



Feeling like different persons: Becoming English teachers through overseas teaching internships

ABSTRACT - This study examines the professional identity development of Indonesian pre-service English teachers during a short-term international teaching internship in Southern Thailand, specifically exploring how participants perceived themselves as becoming "different persons" through this intercultural experience. Although existing research has established the role of intercultural encounters in shaping teacher identity, limited attention has been directed toward understanding how brief yet intensive overseas teaching placements contribute to emerging professional identities through processes of reflective meaning-making. Employing a collaborative narrative inquiry approach, the study analyzed written reflective narratives and semi-structured interview data collected from six Indonesian pre-service English teachers. The analysis focused on how professional identity construction unfolded through participants' everyday intercultural classroom experiences. The findings reveal that participants experienced substantial shifts in professional self-understanding, evidenced by expanded intercultural awareness, negotiated emotional and pedagogical challenges, and the development of adaptive teaching practices in response to unfamiliar classroom norms, multilingual interactions, and local school expectations. Critically, identity development did not result from intercultural exposure alone but emerged through sustained, reflective engagement with intercultural encounters throughout the internship period. This study contributes to the field of English language teacher education by highlighting the pedagogical and affective value of short-term international teaching internships and underscoring the necessity of structured intercultural preparation, guided reflection, and robust institutional support in fostering pre-service teachers' professional learning.

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1. Introduction

“I thought teaching abroad would make me feel proud, but on my first day in the Thai classroom, I suddenly felt very small. The students did not understand my English, I did not understand their Thai, and for a moment, I was unsure of who I was as a teacher.”
(Hana, Female, University B)

Southern Thailand represents a particularly compelling context for examining intercultural teacher development due to its linguistic diversity, multilingual classroom practices, and complex sociocultural dynamics shaped by religious plurality and minority-majority relations. For visiting pre-service teachers, this environment creates intensified intercultural encounters that require rapid negotiation of language, identity, and pedagogical authority, making it a rich site for investigating how professional meaning is constructed through lived teaching experiences.

Short-term international teaching internships are increasingly promoted in teacher education as transformative experiences. A growing body of research highlights their potential to enhance intercultural competences and professional identity development (Jackson, 2018; Huang et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2024). However, recent studies have challenged the assumption that international mobility automatically leads to professional confidence or intercultural growth. Instead, research suggests that such experiences often begin with uncertainty, emotional discomfort, and pedagogical dissonance, which may prompt deeper reflective engagement with language, culture, and professional identity (Chen & McConachy, 2022; Banegas, 2023; Torres-Rocha, 2023).

For Indonesian pre-service English teachers participating in short-term teaching internships in Southern Thailand, intercultural encounters are shaped by linguistic asymmetry, unfamiliar classroom norms, and differing sociocultural expectations. These challenges disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about English as a medium of instruction and teachers' pedagogical authority, leading to feelings of vulnerability and professional self-doubt (Nghia & Tai, 2017; Liu, Mearns, & Admiraal, 2023). Research suggests that such emotionally challenging moments can become productive spaces for professional learning when teachers engage in sustained reflection and meaning-making (Fang et al., 2024; Syahri et al., 2025). Consequently, this context provides a particularly revealing site for examining how teachers interpret intercultural challenges and reassess their professional assumptions.

Southern Thailand presents a complex intercultural setting in which teacher identity negotiations become particularly salient. Characterized by linguistic diversity and religious plurality, classroom communication in this region predominantly involves Thai and Patani Malay, while English is rarely used in everyday interactions (Burarungrot & Premsrirat, 2021). This context often undermines pre-service teachers' confidence in using English as a legitimate instructional language and intensifies feelings of professional inadequacy. Recent studies indicate that these encounters can trigger critical reflection on communication, empathy, and professional identity when teachers interpret them through reflective and narrative practices (Torres-Rocha, 2023; Fang et al., 2024). Thus, this region offers a distinctive lens for examining how intercultural tensions shape teachers' developing professional identities.

Addressing this gap, the present study employs a collaborative narrative inquiry approach to explore how Indonesian pre-service English teachers interpret and negotiate their intercultural experiences during a short-term teaching internship in Southern Thailand. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does participation in a short-term international teaching internship influence the intercultural awareness and professional identity development of Indonesian pre-service English teachers? By foregrounding teachers' narratives, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on intercultural communicative competence and teacher identity while offering practical insights for the design of reflective and ethically grounded international teaching internship programs.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Intercultural teaching and English teacher identity*

Contemporary research in English Language Teaching (ELT) increasingly conceptualizes language as a socially situated practice embedded within cultural, ideological, and political contexts rather than as a neutral system of grammar and vocabulary (Baker, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). From this perspective, teaching English involves not only linguistic instruction but also engagement with diversity, negotiation of meaning, and sensitivity to sociocultural differences in communication.

In multilingual educational contexts, English often functions as a flexible communicative resource shaped by local practices rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms. Research informed by English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Global Englishes highlights intelligibility, adaptability, and intercultural awareness in meaning-making processes (Canagarajah, 2012; Fang et al., 2024). This perspective challenges deficit views of non-native English teachers and foregrounds the importance of contextualized language use in intercultural classrooms.

The Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework has been influential in integrating language and culture in ELT. Byram's (1997) model emphasizes attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness as key components of intercultural competence. However, recent studies have criticized traditional ICC models for insufficiently addressing issues of power, identity, and inequality in intercultural communication, particularly in non-Western and multilingual contexts (Kubota, 2016; Chen & McConachy, 2022). Consequently, scholars argue for reflective and critical approaches to intercultural learning that foreground teachers' lived experiences and identity negotiations.

Teacher identity is widely understood as a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by emotions, beliefs, sociocultural positioning, and lived experiences rather than a fixed professional attribute (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Hiratsuka, 2022; Peng & Xiong, 2021). Research on teacher professional learning similarly conceptualizes identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously negotiated through sociocultural interaction and reflective interpretation of experience (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Hiratsuka, 2022; Banegas, 2023). Darvin and Norton's (2015) identity framework further highlights how access to symbolic, linguistic, and material resources shapes teachers' agency and legitimacy within specific contexts. In intercultural teaching settings, challenges related to linguistic authority and

pedagogical confidence may initially generate vulnerability; however, reflective engagement with such challenges can foster professional growth and heightened intercultural sensitivity (Civitillo et al., 2019; Chen & McConachy, 2022; Banegas, 2023). These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant for examining how pre-service teachers navigate linguistic and cultural complexity during international teaching placements.

2.2. *Short-term international teaching internships and intercultural learning*

International teaching internships are frequently promoted in teacher education as opportunities to enhance intercultural competence and professional confidence. Nevertheless, empirical research suggests that international mobility alone does not automatically result in meaningful intercultural learning (Jackson, 2018; Huang et al., 2023). Instead, learning emerges through teachers' interpretation and negotiation of linguistic, pedagogical, and emotional challenges encountered in unfamiliar contexts.

Compared to long-term study abroad programs, short-term international teaching internships are characterized by time constraints, emotional intensity, and immediate pedagogical responsibilities. These conditions require pre-service teachers to rapidly adapt to new institutional and sociocultural environments (Turbinita et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2024). Studies conducted in Southeast Asian contexts indicate that language barriers and differing classroom norms may undermine teachers' confidence and perceptions of professional competence (Asfihana & Putri, 2025; Maesaro & Wijirahayu, 2025).

While short-term placements share structural similarities with longer international programs, their limited duration may shape learning processes in qualitatively distinct ways. Rather than allowing gradual social integration, short-term internships often compress emotional, pedagogical, and intercultural demands into an intensified timeframe, accelerating moments of uncertainty, reflexivity, and identity negotiation. This experiential intensity may foster heightened self-awareness and critical reflection, yet it may also limit opportunities for deeper cultural immersion and sustained relational engagement. In contrast, longer-term programs may enable progressive adaptation, stabilization of professional confidence, and more enduring identity consolidation. This comparison suggests that duration is not merely a logistical variable but a theoretically significant dimension in understanding how intercultural learning and professional identity development unfold across time-bound educational mobility experiences.

At the same time, teaching in multilingual classrooms can encourage teachers to reconceptualize English as a negotiated intercultural resource rather than a fixed instructional medium. Such experiences have been shown to challenge deficit perspectives on learners and promote greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly when teachers engage in reflective examination of classroom interactions (Fang et al., 2024; Syahri et al., 2025). However, research examining how these learning processes are experienced and interpreted during short-term international teaching internships remains limited.

2.3. *Narrative inquiry in intercultural teacher education*

Narrative inquiry has been widely employed to explore how teachers make sense of intercultural experiences and negotiate professional identities through reflection on moments of confusion, misunderstanding, and emotional tension (Barkhuizen, 2016; McConachy, 2018; Fang et al., 2024). Narrative inquiry offers a methodological and theoretical lens for understanding teacher identity development as a process of meaning-making derived from lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). In teacher education research, narratives are not merely representations of experience but sites where identity is constructed, negotiated, and reinterpreted through reflective storytelling.

Recent studies employing narrative approaches demonstrate their effectiveness in capturing the emotional and relational dimensions of intercultural teaching experiences that are often overlooked in survey-based research (Barkhuizen, 2016; Fang et al., 2024). Through storytelling and shared reflection, teachers articulate moments of uncertainty, tension, and transformation, allowing researchers to explore how professional identities evolve over time.

Despite growing interest in narrative inquiry within intercultural teacher education, its application in examining short-term international teaching internships—particularly through collaborative narrative approaches—remains underexplored. Most existing studies focus on individual narratives or long-term programs, leaving limited understanding of how short-term, intensive intercultural experiences contribute to professional identity development through shared reflection and meaning-making, especially in Southeast Asian contexts characterized by multilingualism and collaborative reflective practices (Nimasari et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025), religious diversity, and linguistic power asymmetries (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025).

Within this broader regional context, intercultural encounters in Southern Thailand are further shaped by the region's distinctive sociopolitical and religious landscape, where Muslim communities occupy a minority position within a predominantly Buddhist national context. For Indonesian Muslim pre-service teachers, this setting introduces a unique form of intercultural engagement that involves both familiarity and difference, as shared religious identity intersects with linguistic, cultural, and institutional variation. Such dynamics make Southern Thailand a particularly significant site for examining how professional identity and intercultural awareness develop through complex negotiations of similarity, difference, and positionality.

Taken together, the literature reviewed above positions intercultural teaching, short-term internships, and narrative meaning-making as interconnected dimensions of teacher development. Intercultural teaching highlights the sociocultural and ideological nature of language practice; short-term international internships provide the experiential context in which such complexities are encountered; and narrative inquiry offers an analytical lens for interpreting how teachers construct professional meaning from those experiences. Integrating these perspectives, the present study adopts a narrative-informed analytical framework to examine how pre-service teachers interpret intercultural encounters and negotiate their emerging professional identities during short-term international teaching placements.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a collaborative narrative inquiry design to explore how cross-cultural teaching experiences influenced the professional identity development of prospective Indonesian English teachers participating in a short-term international teaching internship program in Southern Thailand. Narrative inquiry was selected because of its capacity to foreground participants lived experiences, emotional responses, and reflective meaning-making processes. Through this approach, teacher identity is conceptualized as dynamic, contextual, and socially constructed rather than fixed or static (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

3.2. Participants and context

The participants consisted of six prospective Muslim English teachers—three females and three males—from three private Islamic universities in Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively based on the criterion of having completed a two-month international teaching internship program in Southern Thailand (Dörnyei, 2007). To ensure confidentiality and adhere to ethical research standards, all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

The internship program took place in Islamic educational institutions and multicultural schools at various levels, ranging from elementary to secondary education. Within these settings, Thai and Patani Malay functioned as the primary languages of daily communication, while English was used only in specific instructional contexts. This multilingual and multicultural environment provided a rich context for examining participants' language use practices, intercultural negotiation processes, and the development of adaptive pedagogical strategies.

Table 1

Demographic and background information of the participants.

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Semester	Institution	Duration of Internship	School Context
1	Aisyah	Female	5	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Islamic Montessori primary school (Grade 1)
2	Hana	Female	5	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Primary and junior secondary school
3	Arda	Male	7	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Islamic boarding school (primary, junior, and senior secondary levels)

4	Rizki	Male	5	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Primary school
5	Ratu	Female	5	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Junior secondary school
6	Fahmi	Male	7	A private university in Indonesia	2 months	Primary school

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected through WhatsApp text-based interviews and written reflective narratives, enabling participants to provide asynchronous, flexible, and reflective responses (Gibson, 2022). Participants were invited to describe critical incidents—unexpected yet pedagogically significant events that generated opportunities for reflection, professional learning, and identity negotiation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Riessman, 2008). These incidents included experiences related to language barriers, cultural negotiations, emotional responses, and pedagogical adaptations.

The combination of real-time text-based interviews and retrospective written narratives allowed the study to capture the temporal, social, and emotional dimensions of participants' teaching experiences. This integrative approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of how professional identity development unfolded within multilingual and multicultural classroom contexts.

Data collection was conducted sequentially. WhatsApp-based text interviews were carried out first to elicit participants' immediate reflections, critical incidents, and emotional responses related to their teaching experiences. Following the interviews, participants were asked to produce written reflective narratives, which allowed them to revisit their experiences more holistically and articulate deeper reflections over time. In the analysis, interview data primarily informed the identification of key events and identity tensions, while written narratives contributed to longitudinal meaning-making and reflective interpretation. The two data sources were integrated through iterative comparison to refine emerging themes.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, integrating systematic thematic coding with narrative interpretation to examine how professional identity developed through participants' intercultural teaching experiences (Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted iteratively through repeated readings of interview transcripts and reflective narratives to identify salient events, emotional expressions, and identity-related positioning within participants' stories.

The coding process involved three iterative rounds. In the first round, open coding was conducted inductively to identify salient expressions, emotional responses, and identity related moments emerging directly from the data. In the second round, these initial codes were refined and clustered into broader thematic categories reflecting recurring patterns across participants'

narratives. The third round involved axial coding, during which relationships among themes were examined to construct coherent narrative interpretations. Although the analysis was primarily inductive, relevant theoretical perspectives were used to support interpretation rather than to predetermine coding categories. Coding decisions were revisited iteratively to ensure internal consistency and analytical rigor. To enhance analytical reliability, coding decisions were discussed among the research team until interpretive consensus was reached.

The analytical process was conceptually informed by Byram’s (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework and Banks’ (2008) Multicultural Education theory. These frameworks functioned as sensitizing concepts rather than fixed analytical categories. As summarized in Table 2, narratives were examined in relation to dimensions of intercultural competence, teacher identity, and professional learning processes.

Initial codes were clustered into integrated thematic foci reflecting patterns of identity negotiation, emotional engagement, agency development, and professional growth within multilingual classroom contexts. To preserve narrative coherence, mini-narratives were constructed to illustrate how participants’ identities evolved temporally, relationally, and contextually across their internship experiences. Further interpretation was guided by the principles of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006).

The narrative inquiry was collaborative in nature as participants were positioned as active contributors to meaning-making rather than passive data sources. Collaboration was enacted through ongoing dialogic engagement during data collection, particularly in follow-up WhatsApp exchanges where participants clarified, expanded, and reflected on their experiences. Participants were also invited to respond to emerging interpretations, enabling the researchers to refine narrative meanings in relation to participants’ perspectives. This relational and dialogic process reflects the collaborative principles of narrative inquiry.

Table 2
Conceptual framework guiding the interview questions.

Intercultural Competence (Byram, 1997)	Teacher Dimension	Identity	Professional Learning Process	Integrated Thematic Focus
Knowledge of self and others	Self-image		Reflective practice	Identity development through self–other comparison and reflective dialogue
Interpreting and relating	Task perception and pedagogical beliefs		Socially situated learning	Teacher beliefs shift through reinterpretation of cultural meaning
Discovery and interaction	Motivation		Agency and experiential learning	Engagement in new contexts fosters motivation and professional agency

Valuing others' beliefs and practices	Commitment	Ethical and intercultural sensitivity	Respect for difference strengthens commitment to inclusive teaching
Relativising self	Self-efficacy	Adaptive experimentation	Confidence develops through navigating intercultural challenges
Attitudes and emotions	Emotional engagement	Emotion as a catalyst for learning	Emotional experiences shape identity coherence and professional growth

3.5. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review selected interview transcripts and the researchers' preliminary interpretations of their narratives. Participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of representations and to provide clarification or elaboration where necessary. Their feedback was incorporated by revising narrative accounts and refining thematic interpretations to better reflect participants' intended meanings.

4. Findings

4.1. Teachers' narratives of intercultural learning and professional identity development

This section presents the findings of the study through participants' narrative accounts. Drawing on narrative inquiry, the findings highlight critical incidents, emotional responses, and reflective meaning-making processes through which professional identities were negotiated and developed during the short-term international teaching internship in Southern Thailand.

4.1.1. Aisyah: Reframing teacher authority and classroom interaction

Aisyah's teaching internship marked a significant shift in how she understood her role as a future English teacher. During her first day in a Montessori-based classroom, she encountered a learning environment that challenged her assumptions about teacher authority. Observing students' autonomy and self-directed learning led her to reconceptualise teaching as facilitation rather than control. She reflected that "the children were very independent and used to choosing their own activities," which prompted her to reconsider her pedagogical positioning.

Cultural differences further shaped her interpretation of classroom interaction. Initially, Aisyah associated students' silence with disengagement. Over time, she recognised silence as an expression of discipline and respect, acknowledging that her earlier interpretation was influenced by her own cultural expectations. A pivotal moment occurred when she was unexpectedly left in charge of the classroom. Managing routines, emotional responses, and student conflicts required decisive action. She recalled that "the situation became chaotic,"

which pushed her to design interest-based activities to regain control. This experience strengthened her confidence and professional agency.

Language barriers also influenced her teaching practices. With students struggling to understand English instructions, Aisyah relied on gestures and demonstrations, learning that communication extends beyond verbal language. Emotional connections, such as receiving drawings and warm greetings, reinforced her emerging identity as a reflective, adaptive, and student-centred English teacher. This trajectory illustrates how intercultural classroom encounters can challenge prior assumptions about authority and foster the emergence of professional agency through reflective practice.

4.1.2. Hana: Developing reflective awareness and adaptive pedagogy

Hana's internship became a space for deep personal and professional reflection. From her first teaching session, she realised that teaching involved more than delivering lesson content. She described teaching as requiring continuous adaptation, stating that "being a teacher is not only about teaching, but also about adapting, understanding students' characters, and finding the teaching style that fits best."

Cultural differences encouraged Hana to reflect on her communicative style. She observed that Thai students were more open in expressing feelings and opinions than those in her previous educational experiences. This contrast prompted self-reflection, as she noted that "their openness made me think about myself, because I grew up in a setting where people tend to be shy." Teaching students from different age groups further enhanced her contextual awareness, leading her to interpret student behaviour as culturally and developmentally situated rather than as indicators of motivation.

One of the most challenging moments occurred when she was asked to substitute for a sick teacher without prior preparation. Teaching multiple classes under time pressure tested her confidence and classroom management skills. Language barriers persisted, prompting her to rely on visual aids, gestures, and simplified instructions. Beyond the classroom, living in a community with strong religious values heightened her cultural sensitivity. By the end of the internship, Hana perceived herself as a more confident, adaptable, and reflective English teacher. Her experience demonstrates how adaptive pedagogy develops through reflexive engagement with cultural difference, highlighting identity as a negotiated rather than fixed construct.

4.1.3. Arda: Negotiating cultural meaning and professional agency

Arda's internship shaped his understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Early in his placement, limited student English proficiency required him to rethink his teaching strategies. He reflected that "almost all of them didn't understand basic English, so I had to find different ways to keep the learning alive." Cultural differences initially caused confusion, particularly students' nervous laughter and silence. Over time, he reinterpreted these behaviours as expressions of respect, explaining that "they laughed because they were nervous, not because they were disrespectful."

Teaching independently without constant supervision strengthened Arda's leadership and improvisational skills. He prioritised students' comfort and engagement over rigid lesson plans. Participation in extracurricular activities, such as performing *silat* at a school event, enhanced his sense of professional legitimacy and belonging. Emotional connections with students further reinforced his motivation and commitment to inclusive teaching. By the end of the internship, Arda viewed himself as a more adaptive, reflective, and culturally responsive English teacher. This progression reflects the interpretive dimension of intercultural competence, in which meaning is reconstructed through sustained interaction with unfamiliar communicative norms.

4.1.4. Rizki: Building professional confidence through gradual engagement

Rizki's internship was characterised by gradual self-reflection and confidence development. A significant moment occurred when he was asked to deliver a motivational speech during the morning assembly. This experience heightened his awareness of his professional presence, as he reflected on "who I am as a future teacher." Cultural adaptation outside the classroom, including adjusting to local food, increased his emotional resilience and self-awareness.

In the classroom, highly active students challenged his classroom management skills. Recognising the limitations of teacher-centred approaches, Rizki incorporated games and interactive activities to maintain engagement. Institutional routines and extended teaching hours contributed to his growing sense of professional responsibility. Emotional farewell moments at the end of the internship reinforced his commitment to teaching and clarified his emerging professional identity. His narrative shows how professional identity can evolve incrementally through situated participation, reinforcing the role of experiential legitimacy in teacher development.

4.1.5. Ratu: Developing pedagogical creativity and cultural sensitivity

Ratu described her internship as a transformative period that reshaped her sense of professional self. Being unexpectedly asked to teach junior secondary students prompted reflection on her readiness and confidence. Observing different instructional practices challenged her pedagogical assumptions and encouraged experimentation with games, visual materials, and interactive activities. Increased student engagement strengthened her confidence and belief in adaptive pedagogy.

Communication barriers remained a challenge, leading her to prepare multilingual teaching materials in Indonesian, English, and Thai. Beyond the classroom, exposure to cultural values such as respect for the monarchy enhanced her awareness of cultural hierarchy and inclusivity. Emotional farewells reinforced her understanding that real classroom experience played a central role in shaping her identity as a reflective and culturally sensitive teacher. Her story underscores how pedagogical creativity can emerge as a response to contextual constraints, revealing adaptation as a central mechanism of identity formation.

4.1.6. *Fahmi: Integrating authority, empathy, and professional commitment*

Fahmi's teaching practicum was pivotal in shaping his professional identity. Teaching alongside an international teacher prompted reflection on commitment and responsibility. Linguistic differences required patience and empathy, while exposure to creative instructional practices expanded his understanding of effective teaching.

Classroom challenges pushed Fahmi to balance authority and compassion. He learned that assertiveness could coexist with care, strengthening his classroom presence. Moments of honesty, such as collaboratively searching for answers with students, reinforced professional integrity and trust. Adjusting teaching practices to respect religious and cultural norms further strengthened his intercultural sensitivity. Ultimately, Fahmi emerged as a flexible, empathetic, and culturally responsive English teacher. His experience exemplifies how authority and empathy can co-develop through practice, illustrating the relational foundation of professional identity construction.

4.1.7. *Cross-narrative patterns of identity development*

Across participants' narratives, several cross-cutting patterns emerged. Moments of unexpected responsibility functioned as catalytic events that accelerated identity negotiation. Intercultural understanding developed gradually through routine classroom interaction rather than dramatic cultural confrontation. Linguistic limitations consistently prompted pedagogical innovation, positioning constraint as a productive force for professional growth. Emotional experiences—particularly recognition, anxiety, and attachment—served as reflective triggers that strengthened participants' commitment to teaching. Together, these patterns suggest that professional identity development during short-term international practicums is best understood as a layered process shaped by the interaction of experience, reflection, emotion, and context.

5. Discussion

This study extends research on short-term international teaching internships by demonstrating that brief yet intensive cross-cultural teaching experiences can meaningfully shape pre-service teachers' professional identities through narrative reflection. While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of cross-cultural placements for developing intercultural awareness and professional growth (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023; Syahri et al., 2023), fewer studies have examined how identity transformation unfolds emotionally, cognitively, and pedagogically within short-term programs. The findings of this study indicate that Indonesian pre-service English teachers experienced significant shifts in self-perception, pedagogical beliefs, and intercultural understanding during their internship in Southern Thailand. From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend intercultural competence theory by demonstrating that professional identity development is shaped through recursive cycles of experience, emotion, and reflection rather than through linear skill acquisition.

This study offers three theoretical contributions. First, it extends Byram's ICC model by demonstrating that intercultural competence operates not only at the level of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, but also through identity negotiation shaped by emotion and professional

positioning. Second, it reconceptualises short-term international internships as sites of intensified identity work rather than merely abbreviated versions of long-term mobility. Third, it highlights narrative reflection as a mediating mechanism linking intercultural experience to professional identity transformation.

A central finding concerns participants' changing perceptions of their professional roles. Through being entrusted with classroom responsibilities and institutional participation, participants gradually repositioned themselves from student interns to legitimate classroom practitioners. These experiences functioned as critical incidents that prompted reflection on professional competence and legitimacy, supporting previous research that identifies field experiences as pivotal in teacher identity development (Karim et al., 2023; Kılıç & Cinkara, 2020). From a narrative inquiry perspective, such moments disrupted participants' initial self-conceptions and initiated identity negotiation through reflection and storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Intercultural learning emerged primarily through everyday classroom interactions rather than dramatic culture shock. Differences in student behaviour, classroom norms, and institutional expectations required continuous interpretation and adaptation. Initially perceived challenges—such as student silence or high physical activity—were gradually reinterpreted as culturally situated practices. This process reflects the *interpreting and relating* dimensions of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) and supports the argument that intercultural learning develops through reflective engagement in authentic contexts (Martin Beltrán et al., 2023).

Pedagogical adaptation and professional agency were also salient across participants' narratives. Language barriers and multilingual classroom environments prompted participants to employ gestures, visual materials, games, and simplified language. These adaptive practices illustrate professional learning as a contextual and reflective process emerging from practice rather than the application of fixed pedagogical models (Postholm, 2018). Through such experiences, participants developed confidence and agency, which strengthened their emerging teacher identities (Kaya, 2023).

Emotional experiences played a crucial role in identity formation. Feelings of anxiety, pride, joy, and emotional attachment—particularly during moments of student recognition and farewell—triggered reflection and reinforced participants' commitment to teaching. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing the central role of emotions in teacher identity construction (Pravitasari et al., 2025).

Finally, the sociocultural and institutional context of Southern Thailand shaped participants' ethical sensitivity and intercultural awareness. Exposure to multilingual practices and strong religious values encouraged respect, inclusivity, and culturally responsive teaching orientations. Unlike more linguistically homogeneous international placements, the Southern Thai context required participants to constantly negotiate meaning across linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries, intensifying their identity reflection processes. Overall, these findings indicate that short-term international teaching internships can function as catalysts meaningful professional identity development when pre-service teachers are positioned as legitimate educators and engage reflectively with their experiences.

The specific linguistic and religious landscape of Southern Thailand further intensified this process of identity negotiation. The region's multilingual ecology—where Thai, Malay-Patani, and English coexist in layered social functions—required participants to constantly interpret meaning across languages, even when English served as the instructional medium. Such conditions positioned English not simply as a subject but as a bridging resource within a complex semiotic environment. At the same time, the presence of strong religious values shaped classroom norms, interpersonal conduct, and ethical expectations. For Indonesian participants who may share certain religious affiliations, this context potentially reduced cultural distance while simultaneously revealing nuanced differences in practice and social positioning. Consequently, identity negotiation was not limited to pedagogical adaptation but extended to ethical sensitivity and sociocultural awareness. This configuration distinguishes Southern Thailand from more linguistically homogeneous or secular international placements and underscores the importance of contextual specificity in understanding intercultural teacher development.

Compared with long-term international teaching programs, short-term placements appear to intensify reflective learning because participants encounter concentrated intercultural challenges within a limited timeframe. This intensity may accelerate identity awareness and pedagogical adaptation. However, shorter programs may provide fewer opportunities for sustained integration into local teaching cultures, suggesting that long-term placements may better support deeper professional socialisation. This comparison highlights the complementary value of both models in teacher education.

The intensity of short-term programs appears to generate distinctive pedagogical and psychological affordances. The limited duration creates a heightened sense of urgency that encourages rapid experimentation, immediate problem-solving, and concentrated reflection. Participants are required to negotiate legitimacy, authority, and intercultural meaning within compressed timeframes, which may amplify emotional salience and identity awareness. However, such programs may also limit opportunities for sustained relational trust, long-term curriculum engagement, and deeper institutional socialization. In contrast, longer-term placements may allow for more gradual integration into local professional communities and more stable identity consolidation, though they may not always produce the same degree of intensified reflexivity observed in short-term immersion. Recognizing these complementary affordances highlights the need to conceptualize duration not merely as a logistical variable but as a theoretically meaningful dimension of intercultural teacher education.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how a short-term international teaching internship in Southern Thailand influenced the intercultural learning and professional identity construction of Indonesian pre-service English teachers. The findings demonstrate that, despite its limited duration, the internship facilitated meaningful identity development when participants actively engaged in sustained reflection and narrative meaning-making. Professional identity transformation—evidenced by shifts in self-perception, pedagogical beliefs, emotional

awareness, and cultural sensitivity—emerged primarily through everyday classroom interactions. Theoretically, this study contributes to intercultural teacher education by integrating perspectives from intercultural competence (Byram, 1997), relational teacher identity (Hanna et al., 2019), and professional development as reflective practice (Postholm, 2018). In contrast to studies that emphasize long-term mobility (Fang et al., 2024), the findings demonstrate that short-term international experiences can serve as significant sites for professional identity reconstruction, underscoring the centrality of reflective engagement over mere intercultural exposure. Practically, the findings suggest that short-term international teaching internships should be positioned as strategic components of language teacher education programs. Teacher education institutions are encouraged to provide pre-departure preparation focused on intercultural awareness, reflective practice, and adaptive pedagogy, while host schools play a crucial role by offering orientation, collaborative teaching opportunities, and structured mentoring. At the policy level, regional mobility programs in Southeast Asia hold strong potential to support the development of interculturally responsive and professionally adaptive English language teachers. Future research should further examine how identity negotiation unfolds across varying durations and sociocultural contexts, particularly through longitudinal or comparative designs contrasting short-term and long-term international placements. Investigating similar programs in linguistically homogeneous or non-Southeast Asian settings may clarify the extent to which the intensified reflective processes identified in this study are context-specific or transferable. Such inquiries would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of temporality, context, and narrative reflection within intercultural teacher education.

Declaration on the use of AI

The authors used AI tool, including ChatGPT to assist in language editing and improving the clarity of the manuscript. All ideas, data analysis, and conclusions are the original work of the authors.

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