

Post-Exchange Growth of ASEAN Educators: A Case at Saint Louis University

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ABSTRACT

International teacher exchange programs are widely promoted as instruments for enhancing global competence and pedagogical flexibility, yet empirical evidence regarding their long-term impact on pre-service participants as they transition into in-service careers remains scarce. Guided by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, this qualitative phenomenological study investigates the post-exchange professional and socio-cultural trajectories of former Southeast Asia (SEA) Teacher Project participants hosted by Saint Louis University, Philippines. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five in-service teachers (three from Thailand and two from Indonesia) and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis via a two-phase (cool and warm) coding process. Three core themes emerged: (1) a Philosophical Paradigm Shift from a teacher-centered "knowledge-giver" to a student-centered "learning facilitator"; (2) a Professional Identity Transformation, characterized by heightened confidence, adaptability, and professional maturity; and (3) Pedagogical Adaptability, evidenced by the sustained integration of contextualized, learner-centered instructional strategies. Collectively, these findings suggest that short-term international teaching experiences spark a self-reinforcing, long-term cycle of reflective professional growth. Although limited by a small single-institution sample ($N = 5$) and potential retrospective recall bias, this study highlights the lasting efficacy of mobility initiatives. Ultimately, the results provide practical insights for host institutions and policymakers to enhance structured mentorship, pre-departure orientations, and post-exchange feedback mechanisms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Global higher education has increasingly prioritized internationalization to broaden academic standards, enhance institutional quality, and advance global cooperation (Yao

et al., 2025). Within this paradigm, international exchange programs play a pivotal role in equipping educators with cross-cultural understanding, global competence, and pedagogical flexibility (Goldstein, 2022; Oubit & El Farahi, 2024). Specifically, "inbound reception and exchange" is conceptualized as an onshore activity involving foreign students and in-service teachers who travel to host nations to gain international teaching experience (Yao et al., 2025). Prominent initiatives, such as Europe's Erasmus+ program established in 1987 (Rostamian, 2024) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's (SEAMEO) SEA Teacher Project established in 2016 (Cuadra & Bacud, 2024; Valenzuela et al., 2024), exemplify how structured regional cooperation facilitates student-teacher skill development and cultural awareness across diverse educational environments (Arquillano et al., 2022; Villarama et al., 2024).

Empirical studies on the SEA Teacher Project highlight significant developmental outcomes among pre-service teachers, including enhanced communication skills (Arquillano et al., 2022), heightened self-reliance, and improved time management (Auni et al., 2022). These cross-cultural immersions further foster intercultural communication, cultural awareness, and adaptability—competencies essential for navigating increasingly globalized classrooms (Arquillano et al., 2022; Auni et al., 2022). Oubit and El Farahi (2024) report that 90% of participating educators discovered novel teaching techniques through exchange initiatives, and such formal and informal sociocultural experiences, combined with exposure to varying international educational practices (Werner & O'Dowd, 2025), substantially enrich educators' pathways toward global competence.

Despite these demonstrable benefits, participation in exchange programs presents notable operational and personal hurdles. Financial constraints, cultural adaptation struggles, language barriers, and technical readiness have all been identified as critical challenges for both inbound and outbound pre-service teachers (Cuadra & Bacud, 2024; Du Plessis & Razmjooe, 2026; Tomas et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges requires strategic interventions from host organizations to better prepare participants, thereby enhancing global competence and adding value to local and international education systems (Dechavez, 2024; Tomas et al., 2024). Crucially, navigating these obstacles appears to yield long-term benefits: teachers who participate in international exchanges demonstrate greater openness to adopting innovative instructional strategies over time, underscoring the potential of mobility programs to shape sustained professional growth (Oubit & El Farahi, 2024).

Although existing literature offers valuable insights into international teacher mobility, current scholarship overwhelmingly focuses on immediate, short-term outcomes experienced by pre-service teachers during their placements (Auni et al., 2022; Cuadra & Bacud, 2024; Susanti & Pratolo, 2024). Consequently, a distinct research gap remains regarding how former inbound pre-service participants transition into fully established in-service teachers in their home countries. To address this gap, the present study investigates the lived experiences of former SEA Teacher Project participants hosted by Saint Louis University in the Philippines, examining how early

overseas teaching exposure has influenced their long-term teacher identity, teaching philosophy, and core pedagogical competencies well beyond program completion.

Understanding these long-term influences provides critical insight into how educators adapt to unfamiliar teaching materials, strategies, and academic standards within host contexts such as the Philippines. The findings offer actionable guidance for policymakers and educational institutions seeking to refine support systems, optimize participant satisfaction, and cultivate institutional linkages that facilitate shared pedagogical practices — directly aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) on youth employment, education, and decent work. The study further serves as a practical reference for prospective exchange participants preparing for multicultural integration (Diem et al., 2023) while expanding the scholarly body of knowledge on teacher professional development and international cooperation (Oubit & El Farahi, 2024).

To conceptualize the profound shifts in participants' beliefs, assumptions, and pedagogical approaches, this study is grounded in Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023; Milazzo & Soulard, 2024). Premised on the idea that learners construct meaning by interpreting and reinterpreting their experiences, the framework posits that shifts in prior knowledge serve as guides for future action (Fleming, 2018). Within this study, the SEA Teacher Exchange Program is conceptualized as a catalyst for a "disorienting dilemma" that challenges existing assumptions and encourages participants to evaluate new cultural and educational practices. Accordingly, this study was guided by the following research question: How does participation in the SEA Teacher Exchange Project shape the long-term teaching philosophy, professional identity, and pedagogical adaptability of former inbound participants after their return to their home countries as in-service teachers?

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore participants who lived experiences and perceptions of their involvement in the SEA Teacher Exchange Program before, during, and after participation. A phenomenological approach was adopted because it focuses on understanding subjective experience, personal interpretation, and meaning making. An inductive approach was also applied to allow patterns, themes, and categories to emerge organically from the data, consistent with Thomas's argument that inductive analysis grounds findings in participants' genuine experiences and enables a flexible, data-driven interpretation of results (Naeem et al., 2023).

Participants were in-service teachers who had previously taken part in the SEA Teacher Exchange Project in the Philippines. They were selected through criterion sampling, which allowed the researchers to select participants who best fit predetermined criteria, ensuring that the data collected were both relevant and of strong quality, since they originated from reliable sources (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The sampling criteria were as follows: (1) participants must be in-service teachers with three or more years of teaching experience, and (2) participants must be from a Southeast

Asian country and have been deployed to the Philippines through SEAMEO's SEA Teacher Exchange Program. A total of five participants were interviewed—three teachers from Thailand and two from Indonesia. A sample of five was deemed appropriate given the phenomenological approach, which prioritizes rich, in-depth accounts of lived experience over sample size.

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide comprising open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences, opinions, and feelings before, during, and after the SEA Teacher Exchange Program. The interview questions were developed in line with the study's objectives and reviewed by three expert language teachers and the research promoter to assess their clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Laptops and mobile phones were used to record participant responses. Data collection began with the preparation and expert review of the semi-structured interview guide. Once finalized, participants meeting the inclusion criteria were contacted and invited to take part. Prior to each interview, participants were presented with an informed consent form outlining the study's objectives, confidentiality provisions, and voluntary nature; only those who agreed voluntarily were included.

Individual interviews were conducted through one-on-one Google Meet sessions at mutually convenient times, each lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded using a laptop and mobile phones to ensure accurate transcription, and follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and elicit richer insights.

Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed and labeled using participant codes (e.g., Participant 1 as P1) to maintain confidentiality. Transcripts were subsequently emailed to participants for member checking, a step intended to increase accuracy and support claims regarding the trustworthiness of the data (Birt et al., 2016).

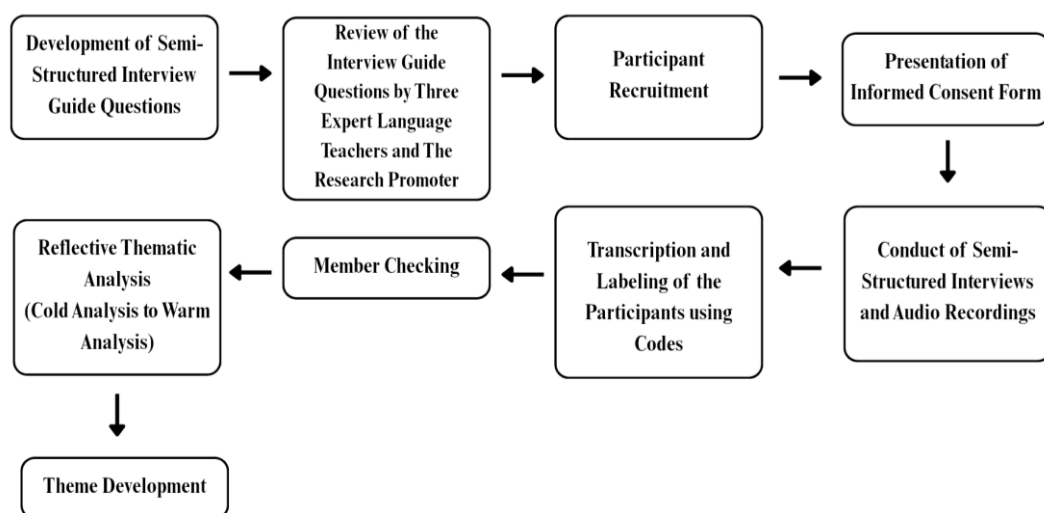


Figure 1. Methodological Workflow of the Study

Collected data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2019). The analysis proceeded in two phases. The cool analysis phase involved repeated reading of the transcripts, initial coding, and descriptive grouping of surface-level patterns, allowing the researchers to familiarize

themselves with the data without imposing interpretation. In the subsequent warm analysis phase, the researchers interpreted the meanings gathered from participants' responses and examined how these connected to broader conceptual patterns, ultimately generating themes that accurately reflected participants' lived experiences.

The study adhered to core ethical principles to ensure that research was conducted with integrity and respect for participants' rights. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose, the nature of their participation, and their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study: identities were replaced with codes during transcription and analysis, and audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the researchers. Data was used strictly for academic purposes and handled in accordance with Republic Act 10173 (the Data Privacy Act of 2012).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Reflexive Thematic Analysis of interviews with three Thai and two Indonesian participants yielded three major themes: (1) Philosophical Paradigm Shift, (2) Professional Identity Transformation, and (3) Pedagogical Adaptability.

Philosophical Paradigm Shift

The first theme captures how participants' teaching philosophy transitioned from being a "knowledge-giver" to a "learning facilitator." This theme was constructed from codes recurring across most participants, reflecting an initial teacher-centered philosophy in which participants viewed themselves as the sole providers of knowledge, focused primarily on content delivery and learning outcomes. Participant Four (P4) recalled:

"Before joining the SEA Teacher Program, my teaching philosophy was more focused on how to deliver the material clearly to my students."

Participant One (P1) similarly noted:

"I believe that teacher is the giver."

The transition from a "knowledge-giver" to a "learning facilitator" illustrates a fundamental shift in participants' epistemological beliefs regarding instructional practice. Before participating in the exchange program, participants held a predominantly transmissive, teacher-centered view of education, prioritizing linear content delivery and output-oriented achievement over student engagement—a perspective explicitly echoed by P4 and P1. This pre-exchange orientation reflects a traditional pedagogical framework where the educator functions as the primary authority and sole repository of knowledge. However, as evidenced by the recurring qualitative codes, immersive teaching experiences challenged these entrenched assumptions, triggering a critical reassessment that restructured their professional identities toward a socio-constructivist model of facilitation.

During the exchange, participants moved from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered philosophy, as Participant Three (P3) described:

"I'm trying to grow my teaching process more with student-center, not as a teacher center. I let them speak, I let them think, I let them discuss, and then I facilitate them."

This shift reflects a strong commitment to learner-centered instruction, in which teachers prioritize active engagement through methods such as project-based learning and group activities. Such international exposure not only changes classroom techniques but also reshapes core beliefs about the purpose of education, prioritizing student-centeredness and cultural sensitivity over rigid instructional delivery. This humanist orientation is further illustrated in Participant Five's (P5) reflection:

"After I joined this project, it really taught me that a good class is not always about having the perfect class control or the clearest content delivery, but it's also about having the connection with your students, building this relationship, having this atmosphere of being free to talk in the class."

This humanist orientation underscores a profound shift in participants' pedagogical priorities, where traditional classroom management and authoritative content delivery are superseded by relational and learner-centered dynamics. As articulated by P5, exposure to diverse socio-cultural classroom environments disrupted conventional notions of instructional success—traditionally benchmarked by strict behavioral control and rigid content transmission—in favor of a socio-affective framework. By prioritizing interpersonal connectedness, psychological safety, and open discourse, participants recognized that effective learning environments are fundamentally reliant on positive teacher-student relationships rather than top-down authority. Consequently, this qualitative account demonstrates how international mobility fosters an empathetic, constructivist ethos, enabling educators to cultivate inclusive classroom climates that nurture student agency and authentic communicative engagement.

Beyond this philosophical shift, participants demonstrated a sustained commitment to reflective, process-oriented teaching that persists in their current practice, prioritizing the processes through which students learn over the mere delivery of information. Participant Three (P3) reflected:

"I still keep my teaching student center but now it's a little bit different because I prepare myself with various research to research the learning process."

This inquiry-oriented stance is found to be international experiences and prompt teachers to continually rethink and refine instructional strategies, bridging the gap between educational theory and practice. This commitment to reflective teaching is further reinforced by participants' view of education as a reciprocal, continuous process, encapsulated in a guiding principle from Participant Two (P2):

"By learning you will teach, by teaching you will learn."

Overall, these findings indicate that the long-term impact of the program includes a mature pedagogical belief system in which teaching is inextricably linked to continuous learning, sustaining educators' identities as facilitators of learning rather than a return to their earlier role as primary sources of information.

Professional Identity Transformation

The second theme examines how participants' interpretation of the teaching profession evolved from unease to viewing themselves as "coaches" or "designers" of

learning. Prior conceptions of the profession were comparatively orthodox: Participant One (P1) described a conservative stance:

"I have a mindset that a teacher should be so conservative. Teachers should dress like that. Teacher should talk like that. Teacher should have a look or something that when people look at you, they have to know that she is studying in education."

Participant Two (P2) expressed a related sense of apprehension:

"I was very excited also because I was quite nervous. I knew the Philippines is one of the top English-speaking countries in Asia, so I was worried about my old English skills."

and Participant Three (P3) recalled:

"Before the program, I saw myself as maybe a structure- and content-focused teacher."

The evolution of participants' professional self-conception from rigid orthodoxy to adaptive instructional leadership highlights a critical transformation in how pre-service teachers conceptualize their professional roles. Initial accounts reveal that participants operated under conventional, high-conformity paradigms—characterized by P1's adherence to traditional socio-professional aesthetics, P3's reliance on rigid structural execution, and P2's language-related anxiety within an unfamiliar socio-linguistic context. These initial anxieties and orthodox beliefs reflect a reactive stance toward teaching, where professional validity was tied to external compliance and content authority rather than adaptive practice. However, the immersive international experience served as a catalyst for cognitive dissonance, dismantling these restrictive preconceptions and empowering participants to reframe their identity into that of "coaches" and "learning designers." Ultimately, this transformation reflects an enhanced sense of self-efficacy and professional agency, enabling educators to shift from passive execution of fixed routines toward proactive, learner-focused pedagogical design.

Over the course of the program, participants' initial perceptions were reshaped by their experiences in the Philippine classroom. Prior nervousness gave way to more positive self-perceptions; Participant Five (P5), for instance, described gaining confidence:

"Filipino students were very nice and they were very expressive. So that actually helped me a lot to gain more confidence teaching because I, myself, was just a student teacher at that time."

Participant One (P1) likewise described how exposure to a different cultural context reshaped assumptions about professional self-presentation:

"When I went to the Philippines, I changed. The Exchange Coordinator taught me that maybe I should wear some lipstick so I look more professional, so the students will know I am more mature and want to listen to me. It made me feel like I should learn, I should change something, so I'll get better at my work."

A recurring internalization concerned growing confidence in classroom performance, reflected in Participant Two's (P2) description of self-transformation:

"I was no longer a nervous student. I became a confident teacher."

and Participant Four's (P4) account of improved instructional performance:

"I feel more confident to create more engaging and structural learning."

These narratives indicate that confidence developed through authentic classroom experience rather than through theoretical preparation alone; interactions with Filipino

students and mentors challenged participants' initial assumptions and allowed them to reconstruct their professional identity through practice.

The data also point to the emergence of an adaptive, curious learner–teacher identity. Participant Five (P5) described how the Philippine classroom environment fostered greater sociability:

"After I joined the program, I became more open — I listen more to my students and care about having this relationship with my students."

Participant Three (P3) described a shift from control toward facilitation that has persisted after returning home:

"Fifty percent of the way I'm teaching right now is from the experience I had in the Philippines. Rather than controlling the students, I let them talk, have a dialogue, and I try to facilitate them."

and Participant Two (P2) described sustaining an English-immersion strategy learned abroad:

"I try to create the same environment as in the Philippines, where everyone uses English. So, I try to have my students use more English every day, speaking every day of their life in school."

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the exchange program contributed to participants' professional identity formation by encouraging self-reflection, openness, and adaptability. Whereas professionalism was initially associated with maintaining a fixed image or mastering content delivery, participants came to view professionalism as the capacity to continuously learn, adapt, and respond to students' needs — supporting the view that professional identity develops through experience rather than remaining static, and indicating that the influence of the SEA Teacher Program extended well beyond the exchange period itself to shape participants' long-term teaching practices.

Pedagogical Adaptability

The third theme concerns how the SEA Teacher Project influenced specific teaching competencies, particularly teachers' capacity to adapt to diverse classroom environments and student needs. Moving beyond the acquisition of isolated instructional techniques, this theme illustrates the tangible, external manifestation of the internal "meaning-making" process described in Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning, evidencing a shift from knowledge-giver to learning facilitator in classroom practice.

A core finding is participants' successful implementation of student-centered strategies such as project-based learning and contextualized instruction. Participant Two (P2) described moving away from "just standing and teaching" toward creating immersive learning experiences:

"I recently created a real project where my students set up a buffet, omelet, and honey-lemon soda shop. They actually cook and sell the food so that students can practice their English in a contextualized manner."

This shift evidences a deeper pedagogical transformation, in which participants no longer perceive teaching as the transmission of fixed knowledge but as the process of creating a learning environment in which students actively engage with and explore

material. Participant Four (P4) similarly reported that contextual teaching and learning improved attention and active engagement:

"I truly think, and I already proved, that when I teach students using contextual teaching and learning, they have better attention."

By relating academic content to daily life, these educators demonstrated an advanced capacity to bridge abstract concepts and student reality, reflecting professional resilience in overcoming the disorienting dilemmas posed by unfamiliar curricula and student expectations in the host country.

Beyond specific instructional strategies, participants also refined their communication style, recognizing that pedagogical effectiveness depends not only on the tools used but, on the clarity, and accessibility of teacher–student interaction — often a direct response to the language barriers identified as a primary challenge in international exchanges. Rather than treating the language gap as an obstacle, participants used it to drive professional growth: Participant One (P1) learned to use short, accessible language for learners, and Participant Four (P4) adopted simpler English terms to aid student understanding. This communicative refinement functions as a foundational pillar of participants' evolving pedagogy, ensuring instruction remains inclusive regardless of students' linguistic background.

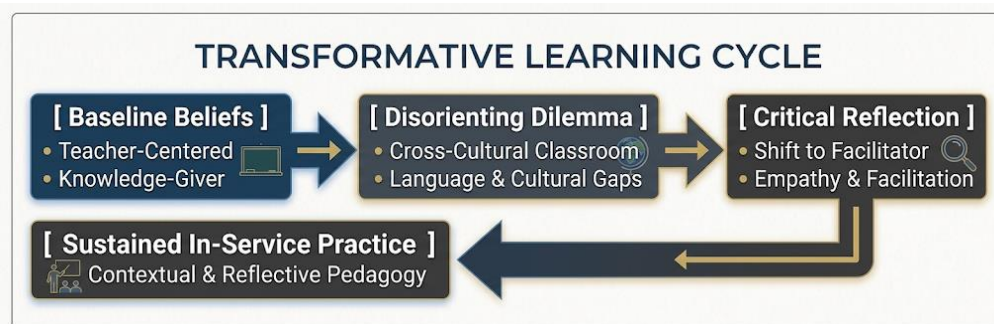


Figure 2. Transformative Learning Cycle

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the long-term professional and socio-cultural trajectories of former pre-service teachers from Thailand and Indonesia who participated in the Southeast Asia (SEA) Teacher Project hosted by Saint Louis University, Philippines. The findings demonstrate that short-term international teaching mobility acts as an acute catalyst for systemic, durable educator development. Rather than merely equipping pre-service candidates with isolated instructional techniques, cross-cultural immersion triggers a deeply interconnected, three-tier transformative cycle: a philosophical paradigm shift, a professional identity transformation, and enhanced pedagogical adaptability. This discussion critically contextualizes these findings within current global literature, evaluates the theoretical mechanics through Mezirow's Transformative Learning Framework, and articulates the scholarly and practical contributions of the study.

The Cognitive Mechanics of Philosophical Reorientation

The emergence of the first theme—a Philosophical Paradigm Shift from a teacher-centered "knowledge-giver" to a student-centered "learning facilitator"—illustrates a cognitive restructuring of core educational beliefs. Prior to the exchange, participants operated predominantly under a transmission-oriented paradigm, conceptualizing teaching as the systematic delivery of content and viewing learners as passive recipients. This baseline reflects established regional literature ([Hallinger & Walker, 2017](#); [Moorhouse & Harfitt, 2021](#)) regarding the prevalence of traditional, directive instructional habits among early-career educators across Southeast Asia.

The cross-cultural immersion in host classrooms served as a pivotal disorienting environment. Exposure to the highly interactive, communicative, and relational dynamics of Philippine classrooms challenged participants' underlying assumptions about authority, classroom management, and knowledge ownership. As captured in the narratives of P3 and P5, participants abandoned strict control in favor of creating a relational space built on dialogue and empathy.

This conceptual shift corroborates recent studies ([Hana et al., 2025](#); [Hidayat et al., 2025](#)) which argue that international exposure forces teachers to move past rigid instructional delivery toward humanistic, learner-centered frameworks. Importantly, this study extends the existing literature ([Arias-Cifuentes & Solano-Cahuana, 2025](#); [Atay, 2022](#)) by demonstrating long-term cognitive durability: years after completing the exchange, returnees continue to view teaching through an inquiry-oriented, process-driven lens, actively using action research and daily self-reflection to treat pedagogy as a continuous learning loop.

Reconstructing Professional Identity Through Practice

The transition in participants' professional identity—from anxious, rule-bound "student teachers" to confident "coaches" or "designers of learning"—directly illustrates the core tenets of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory ([Carter & Nicolaides, 2023](#); [Kurnia, 2021](#); [Milazzo & Soulard, 2024](#)). The phase of initial anxiety, shyness, and strict adherence to conservative physical norms (P1, P2) mirrors the classic experience of a *disorienting dilemma*, where individuals confront a divergence between internal assumptions and external reality ([Jaramillo Cherrez & Gleason, 2022](#); [Tulgar, 2018](#)).

The findings highlight two essential mechanisms driving identity reconstruction during cross-cultural placements:

- **Authentic Experiential Mastery:** Direct, unscripted engagement with expressively active host students forced participants out of passive observer roles into active classroom managers. Confidence was not derived from theoretical pre-service coursework, but forged through real-time instructional adaptation ([Hadiyanto, 2024](#)).
- **Constructive Cross-Cultural Mentorship:** Contextual feedback from host coordinators (e.g., P1's realization regarding professional presentation and maturity) provided the social scaffolding necessary to internalize a mature, professional self-image.

Consequently, participants expanded their definitions of "professionalism." Rather than associating professional stature with fixed authority or static expert status, returnees conceptualized identity as an ongoing, fluid capacity for empathy, adaptability, and open dialogue. This long-term evolution supports the stance that professional teacher identity is a dynamic, continuously negotiated construct rather than a static attribute established upon graduation.

Pedagogical Adaptability as the Tangible Manifestation of Growth

While theoretical and identity shifts operate internally, Pedagogical Adaptability represents the visible, external operationalization of this inner transformation in daily practice. The study's third theme demonstrates that participants successfully translated abstract student-centered philosophies into concrete, highly contextualized instructional strategies upon returning to their home institutions.

The implementation of experiential learning initiatives—such as P2’s interactive English buffet project or P4’s contextualized instruction—underscores an advanced ability to bridge curriculum requirements with real-world application. Rather than viewing cross-cultural language barriers as insurmountable impediments, participants utilized these linguistic friction points to refine their communicative clarity, adopting accessible language and simplified instructional frameworks (Arquillano et al., 2022).

These findings align with Oubit and El Farahi (2024) and Goldstein (2022), confirming that global exchange experiences foster high levels of instructional innovation. However, this study further reveals that these technical competencies do not exist in isolation; they are direct behavioral outcomes of the underlying philosophical shift. Pedagogical flexibility is the practical vehicle through which the "facilitator" identity is continually expressed and reinforced in the classroom.

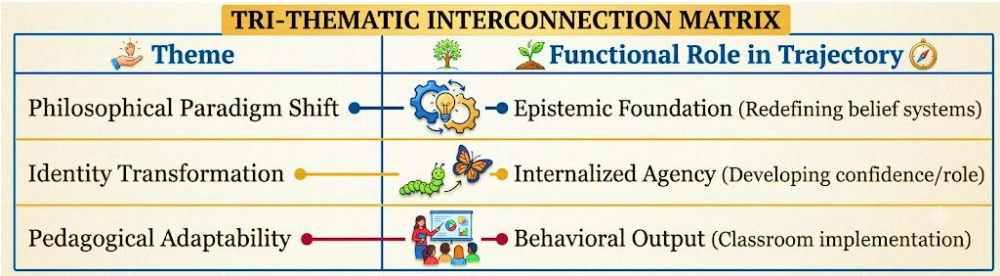


Figure 3. Tri-Themathic Interconnection Matrix

Synthesis and Theoretical Contributions

Taken together, the three themes provide an integrative model of how short-term international teacher mobility generates long-term professional return. Rather than observing ephemeral benefits that fade upon re-entry into traditional home systems, this study confirms that structured mobility programs initiate a self-reinforcing cycle of transformative growth:



Figure 4. Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Transformative Growth

By establishing empirical links between early-career pre-service exchanges and sustained in-service habits across Thailand and Indonesia, this study advances the literature on regional teacher mobility in the Global South. It demonstrates that when international mobility is paired with structured host institution support, short-term practice-teaching placements can alter an educator's long-term professional trajectory, directly supporting systemic goals for educational quality and sustainable teacher development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study addressed its research problem by demonstrating how participation in the SEA Teacher Exchange Program shaped the professional and socio-cultural experiences of ASEAN in-service teachers. The findings reveal that international immersion facilitated a transformative shift in participants' teaching philosophies, professional identities, and pedagogical practices, enabling a transition from teacher-centered instruction toward more student-centered, context-responsive approaches. Consistent with Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning, the program fostered greater pedagogical adaptability, cultural awareness, reflective practice, and global competence that continued to influence participants' teaching well beyond the exchange experience. Overall, the study affirms that international teacher exchange programs serve as meaningful platforms for sustained professional growth and intercultural learning, offering valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers seeking to strengthen teacher development and regional educational collaboration.

While this study offers valuable insights into the long-term professional and socio-cultural trajectories of ASEAN teachers, several methodological constraints warrant cautious interpretation, particularly the reliance on a small, single-institution sample ($N = 5$) of solely active educators—which introduces survival bias—alongside retrospective recall bias, linguistic constraints from non-native English interviews, and potential social desirability bias. To address these limitations and maximize systemic impact, educational leaders and host institutions should institutionalize structured support frameworks, such as peer-mentoring systems and pre-departure orientations, while SEAMEO and partner entities establish systematic post-exchange evaluation mechanisms to foster continuous refinement and sustainable cross-cultural collaboration. Concurrently, future empirical inquiries must adopt longitudinal, multi-site research designs across diverse ASEAN host institutions with larger sample sizes ($N > 5$), incorporate former teachers to eliminate survival bias, and offer native-language interviewing options facilitated by professional translators to capture richer, unconstrained qualitative data regarding the long-term career trajectories of exchange alumni.

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