



Indonesian Intern Teachers in Thailand Classrooms: A Case Study on English Teaching

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-24 Revised: 2026-05-30 Accepted: 2026-06-17 Keywords: <i>Teaching Challenges and strategies, Intern Teachers, Language Barrier, Thailand, Cross-Cultural</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10295 Corresponding Author: Siti Nurhafidza Sitinurhafidza29@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah PROF. DR. HAMKA	<i>This study explores the teaching challenges faced by Indonesian intern teachers during their teaching practicum in Thailand classrooms. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with six participants who had completed an international teaching internship program. The findings reveal that language barriers are the most dominant challenge, affecting classroom communication and instructional delivery. In addition, cultural differences, low student motivation, and limited learning media also influence the teaching process. To overcome these challenges, participants applied various strategies such as using simple English, body language, interactive methods like games, and collaboration with local teachers. The study highlights the importance of pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural adaptation in cross-cultural teaching contexts. These findings contribute to a better understanding of international teaching experiences and provide practical insights for preparing future intern teachers.</i>

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, the world of education is becoming increasingly interconnected, opening up opportunities for prospective teachers to participate in international teaching practicum programs. These programs provide valuable experiences that enable prospective teachers to develop pedagogical competencies, intercultural awareness, and professional readiness through direct engagement in various educational settings (Rustandi et al., 2025). However, teaching in an international context involves more than simply delivering lesson content, as teachers are also required to adapt to diverse languages, cultures, and educational systems.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teaching in cross-cultural classrooms presents various challenges. One of the most frequently reported challenges is the language barrier between teachers and students, which often hinders classroom communication and the effectiveness of instruction. Previous studies indicate that Indonesian pre-service teachers in Thailand frequently face difficulties communicating with students due to students' limited English proficiency and teachers' limited proficiency in Thai (Haryadi, 2024; Turbinita et al., 2023). In addition to language barriers, cultural differences in classroom norms, student behavior, and school systems also require teachers to adapt their teaching approaches and classroom management strategies (Wijirahayu, 2025).

These challenges often prompt teachers to develop adaptive strategies to maintain effective teaching practices. Previous studies have identified several strategies used by student teachers, including simplifying language, using nonverbal communication, integrating learning media, and collaborating with local teachers (Kusuma et al., 2025; Ilyin et al., 2025). These strategies reflect the importance of pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural adaptation in the context of international teaching.

Although previous studies have examined teaching challenges in international practicum programs, most of these studies have primarily focused on identifying challenges rather than exploring how student teachers adapt and respond to these challenges in real classroom situations. Furthermore, few studies have examined how linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical adaptations interact in shaping teaching experiences through an in-depth qualitative perspective.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the teaching challenges faced by Indonesian student teachers in Thai classrooms and to examine the strategies they use to address these challenges. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural teaching adaptation and provides practical insights for improving international teacher education programs.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the teaching challenges and adaptation strategies experienced by Indonesian intern teachers in Thailand classrooms. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' real experiences in specific cross-cultural teaching contexts.

The participants of this study consisted of six Indonesian intern teachers who had completed an international teaching practicum program in Thailand. They were selected through purposive sampling because they had direct experience teaching English in Thai classrooms. The participants consisted of five female and one male intern teachers who taught at elementary and secondary school levels in Thailand for approximately three to four months. Their teaching experiences provided relevant information related to classroom challenges and adaptation strategies in international teaching settings.

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews to obtain detailed information about the participants' teaching experiences during their international teaching practicum program in Thailand. Each interview lasted approximately 7–10 minutes and was conducted after the participants had completed their teaching practicum program. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian so that the participants could describe their experiences more comfortably and clearly. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions focused on the participants' teaching experiences, challenges, classroom adaptation, and teaching strategies in Thai classrooms. The interview questions included:

1. What was your experience like during your teaching internship in Thailand, and what challenges did you face while teaching in a Thai classroom?
2. What was the most difficult challenge for you during the teaching process? Why?
3. How did the language barrier affect your communication with students in the classroom?
4. How did cultural differences in Thai schools influence your teaching style?
5. How did you adapt your teaching methods or strategies to suit students' needs in Thailand?
6. What strategies did you use to overcome language and communication barriers in the classroom?
7. How did you manage the classroom in a different cultural environment?
8. What was the most valuable lesson or experience you gained from teaching in Thailand?

These questions were designed to explore participants' lived experiences and identify major themes related to teaching challenges and adaptation strategies in cross-cultural classroom settings.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. During the data reduction phase, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and conducted initial coding by identifying key statements related to teaching challenges and adaptation experiences. These codes were then grouped into broader categories such as language barriers, cultural differences, student motivation, limitations of learning resources, and teaching strategies. These categories were then further developed into main themes representing the participants' experiences.

In the data presentation stage, the data were organized into thematic descriptions and tables to identify patterns among the participants. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the findings based on the research objectives and relevant literature.

3. Result

Based on interviews with six Indonesian intern teachers who completed their teaching practicum in Thailand, the findings revealed that participants experienced several challenges in cross-cultural teaching contexts. These challenges included language barriers, cultural differences, low student motivation, and limited instructional resources. Among these challenges, language barriers emerged as the most dominant issue because all participants reported difficulties in communicating with students during classroom instruction.

Language barriers became the primary challenge because most students had limited English proficiency, while the participants also had limited ability to communicate in Thai. This situation created difficulties in explaining materials, giving instructions, and maintaining classroom interaction. Participant 1 explained, "The most difficult challenge for me is communicating with the students because they are not able to use English." Similarly, Participant 4 stated, "The most challenging part of the teaching process is the language barrier. The difference in language makes my communication with students limited." These findings indicate that communication plays a central role in classroom instruction. When teachers and students do not share a common language, teaching effectiveness becomes significantly limited.

Table 1. Teaching Challenges Experienced by Participants

Challenges	Participants	Summary of Findings
Language barriers	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	Communication difficulties due to limited English and Thai proficiency
Cultural differences	P1, P3, P4	Differences in school systems, classroom norms, and student behavior
Low student motivation	P3, P5	Students showed low participation and learning interest
Limited resources	P6	Lack of instructional media and teaching facilities

In addition to language barriers, participants also faced cultural differences in Thai classrooms. Several participants explained that Thai schools relied more heavily on textbooks compared to Indonesian schools, which required them to adjust their teaching approaches. Differences in classroom behavior and school culture also required participants to adapt their classroom management strategies.

Another challenge involved students’ low motivation to learn. Some participants reported that students showed limited participation during classroom activities, which required teachers to create more engaging learning environments. Additionally, one participant experienced limited instructional resources, which required greater creativity in delivering learning materials.

To respond to these challenges, participants implemented various adaptive teaching strategies. They simplified classroom communication by using simple English and body language, applied games and interactive activities, utilized instructional media, and used Google Translate to support communication. Participant 5 stated, “I applied games and fun activities because students tend to enjoy learning through play and direct interaction.” Participant 2 also explained, “I use Google Translate, and sometimes students who understand Malay help me communicate.” These findings show that participants actively adapted their teaching practices based on classroom conditions and students’ needs.

Table 2. Adaptation Strategies Used by Participants

Strategies	Participants	Summary of Findings
Simple English and body language	P1, P4	Helped students understand classroom instructions
Interactive activities	P1, P5, P6	Increased student motivation and engagement
Google Translate	P2	Helped overcome communication barriers
Instructional media	P3, P4	Supported explanation of learning materials

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teaching in Thailand required Indonesian intern teachers to adapt linguistically, culturally, and pedagogically. While language barriers remained the most dominant challenge, participants responded by applying flexible and creative strategies to maintain effective classroom instruction.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teaching in cross-cultural classrooms requires not only pedagogical competence but also linguistic and intercultural adaptability. Among the various challenges identified, language barriers emerged as the primary issue faced by prospective teachers from Indonesia in Thailand. This is because most students have limited English proficiency, while the participants also have limited ability to communicate in Thai. Consequently, classroom interactions become less effective, and teachers often struggle to explain the material and ensure student understanding. These findings support previous research identifying language differences as a major challenge in the context of international teaching practice (Haryadi, 2024; Turbinita et al., 2023).

In addition to linguistic challenges, cultural differences also influence the participants' teaching experiences. Findings indicate differences in classroom norms, student behavior, and teaching systems between Indonesia and Thailand. For example, participants reported that schools in Thailand rely more on textbooks, while schools in Indonesia tend to emphasize structured lesson planning. These differences require participants to adapt their teaching approaches and classroom management strategies. These findings highlight that successful teaching in an

international context requires intercultural competence and flexibility in responding to different educational environments (Wijirahayu, 2025).

Another challenge identified in this study was low student motivation and limited learning resources. Some participants reported difficulties in encouraging student participation, while others faced obstacles related to limited teaching materials. These findings indicate that classroom challenges are multidimensional and involve not only communication barriers but also motivational and institutional factors that affect teaching effectiveness.

To address these challenges, participants demonstrated various adaptive strategies. They simplified the language used in class, employed body language, incorporated games and interactive activities, utilized teaching media, and relied on digital tools such as Google Translate. These strategies reflect teachers' ability to adapt pedagogically and creatively based on classroom needs. These findings support Richards and Rodgers' (2014) perspective that effective teaching requires flexibility in selecting teaching approaches based on contextual demands.

This study makes a theoretical contribution by highlighting adaptation as a multidimensional process that involves linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical aspects in the context of international teaching. In practical terms, the findings of this study suggest that teacher education institutions should better prepare prospective teachers for international fieldwork programs by providing language preparation, cross-cultural training, and adaptive teaching strategies for diverse classrooms.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Indonesian intern teachers in Thailand classrooms encounter various challenges in the teaching process, particularly in cross-cultural settings. Among these, language barriers emerge as the most significant difficulty, as they limit effective communication between teachers and students and influence the delivery of instructional content. In addition, differences in school culture, student learning motivation, and limited learning resources also contribute to the complexity of teaching in this context.

Despite these challenges, the findings show that Indonesian intern teachers are able to adapt by developing various practical and flexible teaching strategies. These include the use of simple language, body language, interactive methods such as games and icebreakers, as well as collaboration with local teachers. Such strategies demonstrate that teaching effectiveness in a cross-cultural environment does not rely solely on language proficiency, but also on teachers' creativity, adaptability, and responsiveness to classroom conditions.

Furthermore, this study highlights that the teaching practicum abroad serves as an important learning experience for pre-service teachers. It not only enhances their pedagogical skills, but also strengthens their intercultural awareness and professional readiness to teach in diverse educational environments.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Indonesian intern teachers experience and respond to teaching challenges in Thailand. It also provides practical insights for teacher education programs to better prepare prospective teachers for international teaching contexts, particularly in terms of linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural readiness.

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