

Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence of Pre-Service English Teachers in Southeast Asia (Sea Teacher Project)

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ABSTRACT

SEA Teachers Project is one of SEAMEO's international collaboration programs held by several universities in Southeast Asia to increase students' cultural awareness and pedagogical experience to be international teachers. Their experience as international teachers in other countries are expected to develop a greater sense of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), especially in education. This study aims to investigate the outcome of the international teaching internship experience of Philippines, Indonesian and Thai pre-service English teachers who participated in the 'SEA-Teacher' program in developing their intercultural communicative competence. The result also addressed challenges that pre-service English face during the program. A qualitative case study was used as research design which employs two data collection techniques consisting of questionnaires and interviews. The finding of this research indicated that pre-service English teachers cultivate their intercultural communicative competence. It also found that they faced challenges while in the host country, yet after several times they could overcome it.

Keywords: *Intercultural communicative competence, pre-service teachers, SEA Teachers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, globalization has blurred the geographical boundaries all over the world, where virtually all countries are connected. It involves all aspects of life such as social, cultural, economic, and education. In today's world, there are many opportunities to involve or create a new international organization to engage as world citizens. One of the international organizations is the Southeast Asian Minister of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1990 to promote regional cooperation in education, science, culture, and religion. The purpose of SEAMEO is to enhance regional understanding and cooperation for a better quality of life in Southeast Asia.

One program that promoted by SEAMEO is Southeast Asian Teacher (SEA Teacher) where teachers from ASEAN countries can teach across the country in Southeast Asia. SEA Teachers has been conducted since 2014 serving one of the seven priority areas 'Revitalizing Teacher Education' to improve the quality of education in Southeast Asia. According to the SEA-

Teacher Guidebook (2018), the SEA teachers' program's goal is exposing future teachers to diverse teaching and learning situations and opportunities in different cultures. The participant of SEA teachers is the undergraduate students (pre-service teachers) from several universities that must join internship in another country. The purpose of the SEA teachers' program is to offer pre-service English teachers an international experience in teaching multicultural experience and cultivating intercultural communicative competence (ICC). As a result, they can see cultural diversity from a different perspective.

Deardorff (2006) stated that ICC is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It means that people from different cultures know about the value and the culture between the speaker and the addresser when they conduct interaction. Through ICC, they emphasized the kinds of values, attitudes, behaviors, and skills to be fostered through teaching and learning about peace and diversity, but the delivery varied from country to country through specialized or career

subjects. In the context of foreign language education, intercultural competence has been identified as ‘one approach to systematically conceptualizing and investigating the knowledge, attitudes and behavior associated with successful intercultural communication’. It means that, to be successful in intercultural communication, students need to develop their intercultural competence. It brings new requirements for foreign language courses (teaching and learning). (Baker, 2011)

There are several previous studies that found international internship provided a lot of good effects in fostering intercultural communicative competence. Santoro and Major (2012) conducted research about Indonesian pre-service who had international teaching practice in Australia and Thailand for a month. It was found that pre-service teachers had developed their ICC. Both pre-service teachers had developed their basic cultural understanding in which they were able to articulate their cultural perspectives on certain things, such as how students of their cultures learn in an ELT classroom. It is in line with Zhao (2009) who stated that international teaching internship develops teachers’ knowledge and skill locally and internationally,

Meanwhile, Czura (2018) examined teachers who participated in international internships in Poland and who did not. The result indicates that despite some minor discrepancies in understanding of ICC between both of them. It showed that having experience abroad was not embracing their intercultural communicative competence. Still, regardless of the time spent abroad, the participants seemed to lack practical skill to develop this competence in the classroom.

Therefore, to fill the gap from the previous studies about intercultural communication of international internship, this research focuses on how the experience of pre-service English teachers from Indonesian, Philippine, and Thailand who participated in SEA teachers’ project cultivate their ICC. Hence, the researcher formulates two questions in conducting the research: 1) How do pre-service English teachers’ experiences cultivate their intercultural communicative competence? And 2) What are the challenges faced by the pre-service English teacher during the internship program in terms of intercultural communication? These research results are expected to give new information about the advantages and disadvantages of internship programs in improving teachers’ quality especially in intercultural communication.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This research applied a qualitative research design taking on a case study. This research used case study

because it attempted to analyze the phenomenon of in-depth knowledge about the experience of pre-service teachers on their intercultural competence. The reasons for using qualitative research were, first, because it focused on participants’ experience. As stated by Creswell (2012), The case study method “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes.

2.2. Research Participants

The respondents for this research were 6 pre-service English teachers who participated in the SEA teachers’ program from 8th batch. They are from the English education department in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. In this research, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select the participants. According to Creswell (2012), purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on consideration of a certain aim and on certain criteria or characteristics that have been set beforehand.

2.3. Data Collection

The instruments used in this research were open-ended questionnaires and interviews, following Creswell's (2012) suggestion that open-ended questions would not limit participants' views. The interview was also conducted to gain in-depth information. This research used the semi-structured interview to obtain information about the experience of pre-service English teachers during SEA teachers’ program. In the interview process, the researcher prepared some questions and developed relevant questions based on recommendations to collect more reliable and valid data since the respondents were not led in any way.

The procedure of this research was divided into three phases based on Creswell’s (2012) theory. In the first phase of the research, the questionnaire was distributed to Thailand, Indonesian and Philippine pre-service English teachers by Google Form. After that, the researcher collected the data to investigate the teachers’ challenges using the semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted after the questionnaire was given. The researcher used bilingual (English and Bahasa Indonesia) during the interview to get more evidence from the participants easily and to avoid misunderstanding. After all the data were obtained, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the result in a descriptive qualitative form. The last, the researcher interpreted deeply about the finding and integrated it with the theory and previous study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented based on the research questions and data collection instruments. There are two sections discussed in the research findings. The first section discussed how the experiences of pre-service English teachers cultivate their intercultural communicative competence. The second section describes the challenge faced by them during the program.

3.1. The experience of pre-service English teacher in cultivating intercultural communicative competence

The first finding based on the research question was about how the experiences of pre-service English teachers cultivate intercultural communicative competence. Questionnaires and interviews were addressed to find whether international teaching experience was successful in terms of ICC. Based on Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey (2002), there are three aspects in determining ICC as follow.

3.1.1. Attitude

Attitude dealing with respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery are key attitudes required for efficient intercultural communication. It means they are willing to know the culture in the host country. Based on the questionnaire supported by the interview, pre-service English teachers observe and ask local people about the host culture.

Participant 1 (Thailand) said that he wanted to learn more. He asked about what can and cannot be done in the host country.

“I always want to know about Indonesia people, we have some similarities and also differences, so I asked to the other participant”

Participant 2 (Philippine) mentioned that she observed that Indonesian culture and Philippine culture is not really different except in religion. She learnt a lot about Indonesian language

“Indonesian people are so kind, I don’t have any difficulties to adapt, mmm, I frequently ask my mentor about how to buy something in Indonesian language, and she teach me well”

Participant 3 (Indonesia) said that as participants, they frequently exchange about value, culture in their own country to get new knowledge and respect each other.

“We often share culture like with students from Philippine, we learn Thailand culture, like how to ask halal food in market, and what cannot we ask to them”

Participant 4 (Thailand) stated that before he came to Indonesia, he browsed the internet about Indonesian culture.

“I am not really shocked even firstly come to Indonesia, because I learn before and also ask my friend who have ever come to Indonesia before”

Participant 5 (Philippine) observed that religion, language, and delicacies are different between Philippine and Thailand.

“The students in Thailand asked me about religion, behavior and local language. So, I asked too about habits, language and local beliefs of the people”

Participant 6 (Indonesia) stated that at first, he asked to attend cross-cultural class and can ask anything about culture in the Philippines.

“We ask them like how to act to the older, how is the manner in eating, and the way we socialize with local people there.”

According to 6 participants from each country, It can be concluded that pre-service English teachers are eager to know the culture in the host country. It shows that they are respectful, curious and open toward the new culture. That case is dealing with attitude which is an aspect of ICC.

A sign to be called that person is open to other cultures is by her/his willingness to learn other cultures. A willingness to learn and to accept other cultures and stand up beside their culture is a typical good attitude. It indicates respect as well. The pre-service teacher ensures herself to act with good attitude in intercultural communication (Byram, 2006).

The aspect of the attitude which refers to the appreciation and acceptance to the diversity of the cultures and is able to communicate with culturally different others in an unexpected, interested and open manner (Deardorff, 2006; Matveev & Milter, 2004). Pre-service teachers’ good attitude means they accept and respect the difference, it will make it easier for them to communicate and socialize with people in host countries. Yet, if the attitude is negative, they will confront subtle resistance in communication.

The advantage of having a good attitude for teachers in teaching EFL classrooms is it helps the teacher to give good examples in the form of action for the students as the teacher is a role model for the students. The students will do what their teacher shows them. So, a good attitude for a teacher leads to a good attitude for the students as well.

3.1.2. Knowledge

In the distinction, knowledge has small sub-components. To be named competent in culture, a pre-service teacher should have knowledge about her social groups, their products, practices and the host countries' culture (Byram et al., 2002).

Participant 1 (Thailand) said that he realized that between home country and host country was quite different

“In Indonesia the way students greeting to the teachers, is surprising, they have to kiss the teachers' hand, I also learn some culture like in Toraja, the death body is not buried several weeks, and they also have fight buffalo competition which never been existed in Thailand

Participant 2 (Philippine) said that Indonesian has a lot of similar culture with Philippine

“We are actually same, may be what difference is religion, because most people in Malang is Muslim. Almost all female students wear hijab, between the girls and boys also cannot be very close like in the Philippines.

Participant 3 (Indonesia) she stated that besides religion, she learnt to about the stereotype of LGBT that might be taboo in Indonesia

“After I teach in Thailand, I know that the case of LGBT is quite normal there, they even ask me what my sex orientation is, and that is ok. There are also some festivals there, like school fashion shows, where the girls' dresses are used by the boys.

Participant 4 (Thailand) mentioned that he found some interesting habits in Indonesia

“I have already known that students that I teach always want to know my private life that I don't want to share, but after I told them. They have huge respect and understanding.

Participant 5 (Philippine) stated that English language is seldom used.

“Thailand uses English as a third language, so when I teach it is quite hard compared to if I teach in the Philippines, so they hate English, but I try to use a good approach so they can accept me as the teacher”.

Participant 6 (Indonesian) stated that he knew the Philippine culture quite well, like eating habits and the students' condition there.

“In the Philippines, it is not considered polite if we put a side dish over the rice, so we have to eat them on a different plate.”

Based on the result of the questionnaires and interviews, it shows that pre-service teachers know about the host countries' culture. The culture, defined as the beliefs, values and norms of a group of people, which influence individuals' communication behaviors. They know how to act and behave to respect and avoid culture conflict. It is in line with Deadroff (2006) who mentioned that intercultural knowledge is taken into consideration as an individual's skills to gain knowledge about products of the people of his/her own culture or another culture with which s/he interacts, and the skill to have relevant information which would help the individual to interact with people from the other culture personally.

As a teacher, it is very important to know the culture where they teach, because it will help them to find what kind of suitable method in teaching and find relevant content as teaching materials. The materials that are familiar and close in relation due to some factors like culture, belonging or other can stimulate students' understanding better about the topic taught in the classroom.

3.1.3. Skill

There are four types of skill in intercultural communicative competence. They are interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction. The experience of a pre-service teacher indicated that interaction is the most sequential skill. Interaction refers to the ability to operate knowledge, attitude and skill under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (Byram et al., 2002). These following are the evidence of interaction based on the result of interview

Participant 1 (Thailand): “We are hanging out and traveling to some place in Sulawesi, we go to Makassar and sometimes me and my students talk together outside of class.”

Participant 2 (Philippine): “yes, my mentor in my school asks all of us to go to Bromo, it so beautiful place, we also help them to prepare the celebration in school, it so fun because we always be involved in any events in the school”

Participant 3 (Indonesia): “we celebrated valentine day with our students, they gave us a lot of gifts and flowers. Every Saturday night, we are going to the night market together, because we are Muslim, they tell us which food that can and cannot I eat. Yet, we still cannot understand the language, because Thai language is so hard”.

Participant 4 (Thailand): “My mentor always asked us to go with him to the market to buy some food supplies, we sometimes tried to talk with the seller, asking about something. Many of them cannot speak English, but our mentor helped us to communicate.

Participant 5 (Philippine): “We are living in the campus area, so we only spent time day by day in college, but the college is so wide. In the afternoon we often exercise together in the park, the other people also can come. So, we have less interaction there”

Participant 6 (Indonesia): “We stay in a district area in the Philippines, so we cannot go anywhere, but sometimes, we just like to come to students house and have dialog with local people there, it is easy cause most of them can speak English well.”

According to the result of the interview above, all pre-service teachers that have been interviewed carried out several interactions with the local people in the host country. These interactions seem to work well, yet the trouble is in language. Deardorff (2006) stated skill is acquired when attitude and knowledge has been gained. It can be said that if the teachers have better understanding in attitude and skill, they will have good communication. From the data interaction actually happened without many substantial troubles although basically they share dissimilar culture and social identity. Yet, the different language is the obstacle, even if English is an international language, but not all the local people are able to speak English.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. There are numerous components of ICC. The data result from questionnaire and interview indicate that international internship teaching programs cultivate intercultural communicative competence of pre-service teachers. As Byram (2006) mentioned, to get a good ICC, pre-service English teachers must have good knowledge in analyzing host country culture, they should have good attitude and omit bad stereotypes or judgement. Lastly, to implement knowledge and attitude, they have to interact with the local people from the host country. Even if they show good understanding in all aspects of ICC, yet they only spent less than 30 days, so this research has limited the duration of the international teaching internship program of pre-service English teachers.

3.2. Challenges in SEA Teachers Program

Challenges during the SEA teachers program relate with teaching programs and intercultural communication. It happens because people have different perceptions and attitudes towards other people’s language and culture, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts (Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). Here are the results of the questionnaire and interview.

Participant 1 (Thailand) stated that he was very surprised at the first time. But a week later seems normal for us.

“I was placed in rural area, and it’s hard when we need something, like when my phone was broken and I have to go to the city, and the signal of my phone was really bad at the time, so yeah but by the time, I am usual with that”

Participant 2 (Philippine) mentioned that she experienced a culture shock when firstly taught the students

“When I taught in Indonesia, most of the students there do not like English, and since English as foreign language that is quite hard to teach them because most of them do not understand what I was saying, but I could not translate it to Indonesian”

Participant 3 (Indonesia) stated that it was hard to adapt in Thailand

“I think, in teaching practice I didn’t find a very big challenges, all students can follow the lesson, but what a big problem for me is, I think it was very difficult to find halal food, since I’m a Muslim.”

Participant 4 (Thailand) said that when he firstly came to Indonesia, he felt excited and surprised

“I think, there were no big challenges during my stay in Indonesia, but the problem that I faced was that it was hard to communicate with my cooperating teachers, even if both of us were able to speak English.”

Participant 5 (Philippine) stated that he had challenges in teaching practice.

“Commonly the English teaching practice in Thailand is delivered by Thai language, so it was so hard because I have to be accompanied by a supervisor teacher since many of them do not understand the materials.”

Participant 6 (Indonesia) said that he found a little bit challenges because he ever visited Philippine before

“What become challenges for me is food, because the taste doesn’t fit with me, also that was very hard to find public transportation to go to somewhere”

Based on the interview result, when pre-service teachers come to the host country firstly, they will have culture shock. Culture shock is generally perceived as a condition in which anger and apprehension increase because of the changing of situation.

Commonly people can freely communicate with those who share a similar language, culture, and attitudes, and the opposite is also true in that they avoid communicating with people who have a different linguistic and cultural background since it is more likely that intercultural communication breakdown will occur.

From the data, it can be seen that pre-service English teachers faced various challenges during the program. The challenges came from various fields, such as from school they placed, problems in interaction, and socialization with local people. Those are, can be called culture shock, because their environment was changing and different from their home countries. Culture shock comes from various ways, such as the habit in the host country. It also includes the shock of a new environment, meeting new people, eating new food, or adapting to a foreign language, as well as the shock of being separated from the important people in your life: such as family, friends, colleagues, and teachers.

Thus, effective intercultural communication competence is extremely important to overcome communication challenges since such challenges between people of diverse language and cultural backgrounds usually stem from sociolinguistic and cultural differences that influence their distinctive perceptions, interpretations, lack of shared experiences and frames of reference (Gudykunst, 2003; Silverthorne, 2005). It can be stated that ICC plays an important role in communication. Pre-service English teachers who participated in the SEA teachers program cultivate ICC, they have a positive attitude toward the differences and are willing to know the new culture in the host country. They know what

4. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts. ICC includes understanding to communicate with people from other cultures. There are three aspects of ICC, those are attitude which refers to curiosity, openness and willingness to learn other cultures. Secondly, knowledge that is willing to know what is valuable, habit and other aspects of culture in a country. Lastly, a skill that is the ability to socialize and interact with people from different cultures. Based on the data, pre-service English teachers cultivate and develop their cross-cultural understanding after joining an international teaching internship, because it helps them to understand new cultures.

The challenges of pre-service covers cultural context, those includes language barrier, habit and values that are extremely different from home country. At the first time, the participants have culture shock experience. Culture shock happens because of the impact of moving to an unfamiliar culture. Yet, the participant can omit it after several times living in their home country. Understanding culture shock is needed for broadening horizons. Despite its initial feelings of confusion, culture shock is a vital part of developing as a human being. In short, culture shock is as important

for learning about other and our own culture as it is for fostering understanding between different peoples.

As a teacher, it is very important to understand about culture, due to when teaching with students from a variety of backgrounds and cultures present in the classroom, students gain more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. It also teaches students how to use their own strengths and points of view to contribute in a diverse working environment

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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