Exploring Lived Narratives: Indonesian SEA Teacher Awardees' English Teaching Challenges in the Philippines

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  	This study investigates the experiences of Indonesian pre-service teachers majoring in English education who participated in the SEA Teacher program, specifically focusing on those assigned to teach English in the Philippines. The primary objective was to identify the challenges these Indonesian SEA Teacher awardees encountered and the strategies they employed to mitigate these challenges, considering the differing statuses of English in Indonesia (as an EFL context) and the Philippines (as an ESL context). The research utilized a g inquiry approach, complemented by semi-structured interviews, to gather qualitative data. The participants comprised four pre-service teachers who successfully completed the SEA Teacher international teaching practice program in 2023, which spanned one month. The findings reveal several challenges faced by the participants, including issues related to self-confidence, language barriers, the educational system, and the availability of facilities. The study underscores the importance of thorough preparation, adaptability, and mentor support in overcoming these obstacles and enhancing teaching practices.

I. Introduction

In English language education programs, students are systematically prepared to become English teachers within their home countries and abroad through a series of teaching practice activities or pre-service teacher training. Pre-service teacher training is a fundamental component of teacher education curricula, as it equips student-teachers with the necessary skills and competencies to become effective educators [1]. However, in many Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language, most English teachers receive their training domestically [2]. This limited exposure to native English-speaking environments may affect their language proficiency, cultural understanding, and ability to teach the practical use of the English language effectively.
Simultaneously, the global evolution of English as a communication medium has led to a substantial increase in the number of English learners worldwide, thereby heightening the demand for English teachers in EFL contexts [2]. This trend highlights significant opportunities for teaching English abroad, including for Indonesian educators. According to [3], the fact that Indonesian non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) are employed to teach English in Thailand indicates that Indonesian teachers possess internationally recognized qualifications. This is particularly noteworthy given the prevailing belief that Native English Teachers (NETs) are often perceived as superior to Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs) in terms of fluency, motivational influence, and classroom dynamics [4]. Consequently, Asian universities have initiated cross-cultural immersion programs to

internationalize NNESTs [2]. One such international teaching practice initiative in Asia is the SEA Teacher program.

The SEA Teacher Program, also known as the "Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia," is an internship initiative managed by SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization). As [5] noted, the program aims to enhance teaching skills, motivate student-teachers, and improve their language proficiency, ultimately providing them with diverse experiences regarding various teaching environments and conditions. The program involves students majoring in mathematics, science, English, and early childhood education from eleven SEAMEO member countries [6]. This research examines explicitly Indonesian participants majoring in English education who were assigned to teach English in the Philippines.

English language instruction in the Philippines is conducted within a second language (ESL) context, where English serves as both an official language and a medium of instruction in schools [7]. Conversely, in Indonesia, English is taught within a foreign language (EFL) context [8]. In the Philippines, English instruction begins in the first year of elementary school, and the language is used as the medium of instruction in mathematics, science, and other subjects at both primary and secondary levels, as well as across all disciplines in tertiary institutions [9]. In contrast, English education in Indonesia typically commences at the secondary level [10]. This contrast highlights the differing roles and statuses of the English language in the educational systems of Indonesia and the Philippines, distinguishing between EFL and ESL contexts.

Given the deployment of Indonesian pre-service teachers to the Philippines, where the two countries exhibit significant differences in the status and use of English, Indonesian SEA Teacher awardees may encounter various challenges in teaching English. This research explores these potential challenges and the strategies employed to mitigate them.

A. SEA Teacher Program

The SEA Teacher Program is also known as the "Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia". SEAMEO (Southeast et al. of Education Organization) oversees this internship program. SEAMEO is a regional intergovernmental organization formed in 1965 among the governments of Southeast Asian countries, aiming to foster regional collaboration in education, science, and culture within the region [6]. Currently, SEAMEO comprises 11-member countries, six associate members, and eight affiliate members. The 11-member countries of SEAMEO are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam [6]. As member countries, they actively take part in this SEA Teacher program. One of the countries that is actively collaborating with Indonesia in this program is the Philippines.

SEA Teacher Program fosters invaluable teaching experiences for pre-service student teachers from Southeast Asian universities. The mission of this program is to give aspiring teachers the chance to practice their expertise in classrooms across several regional countries [6]. Additionally, the purposes of the SEA Teacher program are to improve teaching skills, motivate student-teachers, and improve speaking skills, with the final goal of assisting student-teachers in gaining diverse experiences about the situations and teaching conditions [5].

Through file selection and interviews, university students majoring in math, science, English, and preschool education can join this program. The duration of this program is one month. The awardees will take on different tasks and duties each week for a month. They can observe, assist in the classroom, conduct their lessons, and reflect on their progress. The partnering universities will provide dedicated mentors throughout the program, delivering assistance and support to guarantee each student a beneficial and rewarding experience [6].

In summary, this program proves highly beneficial for aspiring educators to acquire teaching experience overseas, particularly given the growing opportunities in international teaching. For Indonesian students specializing in English language education, it offers valuable perspectives and experiences in the field of ESL.

B.   ELT in Indonesia

In Indonesia, English Language Teaching (ELT) occurs within environments where English is considered a foreign language (EFL). [8] highlighted that while English is widely spoken and used, it remains a foreign language in Indonesia. The foreign language status means that English is not used in daily communication among Indonesians, limiting exposure and practical usage outside the classroom. This influences how English is integrated into the educational system.

The Indonesian education curriculum has experienced many changes and developments influenced by social, cultural, political, economic, and other considerations. In the recent development of ELT in Indonesia, English has been taught in elementary school only as an elective subject since implementing the 1994 Curriculum [11]. In addition, English lessons in primary schools were removed, and English lessons in middle and high school were reduced in the 2013 curriculum [10]. This increasingly shows the lack of attention to English language learning in Indonesia.

In the context of classroom instruction, a bilingual approach is commonly adopted. Teachers in Indonesia teach English and Indonesian [12]. Teachers often switch between English and Indonesian to facilitate students' understanding. This flexibility also eases the teacher when explaining a complex concept or difficult point. However, this approach can lead to students' lack of exposure to the English language, which may affect their proficiency and confidence.

Students' lack of exposure to English also leads to their lack of vocabulary. It makes students feel insecure about speaking English, affecting their learning process [13]. Students' limited vocabulary became a significant challenge when teaching English in Indonesia [14]. This hampers their ability to participate in classroom activities and affects their overall language development and fluency.

Another challenge of teaching English in Indonesia is lacking supporting facilities and resources. [14] mentioned that the available facilities in the school, including LCD projectors and up-to-date textbooks, did not support the English teaching and learning processes. Textbooks are essential in teaching any subject, including English, as a central tool for teachers and students by providing well-structured texts and exercises [15]. This makes teachers have to be more creative in presenting learning activities with these various limitations.

In conclusion, English language teaching in Indonesia faces several significant challenges due to its status as a foreign language, which limits daily usage and exposure. Using a bilingual approach in classrooms helps students' understanding but may reduce English proficiency and confidence. Students' lack of exposure to English and limited educational resources exacerbate these difficulties. Addressing this problem requires better resources, innovative teaching methods, and increased opportunities for exposure to English.

C.   ELT in the Philippines

English language teaching in the Philippines operates within the context of English as a Second Language (ESL). Different from other Southeast Asian countries, with the American colonial experience, English has been the MOI or medium of instruction in formal education at various levels of education in the Philippines [16] and for all subjects in school except the Filipino Language [17]. As a result, Filipino students are already familiar with the use of English [18]. In this language context, English plays a significant role in teaching and learning in the Philippines.

Even though English in the Philippines is used as a medium of communication and is used formally, the Philippines government pays high attention to English language teaching in schools. To fully develop and enhance the language competencies of Filipino students, the Philippines government is more focused on improving English teaching and learning to achieve 21st-century skills in oral and written communication. This is because students spend many years studying English in school, yet they often struggle to communicate effectively and efficiently in the language [17]. Motivation, self-confidence, and a limited vocabulary are some of the issues that ESL students confront [19]. These also become challenges for the teacher as the initiator. According to [20], teachers face challenges such as the lack of resources that can be used in teaching, the learning environment such as the unconducive classroom and lack of internet, and the lack of professional development training for teachers.

The challenges of teaching English in the Philippines are also faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers participating in programs like the SEA Teacher program, especially with the differences in

the English language background of the two countries. [5] identify the English language barrier as a significant challenge affecting communication and instructional effectiveness. The English barrier can be caused by a lack of vocabulary, a lack of grammar, differences in phonology (accent and pronunciation), English exposure, and English-speaking skills [21], [22]. It often leads to misunderstanding in the teachers and student's communication.

Moreover, the transition to teaching in the Philippines presents challenges for international teachers. [23] found that participants in international teaching programs express a lack of confidence in managing classrooms and interacting with students. The students in the Philippines were highly proficient in English, particularly in speaking, which made the SEA Teacher awardees feel insecure and lose confidence in teaching English to them [24]. Understanding cultural differences was also a big challenge and has affected the teaching and learning process [12]. Teaching in the Philippines presents challenges for international teachers, who often struggle with self-confidence and cultural differences.

Furthermore, the educational system in the Philippines presents additional challenges for Indonesian pre-service teachers. found that the difficulties came to the planning of lessons and writing an appropriate lesson plan because it is very detailed compared to Indonesia. Consequently, they need to seek assistance from other pre-service teachers to become familiar with the lesson plan there [24]. This highlights the importance of understanding and adapting to the specific educational context in the Philippines for effective ELT.

In conclusion, English language teaching in the Philippines faces challenges, especially for Indonesian pre-service teachers in programs like SEA Teacher. These may be related to the differences in English language backgrounds, English barriers, and the educational system. International teachers may also struggle with self-confidence and cultural differences. Overcoming these challenges may require a deep understanding and adaptation to the specific educational context in the Philippines.

II. Method

This study employed a narrative inquiry research design, as defined by [25], to explore and interpret the stories and experiences of individuals. The research aimed to uncover the challenges faced by Indonesian SEA Teacher awardees while teaching English in the Philippines and the strategies used to alleviate the challenges. Participants included four pre-service English teachers who participated in the SEA Teacher program in 2023, where they taught at different schools in the Philippines for one month. To maintain their privacy, pseudonyms—Rio, Gani, Fira, and Lina—were used. Each participant had varied backgrounds in teaching experience; Gani had prior international teaching experience, while Rio, Fira, and Lina had only taught in Indonesia, with Lina having lived abroad and Rio having experience interacting with foreigners in an international class. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews in a natural setting to facilitate a conversational atmosphere. The interviews consisted of eight main questions adapted from previous studies written by [12] and [23], with follow-up questions used to delve deeper into the participants' responses. The data obtained from the interviews were then processed using thematic analysis. This involved transcribing the interviews, identifying key sentences and points, assigning sub-themes, and grouping these sub-themes to develop broader themes. The resulting patterns were then analyzed within the narrative inquiry framework to provide insights into the participants' experiences.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Self Confidence

The first challenge the participants faced was related to their self-confidence, which included two key areas: their confidence in teaching abilities and English language proficiency. Confidence in teaching abilities refers to how secure and capable the participants feel in delivering lessons, managing classrooms, and conveying knowledge to their students. On the other hand, confidence in English language proficiency involves their self-assurance in using English accurately and fluently,

especially when teaching in an environment where English is more commonly spoken or where students may have a higher level of proficiency.

"...lack of professionalism, because my lack of experience in teaching made me a little less confident" -Rio

Rio said that lack of professionalism due to lack of experience in teaching made him less confident when teaching English in the Philippines. This was the first time he had taught English abroad.

"At first, I felt insecure when I had to teach English to Filipino students." -Lina.

Another participant, Lina, also felt less confident. She felt insecure when she had to teach English to Filipino students. [23] also found that when a pre-service teacher joined an international teaching practice, they were not confident to become a good English teacher.

"...because in the Philippines, English is used as a second language, so they are accustomed to using English, while for me, English is a foreign language, so I am afraid that their English proficiency might be better than mine as their teacher." -Gani

At the same time, the perception in the Philippines about English as a second language (ESL) that their English is better than Indonesians who speak English as a foreign language (EFL) also affects the participants' self-confidence. This was like what Gani felt when teaching English in the Philippines. This aligns with [24] that the SEA Teacher awardees feel insecure and lose confidence in teaching English to Filipino students because they are highly proficient in English, mainly speaking.

"So, before class, I usually practice and prepare one day before..." -Gani.

Because of that, they always prepare well before teaching, such as practising, making learning media, and reading the lesson plan.

To conclude, the lack of experience in teaching and the perception that Filipino students' English proficiency is better than that of Indonesians who speak English as a foreign language (EFL) affect the participants' self-confidence when teaching English in the Philippines.

B. English Barrier

One of the challenges identified by the participants was the English barrier. It often leads to misunderstandings between the participants and their Filipino students. [5] also identified the English language barrier as a significant challenge faced by SEA Teacher awardees teaching abroad, affecting communication and instructional effectiveness.

The English barrier can be caused by English exposure, differences in phonology (accent and pronunciation), and lack of vocabulary [21], [22]. In terms of English exposure, teachers in Indonesia use both English and Indonesian [12].

"The difficulty is because English is not my language and I have to teach it fully with that language. If we teach in Indonesia, we can mix using Indonesian or Javanese, sometimes what I want to convey isn't communicated well because I do not know how to say it in English quickly." -Gani.

Gani felt that teaching English in a foreign context requires a high level of proficiency and the ability to explain complex concepts in English. Unlike in Indonesia, where teachers can switch to Indonesian or Javanese to clarify difficult points, this flexibility was not available when they taught in the Philippines. This is because, in the Philippines, English is considered a second language (ESL) and is used as the primary medium of instruction for all subjects except the Filipino Language [17].

"...students' accent and pronunciation sometimes make me unable to understand… Many students have some terms they cannot express using English, so I must first translate it using Google Translate." -Lina.

Lina also found Filipino students' accents and pronunciation when speaking English were challenging. The students' accents and pronunciation often lead to misunderstandings in teacher communication [5]. Lina said that some Filipino pronunciations of English words made the participants unable to understand their students, such as 'blog', they say 'black', 'education', they say 'education' and 'presentation' become 'presentation'. Students' lack of vocabulary also became a challenge during teaching activities in the Philippines. This makes students unable to express what they want to say in English. Similarly, students' limited vocabulary is a significant challenge when teaching English in Indonesia [14]. This challenge persists despite English being taught as a second language (ESL) in the Philippines and as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia.

In conclusion, students' accents and pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, and using English only became challenges for the participants when teaching English in the Philippines. As a result, the participants used translator applications such as Google Translate to alleviate the challenges.

C. Educational System

The next challenge is related to the educational system. The participants stated that there are differences in the educational system between the Philippines and Indonesia, particularly regarding the lesson plan structure. When implementing this program, the participants must make a lesson plan for each learning activity to use the Filipino lesson plan format.

"...compiling the material because the lesson plans are different. In the Philippines, the lesson plans are super detailed…" -Lina

"...the lesson plan is different from what I have studied in class, we have to look for material and examples too, everything has to be arranged." - Gani.

Lina and Gani said that the lesson plan is very detailed and different from what they have learned in Indonesia. [12] also found that a detailed lesson plan became challenging for Indonesian pre-service teachers teaching English overseas.

In this case, the role of mentors is quite essential. The partnering universities provided dedicated mentors throughout the program, aiding and supporting to guarantee each participant a beneficial and rewarding experience [6]. The participants actively posed inquiries to alleviate this challenge and sought guidance when preparing lesson plans.

It can be concluded that the different lesson plans have become one of the challenges for the SEA Teacher awardees when teaching English in the Philippines, particularly regarding the detailed lesson plan structure.

D. Facilities

School facilities are essential in supporting learning activities in the classroom. The facilities in their placement school became one of the challenges when they taught English during the SEA Teacher program. It was a lack of internet connection and an absence of textbooks, which are essential in teaching any subject, including English. They serve as a central tool for teachers and students by providing well-structured texts and exercises [15].

"...because not all classes can be connected to the internet at my placement school, so we have to go offline. It is prepared before learning. So we cannot spontaneously open YouTube or Google" -Gani.

"the internet is also lacking; not everyone has an internet package, and if everyone uses the wifi, it will be slow, so I do not use online learning media" -Fira.

As Gani and Fira mention above, their placement schools lack internet connection, which affects how they create learning activities. They always prepared offline activities.

"They do not have textbooks or student handbooks. So, every time I teach, I have to make an interesting ppt..." -Lina

On the other hand, Lina was surprised because, in her placement school, they did not have textbooks or student handbooks, so the teachers had to make a PowerPoint presentation every time they taught. This challenge is also found in Indonesia, as [14] mentioned, where the available school facilities, such as LCDs and books, do not support the English teaching and learning process. It influenced how participants created the lesson plans and the learning activities in the classroom. Due to the lack of internet connection, they had to prepare all offline learning media and activities, such as offline PPTs, games, and downloaded videos. Because there is no textbook for students, the participants had to make an attractive PPT for each lesson.

E.   Cultural Differences

Understanding cultural differences is challenging and has affected teaching and learning [12]. Interestingly, cultural differences did not pose a significant challenge for the participants when they taught English during the SEA Teacher program.

"...their culture is not much different from Indonesia." -Rio

"It did not affect the teaching process because traditions and culture are very similar, so I did not experience culture shock." -Lina

They found that the cultural context in the Philippines was similar to Indonesia, which minimised potential culture shock.

"...what surprised me is that they dress freely. There are no uniforms, and they can style their hair however they want, wear accessories, and some even have tattoos. However, it does not affect the classroom..." -Gani.

Gani found a unique aspect they had not encountered in Indonesia: the absence of uniforms and the freedom to express themselves with accessories, including tattoos and dyed hair. However, she reported that these differences did not affect the teaching process.

IV. Conclusion

Through a narrative inquiry and thematic analysis of the participants' experiences, this study identified several challenges Indonesian pre-service teachers face while teaching in the Philippines. The analysis revealed five key themes: self-confidence, language barriers, the educational system, facilities, and cultural differences. Participants reported self-confidence issues related to their teaching abilities and English proficiency, often heightened by the perception that Filipino students had superior English skills. They also encountered challenges with language barriers, particularly regarding the use of English and understanding student accents. Additionally, adapting to the Philippines' detailed lesson planning requirements and managing limited educational facilities posed significant difficulties. Interestingly, cultural differences were deemed minor, as participants observed many similarities between the two countries. To address these challenges, participants employed various strategies. They used translator applications to overcome language barriers and facilitate effective student communication. Additionally, they meticulously prepared lesson plans and instructional materials to enhance their self-confidence and better manage classroom activities.

Engaging actively with mentors was also crucial, as participants sought guidance and advice to navigate the educational system and optimize available facilities.

Acknowledgment

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