



Issues and Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teacher-Participants of the SEA Teacher Project of SEAMEO

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ARTICLE INFO

Date Received: 06-05-2024

Date Last Revised: 11-05-2024

Date Accepted: 11-06-2024

Abstract

This paper assessed the difficulties that pre-service educators experienced while undertaking the SEA Teacher Project. It employed a combined approach incorporating qualitative interviews to explore specific issues and quantitative data from performance evaluations to identify areas of concern. This study targeted 6th-8th batches (2017-2019) through snowball sampling technique from which a purposive sample of 30 participants was obtained. Key findings revealed a range of challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and financial difficulties. These challenges were related to issues like; sex, age, family background, and religious beliefs. For instance, male participants expressed concerns about the application process and academic records, while female participants struggled with acclimatization. Participants from average-income families faced financial challenges, while those from wealthier backgrounds encountered difficulties adapting to the local environment. The study recommends the following: streamlining of the application process, adequate funding, improvement of the Pre-service Teacher Preparation Program, including a feedback and monitoring system as well as the continuity program.

KEYWORDS

SEA Teacher Project
Pre-service teachers
Performance evaluation
Language barriers
Combined research approach

Introduction

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) was formed in 1965 as a regional intergovernmental organization by the governments of Southeast Asian countries with the aim of fostering regional collaboration in education, science, and culture (SEAMEO-Regional Institute for Higher Education [RIHED], 2021). The agenda of SEAMEO is to provide education for all, equity in education, and to enable economic development of member nations (SEAMEO Secretariat, n.d.). One of its projects is the SEA Teacher Project (SEAMEO, n.d.). The project aims to strengthen the higher education

institutions in the SEA Region, to promote regional cooperation and integration, by increasing cross-border mobility, improving quality education, enhancing the ASEAN identity, and supporting ASEAN agencies related to education (Agustin & Montebon, 2019; Lim et al., 2022). The SEA Teacher Project is a valuable initiative that aims to enhance the quality of teacher education in Southeast Asia by providing pre-service teachers with cross-cultural teaching experiences (Salcedo, 2018). Conversely, the project is still relatively new and has not been extensively researched or evaluated (Mahendra, 2019).



This study aimed to address this gap by identifying and analyzing the issues and challenges faced by the pre-service teacher-participants of the said project. Specifically, this research aimed to (1) synthesize how the profile of the pre-service teachers (sex, age, family background, ethnicity, religion, sending university, receiving university, grade level and subject handled) affects their perceived issues and challenges in the SEA Teacher Project; and (2) analyze the issues and challenges that emerged from the pre-service teachers based on their performance evaluation, and propose actions that can improve and optimize the policies and practices of the SEA teacher project to address the issues and challenged faced by the pre-service teachers.

It is worth investigating how improving and optimizing the SEA Teacher Project can help address these issues and challenges while ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability. Such investigation can also contribute to the existing literature on teacher education and student exchange in Southeast Asia and beyond. By identifying the issues and challenges faced in pre-service teacher exchange programs in the Southeast Asia can contribute to regional educational initiatives in several ways:

First, the improvement of program design, by identifying the specific issues and challenges faced, regional educational initiatives can tailor the design of pre-service teacher exchange programs to address these issues. This can lead to the development of more effective and impactful programs that better meet the needs of participating pre-service teachers and ultimately contribute to the improvement of education quality in the region (Hendra et al., 2019).

Second, through the identification of challenges, educational initiatives can facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building activities that aim to address these challenges. This could involve the organization of workshops, training sessions, and collaborative projects to equip pre-service teachers and educational institutions with the skills and resources in overcoming the identified issues, leading to a collective improvement in educational practices (Arquillano, 2023; Nurazizah et al., 2021).

Third, understanding the challenges faced in pre-service teacher exchange programs to foster collaboration and network-building among

educational institutions, governments, and relevant stakeholders in the region. Addressing these challenges collectively, can strengthen regional initiatives, the network of professionals working towards educational improvement, and foster a culture of cooperation and shared learning (Agustin & Montebon, 2019).

Methodology

The study employed a combined quantitative and qualitative research design. Qualitative approach was used to investigate the issues and challenges encountered by the pre-service teachers who have participated in the SEA Teacher Project, while the quantitative approach was employed to assess the performance of the pre-service teachers in general performance areas, teaching performance, and general characteristics to identify the specific areas where they encountered issues or challenges.

The study included the 6th to 8th batches of pre-service teachers who took part in the SEA Teacher Project of SEAMEO in the academic years 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to 2019. A sample size of 30 was reached using snowball sampling. The participants provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Both outbound and inbound pre-service teachers were included. The demographic profile of the respondents is outlined in Table 1.

Thirty percent (30%) of participants in the SEA Teacher Project Research and Studies were men, while seventy percent (70%) of participants were women. Most of the graduating students that made up the pre-service teaching cohort were between the ages of 26 and 30. The data indicates that the majority of respondents came from average backgrounds, and there was no involvement from those with disadvantaged family backgrounds. The participants came from diverse ethnic groups and religious backgrounds, including various groups from Indonesia (Sundanese & Javanese) with the greatest percentage, Philippines (Kankanaey/Ibaloi, Ilokano, Tagalog, Bisaya, and Pangasinense) with second greatest percentage, and Thailand (Thais). The 30 respondents came and were sent to universities in Indonesia, Thailand, and Philippines. In their receiving universities, they had experienced handling pre-school, elementary, or high school classes with subjects depending on their specialization.



Table 1*Profile of the Pre-Service Teachers Participated in the Study*

Demographic Profile	f	Percentage (%)	Rank	Demographic Profile	f	Percentage (%)	Rank
Sex				Sending University			
Male	9	30	2	Indonesia	17	56.67	1
Female	21	70	1	Philippines	8	26.67	2
Age				Thailand	5	16.67	3
21-25	2	6.67	2	Receiving University			
26-30	8	93.33	1	Indonesia	16	53.33	1
Family Background				Philippines	7	23.33	2
Poor	0	0	3	Thailand	6	20	3
Average	20	66.67	1	Subjects Handled			
Rich	10	33.33	2	Pre-school	2	6.67	7.5
Ethnicity				Elementary	2	2.67	7.5
Sundanese	10	33.33	1	Mathematics	4	13.33	4.5
Javanese	4	13.33	4	Economics	4	13.33	4.5
Thai	5	16.66	2.5	Social Studies	2	6.67	7.5
Kankanaey/Ibaloi				Science (Elem)	5	16.67	3
Ilokano	1	3.33	7.5	Science (Secondary)			
Tagalog	1	3.33	7.5	English	10	33.33	1
Bisaya	2	6.67	5	Physics	2	6.67	7.5
Pangasinense	1	3.33	7.5	Grade Level Handled			
Chinese	1	3.33	7.5	Pre-school	2		2.5
Religion				Elementary	2		2.5
Islam	17	56.67	1	High School	26		1
Christianity	8	26.67	2				
Buddhism	5	16.67	3				

The study utilized two instruments for data collection: quantitative data using the SEA Teacher Student Teacher Performance Evaluation Form and qualitative data through online interviews following the E-Interview Research Framework. The reliability of the research instrument was ensured through thorough and systematic techniques, including identifying main research questions, designing the instrument, choosing appropriate formats, organizing items logically, and testing the questionnaire before administration.

This study adhered to the ethical standards and practical considerations, obtaining approval

from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) and obtaining informed consent from participants. E-interviews were scheduled and data was gathered simultaneously using appropriate ICT. Thematic analysis helped identify patterns in qualitative data with the help of the software Qualitative Data Analysis Miner. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in qualitative data, while descriptive statistics like mean, frequency, and percentage provided a summary of the collected data. These instruments and analysis helped identify issues and challenges faced by SEA Teacher Project participants, ensuring data quality and confidentiality.



Results and Discussion

Synthesis of Profile of the Pre-Service Teachers and Their Perceived Issues and Challenges in the SEA Teacher Project

Table 2 reveals language barriers and communication difficulties among SEA Teacher Project participants, regardless of sex, affecting both teachers and students. It was also identified that male participants had a *complacent attitude towards rigorous application process*. They find it very tedious to attend interviews and other processes just to qualify to the program. This is

similar with the results of the study of Lindhart (2017), mentioning that rigorous application process is one reason why male participants opt not to apply in endeavors such as exchange pre-service teacher program. Moreover, some of the male participants admitted that they only had *average academic records*. They feel like it was discouraging to apply since the female participants had better academic records, thus, having a greater chance of being accepted in the program. This is commonly seen that female students dominate higher education, not only in terms of population even in academic performance (Saadat et al., 2022).

Table 2

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Sex

Sex	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Male	Complacent attitude towards rigorous application process	<i>In my university, they gave us the information the Alumni and they give us this project. I have to follow this program after that we were selected. It was tough and need to undergo process. (IND9)</i>
	Average academic records	<i>When I applied there was an announcement about the SEA teacher Project and asked my parents but my parents did not really give me permission but my friends convinced me. My parents did not give support at first and then I explained to them the benefits and I did the selection. I was interviewed and selected and I got high score. My university is one of the top school in education (center of excellence). (IND4)</i>
	Language barriers	<i>I accept the offer shared by my lecture, and fulfil the administration requirements like a TOEFL score, academic transcript. After passing the administration requirements, I followed interview test. I interviewed by 2 people on International Relation Office and asked to go to Philippines on the date when I had to do the study student service (it is like community dedication that required for the students in my university). So if I take the opportunity to follow this project, I have to do my study student service in February while I also had to focus on my thesis. After thinking about pros and cons, I take the opportunity. (IND3)</i>
Female	Difficulty with regards acclimatization	<i>This project has been able to naturally enhance my teaching skills as I was a shy in the past and was reluctant to show up in public or crowded places. (THAI2)</i>
	Language barriers	<i>I speak English but maybe the assessment I want to talk in Indonesia but can not so I have to ask my buddy to translate and can not understand some words so I have to write it and bring to school and the classroom and I think they can understand and learn(THAI1)</i>



On the flipside, the female participants encountered *difficulty with regard to acclimatization*. The group of the female participants, found it more difficult to adjust to the university and/or locality where they are assigned, especially due to the weather condition and difference in culture.

Table 3 reveals the challenges faced by SEA Teacher Project participants aged 21-25. The majority, particularly third-year college students, struggled with *technical knowledge* and skills related to content and pedagogy. They often rely on *cooperating teachers* for teaching strategies and methods, leading to content errors. Additionally, these participants often *struggle with emotional imbalance*, a common theme observed in younger participants. These challenges highlight the need for improved technical knowledge and confidence in teaching methods and content.

According to the study, participants between the ages of 26 and 30 had their *difficulty with regard to acclimatization*, they had trouble transitioning to their new school or community, especially because of cultural differences between the sending and receiving institutions, countries, or communities. Moreover, it is notable that it is harder for the elderly individuals to get used to the new setting.

Table 4 summarizes identified issues and challenges of the SEA Teacher Project participants when grouped according to family background. The lack of result and the fact that no participant came from this group is evidence of this lack of *inclusivity*.

The majority of participants were from average families, who faced financial challenges due to their inability to cover the entire cost of the project. They heavily relied on university budgets and assistance from the receiving university for their living expenses. Additionally, they felt that the financial support provided was insufficient, making it difficult for them to budget the allowance provided.

Lastly, the group from wealthy families mainly faced challenges in *acclimatizing* to their university living conditions. They struggled with the availability of necessary facilities and equipment, preferring high-tech instructional materials (IMs) over traditional ones. Additionally, they faced issues with internet connection stability, unable to use traditional IMs for lesson planning. Despite their technological skills, they struggled to adapt to their new environment. As a result, they had to rely on books as reference materials, highlighting the need for better support and resources in their academic environment.

Table 5 summarizes identified issues and challenges of the SEA Teacher Project participants when grouped according to family ethnicity. Sundanese pre-service teachers in Indonesia faced challenges due to *personal preferences and dietary requirements* and *low proficiency in English* as a medium of instruction. They struggled to adjust to the food they were assigned to and struggled with teaching English. Javanese, another ethnic group in Indonesia, also faced similar challenges, including adjusting to the food and English proficiency. However, Sundanese are considered a minority group and they felt like they felt like they face a lack of representation in the SEA teacher project program. They perceive that as a minority group, they have a lower probability of

Table 3

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Age

Age	Issues and Challenges	Sample Responses
21-25	Lack of technical knowledge and skills	<i>It was my first time encountering the topic lesson given to me by my cooperating teacher, that is why I had a hard time teaching. (FIL 2)</i>
	Lack of emotional stability	<i>I was nervous, excited but also pressured for my host and sending university, I felt home sick. (IND5)</i>
26-30	Difficulty with regards acclimitization	<i>There is cold and rainy and most of the time in which we find it difficult to adjust. (IND2)</i>



Table 4*Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Background*

Family Background	Issues and Challenges	Sample Responses
Poor	No respondents belong to this group	N/A
Average	Dependence on the institutional financial support Insufficient financial support	<i>Last May I heard, June prepared and August I travelled. My school pay everything but my passport I shoulder it. (IND2)</i> <i>I also get a standard living allowance while I followed the project. I just need paid my expenses in Philippines if the living allowance given are not sufficient. (IND3)</i>
Rich	Difficulty with regards to acclimatization	<i>The climate is cold and rainy and typhoon. We have to respect the culture of different countries . Now not all have internet in the remote and rural areas. (IND5)</i>

being chosen compared to Javanese students and Indonesian pre-service teachers. Both Sundanese and Javanese pre-service teachers faced similar challenges in the SEA teacher program.

As for pre-service teachers who came from Thailand, their main issue and concern is also related to *low proficiency in the medium of instruction*, English. Some Thai pre-service teachers cannot communicate effectively and efficiently in English, it was even mentioned in the interviews that some of them would even need to use their mobile phones to facilitate communication to their cooperating teachers and students by serving as translators.

The study surveyed pre-service teachers from four ethnic affiliations in the Philippines: Kankanaey and Ibaloi (Benguet), Ilokano (Ilocos Region), Pangasinense (Pangasinan), and Bisaya (Visayas). The Kankanaey pre-service teachers faced challenges due to *cultural differences*, such as food and clothing, as well as adjusting their diet and clothing to fit the host country's norms. They had to wear long skirts and long-sleeved blouses, which they found uncomfortable due to the warm temperatures. The Ilokano, Tagalog, and Pangasinense pre-service teachers also faced challenges due to *cultural differences*. The Bisaya pre-service teachers faced *language barriers*, as students in some universities were more accustomed to classroom instructions being delivered in their local language, making it difficult to comprehend lessons in English. Overall, the study highlights the need for cultural adaptation and responding to the language barriers in teaching and learning.

With regard to the Chinese pre-service teacher-participants, their main issue is the *lack of representation*. It was mentioned that only few participants were chosen from their ethnic group. They also believed that it would be more beneficial for them if more Chinese pre-service teacher-participants will be chosen to participate in the said project.

As presented in Table 6, majority of the pre-service teacher-participants were Muslims, and the issues and Challenges that they had encountered were categorized into three. First is the *conflict in schedule for prayer and work*, this was encountered by those who were assigned to countries in which majority of the students and teachers are non-muslims. The scheduled time for their prayer, as well as time for visiting the Mosque does not align with the schedule of the receiving university thus, creating conflict. Second is *cultural differences* especially when it comes to the food being served in the receiving country goes against their religion. In some countries pork is often served. Even if food options are available that they can consume, they find it a little uncomfortable. Lastly, due to the way they dress there are times when they feel *uncomfortable with how students look at them*. Even though students were not giving negative and discriminatory remarks, the way how students look at the Muslim pre-service teachers due to curiosity and other reasons gives them a feeling of uneasiness.

As for the Christian pre-service teacher-participants, it was mentioned that at times they encounter difficulty in terms of *contextualizing what they are teaching*. They are uncertain how to



Table 5*Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Sundanese	Personal preferences and dietary considerations	<i>The food is very good but I don't like spicy food. Eating is for 7/11 have Halal and easy to find for me. (IND1)</i>
	Low proficiency in the medium of instruction	<i>English is our second or third language. Sometimes I use it but only few understand it. I have to ask my buddy to translate since I cannot understand some words. (IND10)</i>
Javanese	Cultural differences	<i>When we went to the market and grocery many people are looking on us because maybe they are curious about we wear. When I was there we have to go to the city to the mosque, its far and difficult to find HALAL food. (IND4)</i>
	Low Proficiency in the medium of instruction	<i>How can I handle secondary students specially my English skills. I learned a lot the culture, the accent because there is a bit difference and we really learned. When I was dorm we really talk about how I speak about it. (IND4)</i>
	Lack of representation of low probability of being chosen to participate in the program	<i>In Indonesia we have massive cultural differences, we already declare different intercultural competences but, when I came to the Philippines we are still the minority. (IND6)</i>
Thai	Low proficiency in the medium of instruction	<i>In Chang Mai, Thailand I think because of the nature of the English Program the students use the native language so the students are not familiar about it so the gap is really hindering. (THAI1)</i>
Kanakanaey/ Ibaloi	Food being served in the receiving country Cultural differences	<i>Culture is relative and not universally standard. Also, culture can even lead to stereotypes and prejudices; thus, it is important to be sensitive to avoid conflict. In order to learn more about it, reading alone is not enough but actual engagement with the people is much better. (FIL7)</i>
Ilokano	Cultural differences	<i>Independence, Self-development, Cultural relativism and experience, Traveling, and meeting new people. (FIL7)</i>
Tagalog	Cultural difference	<i>I really had adjusted a lot to enable to adopt from their culture to mine. (FIL8)</i>
Bisaya	Language barriers	<i>I realized that I am more of an outgoing person, adventurous, and open to other people of different nationalities. In this aspect, I have to learn about their language, contextualize the topic on their culture-Material and Non-material. (FIL)</i>
Pangasinense	Cultural differences	<i>I miss the "sinigang" cooked at home, the students are different from my students, the weather is similar.(IND6)</i>
Chinese	Lack of representation	<i>There are few Chinese participants. I am alone in the program. (CHI1)</i>



Table 6*Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Religion*

Religion	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Islam	Conflict in the schedule of prayer and work	<i>I start from 11am for the praying time 11:30 or 11:40. It is challenging for me. Since it overlaps with the schedule of classes. (IND5)</i>
	Cultural differences	<i>In Indonesia, my religion is the most widely followed religion, so I am a majority when I am in Indonesia. It was different when I came to Philippines and I was a minority. Just have difficulty practicing my religion. Food accepted in our religion is difficult to find in my receiving university. (IND9)</i>
	Uncomfortable with how students look at them	<i>Students are not used to seeing people wearing abaya and hijab. I feel comfortable with they look me. (THAI1)</i>
Christianity	Uncertain on how to contextualize teaching	<i>Encountering other people of different religion is inevitable; thus, religious tolerance must be practiced at all times. I cannot integrate my own belief. (FIL1)</i>
Buddhism	No temple	<i>I noticed that there are no temples in this place. (THAI2)</i>

contextualize their lessons and integrate values education. They are too conscious that they might offend specific individuals or religious groups. Even if they were assigned to a dominantly Christian country, the difference in the beliefs per Christian sect affects how they teach.

Lastly, the Buddhist pre-service teacher-participants had only one main issue or concern. This is the absence of a Buddhist temple in the locality where the receiving university is located. Even if they were not limited to express their religious belief, since there is no available temple nearby, they cannot easily access one whenever they want to pay a visit to a temple.

Table 7 presents the perceived issues and challenges of participants when grouped according to sending universities. The sending universities were clustered according to countries where the universities are located, since similar issues and challenges were observed in each cluster. Sending universities from Indonesia observed issues and challenges in preparing their pre-service teachers in teaching in other countries due to *curricular differences*. Indonesian countries often follow Cambridge and/or Islamic curriculum, which is different to the curriculum being implemented in other countries. The pre-service teachers were trained to teach mainly following this kind of curriculum. Thus, providing additional trainings

for pre-service teachers to implement a different kind of curriculum became a challenge.

Sending universities from the Philippines confronted challenges such as *lack of funding*, *language barriers*, and *cultural differences*. They cannot cover the costs of sending participants to the SEA Teacher Project, donations from sponsors are also helpful but still insufficient, pushing them to ask participants to bear their own expenses. Participants also had difficulties due to the language barriers. Even if English is a second language, many students are not proficient in English, making it difficult to communicate effectively. Cultural differences also pose a challenge for Filipino pre-service teachers, as they struggle to adjust to host universities' cultural practices, food, and dress codes.

As for sending universities in Thailand, they had a similar challenges with the Indonesian universities. Sending universities from Thailand observed issues and challenges in preparing their pre-service teachers in teaching in other countries due to *curriculum differences*. There is an existing disconnect between the curriculum that they are using and the receiving universities.

Table 8 presents the perceived issues and challenges of participants when grouped according to receiving universities. The receiving universities



Table 7

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Sending Universities

Sending University	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Indonesia	Curricular Differences	<i>They have different styles, First is the content of the book in Indonesia has many contents like a combination of many subjects, but in Thailand just one book per subject. (THAI1)</i>
Philippines	Lack of Funding	<i>There are only few schools having the source to fund this project. (FIL9)</i>
	Language Differences	<i>Verbal communication techniques are less-effective since “Indonesian English” and “Philippines English” are quite different in terms of accent, so some students not really understand about what I say in class. (FIL3)</i>
	Cultural Differences	<i>As a lady we are expected to wear modest or very covered and conservative clothes despite the hot weather. Since wearing shorts and other things are unusual for them unlike in the Philippines. (FIL2)</i>
Thailand	Curricular Differences	<i>Thailand schools use Cambridge, Philippines and Thailand not, that is hard to teach (THAI5)</i>

were likewise clustered according to countries where the universities are located. Receiving universities from Indonesia observed issues and challenges related to *curriculum differences*. They encounter difficulty at the onset of the project on how to accustom the pre-service teachers assigned in their respective universities to implement the curriculum that the respective universities follow. The difference in curriculum poses to be a barrier. Thus, there was a need to provide additional trainings for pre-service teachers to implement a different kind of curriculum. Moreover, *language barriers* served as a challenge some cooperating teachers found it difficult to communicate to the pre-service teachers because of the difference in the language that they are more comfortable in using.

Focusing on receiving universities from the Philippines, their concerns were related to *lack of facilities and equipment*. There were times when the assigned pre-service teachers were looking for facilities, materials or equipment which are not readily available. Some countries have more advanced technology, that pre-service teachers look for, that Philippine participating universities cannot provide.

As for receiving universities in Thailand, *language barriers* served as the main challenge. Some students perceived that it is difficult to

learn when they cannot understand the medium of instruction being used. *Limited time for classes* was also seen as a challenge since there are some receiving universities that have limited sections, thus, pre-service teachers can only attend few classes.

Table 9 presents the perceived issues and challenges of participants when grouped according to subjects handled. Pre-service teachers across various subjects often struggle with language barriers that hinder their effectiveness. Similarly, this was observed by Musa and Ariyanti (2020) as the most common problem encountered by pre-service teachers participating in exchange programs. In the study, it was identified that Economics teachers, experience significant challenges due to language barriers that complicate their ability to discuss complex concepts and set clear learning objectives. Similarly, English teachers face difficulties related as well since some students prefer learning in their local language, which impacts their ability to connect with students and deliver effective instruction.

Another common issue is the lack of content knowledge and the lack of resources. Math teachers frequently struggle with simplifying complex lessons and conveying mathematical concepts in an accessible manner. Science teachers



also face challenges due to inconsistencies in topic sequences in different schools and the lack of necessary facilities or equipment for experiments. Preschool teachers also need to develop engaging, student-centered approaches to cater to the short attention spans of young learners. Elementary teachers also face difficulties in implementing strategies that address diverse learning needs within their classrooms.

Differences in curricula also pose significant problems for pre-service teachers as well. Elementary teachers often find it challenging to adapt to the different curricula used and implement differentiated instruction to meet the needs of their students. Similarly, Physics teachers encounter obstacles in modifying lesson plans and assessments to accommodate different learning styles. These curricular discrepancies can hinder their ability to deliver a quality education.

Table 8

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Receiving Universities

Receiving University	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Indonesia	Curricular Differences	<i>They have different styles, First is the content of the book in Indonesia has many contents like a combination of many subjects, but in Thailand just one book per subject. (THAI1)</i>
	Language Barriers	<i>Verbal communication techniques are less-effective since “Indonesian English” and “Philippines English” are quite different in terms of accent, so some students not really understand about what I say in class. (IND3)</i>
Philippines	Lack of Facilities and Equipment	<i>Facilities, I think it is proper and provide us LCD, equipment complete, we have the long ruler in Indonesia but in Philippines the school can't provide us. (FIL7)</i>
Thailand	Language Barriers	<i>In Chang Mai, Thailand I think because of the nature of the English Program, the students use the native language so the students are not familiar about it so the gap is really hindering. (THAI1)</i>
	Limited Time for Classes	<i>One month meet only three meetings to get many experiences but not enough to get familiarized and knowledgeable. (IND5)</i>

Table 9

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Subjects Handled

Subjects Handled	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Pre-school	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>I was able to advance myself in terms of the curriculum, but before I was so poor and my teaching skills by taking part in the program. I suggest to have two (2) months or more but it is costly. (THAI3)</i>
	Need to develop skills on how facilitate classess using student-centered approach	<i>It must include an engaging element that will encourage students to participate, such as a game they'll enjoy playing or points they may earn for their best efforts. (THAI2)</i>
Elementary	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>I do not know about how students learn and how teachers teaches in another country and I am not so knowledgeable in the content. (IND3)</i>



Table 9 continuation ...

Subjects Handled	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
	Inexperienced in implementing differentiated instruction	<i>To master the materials before coming, adopt the climate the country. The climate is cold and rainy and typhoon. We have to respect the culture of different countries, also have to prepare instructions and varied activities these are my ups and downs during my pre-service teaching. (IND5)</i>
	Curricular differences	<i>It seems close to our country curriculum because it required students to learn for 12 years (until 12th grade) before university. The difference thing is just about the lesson hours for every meeting, and the lesson plan that just takes 1-2 pages for each meeting. (IND3)</i>
	Inexperienced in implementing differentiated instruction	<i>To master the materials before coming, adopt to the climate of the country. The climate is cold and rainy and typhoon. We have to respect the culture of different countries, also have to prepare instructions and varied activities these are my ups and downs during my pre-service teaching. (IND5)</i>
Mathematics	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>When I was teaching, I first had fractional knowledge about it. (FIL1)</i>
	Low pedagogical knowledge	<i>I was able to discuss the basic concepts but it is still challenging to teach and strategize. (FIL1)</i>
Economics	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>We have no knowledge on the economy of the country we deployed as a pre-service teacher. (IND5)</i>
	Language Barriers	<i>I speak English but maybe the assessment I want to talk in Indonesia but can not so I have to ask my buddy to translate and can not understand some words so I have to write it and bring to school and the classroom and I think they can understand and learn. (THAI1)</i>
	Difficulty in crafting of objectives	<i>The objectives of the lesson were not emphasized to the learners and that was not aligned so that Important concepts may be emphasized during the discussion. (IND8)</i>
Social Studies	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>Before the student teacher to do the project, they need to learn more about the curriculum so when they do the practice teaching so they will understand that time, particularly so they will not learn it there. Like I have to learn the Philippines curriculum so before I go I should know the techniques and strategies I used because not enough time. There should be a briefing of the curriculum (IND4)</i>
	Curricular differences	<i>There is a difference in lesson plan because in Indonesia it is longer and Philippines it is simple. (IND6)</i>
	Low pedagogical knowledge	<i>When I was teaching it is my first time I still do not know a lot of strategy so my cooperating teacher helped me. (IND4)</i>
	Lack of facilities and equipment	<i>In Indonesia not all have internet connection, but in Thailand almost everyone has phone and good connectivity. (THAI1)</i>



Table 9 continuation...

Subjects Handled	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Science (Secondary)	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>So as for me, the Project could be conducted more than a month especially with the difference of the curriculum and teaching the learners. If the project should be continued by the SEAMEO those organizations of the university who will be leaving the Philippines the activity they do together there should be a coordination and cooperation to strengthen the host and the university. Or projects offered by the government offered by the government. (IND6)</i>
	Curricular difference	<i>Integrated Biology and Chemistry (Science) are considered as separate subject. (IND4)</i>
	Low pedagogical knowledge	<i>I feel incredibly grateful and glad to be a part of this initiative since it will hopefully lead to new connections, educational opportunities, and personal growth. I want students to participate in this program, thus they will have a priceless life experience, the only difficulty I face is how to apply my pedagogical skills and knowledge on my actual teaching and that I have bad English skills. (THAI2)</i>
	Lack of facilities and equipment	<i>I got experience in there and thank you, Science Technology and Mathematics Curriculum I learned it there and then when I came back to Indonesia and I wrote a thesis about STEM. I appreciate their Curriculum, however, in my host country we do not have those similar materials, facilities and equipment. (IND8)</i>
English	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>It gives me opportunity to improve my general performance, talk in English confidently, improve my public speaking, learn how to communicate with students casually out of class, and focus when in class, but I feel that my English skills is not that good enough yet (IND4)</i>
	Language barriers	<i>English is our 2nd or 3rd language. Sometimes I use it but only few understand it. (IND5)</i>
Physics	Poor mastery of curricular content	<i>It gives me experience to conduct an effective lesson since in SLS the lesson hour for each subject is an hour. In Indonesia, mostly we have lesson hour for each subjects is min 2 hours. (IND3)</i>
	Low pedagogical knowledge	<i>It gives me experience to teach by English language instead of Indonesian, so I can perform more confident when I have to teach in English language, but the struggle is my knowledge in the teaching strategies to my learners who are better than me (IND7)</i>
	Facilitating differentiated instruction	<i>Students learn mostly during discussion since they really had no knowledge of the subject matter and the country was imposing a traditional approach to make students love reading. (FIL1)</i>



Table 10 presents the perceived issues and challenges of participants when grouped according to grade level handled. When grouped by grade level, three primary issues and concerns emerged: one in pre-school, one in elementary, and one in secondary education. Pre-service teachers in pre-school programs struggled with their lack of training in handling students with special needs. Although inclusive education is a common concept in teacher training, they realized that their practical experience was limited when confronted with actual scenarios involving students with special needs. This was particularly evident in pre-school, where learners are still developing their adaptability to the environment.

In the pre-school setting, pre-service teachers assigned to elementary classes faced challenges in classroom management. They felt unprepared to effectively manage their classrooms. Acknowledging the significant impact of poor classroom management on the learning environment, pre-service teachers should proactively develop strategies for behavior management and create a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. Without effective management, students may become disengaged, leading to disruptions and a lack of progress.

At the secondary level, pre-service teachers faced challenges related to implementing differentiated instruction. The difficulty lies in effectively meeting the diverse needs of all students in the classroom. Creating and managing multiple learning activities and assessments tailored to individual students' abilities and learning styles can be overwhelming.

Additionally, accurately assessing students' needs and adapting teaching approaches accordingly can be challenging.

Issues and Challenges of the Pre-service Teachers Based on Their Performance Evaluation

The evaluation results of the pre-service teachers' general performance, teaching performance, and general characteristics by cooperating teachers and university supervisors are presented in Table 11. This provided valuable insights into their competencies and areas of improvement.

The evaluation result on the teaching performance of the pre-service teachers reveal that most of them, 66.66% were proficient which is defined as consistently meeting expectations; while 26.66% reached the advance level, these are those who consistently exceeded expectations, the remaining 6.66% is rated basic, implying that the interns had partially met expectations. No one was given a rating of needs improvement. The participants had a mean score of 3.20 which has a descriptive equivalent of proficient. Writing learning objectives, assessment strategies, voice modulation, and implementing inquiry-based approaches were identified as areas of improvement under teaching performance.

In terms of general characteristics, data present that most of the pre-service teachers are assessed as proficient or advanced by their supervisors and cooperating teachers or mentors. Out of the 30 pre-service teachers, 66.67% belong

Table 10

Perceived Issues and Challenges of Participants when Grouped According to Grade Handled

Grade Level Handled	Issues and Challenges	Sample Response
Pre-school	Lack of training in handling students with special needs	<i>There are students special we find hard to deal. Studying SPED should be integrated in the Curriculum to Basic Education Curriculum in the SEA. (IND10)</i>
Elementary	Poor classroom management skills	<i>I have limited knowledge techniques on how to handle learners, I find it difficult to implement discipline strategies. (IND6)</i>
Secondary	Inexperienced in implementing differentiated instruction	<i>Maybe learn more from your students you want to teach and that way you can learn so many things from your experience there and start there for the differentiated instructions. (IND9)</i>



Table 11*Pre-Service Teachers Performance Evaluation in the SEA Teacher Project*

Performance Indicators	Performance Evaluation					Descriptive Equivalent	Rank
	Advance (4)	Proficient(3)	Basic(2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Mean		
General Performance	8	20	2	0	3.20	Proficient	2.5
Teaching Performances	8	20	2	0	3.20	Proficient	2.5
General Characteristics	10	20	0	0	3.33	Advanced	1

Legend: Advance (3.26-4.00); Proficient (2.51-3.25); Basic(1.76-2.50) Needs Improvement (1.00-1.75)

to the proficient scale; whereas 10 or 33.33% were assessed as advance. The performance indicator of general characteristics had the highest mean rating of 3.33 and a descriptive equivalent of advance. No specific issues and challenges were identified in this performance indicator.

The results only suggest that in general pre-service teacher-participants of the SEA teacher program had at least proficient rating in all three areas or performance indicators. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in terms of their general and teaching performance, to address the issues and challenges they encounter regarding English proficiency, mastery of content, lesson planning, as well as in the actual demonstrations. These results are supported by the studies of Nurazizah et al. (2021), and Musa and Ariyanti (2020).

Proposed Actions to Improve and Optimize the Policies and Practices of the SEA Teacher Project to Address the Issues and Challenged Faced by the Pre-Service Teachers

Based on the interviews conducted, five specific proposed actions have been identified to improve and optimize the policies and practices of the SEA Teacher Project. These actions aim to address the issues and challenges faced by pre-service teachers and enhance their competence and development (Table 12).

First, there is a need for the refinement of the application and selection process. This suggests

improving the existing process to promote diversity and inclusion in the SEA Teacher program. SEAMEO is encouraged to address barriers that prevent some pre-service teachers from participating. A clearer merit selection plan should be implemented, considering the qualifications of pre-service teachers in terms of academic performance, knowledge, and skill set in content, pedagogy, and technology use (Gallos et al., 2022). Personal characteristics, such as being well-rounded and resilient, should also be assessed. Recommendations as the sole requirement should be avoided to prevent bias. Also, socio-economic status should not be considered, as it may disadvantage qualified pre-service teachers from economically challenged families.

Second, allotment of sufficient funding to support the participation of pre-service teachers must be considered. Some participants from the previous batches were asked to cover all their expenses. This practice may deter potential participants. It is suggested that sending universities should at least shoulder a certain percentage of the overall costs if they cannot cover all expenses. Seeking agreements with local government units is also recommended to lessen the financial burden.

Third, the need for the enhancement of the Pre-service Teacher Preparation Program is evident. Pre-service teachers from different countries face challenges in implementing the curricula of their host schools or receiving



Table 12

Proposed Actions to Improve and Optimize the Policies and Practices of the SEA Teacher Project to Address the Issues and Challenged Faced by the Pre-Service Teachers and to Enhance Their Competence and Development

Proposed Actions	Sample Response
Refinement of the application and selection process	<i>There should be training, orientation, and selection process for those who will be sent off. (IND4)</i>
Allotment of sufficient funding	<i>The living allowance given are not sufficient. (IND3)</i>
Enhancement of Pre-service Teachers Preparation Program	<i>Before the student teacher to do the project, they need to learn more about the curriculum so when they do the practice teaching so they will understand that time particularly so they will not learn it there. Like I have to learn the Philippines curriculum so before I go I should know the techniques and strategies I used because not enough time. There should be a briefing of the curriculum.(IND4)</i>
Development of Feedback and Monitoring System	<i>I think, not all the student-teacher had those opportunities. So, I think it is important for the project to see the opportunity to learn from the class of student-teacher in host university as a part of the project. (IND3)</i>
Arrangement of SEA Teacher Project Continuity Program	<i>The project should be continued by the SEAMEO those organization of the university who will be leaving the Philippines the activity they do together there should be a coordination and cooperation to strengthen the host and the university. Or projects offered by the government offered by the government. (IND6)</i>

universities. Thus, it is proposed that participating countries consider a uniform curriculum and the development of reference materials highlighting Southeast Asian culture, economics, literature, arts, and others. Moreover, universities should reinforce the training of pre-service teachers to be proficient in English and the language commonly used in the countries in which they will be assigned to address issues or challenges regarding language barriers (Gallos et al., 2022).

Fourth, the development of a feedback and monitoring system is proposed. Regular monitoring and evaluation of activities and outcomes should be conducted, along with soliciting feedback from stakeholders involved.

Lastly, the proposal includes an arrangement for the SEA Teacher Project Continuity Program. This involves the effective dissemination of project results to academic communities in Southeast Asia, which can enhance visibility and credibility. Former participants may also serve as mentors for succeeding batches of the project.

Conclusions

SEA Teacher Project participants reported a variety of challenges influenced by factors such as gender, age, family background, and religious beliefs. Both male and female participants experienced language barriers, but male participants also expressed concerns about the application process and academic records, while female participants struggled with acclimatization. Participants aged 21-25 often lacked technical knowledge and emotional stability, while those aged 26-30 faced difficulties with acclimatization. Participants from average families relied on financial support and encountered financial challenges, whereas those from wealthier backgrounds struggled with acclimatization. Pre-service teachers from different countries faced difficulties related to cultural differences, language barriers, and adapting to local norms. Additionally, participants from diverse religious backgrounds



encountered difficulties related to the expression of their faith. Sending and receiving universities also faced curricular disparities and a lack of funding. Pre-service teachers also identified subject-specific challenges and areas for improvement regarding English proficiency, content mastery, lesson planning, and teaching strategies.

Evaluations of pre-service teachers in the SEA Teacher Program revealed that most participants were rated as proficient or advanced in general performance, teaching performance, and overall characteristics. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in areas such as English proficiency, content mastery, lesson planning, and practical demonstrations. Specific areas for development include writing clear learning objectives, designing effective assessment strategies, modulating voice effectively, and implementing inquiry-based teaching approaches. This is consistent in the study of Al Mardhiyyah (2019), highlighting the need for pre-service teacher-participants of SEA Teacher Project to improve in the said areas. Proposed actions to address these challenges include refining the application process, providing adequate funding, enhancing the Pre-service Teacher Preparation Program, developing a feedback and monitoring system, and implementing a continuity program.

Recommendations

The teacher selection process should be inclusive, considering individuals from diverse age groups, sexes, family backgrounds, religions, and ethnicity. To achieve this, the program should be actively promoted in communities with diverse populations, and potential candidates from various backgrounds should be actively sought out. Additionally, the existing participant application and selection procedures should be reviewed and improved.

Sending countries and universities should receive feedback on the evaluation results of pre-service teachers in the SEA Teacher Program, including identified areas for improvement. This can help them enhance their teacher education programs to better prepare pre-service teachers for teaching in Southeast Asia. Additionally, performance evaluation tools should be validated,

and evaluation criteria should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure relevance and fairness.

The policies and practices of the SEA Teacher Project should be continuously reviewed and improved to address the identified issues and challenges faced by pre-service teachers. A thorough feasibility study should be conducted to assess the practicality of the proposed actions, considering resource availability, potential challenges, and the support needed for successful implementation. Stakeholder input should also be sought to gauge their support and identify potential barriers.

Acknowledgment

I am deeply indebted to my adviser, Dr. Maria Myriam B. Bacud, who generously shared her knowledge and expertise with me and helped me shape this work into its final form. I also appreciate the valuable feedback and suggestions from my panel of examiners: Dr. James Loreto C. Piscos, Dr. Ronel P. de la Cruz, Dr. Milagros L. Borabo, Dr. Vicente C. Villan, Dr. Wendell Glenn Cagape and Dr. Maria Rita D. Lucas.

I am grateful to the Benguet State University for allowing me to conduct this study and for providing me with the necessary resources.

I extend my sincere thanks to the librarians, Ms. Susie Laurio and Mr. Julius Cortez, the statistician, Dr. Avelina Raqueno, the English editor- Heidi Rosario Tripona P. Albano, and Rostom Niño B. Supsupin, my editor. I also thank the participants of this study: the 6th to 8th batch of the SEA Teacher Project students, their cooperating teachers, and their university supervisors, for their cooperation and willingness to share their experiences.



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