

# Pre-Service Experiences and Performance of Southeast Asian Student Teachers in the SEA Teacher Project

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**Abstract**—With transnational education becoming more relevant as ASEAN seeks to become an integrated community, the SEA Teacher Project seeks to provide opportunities for Southeast Asian student teachers to learn the best practices in the teaching-learning process in the region. This quantitative and qualitative study sought to determine the pre-service teaching experiences and performance of 52 Southeast Asian student teachers who participated in the said project of SEAMEO. Data were gathered through self-reports, observation, in-depth interviews, and evaluation reports. Salient findings of the study show that various tasks were assigned to the student teachers during the three phases of the project. The most challenging experiences they had during the said phases are adjusting to cultural barriers of the host country (observation), difficulty among students to follow instructions due to language barrier (teaching assistantship), and preparation of lesson plan using the host school's format (teaching period). Moreover, most of the student teachers were rated by their cooperating teachers or mentors as proficient in terms of their level of competence in the areas of content and organization of instruction and strategies and skills for effective instruction. The main strength of the student teachers is their ability to understand the subject matter by making it a point to study the lesson given to them while improving their grasp of English as the medium of instruction is considered the primary area that needs to be enhanced. With these findings, it is recommended that the SEA Teacher Project be extended from one to two months to provide ample time for the student teachers to undergo pre-service training and they should also undergo stringent orientation on their host country's educational system before they commence their training.

*Keywords:* pre-service training, student exchange, transnational education, internationalization

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-service training is one of the most important components of a teacher education curriculum as it paves the way for student teachers to become qualified professional teachers in the future [1].

To emphasize this contention, the SEA Teacher Project was launched by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) to provide opportunity for pre-service student teachers from universities in the Southeast Asian region to have teaching experiences (practicum) in schools in neighboring countries in the region.

Revitalizing education is the priority area of the eleven SEAMEO member-countries which aims for collaborative effort to improve the quality of education in the region by building and strengthening the capacity of teachers. The objectives are the following: to enable pre-service student teachers to develop their teaching skills and pedagogy; to encourage the pre-service student teachers to practice their English skills; and to

allow the pre-service student teachers to gain a broader regional and world view. [2]

These competencies that need to be achieved are in alignment with the results of the survey conducted by SEAMEO INNOTECH, wherein four attributes of a competent teacher in Southeast Asia were identified, namely: pedagogical skills, student performance assessment skills, classroom management skills and professional development skills [3].

The project has four phases- first week focuses on orientation and class observation; the participants perform their function as teaching assistants in the second week; they have their practice teaching in the third week, and the fourth and last week is utilized for reflection and preparation of reports on best practices and lessons learned [4].

Indeed, a successful pre-service teaching experience is the foundation of pre-service preparation [5]. Teaching internship experience provides a controlled learning situation to prospective teachers wherein they

can put into action the principles and methods they have acquired in their teacher education program [6]. Thus, teacher training institutions must produce globally competitive graduates ready for the challenge in becoming the next generation of excellent educators [7].

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study explored the pre-service experiences and performance of Southeast Asian student teachers in the SEA Teacher Project. Specifically, this study aimed to: (1) identify the tasks assigned to them in the observation, teaching assistance, and practice teaching phases of student teaching, (2) determine the challenges they encountered during the said phases; (3) determine their level of competence in the areas of content and organization of instruction and on strategies and skills for effective instruction; and lastly (4) to identify the strengths and areas of improvement in their student teaching.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods of research. The descriptive-phenomenological approach was utilized to analyze the experiences of the participants during their pre-service teaching in their host schools. The quantitative part of the study was anchored on the determine the level of competence of the student teachers in the areas of content and organization of instruction and on strategies and skills for effective instruction

#### **Participants**

Fifty-two (52) Southeast Asian student teachers who participated in the SEA Teacher Project for the School Year 2017-2018 participated in this study. Accordingly, there were twenty-eight (28) Filipinos, twenty-two (22) Indonesians, and two (2) Thais who were assigned at Pangasinan State University in the Philippines; Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Phranakhon Si Ayuthaya Rajabhat University, Surrathani Rajabhat University, Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University in Thailand; and Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta,

Universitas Lampung Mangkurat, Universitas Lampung, and Universitas Borneo Tarakan in Indonesia. As the exchange program prefers college juniors and seniors, the participants in the study are 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> teacher education students specializing in Mathematics, Science, English, Social Studies, and pre-elementary education.

#### **Instruments and Procedures**

Self-reports, in-depth interview, and observation were employed to determine their assigned tasks while interview and observation were also used with regards to the inquiry on the challenges they encountered. Evaluation reports by their cooperating teachers were gathered to determine their level of competence and for additional data on their strengths and areas of improvement.

The level of competence of the student teachers was based on the assessment scale of the evaluation form of SEAMEO as follows: 4-Advance/consistently exceeds expectations; 3- Proficient/consistently meets expectations; 2-Basic/Partially meets expectations; 1-Needs Improvement/Needs focused attention. In identifying the student teachers' strengths in content and organization of instruction and on their strategies and skills for effective instruction; and areas of improvement, the comments made by the cooperating teacher in the said evaluation form were utilized.

#### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency and percentage distribution while the qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed to determine the themes in the responses of the student teachers with regards to their pre-service experiences.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Assigned tasks during the different phases of the project**

In the interview conducted by the researcher, the participants revealed that the allocated period for the different phases of the student teaching mostly depends on the scheduling scheme of their host school. Most of them said that they were not able to follow the prescribed one week per phase schedule

due to some conflicts with the activities of their host schools. Nevertheless, most of the participants stated that they and their receiving schools adjusted to meet the necessary number of hours in each phase. This is in keeping with the regulations in the project period.

Observation serves as the phase wherein the student teachers were able to determine the similarities and differences of the curricula of their host and home schools. A review of the self-reports of the participants reveals that it was the first time for most participants to review the curricula of the educational system of their host country.

During the observation period, the participants revealed through a series of interview that the following were the main tasks that they were able to accomplish: determine the classroom management practices used by the cooperating teachers; observe the teaching-learning process in the host school and compare it with the process in their own schools; determine the classroom management practices used by the cooperating teachers; and observe how the students interact with each other during classroom activities. Their self-reports would show that the participants' placed emphasis on knowing how important it is for them to acquire a great deal of understanding of how the classroom process in their host school works as their performance in the succeeding weeks will be affected by how well do they achieve this understanding.

Moreover, the participants' teaching assistantship focused on the following tasks: facilitate classroom activities; prepare instructional materials; administer quizzes; record quizzes, seatworks and assignments; and check the attendance of students. During the interview, most of the participants disclosed the apprehensions they felt during the second week in facilitating classroom activities as they had a very limited time in familiarizing themselves on the classroom process of their host schools. Nevertheless, the participants said that their teaching assistantship provided them with ideas on what classroom activities were suited to a particular lesson.

Furthermore, the practice teaching period- which is considered by all of the participants as the most stressful yet most

fulfilling week of the project- provided them with opportunities to conduct the following tasks: prepare and implement the lesson plan for the demonstration teaching; prepare the instructional materials for the demonstration teaching; develop and administer an assessment tool to evaluate students' performance; discuss with the cooperating teacher the lesson plan for the demonstration teaching; and facilitate classroom activities.

The participants disclosed that it was during this period that a close interaction with their cooperating teachers was very much evident. SEAMEO highlights the importance of the role of the mentor to provide assistance to practice teachers for them to have an opportunity to improve and learn from their teaching experiences [8].

### **Challenges encountered during different periods**

Despite of the shared culture and similarities in the educational systems in Southeast Asia, challenges were still encountered by the participants during the different periods of the project. Adding to this is the fact that it was the first time for all of the participants to stay in their host countries for a longer period of time.

During the observation period, the participants discussed that adjusting to cultural barriers particularly in the use of the medium of instruction in the host country was the biggest challenge they had. Some said that it was specifically a struggle for them to understand words uttered in the classroom during discussions using the vernacular. Their self-reports show that tendency for the cooperating teachers and students to use the vernacular during classroom discussions was often manifested.

In addition, the participants also stated that they had trouble understanding the curriculum of host schools notwithstanding the similarities they have observed during the first week. This was also an observation in a study conducted by Sujadi wherein it was noted that the lack of knowledge about the curriculum in the destination country caused difficulty to the student teachers in the preparation of lesson plans that match with the school curriculum [9].

Understanding the content of the subjects taught by the cooperating teacher also posed a challenge to some of the participants.

The period of teaching assistantship also provided the participants with a bevy of issues, chief among which was their experience of difficulty in providing instructions to students due to the language barrier. This problem also emerged as they evaluated the papers of the students. Data from self-reports on this matter show that some students employ words in their works using their native language despite of the fact that the instruction was for them to answer in English.

The participants resolved this by simply asking the assistance of their cooperating teacher. This shows the importance for the student teachers to coordinate regularly with their cooperating teacher. Additionally, some of the participants also disclosed that they were also strained in understanding the flow of activities in the host of school's teaching-learning process. This finding would only show that even Southeast Asian schools have vast differences in how classes are conducted. The lack of time in facilitating classroom activities was also noted by the participants. This could be due to the fact that the number of minutes spent per meeting in their host school is lesser than what they utilize in their home schools, as reported by one of the participants from Indonesia.

Lastly, the study also identified the challenges encountered by the participants during the teaching period. All are almost in agreement that preparing the lesson plan using the host school's format was the toughest task that they faced. This is very much a consequence of the fact that, as revealed by some participants, there is a lack of orientation of their sending school on the educational system in general and curricular process in particular of the country where they will be assigned. A Thai and a Filipino participant declared that one week of observation is not enough for them to comprehend the system of lesson planning in their host school.

The utilization of appropriate strategy or approach in demonstration teaching was also recognized by the participants as one of

their top concerns. This validates the results of the study of Montebon in which most of the pre-service teachers surveyed stated that it is a big concern for them to determine the appropriate methods of instruction to be used to successfully deliver the subject matter [10].

The struggle of students in responding to questions or following instructions in English was also pinpointed by the participants as among the most frequent challenges they faced. This is very much evident in the reports of the Filipino participants who spent time in other Southeast Asian countries. Lack of time was again cited by the participants as problem as they prepared their lesson for demonstration teaching. An average of two days were employed by most of the participants in preparing the said lesson, as evidenced by the data they entered in their self-reports. Also, some of the participants have listed the following as challenges in their student teaching phase: difficulty in understanding the classroom assessment scheme of the host school; and catching the attention of students through relevant and effective motivation strategies.

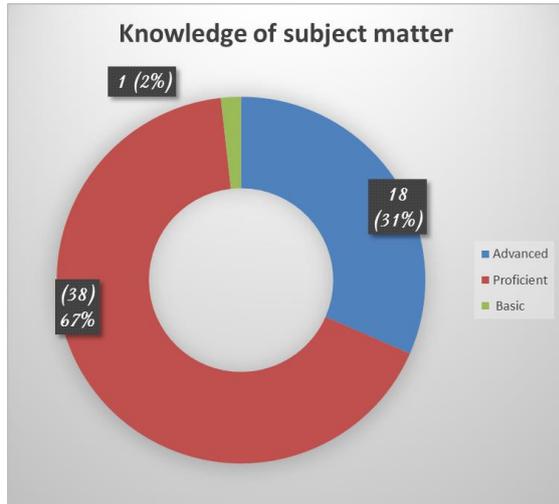
#### **Level of competence of the student teachers**

The cooperating teachers or mentors evaluated the level of competence of the student teachers using the SEAMEO format in the following areas: content and organization of instruction and strategies and skills for effective instruction.

#### ***Content and organization of instruction***

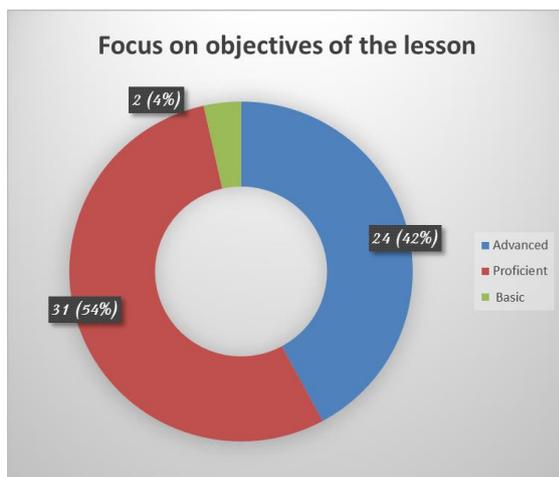
Figure 1 underlines the level of competence of the participants in the area of content and organization of instruction in terms of knowledge of subject matter. Indeed, strong content knowledge is important in one's learning to teach [11]. Thirty-eight (38) or 67% of the participants were deemed proficient while 18 (31%) were rated as advanced. Only one (1) was rated as possessing basic competence. Knowledge of subject matter is described as having the knowledge of the subject matter, understanding the central concepts, tools of inquiry, structure of the discipline/s he teaches.

Figure 1



With regards to the focus on the objectives of the lesson as presented in Figure 2, 31 (54%) of the student teachers were rated as proficient while 24 (42%) were assessed as advanced and two (4%) received a rating of “basic.” This area is described as the ability of the student teacher to organize and plan systematic instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, pupils, and curriculum goals. The findings substantiate the study of Vecaldo et al., in which the pre-service teachers assessed were rated highly in terms of “setting of appropriate learning goals” that shows that they have clearly define their lesson objectives that give sense of direction in the teaching-learning process [12].

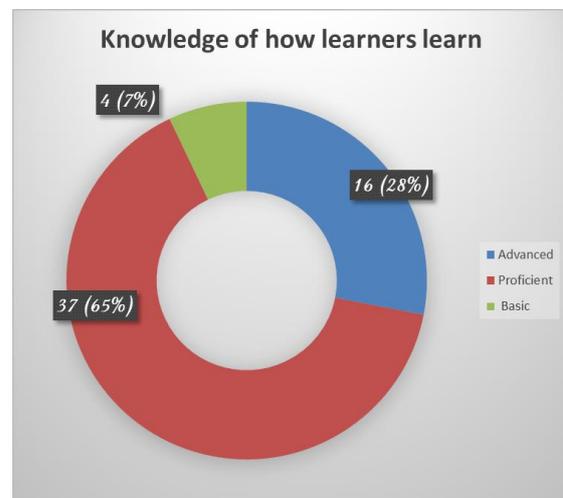
Figure 2



Further, in terms of the knowledge of how learners learn, 37 (65%) were deemed proficient while 16 or 28% had a rating of advanced. Four (4) or 7% were considered as manifesting basic competence as illustrated in Figure 3.

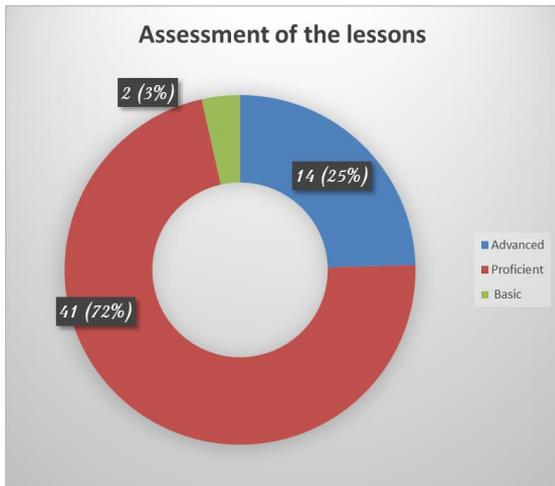
Adapting instructions to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities and understanding how the learners differ in their approaches to learning and the barriers that impede learning were the indicators of this area.

Figure 3



Focusing on how student teachers understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner, an overwhelming number of student teachers were rated as proficient (41 or 72%) while 14 or 25% were considered as advanced. Two (2) or 3% were appraised as possessing basic skills in assessment of lessons as presented in Figure 4.

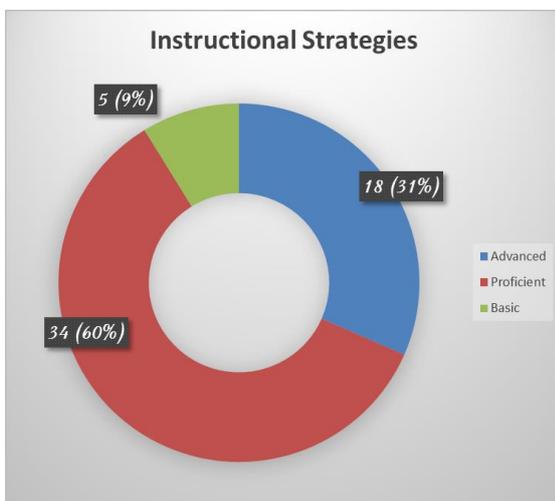
Figure 4



**Strategies and skills for effective instruction**

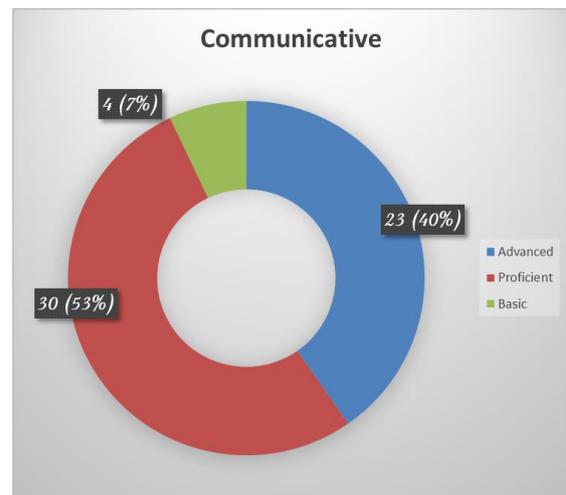
In terms of instructional strategies, Figure 5 shows that 34 or 60% of the students teachers were rated as proficient while 18 or 31% were appraised as advanced. Five or 9% were given the rating of basic. The indicator for this area focuses on the utilization of a variety of instructional strategies, including the use of technology, to encourage learners’ development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

Figure 5



For the communicative component, the findings as presented in Figure 6, show that 30 or 53% were rated as proficient while 23 or 40% were found to be advanced and 4 or 7% were appraised as basic. The use of effective verbal and non-verbal communication techniques as well as instructional media and technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom was the indicator in this area.

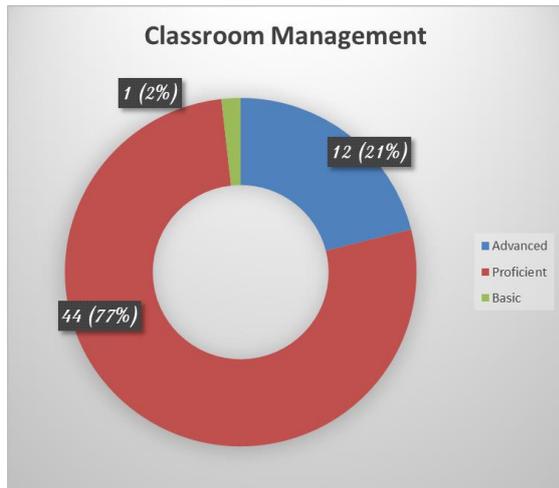
Figure 6



Furthermore, an overwhelming number of the student teachers (44 or 77%) were found to be proficient in classroom management. Twelve or 21% garnered advanced ratings while one (2%) was deemed to have basic classroom management skills.

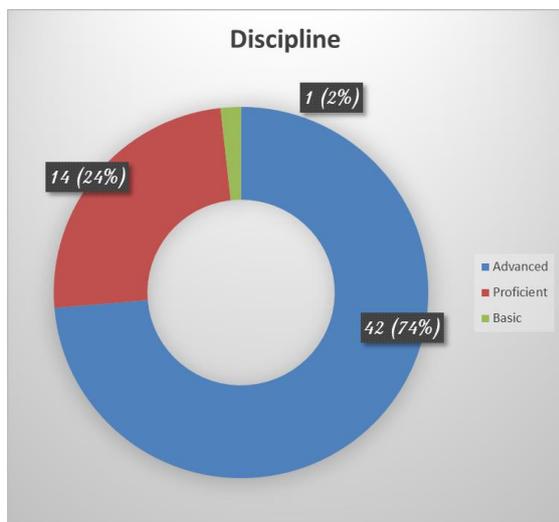
In this area, which is illustrated in Figure 7, the student teachers’ manifestation of understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation; and ability to organize time and resources into a learning environment that enable learners to learn in an equitable way were evaluated by their cooperating teachers.

Figure 7



In the area of discipline as shown on Figure 8, forty-two (42) or 74% were assessed as advanced, 14 or 24% were deemed proficient while 1 or 2% was considered as basic. Attention to learners' misbehavior in a positive manner and promotion of self-esteem, responsibility and mutual respect were considered in the evaluation of the student teachers.

Figure 8



**Strengths of the student teachers**

Based on the comments given by the cooperating teachers, the following were

identified as the strengths of the student teachers in terms of content and organization of instruction and in strategies and skills for effective instruction: understanding of the subject matter by making sure that they studied the lesson given to them for their demonstration teaching; commendable preparation of instructional materials and teaching aids; proper conduct in the classroom which manifests professionalism; very satisfactory organization of the demonstration lessons; good rapport with the cooperating teachers; and very satisfactory classroom management skills. Certainly, teaching excellence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms belongs to those teachers who have dispositions of being effective and passionate [13].

**Areas of improvement**

The areas that the student teachers need to improve were also identified through a review of the comments provided by the cooperating teachers. According to them, non-Filipino should further improve their English skills as utilized as the medium of instruction; lesson plan using the host school's format should be improved particularly in the area of motivation; student-centered approaches should be improved further; employment of additional collaborative learning activities should also be considered; diversity of learners should be taken into consideration in preparing the lesson plan; clear instructions should be given emphasis; arousing of students' interest to make them pay attention to the lesson should be enhanced; and varied assessment strategies should be utilized.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following are conclusions are made: the student teachers were given tasks which made them understand the teaching-learning process in their host schools; the use of English as the medium of instruction is the main challenge among most participants in the study; and the student teachers are proficient or very satisfactory in their levels competencies.

The following are recommended to improve the SEA Teacher project: the project should be extended from one month to two months to provide ample time for the student participants to undergo pre-service training; student teachers should undergo stringent orientation on the host country's educational system and the host school's curriculum before they will be deployed; IELTS may be required for qualified applicants to test their English proficiency skills; and further research may be conducted to include all SEA Teacher Project participants from other countries in the region.

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