

**CULTURE SHOCK EXPERIENCED BY INDONESIAN STUDENT OF SEA  
TEACHER PROJECT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

**THESIS**

**By:**

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**ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM  
FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH PALEMBANG  
2025**

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TEACHER PROJECT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

**THESIS**

**Present to  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Sarjana in English Language Education**

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## SURAT PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN KARYA

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Menyatakan bahwa skripsi berjudul:

***"Culture Shock Experienced by Indonesian Student of SEA Teacher Project  
in the Philippines"***

Beserta seluruh isinya adalah benar merupakan hasil karya sendiri dan saya tidak melakukan penjiplakan atau pengutipan dengan cara-cara yang tidak sesuai dengan etika keilmuan dalam masyarakat ilmiah.

Atas pernyataan ini, saya siap menerima segala sanksi yang berlaku atas yang ditetapkan untuk itu, apabila di kemudian ternyata pernyataan saya tidak benar atau ada klaim dari pihak lain terhadap keaslian skripsi saya.

Palembang, 30 April 2025

Mahasiswa,



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## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

### **Motto:**

**"Do your best, let God take care of the rest."**

### **Dedication:**

**I sincerely dedicate this thesis to those who hold a special place in my heart and have always stood by my side, they are:**

- 1. My endless love, Mr. Zulkipli Jemain, Mrs. Muliana (stepmother), Mr. Syarifudin (stepfather) and Mrs. Eli Fitria. Who always pray, support, motivated, and give all those loves.**
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## ABSTRACT

Dienie, S. H. 2025. Culture Shock Experienced by Indonesian Student of SEA-Teacher Project in the Philippines. Thesis, English Education Study Program, Sarjana Degree (S1), Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang. Advisor (1) Prof. Dr. Indawan Syahri, M.Pd., (2) Rini Susanti, S.Pd., MA., Ph.D.

**Keywords:** *culture shock, SEA-Teacher, intercultural communication, teacher exchange, personal development.*

This study explores the culture shock experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers participating in the SEA-Teacher Project in the Philippines. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through unstructured interviews with three participants. Thematic analysis revealed four main sources of culture shock: language barriers, differences in educational systems, dietary adjustments, and unfamiliar social norms. Despite initial difficulties, participants demonstrated significant personal and professional growth, including increased cultural tolerance, enhanced teaching flexibility, and improved adaptability. This study highlights the importance of pre-departure training, cultural orientation, and post-program reflection as essential components to maximize learning outcomes in international teaching experiences.

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The researcher acknowledges that this thesis may still have imperfections. Therefore, all constructive criticism, suggestions, and feedback are greatly appreciated. It is the researcher's hope that this work can offer insights and be beneficial to readers, particularly in the context of English language teaching and learning.

Palembang, April 2025

Researcher

SHD

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents: (A) background of the research, (B) formula of the problem, (C) objective of the research, and (D) significance of the research.

#### **A. Background of the research**

Culture encompasses a system of symbolic tools and creations that shape human actions and the meaning assigned to these actions. It finds expression in areas such as music, literature, visual arts, architecture, theater, cinema, and lifestyle. Additionally, culture represents a particular stage in the historical progression of society, highlighting human creativity, skills, and potential. It is reflected in various aspects of human life and activities, as well as in the material and spiritual richness that people cultivate (Makhmudova, 2022). Avruch (2002) stated “Generic culture is an attribute of all humankind, an adaptive feature of our species on this planet for at least a million years or so. Generic culture directs attention to universal attributes of human behavior, to “human nature” ( p. 4)

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in shaping individual and societal behavior. According to Avruch (2002) in Rafika et al (2018), “culture is a derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors” (p. 116). This perspective highlights that culture is not static or solely inherited but is dynamic, evolving through personal experiences and social interactions. It serves as a framework through which individuals interpret their environment and engage with their communities. Understanding culture in this way underscores its importance in fostering social cohesion and shaping collective identities, as it integrates both personal and shared dimensions of human experience. Culture is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the social behavior, beliefs, customs, and institutions of a group of people. It includes various elements that define how individuals within a society interact with one another and their environment (Rafika et al., 2018).

Culture shock is a common experience that arises when individuals are exposed to an unfamiliar cultural environment. As Oberg (1960) stated, “culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social inter' course” (p. 177). This anxiety stems from the loss of the familiar social cues and symbols that guide interactions in a known environment. For example, individuals moving to a new country may face challenges in understanding local customs, language, or social etiquette. This lack of familiarity can lead to feelings of disorientation, confusion, and frustration, as they struggle to navigate new social situations. Recognizing culture shock as a response to the absence of familiar social frameworks underscores the importance of cultural adaptation strategies and support systems to facilitate smoother transitions into new cultural contexts.

The term was first introduced by anthropologist Oberg in 1960. As research grows, the concept and definition of culture shock has also expanded, including other terms such as Culture Fatigue, Language Shocks, Role Shocks, and Acculturative Stress (Haryanti, 2020). According to Mardhiyyah (2019), Culture shock is an experience that individuals undergo when they find themselves in a cultural environment distinct from their home culture, often resulting in feelings of confusion, discomfort, or anxiety due to differences in social norms, values, and customs. Research on the experiences of overseas learner teachers highlights that culture shock can significantly impact their ability to adapt and engage with the new cultures they encounter. For instance, these teachers may struggle to understand local educational practices or communicate effectively with students and colleagues, which can hinder their professional development and integration. This illustrates that the emotional and psychological challenges posed by culture shock can impede not only personal adjustment but also professional effectiveness in a new cultural setting. Therefore, recognizing and addressing the effects of culture shock is crucial for supporting overseas educators in their transition and enhancing their overall experience in foreign educational environments.

Phillo and Susanto (2021), stated

cultural shock can be described as a curve, commonly referred to the "U Curve Hypothesis". Where this curve is initiated by positive feelings, such as optimism and excitement, but will eventually run-on negative feelings, such as frustration, tension and also anxiety, this happens because the individual cannot make good and effective interactions with the new environment and culture they face (p. 745)

Cultural shock can be effectively understood through the "U Curve Hypothesis," which illustrates the emotional trajectory individuals experience when adapting to a new culture. Initially, newcomers often feel a sense of optimism and excitement as they encounter unfamiliar customs and environments, leading to a period of positive feelings. However, this initial phase is typically followed by a downturn, where individuals may experience frustration, tension, and anxiety due to difficulties in navigating and interacting within their new cultural context. This shift occurs as the novelty of the new environment wears off and the challenges of adapting to different social norms and practices become apparent. Ultimately, understanding this U-shaped curve can help individuals anticipate and manage the emotional fluctuations associated with cultural adjustment, allowing for a more effective integration into their new surroundings. According to Phillo and Susanto (2021), this U Curve describes four levels, they are: 1) Optimistic; 2) Cultural; 3) Recovery; and 4) Adjustment.

In the context of foreign language education, intercultural competence has been identified as 'one approach to systematically conceptualizing and investigating the knowledge, attitudes and behavior associated with successful intercultural communication'. It means that, to be successful in intercultural communication, students need to develop their intercultural competence. It brings new requirements for foreign language courses (teaching and learning) (Baker, 2011) cited in (Nurazizah et al., 2021). For example, the internship program in the Philippines is one that brings



Indonesian students together with the Filipino educational culture, namely SEA Teacher. According to Nazhafah and Muslim (2021), “Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia (SEA Teacher) is a program that enables pre-service student teachers from Southeast Asian institutions to gain teaching experience (practicum) in schools in other Southeast Asian nations” (p. 696)

The Student Teacher Exchange in Southeast Asia (SEA Teacher) program provides invaluable teaching experience for pre-service student teachers by allowing them to practice in schools across Southeast Asian nations. This initiative facilitates the exchange of student teachers among various institutions, enabling them to immerse themselves in different educational environments and cultures, which enhances their teaching skills and broadens their understanding of diverse pedagogical approaches. By participating in the SEA Teacher program, pre-service teachers develop a more comprehensive skill set as they encounter various teaching methods and classroom dynamics that differ from their home country, fostering adaptability and cultural sensitivity essential qualities for educators in today's globalized world. Ultimately, the SEA Teacher program not only benefits individual student teachers by enriching their professional development but also contributes to strengthening educational ties and collaboration among Southeast Asian countries, promoting a more unified and effective educational landscape in the region. According to (Seameo, 2024),

The SEA-Teacher project aims to provide opportunity for pre-service student teachers from universities in Southeast Asia to have teaching experiences (practicum) in schools in other countries in Southeast Asia. Specifically, the aims of the SEA – Teacher Project are: 1) To enable the student teachers to develop, 2) To encourage the student teachers to practise their English skills, 3) To allow the student teachers to gain a broader regional and world view, 4) To expose future teachers to diverse teaching and learning situations and opportunities, and the value of flexibility (2024, Line 2)

The SEA-Teacher project provides pre-service student teachers from Southeast Asian universities with valuable teaching experiences in schools across the region, aiming to enhance their professional development. Specifically, the project enables student teachers to develop their teaching skills and pedagogy, practice their English skills, gain a broader regional and world view, and be exposed to diverse teaching and learning situations that emphasize the value of flexibility. By participating in this program, student teachers can improve their pedagogical techniques and language proficiency, which are crucial for effective communication in diverse classrooms. Additionally, exposure to various educational contexts allows them to understand different cultural perspectives and teaching methodologies, fostering adaptability and a more holistic view of education. Ultimately, the SEA-Teacher project not only enriches the professional growth of future educators but also promotes regional collaboration and understanding, preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Student exchange programs provide valuable opportunities for academic and cultural enrichment, particularly for those in advanced stages of their undergraduate education. According to Seameo (2024), this program specifically targets students in their 3rd or 4th year, ensuring participants have adequate foundational knowledge in their fields of study. By focusing on education-related majors, such as Mathematics, Science, and Elementary Education, the program aligns with the professional development needs of future educators. The one-month duration provides an immersive yet manageable period for participants to engage in cross-cultural and academic exchanges, facilitated through cost-sharing mechanisms that promote accessibility. Such exchange programs enhance students' educational experiences, preparing them for globalized teaching environments while fostering cross-cultural understanding and professional growth.

Structured practicum programs provide student teachers with a comprehensive framework to develop their teaching skills and reflect on their experiences. As Mardhiyyah (2019) stated, “the one-month practicum is divided as follows: 1st Week = Orientation & Class Observation, 2nd Week = Lesson Plan Making & Assisted Teaching, 3rd Week = Teaching Week, 4th Week = Reflection and Closing Ceremony” (p. 201). This structure ensures a gradual progression in the teaching practice. During the first week, student teachers familiarize themselves with the classroom environment through observation, followed by lesson planning and assisted teaching in the second week. The third week focuses on independent teaching, allowing participants to apply their skills in a real-world setting. Finally, the fourth week provides an opportunity for reflection and consolidation of learning through a closing ceremony. By following a clear and well-organized timeline, such practicums help student teachers build confidence, refine their teaching methodologies, and gain valuable professional insights. Seameo (2024) conclude,

“English is used in all activities throughout the programme and the student teachers’ roles and responsibilities are assigned weekly during the one-month practicum. The receiving universities are required to provide mentors to supervise and monitor the inbound students throughout the practicum period as well as providing buddies during the exchange period” (Chapter 3)

The purpose of SEAMEO is to enhance regional understanding and cooperation for a better quality of life in Southeast Asia. “The purpose of the SEA teachers’ program is to offer pre-service English teachers an international experience in teaching multicultural experience and cultivating intercultural communicative competence (ICC). As a result, pre-service English teachers can see cultural diversity from a different perspective” (Nurazizah et al., 2021, p. 143). Thus, the program plays an important role in enriching the teaching competencies needed by educators to succeed in an international environment.

The phenomenon of culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation has increased along with the globalization of education. Based on data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the number of students involved in international exchange and education programs has increased by 45% in the last decade, especially in the Southeast Asian region, which shows an increasing trend of interest in cross-cultural experiences (UNESCO, 2022). A survey conducted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2021 showed that around 70% of students involved in student exchange programs such as SEA-Teacher experienced cultural adaptation challenges, with 60% of them reporting experiencing culture shock at varying rates, especially in terms of language and social interaction (ASEAN, 2021). This trend suggests that cross-cultural programs such as SEA-Teacher play a significant role in the development of cross-cultural skills but also pose adaptation challenges that require a deeper understanding.

Researcher believes that investigating the cultural challenges faced by Indonesian students abroad is an important and relevant study in the field of intercultural communication and education. With all considerations, the researcher has taken interest in this study, focusing on the experience of Indonesian students participating in the SEA-Teacher Project in the Philippines. The participants were placed in various educational institutions across the Philippines, where they encountered different cultural settings, communication styles, and educational systems. The title of the research is **“Culture Shock Experienced by Indonesian Students of the SEA-Teacher Project in the Philippines.”**

## **B. Formulation of the problem**

The problem of this research is formulated on the following questions:

1. What are the primary sources of culture shock for Indonesian student in the Philippines?
2. How do these experiences impact their personal and professional development?

### **C. Objective of the research**

Relating to the problem previous statement, the objectives of the research was found out the culture shock experiences of Indonesian internship student in the Philippines and how these experiences impact their personal and professional development.

### **D. Significance of the research**

#### **1. For the Researcher Herself**

Studying the culture shock experiences of Indonesian pre-service teachers in the Philippines during the SEA Teacher Program is highly significant for me as a researcher. It allows me to contribute to knowledge about cross-cultural adaptation in education, particularly in the ASEAN context. The findings can provide practical insights for designing better preparation and support mechanisms for students in similar programs. Conducting this research also helps me deepen my expertise in intercultural communication and adaptation, which are crucial in globalized education. Additionally, exploring students' experiences enhances my analytical and empathetic skills, fostering personal and professional growth. Most importantly, this research has the potential to influence policies and practices within the SEA Teacher Program, making it directly applicable and impactful.

#### **2. For Intern Student**

The result can help pre-service teacher better understand and know about the culture shock during Internship Abroad and support them during their internship such as SEA Teacher.

#### **3. For Other Researchers**

Hopefully, this research will give the beneficial that is to see theories and opinions from the perspective of different sources and provide convenience for other researchers to conduct the research with the same topic.

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