Indonesian Pre–Service Teachers' Intercultural Awareness in SEA Teacher Project

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural awareness in international teaching experience is vital since differences in language, lifestyle, culture, and other factors influence how people act and adapt. The SEA Teacher or "Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia" is a SEAMEO's project designed to offer pre-service teachers from Southeast Asian universities the opportunity to provide teaching experience (practice) in schools in other Southeast Asian countries. This study investigates three Indonesian pre-service teachers' intercultural experiences during the SEA teacher project. Therefore, the research used a qualitative method, particularly a descriptive study. The study's data was drawn from open-ended questionnaires and interviews with participating students. This work was carried out at the 8th batch SEA Teacher Project as participants. The findings indicated there are participants' intercultural experiences such as beliefs and religious dissimilarity, sexual orientation, cultural practice, language barrier, and psychological stress. And the participants have the ability of three levels of intercultural awareness.

Keywords: Intercultural awareness, international teaching practicum, pre-service teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

The country's requirements, especially in education, encourage most institutions, colleges, universities, and other public sectors to increase their potential to improve the quality of numerous elements. The skill and intelligence of teachers are an essential element in human capital's dedication to education (Luschei, 2017). To achieve high quality system, teacher education programs are critical in preparing future educators. Teacher education is how pre-service teachers are exposed to and qualified to become teachers before being integrated into the teaching profession (Churchill, 2016).

Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) suggest that Teaching practice (TP) is crucial to teacher development, whereas an effective teacher education program must improve individual teachers' growth and evolution as humans. According to Yost, Sentner, and Bailey (2000), it is vital to provide a valuable framework for pre-service teachers as well as opportunities to connect essential experience and skills experience since pre-service teachers tend to turn memorable experiences into critical thoughts.

Thus, teaching practice is directly linked to the development of competent and professional teachers.

Additionally, many higher education institutions begin to build collaborations with other international organizations as part of their worldwide networking efforts. International teaching experience and placement in numerous universities around developed countries have been included in the practice (Parr, Faulkner, & Rowe 2013; Thomas, 2006). Several researchers have established international teaching practices to provide international learning chances to their pre-service teachers in practical environments. International Teaching Program (ITP) will enable pre-service teachers to watch and work in authentic classroom settings with genuine kids, teachers, and curriculum (Kabilan, Ramdani, Mydin, & Junaedi 2020).

Many colleges and universities in Asia conduct student exchanges to take advantage of the foreign teaching programs to enhance their teachers. The Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia or SEA-Teacher organized by SEAMEO (South East Asia Ministers of Education Organization) is one of the international exchange programs for students.

The SEA-Teacher program offers a teaching internship abroad at a location that is a regional representative of SEAMEO. The exchange is best suited for fourth-year students majoring in math, science,

English, or pre-school. The period is one month and is based on a cost-sharing model. Students are assigned weekly functions and responsibilities (Ralph, 2007). Additionally, mentors will be transferred to the host universities during the practice phase to supervise and follow the students. There have been several studies that investigate international teaching practicum. Firstly, Ozek (2009) conducted research dealing with overseas teaching experience in Turkey. The researchers underline the importance of pre-service teaching programs for Turkish student teachers since they help them better understand the educational system. However, throughout their ITP, the same foreign situations stated previously can become a source of contention for the PSTs. It was revealed by Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman (2014), who discovered that in American schools, a majority of Chinese PSTs encountered cultural shocks, as the students displayed actions that the PSTs considered unacceptable and demonstrated a lack of discipline.

Therefore, to fill the gap from the previous studies about ITP, this research focuses on the participants' intercultural experiences during the SEA Teacher program and how to do participants' level of their intercultural awareness. There are several reasons this study is vital to be researched. First, is to find out how the participant adapt during the SEA Teacher Program. Second, to verified different result from the previous studies on ITP programs. Third, the research on this topic is still limited. Hence, the researcher formulates two research questions: 1) What are participants' intercultural experiences during the SEA Teacher program? and 2) How do SEA Teacher participants' level of their intercultural awareness? This research results are expected to give new information and demonstrate experiences more deeply.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. SEA Teacher Project

Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia (SEA Teacher) is a program that enables pre-service student teachers from Southeast Asian institutions to gain teaching experience (practicum) in schools in other Southeast Asian nations. The SEA Teacher Project's objectives are as follows: 1) to provide opportunities for student teachers to develop their teaching and pedagogical skills, 2) to motivate student educators to put their English skills into practice, 3) to acclimate student teachers to a broader perspective on the region and the world, and 4) to reveal future teachers to a range of teaching and learning circumstances and resources, the importance of the exchange is preferable for students of 3rd and 4th year whose majors are Math, Science, English, Pre-School, Economic Education, Physical Education, Elementary/Primary and Social Science. The exchange program period is one month, depending on the

cost-sharing mechanism, which typically occurs twice a year in January and July (SEAMEO, 2018).

2.2 Intercultural Awareness

Many countries are in a state of intense competition for international students exchange to provide high-quality education and open international programs. In today's society, intercultural understanding, and appropriate comprehension of one's own cultural identity, both personal and social, are vital. Empathy and decentering are two components of intercultural learning, and also two aspects of intercultural awareness. In a contact situation, it is the ability to evaluate and consider the varied opinions of the speaker while simultaneously considering and take the viewpoints of a conversational partner from another community or nationality and its cultural background into account (Korzilius, Hooft, & Planken, 2007).

The value of intercultural understanding and awareness in improving our communication and interactions with one another cannot be overstated. Furthermore, Baker (2011) argues that it should be accompanied by an understanding of cultural elements in intercultural communication in terms of fluid, fragmented, hybrid, and changing cultural groups or boundaries instead of easily defined and referenced cultural groupings or boundaries. ICA can be provided as intercultural awareness is a conscious mind that recognizes the role that culturally dependent ways, behaviors, and frames of understanding can play in intercultural communication and the ability to put these ideas into practice in real-time communication in a real-time communication versatile and context-specific manner.

2.3 Level of Intercultural Awareness

According to Holliday (2010) there are three levels of cultural awareness; firstly, Level 1 shows variations of cultural awareness (CA) that are linked to a broad understanding of cultures with an emphasis on the first culture (C1), rather than being primarily oriented to intercultural communication. This level necessitates a conscientious awareness of C1 and how it affects behavior, beliefs, values, and essential CA elements, leading to level 2, which entails more complicated cultural understandings and cultural frames of reference that move away from essentialist positions. At this level, people are aware of cultures as one of several social groups or contexts. This is coupled with specific awareness of other cultures and the potential impact on communication in terms of confusion and miscommunication. The final stage, level 3, is intercultural knowledge (ICA), which goes beyond seeing cultures as bounded entities. However complex they may be, cultural references and communicative

behaviors in intercultural communication may or may not apply to particular cultures.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

To explore more the significance of sea teacher participants' intercultural awareness experiences during the SEA Teacher program on what participants' level of intercultural awareness, a qualitative descriptive study is used as the design for this study to give detailed descriptions of collected data (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). It is also in line with Patton and Cochran (2002) which described that a qualitative study is about social life, characterize qualitatively, and the method also relates to the words to analyse the data. The reason for using qualitative research were to find clusters of meanings, and concluding with a report that furthers the reader's understanding of the essential structure of the experience.

3.2. Research Participants

The respondents for this research were three Indonesian English teachers. They were chosen since they taught English for a month in Thailand. And the writers decided to recruit the 7th batch and 8 batch because the participants have recently completed the practicum. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2017), good informants have the experience in the cultural scene, are engaged in the scene in many different roles, well respected by their peers or facile speakers of the local language forms.

3.3. Data Collection

The instrument used in this research were open-ended questionnaires and interviews. Open-ended questionnaires were used to collect the data. Open-ended questions allowed the collection of qualitative answers, and it accommodated participants to describe their intercultural awareness during the program. The questionnaire was adopted from Phongsirikul (2017). The items were open-ended and involved straightforward interpretation or elaboration. This section took about 30 - 45 minutes to complete the questionnaires online through a Google form.

To achieve more significant data, the interview section was conducted in this research. The interviews were administered to 3 Indonesian pre-service English teachers to get further information to complete the data. The interviews explored intercultural awareness and teaching experiences of being SEA teachers. The interview was conducted for around 30 minutes through the online video conference application.

There is the process of analyzing data. The participants fill up an open-ended questionnaire, the questionnaire is administered to identify their cultural awareness, such as beliefs, and how they adapt and develop the culture during SEA Teacher Program. Questionnaires collected from each participant were interpreted one by one. The results of the questionnaires were repeatedly checked through the interview. The interview focuses on concrete events and elicits information that would allow the chronology of events or processes to be reconstructed (when things happened, in what order, etc.).

After the data were obtained, the researchers used thematic analysis to achieve the results of the research. There are seven steps: transcription, reading and familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalizing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data is presented based on the research questions and data collection instruments. There are two sections discussed in the research findings. The first section discussed participants' intercultural experiences during the SEA Teacher program. The second section describes how do participants' level of intercultural awareness during the programs.

4.1. Pre-service teachers' intercultural experiences during the program

The first research question was about what are participants' intercultural experiences during the SEA Teacher program. Based on the data, the findings of the research were divided into five themes. There are: beliefs and religious dissimilarity, sexual attraction, cultural practice, language barrier, and psychological stress.

4.1.1. Beliefs and Religion Dissimilarity

Beliefs and religions vary by country. For example, in Thailand, the majority of the population is Buddhist, and they worship statues. This religion is very different from that of Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, and in Indonesia, there are beliefs about Pancasila, whereas there are none in Thailand. As a result, this is a major issue explored in the experience of understanding the culture of pre-service teachers, how they respond to religious and state views discrepancies.

Pre-service teacher 1:
Yes, some differences, such as religious beliefs (the majority religion in their country is Buddhism) and cultural behaviors (barapan horse festival is the same as wing kwa). In terms of values, however, Indonesia adheres to Pancasila principles, but Thailand does not.

Pre-service teacher 2:
The beliefs held in Khon Kaen, Thailand are predominantly Buddhist and the values and cultural practices in that country are different from mine.

The data demonstrates disparities in belief and religion in Thailand; this statement is supported by data below.

Pre-service teacher 3:
Who stated Yes, I noticed similarities in daily routines such as morning prayers, flag ceremonies, and greetings in the morning. What makes them unique is how they do it, and what makes them truly unique is their way of life.

Following the data presented above, their everyday activities are similar to those carried out in Indonesia, but their religious beliefs and practices are distinct from those carried out in Indonesia. This is in line with a study conducted by Ameli and Molaei (2012) focused on intercultural communication and religion as major influences on communication competency among two sects.

The above cultural factors noticed and experienced by PSTs in ESL and EFL courses are unique. They learn to compete with them and understand and adjust to a culture that is not their own, which has resulted in communication failures (Wong, Indiatsi, & Wong, 2016). These sects were found to emphasize their similarities rather than their differences. Religion can also affect intercultural sensitivity, which leads to communicative skills.

4.1.2. Sexual Orientation

The interview revealed that the experience was about sexual desire in Thailand. Because most Muslims in Indonesia believe in the existence of gender boundaries and that attraction to the opposite sex is still prohibited.

Pre-service teacher 1:
I am shocked because something does not happen in Indonesia. They have intimate relations with one another. They skinship in front of me.
Pre-service teacher 2:
I had read the so it will be my knowledge about LGBT, and I respected information about sexual life, but when I saw it in front of my eyes, I just respect what they did.
Pre-service teacher 3:
My reaction is to be fascinated by the distinctions that exist and learn to respect and appreciate them continuously.

She respects the differences of cultures. Although participants had diverse sexual interests, they enjoyed the lifestyle distinction.

4.1.3. Cultural Practice

Each country has its' distinct way of presenting cultural practices. Cultural practices are widely held beliefs of how individuals behave in their daily lives

within a culture (Frese, 2015). This study found the way of how Thailand presents its cultural practice.

Pre-service teacher 1:
I discovered that there are two, particularly the annual Mother's Day celebration. In Indonesia, it is sufficient to simply state that this is not the case and that the ceremony is also really polite. The manner of greeting/tone intonation/slang. In Indonesia, the greeting is similar to namaste. Intonation also distinguishes who we are speaking to. And my tutor taught me slang.
Pre-service teacher 2:
They constantly pray and demonstrate respect whenever they pass Buddha statues and images of their king. I learned how to make a Khon Kaen-style craft.
Pre-service teacher 3:
They celebrate Mother's Day, which is widely observed in all schools, and it's pretty fascinating to watch.

This finding is consistent with Nugent and Catalano (2015). Students will become more receptive to cultural differences if they are exposed to cultural practice through intellectually demanding learning tasks with real-world applications. As a result, cultural practice broadens their knowledge experience because they have personal expertise with it.

4.1.4. Language Barrier

Language is a barrier for certain persons whose country does not require them to speak English as their first language. Based on the data, language is challenging to adapt to language barriers as shown in the statements below.

Pre-service teacher 1:
Language. Because they are, like us, an English-speaking country, English is not the primary language.
Pre-service teacher 2:
The Language and cuisine are predominantly non-halal.
Pre-service teacher 3:
Outside of teaching hours, language and time for interaction are required.

The findings are in line with Rabbani (2017) who states that when there is a language barrier, the effective two-way communication becomes considerably more challenging. And also, intercultural communication is complicated by two issues, namely language and culture (Xiao & Petraki, 2007). It implies that language is a challenge that many people from diverse cultures face consistently.

4.1.5 Physiological Stress

Besides the language barrier, cultural disjunction makes some people depressed, as they cannot keep up with the surrounding culture. Stress is defined as any factor that acts internally or externally to make adaptation more complicated, requiring more enormous efforts from the individual to sustain life in himself and the external environment (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013). This

research examined how people dealt with cultural constraints included in the teaching environment.

Pre-service teacher 1:
I did not have any experience, not to the interaction, but to the burden of being a people instructor haha, as I teach for four hours each day.
Pre-service teacher 2:
No, because the staff is quite polite and capable of making me feel at ease without exerting any pressure.

Most studies have discovered that classroom management is a significant source of stress for teachers (Paker, 2011).

Pre-service teacher 3:
I am completely free of psychological/emotional stress.

These findings contradict with Zhou (2014), who discovered that in American schools, most Chinese PSTs encountered cultural shocks and stress, as the students displayed actions that the PSTs considered unacceptable and demonstrated a lack of discipline. This study found that the pre-service teachers have no stress of the situation.

4.2. Pre-service teachers' intercultural awareness level

The second findings based on the second research question was the participants' level of intercultural awareness. The results indicated 3 levels: articulating one's cultural perspective, the ability to compare and mediating, and adopting cultural practices.

4.2.1. Level 1: Articulating One's Own Cultural Perspective

Knowledge of one's own and another culture is acquired through a variety of specialized training activities. As a result, pre-service teachers must develop cultural awareness. It will provide cultural understanding in thinking, motivational factors, and decision-making.

Pre-service teacher 1:
When I was delivering a cultural presentation, they inquired how it felt to return home. They are curious about what is happening in Indonesia.
Pre-service teacher 2:
Yes, our partner participants discussed one other's ideas, values, and cultural traditions to learn and respect one another. Teachers, lecturers, coordinators.

These findings imply that pre-service teacher capable of generalizing a culture and comprehending its distinctions.

4.2.2. Level 2: The Ability of Compare and Mediate

Participants in intercultural communication at level 2 should be able to use their cultural knowledge to predict potential areas of misunderstanding and misinterpretation (Baker, 2011). To prevent stereotyping, however, this ability must be coupled with the ability to go beyond generalizations in response to the particular instance of intercultural dialogue in which they are involved.

Pre-service teacher 1:
I'm done. My philosophy is to focus on the positive. I learned nothing about LGBT.
Pre-service teacher 2:
I wanted to learn more about their traditional activities, but my teaching schedule prevented me from doing so.

This finding shows they can determine what can be taught and what cannot base on their needs. Thus, it appears that they were able to compare and mediate other cultures.

4.2.3. Level 3: Adapting cultural practice

In level 3, the ability to mediate and negotiate between different cultural frames of reference and communication styles as they arise in concrete examples of intercultural communication is required.

Pre-service teacher 1:
I value time more because I am always on time, even with bus schedules. If I can't perform my habits, I try to accept them and find alternatives.
Pre-service teacher 2:
Teaching in a foreign country affected only one habit: I had to talk in English 24 hours a day, which was exhausting.

These findings found the pre-service teacher can adjust during the program, and they can even adopt beneficial traits from Thai society, such as being prompt. They are also required to communicate in English on a daily. The result fit with the theory that many of the participants' favorable attitudes toward intercultural communication and global English existed before the program (Baker, 2011).

5. CONCLUSION

Intercultural awareness is critical for intercultural communication. Individuals must first acknowledge and comprehend their own culture and identity before comprehending the culture of another. By valuing one's own culture, intercultural dialogue becomes more effective. The results of this research implied that pre-service teachers have many experiences, such as beliefs and religion dissimilarity, sexual attraction, cultural practice, language barrier, and psychological stress.

The participants' level of intercultural awareness divided into three aspects: articulating one's own cultural perspective, the ability of compare and mediate, and adopting the cultural practice. Pre-service teacher participants can understand and distinguish between their own culture and the cultures of others, and they do not feel under any pressure when participating in the program. They simply accept that some cultures are taboo in their opinion and learn to live with it through understanding and adaptation. As a result of the findings, it may be inferred that they exhibit intercultural awareness.

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