



Original Article

Cross-Cultural Challenges and Self-Efficacy of Indonesian EFL Teachers In Thailand

Ainiftria Dueramae^{1✉}, Pirman Ginting²

^{1,2}Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Korespondensi Email: ainiftrian5@gmail.com[✉]

Abstract:

This article examines the level of perceived self-efficacy and pedagogical challenges faced by pre-service Indonesian teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during their international teaching practice in Thai classrooms. Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory and grounded in a sociocultural perspective, this study employs a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire consisting of Likert scale questions and open-ended questions, and analyzed using thematic analysis supported by descriptive interpretation of response patterns. The results showed that participants generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of self-confidence in classroom management, teaching strategies, and student engagement. Despite facing challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and teaching adjustments, participants developed adaptive strategies that strengthened their professional self-confidence. This study concludes that self-confidence in a cross-cultural context is socially constructed through experiential learning and intercultural interactions, highlighting the importance of integrating structured international practice programs into teacher education curricula.

Submitted	: 23 February 2026
Revised	: 28 February 2026
Acceptance	: 3 Maret 2026
Publish Online	: 4 Maret 2026

Keywords: self-efficacy, cross-cultural teaching, international practicum, EFL pre-service teachers

Introduction

The globalized world of education has transformed English language teaching (ELT) into an intercultural practice that involves teachers and students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting in multilingual classrooms. In this context, cross-cultural communication competence has become a major component of English teachers' professionalism, as effective communication and pedagogical behavior must continually adapt to culturally diverse learning environments. Cross-cultural empathetic awareness, defined as the ability to understand, interpret, and respond

appropriately to cultural differences in communication, is a fundamental dimension of this competency ([Ratnasari, 2019](#)). This skill is widely regarded as a prerequisite for optimizing communication and culturally responsive teaching practices in English language education ([Negi, 2024](#)). The urgency to examine the intercultural dimension in English language teaching (ELT) is further reinforced by recent international research showing that culturally responsive teaching significantly influences student engagement, identity development, and language achievement in global classrooms ([Wang et al., 2024](#); [Ismail et al., 2024](#)). These insights suggest that teachers' cross-cultural interaction readiness is essential in contemporary education systems, not optional.

As cultural and linguistic diversity increases, teacher education institutions are increasingly integrating international teaching practice programs into their curricula. International teaching practice provides authentic professional experience for prospective teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through direct interaction with students, curricula, and education systems outside their home countries ([Kabilan et al., 2020](#)). Through this immersive experience, prospective teachers are expected to develop cross-cultural awareness, adaptability, and pedagogical flexibility while navigating differences in classroom interaction patterns, teaching strategies, and educational values ([Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023](#)). In Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, international teaching practices have become a strategic platform for preparing future educators to operate in culturally heterogeneous classrooms. Recent studies highlight that these programs enhance intercultural sensitivity and professional identity formation, but also reveal significant adjustment difficulties in the early phases of teaching immersion ([Choephatruedi & Inpin, 2025](#); [Rustandi et al., 2025](#)). These findings underscore the need for more in-depth empirical investigation into how prospective teachers negotiate pedagogical and psychological demands in a cross-national context.

Theoretically, this study is based on the sociocultural perspective of learning introduced by [Lev Vygotsky \(1978\)](#), which emphasizes that learning and professional development are fundamentally shaped by social interaction and collaborative meaning-making. Learning is not entirely determined by individual cognitive abilities, but is greatly influenced by guided participation and social support. As stated by Vygotsky (1978), "What a learner can do with the help of others reflects their mental development more than what they can do on their own." This perspective is particularly relevant in international teaching practice, where prospective teachers build professional competence through mentoring, peer collaboration, and contextual classroom experiences in unfamiliar cultural environments. In multicultural environments, meaning is socially negotiated, and teaching effectiveness is influenced by the ability to interpret sociocultural cues and adjust teaching strategies accordingly.

Although international teaching practices potentially offer benefits, empirical evidence shows that prospective teachers often face significant pedagogical challenges. Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, difficulties in interpreting culturally embedded learning materials, and barriers to effective classroom interaction, which ultimately affect the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes ([Kustati et al., 2023](#)). In addition, prospective teachers often experience "reality shock" when faced with limited teaching resources, multigrade classrooms, and inadequate mentoring support in the early stages of their teaching practice ([Choephatruedi & Inpin, 2025](#)). These challenges become even more complex in a cross-cultural context, where differences in social norms, communication styles, and educational expectations can trigger culture

shock and adaptation difficulties ([Rustandi et al., 2025](#)).

The barrier most frequently identified in cross-cultural teaching practice is language barriers. In transnational teaching environments, prospective teachers must manage classrooms, implement effective strategies, and support students' English language development without sharing a common native language ([Kusuma et al., 2025](#)). This situation is particularly challenging when teaching young learners with limited English proficiency, which requires creative scaffolding strategies and multimodal instructional approaches. In addition, teaching in a non-native English context requires ongoing negotiation regarding language use, cultural expectations, and institutional practices ([Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023](#)). Practical challenges can also arise from internal factors, such as limited teaching competence and classroom management skills, as well as external factors, including student motivation and limited educational facilities ([Pakpahan, 2023](#)). Altogether, these observations indicate that international teaching practices involve complex interactions between contextual and individual variables.

In addition to pedagogical considerations, psychological dimensions, particularly self-efficacy, play a crucial role in shaping teacher performance in cross-cultural contexts. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks. According to Albert Bandura, self-efficacy significantly influences how individuals think, act, and respond to challenges ([Bandura, 1977](#)). In the context of education, teachers' self-confidence influences instructional decision-making, classroom management, perseverance, and resilience in the face of difficulties ([Wang et al., 2024](#)). Empirical evidence shows that teaching practice experience contributes positively to the development of prospective teachers' confidence and instructional competence ([Ismail et al., 2024](#)). Strong confidence enables prospective teachers to remain adaptive, regulate emotional responses, and maintain motivation even when faced with unfamiliar cultural and pedagogical conditions ([Tutyandari, 2023](#)). Furthermore, teachers' self-confidence has been found to influence their ability to engage students effectively, apply appropriate teaching strategies, and maintain a productive classroom environment ([Injiya & Emaliana, 2024](#)). These observations highlight the importance of psychological readiness alongside pedagogical competence in the context of international teaching.

Although previous studies have examined pedagogical challenges during teaching practice and other research has examined self-efficacy as an independent construct, empirical research integrating both dimensions in international and cross-cultural teaching practice remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in Southeast Asia, where international teaching practice programs are developing but remain underrepresented in academic discourse ([Faez et al., 2025](#)). Most existing studies tend to focus on instructional adaptation or psychological development separately, resulting in a lack of understanding of how these dimensions interact dynamically in real classroom contexts. Consequently, there is an urgent need for comprehensive qualitative research that simultaneously explores pedagogical challenges and the development of self-confidence among prospective English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers involved in cross-cultural teaching environments.

Acknowledging this research gap, this study aims to explore the self-efficacy and pedagogical challenges faced by Indonesian prospective English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers during their international teaching practice in Thai classrooms. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how cross-cultural teaching experiences shape prospective teachers' beliefs about their teaching abilities while influencing their pedagogical strategies. The uniqueness of this

study lies in its integrative examination of psychological and pedagogical dimensions in the specific context of Southeast Asia, thereby contributing to the limited literature linking self-confidence theory to real-world cross-cultural teaching practices. Ultimately, these findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions on cross-cultural English teaching and provide practical recommendations for improving the design and implementation of international teaching practice programs in English teacher education.

Methods

A qualitative case study design was adopted in this study to explore the self-confidence and pedagogical challenges of Indonesian English teacher candidates during their international teaching practice in Thai classrooms. This design was chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences in the specific context of cross-cultural teaching. The study was based on Bandura's (1977) theory of self-confidence, which defines self-confidence as an individual's belief in their ability to plan and carry out the actions necessary to achieve a specific outcome. This theoretical framework was used to confirm the conceptual dimensions explored in this study. An explanatory qualitative orientation was adopted to capture participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to teaching in a multicultural classroom environment.

The participants in this study were Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher candidates who had participated in an international teaching practicum program in Thailand. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because not all teacher candidates had teaching experience in an international or cross-cultural environment. The inclusion criteria required that participants be enrolled in an English teacher education program in Indonesia and have direct teaching experience in Thai elementary or secondary school classrooms during the international teaching practicum program. Selection ensured that participants had relevant mastery experience, which according to [Bandura \(1977\)](#) is the primary source of self-confidence development. The number of participants was determined based on responses to questionnaires completed during the data collection process.

The data in this research consists of qualitative data supported by descriptive response patterns. The primary data source is Indonesian prospective English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers who have completed their international teaching practice program in Thailand. Qualitative data were obtained from participants' written responses describing their teaching experiences, perceptions of self-efficacy, and pedagogical challenges encountered during cross-cultural teaching practice. In addition, scaled responses were used to describe participants' levels of perceived self-efficacy in three dimensions: teaching strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.

The data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to measure participants' perceptions of their self-efficacy. Responses measured with this scale were used to describe general trends in participants' beliefs during their international teaching practice in Thai classrooms. Open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their teaching experiences and pedagogical challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, classroom interaction patterns, instructional adjustments, and teaching strategies applied during teaching practice.

The questionnaire link was distributed to participants via an online communication platform after they completed their international teaching practice program. Participation was voluntary, and respondents filled out the questionnaire independently. All responses were automatically recorded and securely stored in a Google Form database before being downloaded and prepared for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to participants' self-efficacy and pedagogical challenges during international teaching practice in Thai classrooms. The analysis began with familiarization of the data through repeated readings of participants' responses to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Initial coding was done by identifying meaningful units related to the dimensions of self-confidence and cross-cultural teaching challenges. These codes were then grouped into categories and developed into main themes representing the participants' teaching experiences.

Descriptive analysis of scaled response patterns provided contextual support for the qualitative themes. These descriptive tendencies were used to complement and strengthen the interpretation of qualitative findings, rather than to generate statistical generalizations.

Results

The study findings were generated through systematic analysis of questionnaire data obtained from Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers engaged in an international teaching practicum in Thai classrooms. The results are organized into two main parts: (1) self-efficacy beliefs during cross-cultural teaching and (2) pedagogical challenges encountered during the practicum. Quantitative descriptive data from Likert-scale items are used to support qualitative insights derived from participants' narrative responses.

Self-Efficacy Belief during International Teaching

Descriptive Likert scale data show that most participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of confidence in the three dimensions identified in the research framework: teaching strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. This indicates that the mastery experiences gained during international practice serve as an important source for the development of confidence, as emphasized by Bandura (1977). Table 1 summarizes participants' self-efficacy perceptions across key instructional dimensions.

Table 1. Summary of Pre-Service Teachers' Self-Efficacy Belief

Self-Efficacy Dimension	General Tendency
Classroom management	Mostly Agree to Strongly Agree
Explaining English concepts	Mostly Agree
Student motivation and engagement	Agree
Instructional adaptation	Agree
Teaching in multicultural classrooms	Agree

Descriptive Likert scale data show that most participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of confidence in the three dimensions identified in the research

framework: teaching strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. This indicates that the mastery experiences gained during international practice serve as an important source for the development of confidence, as emphasized by Bandura (1977). Table 1 summarizes participants' self-efficacy perceptions across key instructional dimensions.

Participants expressed confidence in selecting and implementing teaching strategies appropriate to student needs, managing classroom behavior across cultural norms, and maintaining student engagement despite language limitations. This development can be interpreted from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) as the result of guided participation and social interaction in the Thai classroom context. Through interaction with students and the school community, participants negotiated meaning, adjusted teaching approaches, and gradually strengthened their professional identities. Further qualitative data illustrates this process:

“At first, I was not confident because students rarely used English, but gradually I learned how to adjust my teaching and became more confident.”
(P3)

Another participant noted that the practicum strengthened their professional identity as a future teacher:

“Teaching in Thailand made me realize that I am capable of handling different classroom situations and students from different cultures.” (P6)

These findings indicate that direct teaching experience in an international setting played a crucial role in strengthening pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Pedagogical Challenges in Cross- Cultural Classroom

Notwithstanding positive developments in self-confidence, participants faced several pedagogical challenges consistent with previous literature on international teaching practice. Thematic analysis identified four dominant categories: language barriers, culturally influenced classroom management, teaching materials, and cultural adaptation. Table 2 presents a summary of the main pedagogical challenges identified in this study.

Table 2. Summary of Pedagogical Challenges Encountered by Participants

Main Challenge	Description
Language barriers	Difficulty explaining vocabulary and instructions
Classroom management	Managing student behavior influenced by cultural norms
Instructional materials	Limited suitability of materials for Thai context
Cultural adjustment	Balancing English teaching and respect for Thai culture

Language barriers emerged as the most frequently reported challenge,

consistent with the cross-country teaching literature. Teaching students with limited English proficiency requires participants to negotiate meaning without sharing a common native language.

“The biggest challenge I face is explaining English vocabulary because students have very limited English skills.” (P1)

These findings support previous studies showing that language barriers are a major obstacle in cross-cultural practice settings. This challenge is not only linguistic but also pedagogical, as participants need to modify their explanations and patterns of interaction in the classroom. Cultural differences also affect classroom management:

“Classroom management was a challenge because the students had different learning behaviors and classroom norms compared to Indonesia.” (P4)

This experience reflects what has been described in previous literature as “reality shock” during early teaching practice, especially in unfamiliar education systems.

Instructional Adjustment and Adaption Strategies

In accordance with the operational framework of instructional adaptation in this study, participants demonstrated active coping strategies in response to challenges. Thematic analysis shows that adaptation includes simplifying language use, increasing visual and gestural support, adjusting speed, and modifying teaching materials to suit local cultural expectations.

“I adjusted my teaching strategy by using simpler instructions and more visuals so that students could understand better.” (P2)

These adaptive practices illustrate the dynamic interaction between pedagogical challenges and the development of self-confidence. Successful experiences of adjustment strengthen participants' belief in their teaching abilities, supporting Bandura's argument that experiences of mastery are the strongest source of self-confidence. Based on a sociocultural perspective, this adaptation represents a negotiated teaching practice, shaped through interaction within a new educational culture.

Cross-cultural Awareness and Professional Self-Confidence Development

In addition to teaching skills, the international practicum program also contributes to participants' professional development and cultural sensitivity. Most participants agree that this experience has increased their understanding of cultural diversity and strengthened their confidence in teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Participants also expressed strong agreement on the importance of cross-cultural experiences for future English teachers. One participant noted:

“This experience helped me understand that cultural awareness is very important in teaching English effectively.” (P5)

Another participant emphasized the long-term professional impact:

“I plan to apply what I learned in Thai classrooms to my future teaching career.” (P6)

These findings show that international teaching practice experiences not only increase confidence, but also develop cross-cultural competence and long-term professional motivation.

Discussion

This research proves that prospective English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia generally demonstrate moderate to high levels of self-confidence during their international teaching practice, despite facing significant pedagogical challenges. In line with Bandura's theory (1977), the experience of success gained through authentic cross-cultural teaching strengthens participants' confidence in classroom management, teaching strategies, and student engagement dimensions.

The presence of language barriers and culturally influenced classroom norms confirms findings from previous cross-cultural teaching research. However, rather than reducing confidence, these challenges trigger teaching adaptation and reflective practice. This supports the view that confidence develops dynamically through the experience of successfully overcoming challenges.

Adaptive practices demonstrate that pedagogical challenges and confidence development are interrelated processes. Consistent with previous research on international teaching practices, instructional adaptation and cultural sensitivity emerge as essential competencies developed through cross-cultural teaching experiences. The increased awareness of participants regarding cultural diversity and differences in classroom interactions indicates that international teaching practice programs play a crucial role in preparing future English teachers for culturally diverse educational contexts. Therefore, these findings reinforce the importance of experiential learning in teacher education, particularly in providing prospective teachers with adaptive skills for multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Compared to previous studies, this research expands on existing literature that often examines pedagogical challenges and self-confidence as separate constructs. While previous studies often emphasize the difficulties, stress, or “reality shock” experienced during early teaching practice, current findings reveal a more nuanced relationship between challenges and professional development. Rather than viewing cross-cultural barriers solely as obstacles, this study shows how such challenges directly contribute to strengthening confidence in teaching when prospective teachers successfully overcome them. This integrative perspective highlights the transformative potential of international practice experiences.

In addition, most existing research on teacher self-efficacy focuses on domestic teaching practice environments in relatively familiar sociocultural contexts. By placing the development of self-efficacy in the explicit context of cross-cultural and international teaching, this study provides empirical evidence that professional confidence is shaped not only by instructional mastery, but also by intercultural negotiation, cultural empathy, and contextual adaptation. Self-confidence in multicultural classrooms is therefore formed through continuous interaction between

teachers' internal belief systems and external sociocultural realities.

Based on theory, this study emphasizes understanding teacher self-efficacy by integrating Bandura's psychological framework with a sociocultural perspective in learning. Although Bandura (1977) emphasizes mastery experiences as the primary source of self-efficacy, findings show that in the context of international practice, social mastery is mediated through intercultural interactions, collaborative meaning-making, and adaptive pedagogical decision-making. In other words, the development of self-confidence cannot be fully understood as an individual cognitive process detached from context; rather, it is embedded in culturally contextualized teaching practices. By considering self-confidence as something that is psychologically grounded and socially negotiated, this study contributes to a more contextual and holistic model of professional self-confidence in English teacher education.

In terms of general findings, this study indicates that international teaching practice serves as an effective platform for simultaneously developing self-confidence and cross-cultural competence among prospective English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia. The interplay between pedagogical challenges and adaptive teaching practices highlights the importance of experiential and cross-cultural dimensions in teacher preparation programs. These results provide empirical support for strengthening international practice initiatives as transformative spaces where psychological resilience, instructional competence, and cultural awareness develop together.

Conclusion

According to the results of this research, the concept of teacher self-efficacy in the context of international cross-cultural teaching practice can be redefined by showing that professional confidence is not merely an individual psychological attribute, but rather a system of beliefs that is constructed contextually and influenced by social interactions. The findings show that the self-efficacy of prospective English teachers in Indonesia develops through continuous engagement with linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical complexities in Thai classrooms. These challenges do not undermine self-confidence but rather activate adaptive teaching practices that strengthen teachers' sense of professional competence.

Consequently, this research contributes to an integrated model of teacher effectiveness development, emphasizing that self-confidence in multicultural classrooms emerges from the interaction between experiential learning, teaching method adaptation, and intercultural negotiation. The results of this study highlight the strategic importance of integrating structured international and intercultural practice opportunities into English teacher education in order to prepare future educators for increasingly diverse global learning environments.

Suggestion

Several recommendations are proposed based on the findings of this research. First, teacher education programs are highly encouraged to integrate international or cross-cultural teaching experiences into their curricula to enhance prospective teachers' self-confidence and cross-cultural competence. Structured preparation and reflective activities before and after international practicum programs can further support prospective teachers in effectively overcoming pedagogical challenges.

Second, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of

participants and use diverse data collection methods, such as interviews or classroom observations, to gain deeper insights into the development of prospective teachers' confidence in a cross-cultural context. Finally, further research could explore comparative perspectives between countries or different educational environments to broaden understanding of how international teaching practice experiences influence teacher development in diverse EFL environments.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.19>
- Choephatruedi, P., & Inpin, B. (2025). Teacher self-efficacy in rural Thailand: Insights from pre-service English teachers' practicum experiences. *Asian EFL Journal*, 27(1), 45–63.
- Faez, F., Karimi, M. N., & De Costa, P. I. (2025). Exploring the relationship between reflective practice and language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (2010–2024): A systematic review. *System*, 117, 103103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103103>
- Haryadi, R. (2023). Professional identity development of Indonesian EFL teachers in international teaching contexts. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 14(3), 512–520.
- Hasymi, M., & Nurkamto, J. (2023). Cross-cultural experience in teacher education: Indonesian pre-service English teachers' perspectives on international teaching practicum. *Journal of Language and Education*, 9(3), 56–69. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jlei.2023>
- Injiya, R. R., & Emaliana, I. (2024). The relationship between EFL pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and their epistemic beliefs. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 9(1), 15–30.
- Ismail, H., Rahman, A. A., & Yusoff, N. M. (2024). Islamic education teacher trainees' self-efficacy during teaching practicum. *Journal of Islamic Education Research*, 9(1), 45–60.
- Kabilan, M. K., Ahmad, N., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2020). International teaching practicum: Challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers in ESL settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, 54(3), 688–712. <https://doi.org/10.1002/teisq.548>
- Kusuma, A. D., Santosa, M. H., & Pratama, H. (2025). Language barriers in cross-national teaching practicum: Evidence from Southeast Asian EFL contexts. *Asian TEFL Journal*, 30(1), 22–40.
- Kustati, M., Al-Azmi, H., & Yuhardi. (2023). Cross-cultural awareness: EFL learners' barriers to learning English. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 52(2), 175–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2023>
- Negi, J. S. (2024). Promoting cross-cultural understanding through English language education: A comparative study at different educational levels. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 34(1), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12401>
- Pakpahan, R. (2023). Challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practicum. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 7(3), 297–306.
- Ratnasari, D. (2019). Cross-cultural empathy in English language teaching. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 7(2), 45–58.
- Rustandi, A. (2025). Intercultural competence in multilingual classrooms: Implications for teacher mobility in Southeast Asia. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2024>
- Tutyandari, H. (2023). Exploring EFL pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy in teaching: An Indonesian case. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 55–63.

- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, Y., Zhang, L. J., & Luo, H. (2024). A systematic review of language teachers' self-efficacy research over the past twenty years: A bibliometric analysis. *System*, *120*, 103189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103189>