



Bridging Borders in English Education: Comparing Teaching Practicum Experiences of Indonesian and Filipino Student Interns

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Abstract: This study aims to explore and compare the teaching practicum experiences of Indonesian and Filipino student interns in secondary schools in the Philippines, with a focus on institutional support, challenges encountered, and the development of teaching competence. Employing a qualitative comparative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Indonesian student interns participating in the SEA-Teacher Program who completed an international practicum, as well as Filipino pre-service teachers undertaking domestic practicum programs at Capiz State University. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Indonesian participants primarily experienced challenges related to language confidence, intercultural communication, and adaptation to an ESL environment, whereas Filipino participants benefited more from sustained pedagogical mentoring and encountered challenges associated with classroom management and learner diversity. Despite these differences, both groups demonstrated adaptive teaching strategies and meaningful professional growth through reflective classroom experiences. Indonesian participants exhibited stronger development in intercultural awareness and professional identity, while Filipino participants demonstrated greater pedagogical refinement and instructional effectiveness. These findings highlight the influence of sociolinguistic context, institutional familiarity, and cross-cultural engagement on professional learning during teaching practicum. The study also emphasizes the importance of strengthening mentoring systems, intercultural preparation, and language readiness in international teaching internship programs.

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Introduction

Teaching practicum is widely recognized as an essential component of teacher education programs because it enables pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Through teaching internships, student teachers gain practical experience in lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, and interaction with students, contributing to the development of their pedagogical competence (Caires et al., 2012; Kari Smith & Lilach Lev-Ari, 2005). These field-based experiences bridge the gap between theoretical coursework and actual teaching practice (Caires et al., 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2021) while also supporting the development of professional identity (Flores, 2020; Flores & Day, 2006; Hong et al., 2024). In this study, the term student interns is used interchangeably with pre-service teachers, referring to teacher candidates who were undergoing teaching practicum in school settings.

Within teacher education programs, teaching practicum involves engagement in core professional activities such as lesson planning, classroom instruction, and assessment of student learning. Through these experiences, pre-service teachers develop the ability to



manage classrooms, communicate effectively with students, and adapt instructional strategies to diverse learning contexts (Caires et al., 2012). Consequently, practicum is considered a critical stage in preparing professional teachers, as it provides direct exposure to classroom realities before entering the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). Moreover, high-quality practicum experiences supported by effective mentoring have been shown to strengthen professional learning and teaching readiness (Ellis et al., 2020; Hudson, 2013).

The learning process during practicum can be explained through experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through cycles of experience, reflection, and adaptation (D. A. Kolb, 1984). This process involves concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this context, student teachers engage in authentic teaching experiences that allow them to apply and refine instructional strategies (Gan, 2014), thereby enhancing pedagogical competence (Rozimela et al., 2025; Yuan & Lee, 2021).

In addition to experiential learning, reflective practice plays a central role in teacher development. Professional growth occurs through reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983). Reflective activities, such as teaching journals, mentoring discussions, and classroom observations, enable pre-service teachers to evaluate their teaching practices and identify areas for improvement (Farrell, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2021), while also fostering critical thinking and professional awareness (Pravitasari et al., 2025). From a sociocultural perspective, teacher learning is shaped by social interaction and participation in meaningful professional practices within specific cultural contexts (L. S. Vygotsky & Michael Cole, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991). During practicum, pre-service teachers interact with mentor teachers, peers, and students, which supports the development of teaching competence and professional identity through observation, feedback, and guided participation (Flores & Day, 2006; Hobson et al., 2009; Lawrent, 2024; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2017).

A growing body of research has examined the role of teaching practicum in pre-service teacher development. Studies have shown that practicum experiences enhance pedagogical competence and teaching confidence (Gan, 2014; Yuan & Lee, 2021), while mentoring support plays a crucial role in helping student teachers adapt to classroom environments and develop effective teaching strategies (Hudson, 2013; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2017; T. M. H. Nguyen & Hudson, 2010). However, pre-service teachers also encounter challenges, including classroom management difficulties, limited teaching confidence, and heavy workloads (Copland et al., 2014), as well as difficulties in adapting instruction and preparing teaching materials (Caires et al., 2012).

In recent years, international teaching internship programs have gained increasing attention as they provide opportunities for cross-cultural teaching experiences. These programs enable student teachers to engage with diverse linguistic and cultural contexts while developing intercultural competence and professional adaptability (Cushner, 2007). One example is the SEA-Teacher Program, which allows student teachers from ASEAN countries to undertake teaching internships abroad. In this context, Indonesian pre-service teachers undertake their practicum in the Philippines, where English functions as a second language and is widely used as a medium of instruction in schools. In contrast, Indonesia represents an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where opportunities for authentic English interaction are comparatively limited outside the classroom. This distinction creates different linguistic and pedagogical conditions for student teachers. Indonesian student interns entering Philippine classrooms may experience additional challenges related to language confidence,



intercultural communication, and adaptation to an ESL environment, whereas Filipino student interns operate within a linguistically familiar educational context.

Recent studies in teacher education have increasingly emphasized cross-cultural teaching practicum, international teaching internships, and teacher identity development as key areas for enhancing pre-service teachers' professional learning (Ellis et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2024; Yuan & Lee, 2021). These studies highlight the role of mentoring, intercultural engagement, and authentic classroom experiences in shaping teaching competence and adaptability across diverse educational contexts. However, these domains are often examined in isolation, resulting in a fragmented understanding of how they interact within shared teaching environments (Flores & Day, 2006; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2021). More importantly, previous studies have rarely compared local and international pre-service teachers within the same institutional and sociolinguistic setting, particularly in ESL environments. Most existing research focuses either on international student mobility or domestic practicum experiences separately, leaving limited understanding of how linguistic environment, contextual familiarity, and institutional structures jointly shape practicum experiences and professional development. Therefore, comparing Indonesian and Filipino student interns within Philippine secondary schools provides a unique opportunity to examine how ESL–EFL differences influence teaching practicum experiences, professional learning, and identity development within the same host educational context.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to explore and compare the teaching practicum experiences of Filipino and Indonesian student interns in schools in the Philippines. Specifically, it examines institutional support, challenges encountered during the practicum, adaptive teaching strategies employed, and their contribution to the development of teaching competence. By adopting a comparative perspective, this study seeks to provide deeper insights into how cross-cultural teaching internship contexts shape professional learning and development among pre-service English teachers.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative comparative design to explore similarities and differences in the teaching practicum experiences of Indonesian and Filipino pre-service English teachers in Philippine secondary schools. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of how different sociolinguistic and educational contexts shaped participants' professional learning experiences during the practicum. Specifically, the comparison focused on four dimensions of teaching practicum experience: (1) institutional and mentor support, (2) challenges encountered during teaching practicum, (3) adaptive teaching strategies employed in classroom contexts, and (4) professional growth developed throughout the internship experience. These dimensions were selected because they consistently emerged in previous literature on teaching practicum and teacher professional development as critical factors influencing pre-service teachers' learning trajectories, classroom adaptation, and teaching effectiveness (Caires et al., 2012; Hudson, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2021). Furthermore, these dimensions were considered particularly relevant for examining differences between international student interns from an EFL background and local student interns operating within an ESL environment.

The participants consisted of six pre-service English teachers who had completed their teaching practicum in secondary schools in the Philippines for approximately one academic semester. Three participants (P1-P3) were Indonesian student interns participating in the SEA-Teacher Program, while the remaining three participants (P4-P6) were Filipino pre-service teachers from Capiz State University completing their domestic practicum.

Participants were purposively selected because they represented two distinct practicum contexts within the same host educational environment: international student interns from an EFL background and local student interns from an ESL context. This selection enabled a contextual comparison of how linguistic environment, institutional familiarity, and intercultural exposure shaped their professional learning experiences.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Program	Internship Duration	Grade level taught	English learning background
P1	Female	Indonesian	SEA-Teacher	1 Month	10th Grade	Third year student of English Education
P2	Male	Indonesian	SEA-Teacher	1 Month	7th Grade	Fourth year student of English Education
P3	Female	Indonesian	SEA-Teacher	1 Month	8th Grade	Third year student of English Education
P4	Female	Filipino	Domestic Practicum	1 Semester	9th Grade	Fourth year student of English Education
P5	Male	Filipino	Domestic Practicum	1 Semester	10th Grade	Fourth year student of English Education
P6	Female	Filipino	Domestic Practicum	1 Semester	10th Grade	Fourth year student of English Education

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews consisting of 15 open-ended questions focusing on institutional support, challenges encountered, teaching strategies, and professional development. The interviews were conducted online, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied several strategies, including member checking to verify the accuracy of participants' responses, peer debriefing with the research supervisor who has expertise in English language education and qualitative research to enhance analytical rigor and reduce interpretive bias, and maintaining an audit trail to ensure transparency and dependability throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the interview data generated four major themes that reflect the teaching practicum experiences of Indonesian and Filipino pre-service English teachers in Philippine secondary schools. These themes include institutional and mentor support, challenges in language use and classroom management, adaptive teaching strategies, and professional growth. Table 2 presents a cross-case summary of the key themes identified across participants.

Table 2. Cross-Case Thematic Summary of Indonesian and Filipino Participants' Teaching Practicum Experiences

Theme	Indonesian Participants (P1-P3)	Filipino Participants (P4-P6)
Institutional and Mentor Support	Received accommodation, transportation, meals, orientation, and buddy system support that eased adaptation to the overseas practicum context. Mentors also helped explain curriculum, lesson planning, and school culture.	Received strong support from school administration, department heads, and cooperating teachers. Mentors provided feedback on lesson plans, teaching strategies, and classroom delivery.
Challenges in Language Use and Classroom Management	Experienced anxiety in speaking English, pronunciation concerns, and adjustment to a different educational culture and classroom expectations.	Faced challenges related to mixed learner proficiency, sustaining student attention, and maintaining classroom engagement.
Adaptive Teaching Strategies	Used interactive tasks, games, visual media, and cultural videos to increase student participation and classroom interest.	Applied adaptive teaching strategies such as simplifying instructions, using questioning techniques, and code-switching to support student understanding.
Professional Growth	Reported increased confidence, improved classroom management skills, stronger intercultural awareness, and better teaching readiness.	Reported improved lesson delivery, communication skills, classroom confidence, and stronger professional preparedness.

Institutional and Mentor Support

The findings indicate that institutional and mentor support played a central role in shaping the practicum experiences of both Indonesian and Filipino pre-service teachers; however, the nature and function of this support differed significantly across contexts. For Indonesian participants, support was primarily oriented toward facilitating adaptation to a new academic and cultural environment. Logistical provisions such as accommodation, transportation, and structured orientation programs functioned as enabling conditions that allowed them to participate effectively in teaching activities. As P2 explained, "The university provided us with accommodation, transportation, and meals," highlighting how basic institutional support reduced initial adjustment burdens.

In contrast, Filipino student interns experienced support that was more pedagogically oriented and sustained throughout the practicum process. Mentor guidance and continuous feedback enabled them to refine their instructional practices more directly. Similarly, P4 noted that "the support system from the administration and my cooperating teacher greatly contributed to my growth," indicating that support in domestic contexts operates as an ongoing mechanism for pedagogical development rather than initial adaptation. This difference can be understood in relation to the nature of entry into the practicum context. Indonesian pre-service teachers entered an unfamiliar sociocultural and institutional environment, which required initial adjustment before meaningful pedagogical engagement could occur. By comparison, Filipino pre-service teachers operated within a familiar educational system, allowing institutional support to function more directly as pedagogical scaffolding rather than environmental adaptation.

From a sociocultural perspective, these differences highlight how learning is mediated through context-specific forms of social interaction (L. S. Vygotsky & Michael Cole, 1978). Indonesian student interns relied on structured entry points into the teaching environment, whereas Filipino participants engaged more deeply in ongoing communities of practice. This distinction reflects that effective practicum design should differentiate between adaptation-oriented support and pedagogically sustained mentoring, particularly in international teaching internship programs. These findings are consistent with recent studies emphasizing that sustained mentoring and institutional support significantly influence pre-service teachers' professional adjustment, emotional readiness, and instructional effectiveness during practicum experiences (Ellis et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2024). Recent research also highlights that international practicum participants particularly benefit from adaptation-oriented support systems that facilitate sociocultural adjustment and classroom participation (Lawrent, 2024).

Challenges in Language Use and Classroom Management

The challenges encountered by participants further illustrate how contextual factors shape the nature of teaching difficulties. Indonesian participants predominantly experienced challenges related to language confidence, pronunciation, and intercultural communication. As P3 expressed, she felt “nervous because she had to speak English all the time,” indicating that linguistic performance became a source of pressure. This suggests that language proficiency functions not only as a communication tool but also as a factor influencing teaching confidence in cross-cultural contexts. This divergence reflects differences in linguistic proximity to English as a medium of instruction. For Indonesian participants, English primarily functions as a foreign language, making classroom interaction a site of linguistic performance pressure.

Meanwhile, Filipino student interns faced challenges that were more pedagogical in nature, particularly in managing mixed-ability classrooms and maintaining student engagement. As P4 observed, “some students were fluent, while others still struggled with basic English,” highlighting the complexity of addressing diverse learner needs. This indicates that familiarity with the linguistic environment allowed Filipino participants to focus on higher-order instructional concerns rather than basic communication. This pattern suggests that familiarity with the instructional language enables teachers to allocate greater cognitive resources toward pedagogical decision-making, such as managing learner diversity and sustaining engagement, rather than focusing on linguistic accuracy. This contrasting patterns reflect different stages within the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984). Indonesian student interns appear to operate at a stage where immediate challenges are linked to performance anxiety and contextual adjustment, requiring greater cognitive and emotional effort. Meanwhile, Filipino student interns, having surpassed these initial barriers, are able to engage in deeper pedagogical reflection and refinement.

These indicates that challenges in teaching practicum are not uniform but layered, with linguistic and cultural adaptation forming an additional dimension in international contexts. This reinforces the need for differentiated preparation that addresses both language readiness and pedagogical competence in teacher education programs. These findings support recent studies on international teaching practicum which reported that pre-service teachers from EFL backgrounds often experience linguistic anxiety and reduced teaching confidence when entering ESL environments (Pravitasari et al., 2025; Rozimela et al., 2025). Similarly, Yuan and Lee (2021) emphasizes that linguistic adjustment in cross-cultural practicum contexts significantly influences professional identity development and classroom participation among pre-service English teachers.



Adaptive Teaching Strategies in Cross-Cultural Classrooms

In response to these challenges, both groups demonstrated adaptive teaching strategies; however, the nature of these adaptations differed in ways that reflect their respective teaching contexts. Indonesian participants tended to employ culturally responsive and engagement-oriented strategies, such as incorporating visual media and interactive activities. For instance, P3 reported using “videos about Indonesian culture to make students interested,” suggesting an effort to bridge cultural differences and enhance student engagement. This tendency reflects an intercultural bridging strategy, where unfamiliar classroom environments prompt pre-service teachers to rely on culturally embedded teaching resources to establish connection and reduce communicative distance.

On the other hand, Filipino student interns demonstrated adaptive strategies that were more instructionally focused, including simplifying explanations and using code-switching to support comprehension. As P6 noted, “If I saw blank stares, I would use Hiligaynon to clarify things,” indicating real-time pedagogical responsiveness to students’ needs. This reflects an instructional pragmatism shaped by linguistic accessibility within the classroom context, where code-switching functions as a pedagogical resource rather than a compensatory strategy for language limitation.

From a reflective practice perspective (Schon, 1983), both groups engaged in cycles of reflection-in-action, although the focus of reflection differed between them. Indonesian student interns reflected more on how to establish connection and engagement, while Filipino student interns focused on optimizing instructional clarity and effectiveness. This suggests that adaptive teaching is not a uniform skill but is shaped by the specific demands of the teaching context. Similar patterns were identified in recent studies showing that pre-service teachers in multicultural classrooms tend to develop flexible and context-responsive teaching strategies to maintain learner engagement and instructional clarity (Rozimela et al., 2025; Pravitasari et al., 2025). These findings suggest that adaptive teaching competence emerges through continuous interaction between contextual demands and reflective classroom practice.

Overall, these findings highlight that cross-cultural practicum contexts tend to foster creativity and cultural integration, whereas domestic practicum contexts strengthen instructional responsiveness and classroom control. This distinction underscores the importance of preparing pre-service teachers with context-sensitive adaptive strategies rather than relying solely on generalized teaching methods.

Professional Growth and Reflective Development

Across both groups, the practicum experience was consistently described as a meaningful process of professional growth. However, the nature and focus of this growth differed depending on the practicum context, revealing distinct developmental trajectories among Indonesian and Filipino student interns. Indonesian student interns emphasized that teaching in a foreign educational context enhanced their confidence, flexibility, and intercultural awareness. For instance, P1 reflected that the experience helped her become more confident in managing classroom interaction and responding to students’ needs. This suggests that cross-cultural practicum environments play a significant role in shaping not only pedagogical competence but also self-efficacy and intercultural sensitivity, as student teachers are required to navigate unfamiliar linguistic and cultural settings.

Within the practicum context, Filipino student interns reported growth that was more closely related to pedagogical refinement and instructional effectiveness. P4 explained that mentor feedback helped her improve her lesson delivery and student engagement, while P6 noted that the practicum better prepared him for his future teaching career. These responses

indicate that in domestic practicum contexts, professional growth is more strongly supported by continuous mentoring and direct classroom experience, allowing student teachers to refine their teaching strategies and classroom management skills.

From an experiential learning perspective (D. A. Kolb, 1984), these findings illustrate how professional growth emerges through cycles of experience, reflection, and adaptation. However, the differences between the two groups suggest that the outcomes of this learning process are shaped by contextual factors. Indonesian student interns appear to engage more in identity transformation and confidence building, while Filipino participants focus more on strengthening instructional competence within familiar environments.

These findings reveal that professional growth in teaching practicum is context-dependent. Cross-cultural practicum may accelerate the development of teaching identity and intercultural competence, whereas domestic practicum may deepen pedagogical expertise and classroom effectiveness. These distinctions extend experiential learning theory by demonstrating how different learning environments shape the direction and outcomes of pre-service teachers' professional development. Recent empirical studies also suggest that international practicum experiences contribute significantly to the development of intercultural competence, reflective thinking, and professional identity among pre-service English teachers (Hong et al., 2024; Lawrent, 2024). In addition, reflective engagement during practicum has been found to strengthen teaching self-efficacy and long-term professional preparedness in diverse educational contexts (Pravitasari et al., 2025).

These differences may also be influenced by the duration and structure of the practicum programs. Indonesian participants completed a shorter one-month international internship focused on cross-cultural exposure and adaptation, whereas Filipino participants underwent a longer one-semester practicum that allowed more sustained pedagogical engagement and classroom immersion.

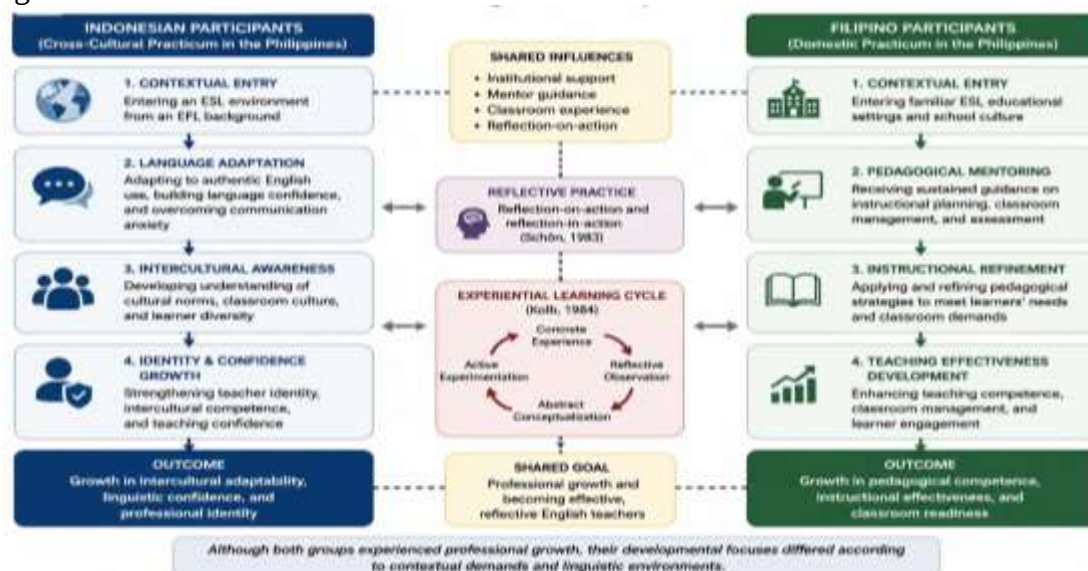


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Differing Professional Growth Trajectories in Teaching Practicum Experiences

Figure 1 illustrates the differing professional growth trajectories experienced by Indonesian and Filipino pre-service English teachers during teaching practicum in the Philippines. Although both groups developed professional competence through experiential learning and reflective practice, their developmental focuses differed according to linguistic environment, contextual familiarity, and institutional support structure. The conceptual model



demonstrates that Indonesian participants primarily experienced growth related to intercultural adaptation, language confidence, and professional identity construction within an ESL environment. In contrast, Filipino participants demonstrated stronger development in pedagogical refinement and instructional effectiveness due to their familiarity with the local educational context. These differences suggest that professional learning during practicum is shaped not only by teaching experience itself but also by sociolinguistic and contextual factors.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that sociolinguistic background, institutional familiarity, and practicum structure shaped participants' professional learning trajectories in different ways. Indonesian student interns primarily developed intercultural awareness, language adaptability, and professional identity through cross-cultural adjustment experiences, whereas Filipino student interns demonstrated stronger pedagogical refinement and classroom management development through sustained instructional engagement. Despite these differences, both groups demonstrated adaptive teaching practices and meaningful professional growth through reflective classroom experiences.

Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding teaching practicum as a context-dependent experiential learning process shaped by sociocultural and linguistic factors. It highlights how cross-cultural environments influence not only pedagogical development but also teacher identity, intercultural competence, and linguistic confidence among pre-service English teachers. In addition, this study provides comparative insights into how EFL and ESL backgrounds shape professional learning within the same institutional setting.

Practically, the findings suggest the importance of differentiated practicum preparation. International teaching internship programs, such as the SEA-Teacher Program, should strengthen linguistic readiness, intercultural competence, and structured adaptation support for student interns entering ESL environments. Meanwhile, domestic practicum programs should continue enhancing mentoring systems and classroom management preparation to support instructional effectiveness and professional growth. Overall, this study underscores the importance of context-sensitive practicum design in supporting the adaptability, competence, and professional identity development of future English teachers in increasingly globalized educational contexts.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, teacher education institutions and program administrators are encouraged to strengthen pre-departure preparation for international teaching internship programs by providing intensive language practice, intercultural communication training, and orientation regarding classroom culture in host countries. Since Indonesian participants experienced challenges related to language confidence and adaptation within a relatively short one-month practicum period, program administrators should consider extending internship duration or providing structured follow-up reflective activities to maximize professional learning outcomes.

In addition, institutions are encouraged to establish structured mentoring systems involving regular feedback sessions between student interns, mentor teachers, and program coordinators throughout the practicum process. Schools hosting international student interns should also provide adaptation-support mechanisms, such as peer buddy systems, collaborative teaching opportunities, and guided classroom observation, to facilitate smoother sociocultural and pedagogical adjustment. Furthermore, teacher education programs should

integrate reflective practice activities, including reflective journals and post-practicum discussions, to help student interns critically evaluate their teaching experiences and professional development across diverse educational contexts.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across different countries and educational settings to further examine the long-term impact of cross-cultural practicum experiences on professional development and teacher identity construction. Such efforts are essential to inform the development of more context-responsive and globally relevant teacher education practices.

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