

Integrating Stress Management into Teaching Practices: A Reflective Case Study of Pre-Service Teachers in the SEA Teacher Program

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the stress management strategies during the SEA Teacher program which implemented in teaching. The research questions inquiries: (1) What were the stressors faced by pre-service teachers during the SEA-Teacher Program (2) What strategies did they employ to manage these pressures. The aims of this study were recognized and outlined the pressures faced by these upcoming pre-service teachers during their overseas internship, and clarify the kinds of coping strategies and techniques they utilized. This study was conducted in the Dong Thap, Vietnam. The method is used qualitative approach with descriptive type was employed using questionnaire and interview to collect the data from twelve pre-service teachers who participated in SEA Teacher program. The findings revealed that there was the source of stress which revealed in several key; communication style, pressure of language adaptation, and cultural differences. Furthermore, it focused on the significance of psychological debriefing and organizational assistance in global internship programs for pre-service teachers. Their capacity to handle stress is greatly influenced by elements like social support, readiness, and the pre-service teachers' ability to reflect on themselves. Considering these results, it is suggested that SEA Teacher program should improve their mental health support. This enhancement could include providing training focused on stress management and developing abilities for effective intercultural communication. Additionally, maintaining steady social support, like mentoring and peer assistance networks, is crucial for aiding pre-service teachers in coping with stress throughout their internship experiences.

Keywords: pre-service teacher; sea teacher; stress management; teaching experience; teaching practice

INTRODUCTION

Effective teacher education relies not only on classroom theory, but also on hands-on practical experience. In this context, internship programs for pre-service teachers have played an integral role in teacher education programs on an international scale (Purba et al., 2025). Nonetheless, taking part in an internship comes with its own difficulties. The transition from the role of a student to that of a pre-service teacher is accompanied by significant psychological and emotional challenges. They encountered pressures in various areas of their

professional journey and preparation (Bayrakdaroglu & Hekim, 2020; Chang, 2013; Kohn, 1996; Kohn et al., 1997; Pines, 2002). Although teaching practice is incorporated into teacher training programs to provide prospective educators with hands-on experience, it often becomes a significant source of pressure (Kyriacou, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Those pursuing a career in education must possess a comprehensive understanding of educational theories and the ability to effectively implement them within the complex and constantly evolving context of a real classroom. Pre-service teachers encounter stress from multiple aspects of their lives, such as their own expectations, those of their parents or students, assessments, personal life challenges, academic pressures, and issues related to managing a classroom (Anton et al., 2023; Bayrakdaroglu & Hekim, 2020; Birchinall et al., 2019; Kipps-Vaughan, 2013; Misra et al., 2003; Yangın Ekşi & Yılmaz Yakışık, 2016) have been shown to lead to stress and diminish professional self-esteem.

The SEA-Teacher Program (South-East Asian Teacher Project) offers opportunities for cultural internships for future educators across various ASEAN nations (SEAMEO, 2025), as a tangible measure to connect theory with practical experience on an international scale. Participants reside in either a homestay or student housing, integrating observational experiences with practical teaching opportunities. They are guided by local mentors and supervisors affiliated with their home universities. The duration of the program is typically between three and six weeks, contingent upon specific arrangements, and necessitates adjustment to the local language, societal customs, and educational assessment methods. The challenges posed by differences in accents, cultural dynamics in educational settings, and formal assessments involving direct observation and reflective reports introduce additional practical pressures for participants.

In the context of a cross-cultural internship, the simultaneous emergence of multiple stressors is a potential concern. Language differences are challenges that obstruct successful communication among people or groups that use different languages (Forat & Salih, 2024). Similarly, Talenta et al. (2023) claimed that language is an integral component of national identity and cultural heritage. It serves as the medium through which individuals convey their ideas and emotions, shaping their sense of community and national belonging. Language is not merely a means of communication; it is the soul of the country and its people. In addition, adapting to a new culture necessitates that individuals understand local lifestyles, social behaviors, and non-verbal cues that may differ greatly from their own. The presence of communication barriers, especially in informal contexts, can result in increased cognitive strain, as individuals must exert additional effort to ensure comprehension and subtlety in verbal interactions. The expectation for formal assessments from supervisors, in conjunction with the pressure to create engaging and appropriate teaching materials, often results in anxiety related to performance. Furthermore, the integration of roles as both educator and participant in social events or school management exerts an increased demand on time and energy resources. This situation increases not just the mental and emotional load, but it also impacts the concentration and mental well-being of pre-service teachers throughout their internship. This creates a constant struggle for them to manage the demands of their profession against their personal abilities.

The present study explores two fundamental inquiries: (1) What were the stressors faced by pre-service teachers during the SEA-Teacher Program? (2) What strategies did they employ to manage these pressures? The theoretical basis encompasses problem-focused and emotion-focused coping by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory. However, research related to stress management in the SEA Teacher program is still limited. Previous studies have mostly addressed challenges, as outlined by Setianti et al. (2024) who focused on self-confidence, language barriers, educational system, and availability of facilities. Additionally, the challenges encountered and the strategies employed to address them are examined, with a

particular focus on the diverse contexts of English language instruction in Indonesia (EFL) and the Philippines (ESL). The study underscored the importance of adequate preparation, adaptability, and the receipt of guidance from mentors in order to optimize the effectiveness of teaching abroad. Another can be identified as Rifki & Ramalia (2025) indicated the optimize of joining this program. It offered insight into the objectives, methodologies, and benefits of the SEA Teacher initiative. It meticulously delineated the requisite administrative guidelines, technical proficiencies, and qualifications necessary for participation in the program. Furthermore, it functioned as a medium for discourse among students, educators, and program coordinators, facilitating the resolution of diverse inquiries and fostering student engagement. Consequently, involvement in the initiation of the SEA Teacher program may conferred a range of benefits, including enhanced personal development and professional opportunities. Hana et al. (2025) who reported the cultural immersion and pedagogical exchange of pre-service teachers participating in the program, with focus on its impact on teaching practices and career development in the home country. It highlighted the importance of modifying teaching methods to align with local cultural contexts was accentuated, as it was believed that this approach would yield enhanced learning outcomes and cultivate cultural awareness. The presence of language barriers was regarded as an opportunity to employ innovative pedagogical methods, such as games and group activities, which enhanced student engagement. The study also emphasized the significance of cultural understanding, effective communication, and an open mindset in fostering inclusive educational settings. Overall, it suggested that the integration of culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches fosters an engaging and motivating classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, the study indicated a necessity for structured pre-program training, encompassing online classroom observations and curriculum development sessions with collaborating organizations. Such preparation has the potential to enhance the participants' capacity to develop learning modules tailored to the local context and navigate regional educational systems with proficiency.

In summary, the previous studies have not thoroughly examined the individual experiences of pre-service teachers within the context of stress management strategies. Accordingly, it inspired researchers to take up the exceptional field of research, especially in-depth studies of stress management strategies. It underscored the importance of understanding the stress and coping mechanisms employed by teacher candidates participating in cross-cultural internships. The SEA-Teacher initiative in Vietnam offers a distinct mix of professional and cultural challenges, with the application of both problem-solving and emotional coping methods likely being crucial for a successful experience. Overall, the objectives of this study were twofold: firstly, to identify and describe the stressors encountered by these future teachers throughout their international internship, and secondly, to elucidate the types and methods of coping strategies they employed. By identifying the key factors that effects their stress during the exchange, the findings can inform best practices and strategies for upcoming programs. It is hypothesized that the findings of this research will contribute to the body of international education literature and offer practical suggestions through mentoring programs, coping training resources, and assessment frameworks that are more attuned to the mental health of teacher candidates in ASEAN nations.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive qualitative that employed a reflective case study approach. Qualitative research is a strategy for investigating and comprehending individual or group

meanings resulting from social situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It focused to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in dealing with stress during the SEA Teacher program in Dong Thap, Vietnam, as well as the coping strategies used. Participants of this study were pre-service teachers in the Sea Teacher Program Batch 10 consisting of two countries, namely Indonesia and Philippines for one month. A total of twelve pre-service teachers participated in the study, and they were selected based on the willingness to share their in-depth experiences. The collection of data was done through questionnaire and interview. The researchers constructed a Google Form for the questionnaire also the interview was done by face-to-face interactions and video calls. The link of Google Form was distributed to pre-service teachers consisted of twenty opened-ended questions. Furthermore, interview with each participant probed deeper allowing for a more shaded analysis of their strategies experiences to face challenges. Ethical consent was secured before gathering any data. Participants were provided with comprehensive details regarding the research and signed a document indicating their informed agreement. The initials were used to maintain anonymity while removing personal information from the transcripts. Additionally, the data was safely stored and could only be accessed by the research team. The collected data were analyzed using Lazarus & Folkman (1984) Theory which revealed the following two elements including problem focused-coping and emotion-focused coping which has been accordance with the result of data collection.

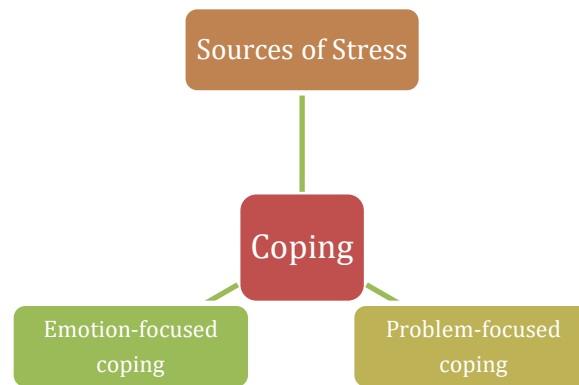


FIGURE 1. Theory Map

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The obstacles encountered during the program, whether they were educational, emotional, or social, transformed into significant pressures that caused worry for pre-service teachers. The different stress factors that surfaced during the internship, including difficulties in managing classrooms, cultural variations, issues with communication, and professional demands, led to several key insights that highlighted the mental and professional interactions of those involved. These insights were subsequently organized and explored through reflective themes, which will be discussed in this section, aiming to grasp how pre-service teachers perceive and cope with the stress they encountered.

Communication Style

Pre-service teachers faced a range of classroom dynamics that greatly differ from those in their home countries. This adaptation process included not only the technical elements of teaching but also the social and cultural factors that affect student learning behaviors. A notable issue

related to the lack of verbal participation demonstrated by students in the classroom environment, as indicated by the current observations in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Statement of Communication Style

Question	Respondent	Response
What aspects of the local culture did you find most challenging to integrate into your teaching practice?	R1	"Students are typically more unwilling and less prone to raise questions out loud, was difficult for me to adjust to."
	R4	"Many students appeared hesitant and felt uneasy about asking questions in class, whether because of shyness, the fear of making mistakes, or not being familiar with an environment that encourages active conversation. This situation made it challenging for me to adapt to a more subdued learning atmosphere than I had anticipated."
	R5	"Students often demonstrated hesitation and anxiety about posing questions in front of others, likely due to societal influences, self-doubt, or an educational environment that positions the instructor as the sole provider of information. This made it difficult for me to grasp their requirements and develop more welcoming and engaging communication in the classroom."

Respondents emphasized that the limited verbal participation of students in the classroom poses a significant challenge for pre-service teacher from diverse cultural backgrounds. Respondent, acclimated to classroom settings that promote spoken interaction and open dialogue, often encounter challenges when adjusting to educational scenarios where students exhibit a propensity for reticence, hesitation to pose questions, and an aversion to overtly expressing their opinions. This demeanor did not necessarily indicate a lack of interest or involvement; rather, it was frequently influenced by sociocultural elements, including respect for authority, anxiety about making errors in public, and community-oriented values that emphasize unity. In such circumstances, the adaptation of teaching methods could not be constrained to mere technical aspects; rather, it must encompass a comprehensive understanding of local communication practices and culturally influenced learning behaviors.

The Pressure of Language Adaptation

The language adjustment represented a substantial challenge that pre-service teacher encountered in multicultural teaching environments. The statement is provided in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. Statement of Pressure of Language Adaptation

Question	Respondent	Response
What role did cultural differences play in your interactions with students and colleagues during your teaching practice?	R5	"The language gap between me and my students greatly impeded my proficiency in delivering educational materials in an understandable manner and in creating a productive exchange of information, leading to frequent misunderstandings or failure to receive anticipated responses throughout the teaching and learning process."
	R7	"The difficulty of communication became a significant hurdle that prevented my ability to create impactful connections with the students. I found it hard to grasp their inquiries or replies, and similarly, they appeared to struggle with comprehending my directions or clarifications in English."
	R11	"Language gap really hinders my interactions with my students."

The respondents shared the observation about the language-related challenges faced by pre-service teacher in multicultural educational settings. Furthermore, adapting to the language here involved more than just mastering grammar and vocabulary; it also necessitates comprehending the social environment, cultural nuances, and regional modes of communication. The emergence of language barriers could impede the fluidity of interactions between instructors and learners, thereby influencing the quality of instruction and the development of personal connections. Moreover, such obstacles frequently result in language-

related stress, which diminishes pre-service teachers' confidence and obstructed the development of an inclusive educational atmosphere.

Cultural Differences

In the context of international educational environments, the success of teaching approaches that have historically proven effective is frequently influenced by variations in culture, institutional frameworks, and classroom settings. It is shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3. Statement of Cultural Differences

Question	Respondent	Response
What challenges did you encounter while integrating new pedagogical strategies learned during the exchange?	R5	"Some strategies that worked well in Vietnam were difficult to implement in my home country due to differences in class size and resources."
	R6	"I faced difficulties when trying to implement them in my country of origin due to the vast difference in class sizes and the absence of support systems and resources, even though some of the teaching strategies I learned in Vietnam were effective."
	R7	"The strategies that were successfully used during my teaching practice in Vietnam are not fully adaptable to the teaching context in my country, given the significant differences in teacher-student ratios and the disparities in the availability of teaching materials and supporting technologies."

Respondents revealed that the contrast between the classroom environments and educational cultures of Vietnam and home country presented significant challenges when implementing teaching methods. In addition, the presence of larger classes and inadequate resources has hindered the efficacy of previously effective strategies, leading to elevated stress levels and a decline in self-confidence as a pre-service teacher. This circumstance underscored the necessity for flexibility and cultural sensitivity in creating teaching practices that suit the local environment while preserving the quality of education and learning.

DISCUSSION

This study indicated that pre-service teacher encountered a variety of stressors during their international internship, including communication style, pressure of language adaptation, and cultural differences. Accordingly, addressing these stressors, the coping methods employed align with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Theory. These methods encompassed two primary approaches: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is defined as the process of taking action to alter the issues that lead to stress. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, is defined as the process of managing one's emotional responses to these issues (Virgianto et al., 2023).

Pre-service teachers addressed challenges by employing problem-focused coping techniques, such as creating a daily activity schedule to enhance organization and reaching out to their supervisor or mentor at the internship site for guidance. Pre-service teachers in this study have been organized in such a way as to systematically arrange their daily tasks. The objective was to ensure that they manage their time and resources in an effective manner, striving to maintain a balance between teaching responsibilities and other activities. Moreover, the ability to manage time effectively has been shown to mitigate feelings of uncertainty and being overwhelmed, which are significant stressors in practical learning environments.

Emotion-focused coping strategies, are employed to manage stress responses. Pre-service teachers utilized variety strategies for articulation of emotions, including writing journals, communication with peers, and personal reflection. One method that has been employed is journaling, which serves as a means of emotional expression and organization through written communication. This practice enables future educators to examine and comprehend their emotional responses more clearly, thereby reducing mental strain and

enhancing self-awareness. Furthermore, journaling can function as a tool for thoughtful reflection, facilitating the identification of stress patterns and the development of more effective coping strategies for future challenges. Additionally, engaging in discourse with individuals who have encountered analogous circumstances can offer invaluable social sustenance. Engaging with individuals who comprehend the same circumstances and difficulties fosters an emotional environment conducive to the sharing of feelings, the cultivation of compassion, and the alleviation of the loneliness that frequently accompanies stress. Besides, the form of social support has the capacity to enhance resilience and alleviate the adverse effects of stress. Self-reflection is a critical component of emotion-focused coping strategies. By engaging in introspection, aspiring teachers can assess their emotional responses, develop a more nuanced understanding of their stressors, and internalize the significance of their experiences. This approach fosters both emotional well-being and professional development by cultivating a more adaptive response to challenges. Furthermore, the utilization of either strategy was imperative for maintaining psychological balance and mitigating the deleterious consequences of stress, which, it must be noted, is not invariably straightforward to eliminate. The integration of these two strategies enabled pre-service teacher to enhance their resilience, support their mental well-being, and sustain their drive and teaching effectiveness during challenging adjustment phases.

The current study supports the idea that a key element of the program is effective stress management, which helps to improve teaching efficacy. The participants listed a number of stress-reduction tactics, such as self-awareness, social support, using relaxation techniques, and maintaining consistent routines. These results imply that a person's ability to handle psychological stress in a cross-cultural setting has an impact on teaching effectiveness in addition to pedagogical preparedness. In contrast to the study by Setianti et al. (2024), which emphasized external challenges such as language barriers and differences in education systems, this study focuses on internal aspects, specifically the coping mechanisms developed by the participants. This expands the existing body of knowledge concerning how teachers cultivate emotional resilience during their professional engagements. The insights from Rifki & Ramalia (2025) related to the organizational aspects and professional advantages of this initiative. However, managing stress has not been the central concern of these programs. This study aims to add valuable information to their results by emphasizing the need for organized psychological support, both before and throughout the placement experience. Meanwhile, Hana et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of adjusting to cultural differences and innovating teaching methods. The current study supports the idea that challenges arising from cultural and language discrepancies do not only present obstacles; instead, they can serve as a driving force for enhancing teaching creativity. This can be realized through the use of game-based learning strategies and cooperative activities. This disparity in emphasis is a reflection of various methodological stances. This study takes a reflective approach to participants' emotional experiences, in contrast to earlier research that was more descriptive. The primary innovation is the way stress management is positioned as a professional skill rather than merely a solution to problems. Accordingly, the main value of this study lies in broadening the comprehension of the role that emotional preparedness plays in global teaching initiatives. This study highlights the crucial need to incorporate stress management training into the preparation of participants, pointing out that the effectiveness of a program is influenced not just by technical or administrative factors, but also by the mental health of educators.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study examined the importance of mental debriefing and institutional support within international internship programs for pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers who

engage in overseas internships encounter multiple stressors that arise from their cultural surroundings as well as personal challenges. The ability to manage stress is heavily impacted by factors such as social support, individual preparedness, and the prospective teachers' capacity for self-reflection.

However, the study is limited by its modest sample size and its focus on a specific internship setting within a particular country. This restriction may preclude the generalizability of the findings to all international internship contexts. The strategy employed was primarily qualitative, which means it did not quantitatively analyze the connection between coping strategy and the stress levels faced. In view of these results, it is advisable for SEA Teacher programs to improve their support for mental health. This improvement might involve training on managing stress and enhancing skills for intercultural communication. Additionally, ensuring consistent social support, such as through mentoring and peer support networks, is essential to help pre-service teachers manage stress during their internships.

For upcoming studies, it is suggested to carry out research with a broader and more varied sample, employing quantitative and mixed methods to more accurately assess the effectiveness of different coping techniques. The study could also delve deeper into factors like the role of institutional support and cultural-specific influences in alleviating stress. This approach would create a more thorough understanding of how pre-service teachers adjust during international internships.

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