesian pre-service teachers experience bad psychological conditions, such as loss of self-confidence to become a good English teachers, (3) there is not enough training for Indonesian pre-service teachers, (4) Indonesian pre-service teachers do not have any experience in teaching English to primary learners.

Kabilan (2020) conducted research on pre-service teachers who took part in an international teaching program held in ESL country, Malaysia. Kabilan stated that pre-service teachers experienced major difficulties and challenges while carrying out international teaching practices, one of which was language proficiency. Malaysia is a country that uses English as a second language, so this makes pre-service teachers feel the difference in speaking English. In addition, language barriers can have a negative impact on pre-service teachers in carrying out international teaching practices, one of which can misinterpret pronunciation due to differences in dialect and slang. Furthermore, language barriers can also cause delays in the process of conveying and absorbing information properly and correctly (Kabilan et al., 2020).

Another previous research stated that language barrier is one of the most challenging things for pre-service teachers during international teaching practice in Thailand. They felt that some students had difficulties understanding the instruction during the learning process (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022). Thus, language barriers are the biggest obstacle and challenge for Indonesian pre-service teachers who are carrying out teaching practice abroad in Thailand.

This research focuses on investigating the barriers faced by Indonesian pre-service English teachers, especially language barriers in teaching English in class. Moreover, in this research, teaching practice abroad is also described as a program that connects two countries that have different cultures and education systems. In addition, through this program, pre-service teachers can increase their motivation in preparing themselves as prospective English teachers. This program is carried out for one month with an international teaching program in cultural differences, curriculum, student characteristics, and the school environment. Based on the background that has been described, this study aims to reveal the main barriers in carrying out international teaching practices in the city of Yala, especially the language barriers

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Barrier

Abu Arqoub revealed that the main causes of many issues or challenges in the fields of healthcare, aviation, maritime, business, and education are language barriers (Abuarqoub, 2019). Another problem that comes up when translating from one language to another is evaluating how different countries' meanings of the translated words differ (Browaeyns, 2015). The things causes language barriers are come from multiple aspects of intercultural communication. The causes of language barriers are comes from semantic barrier, cultural diversity, different language barrier (Mendri, 2022). Therefore, the other causes of language barrier also due to pronunciation issues. Da costa stated that some words appear with the same pronunciation but they are having different meaning (Da Costa, 2021). However, in this research, language barrier refers to one of the challenges that hinders communication during the international teaching practicum, in daily interactions with locals as well as as pre-service teachers.

International Teaching Practicum

Through his research, Kabilan concluded that international teaching practice is an activity that entails building relationships with outside parties in order to give pre-service teachers experience teaching abroad. (Kabilan et al.,

2020). Furthermore, international teaching practice programs provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to enhance their intercultural competence. Hence, international teaching practice in this research refers to providing facilities to Indonesian pre-service teachers to carry out teaching practice broadly.

The goal of implementing international teaching practices is to give pre-service Indonesian teachers a chance to experience teaching in Thailand. Furthermore, introducing foreign teaching methods to Thailand sheds light on the country's distinct culture. Thailand was selected for the international teaching program because it differs from the home country of Indonesian pre-service teachers in terms of customs and culture.

Six pre-service teachers visited Yala, a small city in southern Thailand, for a month in July 2023. The Pattana Wittaya School is the primary school where the six pre-service teachers are employed. Of them, three are English teachers. Others are instructing math classes in Arabic and English.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative research method was chosen to be the research method in this study. The qualitative research design is intended to support researchers gain a thorough understanding of the barriers phenomenon faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers during the teaching practice abroad in Thailand. Thus, this research was conducted using phenomenology as its approach. Phenomenology is used to gather information regarding the experience of Indonesian pre-service teachers in teaching practice abroad. The focus of phenomenology is on people's individualized subjective experiences. Phenomenological studies come in two different varieties. A heuristic phenomenological approach, which is the first kind, emphasizes the researchers' own personal experience (Ahyar et al., 2020). A transcendental phenomenological approach is the second kind; it entails the researchers acknowledging their own experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Sixth semester students who have completed international teaching practice programs in Thailand became participants in this study. They have

completed an international teaching practice program and interact directly with students at Phatna Witya School, Yala. The educational backgrounds of the three students are different, but they have completed a teaching internship program in the same subject, English.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews have been designed to obtain data for this research. An interviewer typically has a framework of themes to be explored during a semi-structured interview (Mashuri et al., 2022). Some of the questions asked were questions that had been designed by researchers and were open-ended questions.

The instruments used to collect data in this research were smartphone, laptops, and interview guides. Smartphone is used to contact research subjects to ask for permission to conduct this research. Furthermore, smartphone is used to record the entire interview process related to this research. A laptop is used to analyze the data that has been collected and also used to make interview guidelines and interview instruments in this research. Additionally, interview guidelines are for help the researchers to gain deep information related to this research.

The procedures for data collection started from observing the two video recordings of English learning from the two pre-service teachers. At this step, researchers were able to find barriers in the form of language barriers experienced by pre-service teachers in the learning process. After carrying out the observation process on the learning video recordings, the researchers conducted interviews with pre-service teachers to explore the barriers when carrying out international teaching practices. The interview guidelines have been sent via *Whatsapp* before the interview process began and the interview process was carried out face to face with the three pre-service teachers. For each research subject, the interview occurred eight to ten minutes. During the interview process, the researcher recorded all conversations with the participants in order to avoid errors in transcribing the data. After the interview step, the researcher transcribed all the sound recordings by typing in *Google Docs* manually. Thus, grounded theory states that data collection and analysis must happen concurrently (Jiang, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this research is to analyze and discover the challenges experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers while implementing an international teaching practice program in Thailand. After identifying several challenges experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers, the biggest challenges were also discovered during the implementation of the program. The results show that all participants (Indonesian pre-service teachers) teach English subjects and in different classes. However, the participants in this research have different educational backgrounds. The names of the three Indonesian pre-service teachers and their identities have been hidden and replaced with the initials NA (Islamic education management), AF (Islamic education teacher education), and IA (Islamic education management). From the data that has been collected, it will be found what the biggest challenges and obstacles experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers are when teaching English subjects in international teaching practice programs.

By collecting data through interview sessions with participants, researchers discovered the barriers experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers while carrying out international teaching practices in Thailand. Below are the challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers.

Table 1. Barriers Faced by Indonesian Pre-service Teachers

Name of Indonesian Pre-service Teachers	Challenge Faced by Indonesian Pre-service Teachers
NA	Difficulty in communicating with students, staff and people around the school environment.
AF	Class management, lack of effective activities during learning, and the language used in communication.
IA	Differences in language background between pre-service teachers and students.

Based on table 1, it shows that the three Indonesian pre-service teachers experienced several major problems in the form of challenges during international

teaching practices, including difficulties in class management and lack of preparation. However, the three Indonesian pre-service teachers said language barriers were the biggest challenge, making it difficult to deliver information and communicating in daily activities with students, teachers, school staff, and people around the school environment. Therefore, the researcher divided the barriers into two categories, internal barriers and external barriers.

Internal Barriers

All participants described the responses given by students, teachers, school staff, and people around the school environment when Indonesian pre-service teachers experienced language barriers, especially in their daily activities. Students, teachers, school staff, and people around the school environment have different responses and methods when facing language barriers faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers. Responses from each explained as follows.

Classroom

Based on the data that has been collected, Indonesian pre-service teachers often experience barriers in delivering material during the teaching and learning process. Even though each Indonesian pre-service teacher teaches at a different grade level, pre-service teachers experience the same thing. Moreover, when the Indonesian pre-service teacher explains using English as a whole, students are considered to have difficulty understanding what has been delivered, as quoted below.

NA : *"In delivering the material, it was a bit difficult because the students didn't really understand what I was saying."*

Based on these interview's excerpt translated directly from Bahasa Indonesia, it shows that language barriers also make it difficult to deliver information related to the learning process. NA stated that Indonesian pre-service teacher faced difficulty during the learning process because students also had difficulty to understand what was delivered by Indonesian pre-service teachers. According to Chasanah & Sumardi (2022) the language barrier that makes it difficult to deliver material by Indonesian pre-service teachers is caused by

differences in first language background between Indonesian pre-service teachers and home students.

While the interview excerpt above provides a statement regarding difficulties caused by differences in language background between Indonesian pre-service teachers and students, other Indonesian pre-service teachers shared their experiences of getting good responses from students. Thus, Indonesian pre-service teachers explained students' good response related to language barriers faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers, as quoted below.

IA : *“They (students) also help to translate what I have delivered to other students during the learning process. Beside that, they (students who can't speak Malay) also asked for help from students who were fluent in Malay.”*

However, one of the Indonesian pre-service teachers conveyed the bad response given by students due to language barriers experienced by pre-service teachers.

NA : *“Students think that what I have taught is trivial because I cannot speak Thai fluently and they cannot speak English optimally. So, this makes students more lazy to participate in the learning process. Furthermore, I also try to communicate using Thai but it is not easy for students to understand because the accent I use is different from local people.”*

Based on the interview excerpt above, it can be seen that language barriers cause the learning process in the classroom to not be optimal.

Teachers and School Staff

Other responses were also given by in-service teachers to Indonesian pre-service teachers. Indonesian pre-service teachers have each advisor who is tasked with guiding and directing every activity of the Indonesian pre-service teachers while implementing the program. The three Indonesian pre-service teachers explained that the in-service teachers always guide and teach basic Thai.

Moreover, in-service teachers always provide support and suggestions to create good communication between Indonesian pre-service teachers and students.

AF : *"More or less always provides direction and support to continue trying to communicate with students using language that is easy for students to understand."*

Moreover, Indonesian pre-service teachers also conduct research during the process of implementing international teaching practice programs. In the data collection process, Indonesian pre-service teachers also interacted with school staff (canteen lady, administrative staff, school officials, etc.). Language barriers also emerged when the data collection was carried out. However, all three Indonesian pre-service teachers stated that the school staff's response was very good. The existence of Google Translate helps Indonesian pre-service teachers reduce language barriers.

NA : *"Google translate is a tool that I use to communicate with school staff, especially when I collect data for research in the form of interviews, I tend to use Google Translate. So, we communicate not directly but using Google Translate."*

Based on the interview excerpt above, communication between school staff and Indonesian pre-service teachers is still maintained even though it is done using the tool, Google Translate. Alam stated that Google Translate is one of the communication tools to help users to translate what we want to convey (Alam, 2020). Relating to this study, Google Translate is also used as communication tools during the implementation of international teaching practice in Thailand.

External Barriers

During the implementation of international teaching practicum, Indonesian pre-service teachers also communicate with shop owners around the school. In everyday life, Indonesian pre-service teachers can meet their needs by buying goods at shops around the school. Thus, communication between Indonesian pre-service teachers and people around the school is formed. This is also a highlight in this research, especially in terms of language barriers. The shop owner around the

school uses Thai as the language of instruction. So language barriers also occur during the buying and selling process. However, Indonesian pre-service teachers felt they did not experience discrimination due to the language barriers they experienced.

IA : *"When I have difficulty in delivering something, they (people around the school environment) don't put me down or be racist, but they help me to deliver the information well."*

Relating to the excerpt above, Indonesian pre-service teachers faced language barriers which hinder the communication process with the shop owners around the school environment. However, the existence of language barriers does not mean that Indonesian pre-service teachers experienced discrimination and racism. Otherwise, Indonesian pre-service teachers helped by delivering something using the Google Translate as a tool that minimizes the occurrence of internal errors to deliver and catch information.

From the results of interviews with Indonesian pre-service teachers, it was revealed that obstacles to communicating with local people occurred because of the language gap. Therefore, what is conveyed by Indonesian pre-service teachers can produce information that is different from what is captured by local people. This argument is supported by Marsakawati (2012) that a gap in the delivery of information is a failure in communication. Not conveying information properly is a result of communication breakdown (Marsakawati, n.d.). Different perceptions and linguistic usage between speakers and listeners are one cause of communication breakdown (Malasati & Sarobol, 2013).

Psychological Barriers

The challenge of facing language barriers can actually affect the psychological condition of Indonesian pre-service teachers while implementing international teaching practice programs in Thailand. The three Indonesian pre-service teachers stated that language barriers affect psychological conditions. The psychological conditions mentioned include loss of self-confidence, anxiety and

overwhelm. This was stated by one of the Indonesian pre-service teachers, as in the quoted below.

IA : *“Apart from that, the language barrier also caused me to lack focus and unworthy performance in carrying out international teaching practices.”*

In terms of the psychological challenges faced by the three Indonesian pre-service teachers while carrying out international teaching practices in Thailand, the two Indonesian pre-service teachers explained the reasons for the emergence of psychological challenges.

AF : *“I feel a bit anxious because what I have conveyed can't be understood by students. Therefore, it is my biggest responsibility to make the material understandable.”*

Apart from the cause of anxiety arising from not achieving the learning objectives experienced by AF as an Indonesian pre-service teacher, others revealed that they felt overwhelmed due to difficulties in handling and managing themselves and the classroom during the program.

NA : *“Because I teach elementary school, I feel quite overwhelmed. I have to control myself to be able to speak Thai, on the other hand I have to liven up the class atmosphere in such a way. Considering that elementary school children are very active, managing them has a little influence on my psychological factors.”*

The interview's excerpt above stated that the Indonesian pre-service teachers were overwhelmed caused of language barrier. Related to that, it is important to overcome language barriers because they frequently make it difficult to develop relationships with others (Abuarqoub, 2019).

How to Overcome Towards the Language Barrier

The results in this section reveal how Indonesian pre-service teachers overcome language barriers experienced while implementing international teaching practices in Thailand. Interview sessions during data collection for this

research revealed that Indonesian pre-service teachers overcome language barriers by studying local culture at school and around the school. Moreover, Indonesian pre-service teachers also learn Thai which is often used in daily activities such as "My name is...", "How are you?", "This is delicious", "You are beautiful", counting in Thai.

The three Indonesian pre-service teachers provided recommendations to reduce language barriers. They agreed that learning the national language of the destination country was the main thing that needed to be learned in order to reduce language barriers. This statement is quoted from an interview session, as follow below.

NA : *"It is essential to at least be familiar with the local language."*

In addition to learning the language, preparing for teaching needs is one of the preparations that can reduce language barriers during the international teaching practice. In dealing with these concerns, it is assumed that a significant issue that may affect the success indicator levels of the teaching practices abroad program is the Indonesian pre-service teachers' capacity to adapt to the local culture, people, language and the new environment for the teaching practicum (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022).

AF : *"Preparing teaching needs such as learning media, teaching materials, lesson plans, teaching materials is an effort to reduce language barriers. By preparing for teaching needs, we can compile keywords for students so that it will be more systematic and easy for students to understand during the learning process."*

Based on the interview quote above, overcoming language barriers is not just about learning the national language of your country of origin. Preparing all teaching needs is also considered to be able to overcome language barriers during the learning process. Being a teacher is not only responsible for providing material, but also responsible for all teaching needs. This is also considered to foster self-confidence as a teacher in the teaching process (Kabilan et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The results in this research reveal that Indonesian pre-service teachers who have implemented a teaching practice abroad program in Thailand 2023 organized by Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya faced several major challenges during the teaching practice abroad program. The big challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers include language barriers, lack of classroom management, and absence of productive learning activities. The biggest challenge that causes other challenges to arise is the language barrier. However, the existence of language barriers does not mean that Indonesian pre-service teachers experience discrimination and racism from students, teachers, school staff and people around the school environment. In addition, the existence of a language barrier influences the unstable psychological conditions experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers.

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