
Classroom management challenges during a cross-cultural teaching practicum in Thailand

AMANDA NURUL FARADINA¹, RINI SUSANTI^{2*}, AND INDAWAN SYAHRI³

Abstract

This study examines the classroom management challenges an Indonesian pre-service teacher experienced during a two-month teaching practicum at a primary school in southern Thailand. It employed a qualitative reflective case study design. The participant, who was also the first author, taught English to nine Grade 1 students in a Montessori-inspired classroom. Data were collected through classroom observations, daily teaching notes, and reflective journals and were analysed thematically. Three interconnected challenges emerged. The first was maintaining young learners' attention, which was undermined by short attention spans, frequent distractions, side conversations, and low task engagement. The second was negotiating teacher authority. The third was the language barrier, which reduced instructional clarity and led to misunderstood directions, repeated explanations, and difficulties in managing student behaviour. The study highlights the need to prepare pre-service teachers with classroom management strategies, multilingual communication skills, and intercultural competence before international teaching practicums.

Keywords

Classroom management, cross-cultural teaching practicum, pre-service teacher, Thai primary school, young learners

Article History

Received 17 July 2026

Accepted 24 September 2026

How to Cite

Faradina, A. N., Susanti, R., & Syahri, I. (2026).

Classroom management challenges during a cross-cultural teaching practicum in Thailand. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education | IRJE |*, 10(3), 1578-1592.

<https://doi.org/10.22437/akx2ay08>

^{1,3}Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang, Palembang, Indonesia

^{2*}Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang, Palembang, Indonesia, Corresponding author: rini@um-palembang.ac.id

Introduction

As English continues to serve as a global language for communication, education, and employment, many countries have introduced English instruction in primary schools. Teaching English at an early age is considered beneficial because it helps children develop vocabulary, communication skills, and confidence in using the language (Sahin & Yavuz, 2025). However, teaching young learners requires pedagogical approaches that differ substantially from those used with adolescents and adults. Young learners have shorter attention spans, learn more effectively through meaningful, engaging activities, and require instruction appropriate to their cognitive and emotional development (Zein, 2017). Consequently, English teachers need to employ age-appropriate teaching strategies that actively engage children throughout the learning process.

One of the most important factors influencing successful teaching with young learners is effective classroom management. Classroom management extends beyond maintaining discipline; it involves creating a learning environment that promotes engagement, participation, and meaningful learning while minimising classroom disruptions. Previous studies consistently show that pre-service teachers often struggle to manage student behaviour, maintain learners' attention, and achieve lesson objectives, particularly when teaching young learners (Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Serliana et al., 2021). Because young children are easily distracted and require continuous engagement, effective classroom management plays a central role in determining the success of English language instruction.

These challenges become even more complex in an international practicum context. Teaching practicum abroad requires pre-service teachers to adapt not only to different educational systems but also to unfamiliar languages, classroom cultures, and expectations regarding teacher–student interaction. Limited shared language proficiency may reduce students' understanding of classroom instructions and limit classroom interaction (Nketsia & Carroll, 2023). Similarly, differences in cultural expectations regarding authority, participation, and classroom behaviour may influence how teachers establish classroom routines and manage student engagement. Such linguistic and cultural differences have been shown to affect teacher–student communication and classroom management, particularly among novice teachers who are still developing their professional practice (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

Although classroom management has been widely examined in teacher education research, most studies have focused on practicum experiences within familiar or domestic school contexts. Comparatively little attention has been given to how classroom management is negotiated during international teaching practicums, where language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar classroom norms interact simultaneously. In particular, research on these experiences in Southeast Asian cross-cultural practicum settings remains limited. Consequently, contextualised research is still needed to explore how these interconnected factors shape pre-service teachers' classroom management experiences in multicultural educational environments.

To address this gap, the present study examines the classroom management challenges an Indonesian pre-service teacher encountered during a teaching practicum in a Thai primary school. It focuses on how language barriers and cross-cultural differences influenced classroom management and student engagement. By examining these experiences in an authentic international practicum context, the study deepens understanding of classroom

management across cultures. It provides practical insights for teacher education programmes preparing pre-service teachers for international teaching experiences. (1) What classroom management challenges does an Indonesian pre-service teacher face during a teaching practicum in a Thai primary school? (2) How do language barriers affect classroom management during teaching practicum?

Literature Review

Teaching English to young learners

As English continues to function as a global language for communication, education, and employment, many countries have introduced English instruction at the primary school level. Early English education is widely regarded as beneficial because children are generally more receptive to language learning during their early years, allowing them to develop vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence, and communication skills more naturally (Pratama, 2025). Beyond language acquisition, early English learning also contributes to children's cognitive development, problem-solving abilities, and intercultural awareness. Despite these benefits, teaching young learners differs substantially from teaching adolescents or adults. Young learners have shorter attention spans, rely heavily on concrete experiences, and learn most effectively through active participation and meaningful interaction. Consequently, teachers need to design developmentally appropriate learning experiences that combine cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. Previous studies consistently recommend using games, songs, storytelling, visual materials, and multisensory activities because these approaches correspond with children's natural learning processes and increase classroom participation (Islahuddin, 2023; Judijanto, 2026). Such activities sustain learners' attention and create enjoyable learning environments that promote confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

However, engaging instructional activities alone do not guarantee successful learning. Young learners require well-managed classrooms where teachers can balance participation, behaviour, and instructional objectives simultaneously. Consequently, classroom management becomes an essential pedagogical competency for teachers working with young learners.

Classroom management during teaching practicum

Classroom management is widely recognised as one of the most important competencies in effective teaching (Baier-Mosch & Kunter, 2024; Franklin & Harrington, 2019). Rather than merely maintaining discipline, classroom management involves organising learning environments that encourage engagement, maximise learning opportunities, establish positive teacher–student relationships, and minimise disruptions. Effective classroom management enables teachers to deliver instruction efficiently while creating supportive environments in which students can participate actively and confidently.

Developing these skills is particularly challenging for pre-service teachers. During the teaching practicum, novice teachers must manage student behaviour, implement instructional strategies, maintain lesson flow, and respond to unexpected classroom situations simultaneously. Previous studies consistently report that pre-service teachers often struggle to maintain students' attention, manage disruptive behaviour, balance lesson delivery with

classroom interaction, and establish classroom authority (Purwanti & Vania, 2021; Serliana et al., 2021; Suryanto & Brawijaya, 2024). These challenges are often intensified when teaching young learners because children's behaviour changes rapidly and requires continuous instructional adjustment.

Teaching practicum therefore represents far more than an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge. It provides authentic professional learning experiences through which prospective teachers develop instructional competence, confidence, decision-making skills, and classroom management abilities. Through direct classroom experience, pre-service teachers begin to understand that effective teaching involves not only delivering subject content but also responding flexibly to learners' diverse academic, behavioural, and emotional needs (Mulyani et al., 2022; Upa, 2025; Zapatero-Ayuso et al., 2026).

Classroom management in cross-cultural teaching contexts

The challenges associated with classroom management become considerably more complex during international teaching practicums. Beyond managing instruction and student behaviour, pre-service teachers must adapt to unfamiliar educational systems, communication styles, classroom cultures, and expectations for teacher–student relationships. Language barriers may reduce students' understanding of classroom instructions, limit classroom interaction, and increase teachers' uncertainty when explaining learning activities (Dzormeku et al., 2024; Nketsia & Carroll, 2023).

Cultural differences further influence classroom management because expectations regarding teacher authority, classroom participation, student autonomy, and acceptable behaviour vary across educational contexts. Practices that are effective in one country may not be appropriate in another. Previous studies indicate that such differences often contribute to anxiety, reduced confidence, and uncertainty among pre-service teachers, during the practicum (Pravitasari et al., 2025). These feelings tend to intensify in international placements (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023; Shofia et al., 2026). Consequently, effective classroom management in cross-cultural settings requires teachers to negotiate linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical differences at the same time.

Nevertheless, international teaching practicums also provide significant opportunities for professional development. Research suggests that cross-cultural teaching experiences encourage prospective teachers to become more adaptable, culturally responsive, and reflective practitioners (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023; Kabilan, 2013). Rather than simply overcoming difficulties, pre-service teachers often develop greater intercultural competence and more flexible instructional practices through sustained interaction with unfamiliar educational environments.

Theoretical framework: reflective practice

This study draws on Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice, which views professional learning as a continuous process of reflecting on experience. Schön (1983) argues that professionals develop expertise not only through formal knowledge but also through critical reflection on authentic practice. He distinguishes between reflection-in-action, which occurs while responding to situations as they unfold, and reflection-on-action, which involves analysing experiences after they occur to improve future practice.

Within teacher education, reflective practice has become an important framework for understanding how pre-service teachers develop professionally during teaching practicum. Reflection enables teachers to analyse classroom events, examine their instructional decisions, recognise challenges, and identify strategies for improvement. Rather than viewing classroom difficulties as failures, reflective practice encourages teachers to interpret these experiences as opportunities for professional growth and pedagogical development.

In the context of international teaching practicum, reflective practice becomes particularly valuable because pre-service teachers frequently encounter unfamiliar linguistic and cultural situations that cannot be addressed solely through previously acquired theoretical knowledge. Reflection allows teachers to reconsider their assumptions, adapt instructional practices, and develop contextually appropriate classroom management strategies. Accordingly, Schön's (1983) framework provides an appropriate theoretical lens for interpreting how an Indonesian pre-service teacher negotiated classroom management challenges while teaching in a Thai primary school.

Research gap

Previous studies have independently examined young learner pedagogy, classroom management, teaching practicum, and cross-cultural teaching experiences. Collectively, this body of research shows that classroom management is one of the greatest challenges pre-service teachers face and that language and cultural differences further complicate teaching during international practicum experiences. However, these themes have usually been investigated separately.

In particular, limited research has explored how classroom management, language barriers, teacher authority, and cross-cultural adaptation interact during international teaching practicums undertaken by Indonesian pre-service teachers in Southeast Asian primary school contexts. Existing studies predominantly focus on domestic practicum experiences or investigate classroom management without considering the influence of intercultural communication and language differences. Consequently, relatively little is known about how pre-service teachers negotiate classroom management while simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environments.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the classroom management challenges experienced by an Indonesian pre-service teacher during a teaching practicum in a Thai primary school. Guided by Schön's theory of reflective practice, the study examines how language barriers and cross-cultural differences shaped classroom management experiences and professional learning within an authentic international practicum context.

Research Methodology

Research design

This study used a qualitative reflective case study design informed by Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice. A reflective case study was appropriate because the aim was not to measure variables or test hypotheses. Instead, the study sought to understand how a pre-service teacher experienced and interpreted classroom management challenges in an authentic cross-cultural teaching context. The study focused on a single case: an Indonesian pre-service

teacher completing an international teaching practicum in a Thai primary school. This focus allowed an in-depth understanding of classroom management, language barriers, and professional learning.

In this study, the first author served as both participant and investigator. This dual role enabled close engagement with the teaching process while allowing systematic reflection on classroom events, instructional decisions, and interactions with students. Guided by Schön's concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, the researcher examined how classroom management challenges were experienced, interpreted, and addressed throughout the practicum. Rather than generalising the findings, the study aimed to develop a contextualised understanding of teaching experiences within a specific cross-cultural educational setting.

Research site and participant

The study took place during a two-month international teaching practicum at a primary school in southern Thailand. The participant was the researcher, an Indonesian pre-service teacher responsible for teaching English to a Grade 1 class of nine students. The classroom followed a Montessori-inspired learning approach that emphasised hands-on learning materials and student-centred activities. This setting allowed classroom management to be examined in an authentic cross-cultural context.

Because the study investigated the researcher's professional experiences rather than individual students, the learners were treated collectively throughout the analysis. The study reports no personal information or identifying details about the students.

Data collection

The data were collected throughout the teaching practicum from three primary sources: classroom observations, daily teaching notes, and reflective teaching journals. Classroom observations documented students' participation, classroom interaction, and behavioural responses during lessons. Daily teaching notes recorded instructional activities, classroom events, and immediate reflections following each lesson. Reflective journals captured the researcher's ongoing interpretation of classroom experiences, instructional decisions, emotional responses, and perceived challenges encountered during the practicum.

Using multiple data sources enabled the researcher to examine classroom management from different perspectives while documenting the development of professional understanding over time.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. First, the classroom observations, daily teaching notes, and reflective journals were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful statements related to classroom management, language barriers, teacher authority, and student engagement were identified and assigned initial codes. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories, which were subsequently refined into overarching themes representing the major classroom management challenges encountered during the practicum.

Throughout the analysis, the emerging themes were interpreted through Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice. Particular attention was given to how the researcher reflected on classroom experiences while teaching (reflection-in-action) and after teaching (reflection-on-action) to understand the professional learning that occurred during the international practicum.

Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Several strategies enhanced the study's trustworthiness. First, the researcher triangulated data by analysing classroom observations, daily teaching notes, and reflective journals, rather than relying on a single source of evidence. Second, prolonged engagement over the two-month practicum enabled the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the classroom context. Third, the researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the process by critically examining personal assumptions and interpretations while analysing the data.

The researcher carefully observed ethical principles throughout the study. Students' identities and the participating school remain anonymous, and the study reports no personal identifying information. The study focuses exclusively on the researcher's professional experiences and reflections rather than evaluating students' academic performance or behaviour. All classroom descriptions are presented solely to illustrate classroom management experiences within the international teaching practicum.

Findings

This section presents findings from the researcher's reflective journals, daily teaching notes, and classroom observations collected during a two-month teaching practicum at a primary school in southern Thailand. The study explored the classroom management challenges an Indonesian pre-service teacher encountered while teaching English to a Grade 1 Montessori class of nine students aged six to seven years. English functioned as a foreign language in the classroom, and students demonstrated limited English proficiency. Instruction relied primarily on flashcards, printed materials, gestures, and hands-on learning activities, as the teacher did not use digital technologies during lessons.

The thematic analysis identified three major themes that addressed the two research questions: (1) Managing Young Learners' Attention, (2) Negotiating Teacher Authority, and (3) Language Barriers and Instructional Clarity. Table 1 summarises the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis.

Table 1. *Themes and sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme one Managing Young Learners' Attention	Short attention spans Frequent distractions Low task focus
Theme two Negotiating Teacher Authority	Student response to teacher presence Difficulty establishing authority

Theme three Language Barriers and Instructional Clarity	Weak classroom control
	Limited shared language
	Misunderstood directions
	Repeated instructions
	Behaviour management difficulties

Theme one: managing young learners' attention

Short attention spans, the teaching notes indicate that one major challenge was managing students' attention. Across the 24 meetings, students frequently struggled to stay focused because of their short attention spans. Even when interactive materials and visual aids were used, students quickly became bored if explanations lasted too long.

“Some students continued talking during the lesson because they appeared bored with the teacher's explanation and sometimes lost focus while doing their worksheets” (Teaching note, meeting 17).

These observations show that maintaining learners' attention required frequent changes in instructional activities and continuous student engagement.

Frequent distractions, Sstudents were easily distracted by their surroundings when explanations were long and they had little to do. In several lessons, students shifted their attention to activities unrelated to the task. These behaviours disrupted learning and slowed the lesson. Some students also said aloud that they were bored.

“The most challenging part was managing the time and the classroom at the same time. Some students spoke with their friends. For that reason, the activities did not run exactly as planned” (Teaching note, meeting 17).

These distractions affected lesson pacing and required additional classroom management efforts.

Low task focus, some students were reluctant to complete assigned worksheets. One common issue is that they regularly speak with the student next to them while the teacher explains the material, which drew their attention away from the lesson. Some students also showed little interest in the materials. For example, some lay on the floor during activities.

“They are chatting and sleeping in the class” (Teaching note, meeting 8)

Such behaviours reduced students' participation and required continuous teacher intervention to redirect their attention.

Theme two: negotiating teacher authority

Student response to teacher presence, during the teaching practicum, students' reactions to the teacher's presence also seemed to affect classroom interaction. Students did not always react with the same degree of focus or obedience during lessons. Over several

teaching sessions, some students appeared less responsive to verbal instructions and less likely to comply immediately during class activities. This inconsistency made it more difficult to establish teacher authority.

“It was difficult when I explained vocabulary one by one. The students were reluctant to repeat the words and write the spelling” (Teaching note, meeting 11).

These observations indicate that gaining students' immediate attention was not always straightforward during classroom instruction.

Difficulty establishing authority, students responded unevenly to directions, and orderly classroom behaviour was hard to maintain. This pattern indicated weak classroom control. Some students continued side conversations or took longer to follow instructions, suggesting they did not always immediately recognise the researcher as the classroom instructor. This suggests that consistent classroom routines had not yet been established.

"Some students became less active, and I had to repeat instructions and call their attention more often." (Teaching note, meeting 11)

Repeated attempts to regain students' attention became a regular feature of classroom management during the practicum.

Weak classroom control, the challenges of managing this class also influenced the researcher's emotional and professional adjustments during the teaching practicum. At times, the researcher was unsure how to continue the lesson because students did not respond and order was hard to maintain. Occasionally, the researcher had to speak more loudly when giving instructions.

"I raised my voice slightly and used gestures to attract their attention." (Teaching note, meeting 11)

These classroom experiences illustrate the ongoing adjustments required to maintain lesson flow and student engagement.

Theme three: language barriers and instructional clarity

Language differences emerged as a major factor influencing classroom management throughout the practicum.

Limited shared language, one of the main challenges encountered during the teaching practicum was the lack of a shared language. English was the main language of instruction, and Malaysian Malay was occasionally used to support comprehension. This was not always successful because most students spoke Thai and Pattani Malay among themselves. Because English was a foreign language for these children, a linguistic gap made classroom engagement more difficult.

“There are communication barriers because the students use Thai. They are also unable to understand Malaysian Malay, except for a few students” (Teaching notes, meeting 8)

These language differences often complicated classroom communication and instructional delivery.

Misunderstood directions, the lesson notes provide an example of how language misinterpretation affected task completion. In one worksheet task, students were asked to write weather and clothing words based on the pictures provided. Some students, however, misinterpreted the directions and cut out the pictures instead of writing the words. This illustrates how linguistic differences can lead to misunderstandings and incorrect task completion. The students often needed repeated instructions and gestures before they understood what was expected.

“The students misunderstood my instructions; they were supposed to write down weather and clothing vocabulary based on the pictures. Instead, they cut out the pictures.” (Teaching note, meeting 11)

This suggests that the error arose from limited comprehension of the instructions, not from deliberate non-compliance. The students understood what was expected only when the instructions were repeated through demonstration and gestures.

Repeated instructions, because misunderstandings occurred, the researcher often repeated instructions to support comprehension. Repetition, gestures, and visual examples appeared to help the students follow directions despite the linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom.

“Some students need repeated instruction; they understood because I used gestures and showed examples, but some still needed help.” (Teaching reflection, meeting 11)

These observations highlight the importance of combining verbal explanations with visual and non-verbal communication.

Behaviour management difficulties, the communication gap also influenced several behavioural reactions in the classroom. When students could not understand the directions, many disengaged and turned to other activities. Some students put their heads down on their desks, played during class, chatted with classmates, or refused to finish the task. These behaviours often arose from uncertainty and poor comprehension, showing that students' classroom behaviour was strongly shaped by their grasp of the language used during instruction.

“One student refused to write or draw based on the given topic after arguing with a friend. After the conflict, the student lost motivation and did not want to continue the task. This situation became more difficult to manage because the language barrier made it harder to provide clear instructions and calm the student.” (Teaching note, meeting 9).

The limited shared language reduced students' comprehension of tasks. This led to more task refusal and made behaviour harder to manage. Overall, the findings indicate that classroom management during the international teaching practicum was shaped by three interconnected

challenges: maintaining young learners' attention, establishing teacher authority, and overcoming language barriers. Across the reflective journals, these challenges consistently influenced lesson implementation, classroom interaction, and students' engagement in learning activities.

Discussion

This study explored the classroom management challenges an Indonesian pre-service teacher encountered during a two-month teaching practicum in a Thai primary school. Guided by Schön's (2009) theory of reflective practice, the discussion interprets the findings as a process of professional learning through experience. Rather than viewing the identified challenges as isolated classroom problems, the findings demonstrate how continuous reflection enabled the researcher to reconsider teaching decisions, adapt instructional practices, and gradually develop a more profound understanding of classroom management in a cross-cultural context.

One of the most consistent challenges identified throughout the practicum was maintaining young learners' attention. The findings showed that students frequently lost concentration during lengthy teacher explanations and became distracted by conversations with classmates or unrelated classroom activities. These behaviours should not be interpreted simply as poor discipline but as characteristics of young learners' developmental stage. Previous studies have similarly reported that children aged six to seven possess relatively short attention spans and require continuous engagement to remain focused during learning activities (Judijanto, 2026; Suryanto & Brawijaya, 2024; Zein, 2017). From a reflective perspective, these classroom experiences prompted the researcher to reconsider the effectiveness of teacher-centred instruction. Reflection-on-action revealed that lessons that relied heavily on explanations and worksheets, without sufficient variation, reduced students' engagement. Consequently, the researcher recognised the importance of incorporating games, songs, movement, and multisensory activities to sustain learners' attention throughout the lesson. This reflection supports previous research suggesting that meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences are essential for maintaining young learners' motivation and participation (Islahuddin, 2023; Judijanto, 2026).

The findings also show that classroom management extends beyond maintaining order and involves building positive relationships and establishing teacher authority. Students did not always respond immediately to classroom instructions and often required repeated prompting before participating in learning activities. Initially, these responses created uncertainty regarding the researcher's ability to manage the classroom effectively. However, continuous reflection helped the researcher recognise that the students' behaviour was not necessarily intentional resistance but part of their adjustment to an unfamiliar teacher with different communication styles, teaching routines, and a different cultural background. Reflection-in-action enabled the researcher to modify classroom interactions by using gestures, adjusting vocal delivery, and providing additional encouragement during lessons. These experiences demonstrate that teacher authority is negotiated gradually through consistent interaction. It is not established automatically at the start of a practicum. Similar findings have been reported by Nketsia and Carroll (2023) and Pravitasari et al. (2025), who found that novice teachers often experience anxiety and reduced confidence during their first practicum. Studies of Indonesian pre-service teachers abroad report similar pressures (Hasymi

& Nurkamto, 2023; Shofia et al., 2026). This study extends this understanding by showing how reflective practice supported the gradual development of teacher confidence and classroom authority.

Language barriers emerged as another significant influence on classroom management. Because the researcher primarily used English and Malaysian Malay while students communicated mainly in Thai and Pattani Malay, misunderstandings frequently interrupted classroom communication. Students occasionally completed tasks incorrectly because they misunderstood verbal instructions, not because they lacked motivation or ability. These findings support previous research demonstrating that limited shared language can hinder classroom communication and reduce students' comprehension of instructional activities (Dzormeku et al., 2024; Shofia et al., 2026). Rather than relying solely on verbal explanations, the researcher gradually adopted additional communication strategies, including gestures, demonstrations, repetition, and visual materials. Reflection-on-action highlighted that combining verbal and non-verbal communication appeared to improve students' understanding and participation. These adaptations demonstrate how reflective practice enabled the researcher to respond flexibly to linguistic challenges within a multilingual classroom.

The findings indicate that classroom management in international teaching practicums is inseparable from its cultural context. Differences in language, classroom expectations, and communication styles influenced how the researcher managed student behaviour, maintained attention, and delivered instruction. Instead of applying teaching strategies developed in Indonesia without modification, the researcher gradually learned to adapt instructional practices to the local educational environment. This finding reinforces the argument that international teaching practicums are not only opportunities to apply pedagogical knowledge but also contexts for developing intercultural competence, professional adaptability, and reflective teaching practice (Hasymi & Nurkamto, 2023; Kabilan, 2013).

This study also contributes to teacher education by illustrating the value of reflective practice during international teaching practicums. Through continuous reflection, classroom challenges became opportunities for professional growth rather than indicators of teaching failure. The findings therefore support Schön's (1983) proposition that professional expertise develops through an ongoing cycle of experience, reflection, and instructional adaptation. Reflection enabled the researcher to recognise classroom management challenges, evaluate instructional decisions, and develop more contextually appropriate teaching strategies within a multilingual and multicultural classroom.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study examined only one Indonesian pre-service teacher during a single international teaching practicum; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all cross-cultural teaching contexts. Second, the study was conducted in one Grade 1 classroom within a Montessori-inspired primary school, and classroom dynamics may differ across educational settings and age groups. Finally, because the analysis relied primarily on reflective journals and teaching notes, the findings represent the researcher's perspective and do not include students' or mentor teachers' viewpoints.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing literature on cross-cultural teacher education by showing how language, culture, and reflective professional learning shape classroom management challenges. By examining classroom experiences through Schön's theory of reflective practice, the study highlights that successful classroom management during an international teaching practicum involves not only pedagogical

knowledge but also the ability to critically reflect on experience and adapt teaching practices to unfamiliar educational contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the classroom management challenges an Indonesian pre-service teacher experienced during a two-month teaching practicum in a Thai primary school. Guided by Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice, the findings revealed that classroom management in a cross-cultural context extends beyond maintaining student discipline. Three interconnected themes emerged from the analysis: managing young learners' attention, negotiating teacher authority, and overcoming language barriers to achieve instructional clarity. Together, these findings demonstrate that classroom management is shaped by the interaction between pedagogical knowledge, communication, cultural understanding, and teachers' capacity to reflect on and adapt their instructional practices.

The study also demonstrates that language barriers and cultural differences influence not only students' comprehension of classroom instructions but also teachers' confidence, authority, and classroom decision-making. Through continuous reflection on classroom experiences, the researcher gradually modified instructional strategies by incorporating gestures, visual materials, repeated explanations, and more interactive learning activities. These adaptations illustrate how reflective practice supports professional learning and enables pre-service teachers to respond more effectively to unfamiliar teaching contexts.

The findings have important implications for teacher education programmes. Preparing future teachers for international teaching practicums should extend beyond developing pedagogical knowledge and include opportunities to build intercultural competence, adaptive classroom management strategies, and communication skills for multilingual classrooms. Teacher education programmes should also encourage systematic reflective practice so that pre-service teachers learn to critically examine their teaching experiences, identify classroom challenges, and continuously improve their instructional practices. Such preparation will better equip future teachers to manage culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Future research could involve multiple pre-service teachers undertaking international teaching practicums across different countries and educational settings to compare classroom management experiences. Studies that include interviews with mentor teachers and students, along with classroom observations by independent researchers, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language, culture, and reflective practice shape classroom management in multicultural learning environments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the supervising lecturer and the participating school for their support and contribution to this study.

References

- Amin, M., Tsaqila, T. Q., Zamzam, A., & Arfah, H. (2023). The earlier, the better: Global and Indonesian views on TEYL (teaching English to young learners). *Voices of English Language Education Society*, 7(1), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v7i1.12403>
- Baier-Mosch, F., & Kunter, M. (2024). Pre-service teachers' knowledge about classroom management from university studies and own schooling experiences—content and effects of their activation. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1365005. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1365005>
- Dzormeku, C. S., Veermans, K., & McMullen, J. (2024). Linguistic challenges of pre-service teachers in English medium instruction and its relationship to their teaching self-efficacy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 146, 104632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104632>
- Emylyana, & Upa, Y. (2025). Professional identity construction: EFL pre-service teachers' challenges in doing teaching practicum at public primary schools. *Teaching English and Language Learning English Journal*, 5(2), 232–249. <https://doi.org/10.36085/telle.v5i2.8598>
- Franklin, H., & Harrington, I. (2019). A review into effective classroom management and strategies for student engagement: Teacher and student roles in today's classrooms. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(12), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i12.4491>
- Hasymi, M., & Nurkamto, J. (2023). Cross-cultural experiences in teacher education: Indonesian pre-service English teachers' perspectives on international teaching practicum. *Voices of English Language Education Society*, 7(3), 614–626. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v7i3.24115>
- Ibrahim, M. S., Ahmed, N., & Mohammed, M. H. (2025). Exploring classroom management challenges and strategies among EFL school pre-service teachers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 8(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v8i1.12734>
- Islahuddin, M. (2023). Teaching English to young learners: A literature review. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(10), 500. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v10i10.5127>
- Judijanto, L. (2026). Core pedagogical principles for teaching English to young learners: A review. *Global Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.20448/gjelt.v6i1.7976>
- Kabilan, M. K. (2013). A phenomenological study of an international teaching practicum: Pre-service teachers' experiences of professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 36, 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.07.013>
- Mulyani, M., Gunawan, M. H., & Kusuma, I. P. I. (2022). Identifying teacher professional identity in the content of pre-service teachers' reflection on teacher's teaching practicum. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 8(1), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.25134/iefj.v8i1.5584>
- Nketsia, W., & Carroll, K. (2023). Foreign language pre-service teachers' perceptions of concerns before and challenges experienced during the first teaching practicum. *Heliyon*, 9(7), e18370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e18370>

-
- Pravitasari, H., Yanto, E. S., & Fatihah, I. N. K. (2025). Emotional experiences and identity construction of pre-service English teachers during teaching practicum in Indonesia. *Journal of English and Education*, 11(1), 68–87. <https://doi.org/10.20885/jee.v11i1.40130>
- Purwanti, E., & Vania, G. (2021). Classroom management: Applying appropriate strategies to enhance effective teaching. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.v6i1.10638>
- Sahin, D., & Yavuz, M. A. (2025). Fostering effective vocabulary retention among primary school students: A case study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1594620. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1594620>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books.
- Serliana, A., Utami, P. P., & Kamil, A. B. (2021). Pre-service teachers' challenges in classroom management during teaching practice. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(2), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v9i2.2075>
- Shofia, A., Suryani, F. B., & Rismiyanto. (2026). A narrative study of Indonesian pre-service teachers' experiences in teaching internship in Thailand. *Sosioedukasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan dan Sosial*, 15(2), 2531–2538. <https://doi.org/10.36526/sosioedukasi.v15i2.8420>
- Suryanto, S., & Brawijaya, A. (2024). Exploring elementary school English teachers' voices in gaining students' attention in learning. *Journal of English and Education*, 10(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.20885/jee.v10i1.33714>
- Zapatero-Ayuso, J.-A., Díaz-Carretero, A., Gil-García, M.-I., & Gil-Madrona, P. (2026). Competence development of pre-service teachers during practicum: A qualitative study from the perspective of its protagonists. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 15(1), Article 11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44322-026-00057-0>
- Zein, S. (2017). The pedagogy of teaching English to young learners: Implications for teacher education. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 12(1), 61–77. <https://doi.org/10.25170/ijelt.v12i1.1469>