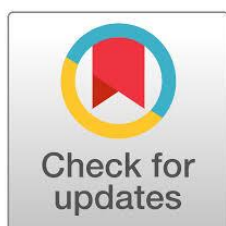


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'I feel like I am more respected here in Thailand': Indonesian EFL Teachers' Experiences and Challenges in Thai Elementary Schools

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Abstract

With the growth of teacher mobility, where teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds attempt to broaden their teaching experiences, the resulting global community has given rise to new and challenging educational environments. In Thailand, numerous English programs welcome teachers from different countries, accordingly contributing to the nuances of foreign English teachers' experiences. This study aims to delve into the experiences and challenges faced by Indonesian EFL teachers working in Thailand. In the context of the globalized educational system, the inclusion of Indonesian teachers in this study is essential. Their distinct cultural experiences and challenges not only enhance multicultural understanding but also contribute significantly to the existing literature on teaching English in foreign settings. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, this study conducted multiple semi-structured interviews with two Indonesian EFL teachers employed in both a public elementary school and a private elementary school in Thailand. The findings reveal that teaching English in Thailand has provided them with valuable insights and has been a transformative experience, enhanced their professional growth. The findings also provide comprehensive insights into the unique challenges faced by these teachers, particularly regarding language barriers, cultural adaptation, and professional relationships. This study not only illuminates the challenges encountered by teachers but also underscores the considerable potential for personal and professional growth within the ever-evolving landscape of teaching English oversea.

Keywords: challenges; experiences; Indonesian EFL teachers; ELT in Thai education; NNESTs

Introduction

The globalization of education has facilitated the development of teacher professional communities on an international scope, promoting the exchange of ideas and experiences across countries (Liu, 2016). This global mobility has given rise to new teaching communities that offer challenging social and cultural experiences (Zembylas, 2010).

In Thailand, a non-English speaking country, efforts have been initiated to prepare citizens for global competition by mandating English as a compulsory subject across all levels of education (Oeamoum & Sriwichai, 2020). The Ministry of Education of Thailand has formulated a comprehensive English curriculum with objectives centered on cultivating students' interest in language learning, fostering positive attitudes toward English, and promoting English communication ability (Ministry of Education, 2001). In alignment with these goals, Thailand has significantly increased the recruitment of both native English-speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) over the past decades, complemented by extensive teacher training and development programs (Ulla, 2018).

To meet the demands of stakeholders, teaching opportunities are extended to both native and non-native English speakers in various educational institutions in Thailand. The country hosts various English programs, including the Intensive English Program (IEP), English Program (EP), and mini-English Program (MEP), attracting teachers from diverse nationalities such as Americans, Australians, and British (Hickey, 2014). The escalating demand for English teachers has resulted in an influx of educators from various countries, including both native English speakers (NEST) and non-native English speakers (NNEST) from neighboring nations like the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam (Satienchayakorn & Grant, 2022). Indonesians have also joined this community, contributing to the growth and diversification of foreign English teachers in Thailand (Putri, 2020).

However, this unprecedented mobility has exposed teachers to numerous challenges, including understandings and misunderstandings within the workplace due to linguistic, communal, and cultural differences (Cowie, 2011). Foreign English teachers, including Indonesians, grapple with homesickness (Frederiksen, 2014), language barriers (Abramova, 2013; Ulla, 2018), culture shock before, during, and after teaching (Bailey, 2013), and

demanding workloads (Bense, 2014). Moreover, they are exposed to various emotional experiences, such as fatigue, frustration, and stress, stemming from workload intensification, insufficient resources, and inadequate support (Karousiou, Hajisoterious & Agnelides, 2019).

There have been a set number of studies focusing on the experiences and challenges of Indonesian EFL teachers in recent years. Putri (2020), for instance, conducted a study that offered valuable insights into the perceived experiences and challenges of Indonesian EFL teachers functioning as Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) in Thailand. Furthermore, Fauziyah, Hidayati, and Abdulllah (2021) explored the perspectives of Indonesian pre-service teachers during teaching practicum in diverse Thai schools. Finally, Perwitasari and Sundari (2022) delved into the teaching experiences and practices of Indonesian teachers instructing English in northeastern Thailand.

While several studies have concentrated on the perspectives of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers regarding their experiences and challenges in teaching abroad, there is an ongoing need for further exploration of this topic (Perwitasari & Sundari, 2022). Further, despite the growing presence of Indonesian teachers in Thailand, limited research has focused on understanding their unique experiences and challenges within the Thai EFL landscape. Therefore, the significance of conducting this study lies in providing complementary insights to the existing literature. Additionally, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences and challenges faced by Indonesian EFL teachers in the Thai educational context. To achieve this, the study responds to this research question: What are the experiences of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in teaching English in elementary schools in Thailand, including their teaching practices and challenges?

Literature Review

English Language Teaching in Thailand

English language teaching in Thailand plays a pivotal role in empowering and elevating the country's education system. This perspective is reinforced by Masavisut et al. (1986, as cited in Saengboon, 2004), who assert that "English is being used as a powerful tool to bring the world to Thailand and Thailand to the world" (p.206). Notably, English has been designated as

a compulsory subject for Thai students, requiring them to study it continuously for twelve years, from primary to secondary school (Noom-ura, 2013). Additionally, the Thai government has instituted an annual national English examination, the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET), mandatory for all Thai students (Deerajiset, 2015).

Darasawang and Todd (2012) highlight the four key objectives set by Thai national education standards and curricula for English language teaching. These objectives include making English the medium for communication with both native and non-native speakers, fostering cultural exchanges between Thai citizens and global society members, integrating the use of English with the content of other subjects, and encouraging students to engage in project work and applications outside the classroom within the international community. Consistent with Raksaphet's (1991) perspective, exposure to English is seen as a means for Thai students to study and explore various subjects from international resources in English.

Despite these ambitious English learning objectives and the mandatory status of the subject in Thailand, the English proficiency level of Thai students remains considerably low (Noom-ura, 2013; Perwitasari & Sundari, 2022). Research studies consistently identify factors contributing to this low proficiency, including unqualified and poorly-trained teachers (Dhanasobhon, 2006), limited exposure to English outside the classroom (Suwannopharat & Chinokul, 2015), inadequately equipped classrooms, and insufficient English knowledge and teaching methodologies among Thai teachers (Bernstein & Woosnam, 2019). In response to these challenges, the Thai government has initiated teacher development programs and training for local educators (Ulla & Winitkun, 2018). Furthermore, the Thai education system has actively engaged foreign English teachers to enhance English language education in the country and improve the pedagogical competencies of Thai English teachers (Perwitasari & Sundari, 2022).

The influx of foreign English teachers into Thailand has seen a significant rise over the years. Maxwell (2015) estimates the number of international English teachers in Thailand to be between 30,000 and 50,000. These teachers are deployed across various educational institutions, including public and private schools, universities, international schools, tutoring schools, and online platforms. Their presence reflects the ongoing efforts to address English

language proficiency challenges in Thailand and foster a dynamic and inclusive language education environment.

In elementary education, foreign English teachers are mandated to contribute to the language learning area outlined in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008's objectives. This curriculum centers on four strands of study: communication, culture, connection, and community. Foreign English teachers are expected to demonstrate English as a communication tool, enabling students to engage in the interpretation mode, interpersonal mode, and presentational mode when using English. The goal is to enhance students' skills in exchanging information, expressing emotions and perspectives, interpreting, and presenting information and concepts, and appropriately creating interpersonal relationships. In terms of culture, foreign English teachers should proficiently use English as a foreign language to harmonize cultures in a broader context. The connection strand emphasizes linking English as a foreign language to other learning areas, forming the basis for further development and broadening students' knowledge. The community strand involves the use of English in various situations, particularly in the outside community and the global society.

Despite the implementation of this program over decades, Thai students' proficiency in English in the elementary program remains moderate. They still struggle to use English in communication and knowledge research due to a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes (Prasongporn, 2016). In the context of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers working in Thailand, this phenomenon becomes a worthwhile focus for exploration. Indonesian EFL teachers play an essential role in imparting knowledge to elementary students in Thailand. Therefore, this study is necessary to delve into the challenges and cultural experiences faced by Indonesian EFL teachers, shedding light on English language teaching in Thailand.

Native English Speaker-Teachers (NEST) and Non-Native English Speaker-Teachers (NNEST) in Thailand

The recruitment of foreign English teachers, encompassing both Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs), has significantly enriched the teaching and learning landscape in Thailand. Sung's (2012) study

underscores the remarkable capabilities exhibited by both groups in teaching English subjects, reinforcing the undeniable growth in the population of foreign English teachers. However, as noted by Hickey (2018), Thai educational institutions tend to favor NESTs over NNESTs in their hiring practices. Despite this preference, there is no strict requirement for specific nationalities, and many schools and universities in Thailand actively recruit qualified NNESTs.

The recruitment process for both NESTs and NNESTs involves rigorous criteria, including English proficiency tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, or IELTS (Comprendio & Savski, 2020). Additionally, foreign teachers seeking employment in Thailand are mandated to hold a degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), English education, or a related field in applied linguistics (Hickey, 2018). Shahri's (2018) study highlights the critical pedagogical competencies that educators with degrees in TESOL or similar fields can offer, enhancing teaching effectiveness through moment-to-moment interaction and the integration of culture and educational context.

Despite the complexity of the recruitment process shared by both NESTs and NNESTs, there are notable disparities in the treatment of these two groups. Hickey (2018) notes instances of lower salaries for Asian and African teachers and negative attitudes from local authorities, reflecting the challenges and biases that persist within the hiring practices for international English teachers in Thailand. This underscores the need for ongoing efforts to address such disparities and promote a more equitable and inclusive approach to the recruitment and treatment of both NESTs and NNESTs in the Thai educational system.

Teaching Across Culture

In situations where English serves as the primary mode of communication among non-native speakers, the cultural and societal backgrounds of these individuals gain heightened importance compared to the cultural norms traditionally associated with native speakers. For example, when Indonesians communicate in English with people from neighboring countries such as Thailand, Japan, or various other nations, it becomes essential to grasp the cultural contexts of these interlocutors. Effective and respectful communication, as emphasized by Kirkpatrick (2007), requires Indonesians to familiarize themselves with the values, beliefs, and customs of these individuals. In the realm of education, Kirkpatrick underscores the

significance of incorporating cultural content into the curriculum that aligns with the learners' backgrounds rather than solely adhering to the culture of native speakers.

Teaching in diverse settings and cultures, as highlighted by Kirkpatrick (2007), demands that English teachers possess not only multilingual proficiency but also a diverse cultural background. Their competence should include a deep understanding of their students' language as well as awareness of the educational, social, and cultural contexts surrounding them. These considerations are reinforced by previous studies advocating for additional competencies essential for English educators in such environments. For instance, Xu (2017) stresses the crucial role of meta-cultural competency, facilitating communication and cultural exchange among teachers from diverse backgrounds. This competency enables fruitful intercultural dialogues, allowing the negotiation of ideas about culture. Noviyenty, Morganna, and Fakhruddin (2020) affirm that English teachers should view their teaching context as an avenue for fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC), empowering them to seamlessly integrate and teach within diverse cultural settings.

In simpler terms, teaching in different cultural contexts extends beyond linguistic competence. By developing intercultural communication skills and meta-cultural competency, English teachers can navigate the complexity of cultural diversity, enhancing their ability to communicate and educate successfully in various cultural and educational environments. To address this matter effectively, implementing intercultural training programs is advisable, providing teachers with a cohesive approach to teaching across cultures. This recommendation is supported by various scholars, including Deniz et al. (2016), Oranje & Smith (2017), Rahatlou et al. (2018), and Tolosa et al. (2018). Moreover, considering Puntaney's (2016) research, cultivating a curriculum based on intercultural principles serves as a catalyst for the successful implementation of teaching English across cultures. Therefore, alongside the multifaceted skill set required of English teachers, the crucial role of academic establishments and affiliated entities in shaping their environment must also be acknowledged. Instilling an introductory and habituating experience in the pedagogical practice of teaching English across diverse cultural contexts is essential for teachers during their preparatory phase.

When examining the cross-cultural aspects of English language teaching, a qualitative investigation conducted in Thailand involving three prospective English teachers from

Vietnam, Malaysia, and Laos by Loo, Maidom, and Kitjaroonchai (2019) underscored the challenges faced by pre-service teachers (PSTs) in Thailand in implementing English language teaching. These challenges were attributed to disparities between prescribed teaching methods and the actual needs of students. The study shed light on the emotional impact on teachers, the influence of language policies, and the mismatch between expectations and reality in English language education in Thailand. The experiences of the PSTs, including the necessity to adapt teaching approaches and reconcile initial teaching beliefs with practical challenges, were also documented. Furthermore, the study emphasized the significance of reflective exercises for PSTs to comprehend their teaching experiences and enhance their teaching practices. Another study by Ulla (2019) disclosed that Filipino teachers of English as a foreign language in Bangkok encountered challenges such as difficulties in adapting to the local culture and language, separation from their families, and the absence of provision for teacher enhancement and development programs. The challenges faced by non-local EFL teachers in teaching English abroad, particularly in Thailand, vary depending on their own cultural and linguistic background. Previous research studies have encompassed teachers from diverse nationalities. Therefore, to contribute to the existing literature on teaching English in Thailand as non-native English-speaking teachers, this investigation into Indonesian EFL teachers becomes imperative.

Method

Methodological approach

This research study used a qualitative approach to support deep understanding of the real-life phenomena within their contextual conditions (Yin, 2003). Additionally, Simon et al. (2009) stated that qualitative approach is used for an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of individuals in 'real-life'. This is in line with Mesec (1998) who claimed that a qualitative study is a vivid description of an individual case and its analysis. This approach was chosen to facilitate knowledge of the phenomenon related to the challenges in teaching English in Thailand. Furthermore, there are some aspects in a qualitative approach that can be helpful for this research such as studying the meaning of teachers' lives, under the real world and work conditions, providing chronological narrative

events to the case, focusing on individual actors or group to understand their perceptions, and portraying the richness of the case in writing reports (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

The Context of the Study

This study was conducted in Thailand, focusing on two Indonesian teachers employed at a public elementary school in Nakhon Ratchasima and a private elementary school in Bangkok. Participant one is a female Indonesian who works at a public school in Nakhon Ratchasima, a province in the northeast of Thailand. This particular school offers two programs: the Intensive English Program (IEP) and the regular program. In addition to the English subject taught by local teachers, both programs provide English instruction by foreign teachers. In the IEP program, Math and Science are taught in English by foreign teachers, while in the regular program, they are only taught in the Thai language by local teachers. By November 2023, the school has five foreign teachers: two female teachers from the Philippines, two female teachers from Indonesia, and one male Indonesian teacher.

The private elementary school in Bangkok, where the other female teacher works, offers three programs: the Intensive Language Program (ILP), Gifted Program, and International Program. In the ILP, subjects taught by foreign teachers include Chinese language and English, while other subjects such as math, science, and geography are taught by local teachers. The gifted program selects academically outstanding students from the ILP and provides them with more subjects taught by foreign teachers compared to the ILP. In the gifted program, students study required subjects like math, arts, science, and social with both foreign and local teachers. The international program offers all subjects in English by foreign teachers, providing a more immersive language exposure. The foreign teachers in this school come from different nations such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, the UK, the USA, and China. It is worth noting that the participant in this study is the only Indonesian citizen working in this school.

Despite being in different provinces in Thailand, these two schools share similar regular activities throughout the academic year, such as Wai Khru Day (Thai Teacher's Day), Sports Days, Songkran Week, English Camp, and Science Camp. These regular events also require foreign teachers to participate in each process, involving them in training class representatives to perform or present their works in English. The context of this study is crucial as it provides a

deeper understanding of how the participants perceive themselves as Indonesian EFL teachers in Thailand.

Study Participants

The participants selected for this study consist of two female Indonesian teachers who bring valuable experience from their teaching roles in Thailand. The rationale for choosing the number of participants aligns with Hancock and Algozzine's (2017) assertion that qualitative approach research does not adhere to strict participant quantity guidelines. Instead, it focuses on individual representatives of a group or phenomenon, each situated within a specific context.

Both participants have dedicated their teaching expertise to elementary schools, with placements in two distinct provinces in Thailand: Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima. Their academic background includes a bachelor's degree in English Language and Education, emphasizing their qualification and proficiency in the subject matter. As part of their responsibilities, these teachers have been entrusted with instructing various aspects of English education, encompassing communication, phonics, listening and speaking, reading and writing, grammar, basic English, and general English. The names of the participants are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Participant one can be identified as Anuradha, while participant two is referred to as Bhanuresmi.

It is noteworthy that one of the participants possesses additional experience beyond the conventional English teaching domain. She has extended her pedagogical reach to include math and science instruction in English. Moreover, her teaching experience extends to a different school in the province of Nakhon Ratchasima. This diversity in their teaching assignments enriches the depth and breadth of their experiences, offering a multifaceted perspective on the challenges and nuances encountered by Indonesian teachers working in the Thai educational landscape.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

Participants	Age	Educational Background	Teaching Experience in Thailand	Type of School	Province
Anuradha	24	Bachelor's degree in ELT	1 year 3 months	Public School	Nakhon Ratchasima
Bhanuresmi	28	Bachelor's degree in ELT	6 years	Private School	Bangkok

Data Collection

To gather data concerning the challenges and experiences encountered by Indonesian teachers in Thailand, this current research study employed semi-structured interviews. This approach aligns with the flexibility of interviews, as highlighted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), allowing for the utilization of multi-sensory channels in verbal, non-verbal, spoken, and heard contexts. Semi-structured interviews offer the researcher the ability to establish outlines for the targeted data, as emphasized by Creswell (2014). In addition, this research utilized an interview guideline as the primary instrument for data collection. The open-ended interview questions were categorized into three sections: teachers' background, teachers' experiences, and teachers' challenges. The interviews aimed to address the research questions by providing a platform for participants to share and discuss their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on various situations.

The interviews were conducted online via the Instagram call feature and WhatsApp call feature, then they were recorded using a mobile phone recorder. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes. Throughout the interviews, the Indonesian language was employed to avoid misconceptions, as it is the mother tongue for both the researcher and the participants. Alongside the interview process, the data collection procedure involved reconfirming the information obtained through the WhatsApp text feature and WhatsApp voice recorder. The data collection period spanned from September to December 2023.

Other than the aforementioned data collection procedures, to maintain the rigor of the data collection, the researcher has engaged with the participants in various ways. This includes

following their social media accounts, where they frequently share their stories related to teaching and participation in school events such as English camp and sports days. This approach enables the researcher to respond to the participants' stories and inquire about their experiences in these activities. Additionally, due to proximity, the researcher visited the school where the first participant works and sat in her class, with prior informed consent. This visit allowed the researcher to familiarize himself with the teaching environment and gain insight into how the first participant perceives it. Lastly, the data collection also involves unrecorded informal conversations and group discussions with the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis has been defined as a process of systematically applying statistical or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense, and recap, and evaluate data in conduction research (Shamoo & Resnik, 2003). This present research had adopted data analysis technique promoted by Miles and Huberman (1994) in which the data analysis process includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Furthermore, this current study utilized four types of coding adapted from Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), such as open analytical, axial, and selective coding to analyze the data obtained from the interview transcriptions. The last step of the data analysis was coding the data. The coding process was adapted from Salnada (2009) and Creswell (2014) who stated that coding is the process of creating and categorizing text to form details and broad themes in the data.

In the coding process, the researcher is required to start the open coding by systematically breaking down the transcriptions into smaller segments. Grouping related open codes to form broader categories is the next step in the data analysis procedures. The next one includes establishing connections between categories and subcategories, allowing the researcher to map out the data's structure. The last step in the coding procedures involves focusing on these key themes, clarifying their significance and implications. This coding procedures help the researcher address the research question and draw conclusions.

Findings and Discussions

The interview questions are designed to obtain the experience of two Indonesian teachers who teach English in a public school in Nakhon Ratchasima and a private school in Bangkok. Moreover, this current study delves into their teaching practices, the challenges, and their strategies in tackling such challenging situations when teaching English in Thailand. The findings of the research were presented to respond the proposed research question:

“What are the experiences of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in teaching English in elementary schools in Thailand, including their teaching practices and challenges?”

Participants’ Teaching Practices in Thailand

Anuradha expressed that her desire to work in Thailand has intensified since she was offered a teaching position in a public elementary school by her senior from her previous university in 2022. Initially, Thailand was one of the countries she had wanted to visit, either for work or vacation. Therefore, she was enthusiastically passionate about applying for the position and subsequently working in her current school. Her statements are presented in the excerpt below:

“I was offered a job in this school by my senior, and I was thrilled to be accepted in the position because I’ve always wanted to come and visit Thailand, either for vacation or work.” (Anuradha)

As for Bhanuresmi, her interest in pursuing a career as an English teacher in Thailand stemmed from her participation in an exchange program in the country in 2018. Having become familiar with the context, she was eager to further broaden her teaching experience in Thailand. Subsequently, she has taught English in several elementary schools in different provinces of Thailand. Furthermore, deciding when to return to Indonesia has proven to be a challenging decision for her.

‘Actually, there is no specific motivation for me to work in Thailand, but when I joined an exchange program back in 2018, I felt like I wanted to pursue a career as an English teacher

here. Honestly, I do not know exactly what my initial motivation is to work in Thailand.'

(Bhanuresmi)

'At this point, I still cannot predict when I will be back to Indonesia to work because basically, I have worked here since I graduated. So, it's hard to decide.' (Bhanuresmi)

The findings of this research contribute valuable nuances to the results of previous studies conducted by Putri (2020) and Perwitasari and Sundari (2022). While earlier research highlighted various motivations for Indonesian EFL teachers to work in Thailand, such as gaining teaching experience abroad, earning higher salaries, enhancing teaching skills, improving English proficiency, and addressing limitations in employment options in Indonesia (Putri, 2020), our study unveils unique findings not explored before. The participant's engagement in an exchange program emerges as a crucial factor opening opportunities for working in Thailand and serving as a motivating factor for pursuing a career as an English teacher in the country.

Along with other advantages of teaching abroad, such as expanding their experiences in instructional skills and making connections with people across the globe, the two agreed that having a high salary in Thailand is one of the bright sides of teaching English in an elementary school. This finding complements Perwitasari and Sundari's (2022) statement that a high salary emerges as motivation for Indonesian EFL teachers working in Thailand. Here are some excerpts from the participants of this study.

'If we talk about salary, of course, it's higher than in Indonesia. I don't think that elementary English teachers in Indonesia are paid the same amount of money as English teachers here, especially with the same teaching hours and responsibilities. In addition, I have got health insurance here, so I do not have to worry if I get sick because the expense is covered.' (Anuradha)

'Of course, essentially, it's the experience of teaching abroad. With my current job, I can lead a more stable life. I don't think I could enjoy the same benefits with a similar job back home. I can

confidently say that my life here is very comfortable, and I never face any difficulties in getting everything I need.' (Bhanuresmi)

Teaching English in elementary schools in Thailand has provided them with a rich and emotional experience. Anuradha shared that she encounters a wide range of emotions in her role. This emotional spectrum is largely influenced by the highly engaging and affectionate nature of elementary students in Thailand, especially during interactive activities like games and videos. Bhanuresmi echoed a similar sentiment, describing her teaching experience in Thailand as a roller-coaster of emotions. Despite occasional challenging days, she expressed that teaching English to elementary students in Thailand makes her feel like she is living her best life.

'When teaching in the classroom here, I experience a wide range of emotions.' (Anuradha)

'I can say it's a rollercoaster. There're ups, there's downs. Yeah, basically, whatever the job is, right? You have ups and downs. But because we're talking about teaching in Thailand, and based on my experience, of course, there's days that, oh my God, I find it really challenging. But then there are days that, oh my God, I'm living my best life ever. That's how I explain it, though.' (Bhanuresmi)

The above findings contribute nuanced insights to prior research conducted by Fauziyah, Hidayati, and Abdullah (2021), where their study highlighted emotional shifts among Indonesian EFL teachers working in Thai schools. However, their research primarily uncovered a prevalence of negative emotions, including worry, shock, exasperation, and surprise. These emotions were attributed to the language barrier encountered by the participants while teaching English in Thailand.

When discussing culture, teaching English to elementary students provides a distinctive experience for Anuradha. The interview excerpt below captures her perspective.

'Yes, there are... amazed, surprised, surprised by the culture here. In my home country, as far as I know, when I was a student, I knew what the culture was like in Indonesia. In my place, there

weren't as many celebrations in schools. There was no sports day like they have here. Then there's Teacher's Day here, which is celebrated from morning until almost the full day. I'm trying to remember what else... Student's Day is celebrated here in a big way, unlike in my country where celebrations are minimal. Here, there are so many, and even Christmas is celebrated, even though most of them are Buddhists. But they want to celebrate it, especially Buddhist holidays; they celebrate a lot here. So that's the first thing, the culture here. Secondly, the daily ceremonies here surprised me. In my home country, there's only one ceremony per week. It's surprising because we fought for our independence, whereas here, they were never colonized. They have a ceremony every day, and it shows how much they value their country. I think it's a good thing, Mas, having a ceremony every day. It nurtures your love for your country. In contrast, having it just once a week, as in my home country. Here, they have a daily ceremony, singing the national anthem and daily prayers. Oh my god, I was like, "Wow." (Anuradha)

This situation offers Anuradha opportunities to initiate discussions in the classroom about the cultural differences between Indonesia and Thailand. It aligns with Noviyenty et al.'s (2020) assertion that English teachers should perceive their teaching context as a platform for cultivating intercultural communicative competence (ICC), enabling them to integrate and teach effectively within diverse cultural settings.

Challenges of Teaching English in Thailand

Moreover, the subsequent finding brought to light the challenges encountered by English teachers working in elementary schools in Thailand. The primary challenge for both participants revolves around the language barrier. Anuradha articulated the difficulty of explaining concepts in English, especially when there is no Teaching Assistant (TA) in the classroom. She emphasized that without the assistance of the TA, students struggle to comprehend the materials. Parallely, Bhanuresmi shared a similar experience, recounting instances where explaining complex concepts in English led to students waiting for the TA's assistance, as they were unable to grasp the content.

"The biggest challenge in my case is when I have to teach grade one and grade two without a TA. It is extremely difficult to get them ready and make them listen. I have to try several ways to make them silent. It is really frustrating sometimes." (Anuradha)

"Of course, the language. I think I do not have that many challenges when teaching kids here except for the language. Like they're kids, and they try their best to listen to the difficult concept that I explained, but when they don't understand, they will have to wait until the TA explains. I can see their struggling face waiting for TA to translate. And I understand them." (Bhanuresmi)

This discovery aligns with earlier research by Putri (2020), Fauziyah, Hidayati, and Abdullah (2021), and Perwitasari and Sundari (2022), emphasizing the substantial challenge posed by linguistic competence, particularly the limited vocabulary of students at the elementary level. In response to this challenge, Anuradha revealed her proactive approach of learning basic classroom instructions in the Thai language to address the linguistic barriers faced in the classroom. What Anuradha did align with studies (Ling and Braine, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Loo, Maidom & Kitjaroonchai, 2019) that have argued that non-local EFL teachers understand the struggle of their students in understanding classroom instructions in English and are able to communicate in their learners' native language when communicating in English is not feasible.

Apart from the aforementioned challenge, both participants encountered additional difficulties while teaching English in Thailand. These challenges encompass teaching special needs students (Anuradha), engaging in arguments with a Teaching Assistant (TA) (Anuradha), facing conflicts with colleagues from other countries (Bhanuresmi), managing visa extension documents (Bhanuresmi), and conducting classes on the fourth floor of the building (Bhanuresmi).

Despite facing various challenges, both participants acknowledged that teaching in Thailand has introduced them to new and positive experiences. They conveyed a sense of being respected and cherished by their students. Socioculturally, Bhanuresmi underscored that teaching English at the elementary level in Thailand is comparably easier than in Indonesia. She attributed this to the students' heightened motivation to learn English and her perception of being more respected in the Thai context. This sentiment aligns with Sulistiyo et al.'s (2022)

findings, indicating that, from a sociocultural perspective, teaching in Thailand is less challenging than teaching in Indonesia.

'I feel like I'm more respected here in Thailand. I feel more enjoyable. Like, I feel like what is it called? The motivation to study? I feel it more here. So compared to the classroom environment, I enjoy way more here. I don't feel like I'm going to be a good enough teacher back home. Like compared to the kids and the classroom environments and the pressure from the directors, from the classroom teachers, those pressure, I don't feel it here. And all the respectful manners that is, I don't know, human wise or meant to be for those kinds of ages, I don't think I can feel it back home.' (Bhanuresmi)

Following their teaching English in Thai elementary schools, the two participants conveyed that the experience was positive, contributing significantly to their exploration of teaching practices and cultural adaptation. Moreover, they asserted that they encountered no discrimination during their teaching experiences; instead, they felt exceptionally supported and respected. Below are excerpts from the interview that shed light on these sentiments.

'As an Indonesian and a foreign teacher here, I feel greatly supported by the school. Just a few days ago, the vice director asked us to note what we needed to support our teaching. We mentioned that the printer was broken and listed other requirements. Surprisingly, a few days later, everything we needed was provided by them. They consistently support and accept us, regardless of where we are from. They treat foreign teachers with equal respect.' (Anuradha)

'I don't think I've felt any discrimination from anyone because I know where to place myself. I have been here for 6 years, right? So, I really understand, for example, during sports days, some parents prefer to talk to native teachers over non-native teachers. I think that is common in Southeast Asia. Or, in other cases like Teacher's Day, only some native teachers represent the foreign teachers, which makes sense because it is done for the sake of the school's reputation since they have native speaker teachers. I mean, as a non-native teacher, I can pretty much understand the situation. The students do not see me as an Indonesian; the other teachers do not see me as an

Indonesian. They see me as a teacher, and they extend the same amount of respect to me as to other teachers, regardless of their countries of origin.' (Bhanuresmi)

This finding indicates that, in the participants' perspective, they consider themselves equally competent compared to teachers from other nationalities. Consequently, Indonesian EFL teachers working in Thailand are perceived as qualified for teaching English overseas, provided they possess the necessary teaching qualities and meet the requirements to be professional English teachers at international levels.

In addressing the research question, this study set out to explore the experiences of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers working in Thailand. The findings provide comprehensive insights into the unique challenges faced by these teachers, particularly regarding language barriers, cultural adaptation, and professional relationships. The data reveal that, despite encountering obstacles, participants viewed their teaching experiences positively, emphasizing the value of cultural understanding and the mutual respect fostered between teachers and students. In comparison to previous studies, the distinctiveness of this research lies in its focus on Indonesian teachers specifically, contributing a nuanced perspective to the broader body of literature on non-native English-speaking teachers in foreign contexts. In addition, the exploration in this study provides a unique context where the participants are from a country where English is not used as a native language, and they are working in Thailand, another country where English is considered a foreign language. The study sheds light on the intersection of cultural, linguistic, and professional factors, offering a rich narrative that advances our understanding of the experiences of Indonesian teachers in Thailand.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This supplementary investigation seeks to capture the perspectives of two Indonesian EFL teachers employed at a public elementary school and a private elementary school in Thailand. Motivated by various factors, including their participation in an exchange program, a desire to explore Thailand, the allure of higher salaries, and the opportunity to broaden their teaching experiences, these Indonesian teachers have navigated through both rewarding and challenging teaching scenarios. Throughout their teaching journeys, they unanimously

identified the language barrier as a significant hurdle, prompting them to develop a heightened awareness of the local culture and a commitment to learning the Thai language. The findings also revealed additional challenges such as conflicts with Teaching Assistants (TAs) and colleagues, managing visa extension documents, and teaching on the fourth floor.

The current research findings highlight the transformative nature of teaching English in Thailand, showcasing the participants' valuable insights that significantly contribute to their professional development and cultural adaptability. The shared experiences resonate beyond the individual, offering important implications for foreign teachers and researchers navigating the dynamic context of international English language education. This study not only illuminates the challenges encountered by teachers but also underscores the considerable potential for personal and professional growth within the ever-evolving landscape of teaching English oversea.

Despite encountering these challenges, they view teaching English in Thailand as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The inclusion of a limited number of invited Indonesian EFL teachers might restrict the generalizability of findings to specific local contexts. Therefore, caution is advised in applying these findings to different settings. Furthermore, relying solely on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method may not fully capture the intricacies of their teaching practices. Future research is recommended to incorporate additional instruments such as observations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

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