

Pre-Service Teachers' Adaptability in The Philippines during Student Exchange Program

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Abstract

This research investigates the adaptability skills of pre-service teachers during a student exchange program in the Philippines, focusing on their development and challenges in a new cultural and academic setting. Through qualitative methods, findings highlight cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptability, as three participants overcame language barriers, culture shock, and logistical issues. Despite challenges in STEM teaching, cultural norms, and infrastructure, these experiences fostered significant personal and professional growth. The study underscores the transformative role of exchange program in preparing teachers for diverse educational contexts and offers recommendations for stakeholders to enhance program effectiveness.

Keywords: student exchange program, adaptability, cultural differences

1. INTRODUCTION

As classrooms around the world become increasingly culturally diverse, teachers are faced with the challenge of creating inclusive learning environments that not only celebrate cultural differences but also address the unique needs of each student. This growing demand for culturally responsive teaching has led to a stronger emphasis on developing intercultural competence within teacher education programs. These programs now recognize the importance of immersing pre-service teachers in diverse cultural settings to build the skills necessary for effective teaching in multicultural environments. According to Nurhayati (2022), exchange programs are beneficial because they give pre-service teachers the chance to live and study abroad, exposing them to diverse cultures, educational systems, and pedagogical approaches. These transformative experiences play a crucial role in shaping teachers' ability to adapt their teaching practices and engage precisely with students from diverse backgrounds. However, the impact of exchange programs can vary, depending on several factors such as the length of the program, the type of support provided, and the specific context in which the program takes place.

Despite the increasing interest in international education, there is still limited research on how exchange programs specifically affect the intercultural competence and adaptability of Indonesian pre-service teachers, particularly at institutions like

Mulawarman University. Located in East Kalimantan, Mulawarman University has actively fostered international collaborations, offering exchange programs that expose students to a wide range of teaching practices and cultural norms. These experiences are designed to enrich their professional development and prepare them for the challenges of teaching in diverse educational environments. However, there is a need for more in-depth research on how such exchange programs contribute to the development of intercultural competence among Indonesian pre-service teachers. This study focuses specifically on exchange programs in the Philippines, a neighboring Southeast Asian country with a distinct cultural identity and an ESL country. Despite living in the same geographic area, Indonesia and the Philippines provide pre-service teachers a rare chance to experience a variety of cultural customs, communication techniques, and teaching philosophies because of their cultural variances. English is widely used in government, media, and education in the Philippines, an ESL nation that also recognizes it as an official language alongside Filipino (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Indonesia, on the other hand, has a very distinct linguistic and learning environment since English is mostly taught as a foreign language there and is rarely used outside of educational institutions (Lauder, 2008). Through these exchanges, pre-service teachers are encouraged to examine their own cultural assumptions, challenge their perceptions, and broaden their understanding of the world around them.

The goal of this research is to look into how the experiences of pre-service teachers from Mulawarman University participating in exchange program in the Philippines contribute to the development of their intercultural competence, adaptability skill. By analyzing how cultural interactions and educational practices in the Philippines shape their ability to engage with and adapt to different cultural environments, this study will provide valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of such exchange programs. Ultimately, the findings of this research seek to inform the design and implementation of more effective exchange programs, ensuring that they better equip pre-service teachers with the skills needed to thrive in diverse, multicultural teaching contexts. The insights gathered from this study will contribute to the ongoing efforts to prepare educators who are not only culturally competent but also adaptable, empathetic, and capable of creating inclusive learning environments for students from all backgrounds.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's globalized society, cultivating intercultural competency is an essential part of teacher education. Teachers must comprehend, interact, and communicate with pupils from a variety of backgrounds. Deardoff (2006) identifies three key components of intercultural competence in teacher education: understanding, communication, and engagement. Understanding involves recognizing cultural differences and learning how cultural values shape behavior. Fantini (2009) emphasizes the value of self-awareness and cultural awareness in this process. Effective communication requires not only language proficiency but also active listening and adapting to different cultural contexts (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Engagement goes beyond participation and involves meaningful interactions with people from different cultures, requiring an understanding of cultural norms (Bennett, 1993;

Byram, 1997). These three components—understanding, communication, and engagement—are essential for developing intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence helps teachers create inclusive learning environments that respect cultural differences. Byram (1997) stresses that intercultural competence involves not just tolerance but understanding how cultural backgrounds influence classroom dynamics. Teachers need intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Intercultural knowledge means understanding one's own and others' cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995), which helps create an inclusive classroom. Intercultural skills allow teachers to relate to diverse cultural contexts, adapt teaching methods, and mediate cultural differences (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2020). Intercultural attitudes, as Byram (1997) notes, involve respecting and valuing other cultures, fostering a classroom atmosphere of curiosity and respect.

Student exchange programs act a crucial role in developing intercultural competence among pre-service teachers. Lantz-Deaton (2017) and Penbek (2012) highlight that these programs offer immersive cultural experiences that enhance cultural awareness, adaptability, and pedagogical skills. James et al. (2021) argue that such programs are essential for teacher education, as they allow pre-service teachers to experience different cultural practices and educational systems. Pre-service teachers learn more about their own cultural identities and develop a greater awareness of the needs of children from different origins through exchange programs. This immersion broadens their perspectives, fosters adaptability, and improves their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies (Klein & Wikan, 2019).

Mulawarman University in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, actively promotes international collaboration, offering exchange programs that expose pre-service teachers to a variety of educational practices. These exchange programs are often integrated into field practice periods (KKN PLP), providing valuable chances for pre-service teachers to apply their learning in real-world settings. Field practice allows pre-service teachers to develop and refine their teaching skills while adapting to diverse student populations. Thomassen and Munthe (2021) show that pre-service teachers use higher values to address diversity, suggesting emerging adaptability in their teaching practices. However, challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, or culture shock can arise, but overcoming these challenges contributes to personal and professional growth. Pre-service teachers report increased cultural sensitivity, empathy, and critical thinking skills, which enhance their ability to create inclusive and culturally responsive classrooms (Fantini, 2018).

3. METHODS

Design

In order to break down into the adaption experiences of pre-service teachers participating in student exchange programs at Mulawarman University and how these experiences aid in the development of their intercultural competence, this study used a phenomenological qualitative approach. Researchers can learn how people view their situations and actions in natural environments by using a qualitative approach. To ensure a thorough

understanding of participants' intercultural learning experiences, data were gathered mainly through in-depth interviews, supplemented by reflective journals and pertinent documents.

Participant

Students from Mulawarman University's Faculty of Teacher Training and Education who took part in a student exchange program in the Philippines during the KKN-PLP Tematik Terintegrasi and Asistensi Mengajar periods are the participants in this study. To ensure varied viewpoints and a thorough examination of multicultural experiences and adaptability skills among pre-service teachers, the researchers chose participants from three fields: biology education, elementary school teacher education, and English education.

Instrument

In this study, the researchers performed both face-to-face and online interviews (WhatsApp call). Researcher used important records, including photographs, and an interview guide.

Data Collection Technique

The researchers have taken the following actions to obtain the data:

1. The candidate volunteers were chosen by the researchers based on the requirements necessary to carry out this particular study.
2. The researchers requested the participants' consent.
3. The researchers interviewed the participants on their intercultural experiences during the student exchange program after the approval was given.
4. After the interview, the researchers collected the relevant document which is photo, then the participants were asked to describe the photos.

Data Analysis Technique

The data in this study was examined by the researchers using theme analysis. The experiences of participants in the 2020 academic year's student exchange program from Mulawarman University's Faculty of Teacher Training and Education were the main subject of the study. The data reduction, data display, and conclusion steps of the flow model data analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used by the researchers.

4. RESULT

The results of the data analysis are used to convey the findings, which are divided into two sections that each focus on one of the two research questions.

1. Pre-Service Teachers Adaptability Skills through Student Exchange Program

In this research, participation in a student exchange program demonstrated the development of pre-service teacher skills, particularly adaptability. This finding reveals that students exchange programs significantly impact the intercultural experiences. This study breaks down into four elements:

- a) Motivation and background

One thing unites the three participants: they are all driven to take part in the student exchange program because they have always wished to travel, study abroad, and experience new things. They all expressed a wish to visit and learn in new locations. Furthermore, despite their initial reluctance, their lecturer encouraged them to apply after initially informing them about the opportunity. All three valued the assistance provided, particularly the program's coverage of living expenses and travel expenditures, and understood the importance of taking advantage of a special opportunity that might not present itself again.

b) Intercultural experiences

The three participants mentioned about their first impression when they arrived in the Philippines:

In terms of culture, it's actually not too different from Indonesia; there are a lot of similarities between the two countries.... (P1)

The atmosphere there is actually quite similar to Indonesia, since it's a neighbour country and both are in Southeast Asia....(P2)

As for my first impression, everyone there was very kind and friendly—pretty much like people in Indonesia....(P3)

The transition seemed a little more comfortable because all three participants recognized the cultural similarities between Indonesia and the host country. Despite initial perceptions of differences, every participant highlighted aspects that were familiar, such as the language, climate, or religious demographics. They all compared the generosity of Indonesians to the warmth and friendliness of the locals, which made them feel welcome.

c) Adaptability development

Regarding adjusting to a new environment and culture, three participants displayed varying experiences. Another participant was impressed by the host culture's appreciation and celebration of teachers, while two participants developed a deeper awareness of cultural and religious diversity, improving their empathy, tolerance, and self-consciousness as Muslims in a largely Catholic environment. By contrasting the Indonesian approach with the great degree of public appreciation seen overseas, this respect highlights the disparities in how countries celebrate educators. Additionally, the participants emphasized how important flexibility skills were to their ability to perform at their best throughout the program, particularly while they were teaching.

d) Teaching practice impact

Each participant thought that the ability to adjust to other cultures had an effect on the teaching methodology. In order to overcome the difficulties they encountered in their teaching environment, the participants displayed considerate and flexible teaching

techniques. One participant underlined how crucial it is to ask the teacher for advice in order to comprehend the preferences and behavior of the students and how group learning can be used to promote participation. Another participant overcame the language barrier, especially in science, by carefully crafting English scripts and practicing beforehand to guarantee effective communication. Last but not least, one participant noted during observations that there was a lack of inclusivity in class engagement. To remedy this, they gave less-engaged students opportunities during demo teaching. When taken as a whole, these tactics demonstrate the participants' flexibility and dedication to creating a welcoming and productive learning environment.

2. *Pre-Service Teachers Challenges during the Student Exchange Program*

In order to connect with children and fit in with the school community, pre-service teachers may find it difficult to comprehend the cultural norms and expectations of the host nation. Notwithstanding these challenges, the experience offers valuable opportunities for both professional and personal growth since it fosters resilience, adaptability, and intercultural competency. The following are the difficulties that the participants mentioned while in the Philippines:

a) Language use

Two out of three participants reported that they have some issues in communicating and teaching in English moreover they taught the science subject. One participant mentioned that their English was very basic and to overcome this problem, they started to learn English again before departure. The other one faced difficulty in the academic settings because of the difference in terms.

b) Food challenges

Two out of three participants mentioned that finding halal food was quite hard due to the cultural settings where Muslims are minor. To overcome this, they decided to cook their own food.

c) Schedule

There is no fixed schedule according to the participants, so most of the time their schedules are impromptu and no preparation.

d) LGBTQ+ culture

The LGBTQ+ community was normalized in the Philippines. LGBTQ+ issues are viewed as normal and largely accepted, even in academic contexts. The cultural gap was further emphasized by educators who publicly identified as LGBTQ+ and influenced their students' acceptance of these problems. When talking about Indonesia's prohibitive stance, the participants encountered people who were confused, highlighting the cultural differences in attitudes toward these delicate subjects.

e) School regulations

Unlike Indonesia where uniform is a must, in the host country there are no uniform. Students freely to use whatever they want and also tattoo is allowed for the student.

f) Additionally, the lack of transportation, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, such as sidewalks. The area's also vulnerability to natural disasters, such as earthquakes and typhoons.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the development of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptability according to Martin et al. (2013) among pre-service teachers participating in a student exchange program in the Philippines.

Cognitive:

When faced with academic obstacles including teaching in English and handling specific STEM vocabulary, participants showed critical thinking and adaptability. They created lesson plans and modified instructional techniques, such group projects, to boost student interest. They demonstrated their problem-solving abilities and flexibility in new situations by resolving practical problems, such as shared dorm limitations and transportation difficulties. Additionally, their cognitive flexibility in negotiating and understanding cultural differences was demonstrated by cultural modifications such adopting local practices like the *mano po* gesture.

Emotional:

By adjusting to new cultural norms, such as LGBTQ+ openness and liberal clothing regulations, participants demonstrated empathy and resilience in the face of culture shock. They acquired receptive mindsets that promoted tolerance and comprehension of other religious and cultural viewpoints. By establishing trust and gently promoting student involvement, participants' emotional flexibility also improved their classroom rapport and helped to create secure, encouraging learning environments. By concentrating on the good, remaining resilient, and remaining solution-focused under pressure, they were able to effectively handle stress.

Behavioral:

Based on the dynamics of their local classrooms, the participants modified their teaching styles, adding interactive techniques and group projects to increase student involvement. They overcame logistical obstacles in their daily lives by modifying their schedules and coming up with workable alternatives, such getting up early to use communal facilities or traveling vast distances because there were few other ways to get around. Managing erratic program schedules demonstrated behavioral flexibility as well, as participants modified their plans and stayed adaptable to evolving conditions.

This study also identified key challenges categorized into linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and logistical issues. Each of these challenges required participants to develop strategies to overcome them, contributing to their overall adaptability and professional growth.

1. Linguistic Barriers

Teaching in English was difficult for some of the participants, especially when it came to defining technical vocabulary in fields like biology. They overcame this by creating thorough lesson plans, practicing for clarity, and enhancing understanding with gestures and visual aids. Students were reluctant to participate at first, but through engaging exercises and emphasizing clear communication above flawless grammar, participants promoted inclusivity and confidence. These tactics shown their flexibility and success in a bilingual environment.

2. Cultural Differences

At first, cultural differences like acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships, permissive dress requirements, and tattoos as a form of self-expression made people uneasy. As they adapted their viewpoints, participants gained empathy and tolerance for these distinctions. Challenges were also brought on by religious difference, as Muslim participants had to adjust to living in a largely Catholic setting. They adopted cultural customs that promoted relationships and respect for one another, such as the *mano po* gesture. Participants' intercultural competency improved as a result of managing these disparities and became more understanding, sympathetic, and culturally aware.

3. Logistical Challenges

Limited availability of halal food, erratic scheduling, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent transportation were among the logistical problems. In order to cope with abrupt schedule changes, participants adjusted their routines to handle shared facilities, cooked their own meals, and relied on local transportation options like tricycles. Natural disaster experiences, like earthquakes, put their flexibility and resilience to the test. Notwithstanding these challenges, participants gained problem-solving, time-management, and resourcefulness abilities that equipped them for a variety of work settings.

Overall, these challenges pushed participants to grow as adaptable and culturally competent educators, equipping them with valuable skills for navigating diverse educational contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study shows that student exchange programs are essential for helping pre-service teachers build their flexibility skills. Participants gained knowledge about navigating cultural differences, overcoming language obstacles, and adjusting to logistical challenges through their experiences, all of which aided in their overall development as teachers. These results highlight how crucial these programs are in educating aspiring educators

for the challenges of working in dynamic, diverse classrooms. Through the development of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptability, student exchange programs give aspiring educators the tools they need to prosper in a worldwide society and successfully meet the dynamic demands of the teaching profession.

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