

Reimagining Elementary School Teacher Preparation: Pedagogical Transformation Through International Mobility ExperiencesPutri Rachmadyanti¹, Dwi Agus Setiawan², Zetti Finali³, Ulhaq Zuhdi⁴¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya²Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang³Universitas Negeri Jember⁴Universitas Negeri SurabayaEmail: putrirachmadyanti@unesa.ac.id, setiawan@unikama.ac.id, zetti.fkip@unej.ac.id, ulhaqzuhdi@unesa.ac.id**Abstract**

International student mobility programs as a platform for enhancing teacher education globally is on the rise. This research examines how engaging in an international student mobility program supports the creation of pedagogical competence in future elementary school educators. This research used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore participants' lived experiences. Seven students from an Elementary Education Unesa program participated in a short-term international mobility program in 2025. The data was created from semi-structured interviews, which were thematically analyzed. The results find five interrelated themes: (1) student exposure to interactive and practice-oriented learning; (2) students' transformation of their understanding of the teacher as facilitator and character educator; (3) development of instructional strategies and digital pedagogical competence including the integration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in teaching; (4) reflective and adaptive awareness developed through cross-cultural comparison; (5) enhanced professionalism and self-confidence. The experience of participating in an international mobility program served as an experiential catalyst that shifted participants' pedagogical perspectives from being primarily theoretical to reflective and context-responsive. The findings emphasize the need for international and well-organized mobility experiences as a way to prepare prospective teacher students for dynamic and globally inspired educational settings.

Keywords: International Student Mobility; Pedagogical Competence; Pre-Service; Elementary School Teachers; Teacher Education**Introduction**

The International Student Mobility Program is a form of implementation of the internationalization of higher education which aims to expand academic horizons, cross-cultural experiences, and improve the quality of student competencies. Elementary School Teacher Education students, the experience of studying abroad not only enriches a global perspective, but also has the potential to strengthen pedagogic competence as a prospective elementary school teacher. As is known, the internationalization of higher education is one of the strategic agendas in improving the quality and competitiveness of graduates in the global era. Universities are encouraged to not only produce academically competent graduates, but also have a global perspective, adaptive abilities, and professional readiness in the face of the dynamics of 21st-century education. One form of implementation of internationalization is the international student mobility program, which provides students with the opportunity to participate in cross-border academic experiences within a certain period of time. Such experiences are essential to encourage transformative learning, enabling prospective teacher students to critically evaluate their own pedagogical approaches and integrate culturally responsive new strategies into their future teaching (Vatalaro et al., 2015).

In the context of students of the Unesa Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program who participated in the international mobility program at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia, the experience presented learning dynamics that were interactive, collaborative, and practice-based. Of course, international mobility programs have significant relevance. Prospective elementary school teachers are required to have comprehensive pedagogic competencies, including the ability to design learning, implement strategies that suit the characteristics of students, manage classes, conduct assessments, and utilize technology in the learning process. At the elementary school level, the role of teachers is not only as a material presenter, but also as a facilitator, guide, and character educator. These programs offer a unique opportunity for future educators to immerse themselves in diverse educational settings, observe varied teaching methodologies, and develop a more nuanced understanding of global educational practices (Kaçar, 2021). Therefore, the development of pedagogic competencies is not enough only through theoretical learning in the classroom, but requires contextual and reflective experiences that enrich students' professional perspectives.

The international student mobility program offers an alternative learning space that has the potential to expand students' pedagogical horizons. In particular, these cross-cultural experiences were instrumental in changing their perceptions and attitudes towards multiculturalism, preparing them to engage effectively with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Schäfer, 2026). The increasing globalization of education requires prospective teachers to cultivate intercultural understanding and competence, which is becoming an increasingly important component of their professional development (Su et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant given the increasing diversity in contemporary school classrooms, which demands teachers to have a broader cultural perspective beyond a purely local perspective (Walkington, 2015). In this context, international teaching practicum is invaluable because it enhances the confidence and adaptability of prospective teachers in unfamiliar cultural settings, encouraging the development of a globally informed and culturally responsive curriculum (Knight & Knight, 2006). In addition, involvement in such programs can lead to deep personal growth, academic enrichment, and the acquisition of global competencies that go beyond pedagogical skills alone (Sempewo et al., 2026). This international experience is critical to nurturing a generation of educators who are ready to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, as it provides real-world opportunities to work with diverse populations and education systems (Nunez & Cruz, 2026). This transformative learning environment allows pre-service teachers to not only improve their professional competencies, such as classroom management, but also to develop a more interconnected worldview (Mubiru, 2021). This broader perspective allows them to critically analyze how knowledge is influenced by culture and context, thus encouraging the development of culturally relevant teaching practices and reducing ethnocentrism (Freed et al., 2019).

However, the study of student mobility in teacher education is still dominated by discussions about improving global insight, language competence, or participant satisfaction with the program. Research that specifically explores how the experience of international mobility contributes to the transformation of pedagogic competencies of prospective primary school teachers is still relatively limited, especially with a phenomenological approach that focuses on participants' lived experiences. In addition, there has not been much research that examines how students interpret changes in understanding the role of teachers, develop innovative learning strategies, and adapt foreign practices into the context of Indonesian education.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore the pedagogic transformation experiences of prospective elementary school teacher students participating in international mobility programs, as well as identify the contribution of these experiences to the development of pedagogic competencies and the formation of their professional identity. By using a phenomenological approach, this research is expected to make an empirical and conceptual contribution to the development of a more targeted student mobility program in supporting the improvement of the quality of education of elementary school teachers in Indonesia.

Method

This study uses a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore participants' life experiences during student mobility programs and how these experiences shape their pedagogical competencies. Phenomenology was chosen to capture the essence of the participants' reflective meanings regarding their academic and professional growth as prospective teachers in elementary schools. Participants consisted of seven students from the Elementary School Teacher Education Program of the Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Unesa) class of 2023 who participated in the International Student Mobility Program for two weeks at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Malaysia, in November-December 2025. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide includes the participant's understanding of student mobility, pedagogic experience, reflection on pedagogic competency development. All interviews are transcribed verbatim before being analyzed.

The data analysis in this study uses thematic analysis techniques, which focus on identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) in qualitative data (Gaston et al., 2026). The analysis process begins with a familiarization stage through repeated reading of interview transcripts to understand the overall experience of the participants. Next, initial coding of the units of meaning relevant to the focus of the research is carried out, then the codes are grouped into more conceptual categories. From the process, the researcher develops and reviews the main themes to ensure internal coherence and differences between themes. The final stage in the form of defining and naming themes is carried out to produce an interpretation that represents the pedagogical transformation experience of prospective elementary school teachers in the international mobility program. This approach allows for a systematic and reflective analysis of the meaning of the participants' experiences. The validity of the data in this study is maintained by applying the principle of trustworthiness within the framework of thematic analysis. Credibility is carried out through member checking, which is by reconfirming the summary of the interview results and the interpretation of the theme to the participants to ensure the suitability of the meaning with the experience they convey. In addition, the researcher conducted repeated readings and

reviews of codes and themes to ensure internal consistency and coherence between the data. Transferability is strengthened through the presentation of detailed contextual descriptions of the mobility program setting and participant characteristics. Dependability and confirmability are maintained by documenting the entire analysis process, starting from the initial coding stage, categorization, to the formation of the final theme in the form of a matrix and thematic table, so that the resulting interpretation can be traced back to empirical data in a transparent and systematic manner.

Result and Discussion

The analysis of interview data on seven participants produced a number of essential meanings that reflect the experience of pedagogic transformation during the international student mobility program. Through the process of open coding, categorization, and grouping of themes, consistent patterns of experience were found among participants despite the different backgrounds and experiences of individuals. In general, participants interpreted the mobility program as a learning space that not only broadens academic horizons, but also encourages deep reflection on pedagogic practices that they have been understanding.

The thematic analysis process identified five main interrelated themes, namely: (1) interactive and practice-based learning, (2) transformation of understanding of the role of teachers, (3) development of learning strategies and technology integration, (4) reflective and adaptive awareness in cross-cultural contexts, and (5) increased professional confidence. These themes show that the experience of international mobility contributes to the strengthening of pedagogic competence holistically. Details of the results of coding, theme grouping, and interpretation of meaning are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Student Mobility Experiences in Developing Pedagogical Competence

Initial Coding (Meaning Units)	Sub-Theme	Main Theme	Interpretation
Practice-based and simulation-based learning	Experiential learning exposure	Interactive and Practice-Based Learning	Student mobility exposes participants to experiential pedagogy that emphasizes active engagement and contextual learning rather than lecture-centered instruction.
Active group discussions and presentations	Collaborative learning	Interactive Learning and Practice-Based	Collaborative academic culture strengthens communicative competence and peer-learning orientation.
Role-play Counseling	Pedagogical simulation	Interactive and Practice-Based Learning	Simulation activities enhance applied pedagogical understanding and emotional sensitivity toward students.
The use of AI for storytelling	Technology integration	Development of Instructional Strategies and Technology Integration	Exposure to AI-based learning tools expands digital pedagogical competence aligned with 21st-century teaching demands.
Observation of learning in elementary school	Authentic classroom exposure	Strengthened Understanding of the Teacher's Role	Direct observation reshapes participants' perception of teachers as facilitators and character educators.
Teachers as guides and character builders	Role transformation awareness	Strengthened Understanding of the Teacher's Role	Participants internalize a broader professional identity beyond content delivery.
Reflection on the differences in the education system	Reflective comparison	Reflective and Adaptive Pedagogical Awareness	Cross-cultural comparison fosters reflective thinking and critical evaluation of local practices.
Adaptation of the method according to the Indonesian context	Contextual adjustment	Reflective and Adaptive Pedagogical Awareness	Participants demonstrate adaptive competence by filtering and modifying foreign practices.
Increased confidence	Professional confidence growth	Increased Professional Confidence	International exposure strengthens professional identity and communication confidence.
The duration of the program is too short	Program limitation	Structural Limitation of Mobility Program	Short-term mobility provides catalytic impact but limits deeper pedagogical immersion.

The results of the thematic analysis show that the student mobility experience enriches learning through an interactive and practice-based approach. The participants emphasized that the learning process they experienced was more collaborative and applicable than the previous experience. P1 stated, *"There we not only listen to the material, but directly practice and group discussions."* P3 said the same thing, *"Role-play and simulation made me really understand how theory is applied in real situations."* These findings suggest that exposure to experimental learning strengthens pedagogic understanding both contextually and applicatively. The second theme indicates a transformation of understanding of the role of teachers. Observations at partner primary schools provide hands-on experience of humanistic and participatory pedagogic practices. P4 revealed, *"I see teachers guiding and shaping the character of students, not just delivering material."* Meanwhile, P2 stated, *"Teachers invite students to actively ask questions and discuss, so that the class feels more lively."* The statement shows a shift in the perspective of participants from teacher-centered to facilitator-centered orientation.

The development of learning strategies and technology integration are also dominant findings. Several participants highlighted the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in supporting learning creativity. P5 said, *"We are taught to use AI to create compelling storytelling for students."* P6 adds, *"I have become more confident in using technology as part of my teaching strategy."* This indicates the development of digital pedagogic competencies that are relevant to the educational needs of the 21st century. The last theme shows the emergence of reflective awareness and increased professional confidence. Participants realized that foreign practices need to be adapted to the Indonesian context. P7 stated, *"The method I see is very interesting, but it must be adapted to the conditions of schools in Indonesia."* In addition, P1 revealed, *"After participating in this program, I feel more prepared and confident to become a teacher."* Nevertheless, some participants rated the duration of the program relatively short for deepening teaching practices. Overall, these findings suggest that the international mobility experience serves as a catalyst in shaping more reflective, adaptive and professional pedagogic competencies.

Discussion

The following is a critical discussion of the findings in the context of this research, by making an exposure to each main theme.

1. Interactive and Practice-Based Learning: The findings show that the international mobility experience enriches learning through an interactive and practice-based approach. This is in line with the experiential learning theory put forward by Kolb (2015), which emphasizes that effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. Exposure to collaborative discussions, simulations, and role-play allows students to internalize pedagogic concepts more deeply than lecture learning. Thus, international mobility functions as a space of pedagogic praxis that strengthens the applicative dimension of teaching competence (Hamilton & Margot, 2023). Participants consistently described the learning process at UPSI as interactive, collaborative, and practice-oriented. Activities include role-play counseling, project-based assignments, AI-assisted storytelling, language games, and school observations. Learning is not limited to theoretical lectures; Students are actively involved in simulations, group discussions, and product-based outputs. This approach enhances their understanding of experiential learning in primary education. In the context of the education of prospective primary school teachers, experiences such as collaborative discussions, simulations, and real-world observations provide opportunities for students to test and reconstruct their pedagogic understanding (Wibowo et al., 2025). Thus, international mobility acts as an authentic learning space that strengthens the integration between theory and practice (Yi et al., 2023).

However, it is worth criticizing that intensive and short-term interactive experiences do not necessarily guarantee a sustainable pedagogic transformation. Without mechanisms of systematic reflection and follow-up in the context of the home institution, practical experiences risk becoming episodic experiences of temporary impact. In addition, the effectiveness of the interactive approach is also greatly influenced by the learning culture and the readiness of the education system in the environment where students will teach. Therefore, the contribution of international mobility to strengthening practice-based learning needs to be understood as a catalyst for change that requires curricular integration and institutional support to have a deeper and more sustainable impact.

2. Transformation of Teacher Role Understanding: Participants reported a shift in perspective regarding the role of teachers. Teachers are considered not only as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators, mentors, and character builders. Observations at Sri Budiman Primary School significantly influenced this perspective. Practical activities, such as hands-on environmental learning (waste sorting activities), demonstrate the effectiveness of concrete learning in the primary classroom. The transformation of the understanding of the role of teachers from material presenters to facilitators and character builders shows the development of professional identity (Parry & Metzger, 2023). These findings are in line with the pedagogical concept of content knowledge which emphasizes the integration between mastery of the material and meaningful delivery strategies (Cui & Zhang, 2021). The experience of observation and cross-cultural interaction allows students to reconstruct the meaning of the teaching profession in a more humanistic manner. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework emphasizes that teachers' professional competence does not only lie in mastering the material (content knowledge) or teaching strategies (pedagogical knowledge) separately, but in the ability to integrate the two with technological knowledge synergistically (Cui & Zhang, 2021). From TPACK's perspective, effective teachers are able to understand how technology can be used to represent content in a more meaningful way and support learning strategies that suit students' characteristics (Ginting & Linarsih, 2022). This integration is not just the use of digital tools, but the ability to make pedagogic decisions that consider the suitability between learning objectives, methods, and technological media. Therefore, strengthening TPACK is crucial for prospective elementary school teachers in facing the demands of 21st century learning that emphasizes digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability in an ever-evolving learning environment.

However, changes in perception are not always directly proportional to changes in real practices. The formation of teacher identity is a long-term process influenced by repeated experiences and deep reflection (Ibda et al., 2023). However, changes in perception are not always directly proportional to changes in real practices. The formation of teacher identity is a long-term process influenced by repeated experiences and deep reflection

3. Development of Instructional Strategies and Technology Integration: The development of learning strategies and technology integration, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), shows the development of students' digital pedagogic competencies. This is relevant to the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) which emphasizes the simultaneous integration of technology, pedagogy, and content. Exposure to digital innovation broadens students' knowledge of the variety of 21st century learning strategies. This is in line with the results of this research that most participants identified instructional strategies as the most developed aspect of pedagogical competence. They reported improved ability to Design active, student-centered learning, use questioning strategies, integrate Artificial Intelligence tools (e.g., AI-generated storybooks), and also conduct basic counseling simulations. The evolving instructional strategy is not just the addition of new methods, but a change in orientation from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Thus, international mobility contributes to the expansion of the repertoire of teaching strategies that are more contextual and responsive to the characteristics of primary school students.

In addition to learning strategies, the seven participants also highlighted exposure to technology integration, especially the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in media development and learning storytelling. Some participants stated that the experience opened up a new perspective on how technology can be used to enhance creativity and the appeal of learning, rather than just as a presentation tool. They learned that technology can help design materials that are more interactive, personalized, and efficient. This is relevant to previous research that found that a student-centered approach is closely related to the use of technology for research, interaction, gamification, simulation, and feedback (Ho & Tang, 2023). The use of technology in student-based learning is also to help improve student learning activities (Ulimaz et al., 2023). The use of AI in learning also requires wise insights in its use, given that this AI supports future learning (Karataş & Yüce, 2024). Other studies have even revealed how the evaluation of the impact of the use of technology in integrated learning, as evidence is found to improve performance in educational practices enriched by technology (Valverde-berrocoso et al., 2022).

However, some participants also showed critical awareness that the application of technology needs to be adjusted to the condition of infrastructure and school readiness in Indonesia. These findings show that the integration of technology they experienced not only improves pedagogic digital literacy, but also fosters adaptive ability to choose and modify instructional strategies according to the local context. The use of technology does not necessarily improve the quality of learning. The effectiveness of technology depends on meaningful pedagogic design (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Without a strong pedagogic foundation, technology has the potential to become just an additional tool. In addition, access and infrastructure gaps in Indonesian elementary schools can be an obstacle to the implementation of technology-based strategies. Experience in an international environment that is relatively more technologically ready is not necessarily optimally replicated. Therefore, digital pedagogic competence needs to be accompanied by the ability to adapt to the limitations of the local context.

4. Reflective and Adaptive Pedagogical Awareness: Reflective awareness that emerges through cross-cultural experiences suggests a transformative learning process. Exposure to different educational systems encourages students to compare and evaluate pedagogic practices that they have understood. The adaptability shown by participants is an indicator of the development of contextual competence. Professional teachers are required to be able to adapt strategies to the characteristics of students and the school environment (Harrison et al., 2022). Participants demonstrated reflective capacity by acknowledging that foreign practices should not be adopted directly but adapted to the Indonesian context. It is important for teachers to adapt in order to create a class that shows that there are critically thinking students who support 21st Century skills (Leibovitch et al., 2025). Adaptation strategies can also include simplifying outdoor activities, adapting media use to available facilities, and considering students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

This shows the adaptive pedagogical competence that emerges in the participants. Thus, this adaptive awareness is an important contribution of international mobility to the professional readiness of students. Adaptive ability is a key competency for prospective elementary school teachers in dealing with the ever-changing dynamics of education, both in terms of curriculum, student characteristics, and technological developments (Ajani, 2024). In the context of the findings of this study, the experience of international mobility encourages students to not only adopt the pedagogic practices they observe, but to adapt them to the reality of Indonesian education. This shows the development of contextual awareness, namely the ability to understand that effective learning strategies in one environment cannot necessarily be applied directly in another. Theoretically, this adaptive ability is in line with the concept of reflective teachers who always try to improve all aspects of learning that have been carried out such as planning, implementation and performance improvement. Even previous research has also measured how this effective activity affects prospective teachers (Zahid, 2019). Furthermore, adaptive abilities are also related to the formation of a teacher's professional identity that is flexible and responsive to change. In the digital era and globalization of education, teachers are not only required to master methods and technology, but also be able to adapt strategies to limited facilities, socio-cultural backgrounds of students, and diverse learning needs. Without adaptive capacity, pedagogic innovation runs the risk of becoming irrelevant or even iraplicable. Therefore, the experience of international mobility that triggers cross-contextual reflection can be understood as an important learning space in building the adaptive readiness of prospective teachers, so that they become not only users of methods, but also critical and contextual pedagogic decision-makers.

5. Increased Professional Confidence: As per the findings of this research, all Participants reported increased confidence in communication, classroom interactions, and professional readiness. Increasing professional confidence is one of the significant impacts of mobility programs. Exposure to the international academic environment and cross-cultural interaction can strengthen the self-efficacy of prospective teachers. Teachers who have good self-efficacy can support their performance achievements at school (Mohammed et al., 2023).

The increase in teacher confidence that arises from international mobility experience is an important indicator in the formation of their professional readiness. Exposure to a cross-cultural academic environment, the use of foreign languages, and involvement in international pedagogic discussions and practices provide a successful experience that strengthens self-efficacy. In Bandura's perspective, belief in one's own abilities plays a big role in determining how individuals face challenges, make decisions, and survive complex situations. In the context of basic education, teachers who have healthy confidence tend to be more courageous to try innovative learning strategies, manage classes proactively, and build positive communication with students.

However, developing confidence needs to be accompanied by critical reflection and continuous competency strengthening so that it does not stop at the motivational level alone. Mature confidence is not just confidence, but confidence based on experience, strong pedagogic understanding, and adaptability to a wide range of learning conditions. Therefore, the international mobility experience can be understood as an initial foundation in building the psychological and professional readiness of prospective teachers to face a dynamic future of learning, as long as it is supported by continuous practice and systematic competency development. The limitations of this student mobility program, which were expressed by all participants, were the relatively short duration of the program, limiting the opportunity to test pedagogic skills in depth. Short-term mobility tends to have a strong motivational impact, but it does not necessarily result in a structural transformation in competence. Therefore, the sustainability of the program and its integration in the curriculum is a key factor to ensure long-term impact.

Conclusion

This study shows that the international student mobility program contributes well to the development of pedagogic competencies of prospective elementary school teachers through interactive, reflective, and practice-based learning experiences. The five main themes were findings, namely interactive and practice-based learning, transformation of understanding of the role of teachers, development of learning strategies and technology integration, reflective and adaptive awareness in cross-cultural contexts, and increasing professional confidence. Cross-cultural experiences encourage students to reconstruct their understanding of teaching practices, broaden professional horizons, and develop readiness to face the dynamics of 21st-century education. However, the resulting impact is still catalytic and not completely structural. The relatively short duration of the program limits the deepening of pedagogic practice and the internalization of change on a sustainable basis. The transformation that occurs is more at the level of conceptual and reflective awareness, so a more systematic integration between mobility experience and field practice in the home institution is needed. Thus, student mobility should be positioned as part of the planned teacher education curriculum design, rather than as a separate additional experience. For further research, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to see the sustainability of the impact of international mobility on students' teaching practices when entering the field practice stage or the teaching profession. In addition, comparative research between mobility programs of different durations can provide a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the effectiveness of the program. A mixed approach can also be used to measure the contribution of student mobility more comprehensively, both from the perspective of perception and measurable pedagogic performance indicators.

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