

Original Article

International Practicum Experiences of Teacher-Education Students in a Private Higher Education Institution

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Abstract. Internationalization of on-the-job training (OJT) programs helps students develop greater global competence and intercultural sensitivity, prompting schools to further enhance their international practicum programs through feedback and evaluation. In this study, the researchers aimed to describe the international practicum experiences of teacher education students at a private higher education institution in Bulacan. Using a qualitative research method, three themes were identified in the students' and principals' evaluation and narrative reports. These themes are: From Theory to Practice, More than just the Classrooms, and Overcoming Roadblocks. The findings showed that the teacher-education students who took their practicum in Thailand have positive experiences in terms of the learning they have gained, the opportunity for them to earn, their exposure to Thai culture, and their further professional enhancement. Since the results of the study imply that the respondents have acquired the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed in the teaching profession, it is recommended that the university continue its international practicum program, as this will provide opportunities to its teacher-education students to apply for a teaching position in Thailand or in other countries because of their experiences.

Keywords: Internationalization; Practicum experiences; Teacher-education students.

Internationalization of education refers to institutional and instructional processes that equip learners with knowledge, skills, and values applicable across cultural and national boundaries, to develop globally competent citizens (Deshpande, 2023). In higher education, internationalization is now recognized as a strategic response to globalization, enabling institutions to improve educational quality, competitiveness, and inclusivity while responding to the demands of a global knowledge society (Saldanha et al., 2020). Globalization has intensified cross-cultural interactions, labor mobility, and knowledge exchange. This allowed institutions to prepare students for culturally diverse and interconnected environments (Seguna, 2020). While globalization presents opportunities for collaboration and innovation, it also raises challenges related to equity, access, and cultural understanding. Nahouli (2023) emphasizes the need for balanced and inclusive approaches to internationalization that address these challenges while promoting equal access to quality education. Within this context, internationalization in higher education has become a critical mechanism for fostering intercultural

competence and global awareness among students.

Internationalization initiatives in higher education commonly include student and faculty mobility, curriculum alignment with international standards, research collaboration, and international practicum or internship programs (Karampampa, 2021). Studies have shown that such initiatives contribute significantly to students' global competence. They also enhance adaptability, intercultural sensitivity, and awareness of global and local issues (Holmarsdottir et al., 2023). International practicum and internship programs have gained scholarly attention as experiential learning opportunities that allow students to apply disciplinary knowledge in multicultural settings (Kham, 2022).

Existing literature highlights several benefits of international practicum experiences. These include the development of professional competencies, improved language proficiency, heightened cultural awareness, and increased career readiness (Hebron, 2020; Moreno et al., 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights into the outcomes of international training programs, most focus on general skill acquisition or employability. Fewer studies explore students' motivation for participating in international practicum programs and how these motivations shape their learning experiences, particularly in teacher education and within the ASEAN context. Moreover, there remains limited empirical evidence on how such programs operate in private higher education institutions in the Philippines.

In response to the growing importance of internationalization, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) encouraged higher education institutions to integrate international perspectives into academic programs as part of its broader goal of developing globally competitive human resources (CHED, 2016). One area in which this policy is implemented is the international practicum and on-the-job training programs. They are intended to enhance students' professional preparation while promoting cross-cultural engagement. Hence, the effectiveness and experiential dimensions of these initiatives, especially from students' perspectives, warrant further study.

Within this context, a private higher education institution in Bulacan has partnered with three selected schools in Thailand. This is to provide teacher education students with international practicum opportunities. Since 2009, this HEI has been sending pre-service teachers to Thailand to conduct English tutorial classes while gaining exposure to a different educational system and cultural environment. Despite the program's longevity, systematic documentation of students' experiences, motivations, and perceived benefits remains limited. In light of this, the present study seeks to describe the experiences of teacher education students who participated in an international practicum in Thailand. Specifically, it aims to examine the challenges and benefits they gained from the cross-cultural teaching experience. Understanding these factors is important for evaluating the effectiveness of the international practicum programs and informing institutional policies and practices that support meaningful internationalization in teacher education.

Methodology

This study used document analysis as its primary qualitative research method. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed or electronic documents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007, as cited in Bowen, 2009). This design involves applying a rigorous process to examine and interpret textual data, distill meaning, and generate empirical knowledge. This design explores patterns, themes, and insights.

The documents used in this report were analyzed through skimming (superficial examination), reading (through examination), and interpretation. This process combines content analysis, in which meaningful and relevant passages or texts are identified, and thematic analysis, which involves careful and more focused re-reading and review of the data to uncover themes (Bowen, 2009). By combining these methods, the study ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the students' experiences as reflected in their written outputs. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the study employed various methods. Triangulation of data sources (student portfolios and narrative reports, and principal and owner feedback forms) was conducted to validate the emerging themes. These data sources were used because they were provided by those who experienced and witnessed the international practicum firsthand. Although they come from different perspectives, triangulation indicates that the experiences and reports shared by both parties are consistent and therefore credible. Afterward, peer debriefing among the researchers, in which they reviewed interpretations, was conducted to minimize bias in the study. Lastly, audit trail documentation was ensured to maintain transparency in the analytical process. To ensure ethical standards in research, the researchers coded all student names and kept

them confidential. The principals and school owners involved were also not mentioned in the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the emergent themes and subthemes regarding the experiences of Baliuag University teacher education students during the implementation of an international practicum in Thailand. It revolves around the emergent themes 'Intrinsic Factor' and 'Extrinsic Factor'. Upon analysis, the theme clusters signify students' experiences in their international practicum. Moreover, the following theme clusters have emerged: 'Learning and Growth Gained, Opportunity to Earn, Exposure to Thai Culture, Professional Enhancement, and Thai Pupils Learning English.

Table 1. Emergent Themes and Sub-themes on Positive Experiences of Students in the Implementation of International Practicum

Theme and Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
<i>Theme 1: From Theory to Practice</i>	
1.1. Learning and Growth	Teacher-education students are acquiring teaching experiences and skills during their international practicum in Thailand.
<i>Theme 2: More than just the Classrooms</i>	
2.1. Opportunity to Earn	Teacher-education students are given honoraria for handling tutorial classes. They were also given an allowance.
2.2. Exposure to Thai Culture	Teacher-education students can experience Thai culture and visit various places.
2.3. Professional Enhancement and Mentorship	Teacher-education teachers were taught teaching strategies by their cooperating teacher.
2.4 Thai Pupils Learning English	Thai pupils learned how to write and speak in English.
<i>Theme 3: Overcoming Roadblocks</i>	
3.1 Challenges Encountered	Teacher-education students encountered several obstacles during their practicum.
3.2 Adjustments Applied	Teacher-education students employed various strategies to address problems.

Theme Cluster 1: From Theory to Practice

One of the primary goals of the practicum is to expose students to workplace scenarios. It provides students with opportunities to apply what they have learned in the classroom and translate theory into practice. Theme Cluster 1 highlights how the international practicum bridges academic learning with real-life application. It also highlights the transformative impact of experiential teaching for teacher-education students.

Learning and Growth

In this study, this theme cluster emerged from the narratives of teacher-education students in Thailand. Student teachers actively implemented teaching theories learned in the University. They engage learners through a variety of activities, games, exercises, and songs. Most of their lessons focused on basic English skills. The practicum created opportunities for varied instructional approaches through which student teachers could apply their knowledge and skills.

"I taught my students how to ask and answer whenever someone asked their favorite color. I realized that they do not yet know how to read, so I need to find a way to teach them. I have to improve my teaching methods so that they will find the topics easier." (ST2)

Based on the teacher-education students' narrative reports, they further honed their teaching skills by teaching actual classes. The students much appreciate this. One student said:

"It has been a fulfilling journey [internship], filled with both challenges and growth opportunities. From lesson planning and classroom observation to hands-on teaching experiences, each task has equipped me with valuable skills and insights in education. As a student-teacher here in Thailand, I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment as I reflect on how far I've come." (ST6)

The statement above reflects a sense of fulfillment and pride developed during the practicum. It is proof of the achievement of the objectives of the international practice-teaching program as stipulated in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA):

"For the students, to be provided with opportunities for student teachers to apply in actual situations the principles learned regarding the teaching learning process, to evaluate themselves and discover their weaknesses and certain phases of the teaching job by putting themselves and their ideas to test in actual situations."

In summary, Theme 1 cluster emphasizes how the international practicum bridges the theories that teacher education students learn in the classroom. It helps them create meaningful and effective practices that they can eventually apply in their future careers. The results of the study are consistent with Rasheed (2025), who found that practicum experiences significantly develop important teaching competencies. These include classroom management, lesson planning, and application of pedagogical theories. During the teaching practicum, particularly when conducted internationally, student teachers reported higher self-confidence and self-efficacy. Additionally, Hollingsworth (2025) found that studying abroad and having an international practicum yield significant benefits as field experiences "facilitate growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions". They also boost adaptability and intercultural competence. In another study by Chen et al. (2024), it was found that teachers' identity, practical teaching skills, and reflection and adaptation are developed through an international practicum. The study noted that practicum "plays a vital role in shaping and modifying student teachers' beliefs about teaching" (p. 172).

Theme Cluster 2: More than Just the Classrooms

Beyond gaining a more contextual understanding of teaching principles and practices, students benefit more from their international practicum. They derive various benefits from the internship. This theme synthesized a multidimensional perspective on the international practicum, benefiting students, teachers, and host schools.

Opportunity to Earn

This theme cluster emerged from one of the provisions stated in the Memoranda of Agreement signed by Baliuag University with the Thai schools. The provision stated that:

"Provide modest payment to student teachers who will be assigned to handle tutorial classes."

Additionally, the student teachers are provided free food and lodging by the host schools. This can be seen in the statement of S6 saying:

"For our food, they provided a coupon that we can use at the canteen so that we can buy something to eat. Additionally, all teachers receive free lunch, so we can use only the 100 Baht coupon for breakfast and break time. The food is good and healthy as well."

Teacher education students at BU not only received meaningful teaching assignments but also gained tangible benefits from the practicum. This is an added motivation for the BU teacher-education students who chose to be assigned in Thailand for their practicum, since they will receive allowances from the schools for handling tutorial classes. In addition, they will receive the following benefits: free accommodations, breakfast, lunch, and dinner (MOA for BU and Chumphon Sueksa School and Anuban Chuleekorn School).

Exposure to Thai Culture

Sending students abroad for their internships provided opportunities to explore the host country's cultures and traditions. Aside from differences in the educational system and students, teacher-education students also gained a deeper understanding of Thailand. They also have the opportunity to visit other places in Thailand. The following are some accounts from the practice teachers:

"After we took our lunch, we made a bouquet and a presentation of flowers and leaves because today is Loy Khratong Day. Loy Khratong Day is an event in Thailand in which we offer flowers and food and let them float in the river at exactly 7:00 in the evening. The flowers and food will serve as an offering to their ancient people and king." (ST1)

"One of the most striking aspects of my internship was the cultural immersion. Thailand's rich heritage and warm hospitality created an environment where learning extended far beyond the workplace. Interacting with the locals not only improved my language skills but also broadened my understanding of global perspectives. I learned to appreciate the beauty of Thai traditions and customs, fostering a deep respect for cultural diversity." (ST6)

The practicum in Thailand provides immersive cultural exposure, enabling students to experience Thai traditions, festivals, beliefs, and cuisine. Through various activities and holidays, students developed a deeper appreciation of Thailand's creativity, hospitality, and heritage. This fulfills one of the purposes of internationalization, which calls for the schools to promote diversity and intercultural understanding (Seguna, 2020). The study's findings align with those of Barton et al. (2015), who highlight that international practicum promotes intercultural understanding. International students reported that immersion in a different cultural context fosters openness, adaptability, and a more profound respect for diversity. Also, an international practicum is a "platform for growth, intercultural understanding, and collaboration (Orlova, 2024). Moreover, student-teachers who had an international practicum also had improved communication skills, adaptability, empathy, and resilience. They can also bring these skills to their home countries, which translates into professional and civic engagement (Wu & Wang, 2025).

Professional Enhancement and Mentorship

The primary purpose of international internships for students is to provide them with real-world work experience that can support their future careers. The Baliuag University international practicum underscores this goal and offers students the opportunity to enhance their professional skills. This can be observed from the narrative reports of the teacher-education students, as evidenced by these statements:

"I taught them about the members of the family using the Montessori materials I made yesterday. I don't know if I did well on it because I'm not really that familiar with the Montessori way of teaching, but I am really interested to learn, and I got plenty of time to practice." (ST2)

"I taught them demonstrative pronouns. The boys understand the lesson faster, and most of them got perfect scores, while for the girls, I have to teach it again." (ST2)

One of the teaching methods learned by BU teacher-education students during the international practicum is the Montessori Method. In this method, the teacher's goal is to promote independent learning and self-discovery. The teacher also uses manipulative objects to support and engage children's development (Marshall, 2017). During their practicum in Thailand, BU teacher-education students had opportunities to apply the educational theories and methods they had learned in an actual classroom setting. Furthermore, the BU teacher-education students demonstrated patience and dedication during their practicum, enabling their pupils to learn English. Additional experiences of the students can be seen in the following statement:

"I decided to teach with a game. During the discussion, I noticed that my students were enjoying our lesson, and it made me happy that I was able to impart knowledge to them." (ST3)

These teacher-education students were monitored and guided closely by their cooperating teachers and principals. They served as mentors to the students, praising them when they deserved it and correcting them when needed.

"I am really thankful that Teacher B is my cooperating teacher because she really exerts effort in teaching me some techniques to catch the attention of my students. She also helps me with my semi-detailed lesson plan." (ST1)

"The guidance and support of our mentors empowered us to reflect on our own teaching practice, identify areas for improvement, and strive for excellence. Building meaningful relationships with colleagues and mentors enriched my learning experience and instilled in me a lifelong commitment to continuous professional development." (ST5)

The cooperating teachers and mentors of the teacher education students played a significant role in their learning experiences. This is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2024), who highlighted that support from mentors and partner schools helps build student-teachers' confidence, enhances their professional skills, and develops resilience during their stay in the host school. Moreover, the support of cooperating teachers is related to the student-teachers' advanced teaching capacities, classroom management, and time and workload management. It is also linked to self-esteem, confidence, morale, and job satisfaction. When students have effective mentors, they can also develop socialization, autonomy, and access to resources, enabling them to thrive in the teaching profession. Cooperating teachers also serve as models, critics, and an emotional support system for the future teachers (Scortescu, 2024). In addition to developing the academic side of teacher education, students' values were

honed through the international practicum. They developed additional virtues that they will apply in their future professional practice. This can be seen in the following narrations of the students:

"During this time, I realized that the school has a big part in our lives, that the school keeps motivating and encouraging us to discover new things about ourselves. As a teacher, I need to embrace them and help them to achieve their dreams." (ST6)

"I realized that being a teacher is not about how many students you will teach but the effort that you have to give your students. I just cannot imagine how other teachers manage all their tasks." (ST6)

"When we enter the classroom, we are not only there as their teacher, we also become the students' caretaker and parents. This is what I truly realize from my practicum." (ST4)

Thai cooperating schools also benefited from the partnership with Baliuag University. Based on the report on the conduct of international practicum teaching provided by the Principal of Chumphon Sueksa School:

"Our partnership with the (Baliuag) University allows our students the opportunity to experience studying English abroad. Also, embracing new culture gives way to stepping out of their comfort zone and experiencing an unfamiliar situation through community immersion."

Furthermore, the Principal mentioned that the BU education students:

"Assisted our students in different school activities, also in our community events; they were eager to give assistance and support our learning programs in English literacy that benefited our Thai students."

Another Principal from Chumphon Sueksa School remarked that:

"We had a very wonderful experience with them. They have helped us a lot. Our students loved them, and they are keen on their chosen profession."

The international practicum undertaken by selected teacher-education students at Baliuag University has contributed to their training and preparation as future teachers. In addition to teaching, BU education students participated in and supported their Thai cooperating schools in conducting various programs and activities, including English Camp, Field Trip, Children's Day, School Promotion, and others. On the other hand, Thai teachers who have visited Baliuag University were able to conduct observations at the University's grade school and high school departments. They also attended discussions at Baliuag University on lesson planning, teaching strategies, and an overview of the Philippine educational system, with a focus on basic education.

Thai Pupils Learning English

Establishing the partnership between BU and the Thai schools also largely benefited the Thai students. They were exposed to teacher-education students whose second language is English. This also provided them with more opportunities to improve their English. The practicum students did their best to help students learn English and, at times, the Filipino language. This can be observed in the accounts of the students:

"My discussion revolved around the letter W. I started the day by asking what the day was and how the weather was. I asked whether they recognized the letter W. A few knew what letter it was, but many were still unfamiliar with it. After discussing the letter W, I gave some examples from the book and asked them to give their own example." (ST4)

"Teacher Tong told me to teach the students how to count properly. They have difficulty counting in English, so I ensured they learned it properly from me. I also taught two songs: Good Morning Song and Hello, Hello. They were so cute whenever they sang it because, though they find it difficult to pronounce every word, they were still trying to memorize and sing it." (ST1)

From the statements of the students and the testimonies of the principals in the previous section, it is evident that the teacher-education students were a significant help to the schools and the students. They brought with them insights gained during their college education, thereby benefiting the students. The partnership yielded reciprocal benefits. The pupils gained additional exposure to English, broadening their language skills through engaging

and meaningful activities. Student teachers enriched the school life of Thai Schools by assisting and participating in campus activities. Theme 2 cluster shows how the international practicum transcends classroom boundaries by providing a holistic and exchange experience. Teacher education students are professionally, culturally, and personally developed, with host schools benefiting from enriched programs and cultural integration. The partnership deepens global understanding, hones the skills of future educators, and enhances learning for all participants.

Theme 3 Cluster: Overcoming Roadblocks

The international practicum in Thailand not only offered opportunities and experiences to student teachers. They faced these roadblocks, which tested their resilience and adaptability. They had to devise strategies and adjust to their new environment.

Challenges Encountered

Conducting an international practicum can be challenging (Alsarawi, 2024; Ding et al., 2025; Sueraya Che Haron et al., 2025). Teacher education students face language barriers and adjustment as their primary challenges. One of the biggest challenges faced by the teacher education students in Thailand is communication. This is primarily due to the language spoken by Thai teachers and students. Although Thailand makes efforts to integrate English into its school curriculum, some students and teachers still have difficulty expressing themselves in English. There are even those who really have minimal to zero knowledge of the language. This posed some problems for the teacher education students. This is evidenced in the following statements:

“Language barrier is one of the main problems that I encountered here in Thailand, not just among the students but outside of the school. In the school, it is really not a big problem because some can speak English, or some can communicate with us inside the school...But when we go outside the school, it is very hard to communicate with the locals, especially with the elders.” (ST7)

Beyond language, personal adaptation was also a core challenge. Teacher education students experienced homesickness, the absence of familial support, and the need to assume responsibilities and chores independently. This was a significant concern for ST5, saying:

“My international teaching internship was tough because I used to live with my parents. Every day was like solving a puzzle. I had to deal with different ways of teaching, do things that my parents used to do with me, on my own, and strange classroom rules in order to make students behave. Even simple things like speaking in another language were difficult because, to communicate with people there, I needed to make extra effort to express my thoughts and ideas...I had to learn how to get around, understand cultural rules, and adjust.”

Challenges in international practicum are common as students are exposed to an unfamiliar territory. The same is true with the study of Sueraya et al. (2025), which found that trainee teachers face lesson planning, classroom management, language barriers, and homesickness. They also experience problems in adapting to new school cultures. Problems in student behavior and discipline, limited mentor support, and heavy workload are also common.

Adjustments Applied

To address the challenges they faced, teacher education students had to adopt strategies that made their practicum more manageable. Regarding the communication issue, the student teachers requested assistance from Filipino teachers at their host schools. Their cooperating teachers made sure that the teacher education students were guided. This can be seen in the response of ST1:

“I am really thankful that Teacher Mela is my cooperating teacher because she really exerts effort in teaching me some techniques to catch the attention of my students. She also helps me with my semi-detailed lesson plan.”

As for their personal concerns, students had to learn to live independently. They had to complete chores independently because their parents were not present. This is a common activity among the student teachers. Saturdays are for doing chores for them. Below is a sample narrative of what their typical Saturday looked like:

"I woke up at 8:00 and scrolled on my phone. I then arranged the clothes I would be washing and removed all bed covers, pillows, towels, and blankets. My schedule for using the washing machine is every Saturday... After doing my laundry, I cleaned my room and wiped off every single dust I saw. Then, I cooked our lunch and then lay on my bed all day." (ST4)

Theme 3 underscores that the international practicum is a rigorous test of student teachers' professional and personal adaptability. Overcoming barriers ultimately equipped them with valuable skills for future multicultural and international teaching environments. Ibrahim et al. (2025) enumerated several effective coping strategies employed by student teachers. This includes seeking guidance from mentors, building peer support networks, and engaging in reflective practice. Resilience, adaptability, and practical experience prior to the formal international practicum also helped mitigate these challenges. Additionally, the study's results revealed that an international practicum is a multifaceted journey. It is a training ground for students where theory meets practice. It is also a platform for personal growth, intercultural understanding, and collaboration. Opportunities for cultural immersion, professional development, and overcoming roadblocks prepare future teachers for their profession. The respondents' responses support the claimed benefits of initiating an international practicum, particularly for teacher education students.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of selected teacher education students from a higher education institution who participated in an international practicum in Thailand. Overall, the findings indicate that international practicum experiences contribute significantly to students' professional development by enhancing their teaching competencies, practical application of pedagogical theories, and readiness for real classroom situations. Exposure to authentic teaching contexts enabled participants to bridge the gap between theory and practice, resulting in enriched learning experiences essential to their preparation as future educators.

Beyond pedagogical skills, the international practicum provided meaningful opportunities for cultural immersion. Engagement with Thai educational institutions and communities heightened the students' intercultural awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity. These experiences underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in teaching, particularly in increasingly multicultural learning environments. However, the cultural differences encountered by the participants also highlight the need for comprehensive pre-departure orientation programs. Providing future participants with adequate background knowledge on host-country customs, traditions, and institutional expectations may ease cultural adjustment and maximize learning outcomes.

Positive feedback from both participating students and cooperating school administrators suggests that the international practicum program is a valuable component of teacher education. Sustaining and strengthening such initiatives may enhance graduates' employability, not only in the Philippines but also in international teaching contexts. As such, it is recommended that the higher education institution continue and further develop its international practicum partnerships, including structured mentoring, monitoring, and support mechanisms for student-teachers.

Contributions of Authors

Authors 1,2: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, writing

Authors 3,4: data analysis, data gathering

Authors 5, 6, 7: data gathering, proposal writing

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