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Crossing Classrooms and Cultures: Filipino Pre-Service Teachers' SEA Practicum Narratives in Medan, Indonesia

Herman M. Lagon^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

Teaching abroad is widely seen as a powerful learning experience, yet stories from the Global South remain underdocumented even though this is where most teachers will eventually practice their craft. In 2025, three ISUFST pre-service teachers took the leap from Iloilo, Philippines, to Medan, Indonesia for SEAMEO's SEA Teacher Project. They taught English to Grades 5–6, tackled math in gender-segregated classes, and led PE games for high school girls. The month was marked by both nerves and laughter, with lessons that extended well beyond academics. Using a narrative case study approach, evidence from interviews, journals, and teaching artifacts revealed five themes: courage under personal and financial strain; belonging fostered by community hospitality; pedagogy adapted to language barriers; confidence built through reflection and improvisation; and values-driven global citizenship. The findings show that international practicums, when backed with solid support, drive lasting growth. They urge teacher education and policy to move beyond competence, shaping teachers who can lead with resilience and empathy in today's globalized world.

INTRODUCTION

The departure lounge at Iloilo International Airport in the Philippines is not typically the setting for teacher education research. Yet for three pre-service teachers from the Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology (ISUFST), the journey from Dumangas, Dingle, and Main campuses to Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia starting July 13, 2025 captures in miniature the dilemmas, dreams, and discoveries of globalization in teacher education.

Rojeal clutched a passport that had barely arrived in time, torn between caring for a sick grandfather and supporting her single mother, yet still compelled by the “fire” to teach abroad. Warren leaned on extended family and the encouragement of his dean to cover travel costs, driven by the promise of becoming a better mathematics educator. Kath, a PE major, opened TikTok videos of UMSU, hoping to quiet her nerves about stepping into the unknown. Together with Rojeal and Warren, she would soon walk into the SEA Teacher Project—a journey that promised not just new classrooms, but new ways of seeing self and world.

Practicums abroad have been called transformative. They lift students from their familiar contexts, immerse them in linguistic and cultural difference, and train them for a global stage. Studies across continents affirm the benefits—greater intercultural competence, more substantial confidence, more adaptive teaching (Johnson & Ng, 2022; Nguyen, 2023; Wong & Ramirez, 2021). After the COVID-19 pause, universities quickly revived such exchanges to rebuild global citizenship skills (Santos & Castañeda, 2023).

Still, the literature leans heavily toward Global North

cases. Chen and Li (2024) note that over 70% of studies trace Western experiences, with less than 10% capturing ASEAN realities. This silence leaves unanswered how student-teachers from resource-strapped settings, like Philippine state universities, face economic strain, family obligations, and cultural adjustment.

Since its 2014 launch, SEAMEO's SEA Teacher Program has included over 2,000 Filipinos. But peer-reviewed accounts remain sparse (Reyes, 2023). Those that exist capture resilience and humility (Dizon & Macaraig, 2021; Palarca, 2022), but comprehensive, narrative work is rare. Meanwhile, teacher education in the Philippines still struggles with foundational skills and competitiveness, a concern flagged by the Philippine Education Commission (EDCOM) 2 (2023).

These realities echo the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 10 on reducing inequality. As Arriola and Bautista (2024) warn, mobility without adequate support risks deepening divides. Documenting how first-generation provincial students like these three navigated such hurdles offers lessons both inspiring and practical.

While internationalization is often discussed in terms of policies and memoranda, the lived stories of student-teachers reveal a subtler layer: courage, community, and creativity. As Villanueva (2022) notes, “internationalization is not only about exchange rates and airfare but about resilience shaped in unfamiliar classrooms.” Local scholarship echoes this. Ladrado (2023) emphasizes that Filipino student mobility succeeds only when grounded in local values of pakikisama (social connectedness) and bayanihan (community support). These human dynamics often remain underreported in formal evaluations, yet

¹ Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology (ISUFST) & University of St. La Salle (USLS)-Bacolod, Philippines

* Corresponding author's e-mail: hermanlagon1@gmail.com

they are essential to how participants experience growth. International research similarly points to these dynamics. A longitudinal study in Thailand found that student-teachers who faced language barriers developed stronger improvisational teaching skills, often relying on humor, gestures, and relational trust (Patel & Cho, 2021). In Indonesia, Alamsyah (2022) documented how pre-service teachers from Malaysia adapted through collaborative learning strategies, showing that empathy can substitute for shared language. In the Philippines, Garcia and Cruz (2024) observed that returning SEA Teachers reported “expanded empathy” and “enhanced self-efficacy,” but also expressed frustration at inadequate financial and institutional scaffolds.

Despite these insights, two major gaps persist.

First, few studies systematically analyze the intersection of financial precarity, institutional support, and intercultural pedagogy in the SEA Teacher program. Most focus on cultural immersion alone, leaving economic and structural barriers underexplored. Second, while aggregate surveys exist, thick, narrative accounts of Filipino student-teachers’ cross-cultural experiences are limited. As Reyes (2023) argues, “policy cannot be informed by numbers alone—it requires listening to the stories that numbers cannot capture.”

This study addresses these gaps by examining the narratives of three ISUFST student-teachers who joined the SEA Teacher program in Medan, Indonesia. Behind their stories lie struggles that ring true to many—scarce funds, paperwork delays, the weight of family obligations. Yet, woven through these hardships were moments of profound learning: new ways of teaching, fresh empathy for difference, and the quiet strength of resilience.

Purpose and Objectives

The study set out to explore how international practicum experiences contribute to the identity and practice of Filipino pre-service teachers. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Chronicle the decision-making, preparation, and immersion of three ISUFST participants in the SEA Teacher program.
2. Trace how their pedagogical and personal growth unfolded in classrooms shaped by cultural and linguistic diversity.
3. Examine the enabling role of community, institutional, and family support.
4. Suggest implications for teacher education, policy, and internationalization that honor Philippine contexts while aligning with the UN SDGs.

Blending narrative inquiry with thematic analysis, this study bridges missing evidence while grounding teacher education internationalization in lived experience. The stories of Rojeal, Warren, and Kath show that global learning is more than theory—it is found in airport queues, lesson plans, canteen tables, and moments of prayer.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research used a qualitative multiple-case narrative

inquiry because at its heart it wanted to listen—to stories as both evidence and method. In cross-cultural teaching, the important question is not only what happened but how it felt and how meaning was made (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2021). Since the aim of this research was to explore how pre-service teachers from the Filipino context approached an experience in international study abroad practicum, narrative inquiry provided the most appropriate lens. This approach is able to consider experiences in context, identify those contextual influences, and consider multiple aspects of identity, resilience, and agency, that do not lend themselves to solidified metrics (Santos & Castañeda, 2023).

This research also offered an example of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), a practice that encourages storytelling while still holding the researcher to the rigor of the coding process. The reflexive thematic analysis process helped to identify both the individual aspects of each story, as well as the overall themes which connected them. This hybrid approach enabled both rich storytelling and rigorous theme development across cases.

A similar phenomenological approach was adopted in the study by Lagon (2023), who used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to examine pre-service science teachers’ experiences with PHET interactive simulations—highlighting how technology-mediated engagement can foster conceptual understanding and narrative depth.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were three pre-service teachers from ISUFST (Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology) who joined the SEA Teacher Project in Medan, Indonesia in early 2025. All were purposively selected because they represented different specializations. Such variation allowed for comparative insights across subject areas while preserving the common context of international practicum.

- Rojeal Castro (Dumangas Campus): Bachelor of Science in Education (BSED) Major in English, taught Grades 5–6 at Al Amjad School.
- Warren Villazana (Dingle Campus): Bachelor of Science in Education (BSED) Major in Mathematics, taught six weekly secondary classes (boys and girls).
- Kath Manero (Main Campus): Bachelor in Physical Education (BPED), taught sports to Grades 7–9 girls.

All three were first-time international participants, aged 20–22, with diverse family backgrounds. Their stories highlight both shared and unique dimensions of cross-cultural teaching.

Setting

Their practicum for the SEA Teacher Project was held at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU), in Medan City, North Sumatra. They were hosted in a hotel owned by UMSU, where casual conversations with colleagues and the faculty developed into friendships. Teaching at partner schools like Al Amjad, they experienced a society where Muslim faith guides daily

life and teachers are regarded with genuine reverence a setting that offered both comfort and challenge.

Data Sources and Instruments

The study drew on several sources of evidence to capture participants' experiences from different angles. First, each participant took part in semi-structured interviews, lasting 60–90 minutes, conducted in both English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon to allow for comfort and nuance. Second, the students provided written reflective accounts, originally prepared as part of their SEA Teacher program requirements. Finally, teaching artifacts including lesson plans, classroom photos, blogs, and personal journals were collected to add texture and context to their stories. The semi-structured interviews used guiding questions (e.g., motivations, challenges, adaptations, reflections) while encouraging participants to share freely, allowing comparisons across cases. Interview questions were piloted with two non-participant ISUFST pre-service teachers for clarity.

No standardized psychological or attitudinal scale was utilized; the emphasis was on narrative richness. However, the study referenced a reflection rubric from Nguyen (2023) to help organize emergent themes around professional growth, intercultural competence, and teacher identity.

Data Collection Procedures

Between July 5 and August 20, 2025, data was collected in three phases. First, pre-departure interviews in Iloilo asked about their expectations and decisions before the trip. Second, while in Medan, participants' journals, blogs, posts, and photos became a record of what they were living day to day. Third, after coming home, interviews in Iloilo helped draw out the lessons, challenges, and growth that the experience left behind.

Interviews were recorded with permission and carefully transcribed. To make sure nothing was lost or misrepresented, transcripts and early themes were shared back with participants for their feedback and approval.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive six-step guide. First came familiarization, with transcripts and reflections read and re-read until the voices of participants felt vivid and clear. Next, descriptive codes were created phrases like "financial strain," "gestures as teaching tool," and "hospitality" captured recurring details. These codes were then clustered into early themes, including "courage amid constraint" and "belonging through hospitality."

From there, themes were refined to ensure they made sense both within each case and across all three. Each was defined and named in ways that reflected the heart of participants' narratives. In the report, these themes were woven into analytic stories, enriched with direct quotes and cross-case comparisons. NVivo and Large Language Models (LLMs) helped with the technical side of coding

and organization, but interpretation stayed rooted in people the process was reflective, iterative, and always centered on participant voices.

Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor and credibility, the study drew on several strategies. Credibility was strengthened through member checking with participants and peer debriefing with ISUFST colleagues. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of context—participants' family backgrounds, host school, and the cultural settings of Medan. Dependability was upheld through an audit trail that recorded coding decisions and theme development step by step. Confirmability came from the researcher's own reflexive journal, which surfaced potential biases and positionality, particularly as a faculty member of ISUFST. Together, these steps followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for qualitative trustworthiness, ensuring that findings were both faithful to the participants and meaningful to wider audiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was secured from the ISUFST Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Before any interview began, participants signed informed consent forms and were assured of their rights. They knew they could withdraw at any point, that their stories would be treated with confidentiality, and that sensitive details about family or finances would be carefully generalized. While pseudonyms were offered, all three participants chose to have their real names credited as part of their story. Respect was central: their narratives were co-constructed, with opportunities to clarify or even remove parts they did not wish to share.

The study followed the principle of beneficence—research done not just for knowledge but for the good it can bring. In this case, the intent was to help inform and improve ISUFST's internationalization initiatives. Narrative inquiry and reflexive thematic analysis were used together, grounded in triangulated data and ethical care. Through three diverse cases, the study highlights how international practicum experiences shape not only teaching practice but also the professional identity of Filipino pre-service teachers learning to find their place in global classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The narratives of the three ISUFST pre-service teachers Rojeal, Warren, and Kath converged around five interlinked themes: (1) courage amid constraint, (2) belonging through hospitality, (3) pedagogical adaptation to language and context, (4) reflexive confidence and identity formation, and (5) values-anchored global citizenship. Each theme is presented with supporting quotes and cross-case comparison.

Theme 1. Courage Amid Constraint

All participants described the decision to join the SEA

Teacher Program as both a leap of faith and a negotiation of constraints. Financial strain was the most consistent barrier. Rojeal, raised by a single mother while helping care for her grandfather, admitted:

“There are lots of reasons behind my hesitation ... the lack of financial support is above all. But the eagerness burned within me, so I decided to say yes and I never regretted it.”

Warren similarly relied on extended relatives and even formal solicitation letters:

“Before I could say ‘yes,’ I worried most about money. I was lucky to have family and relatives who helped right away.”

Kath highlighted her parents’ role:

“My parents took care of almost all the expenses and reminded me, *ang kwarta mabalik lang ran* [money can return, but opportunity cannot].”

Beyond finances, participants recounted challenges of incomplete documentation (travel processing requirements), emotional hesitation, and family obligations. Yet each framed these obstacles as part of a larger growth trajectory illustrating what Alamsyah (2022) calls “courageous precarity” in cross-cultural teaching.

Theme 2. Belonging Through Hospitality

On arrival in Medan, all three reported a strong sense of being welcomed and valued. For Rojeal, the turning point was the way students at Al Amjad treated her:

“They never treated us like we were different. Every day they gave us food, warm hugs, and even letters. It made us feel like we were part of their community.”

Warren noted how “many strangers quickly became friends,” observing that gestures and smiles substituted for shared language. Kath described her first impression as “prestigious, yet warm,” recalling UMSU’s welcome dinner and community support that eased her homesickness.

Such experiences mirror findings in Southeast Asian mobility studies, where hospitality fosters belonging (Patel & Cho, 2021). The students’ sense of being “adopted” into Indonesian communities contrasted with initial anxieties of isolation.

Theme 3. Pedagogical Adaptation to Language and Context

The classroom was where participants confronted both the sharpest challenges and the most creative adaptations.

- Rojeal, expecting to teach junior high, was assigned to Grade 5 and 6 English:

“At first, shock. Then acceptance. Then joy. I leaned into games and group work—I wanted English to feel like an adventure, not a burden.”

- Warren handled six mathematics classes per week, including 2.5-hour sessions:

“I realized math classes need energy. If I’m lively, the students are too—and they learn better.”

- Kath, teaching sports to all-girls sections, adapted her strategies:

“What worked for Grades 7 and 8 didn’t work for Grade

9. I had to change my approach teaching became like an experiment.”

Across cases, language barriers emerged as both a hurdle and catalyst. Participants reported relying on humor, body language, and visuals to engage learners. Gestures became “bridges” that turned awkwardness into connection. This aligns with Reyes (2023), who noted Filipino SEA Teachers’ reliance on relational cues in multilingual classrooms.

A recent E-Palli study by Bunda (2025) on out-of-field teachers in Masbate echoes this pattern, showing how resilience, self-directed learning, teamwork, and adaptive instructional research became their lifelines in the face of subject gaps and multicultural challenges. Like the participants in this study, these teachers turned constraints into opportunities for growth, proving that creativity and collaboration often emerge strongest when resources and familiarity are scarce.

Theme 4. Reflexive Confidence and Identity Formation

Each participant described developing greater confidence and professional identity through daily reflection. Warren noted:

“I began reflecting on each class—what worked, what didn’t, what I could improve. That habit became second nature.”

Rojeal shared a similar realization:

“Teaching required trust in myself as much as trust in my lessons.”

For Kath, resilience emerged through trial-and-error:

“I lost confidence at first with my Grade 9 class. But I told myself to change my approach, and it worked. Teaching is physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging.”

These reflections reveal a process of professional becoming—moving from tentative novices to adaptive educators. It reflects what Garcia and Cruz (2024) describe as “confidence through improvisation” among Filipino student-teachers abroad.

Theme 5. Values-Anchored Global Citizenship

Despite cultural differences, participants anchored their growth in ISUFST’s values of Integrity, Social Justice, Discipline, and Academic Excellence (ISDA). These values framed their teaching and guided their responses to challenges.

- Rojeal: “ISUFST’s principles were always with me.”
- Warren: “Those values anchored me the whole time—I was living ISUFST’s mission in Medan.”
- Kath: “I carried our university’s core values [integrity, social justice, discipline, academic excellence] as my compass.”

Exposure to Indonesian culture also broadened their sense of global citizenship. Participants highlighted reverence for teachers, Muslim prayer rhythms, and respect for elders as lessons they would carry home. Rojeal captured this best:

“Teaching isn’t only about books—it’s about people and building bridges. Empathy became the truest subject of all.”

Table 1: Summary of Emergent Themes Across Participants

Theme	Rojeal (English)	Warren (Math)	Kath (PE)
Courage amid constraint	Financial strain; sick grandfather; single-mom family	Financial worry; relied on relatives' support	Financial concern; parents' sacrifice
Belonging through hospitality	Daily hugs, letters, food from pupils	Strangers quickly became friends	Prestigious but welcoming UMSU environment
Pedagogical adaptation	Games, group work, collaborative tasks	Energetic math lessons; interactive strategies	Adjusted per grade level; experiment mindset
Reflexive confidence & identity	Trusted herself despite fear	Daily reflections shaped pedagogy	Learned resilience via trial-and-error
Values-anchored global citizenship	Guided by ISDA values; empathy as subject	Anchored in ISDA; broadened worldview	Carried ISDA values; intercultural humility

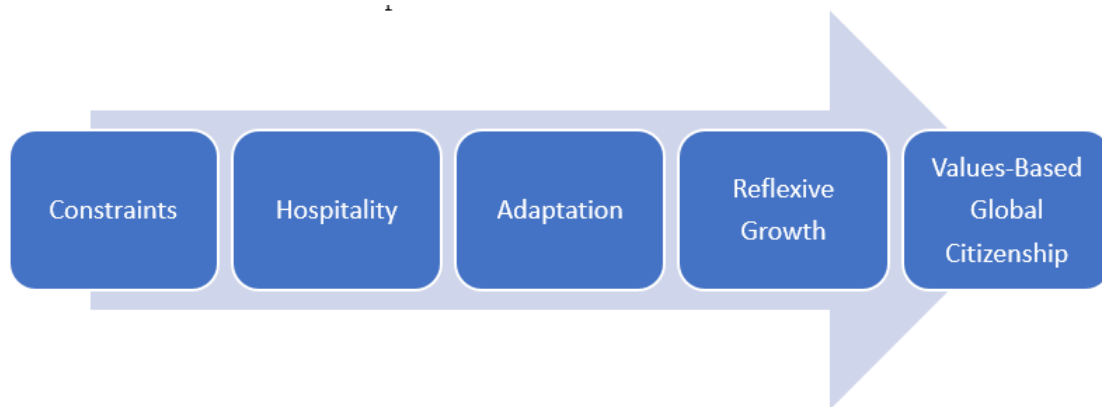


Figure 1: A flow model showing progression: Constraints → Hospitality → Adaptation → Reflexive Growth → Values-Based Global Citizenship.

Cross-Case Insights

While all three participants shared broad themes, nuances emerged:

- Rojeal exemplified resilience through family/community support.
- Warren highlighted the role of extended kinship and dean mentorship.
- Kath illustrated how parental investment reframed financial sacrifice as educational investment.

Put together, their stories show that international practicums don't just teach lessons abroad—they grow resilience, agency, and cultural empathy, even when money is tight.

Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate that international practicum experiences are not merely exercises in mobility, but crucibles where pre-service teachers reshape their professional identities, pedagogies, and worldviews. For Rojeal, Warren, and Kath, joining SEAMEO's SEA Teacher Project demanded courage amid constraints, nurtured belonging through hospitality, catalyzed pedagogical adaptation, developed reflexive confidence, and anchored global citizenship in ISUFST values. These interconnected themes both affirm and extend prior

scholarship on cross-cultural teacher preparation.

International literature continually underscores the transformative potential of short-term teaching overseas. Johnson and Ng (2022) contend that these programs enhance intercultural competence and adaptability, whereas Nguyen (2023) emphasizes their influence on teacher self-efficacy. The results are in line with these ideas: Participants indicated increased adaptability, resilience, and introspective practice. But the stories here offer depth by putting the structural and human costs that are often left out of happy stories front and center. Financial instability, insufficient documentary preparations, and familial responsibilities could have impeded participation; however, community and institutional support converted these obstacles into opportunities for advancement. This is in line with Reyes (2023), who says that we should look at not only what participants receive abroad but also what they go through to get there.

Theme 1: Courage Amid Constraint and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

The participants' narratives reveal how financial strain and family responsibilities nearly prevented their involvement. This underscores inequities in access to mobility opportunities. As Arriola and Bautista (2024)

caution, without adequate support, exchange programs risk privileging students from wealthier backgrounds. In this study, however, informal networks—family, relatives, local officials, and mentors—played a decisive role in enabling access.

This finding speaks directly to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Equitable internationalization requires scaffolds that level the playing field. ISUFST's modest assistance, combined with local government support, helped bridge gaps, but systemic mechanisms—such as mobility scholarships or institutional travel funds—are necessary to ensure sustainability and fairness. Thus, courage amid constraint is not simply individual heroism but evidence of structural inequity requiring policy attention.

Theme 2: Belonging Through Hospitality and the Value of Community

Hospitality emerged as a transformative force. The warmth of Indonesian hosts—daily hugs, hellos, food, and letters—cultivated belonging. This echoes Patel and Cho's (2021) study in Thailand, where host community care helped student-teachers overcome loneliness. Locally, Villanueva (2022) also documented how “pakikisama” and community integration shaped Filipino participants' resilience in overseas practicums.

Hospitality here did more than ease homesickness; it fostered a sense of shared humanity. Participants realized that teaching transcends language and nationality when grounded in relational trust. For Filipino teacher education, this finding highlights the importance of preparing students not just to deliver lessons, but to enter communities with humility and openness. Partnerships with host schools should thus prioritize community immersion rather than treating practicum as mere technical exercise.

Theme 3: Pedagogical Adaptation and SDG 4 (Quality Education)

Language barriers and unexpected teaching assignments pushed participants toward innovative pedagogy. Rojeal's game-based activities, Warren's energetic math classes, and Kath's differentiated sports instruction demonstrate adaptive teaching strategies born from necessity. These align with Alamsyah's (2022) observation that improvisation becomes a critical competence when language fails.

In the Philippine context, where classrooms are increasingly multilingual and diverse, such adaptability is vital. Garcia and Cruz (2024) note that Filipino teachers often face heterogeneous classes where creativity compensates for resource scarcity. The participants' strategies—gestures, humor, group work—mirror inclusive teaching principles recommended by UNESCO (2023). Their experiences thus illustrate how SDG 4 (Quality Education) can be advanced not only by resources but by pedagogical agility and empathy.

Theme 4: Reflexive Confidence and Professional Identity

All three participants emphasized daily reflection as a habit that shaped their confidence. Warren's practice of evaluating each class echoes international findings on reflective practice as a hallmark of effective teacher education (Nguyen, 2023; Wong & Ramirez, 2021). Kath's description of teaching as “an experiment” captures the iterative, inquiry-oriented stance promoted by constructivist pedagogy.

What is novel here is how reflection was not imposed by supervisors but self-initiated. The participants' sense of responsibility to improve resonated with ISUFST's institutional ethos and personal survival instinct in unfamiliar classrooms. This finding strengthens the case for embedding reflection journals and mentoring in Philippine teacher education, ensuring students cultivate agency rather than dependency.

Theme 5: Values-Anchored Global Citizenship and SDG 17 (Partnerships)

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution of this study is the role of institutional values. ISUFST's ISDA values—Integrity, Social Justice, Discipline, and Academic Excellence—provided an ethical compass. Unlike prior studies where global citizenship is framed abstractly (Santos & Castañeda, 2023), here it was lived through specific local values. Escuadra and Dy (2022) describe this as “Filipino-rooted internationalization”—a way of becoming global without losing one's roots. For the participants, this meant absorbing Indonesian practices: the rhythm of prayers, the honor given to teachers, the respect for elders. As Rojeal put it, “empathy became the truest subject of all.”

Relatedly, Pinalas-Abaton and Osias (2025) show that competent teachers who understand and cater to the psychological needs of learners significantly bolster relatedness and empowerment—suggesting that emotional support is as foundational as pedagogical competence in cross-cultural settings. This mirrors SDG 17, which says partnerships across nations build understanding. And it worked both ways—the Filipino SEA Teachers didn't just absorb culture; they shared their own teaching ideas, adding something fresh to their host communities.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by showing how narrative inquiry can uncover hidden dimensions of teacher mobility: courage shaped by constraint, values as anchors of identity, and hospitality as pedagogy. Practically, it offers actionable insights for teacher education institutions:

1. Strengthen financial scaffolds (scholarships, stipends, LGU partnerships) to reduce inequity.
2. Embed intercultural preparation (language orientation, cultural humility workshops) before deployment.

3. Encourage structured reflection (journals, peer sharing) to build professional agency.

4. Institutionalize mentorship by ensuring faculty accompany or virtually guide student-teachers abroad.

5. Align mobility with SDGs to frame internationalization as both personal growth and social responsibility.

Limitations and Future Research

While rich, this study is limited by its small sample size of three participants, representing one institution and one host city. Findings cannot be generalized to all SEA Teacher participants. The data in this study came mostly from participants' own accounts, which may reflect their hopes to please or be seen in a certain light. It also focused only on a one-month window, leaving unanswered questions about the lasting effects of such an experience. Future research could take a broader and longer view. It might include student-teachers from different Philippine institutions and diverse ASEAN partners, track outcomes over several years, and use both narrative and quantitative tools to measure growth. Comparative work between Filipino and non-Filipino participants could also show how cultural roots shape the way teachers adapt abroad.

Synthesis

The stories of Rojeal, Warren, and Kath show that teaching overseas is not just about sharing knowledge; it's also about gaining wisdom and acquiring humility, empathy, and courage along the way. This study situates the challenges and achievements within the context of greater global and Philippine literature, illustrating that mobility programs should be assessed not alone by student participation rates, but by the profound transformations they effectuate in individuals and communities.

This study redefines foreign practicum from a privilege to a requisite, equity-focused approach for cultivating internationally competent, locally rooted Filipino educators.

CONCLUSION

It was only a month, but for Rojeal, Warren, and Kath, it felt like a leap across years. They found that the hardest parts worrying about money, fumbling with words, missing home were the very places where growth began. With courage to push through, hospitality to hold them, and reflection to guide them, they walked away stronger and more confident than before. Three strong takeaways emerge. First, international practicums amplify professional identity. By improvising in unfamiliar classrooms, participants learned that adaptability is not a bonus skill but a core teaching competence. Second, community support transforms access. Without families, mentors, and local leaders, these journeys would have remained only on paper; mobility programs thrive when scaffolds reduce inequities. Third, values travel with the teacher. ISUFST's ISDA principles Integrity, Social Justice, Discipline, and Academic Excellence did not stay in Iloilo; they guided decisions and shaped conduct abroad,

proving that rootedness enhances global citizenship. This study shows that education does not just happen inside classrooms. It happens in airports, in shared meals, in prayers that mark the day, and in children's laughter that needs no translation. For the Philippines, facing tough calls for reform, these are not just nice stories they are proof that teaching for a global future takes both real chances and real empathy. At the end of the day, the 2025 SEA Teacher journey of three young Filipinos proves what education does best: it builds bridges—between cultures, between communities, and between people.

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