

From expectation to reality: A study on self-efficacy and motivational adjustment of Indonesian pre-service English teachers in cross-cultural teaching in Thailand

ABSTRACT - Cross-cultural teaching experiences, while often challenging, offer significant developmental value for pre-service teachers. Participants in such programs frequently encounter cultural norms and instructional contexts that diverge from their prior expectations. Despite the growing prevalence of international teaching practicums, empirical research specifically examining the expectation–reality gap in cross-cultural teaching remains limited. To address this gap, the present study investigates how Indonesian pre-service English teachers experience shifts between their initial expectations and classroom realities during a one-month teaching placement in Chiang Rai, Thailand. In addition, the study explores how such teaching experiences influence the participants' professional confidence and motivation. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the researchers recruited five participants and conducted semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and emergent themes. The findings indicate that participants experienced uncertainty and diminished confidence when confronted with unanticipated classroom events and cultural differences. Over time, however, the cross-cultural environment served as a catalyst for rebuilding both confidence and motivation, suggesting that such challenges can be reframed as opportunities for professional growth within international English language teaching contexts. The study concludes by emphasizing the necessity of preparing pre-service teachers not only in pedagogical skills but also in cultural awareness and adaptability prior to participation in international practicum programs.

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1. Introduction

Teaching in various cultures has become an essential aspect of teaching and learning, especially in the modern world (Adekunle et al., 2023). English is no longer just the language of native speakers; it is also a way for people from different languages and cultural backgrounds to communicate (Jenkins, 2014). For English teachers preparing to teach across cultures, it is more than just teaching the language. It also includes understanding their self-identity, adapting to new cultures, and changing how they motivate their students. This study explored the experiences of Indonesian pre-service English teachers who participated in a one-month international teaching practicum in Thailand. It explored how they experienced shifts between their initial expectations and classroom realities in cross-cultural teaching and examined how these experiences influenced their self-efficacy and motivation.

Expectations about teaching ability and classroom realities often form before going on a teaching practice, shaped by teacher education coursework, prior learning experiences, and personal beliefs about effective teaching (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025). According to Oliver (1980) these expectations serve as reference points for evaluating actual experiences. When entering the teaching context in the destination country, the experiences encountered may either confirm or contradict previous beliefs. Such discrepancies may influence teachers' efficacy, or their belief in their ability to teach effectively (Bandura, 1977). When teachers begin to question or strengthen their confidence based on real classroom experiences, this change in self-belief can, in turn, affect their motivation. In this way, shifts between expectations and reality may indirectly reshape teachers' motivation through changes in their self-efficacy. Importantly, unmet expectations do not always lower motivation (Schiebler et al., 2025). Instead, they can spark personal growth. Teachers can see challenges as chances to improve their skills, which fits with the ideas of Self-Determination Theory.

However, existing studies often look at teacher self-efficacy and motivation separately instead of together. Most studies on teacher self-efficacy focus on how teachers view their skills and what affects their confidence in specific situations, using self-reported data or samples from particular contexts, which may not reflect real classroom experiences (Cui et al., 2025; Gürsoy & Bal, 2025). On the other hand, research on teacher motivation usually examines factors like personal beliefs, outside influences, or career goals (Izhar et al., 2025; Wiboolyasarini et al., 2025; Yoney & Mirice, 2025), but tends to see motivation as something that doesn't change much, rather than as something that develops through actual teaching experiences. At the same time, studies on cross-cultural teaching experiences highlight a range of emotional and situational challenges, including initial culture shock, communication anxiety, and structural constraints such as limited resources which can lead to decreased confidence and feelings of uncertainty or disappointment (Jasmine et al., 2026 ; Koşar et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, there is still not enough research on the difference between what future teachers expect and what they actually experience in the classroom, especially during their international training. When their experiences don't match their expectations, it can cause confusion and emotional struggles. Still, this doesn't always mean they will feel less motivated. Instead, these experiences can be seen in a new light and turned into a source of inspiration for

personal growth and increased motivation to continue in a teaching career. Understanding this process is important for designing international practicum programs that better support pre-service teachers' professional development. Therefore, this study aims to examine this transitional process and its impact on self-efficacy and motivation. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Indonesian pre-service English teachers experience shifts between expectations and reality during a cross-cultural practicum?
2. How do these shifts influence their self-efficacy and motivation?

2. Literature review

2.1. *From expectations to realities in international teaching practicum*

Cross-cultural teaching and the International Teaching Practicum (ITP) is a key to preparing teachers for the twenty-first century, which emphasizes skill development in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. So that new teachers can act as global citizens, who understand the international education system (Barlaman & Umamah, 2025; Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Yuyun et al., 2025). However, the journey from being a pre-service teacher at an international level is filled with the process of adapting between "Expectations" and "Reality", which is challenging. Especially when facing "reality shock" when the theories or ideal beliefs learned do not align with the real classroom conditions that are complex (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Mustadi et al., 2023; Sanjaya & Kuswando, 2025).

2.1.1. *The expectancy gap and disconfirmation*

According to Oliver's Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory (1980), satisfaction and adjustment arise from comparing pre-experience expectations with actual outcomes. Prospective teachers often create an image of success or a teaching model in advance based on what they learn in the course (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Mustadi et al., 2023). In the context of the International Teaching Program, "negative disconfirmation" often occurs significantly (Yasa et al., 2026), which is mainly caused by two factors: language barriers and diverse proficiency levels. Several studies found the same thing, that the biggest obstacles during the brief international teaching program were language (Adekunle et al., 2023; Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Ilyin et al., 2025), which severely affects the explanation of academic concepts and classroom interactions. *Student diversity*, in cross-cultural classrooms, often has very different levels of knowledge and language ability (huge discrepancies). (Dzulfikri & Azami, 2024) mentioned that students were very diverse in terms of their competencies. Some students struggle with basic concepts, others grasp them quickly and possess advanced English skills (Asfihana & Putri, 2025). To ensure that no student feels left behind in the learning process, it is essential to address these variances effectively (Asfihana & Putri, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025).

2.1.2. *Psychological impact of negative disconfirmation*

When reality does not match expectations (Negative Disconfirmation), student teachers often face intense emotional reactions and disorienting dilemmas (Syahri et al., 2025), in which

existing beliefs or experiences are severely challenged which leads to stress. Language barriers are the main factor that causes pre-service teachers to panic and overthink (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Ilyin et al., 2025). When these feelings build up, they can cause teachers to question their identity, especially if they start to wonder if their limited communication skills affect how others see them as experts in their subjects (Signori et al., 2024). This mental struggle can lower teachers' confidence in their skills (Dzulfikri & Azami, 2024), these factors also linked to higher rates of teachers leaving their jobs (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Mustadi et al., 2023). According to Bandura's theory (1977), it indicated that high levels of anxiety will undermine confidence in one's self-efficacy and reduce motivation, if without proper emotional support or help from others, their motivation to teach may decrease. However, these negative psychological conditions are not the end, but a "crucial turning point" that forces teachers to enter the process of reflection and adaptation (Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025)

2.1.3. Adaptation through Reflective Journals and Support Systems

In order to bridge this gap, pre-service teachers need to go through a transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2018). Critical reflection is a key component that helps pre-service teachers analyze and interpret "disorienting dilemmas", such as teaching obstructions, turning them into opportunities to develop a flexible professional identity and a broader understanding of the world (Fook & Gardner, 2007; Yahri et al., 2025; Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025). Reflective journals serve as a primary tool for tracking both cognitive and emotional development (Barlaman & Umamah, 2025; Priajana & Umaemah, 2025). These journals help student teachers (1) analyze and adjust teaching strategies to align with real contexts, for instance, shifting from lecture-focused lesson plans to using visual media, games, or music to overcome language barriers (Ilyin et al., 2025; Asfihana & Putri, 2025), (2) become aware of emotional development, moving from feelings of nervousness and self-doubt to building confidence through real mastery experiences (Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025; Signori et al., 2024), and (3) turn negative experiences or mistakes in the classroom into lessons that are meaningful for building a teacher's identity (Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025). At the same time, support systems play a crucial role in reducing anxiety and enhancing resilience (Yuyun et al., 2025).

These support systems include (1) supervising professors and mentor teachers who provide guidance through dialogic interaction and serve as emotional anchors that help create a safe learning space (Priajana & Umaemah, 2025; Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025; Signori et al., 2024), (2) professional networks and peers who help exchange experiences and build communities of practice to solve problems together (Yuyun et al., 2025), and (3) family, which acts as a buffer against stress and helps restore mental well-being (Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025). In summary, reflective thinking combined with systematic support not only helps reduce the reality shock when encountering unexpected situations (Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Ilyin et al., 2025), but is also a key factor in developing student teachers into professional teachers who

are resilient, self-confident, and capable of effectively adapting in multicultural contexts (Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Signori et al., 2024; Syahri et al., 2025).

2.2. *Psychological impact: The interplay of self-efficacy and motivational adjustment*

The psychological impact of teaching in an international context is not merely a decline in confidence when facing obstacles, but rather a dynamic interaction between internal belief systems and external reality (Dueramae & Ginting, 2026). Cross-cultural challenges often serve as triggers for the adjustment of motivation and the reassessment of one's abilities (Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Sanjaya & Kuswandono, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025). This process can be explained through Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which states that 'Mastery Experience' is the most powerful source for developing teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). A teacher's confidence gradually strengthens as they experiment with new teaching strategies and observe tangible results, such as shifting from lectures to using games, visual media, or activities that engage a diverse group of students (Ilyin et al., 2025; Asfihana & Putri, 2025; Yuyun et al., 2025). Encountering initial difficulties, whether language barriers or unpredictable student behaviors, and then being able to recover through repeated effort, helps build resilience, and it gives teachers confidence that they can handle complex situations in the future (Dueramae & Ginting, 2026; Syahri et al., 2025).

The feeling that they can perform well through acceptance from students is therefore an important factor in dispelling self-doubt and transforming emotions from nervousness into professional pride (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025). Furthermore, growth into a professional teacher also requires fulfilling fundamental psychological needs according to the framework of Self-Determination Theory, which encompasses competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Yue & Lu, 2022). When teachers experience success, it leads to a sense of their own potential to manage the classroom, which is a key driving force in further developing professional skills (Yue & Lu, 2022). Alongside having opportunities to make decisions about teaching methods or participate in content (Instructional ownership), transforming their role from mere implementers to critical reflective thinkers (Priajana & Umaemah, 2025). In addition, positive relationships with students and receiving support from professional learning communities, such as mentor teachers and peers, are decisive factors that help reduce feelings of isolation and significantly foster professional commitment (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Macapagong et al., 2023; Yuyun et al., 2025). When these psychological needs are met alongside the accumulation of successful experiences, pre-service teachers undergo a process of transformative learning that turns the 'shock of facing reality' into the creation of a professional teacher identity that is flexible and sustainably capable of operating at an international level (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025).

3. Method

3.1. *Research design*

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore how their expectations and reality differences affect the self-efficacy and motivational adjustment of Indonesian Pre-service English teachers. In this case, specifically when they had the authentic experience of teaching in Thailand. The method was chosen because a qualitative method is considered suitable to fully understand the participants' experiences and challenges (Creswell &

Creswell, 2017). It was also selected because it allows researchers to understand participants' genuine and authentic experiences. In a qualitative descriptive study, the goal is to "describe" a phenomenon in detail within its actual environment.

3.2. Research participants

The purposive sampling technique was used because researchers are able to select the participants based on the researchers' need, which will guarantee that the participants will give direct and appropriate answers from their experience about the phenomenon (Andrade, 2021). It is aligned with Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling enabled the researchers to choose participants who had empirical experiences relevant to the research focus, namely adjustment, motivation, and self-confidence in a cross-cultural teaching context. In qualitative research, purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher aims to identify "information-rich" cases that can provide deeper insights into the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants were second-year students of the English Language Education Master's Program from Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, who got the chance to experience the cross-cultural teaching practice in Thailand. All participants were Indonesian pre-service teachers with no prior experience teaching abroad.

Table 1

Participants demographic.

Number	Participant	Gender	Practicum context	Subjects	Prior teaching international class experience
1	P1	M	Junior students (First – third year)	Speaking and pronunciation	No
2	P2	M	Senior students (Fourth year)	Reading comprehension	No
3	P3	F	Senior students (Fourth year)	Grammar and writing	No
4	P4	F	Senior students (Fourth year)	Grammar and writing	No
5	P5	F	Junior students (First – third year)	Speaking and pronunciation	Yes

Table 1 presents the demographic backgrounds of the five participants involved in this research. Each participant taught different subjects and classes, which provided diverse perspectives for the study. This study involved a small, purposive sample (N=5), which may limit the transferability of the findings. However, this sampling decision was aligned with the design of the study, which prioritises depth of understanding over statistical generalisation. As noted by Merriam & Tisdell (2015), the findings are not intended to be generalised, but to support transferability by enabling readers to determine the relevance of the findings to similar contexts.

3.3. Data collection

The data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. A semi-structured interview was used as the main approach to answer both research

questions, as it was considered suitable to explore in-depth participants' experiences. This technique was chosen because it provides a balance between a directed question structure and flexibility for researchers to dig deeper for information according to participant responses (Creswell & David Creswell, 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The questions prepared for the interview were designed to focus on the intended result and an effective interview process. There were seven questions surrounding the topic of expectations, motivations, self-efficacy, and their point of view at the end of the teaching practicum. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the researchers also conducted document analysis of participants' reflective journals as supplementary data towards the research questions. This helped the researchers to do the triangulation of the data and added trustworthiness to the whole research. It is aligned with Morgan (2024), who stated that the use of triangulation will increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research through a set of methods or data, enabling the researchers to validate the results of the research, address biases, and enhance the credibility of the research. In this research, data triangulation was employed by integrating two types of data, which are semi-structured interview data with reflective journals as complementary qualitative sources to strengthen the trustworthiness of findings.

3.4. Data analysis

The interview data and reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis. To analyze the data, the researchers used thematic analysis on either the interviews or the reflective journals. The method was used because it allows researchers to see and identify the patterns across the qualitative data flexibly. This reason is supported by Creswell & Creswell (2022), who stated that thematic analysis is particularly suitable for qualitative studies because it explores participants' lived experiences and perspectives through understanding the meaning and patterns. It is aligned with Braun & Clarke (2006), who argued that thematic analysis is a good way to examine how individuals make sense of their experiences across different contexts. Therefore, since this research focuses on students' experiences during an international practicum, thematic analysis was considered appropriate and the best approach to uncover the recurring patterns. In this research, the data analysis followed a systematic thematic step and procedures. In the very first step, the researchers transcribe the audio files into the written transcript with the help of *turboscribe.ai*.

Some minor adjustments were made to the transcription part, especially for the mistranscription words. After that, the researchers sent the transcription of the audio files to the participants as part of the member checking process. This process is considered important to establish the validity of the qualitative research study (McKim, 2023). After the transcripts were reviewed by participants, the researchers tried to familiarise themselves with the transcript itself by repeatedly reading the text. Next, open coding was conducted with the help of the QDA Miner Lite tool to make the process more effective and efficient. The researchers tried to identify meaningful parts or units that might be useful and relevant to the research questions. These initial codes were compared across participants and grouped into broader categories based on recurring similarities or patterns. After that, the grouped themes were further synthesised into overarching

themes that represented shared experiences across the dataset. This process was adopted from analytic procedures outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2022). Below is the figure of the analytical process:

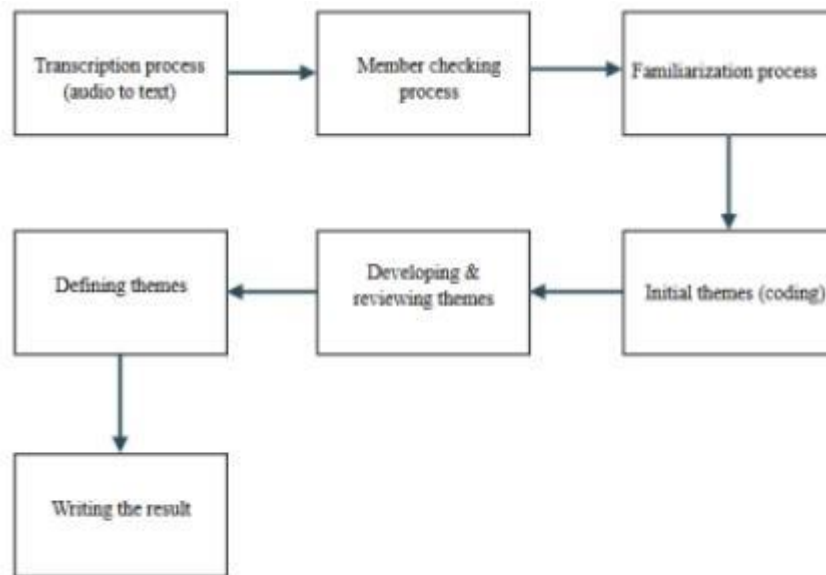


Figure 1. The analytic process of the thematic analysis by Creswell & Creswell (2022), adapted by researchers using moqups

Figure 1 above summarises the step-by-step thematic analysis process applied in this study, from the transcription process to theme generation. This transparent analytic procedure ensured that the findings were systematically derived from the data. The coding process was conducted by a single researcher. Even though formal inter-coder reliability was not calculated, preliminary codes or themes were discussed with a peer to refine interpretations and enhance analytic credibility. The resulting themes are presented and elaborated in the Findings section.

3.5. Ethical consideration

To protect the privacy of the participants, the researchers carefully paid attention to the ethical considerations. The researchers gave consent forms verbally and made the participants aware that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary. The researchers implemented numerical pseudonyms, all the participants were kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality. These principles are aligned with the qualitative research ethics guidelines in the modern era that emphasize consensual information transfer, anonymity, transparency, and protection of participants' rights (Tracy, 2020). In conclusion, this research method made sure that the study was clear, reliable, and trustworthy when exploring the topic.

4. Findings and discussion

The analysis of participants' data revealed several recurring patterns in how they experienced and interpreted their month-long teaching practicum in Thailand. These patterns were reflected in their explanations or descriptions of their expectations, challenges, or adjustments throughout the experiences. The findings below present these patterns by linking selected data extracts with their corresponding interpretations, showing how they reflect their experiences.

Table 2

Data extracts and patterns emerging in participants' practicum experiences.

Data Extract (Example of evidence)	Initial Code	Category	Emerging Theme
“I feel super excited to teach foreigners and gain new experience” (P2)	Excitement	Positive initial expectations	Expectation shifts during practicum
“I feel excited, of course, but also a bit nervous” (P1)			
“I think it might be very challenging to communicate clearly with students” (P1)	Challenges in communication	Teaching communication challenges	
“Turns out not easy, especially to communicate because they have different accents” (P5)			
“At first, I didn't feel confident when teaching the students” (P3)	Lack of confidence	Low self-efficacy	Development of self-efficacy and motivation
“I feel like I am not really worth teaching, I have little confidence” (P2)			
“After several sessions, I felt more confident because students responded well” (P3)	The growing confidence and motivation	Experiential learning impact	
“I realized that good education is not only about academic content but also connection with students” (P5)			

As illustrated in the table, participants' experiences demonstrate clear shifts in their perceptions and responses throughout the practicum. Initial feelings of excitement and uncertainty were frequently contrasted with the realities of classroom challenges, particularly in relation to communication and student diversity. Over time, these experiences contributed to noticeable changes in participants' confidence and teaching approach. Several participants

described becoming more self-assured as they gained experience and engaged more actively with students. In addition, participants' motivation appeared to evolve beyond initial interest, developing into a more meaningful and reflective understanding of teaching. This was evident in how they began to value not only academic outcomes but also relational and contextual aspects of education. Overall, these findings highlight a progression in participants' perspectives, shaped by direct engagement with the practical realities of teaching. The theme would be presented in the following section.

4.1. Expectation shifts during the international teaching practicum

This addresses the first research question, which explores how Indonesian pre-service English teachers experience shifts between expectations and reality during a cross-cultural practicum. The findings of expectation shift during the international teaching practicum are explained in the table below, this includes what participants expected at first, the real situations they faced in classrooms, and how their view changed as a result.

Sometimes, overly idealistic views about teaching in another country. However, these views were challenged when they faced the real challenges of teaching in classrooms. This situation illustrates a process where participants compared their original beliefs with the actual teaching experience, leading them to change their viewpoints. As a result, they gained a more realistic and sensitive understanding of teaching in different cultures.

The results show that Indonesian pre-service English teachers started their cross-cultural practicum with positive expectations of gaining teaching experience in different educational and cultural environments. Many were excited to meet students from diverse backgrounds and to enhance their teaching abilities. One participant expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to teach abroad. As Participant 2 and 4 noted:

I feel super excited to teach foreigners because I think it will be a valuable experience for me to learn new things and understand students from different backgrounds. (Participant 3- interview). It was supposed to be challenging and exciting. When the opportunity finally came, it felt surreal. It was more than just teaching. For me, it was a precious space for my personal growth. I learned a lot! (Participant 4- reflective journal)

This statement shows the positive feelings that many participants have at the start of an international teaching practice program. Teaching in another country is seen as both a professional challenge and a valuable learning experience. However, participants' expectations began to shift when they faced reality in the classroom. They faced difficulties such as students' pronunciation, different levels of English skills, and struggles to give clear instructions in a multilingual classroom. These issues sometimes led to feelings of doubt, especially before their first day in the classroom. For example, Participant 1 reflected on concerns about communication barriers: I feel worried because the students may not fully understand English, and I also don't understand their language, so it might be very challenging to communicate clearly. (Participant 1-interview)

These findings align with what they wrote in their reflective journal: Their pronunciation was sometimes difficult to understand. I needed to listen carefully and occasionally ask them to repeat or clarify. (Participant 5 - reflective journals)

These thoughts indicate that participants moved from having idealistic expectations to a more realistic understanding of the challenges and complexities of teaching in a cross-cultural context. This is in line with Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, which suggests that people compare their initial experience with the actual outcomes (Oliver, 1980). When outcomes do not match expectations, they may feel disappointed, leading them to adjust their perspectives based on what they experience.

Previous research has shown that pre-service teachers participating in international teaching programs often encounter unexpected challenges in the classroom, particularly regarding language differences and the diverse learning needs of students (Ilyin et al., 2025; Asfihana & Putri, 2025). While these challenges may create some uncertainty at first, they can also lead to deeper professional growth by prompting pre-service teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and communication styles (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Yuyun et al., 2025).

4.2. Development of teacher self-efficacy through practicum experiences

This section looks at the second research question, which examines how cross-cultural practicum experiences influence Indonesian pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy. The results show that the participants' beliefs in their teaching skills were built up and strengthened as they took part in real classroom activities. Their self-efficacy in teaching changed over time as they got used to the classroom and improved their ability to handle challenges.

The shift between expectations and classroom realities also appeared to influence participants' sense of teaching self-efficacy. At the beginning of the practicum, several participants described feeling uncertain about their ability to teach effectively in an unfamiliar classroom environment. Participant 3 admitted that she lacked confidence at the start of the program: At first, I didn't feel confident about my teaching ability. I only hoped that I could deliver the material properly to the students. (Participant 3- interview)

Both participants 2 and 3, have similar feelings, especially mixed feelings. However, before the teaching practicum, I got mixed feelings, I saw it as a very exciting (Participant 2- reflective journal). From the moment I arrived, I felt both excited and nervous (Participant 3- reflective journal). Similarly, another participant also expressed initial hesitation about specific subject matter. At first, I was afraid to teach writing, but there was some encouragement to make this course become meaningful. (Participant 4- reflective journal)

These reflections illustrate how the difference between expectations and classroom realities could temporarily lower participants' confidence in their teaching abilities. Such experiences are not uncommon among pre-service teachers who are entering real classroom settings for the first time (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025). However, the data suggest that the participants' self-efficacy gradually improved as they gained more real teaching experience.

They began to get more familiar with the classroom routines and observed how students reacted to their teaching styles, which helped them feel more in control of the situation.

Social Cognitive Theory explains that people can build their confidence through mastery experiences that are powerful sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). When people are able to accomplish a particular task, it is self-efficacy that allows them to accomplish other similar tasks in the future. In this case, it is apparent that positive interactions helped boost their self-confidence as teachers. Nevertheless, the development of self-efficacy was not always easy for participants to develop self-efficacy as some moments could be frustrating, especially when students did not seem very interested in class activities or when there was a problem of communication due to a different native language. These challenges support earlier research indicating that differences in students' language skills can create anxiety for pre-service teachers (Dzulfikri & Azami, 2024). Despite these difficulties, peer collaboration and feedback from mentors seemed to play an important role in helping participants reflect on their teaching practices and regain confidence (Sanjaya & Kuswando, 2025).

4.3. The influence of cross-cultural teaching experiences on motivation.

This part still looks at the second research question by exploring how the cross-cultural practicum influenced the motivation of Indonesian pre-service English teachers. The results show that the teachers became more motivated as they participated in real classroom activities and faced the challenges of teaching in a different culture. As they went through these experiences, the teachers started to see teaching not just as a job, but as something meaningful and important. Their motivation grew as they felt a sense of achievement, connected with their students, and understood the importance of teaching in various settings.

In addition to affecting self-efficacy, teaching practicum experiences also seem to influence their motivation for teaching and how they view their future careers in the future. Being exposed to different educational contexts allowed participants to start viewing the teaching profession from a broader perspective, and some showed increased interest in teaching in an international context. Participant 2 described feeling proud of the opportunity to teach students from different cultural backgrounds: It is kind of cool to teach abroad with students from different nationalities. I am, in fact, pretty proud about that, you know, being able to teach abroad with different students. (Participant 2-interview)

Instead of feeling discouraged, many participants found that the challenges they faced during the practicum seemed to strengthen their motivation to improve their teaching skills. They often see difficulties in the classroom as opportunities for learning rather than as obstacles.

I learned that good education is not only about teaching academic content, but also about building relationships, empathy, and understanding. The staff and teachers were also incredibly friendly and respectful. They never saw differences as barriers, but as strengths that enriched the community. (Participant 5-reflective journal)

This is understandable from the framework of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness in supporting intrinsic motivation (Yue & Lu, 2022). The participants were given some autonomy to design their own lesson plan and apply their own methods in class. They felt a sense of accomplishment as they were able to manage the activities well in class, and supportive relationships with peers and mentors helped them feel connected.

4.4. The conceptual relationship between cross-cultural teaching expectation and realities to their self-efficacy and motivation

Together, these components seem to help enhance long-term professional motivation. Similar findings have been reported in studies suggesting that international teaching experiences can broaden teachers' global perspectives and influence their professional aspirations (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Barلمان & Umamah, 2025). Furthermore, overcoming challenges in teaching has been shown to strengthen teachers' adaptability and resilience in complex classroom environments (Dzulfikri & Azami, 2024). For this reason, international practicum programs may serve as an important catalyst for the professional growth of pre-service teachers (Macapagong et al., 2023).



Figure 2. Conceptual summary of Indonesian pre-service teachers' experience during a cross-cultural teaching practicum.

This diagram illustrates the process that Indonesian student teachers of English experience during the transition from initial expectations to classroom reality. During teaching practice in a cross-cultural context in Thailand which is not merely the development of conventional teaching skills but a paradigm shift from “initial expectations” to “the formation of teacher identity” that aligns with reality (Anindya & Triyoga, 2025; Syahri et al., 2025). In the initial stage, the participants viewed teaching abroad as an “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” or a “dream”, but when entering the actual classroom, they faced severe disconfirmation of their expectations (Oliver, 1980). Findings indicate concrete challenges, such as in the case of the Participant 5, who had difficulty understanding the English accents of Burmese students and had to ask them to repeat several times, or in the case of Participant 3, who felt confused and alienated when students in the class primarily communicated in Thai, which was an obstacle beyond the lesson plans that had been prepared.

When facing obstacles, pre-service teachers did not abandon their commitment but develop context specific strategies to overcome problems, which is considered a crucial turning

point in creating “Mastery Experiences” (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Bandura, 1977; Syahri et al., 2025). For example, Participant 4, solved students’ writing skill problems by using the PEEL formula to help students have a clear paragraph structure until they succeeded. Participant 3, transformed the boring classroom atmosphere by using gamification (such as Quizizz and Blooket) to turn complex grammar lessons into fun and engaging activities for students. Participant 2, focused on using the Reading Aloud technique to build familiarity and reduce students’ anxiety in English pronunciation. This accumulated experience of success directly affected the enhancement of teachers’ self-confidence (Teacher Self-efficacy) and significantly changed their professional motivation (Priajana & Umaemah, 2025; Signori et al., 2024). The participants began redefining themselves from “intern students” to “international-level professional teachers” (Syahri et al., 2025). Ultimately, this experience became a “door” to global opportunities and made them understand that the essence of teaching in a cross-cultural context is not merely delivering content but building relationships and empathy and understanding, which is clearly reflected in the case of Participant 2 and colleagues, showing that success in managing challenging classrooms abroad has become a key driving force for them to continue pursuing an international-level teaching profession in the future.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how Indonesian pre-service English teachers experienced the shift between initial expectations and classroom realities during a cross-cultural teaching practicum in Chiang Rai, Thailand, as well as how these experiences influenced their self-efficacy and motivation. The findings indicate that participants' initial expectations were challenged by a range of classroom-related difficulties, including linguistic barriers, discrepancies in student proficiency levels, and unfamiliar classroom environments. Despite these challenges, the cross-cultural practicum experience contributed to a gradual enhancement of participants' self-efficacy and motivation. This positive development was facilitated primarily by successful teaching and learning episodes, as well as peer support and collaborative learning. Consequently, participants broadened their perspectives on international education and expressed increased interest in pursuing further professional development opportunities abroad. These findings are significant in that they highlight the necessity of adequate preparation and systematic support for pre-service teachers engaged in international practicum programs. Specifically, teacher education institutions should consider implementing pre-departure training modules and ongoing mentoring support to better equip pre-service teachers with the competencies required to navigate cross-cultural pedagogical challenges. Nevertheless, the present study is limited by its small participant sample and its focus on a single instructional context in Thailand. As such, the generalizability and transferability of the findings are constrained. Future research should employ larger participant cohorts or adopt comparative designs across diverse international teaching contexts to examine the long-term impact of cross-cultural practicum experiences on teacher development.

Declaration on the use of AI

During the preparation of this article, the authors used ChatGPT (GPT-4) and Scispace.ai to assist with literature searches and brainstorming. The author also used DeepL and Grammarly to improve the language quality. QDA Miner Lite was used to organise data and to map the relationships between themes, which are then reinterpreted in depth by the researchers. The author has manually verified all information, citations, and analyses generated by these tools and takes full responsibility for the originality and accuracy of the final manuscript.

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