

**EFL STUDENT TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH
IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM IN
THAILAND**

THESIS

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**FACULTY OF TARBIYAH AND TEACHER TRAINING
AR-RANIRY STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY**

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THESIS

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in the Field of Education in English Language Education

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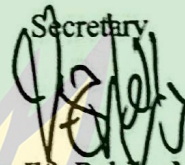
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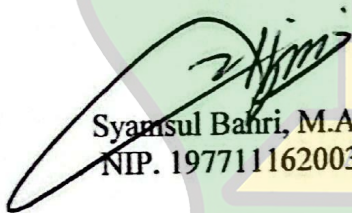
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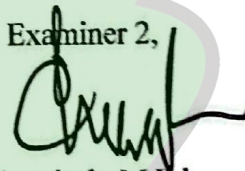
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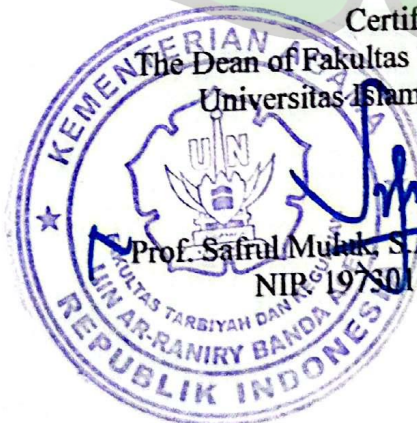
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Hereby declare that in writing this thesis, I:

1. Did not use the ideas of others without being able to develop and be accountable for them;
2. Did not plagiarize the work of others;
3. Did not use others' works without proper citation or permission;
4. Did not manipulate or falsify data;
5. Complete this work independently and fully responsible for it.

If at any point in the future, a party raises a legitimate concern and proves that I have violated this declaration, I am willing to accept the sanctions in accordance with the prevailing regulations of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University Banda Aceh.

This statement is made truthfully and without coercion from any party.

Banda Aceh, 15 August 2025
Declarant,


Putri Rahmasari

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First and foremost, the writer would like to express the highest gratitude to Allah the Almighty for His abundant mercy, guidance, and blessings, which have enabled the writer to complete this thesis. Salutations and peace are also devoted to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, companions, and followers until the end of time.

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ABSTRACT

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Thesis Working : EFL Student Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English in International Community Service Program in Thailand
Supervisor : Rita Hermida, S.Pd.I., M. Pd
Keywords : EFL students, international community service, teaching challenges, teaching strategies

This study explores the challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers from UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh during an international community service program in Thailand. Teaching English in a foreign environment demands not only linguistic ability but also cultural sensitivity, pedagogical flexibility, and emotional endurance. Although international service programs provide valuable cross-cultural and professional experiences, they also confront participants with complex obstacles that require adaptive strategies. This research employed a qualitative case study involving six purposively selected participants. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to capture the depth of their experiences. The findings revealed four main categories of challenges: linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and emotional. Linguistic barriers were the most prominent, as Thai students had limited English proficiency while participants lacked mastery of the Thai language, which hindered classroom communication. Pedagogical difficulties arose from adapting to local curricula, inadequate resources, and passive student learning habits. Cultural challenges included differences in classroom behavior, communication styles, and expectations within Thai schools. Emotional struggles emerged in the form of stress, homesickness, and the pressure of rapid adjustment to new environments. Despite these challenges, the participants displayed resilience by adopting multiple coping strategies. They used translation applications, visual aids, and non-verbal communication to overcome language barriers. They also adjusted lesson plans, incorporated culturally relevant materials, and sought guidance from mentor teachers. To manage emotions, they practiced self-reflection, peer support, and relaxation activities. These strategies highlight their ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical adaptation in international teaching contexts.

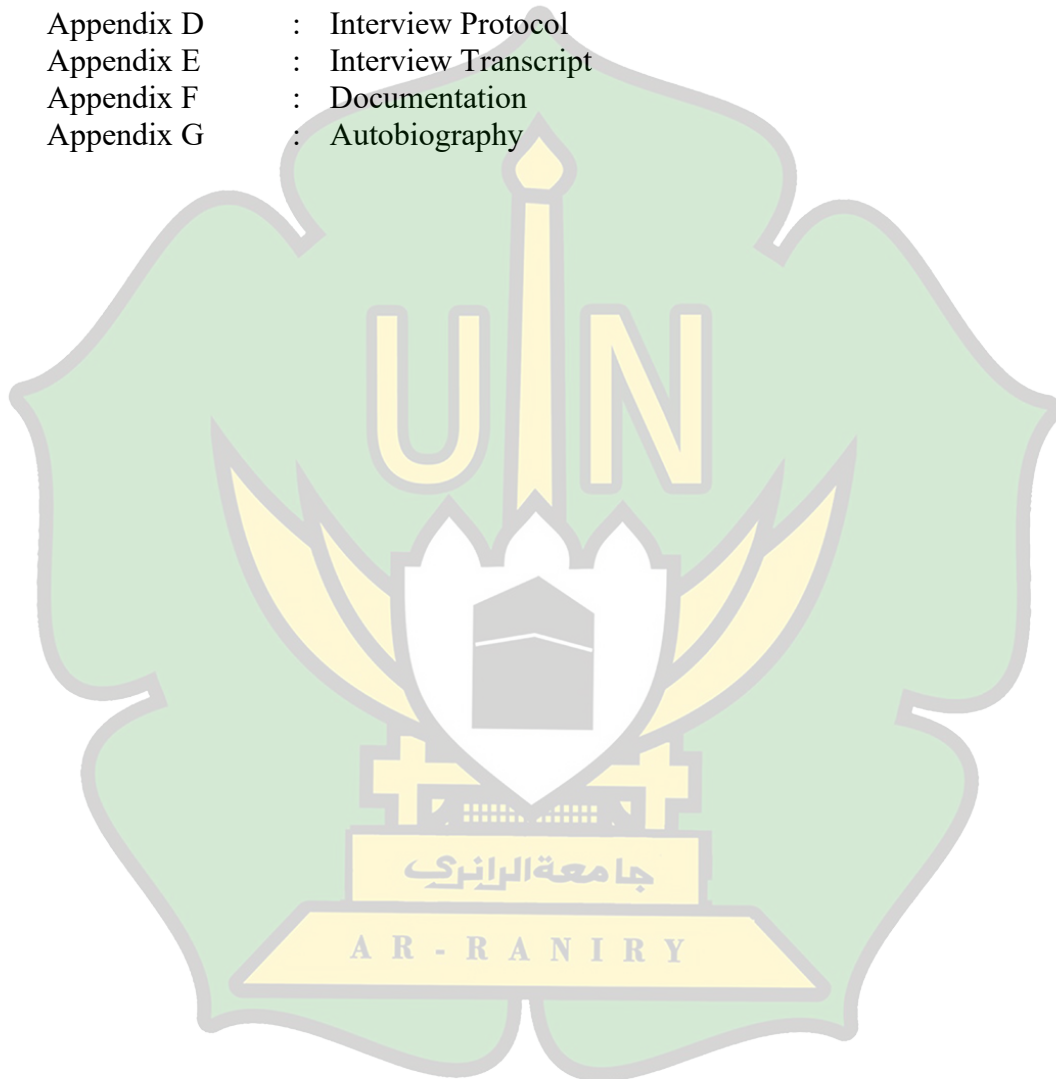
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has become increasingly significant in the globalized world, where English functions as a lingua franca for communication, education, and business. Countries like Thailand have incorporated English education into their national curriculum, reflecting its role in international competitiveness (Kirkpatrick, 2012). However, despite this emphasis, English proficiency in Thailand remains relatively low compared to neighboring Southeast Asian countries. This discrepancy highlights the challenges faced by educators in non-native English-speaking environments.

English has emerged as a dominant global language, influencing various domains of life worldwide. Non-English-speaking countries, particularly in Asia, have adopted English as a crucial skill for their citizens to engage in international opportunities. In the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), English proficiency is essential for cross-border collaboration and mobility (Baker, 2015). As a result, educational institutions across the region, including Thailand, prioritize English learning. Nevertheless, there are gaps in effective teaching methodologies and teacher preparedness, especially among non-native English-speaking teachers.

In this study, the participants are EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, which refers to learners who study English in a context where it is not the primary means of daily communication. Unlike ESL (English as a Second Language)

students who live in environments where English is widely spoken, EFL students, such as those in Indonesia, learn English mainly in classroom settings and have limited opportunities to use it in real-life situations. This condition often presents specific linguistic and pedagogical challenges when they are required to teach English abroad.

International service programs have gained popularity among universities as platforms for cross-cultural engagement and professional development. These programs allow students to gain real-world teaching experiences in diverse educational contexts, often challenging their adaptability and teaching skills (Tarry, 2011). For English language education majors, participating in such programs, particularly in countries with distinct cultural and linguistic barriers like Thailand, provides invaluable opportunities to understand the complexities of TEFL. However, these programs also expose students to significant challenges, such as language barriers, classroom management issues, and cultural differences.

Specifically, at UIN Ar-Raniry, the International Community Service Program (PPKPM) is a special program organized by the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training under the supervision of the Instructional Development Center (IDC). This program provides students with opportunities to engage in community service and cross-cultural teaching experiences abroad, particularly in countries such as Thailand. The program not only aims to strengthen students' teaching competencies but also to foster global awareness, intercultural communication, and reflective professional development.

Teaching English in Thailand presents unique challenges due to linguistic, cultural, and systemic factors. The Thai language's tonal nature and different grammatical structures often create learning difficulties for Thai students, while cultural norms emphasizing rote learning may limit the adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) methods (Noom-ura, 2013). Moreover, international teaching participants, including university students, often face difficulties in adjusting to these cultural and pedagogical differences. Understanding these challenges is crucial to preparing future educators for teaching in diverse contexts.

Student teachers, particularly those majoring in English education, often encounter multiple hurdles during their initial teaching experiences. They may struggle with classroom management, lesson planning, and adapting to unfamiliar educational settings. According to Richards and Farrell (2011), novice teachers face a steep learning curve as they transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application. In international service programs, these challenges are exacerbated by cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity, placing additional pressure on student teachers.

In the context of Thailand, student teachers participating in international service programs must navigate specific challenges. These include addressing Thai students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom, overcoming cultural norms that discourage active participation, and adapting to Thailand's hierarchical educational structure (Foley, 2005). Additionally, student teachers must often develop innovative strategies to engage learners and make language lessons relevant and interactive despite these constraints.

The experiences of student teachers in international service programs offer valuable insights for English language education curricula. By understanding the challenges faced during these programs, universities can better prepare students for the realities of teaching English in diverse contexts. Incorporating cross-cultural training, classroom management strategies, and exposure to various teaching methodologies into teacher education programs can enhance student readiness (Harmer, 2007). This preparation is essential for equipping future educators to thrive in international teaching environments.

Although existing studies have explored the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language, few have specifically examined the experiences of student teachers during international service programs in Southeast Asia. Most research focuses on the perspectives of in-service teachers or general teaching challenges, leaving a gap in understanding the unique difficulties faced by novice educators (Wichadee, 2011). This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on English education students' experiences in Thailand, providing insights into their struggles and strategies for overcoming them.

This research aims to explore the challenges faced by EFL students during an international service program in Thailand. By examining their experiences, this study aims to identify the key difficulties encountered and the coping mechanisms employed. The findings will contribute to improving teacher training programs, enhancing students' preparedness for teaching in diverse and challenging contexts.

The outcomes of this study are expected to benefit multiple stakeholders, including student teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers. For student

teachers, the research will provide practical insights into overcoming challenges in international teaching contexts. For teacher education programs, the findings will offer recommendations for curriculum improvement to better prepare future educators.

B. Research Questions

Based on the explanation above, the researcher outlined the problems formulation as follows:

1. What are the primary challenges faced by EFL students in teaching English during their international service program in Thailand?
2. What strategies do EFL students apply to overcome challenges in teaching English during the program?

C. Research Aims

From the formulation of the problem above, the researcher has the following research objectives:

1. To identify the primary challenges faced by EFL students in teaching English during the international community service program in Thailand.
2. To analyze the strategies employed by the students to overcome these challenges and adapt to the teaching environment.

D. Significance of The Study

This study offers both academic and practical contributions in understanding the challenges faced by EFL students in teaching English in international service program in Thailand.

1. Academic Contribute: The research provides valuable insights into the difficulties students encountered when teaching English in a cross-cultural and multilingual context. By identifying these challenges, the findings can enrich the literature on international teaching experiences and contribute to the field of English Language Education, particularly in preparing pre-service teachers for global teaching assignments.
2. Practical Contribute: On a practical level, this study benefits institutions, educators, and students by highlighting the areas that require attention in preparing for international teaching programs. The findings can guide curriculum designers to incorporate training modules that address cultural adaptation, teaching methodologies, and classroom management in diverse environments. Additionally, it may suggest practical strategies or tools, such as the use of multimedia, to support students in overcoming teaching challenges and improving their teaching effectiveness in international settings.

E. Terminology

To avoid misunderstanding of this study, there are some terms in the title of this research:

1. Challenges

Challenges in this context refer to the obstacles or difficulties encountered by students in performing teaching-related tasks. These may include language barriers, cultural differences, classroom management, instructional delivery, or adapting to unfamiliar educational settings (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

Challenges in this study refer specifically to the multifaceted obstacles experienced by EFL students from the English Language Education Department during their participation in an international community service program in Thailand. These challenges are categorized into four main areas: linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and emotional. Linguistic challenges involve difficulties in communicating due to language differences between the student teachers and Thai learners. Pedagogical challenges include issues in adjusting teaching strategies, lesson planning, and instructional delivery in an unfamiliar educational context. Cultural challenges arise from differences in classroom norms, student behavior, and sociocultural expectations. Emotional challenges refer to psychological stress, homesickness, and anxiety experienced due to the new and unfamiliar environment. These challenges are explored in depth to understand how they affect teaching effectiveness and the student teachers' overall experience.

2. International Service Program

This refers to a program where students are sent abroad, usually as part of a university initiative, to provide educational or community services in a foreign country. It often involves adapting to new cultural and linguistic environments while fulfilling assigned responsibilities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

3. EFL Students

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students refer to learners who study English in a country where English is not the primary medium of communication. In this study, EFL students are those from the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry, who primarily learn English in formal classroom settings with limited opportunities for real-life practice. Their status as EFL students influences the types of linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural challenges they face when teaching English abroad, particularly in Thailand.

