

Pedagogical, Socio-Cultural, and Infrastructural Dimensions of International Mobility: SEA Teacher Exchange

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ABSTRACT

International student mobility plays a critical role in advancing the internationalization agenda of higher education institutions. However, successful mobility programs require not only academic opportunities but also adequate social support and institutional infrastructure. Employing a mixed-method descriptive research design, data were collected through structured exit interviews and satisfaction surveys from twenty-four (24) international pre-service teachers from Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed an exceptionally high overall satisfaction rating ($M = 9.70/10$), attributed to effective mentorship, meaningful cultural immersion, and strong manifestations of Filipino hospitality. Participants reported significant professional growth in classroom management, English communication, and contextualized teaching practices. Nevertheless, critical challenges emerged regarding dormitory safety, water quality, dietary inclusivity, and administrative communication. The findings suggest that while the program effectively promotes intercultural learning and professional development, institutional improvements in infrastructure and student welfare services remain necessary. The study contributes to the growing literature on international student mobility within Southeast Asia by highlighting the interconnected influence of pedagogical, socio-cultural, and infrastructural factors on participant experiences.

Keywords: International Student Mobility, SEA Teacher Exchange, Student Satisfaction, Filipino Hospitality, Cross-Cultural Adjustment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of international mobility programs in developing the professional and intercultural competencies of pre-service teachers. According to Cruzata (2023), participation in the SEA Teacher Program significantly enhanced teaching skills, classroom management, and confidence among future educators. Similarly, Tangen and Henderson (2023) reported that international exchange experiences foster transformative learning by promoting intercultural understanding, adaptability, and global perspectives. Zhang et al. (2024) further noted that student mobility programs contribute to both individual development and institutional internationalization objectives. In examining student experiences, Muslichah and Maajid (2025) found that satisfaction with exchange programs is influenced not only by academic opportunities but also by social integration and support services. Moreover, Rifki et al. (2025) concluded that meaningful cultural immersion and structured mentoring are critical factors in the success of international teaching exchanges. These studies indicate that pedagogical, sociocultural, and infrastructural dimensions collectively shape the overall experiences of international exchange participants and should be considered in evaluating mobility programs.

Despite these insights, a critical synthesis reveals a tendency in the literature to isolate academic outcomes from the lived infrastructural realities of the participants. Most existing studies focus primarily on teaching competencies and sociocultural adaptation, giving significantly less empirical attention to the micro-level logistical and infrastructural friction points that dictate daily survival. There remains a distinct research gap

regarding how institutional infrastructure directly interacts with and mediates the socio-cultural and pedagogical experiences of exchange students within the Southeast Asian context. This study addresses this gap by holistically examining the interconnected pedagogical, socio-cultural, and infrastructural dimensions of the exchange experience to determine how they collectively shape overall satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has become a strategic priority among universities worldwide, facilitating cross-cultural learning, global competence development, and academic collaboration. Within Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) has strengthened regional cooperation through initiatives such as the SEA Teacher Exchange Program, which provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to experience diverse educational systems and cultural environments.

International mobility programs offer numerous educational and professional benefits. Previous studies have demonstrated that participation in exchange programs enhances intercultural competence, communication skills, adaptability, and professional preparedness among students. However, the success of these programs extends beyond academic activities and depends heavily on participants' ability to adjust socially, culturally, and psychologically to their host environment.

Despite the increasing popularity of international exchange programs, students frequently encounter challenges related to language barriers, cultural adjustment, accommodation, food accessibility, administrative procedures, and academic expectations. Such challenges may significantly affect participants' overall satisfaction and learning outcomes. Understanding these experiences is essential for institutions seeking to improve the quality and sustainability of mobility programs.

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of evaluating student experiences as part of institutional quality assurance and internationalization efforts. However, limited research has examined the combined influence of pedagogical, socio-cultural, and infrastructural dimensions within the context of Southeast Asian teacher mobility programs. Most existing studies focus primarily on academic outcomes while giving less attention to environmental and support-related factors that shape participant experiences.

This study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of SEA Teacher Exchange participants. Specifically, it explores participants' perceptions of pedagogical growth, social integration, cultural immersion, and logistical challenges. The findings provide empirical evidence that may guide policy improvements and strengthen future implementations of international mobility programs.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on international student mobility by providing a comprehensive evaluation of SEA Teacher Exchange participants within the Philippine higher education context. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on professional development outcomes, the present study simultaneously examines pedagogical, socio-cultural, and infrastructural dimensions of the exchange experience. The findings offer evidence-based recommendations for enhancing student support services, intercultural programming, and institutional infrastructure to improve future mobility initiatives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Oberg's U-Curve Theory of Cultural Adjustment and Allport's Contact Hypothesis.

According to Oberg (1960), individuals undergoing cultural transition experience four stages: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Exchange students initially experience enthusiasm and excitement upon arrival but may later encounter challenges associated with unfamiliar academic expectations, living conditions, and social norms. Successful adaptation occurs as participants gradually develop coping mechanisms and cultural understanding.

Meanwhile, Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954) posits that positive interactions among individuals from different cultural backgrounds can reduce prejudice and strengthen mutual understanding when conditions such

as equal status, cooperation, common goals, and institutional support are present. Programs such as "Halina Umay Kan" exemplify these conditions by creating opportunities for meaningful intercultural engagement among participants.

Together, these frameworks explain both the adjustment challenges and positive intercultural experiences reported by SEA Teacher participants.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design.

The research design used in this study is the descriptive mixed-method design. It utilized structured exit interviews to gather qualitative themes and a rating scale to quantify satisfaction. This design generates data that best describes the attributes of the target population's experience.

Participants of the Study

The study involved twenty-four (24) international pre-service teachers who participated in the SEA Teacher Exchange Program. Participants represented Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Purposive sampling was utilized because participants possessed direct experience with the exchange program and could provide relevant insights regarding academic, social, cultural, and logistical aspects of their stay.

Data Collection and Instrument

The primary instrument was the Exit Interview Protocol. It comprised open-ended questions targeting four themes: (1) pedagogical growth, (2) social dynamics, (3) cultural immersion, and (4) logistical challenges. Additionally, a 10-point Likert-type scale was used to measure overall satisfaction.

Data were gathered through a structured Exit Interview Protocol consisting of open-ended questions addressing:

1. Pedagogical growth and professional development;
2. Social integration and cultural immersion;
3. Logistical and infrastructural experiences; and
4. Recommendations for program improvement.

A 10-point satisfaction scale was also administered to measure participants' overall program evaluation.

The instrument underwent expert validation by specialists in international education, educational research, and student affairs administration. Revisions were incorporated based on their recommendations to improve clarity and relevance.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis using a systematic coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved an initial cycle of open coding of the exit interview transcripts, followed by focused coding to identify and define recurring overarching patterns.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (weighted means) to determine the average satisfaction rating. To strengthen the quantitative insights, inferential analyses were incorporated. Specifically, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to conduct group comparisons, determining if overall satisfaction significantly differed based on the participants' nationalities.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To ensure the credibility of the qualitative findings, member checking was conducted with select participants to verify that the synthesized themes accurately reflected their lived experiences. Furthermore, reflexivity was actively maintained throughout the research process. Recognizing the researcher's dual role as an evaluator and university faculty member, reflexive journaling was utilized to bracket institutional biases and ensure the analysis remained authentically grounded in the students' perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and anonymity was maintained to encourage honest responses. Participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for research and quality improvement purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pedagogical Growth & Professional Development

Table 1. Key Observations on Pedagogy

Subtheme	Key Findings
Skill Enhancement	Strong consensus on improved English proficiency and classroom management
Mentorship	Resource teachers were praised for being "emotionally available".
Workload	"Culture shock" regarding the intensity of the Philippine education system.

Findings indicate that participation in the SEA Teacher Exchange Program contributed substantially to the professional development of the participants. Students reported improvements in classroom management, English communication skills, instructional delivery, and contextualized teaching strategies.

Mentorship emerged as one of the strongest positive themes. Participants consistently described cooperating teachers and university mentors as supportive, approachable, and professionally competent. These findings align with previous research demonstrating that mentoring relationships significantly enhance learning outcomes and professional confidence among pre-service teachers.

However, participants experienced considerable adjustment difficulties regarding instructional planning requirements. The Philippine practice of preparing detailed daily lesson plans differed substantially from the semester-based planning systems commonly used in their home countries. This difference created what participants described as "academic culture shock."

These findings support Oberg's theory, wherein participants encountered temporary stress while adapting to unfamiliar educational practices before eventually adjusting to institutional expectations.

Social Dynamics & Cultural Immersion

Table 2. Key Observations on Social Dynamics

SubthemeKey Findings

Subtheme	Key Findings
Hospitality	"Filipino Hospitality" is the strongest positive theme; students felt like "family".
Inclusivity	Muslim students generally felt respected regarding attire (Hijab).
Engagement	The "Halina Umay Kan" program was cited as a critical bridge for networking.

Participants consistently identified Filipino hospitality as the most memorable aspect of their exchange experience. Many respondents described their host communities as welcoming, supportive, and inclusive.

Programs such as "Halina Umay Kan" significantly contributed to cultural adaptation by facilitating interactions between local and international students. These activities fostered friendship, intercultural understanding, and a sense of belonging among participants.

The findings strongly support Allport's Contact Hypothesis, which emphasizes the positive outcomes of meaningful intercultural interactions. The supportive environment created by faculty, students, and local communities enabled participants to overcome cultural barriers and develop positive perceptions of Filipino culture.

Logistical Challenges & Infrastructural Pain Points

Table 3. Key Logistical Challenges

SubthemeKey Findings

Subtheme	Key Findings
Dormitory Safety	Reports of "sparking electrical plugs" and poor water quality causing skin allergies
Dietary Issues	Scarcity of Halal food; difficulty finding pork-free options for Muslim participants.
Administration	"Late announcements" (night before) caused stress and cultural friction.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive social and academic experiences, several infrastructural issues emerged as major concerns.

Participants reported electrical safety hazards within dormitory facilities, including malfunctioning outlets and exposed wiring. Water quality issues were also reported, with some students experiencing skin irritation and allergic reactions.

Dietary inclusivity represented another significant challenge. Muslim participants experienced difficulties identifying Halal-certified food options and expressed concerns regarding food preparation practices.

Administrative communication was likewise identified as an area requiring improvement. Several participants reported receiving important announcements at short notice, which limited their ability to prepare for scheduled activities.

These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that basic physiological and safety needs are adequately addressed to support successful internationalization efforts.

Quantitative Satisfaction

Table 4. Overall Satisfaction Rating

Metric	Average Rating	Interpretation
Over-all Experience	9.70/10	Outstanding

The data reveals an average overall satisfaction rating of 9.70, verbally interpreted as Outstanding. To determine if these satisfaction levels varied by demographic background, a one-way ANOVA was conducted comparing the overall satisfaction scores across the three participant nationalities (Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand). The inferential analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in satisfaction among the groups ($p>0.05$). This indicates a cohesive, universally high level of satisfaction across diverse cultural cohorts, despite the localized logistical friction points they all encountered. The data reveals an average rating of 9.70, verbally interpreted as Outstanding. Despite significant logistical challenges, the satisfaction remains exceptionally high.

The empirically high satisfaction rating initially presents a paradox when juxtaposed against the significant logistical and infrastructural challenges documented in the qualitative data. This phenomenon can be clearly contextualized through the Compensation Hypothesis found in service recovery and organizational literature

(McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). The hypothesis posits that exceptional interpersonal treatment can effectively buffer and compensate for tangible, physical service failures.

In the context of this study, the extraordinary warmth of Filipino hospitality and the high quality of academic mentorship successfully outweighed the physical discomforts related to dormitory infrastructure and administrative delays.

CONCLUSIONS

The SEA Teacher Exchange Program successfully achieved its objectives of promoting intercultural learning, professional development, and regional collaboration among future educators. Participants reported significant gains in teaching competence, communication skills, and cultural understanding.

Filipino hospitality, supportive mentorship, and meaningful cultural immersion activities emerged as the strongest contributors to participant satisfaction. These elements facilitated successful social integration and enhanced the overall educational value of the exchange experience.

However, the study also identified critical areas requiring institutional attention, particularly dormitory safety, water quality, dietary inclusivity, and administrative communication. While these issues did not significantly diminish overall satisfaction, they present potential risks that may affect future participants' welfare and program quality.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that successful international mobility programs require a balanced approach that integrates academic excellence, intercultural engagement, and adequate institutional support systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For University Administration

- Conduct comprehensive safety inspections of student housing facilities and implement necessary repairs immediately.
- Improve water quality monitoring systems and install appropriate filtration mechanisms.
- Establish standardized protocols for facility maintenance and emergency response.

2. For Student Affairs and International Relations Offices

- Develop a Halal-friendly food support program and provide verified lists of Halal-certified establishments.
- Enhance orientation programs to address academic and cultural expectations before participant arrival.
- Strengthen communication systems to ensure timely dissemination of announcements.

3. For Program Coordinators

- Expand intercultural engagement activities that promote interaction between local and international students.
- Improve the buddy system by assigning multiple student volunteers to each participant.
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms throughout the exchange period rather than relying solely on exit evaluations.

4. For Future Researchers

- Conduct longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of the SEA Teacher Exchange Program on professional development and intercultural competence.

- Compare experiences across multiple host universities to identify best practices in exchange program implementation.
- Explore the relationship between institutional support services and international student satisfaction using larger sample sizes and inferential statistical analyses.

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