

Comparative Study of Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers' Challenges and Strategies in Thailand and Australia

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Abstract

International teaching practicums are vital for teacher education, offering pre-service teachers (PSTs) transformative experiences that vary significantly by host country. This qualitative comparative case study fills a literature gap by examining the challenges and coping strategies of two Indonesian English Education PSTs, Anita (Australia) and Anto (Thailand). This study applied Searle and Ward's (1990) two-domain model of cross-cultural adaptation. Data, collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and supplementary documents, were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis. Findings show that while both participants achieved significant professional growth, their main challenges and adaptation routes differed based on the host country's developmental, linguistic, and cultural context. Anita, in a developed, English-speaking country, Australia, primarily faced systemic and academic hurdles, such as formal curriculum standards (AITSL) and initial difficulty understanding English accents. Her adaptation, supported by a mentor from a similar background, greatly improved her English speaking confidence. On the other hand, Anto, in a developing, non-English-speaking country, Thailand, struggled with language barriers both in daily life and professional situations, along with significant culture shock. His adaptation, supported by two mentors and support from peers, helped him become highly adaptable and culturally aware by actively engaging with new languages and social settings. The study concludes that the specific institutional, linguistic, and cultural conditions of the host country are closely linked to how sociocultural and psychological challenges emerge, and they shape the most effective coping strategies for pre-service teachers.

Keywords: *International Teaching Practicum, Pre-Service Teachers, Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation,*

INTRODUCTION

In response to the internationalisation of education, many institutions around the world have initiated international teaching practicum programmes that send pre-service teachers (PSTs) abroad to gain experiences that contribute to their professional and personal development (Ahmad et al., 2019; Barlaman & Umamah, 2025; Chacko & Lin, 2015). In teacher education, such practicums aim to prepare globally competent educators who can work in diverse classrooms by developing flexible teaching skills, personal resilience, and

intercultural competence (Ateşkan, 2016; Jacob et al., 2010). For nations like Indonesia, these programmes represent a key strategy for internationalisation, placing PSTs in partner schools overseas to gain professional experience (Setyaningsih et al., 2023). Although often described as transformative, these programmes do not guarantee such outcomes. Without the right support and guidance for reflection, participants may face challenges that reduce the quality of their teaching experience and professional growth (Briscoe & Robino, 2022).

International teaching practicums are essential to teacher education, enabling PSTs to connect theoretical knowledge with practical application through critical reflection on experience (Iglesias Martínez et al., 2019). When undertaken in a foreign setting, the practicum becomes more demanding, evolving into a dynamic process of stress, adaptation, and growth (Kabilan, 2013). Across different host countries, the literature consistently identifies two main categories of challenges. Professional challenges include adapting to unfamiliar curricula, different assessment standards, and distinct classroom management styles (Kabilan et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2024). Alongside these, PSTs face personal and cultural challenges such as language barriers, culture shock, and lifestyle adjustments (Bibi & Aziz, 2024). To navigate these hurdles, coping strategies are key. Seeking mentorship, building peer support networks, and engaging in reflective practice are important for developing resilience and turning these challenges into opportunities for growth (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ateşkan, 2016).

Previous research has documented the specific experiences of Indonesian PSTs undertaking these practicums, establishing a clear pattern of challenges within the Southeast Asian context. For instance, studies on Indonesian PSTs in Thailand show they experienced significant culture shock related to lifestyle, communication, and psychological stress, in spite of being geographically close to Indonesia (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022; Wahyuni, 2019). These difficulties extended beyond daily living, as students also had to adjust to classroom interaction norms and teacher–student dynamics that differed from those in their home country. Similarly, when Indonesian PSTs were placed in a neighbouring country like Malaysia, their challenges were not only cultural but also deeply professional, centred on understanding an unfamiliar curriculum and managing lesson planning (Kabilan et al., 2020). Differences in curriculum structure and assessment standards required them to rethink their approaches to instruction and adapt more quickly than anticipated. Taken together, these findings suggest that even within neighbouring contexts, where cultural or linguistic familiarity could be expected, adaptation to local norms and professional expectations still presents a major challenge for Indonesian PSTs.

Studies in Western contexts highlight a somewhat different set of concerns, with professional demands often outweighing cultural or lifestyle adjustments. For instance, Australia, categorized as a Western context despite its geographical location due to strong cultural and political ties (Fruehling & Schreer, 2011), has seen research on foreign language PSTs indicate that classroom management (particularly handling student behaviour) and limited preparation time emerged as major stressors (Nketsia & Carroll, 2023). These pressures were increased by the expectation to maintain high standards of lesson delivery in classrooms where students were not only more vocal but also more confident and direct in sharing their ideas, asking questions, or disagreeing when necessary than those the PSTs were accustomed to in their home context. Similarly, Ateşkan's (2016) study of PSTs undertaking practicums in the United States found that participants struggled to adjust their teaching methods to align with

new pedagogical approaches, classroom participation norms, and unfamiliar school cultures, these findings illustrate that within such educational systems, the primary pressures tend to shift away from general cultural adaptation and towards the practical challenges of classroom practice, instructional expectations, time management, and navigating student dynamics that may differ significantly from those in Asian contexts.

The challenges encountered during international teaching practicums clearly depend on the context. Studies show that participants in culturally and linguistically similar settings frequently highlight issues such as communication barriers, social norms, and lifestyle adaptation, whereas those in educational systems with highly formalized teaching standards and different pedagogical traditions tend to report greater difficulty with curriculum alignment, classroom practices, and instructional expectations. These contextual variations highlight the need for further comparative analysis to understand why adaptation demands differ across settings. Accordingly, a direct comparative study examining how the challenges and coping strategies of Indonesian pre-service teachers (PSTs) emerge and are addressed across two contrasting practicum environments is highly valuable. This study not only builds on existing work but also moves beyond context-specific findings, offering insights that can help researchers and programme designers identify the key factors shaping adaptation. In doing so, it contributes to developing training and support that are better aligned with teachers' specific needs and the contextual realities of their placements.

To better address these contextual differences and deepen our understanding of how PSTs adapt, this study draws on Searle and Ward's (1990) framework of psychological and sociocultural adaptation. This foundational model in intercultural psychology views adaptation as made up of two distinct but connected dimensions: psychological adaptation, referring to an individual's emotional well-being, mental health, and sense of belonging in the host environment, and sociocultural adaptation, referring to the behavioral and interactional competencies needed to function effectively in daily life and social contexts. Therefore, this study investigates the similarities and differences in the challenges and coping strategies employed by English-major pre-service teachers during their international teaching practicum programmes in Thailand and Australia.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative comparative case study design to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian pre-service teachers during their international teaching practicum. The research aimed to identify similarities and differences in their experiences across two distinct contexts, Thailand and Australia, guided by the Comparative Case Study (CCS) framework proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017). This approach allowed for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, prioritizing rich insights over generalizability.

Research participants

Two participants were selected through purposive sampling (Bell et al., 2022), a method chosen for its ability to identify individuals whose experiences are central to the research focus. The

primary selection criteria required participants to be final-year undergraduate students in the English Education programme at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia who had recently completed a solo international teaching practicum. The two participants, given the pseudonyms ‘Anto’ and ‘Anita,’ met these criteria.

In qualitative studies, researchers often use smaller, purposefully chosen samples to gain rich, detailed insights into participants’ experiences (Kane & Emich, 2024; Wan, 2019). Prior to their involvement, both participants provided voluntary informed consent in accordance with ethical research guidelines (BERA, 2018), and their confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (Crow & Wiles, 2008). Full demographic and programme details for each participant are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Programme Details

Pseudonym	Gender	Practicum Location	Practicum Duration	Programme Name
Anto	Male	Thailand	4 weeks	SEA Teacher Project
Anita	Female	Australia	10 weeks	PPL Luar Negeri

Instruments

Data were gathered using two primary instruments: an in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol and participant-provided documents. The interview protocol guided discussions with open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to elaborate on their challenges and strategies, with probes used to draw out detailed descriptions (Çakır & Cengiz, 2016; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Participant-provided documents included Anto’s weekly reflective reports and classroom observation sheets, and Anita’s formal lesson plans, supervisor feedback forms, and a final assessment report. While the types of documents varied across participants, their relevance to the phenomenon under study was prioritized, which is considered a strength in qualitative case study research (Bowen, 2009).

Procedures

This study employed a qualitative case study design where each participant’s international teaching practicum was treated as a distinct case, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences in their natural setting (Stake, 1995). A comparative case study design was then adopted to examine how the phenomenon unfolded across two different international sites (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Data collection was primarily conducted through one remote, audio-recorded video interview with each participant, lasting approximately 40 to 60 minutes, after they completed their practicum (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These initial sessions were followed by a brief remote interview with each participant to clarify and expand on points that remained underdeveloped (Robinson, 2023). To enhance the credibility of the findings through triangulation (Patton, 2015), the interviews were supplemented with participant-provided documents. These

documents, serving as stable, unobtrusive, and contextual sources (Yin, 2018), were gathered after the interviews and reviewed alongside the interview data.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This involved an initial inductive coding process to generate themes directly from participants' narratives, which were then deductively mapped onto the two domains (psychological and sociocultural) of Searle and Ward's (1990) model. Psychological themes related to emotional experiences, perceptions, and judgments, while sociocultural themes described behavioral competencies, interactional strategies, communication practices, and task-oriented adaptation. Coding reliability was ensured through peer discussions.

Documentary evidence, regardless of its specific type, was analyzed using a systematic document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009). Materials were reviewed and interpreted to identify content related to challenges and strategies, which was then compared with the interview data. These documents were utilized not only to support interview findings but also to add nuance, highlight contradictions, or reveal complexities, thereby strengthening the depth of the analysis (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Stake, 1995).

To ensure what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as "the trustworthiness of the findings," member checking was conducted, where each participant reviewed a summary of their case analysis to ensure the interpretations accurately reflected their lived experience (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Furthermore, data triangulation, achieved by comparing interview narratives with participant-provided documents, contributed to the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Patton, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sociocultural Adaptation: Professional and Cultural Challenges

Navigating Curriculum and School Systems

Anita, undertaking her practicum at a private school in Canberra, Australia, identified curriculum differences as her primary challenge. She noted the distinct contrast between Indonesia's "Kurikulum Merdeka" and Australia's national curriculum, which included demanding "professional AITSL standards." Anita described "understanding their system at first" as a significant hurdle, despite her mentor providing resources. To cope, she focused on close observation and practical application, explaining, "I focused on observing my mentor teacher closely and then trying to apply what I learned in my own lessons." She further articulated her strategy by stating, "These small steps helped me start aligning my teaching with the Australian standards," which involved practicing setting clear expectations and using praise and rewards.

Her program planning document for Indonesian language classes further demonstrated efforts to align with the local curriculum by outlining objectives, activities, and assessments with direct connections to the "Australian Curriculum, BSSS." This need to align with clear professional standards (AITSL) mirrors findings that pre-service teachers (PSTs) in Australia

learn to navigate institutional expectations with guidance from their mentors (Zheng et al., 2024) and highlights broader policy conflicts surrounding curriculum flexibility (OECD, 2021). Her proactive approach, including the use of positive reinforcement, directly reflects professional expectations in AITSL Standard 4 to ‘create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments’ and Focus Area 4.3 ‘Manage challenging behaviour,’ indicating that in Western, developed contexts, professional alignment with established standards is a key part of sociocultural adaptation (AITSL, 2018).

Conversely, Anto in Thailand faced challenges related to his unexpected placement. He had anticipated teaching in a state school but was placed in an international school where English was the medium of instruction. Anto described this environment as, “very different from what I expected,” noting advanced technology like smart boards and iPads serving a diverse, multicultural student body. While teaching resources were readily available through mentor guidance and Cambridge books, Anto’s adaptation focused on aligning with the international school’s advanced facilities and its internationally focused teaching method.

He coped by adapting his teaching material for this diverse context, explaining, “I adapt it to my students depending on their culture and background.” He shifted from teaching only about Indonesian culture to ‘very general’ topics such as Valentine’s Day or the Seven Wonders of the World. He understood that the SEA-Teacher program aimed to provide experience teaching students from ‘various backgrounds,’ so he made his content universally understandable. Anto’s approach, prioritizing content relevance for a diverse student body is consistent with research emphasizing the need for teachers to develop flexible teaching methods in different international settings (Villaver, 2024).

This experience, when compared to Anita’s, clearly shows how the particular type of school within a host country, like an international school with an English-speaking environment and a Cambridge curriculum, significantly influences how teachers adjust to the curriculum and sociocultural adaptation. This process often places more importance on including all students rather than strictly following fixed structures, pushing us to look beyond simple country-level differences (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023).

Overcoming the Language Barrier

Language barriers were a notable sociocultural challenge for both participants, though appeared differently based on context. Anita primarily experienced this within the school environment. She found it “sometimes hard to express what I wanted to say because I didn’t know the right vocabulary,” and initially struggled to understand the distinct “accent” from other Australian colleagues. She adopted a proactive communication and learning strategy, acting first rather than waiting. She explained, “If I struggled with a word or phrase, later that night I would do my research on the vocabulary I needed to use next time.” She also observed that over time, she “gradually got used to the way the other teachers spoke.” Anita viewed outside-of-school language challenges positively, stating that they fostered “basic conversations and improve my speaking skills.” Anita’s self-guided and active way of dealing with language problems directly boosted her confidence. Her experience highlights how effective informal learning can be in new language environments, especially when someone needs to adapt to particular accents and specialized professional vocabulary. This aligns with

findings from Rezaia, Soyoo, and Reynolds (2024), who note that “informal language learning beyond traditional classrooms provides exposure to authentic and diverse English input, supporting vocabulary growth and communicative competence.”

Anto, however, faced more common and even potentially dangerous language barriers in Thailand. In the classroom, he noted that students often used Thai when English words were unknown, despite English being the primary medium of instruction. Outside school, the language barrier was “significant” in daily interactions with local vendors. Anto recounted a concerning incident involving an online driver verbally abusing his Japanese friend in Thai, understood only via Google Translate, which he identified as a “dangerous” miscommunication. He also experienced communication difficulties with non-Indonesian peers from the SEA Teacher program. Anto coped by actively learning basic Thai phrases for “survival” communication, attempting Filipino and Japanese with peers, and using “pictures,” “gestures or a method called TPR (Total Physical Response),” and engaging activities in class.

This pervasive language barrier in daily life and professional settings, including potentially risky miscommunication, aligns with findings by Bibi & Aziz (2024) and Chasanah & Sumardi (2022) for Indonesian PSTs in Southeast Asian contexts. Anto’s reliance on TPR and basic Thai for “survival” communication reflects the challenges of adapting to real-life language use in an immersive environment, prompting him to develop informal learning strategies (Mitrevski & Almorabe, 2024). This highlights that language adaptation is not a one-size-fits-all, but deeply influenced by the social and cultural needs of the particular host country and significantly enhanced Indonesian PSTs’ awareness of both linguistic and cultural limitations (Nurhastuti & Basikin, 2022), strengthening the connection between language adjustment and intercultural competence.

Managing the Classroom

While both participants faced the universal challenge of classroom management, their experiences and perceptions diverged significantly. Anita found classroom management in Australia to be relatively less challenging than in Indonesia. She observed “very little difference in behavior at the primary level,” but also noted that “in Australia, surprisingly, the primary students were very well-behaved,” which she explained as partly due to her status as “a new, foreign teacher to them.” Anita concluded it was “actually harder to manage the classroom in Indonesia compared to when I was in Australia.” To address supervisor feedback about challenging quicker students, she implemented differentiated strategies, using “peer helpers” for quick learners and breaking down tasks, using visuals, and checking in more often for slower learners. Her observation forms noted her effective management and movement around the class. Anita’s experience, where Australian primary students were perceived as easier to manage, allowed her to concentrate on enhancing her teaching methods, particularly through differentiated strategies to meet diverse learning needs, a professional challenge distinct from managing behavior.

Anto, assigned to a primary level class in Thailand, observed student behavior as “quite similar to Indonesian students,” but described initial difficulties in “getting their attention at first” due to being new and starting mid-semester in a diverse class. He noted that students needed to “meditate for around five minutes before the lesson starts” but became “more excited,

sometimes running around the classroom or going outside the class” after a coffee break. Anto also mentioned one student who was “very good at English, but his manners were just so bad.” He coped by building rapport and using engaging activities, explaining that he “tried to become more friendly” and got to know students individually, and utilized engaging activities like the clothes-hanging exercise to maintain focus. His weekly reports additionally highlight efforts to ensure student discipline and engagement.

This reveals that Anto’s core challenge was not dealing with significantly different student behavior, but rather the classic teacher’s task of establishing authority and keeping a diverse classroom focused through building strong relationships and creating engaging activities. This reliance on rapport and engagement is a common theme in research across different cultures (Muluk et al., 2021; Villaver, 2024) and consistent with findings that Indonesian teachers abroad had to try new methods to keep students engaged in unfamiliar classroom settings (Yuyun et al., 2025), reinforcing that classroom management abroad is an ongoing process of adjustment.

Experiencing Culture Shock

Culture shock manifested differently for each participant, reflecting the distinct cultural distances and host environments. Anita described her culture shock in Australia in terms of daily routines, for example, finding “supermarket closing at five o’clock” as “very strange to me.” In the school culture, she encountered a “morning tea” activity as a new routine not commonly practiced in Indonesia. Anita coped by observing and accepting these new routines within her generally welcoming environment, and stated that she “didn’t experience being an outsider or feeling lonely.” Anita’s culture shock primarily involved surface-level lifestyle adjustments and new social norms that she readily integrated, indicating a relatively lower cultural distance or a highly supportive environment that helped prevent more serious psychological effects.

Anto, however, experienced a more significant culture shock in Thai society, particularly regarding deeply held societal values. This shock stemmed from his observation of Thailand's openness and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions. He noted instances of public affection between same-gender couples and worked alongside a colleague who identified as bisexual. Anto contrasted these observations with his experiences in Indonesia, describing Thailand as “more free and liberal.” His way of coping involved actively trying to understand and directly engage with these cultural differences. Anto's open and honest approach arose from his desire to make sense of what he was seeing compared to his own cultural background, leading him to ask direct questions. He recalled, “I even asked the person directly, ‘why are you gay?... I asked questions so I can understand why they are gay,’” clarifying that his goal was to gain personal insight and fill a gap in his knowledge, not to judge.

This finding, while different from the 'lifestyle, communication, and psychological stress' that Chasanah & Sumardi (2022) identified among Indonesian Preservice Teachers (PSTs) in Thailand, still indicates a significant cultural challenge. Such situations frequently arise in non-Western contexts where fundamental societal values can be very different with those of one's home country (Uppal-Hershorn, 2022; Shiobara, 2022). Anto’s experience with

these contrasting societal values can be best understood as a direct 'value-system clash.' This is consistent with studies where Indonesian PSTs abroad described adapting their personal identities and having cross-cultural interactions primarily focused on deep value-based differences (Syahri et al., 2023). Anto's approach of actively asking questions demonstrates a strong engagement with this cultural divergence. He effectively turned potential discomfort into an opportunity for greater understanding, thus showcasing his active social and cultural adaptation, a process aligned with Searle and Ward's model.

Psychological Adaptation: Internal Resilience and Support Systems

Managing Anxiety and Fostering a Sense of Belonging

Both participants developed proactive strategies to manage feelings of anxiety and successfully built a sense of belonging, which points to effective psychological adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990). Anita initially held significant anxiety about her English speaking skills, fearing judgment from native speakers. She recounted feeling "very afraid that native speakers would judge me." This also manifested as a "little shy" feeling when interacting with other Australian colleagues. Anita largely coped by relying on a strong, understanding support network. She found that her Indonesian mentor made communication "very easy," and one Australian teacher "kindly adjusted their accent" to adapt for foreigners. This supportive atmosphere allowed her to overcome her shyness as she "gradually got used to the way the other teachers spoke," Anita explicitly stated, "Alhamdulillah, I didn't experience being an outsider or feeling lonely. My friends, my mentor, and my colleagues were all very welcoming." Anita's experience highlights how important mentors and peer support are in easing the stress of international practicums (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ateşkan, 2016; Kabilan, 2013), and demonstrates how a welcoming social environment and support from colleagues can directly help create a sense of belonging and reduce psychological anxiety related to language skills.

Anto, on the other hand, experienced social anxiety within the teacher's room. He found his challenge was that when colleagues "spoke in Thai, not in English, I would feel anxious, wondering if they were talking about me or if I did something wrong." This aligns with recent work confirming that practicum-related anxiety is a persistent issue among Indonesian PSTs, driven both by fears of linguistic inadequacy and the stress of judgment (Zuhriyah & Laili, 2023), underscoring the psychological dimension of adaptation across diverse contexts. Anto's way of coping involved developing a personal strategy of exploration and acceptance, either seeking direct clarification when feasible, or consciously choosing to "just let it be." This dual approach showed his sensible and flexible way of adjusting to new situations, allowing him to manage discomfort and avoid unnecessary confrontation while still safeguarding his emotional well-being. Additionally, Anto ensured he never felt lonely by actively using his established social connections, he mentioned having "two other teachers from Indonesia" at school and engaged with an "Indonesian student community at Khon Kaen University," who provided practical and social support. Anto's approach, involving actively asking questions and acceptance with unknown situations, indicates a different kind of mental toughness in navigating an environment with constant language barriers. Both cases confirm what existing research says about how crucial social support and collegial acceptance are for building

resilience and improving well-being in new cultural settings (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ateşkan, 2016; Goforth et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2024), though the specific worries (professional assessment vs. social acceptance) influenced their inner psychological reactions and coping methods.

Personal and Professional Growth (Outcomes of Adaptation)

The international practicums proved transformative for both PSTs, leading to significant personal and professional development, although they had different primary focuses and developmental paths, highlighting the connection of psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Anita reported a notable increase in her confidence, particularly in speaking English. She found that “teaching in Australia really helped me improve and feel more confident.” Anita further noted that she was “very confident now, especially when speaking English.” She identified the “most important lesson” as it “made me brave enough to start talking in English... nobody will judge you.” This newfound confidence allowed her to “manage lessons better” without relying on notes, to ask “open-ended questions and encouraging discussion” with students, and to share ideas and ask for feedback more confidently with teachers. Her performance evaluations and the confirmation letter from the private school praised her “dedication and professionalism” and noted her “exceptional” performance, stating that her “experiences gained... will contribute significantly to their development as an aspiring educator.” Anita’s significant increase in confidence and improved professional teaching abilities suggest a truly transformative professional development experience, strongly backed by excellent performance reviews. Her swift confidence aligns with literature of significant professional development in well-supported practicums, indicating a more profound and lasting professional and personal development likely supported by her longer, 10-week practicum.

Anto acknowledged significant learning and experience, but was more cautious about a drastic increase in confidence. He stated, “Not really, because even though I have the experience of going and teaching abroad, I feel like I need to learn more. There are so many people who have more experience than me.” Anto also reflected positively on the unique benefit of his religious identity abroad. He commented, “It’s very nice to be a Muslim when we go abroad, like if we lost or something we can go just go to the mosque.” Both participants highlighted adaptability as a key outcome. Anita described herself as becoming “more responsible and mindful in facing problems.” While Anto articulated his most important lesson as the need “to be able to adapt to any environment,” citing the Indonesian proverb, “*Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung*” (Where the earth is stood upon, there the sky is held up), which he interpreted as being adaptive and respecting local customs.

His experience teaching diverse students and engaging with Thai social norms directly contributed to his cultural sensitivity and broader worldview in teaching. Anto’s more modest and cautious view of his confidence boost, valuing ongoing learning over an instant feeling of self-assurance, shows a different way of looking at professional growth, aligning with a focus on deep development in intercultural skills (Jacob et al., 2010; Syahri et al., 2025) and adaptability in varied settings (Villaver, 2024). His shorter, 4-week experience, though intensely developing his adaptability and cultural awareness, focused on immediate survival

and practical skills rather than deep self-perception transformation. This suggests that while shorter practicums can quickly build initial adaptation and resilience, longer ones might lead to more profound and lasting professional and personal development. These diverse outcomes, though distinct, demonstrate how international practicums are crucial sites for developing globally competent educators, but their specific developmental impact is deeply intertwined with contextual factors (OECD, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the profoundly transformative, yet context-dependent, nature of international practicums for pre-service teachers, as seen through the experiences of two Indonesian English-majors. While both faced initial anxieties, their adaptation pathways diverged. Anita's practicum in Australia demanded professional-structural adjustment to a formalized curriculum, which ultimately fostered her professional confidence. In contrast, Anto's time in Thailand required pervasive-environmental adaptation as he navigated language barriers and cultural shocks, cultivating personal resilience. These findings underscore that the nature of growth professional or personal is shaped by the specific challenges of each environment. To better prepare future pre-service teachers, universities should provide tailored pre-departure training that covers curricular differences, school environments, safety, and cultural norms. This training could involve scenario-based learning, cultural sensitivity workshops, and briefings from alumni who have experienced similar practicums. Such training should be integrated with targeted language instruction and should focus on both professional and daily communication needs, while culturally aligned mentorship and structured reflection sessions (e.g., through reflective journaling or group debriefs) can help PSTs process their experiences and build coping mechanisms effectively.

This study's findings should be interpreted within several key limitations. First, the sample size was small (two cases) and based on self-reported experiences, which may limit the transferability of results beyond similar contexts. Second, the cases differed in duration, school type, and mentoring structures, all of which may have shaped the adaptation processes observed. Third, we relied on retrospective accounts rather than direct classroom observation or mentor interviews, which could have provided additional perspectives on participants' adaptation. Finally, while we drew on Searle and Ward's (1990) model, this study did not include standardized measures such as the SCAS or BSAS; future mixed-methods research could triangulate qualitative narratives with quantitative adaptation scales for stronger construct validity. This study shows how international practicum adaptation pathways are shaped not just by host country context, but by institutional type, practicum length, and local sociocultural values.

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