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A RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' LANGUAGE BARRIER EXPERIENCES IN INTERNATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICUM

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Abstract

The present retrospective narrative study reported in this article explores the international teaching practicum program has become a new trend in a lot of university-based English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs, particularly in Southeast Asian countries. This phenomenon led to the high demand for university-based EFL teacher education programs of having international networking which aims to give more cross-cultural understanding and experience for the pre-service teachers in teaching EFL abroad. This retrospective narrative case study aims to investigate the language socialization experiences and challenges of two Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers during the teaching practicum program in Thailand. The data was collected through participants' teaching practicum documents and semi-structured interviews. Grounded in a retrospective narrative study and Relational Turning Point Events (RTPEs) theoretical framework, this study is hoped to provide a better understanding of the EFL teaching development, particularly for preparing pre-service teachers for intercultural teaching practicum.

Keywords: international teaching practicum, language barrier, Relational Turning Point Events (RTPEs), retrospective narrative study

Introduction

The use of English in global society and communication has changed over time. This phenomenon increases the rapid growth of English learners globally while also increasing the demand for English teachers in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. In Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language, most English teachers are trained inside their hometowns. Hence, to internationalize Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), universities across Asia have engaged in cross-cultural immersion experiences worldwide. Cross-cultural immersion experiences are an effective way to help pre-service teachers improve a broader and more global perspective (Cushner, 2007; Gay, 2010; McAllister & Irvine, 2012; Nieto, 2016). For instance, several universities in Indonesia have an international teaching internship program in collaboration

with various organizations such as governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Many studies on international teaching practice involved pre-service teachers which come from English as a Second Language (ESL) communities or native English speakers (Luk & Lin 2019; Lee 2009). Besides, a few studies of pre-service teachers trained in the EFL context undergoing their teaching practice in other EFL countries are scarce in the literature. Ulla (2019) conducted a study to explore 56 Filipino English teachers' experiences while teaching EFL learners in Bangkok. The data from this article was collected from an individual follow-up interview and a modified questionnaire. Then, a qualitative content analysis was also used to analyze the data collected from distributed questionnaires and individual interviews. The result revealed that the participants showed a positive insight regarding being one of the NNESTs communities that teach English to EFL learners in Bangkok. Another qualitative research from Yulia (2019) found that six pre-service teachers from Indonesia faced a significant challenge during their international teaching practice in Thai primary schools such as difficulty communicating with EFL learners, not being well-prepared to face the different language, culture shock, and classroom management.

A study conducted in China by Jin (2020) revealed that both Chinese teachers and students showed how Australian pre-service teachers can engage and motivate them to learn English. The data in this research were collected from an interview session with the Chinese teachers and students directly in the school. This study tried to provide more information on how to develop global teacher education experiences and intercultural understanding. It also highlighted the potential gap between Australian pre-service teachers' and Chinese students' preparation regarding cross-cultural awareness. However, most international teaching research is restricted to discussing only pre-service teachers' experiences in international practicums. Particularly in any cultural exchange, all participants' advantages and disadvantages are experienced (Patrício, Santos, Loureiro, 2018). To further comprehend the implications of international teaching practicum and to address current research gaps, the purpose of this study is to concentrate on how pre-service teachers implement the use of the English-only language teaching approach into the EFL community from another country.

This research's primary focus is to investigate the challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers on the use of the English-only language teaching approach in Thai EFL classrooms and the language barriers that happened during the learning-teaching process. Moreover, in this study, the international EFL teaching practice is defined as a beneficial program that engages and motivates Indonesian pre-service teachers to develop their cross-cultural understandings and experiences from another culture and educational systems outside their own educational country. The program is conducted in a short-term international teaching program in different cultures, customs, curriculums, professional teaching practices, and students' behavior. Based on the background mentioned above, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers cope with the second language barriers during international teaching practicum?
2. How are Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers experienced the Relational Turning Point Events (RTPEs) during international teaching practicum?

Method

This study was grounded on a qualitative approach following a retrospective narrative study. Richards (2003) expressed that qualitative research has two features, such as studying the natural setting of human beings in their ordinary context, everyday world, and seeking to understand the meaning of their perspectives and significance of these actions (p. 10). We explored the pre-service teachers' experiences, which is the pre-service teachers who were positioned within the context of an international teaching practicum program and schools. We intended to investigate the challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers on the use of the English-only language teaching approach in Thai EFL classrooms and the language barriers that happened during the learning-teaching process. Narrative inquiry is one of qualitative research (Trahar, 2009). Clandinin & Connely (2000) mentions that narrative inquiry is used to understand the actual participants' experiences. The narrative inquiry method also helps the researcher to obtain more detailed information about the process of pre-service teachers' relationships and how they positioned themselves during the international teaching practicum.

This narrative case study was conducted at a private university in Indonesia. The university was selected because they successfully conducted an international EFL teaching practicum for several semesters from the academic year of 2019/2020. In order to gain the data, there are two eligible participants from the undergraduate English Language Education Program (ELEP) students who experienced as international pre-service teachers in Thailand. These two pre-service teachers have finished their international teaching practicum in 45 days with 25 hours of a teaching session in a week. The participants took a major in Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL), they were assigned to teach young learners in different state primary schools in Thailand. They were selected by the faculty representatives to do their international teaching practicum under the program collaborated with AIESEC in Thammasat University, Thailand.

Further, these two eligible participants were given 25 hours of a teaching session in a week for 45 days of teaching practicum completion. They were required to write daily journal activities during the practicum, design a lesson plan for each meeting, prepare and create Audio-visual Aids (AVA), and record their activities in the school as much as possible for the project reports and reflections. These two pre-service teachers were voluntarily participated in this research due to their consent in telling their experiences during their overseas teaching practicum to give an insight and reflection for the other pre-service teachers to try international teaching practicum abroad. Prospectively before the participants participated on the data collection process, the researcher gave a brief explanation to the participants about the details and the purpose of this study, the confidentiality of the data, the participants' job description in this research, and how all of the data storage were arranged. The consent has been obtained after the first meeting and the participants were willing to take a part in this research voluntarily without pressure to respond the researcher immediately.

Narrative inquiry was designed to gain the data for this research. This approach is a type of longitudinal research design where the data is collected after the fact (Street & Ward, 2012). This method was used for collecting the data in a form of daily teaching practicum journals that has been recorded by the

participants. Further, the data collection also included an individual follow-up interview. Firstly, the researcher has reached the participants through a private WhatsApp messenger platform to ask for permission to collect the data that they already recorded during their international teaching practicum abroad, respectively. Secondly, the data which is presented in a form of daily teaching journals was compiled and shared through a Google Drive folder so that it is accessible for both the researcher and the participants. After collecting the abundant data, the data were classified into several parts by reading the daily teaching journals. Last, the individual follow-up interview was conducted after the identification and classification process finished.

To analyze the data, we use a coding method that consists of three analysis stages: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Saldana, 2009). Firstly, in the open coding stage, we read the daily teaching journals of the individual participants and identify initial codes such as teaching English to Thai young learners is challenging, home teachers' expectations, and cross-cultural adjustment. Secondly, in the axial coding stage, the initial code was re-examined and identified the relationship between each data to generate some categories. In the selective coding stage, the categories were combined into themes or sub-topic by choosing the related themes to the research topic selectively.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present the participants' opinions towards language socialization experience during the International Teaching Practicum (ITP) program. The discussion is divided into three themes which come up from the data collection of participants 1 (P1) and participant (P2) as can be seen in the following:

Cross-cultural adjustment

This section shows how participants were trying to analyze and adapt with the students at the beginning of teaching session. The words respect, listen and understand came up as a signal of how the Thai students were willing to give the participants as outsider teachers some space to adapt to the Thai classroom culture.

(Excerpt 1)

Thai students respect their teachers when I teach even if I teach fully in English. They listen to the teacher while talking. (P1/ individual reflection)

(Excerpt 2)

Since I cannot use the Thai language fluently, I have been using English to teach my younger and older students since the first meeting. Then, I was teaching grade 2 of the primary school, the biggest number of students in the school. We learn color, same with the grade 1 but with different classroom activities. I also included a video to attract and make them understand more about the color palette in English. (P2/ individual reflection) (P1/ individual reflection)

(Excerpt 3)

The last class is P.1/1, I was teaching about numbers. The purpose of this teaching is that they can write and read numbers such as one, two, and ten. At the end of the class, they could write the number but still could not read it. (P2/ individual reflection)

Home teachers' expectations

This section shows how participants were trying to adapt and fulfill their home teachers' expectations from the beginning to the end of the international teaching practicum program.

(Excerpt 4)

The English teacher assigned me to teach grade 6 today. She said that I need to teach the students the 'conversation of occupation' from their local English book. I and my students read the conversation together and pronounce the vocabulary. Then, I gave the students the post-exercise, which is making a simple conversation. After that, the students came to the front of the class to present their works in pairs. I told them "It will be fine if you are mispronouncing the words, I appreciate your willingness to try it. Don't be shy". The presentation went smoothly from the beginning to the end of the session, so that I can report today's English class was great to my teacher mentor. (P1/ individual reflection)

(Excerpt 5)

Today, I taught grade 5 about greetings. I made material and conversation for them as my teacher-mentor assigned yesterday. I asked the students to read the material and had some conversations slowly because they had never spoken English before. It made them difficult for them to speak but I always give positive affirmations to engage their speaking confidence. I also divided them into some groups to practice speaking. Further, I also speak in the Thai language (a little bit) to helo my students in understanding my instruction. The students were more motivated when I repeat the instruction phrases in the Thai language. However, I still want the students to have more English exposure during my teaching practice. (P2/ individual reflection)

(Excerpt 6)

My third class for today was grade 5. We have learned about Introducing Themselves, I made PPT that includes many expressions to introduce themselves and the responses. But in one hour I just can't teach them four phrases such as "My name is…"; "I am ... years old"; "I am from …"; and "Nice to meet you", it was difficult for them to understand the rest of the expressions because they cannot read the alphabet, so I need to repeat like 5-7 times for one phrase to make sure that they are understood and know how to introduce themselves using English appropriately in the next meeting. As an additional classroom activity, I asked them to write how they introduced themselves on a piece of paper. At the time, the class was too crowded, and I should take a moment to have a negotiation with them to stay in their seats. It is a little bit tricky to handle the crowded class so that I switch the instruction to the Thai language that I learned from the internet

and the local teachers. It helped me a lot to handle the class. (P2/ individual reflection)

The quality and professionalism aided pre-service teacher professional knowledge to approach challenging students. However, international experiences are not always positive. The experience overseas, in many ways, is similar to the first time of teaching, in which the individual must deal with classroom management, instruction, and communication. These are challenges for pre-service teachers. They must have other ways to interact with students and try to make students understand what has been conveyed. As we know that communication is very important between teacher and student.

Intercultural classroom management

This subtheme shows how the preservice teachers were trying to mingle with the intercultural classroom. They were practically tried to manage the diverse classroom.

(Excerpt 7)

Today's first-class was grade 5: I taught about ocean animals and their habitat. I was so happy when I asked the students about ocean animals using pictures, they can mention the ocean animal vocabularies in English. It means they understand about it. Then, I also asked them to remember the vocabulary and asked them one by one. Finally, I distributed the worksheet to the students. Then, the second class was grade 2. I taught about colors using the guidance of their English book. First, I introduced the colors using origami papers. Then, I read, and the students repeated together. Finally, I gave instructions to write the colors in the books. During the assessment session, I always checked the students' progress by strolling around the class.

(Excerpt 8)

My schedule today was teaching grade 3. The topic is Vegetables and Fruits. I showed them several flashcards and asked them to spell and memorize the vocab. For the classroom activity, I asked them to work in a group and mention 10 vegetables and fruits that they remembered and knew. (P2/ individual reflection)

(Excerpt 9)

Today's schedule was teaching grade 6. It was a sunny day here. I taught the same topic with the last meeting, that is "procedure text". Some students can follow my explanation and instruction well but the rest was blank. I checked their homework and I reviewed the material again. I asked students to help me explain the material to their friends. I gave them homework too to check their understanding. (P2/ individual reflection)

From the excerpts above, the pre-service teachers have felt positive experiences during their teaching practicum. This experience as an English teacher gave them motivation and increased their self-confidence. Reality taught them that teaching is not only giving and explaining the material but they also should be a creative teacher to find some ways for making an interesting thing in

teaching to make the student understand the material easier. In this international teaching practicum program, pre-service teachers learned about being a teacher in the school real life and it showed them that being a teacher is not an easy profession. There is a challenge experienced by pre-service teachers, it is language. There are some students who have difficulty understanding the interactions. Concerning the pre-service teacher command of English, there are some students who still don't understand it because they don't know English.

The focus lens of this study is analyzing the language socialization experiences and challenges of two Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers during the teaching practicum program in Thailand. The results revealed that most of the participants was facing difficulties in managing the intercultural classroom situation where the students and teachers' first language was different. In the same vein, Patrício et al. (2018) found that several studies examine socio-cultural elements of faculty mobility, such as the possible conflict between universities' values and learning styles and the countries participating in exchange programs. The exchange program provides a gateway to new educational environments, a new perspective, and the chance to improve the quality of teaching, further research, and networking (Hirsch, Quartaroli, Price, & Allen, 2015). However, the participants' experience and degree of adaptation differ depending on the teaching planning and preparation, duration of stay, and previous academic experiences (Patrício et al., 2018). Besides, McNamee and Faulkner (2001) argue that the educational movement can be unsettling due to a cultural diversity between exchange participants' background experience and the new environment. This kind of experience highlights the different workplaces and adaptation processes required in the host exchange country, including teaching-learning styles and the social life with students and colleagues.

A teachers' socialization describes the effect of professional rules, teacher culture, and the school environment on teachers in professional organizations (Deng, & Yuen, 2011; Killeavy & Moloney, 2010). Thus, for pre-service teachers, teaching practicum drives them to a transformational process from novice to expert teacher in the future (Chou, 2011). In spite of the advantages of the international teaching practicum program, Ateskan (2016) found that the culture and school environments in the United State of America were not common in Turkey, specifically the safety and security issues around. A previous study conducted by Zhou (2014) found that most Chinese pre-service teachers got such a culture shock in American schools due to the portrayed behaviors of the students that the Chinese pre-service teachers assumed as inappropriate and defined an indiscipline attitude. Lee (2012) researched the English-only approach in Korea in the EFL learning context for young learners. He found that the English-only (EO) teaching approach should be re-evaluated due to the results showing that Korean young learners were not so favorable towards EO's use for the whole English class session. He suggests that the limited use of code-switching may make English input more comprehensible and facilitate learner EFL acquisition much better. In responding to these issues, the ability of pre-service teachers to adapt to the local culture, people, customs, and the new environment for the teaching practicum is assumed as a significant issue that can determine the success indicator levels of the international teaching practicum program (Kabilan, Hallijah, Nooraishah, Anna, Hairul, & Mahbub, 2017). According to Lin and

Chien (2011), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is focused on English studies from the teachers and English learners with a different first language (L1). Corresponding to the results of this study, TEFL's proper understanding would be that it considers English as a medium of communication in the world of different communities, instead of considering it more as a lingua franca, or mainly an academic language.

Moreover, this study relies on Docan-Morgan and Manusov's (2009) RTPEs (Relational Turning Point Events) theory to explore the connection of student and teacher to one another that recognizes that the student-teacher relationship changes over time. Relational turning point events (RTPEs) talking, the analysis from the excerpts shows that the participants were happy as they know that all of the local school community members were very helpful. It shows when the participants were fully facilitated with the teaching essentials, foods, and the teaching methods along with the local language to help them in code-switching for at least the basic classroom language discourse. Docan-Morgan & Manusov (2009) emphasize that the dialectical process is involved in student-teacher relationships indicative of change, they will be marked by relational turning events over their life course. Previous research demonstrated relationships that develop such as positive and negative turning points (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 490). Docan-Morgan & Manusov (2009) found a positive turning point from students' perspective in their studies, such as a course assignment's discussion, college, independent study, internship, coursework, personal information, and teaching quality. They also found a negative turning point which gives an initial understanding of how the individual relationship may affect the teacher outcomes. Further, RTPEs give a starting point for an understanding of types of turning points (positive or negative) both student and teacher.

However, the participants were well-exposured to the coss-cultural differences during their international teaching practicum (ITP) program. It is in line with Cushner and Mahon's (2002) study that found preservice teachers who came back from international teaching practicum are highly aware of cultural differences (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Further, the teacher training instituioin should consider this kind of international teaching practicum program for the EFL pre-service teachers, they should increase their cross-cultural knowledge and the awareness of multicultural understanding through an international teaching practicum program. Kabilan (2020) conducted a study of Indonesian pre-service teachers who had their international teaching practicum in Malaysian schools. The results showed that pre-service teachers face four major challenges during their teaching practicum in Malaysia such as planning the lessons, language proficiency problems, cross-cultural differences, and the different curriculum used.

Conclusion

This retrospective narrative study investigated and documented the language barriers come up during international teaching practicum (ITP) experiences of two Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers in Thailand. Further, the study revealed that the language socialization among the international pre-service teachers and the local students was intensively developed in a good approach to make better-improvised teaching. Hence, the relationship between the teacher with the students, the home teachers, and the professional community was considered as an

important parameter to engage the confidence during the teaching and learning process in a different culture. Their relationship does matter since they can help and guide the pre-service teachers to teach and adapt to the teaching cultures. The pre-service teachers gain many insightful and beneficial cross-cultural experiences as they can be interpreted from the individual daily teaching journals. They were enjoyed their first teaching experience in the international community where they never learned about the first language and cultures.

However, the international teaching practicum experienced by the participants was quite challenging in some moments, particularly in the language socialization with the local school members and the people who lived in the guest house. The language barriers among the local school members with the pre-service teachers happened since none of the participants are able to speak the Thai language fluently and the locals had not much English language exposure during their life. After conducting this study, we learned how important it is for pre-service teachers to acknowledge their socialization process in the professional community (e.g., local and international community) as it can influence their personal and professional identity development. In initial teacher education programs, exploring the identity, experiences, and beliefs should be discussed in detail on the teaching practicum preparation so that the student-teachers can aware of what they may encounter in the real-life teaching situation and, hopefully, be more prepared for the teaching and learning process (e.g., international and local teaching practicum). In sum, preparing student-teachers to critically think of those issues is needed and can be implemented through (1) classroom observation, (2) real-life classroom teaching simulation, and (3) discussion with the real teacher. This kind of preparation is needed to be conducted for both national and international teaching practicum programs to prepare the student-teachers to successfully incorporate and understand their personal and professional identity into the real-life school environment.

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