FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS ABROAD: INDONESIAN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN THAILAND

Siti Aisyah[1*], Zulhermindra [2], Suyono [3], & Deni Asrida [4]
[1,2,3,4]UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Batusangkar, Indonesia

stiiaisyhh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in teaching English in Thailand's elementary schools. Although previous studies have examined Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), limited research has specifically explored how pre-service teachers experience and navigate challenges in international teaching contexts. This study employed a qualitative case study design involving eight pre-service teachers from UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar who participated in the International Pre-Service Teaching Program in Thailand. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1984) interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed three categories of challenges. First, challenges related to learners include cognitive development difficulties, multi-level groups, discipline problems, low focus, lack of motivation, speaking problems, and writing problems. Second, challenges related to pre-service teachers themselves include limited use of technology, lack of professional development, inadequate use of teaching English to young learners (TEYL) methods, difficulty understanding teaching materials, and issues of teacher professionalism. Third, challenges related to the teaching context include language differences, insufficient facilities, curriculum or syllabus issues, lack of mentor support, and cultural differences. Beyond identifying these categories, this study shows that these challenges are interconnected, where linguistic barriers and contextual constraints influence classroom interaction, instructional decisions, and teacher confidence. The findings imply that teacher education programs need to strengthen practical preparation, particularly in classroom management, TEYL pedagogy, cross-cultural communication, and teaching in low-resource environments. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical insights into the complexity of pre-service teachers' experiences in international teaching contexts.

Keywords: Challenges, Pre-Service Teachers, Thailand, Young English Learners

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English functions as an international language that plays a central role in communication especially in education. The increasing global demand for English proficiency has led to a growing need for teachers who are not only linguistically competent but also pedagogically prepared to teach in diverse and multilingual contexts. In

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

response, teacher education institutions have implemented pre-service teaching programs to equip student teachers with practical experience and professional competencies, enabling them to integrate theoretical knowledge with classroom practice (Meha & Bullu, 2021; Ramirez, 2020; Trisoni et al., 2020)

Within this context, Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) requires specific pedagogical approaches due to the distinctive cognitive, emotional, and developmental characteristics of children aged five to twelve (Cameron, 2001; Scott & Ytreberg, 2001). Young learners tend to learn more effectively through interaction, play, and meaningful activities rather than abstract explanations (McCloskey, 2014; Pinter, 2011). Recent studies have further emphasized the importance of student-centered and interactive approaches in supporting engagement and language acquisition (Copland et al., 2014; Garton, 2014).

However, despite these pedagogical principles, a growing body of international research has identified persistent challenges in TEYL. These include classroom management difficulties, low learner motivation, mixed-ability classrooms, and limited instructional resources (Copland et al., 2014; Garton, 2014; Nilsson, 2024). While such challenges are widely reported, previous studies suggest that they are shaped by differences in teaching context, educational systems, and linguistic environments rather than being universally experienced in the same way. For example, in Colombia, challenges are often related to limited resources and a continued reliance on grammar-focused instruction (Truscott de Mejía, 2009), whereas in South Korea, exam-oriented systems restrict the implementation of communicative approaches (Garton, 2014). In contrast, studies focusing on pre-service teachers highlight a different issue, particularly the gap between theoretical preparation and classroom practice, as reported in Turkey (Camlibel-Acar, 2016). These findings indicate that TEYL challenges vary not only across countries but also across teaching roles and contexts.

In the Southeast Asian context, particularly in Thailand, English has been implemented as a compulsory subject at the primary level. However, students' proficiency remains relatively low due to limited exposure to English, lack of confidence, and the dominance of teacher-centered instruction (Prasongporn, 2016; Ulla, 2018). In addition, many primary school teachers are generalists with limited professional training in English teaching, which further affects instructional quality (Kuadnok, 2017; Ulla, 2018). These conditions suggest that teaching English to young learners in Thailand involves not only pedagogical challenges but also linguistic and teaching context complexities. In addition, evidence from pre-service teaching experiences indicates that classroom practices in some Thai schools are still largely teacher-centered, with limited use of interactive media and technology. Pre-service teachers are often required to adapt to limited facilities, communication barriers, and differences in classroom culture, which may further complicate the teaching process (Fikri & Widowati, 2024; Haryadi, 2024; Suparma et al., 2018). These findings highlight that challenges in international teaching settings are often multifaceted and shaped by the interaction between learners, teachers, and the teaching context.

Despite the growing number of studies on TEYL challenges, most research has focused on in-service teachers in local contexts. Studies on pre-service teachers, particularly those involved in international teaching programs, remain limited. Moreover, previous research

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

tends to examine challenges separately (e.g., focusing only on motivation or classroom management), rather than exploring how different types of challenges are interconnected within actual teaching experiences. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how learner-related, teacher-related, and teaching context challenges interact in shaping pre-service teachers' experiences in international classrooms. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesian pre-service teachers participating in international teaching programs in Southeast Asia. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers in teaching English to young learners in Thailand's elementary schools during the 2024/2025 academic year.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical insights into how learner-related, teacher-related, and teaching context challenges are experienced and interconnected in an international practicum setting. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges are faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers related to learners?
2. What challenges are faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers related to themselves?
3. What challenges are faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers related to the teaching context?

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in teaching English at Thailand's elementary schools. A case study design was selected as it allows an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within a bounded context, focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions. The research was conducted at UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar and involved pre-service teachers from the English Teaching Department who had participated in the International Pre-Service Teaching Program in Thailand during the 2024/2025 academic year. The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) they had completed the teaching program in 2024, and (2) they had teaching experience at the elementary (Prathom) level. From a total of eleven participants, eight met the criteria and agreed to participate voluntarily. The sample size was considered sufficient as qualitative research emphasizes depth of data, and saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged after repeated interviews.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument, supported by an interview guide, notebook, and smartphone for recording. As a researcher who shared a similar academic background with the participants, the researcher held an insider position, which facilitated rapport during data collection. To minimize potential bias, reflexivity was maintained by carefully interpreting participants' responses and verifying the data through member checking. Data were collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews conducted from July 1st to July 26th, 2025, both face-to-face and via phone calls, depending on participants' availability. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure clarity and allow participants to express their experiences naturally. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interview process was guided by key questions such as: *"What challenges did you face when teaching English to young learners in Thailand?"*, *"How did you*

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

deal with those challenges?", and *"What factors influenced the difficulties you experienced?"*The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis process involved coding and categorizing the data into themes, particularly learner-related, teacher-related, and contextual challenges.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied member checking and time triangulation. Each transcript was returned to participants for verification, and two rounds of interviews were conducted to confirm and enrich the data. Data saturation was reached when no new significant information emerged from the second round of interviews. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. All participants provided informed consent and were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

This study aims to find out the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in teaching English at Thailand's elementary schools. The data were obtained through interviews and analyzed qualitatively. The research findings are presented based on three major categories of challenges, namely: (1) challenges related to learners, (2) challenges related to the pre-service teachers themselves, and (3) challenges related to teaching contexts.

Challenges Faced by Pre-service Teachers Related to Learners

Cognitive Development Difficulties

Several pre-service teachers reported that students' cognitive development affected their ability to understand English instruction, particularly abstract concepts and complex directions. Young learners tended to require repetition, simplified input, and physical support to comprehend meaning.

> *"They don't understand the instructions…... many times they don't understand, then we have to use body language." (I-5)*

> *"Many don't understand… even simple instructions… I used more movement media… it's normal for their age." (I-8)*

This finding indicates that learners' developmental stage limited their readiness for abstract language, requiring teachers to adapt instruction through gestures and interactive media.

Multi-Level Groups (Diversity in Proficiency)

Another challenge involved uneven proficiency levels within the same classroom, where only a few students could understand English while others struggled.

> *"In one class… only one student understands… and helps explain to others." (I-8)*

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

This condition created learning imbalance, where advanced learners became disengaged while others required more support, highlighting the need for differentiated instruction.

Discipline Problems

All pre-service teachers experienced challenges in managing classroom discipline, particularly due to students' hyperactivity, noise, and non-compliance with instructions.

> *"…students were overly excited, jumping, running to the front… even fighting sometimes…" (I-6)*

> *"…some students left the class without permission… sometimes when told to sit they stood… which became a challenge…" (I-7)*

These behaviors disrupted lesson flow and required constant attention management, indicating that classroom control remains a major challenge in teaching young learners.

Low Focus

Students' inability to maintain attention emerged as a recurring issue during lessons.

> *"I often do exercise suddenly, like aerobics… so they feel excited, regain focus, then I continue teaching… otherwise, they lose focus and talk about other things.." (I-1)*

> *"…children usually get bored every five minutes… just a few minutes into the lesson they start walking around restlessly…" (I-8)*

This shows that students quickly lost concentration and were easily distracted. This pattern consistently appeared across participants, indicating that short attention span is a common characteristic of young learners.

Lack of Motivation

Some pre-service teachers reported that students showed low interest in learning English, often influenced by repetitive activities and limited exposure to the language (Nunan, 2011).

> *"For one month there was no progress… repetitive grammar memorization made them bored, not memorising but just reading it passively." (I-1)*

> *"He walked out of class as if he was not interested in learning English with me… maybe because he was also bored in class." (I-7)*

These responses indicate that students' motivation decreased when learning activities were monotonous and lacked meaningful engagement.

Speaking Problems

Another challenge identified in achieving the research objective was students' difficulty in speaking, particularly due to pronunciation issues influenced by their first

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

language. As highlighted by Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat (2021), differences in phonological systems can significantly affect learners' intelligibility in English.

> *"For example, when we say seven-eleven, they pronounce it as sewen-elewen… because V is read as W in Thai… their pronunciation is also hard to understand…" (I-3)*

> *"…they find it difficult to pronounce English sounds, for example the letter L… we say Apple, they say appoe, so the L sound is unclear." (I-6)*

These results suggest a consistent tendency among learners to substitute unfamiliar English sounds with those from their native language, which directly impacts their speaking performance.

Writing Problems

Writing difficulties were also identified as a challenge, particularly related to students' unfamiliarity with the English alphabet, which differs from their first language writing system.

> *"…they can't even write their own name in the alphabet, so I was confused about what to do." (I-5)*

> *"…our alphabet is different from Thai… elementary students there must learn extra… so I always teach additional English alphabet every day."*

These results indicate that students lacked foundational knowledge of the English alphabet, which hindered their ability to perform basic writing tasks.

Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers Related to Themselves

Limited Use of Technology

A few pre-service teachers experienced difficulties in utilizing available technological facilities, despite their availability in schools.

> "The facilities were quite complete… but I only used the TV once… the problem was my laptop had no USB port, and the plug was different there." (I-3)
> "…the monitor was in Thai language and hard to set up… so it was used only occasionally." (I-7)

This indicates that technology use was not limited by access, but by operational challenges and unfamiliar settings.

Lack of Professional Development

Professional development refers to the process through which teachers develop their knowledge, skills, and teaching practices to effectively manage classroom instruction (Day, 1999; Bredeson, 2002). In this study, limited preparation before the practicum emerged as a significant challenge.

> *"I had never taught a subject before… there was no training… I even doubted whether I could really teach." (I-3)*

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

"I had never taught elementary school children… I didn't take the young learner course… at the beginning I was really afraid whether the students would understand." (I-6)

These responses indicate that pre-service teachers entered the pre service program with limited pedagogical preparation. Pre service teachers shows that the absence of training and prior experience reduced their confidence and made it difficult to apply appropriate teaching strategies in real classroom settings.

Inadequate Use of TEYL Methods and Techniques

One pre-service teacher experienced difficulties in applying varied and developmentally appropriate teaching methods when teaching young learners.

"The materials may differ from class to class… but the teaching method is basically the same… writing on the board, reading together, and repeating together." (I-3)

This indicates that the teacher relied on a consistent, teacher-centered approach across different classes, showing limited variation in TEYL methods and reducing opportunities for interactive and engaging learning

Difficulty Understanding Teaching Materials

Some pre-service teachers experienced difficulties in understanding and selecting appropriate teaching materials, particularly due to unfamiliar textbooks used in Thai classrooms.

"I found it difficult to determine which materials and what topics must be taught." (I-4)

"The book was not fully in English… one line English, then Thai… it was hard to understand, so I took materials from other sources." (I-7)

This indicates that unfamiliar and mixed-language materials created confusion in lesson planning, making it difficult for teachers to identify appropriate content and effectively rely on textbooks.

Issues of Teacher Professionalism

One pre-service teacher experienced challenges in maintaining professional behavior, particularly outside formal teaching situations.

"Sometimes my bad habits were copied by students… we used rude words with friends and somehow the students imitated them." (I-8)

This suggests that maintaining consistent professional behavior was challenging, as students tended to imitate teachers' actions, highlighting the importance of self-awareness in shaping a positive role model.

Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers Related to the Teaching Context

Language Differences

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

Language differences emerged as a major contextual challenge affecting classroom communication, particularly due to students' limited English proficiency and pre-service teachers' inability to use Thai effectively (Sukkhapatvara, 2023).

"I repeat the instruction in English then ask my mentor to use Thai…" (I-1)
"…in Thailand we use pure English, but they don't really understand… sometimes they don't catch what we say." (I-8)

These responses indicate a recurring breakdown in instructional communication, where students struggled to comprehend English input without support. As a result, pre-service teachers consistently depended on mentor translation, simplified language, and non-verbal strategies to convey meaning. This pattern highlights that the absence of a shared language not only limited comprehension but also affected classroom control and interaction, making communication adaptation a central requirement in achieving the research objective.

Insufficient Facilities

Another challenge involved limited and inconsistent access to teaching facilities, which restricted the use of interactive learning media.

"I only found a monitor… other media were just stickers…" (I-1)
"TV and infocus were only in grade 6… other classes only had whiteboards…" (I-6)

This pattern suggests that unequal resource distribution constrained teachers' ability to deliver engaging lessons. As a result, instruction often shifted toward simpler, less interactive methods, reducing opportunities for varied learning experiences.

Curriculum or Syllabus Issues

Pre-service teachers also experienced uncertainty in implementing the curriculum due to unclear structure and lack of guidance.

"There was no module… I was confused how to implement what I prepared." (I-1)
"I had to prepare the material just one hour before teaching…" (I-4)

These responses reflect a recurring lack of instructional direction, where teachers were required to improvise lesson content. This condition highlights inconsistency in curriculum implementation, making lesson planning less structured and more reactive.

Lack of Mentor Support

Limited guidance from mentor teachers further complicated the teaching process.

"When I asked about the lesson, the mentor just said 'up to you'…" (I-3)
"There was no English teacher, so I taught without direction…" (I-5)

This reveals a tendency toward minimal mentoring, where pre-service teachers worked independently without sufficient feedback. Such conditions reduced opportunities for professional learning and increased uncertainty in instructional decision-making.

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

Cultural Differences

The final theme, *"Cultural Differences,"* focuses on the pre-service teachers' struggles to adapt to classroom norms and behavioral expectations in Thailand. Different cultural values shaped how Thai students interacted with teachers, expressed respect, and responded to authority. Informant I-2 expressed, *"The culture between us and them is different; with their regular teachers they stay quiet, but with us practice teachers they tend not to show respect… they are more comfortable with their main teacher."* She further explained, *"At first they were distant, but after a few days they became more excited, although still more attached to their regular teacher."* This theme highlights the role of cultural familiarity in building classroom rapport. The students' initial reluctance was not due to rejection but rather their adherence to hierarchical respect typical in Thai classrooms. (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022) note that such differences in teacher-student relationships can make it difficult for foreign teachers to establish authority early on. Over time, however, increased exposure and empathy helped the pre-service teachers bridge these cultural gaps. The experience underscores the importance of intercultural competence and adaptive communication strategies when teaching abroad.

DISCUSSION

This section presents the discussion of the research findings, focusing on the challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers in teaching English in Thailand's elementary schools. These challenges are categorized into three main dimensions: learner-related, teacher-related, and teaching context. Rather than occurring independently, these challenges are interconnected and collectively shape the teaching and learning process in international TEYL contexts. The first category concerns learner-related challenges. The findings show that cognitive development difficulties were one of the major issues faced by pre-service teachers. This is consistent with previous studies indicating that young learners' developmental limitations affect their ability to understand abstract concepts and process new language input (Jannah, 2021; Prihatin et al., 2020). However, the present study suggests that these difficulties are not solely caused by developmental factors, but are also influenced by language barriers and limited exposure to English. Similarly, (Kusuma et al., 2025) found that although students showed enthusiasm, their understanding remained limited due to linguistic constraints. This indicates that when students struggle to understand instructions, their cognitive processing, participation, and confidence are also affected.

Another challenge was the existence of multi-level proficiency within the classroom. This finding is in line with (Alikhanova, 2024), who reported that mixed-ability classrooms often lead to disengagement among advanced learners and frustration among beginners. This issue appears to be universal, as similar findings were reported in Sweden, where teachers also struggled to address diverse student proficiency levels (Nilsson, 2024). In this study, such diversity made it difficult for pre-service teachers to design lessons that accommodate all learners, particularly in limited-resource settings. Discipline problems were also frequently reported, including students being noisy, sleepy, and difficult to

(cc) BY

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

manage. This aligns with previous research (Copland et al., 2014; Fikri & Widowati, 2024; Songbatumis, 2017). These behaviors can be interpreted as a reflection of young learners' short attention span and need for engaging activities. Without interactive and varied teaching strategies, students tend to lose focus and become less responsive during lessons. Similarly, lack of motivation was identified as a challenge. However, this study suggests that low motivation may not necessarily indicate a lack of interest, but rather limited comprehension and unfamiliarity with the language being taught. This interpretation is supported by (Nilsson, 2024), who found that students' reluctance to participate is often linked to anxiety and lack of confidence rather than purely motivational factors. Speaking and writing problems were also significant challenges faced by pre-service teachers. Students experienced difficulty in pronunciation due to the absence of certain English sounds in the Thai language, such as /v/, /l/, and consonant clusters (Prihatin et al., 2020; Setiadewi, 2019; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). In addition, writing in English posed challenges due to students' unfamiliarity with the Latin alphabet, which differs significantly from the Thai script (Lubis et al., 2025; Oktavia et al., 2022). These findings further support the argument that linguistic differences contribute not only to language production difficulties but also to broader learning challenges. Therefore, learner-related challenges in this study indicate that cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors are closely interconnected.

The second category relates to teacher-related challenges. The most dominant issue was lack of professional development, as most pre-service teachers had limited experience in teaching young learners prior to the program. This finding is consistent with (Camlibel-Acar, 2016), who highlighted the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching experience among pre-service teachers. This gap often results in low confidence and difficulty in applying appropriate teaching strategies in real classroom settings. Another challenge was the limited use of technology. Although teachers were aware of its importance, they were unable to integrate it effectively due to limited skills and contextual constraints. This is in line with (Nilsson, 2024) and (Songbatumis, 2017). In addition, the inadequate use of appropriate TEYL methods indicates that pre-service teachers often relied on teacher-centered approaches, especially when they were uncertain about how to manage the class. Similarly, (Hidayatulloh & Sugirin, 2022) reported that traditional techniques such as drilling and repetition remain widely used despite the emphasis on interactive teaching approaches.

This study also found that pre-service teachers experienced difficulty in understanding teaching materials, particularly when textbooks were written in a mix of Thai and English. This aligns with previous studies showing that foreign teachers often struggle to interpret local materials (Luangkrajang, 2023; Sukkhapatvara, 2023). In line with (Kizildag, 2019), inappropriate and non-contextualized materials may hinder effective language learning, especially when they are not aligned with students' needs and background. Another important finding was related to teacher professionalism. Students were observed imitating the informal behavior of pre-service teachers, indicating that teachers play a significant role as models in the classroom. This supports (Ghufron, 2024) and (Camlibel-Acar, 2016), who emphasized the importance of maintaining professional conduct both inside and outside the classroom. Overall, these findings suggest that teacher-related challenges are not only

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

caused by lack of knowledge, but also by the need to adapt quickly to unfamiliar teaching environments.

The third category involves contextual challenges. The most prominent issue was language difference, as none of the pre-service teachers were fluent in Thai. This significantly limited classroom interaction, instruction, and communication with both students and mentors. This finding echoes previous research showing that foreign teachers in Thailand often struggle to manage classes and explain material due to language barriers (Haryadi, 2024; Nuraeni & Alda, 2019; Sukkhapatvara, 2023). Language limitations affected not only instruction but also classroom control, relationship building, and access to instructional resources. This finding is further supported by (Kusuma et al., 2025), who reported that 89% of Indonesian pre-service teachers experienced language barriers during their practicum in Thai schools. It also supports (Kizildag, 2019), who stated that in foreign language contexts, learning is often limited to classroom exposure, reducing opportunities for authentic communication. This explains why language differences become a central challenge in international teaching contexts, as both teachers and students rely on limited linguistic resources. Another challenge was the lack of school facilities. Many schools lacked adequate media such as projectors, audio tools, or printed materials, forcing teachers to rely on simple teaching aids.. This finding is in line with previous studies (Copland et al., 2014; Songbatumis, 2017) and supported by (Kusuma et al., 2025), who found that limited resources force teachers to rely on simple and improvised materials. Similarly, (Kizildag, 2019) emphasized that lack of infrastructure limits the implementation of communicative language teaching. These findings suggest that resource constraints not only affect the availability of teaching media but also restrict the use of interactive and student-centered approaches, which are essential in TEYL contexts.

Curriculum and syllabus issues were also identified as challenges. Pre-service teachers reported that the curriculum lacked clear guidance, making it difficult to implement effectively. This is consistent with (Noom-Ura, 2013) and (Ulla, 2018), and also aligns with (Kizildag, 2019), who found that curriculum expectations are often not aligned with classroom realities. In addition, organizational factors such as limited collaboration and unclear instructional direction further complicated teaching practices (Kyeyune, 2025). Lack of mentor support was another significant challenge. Many pre-service teachers had to independently plan and conduct lessons with minimal guidance. This finding is consistent with (Dorsah et al., 2023) and (Petrovska et al., 2018), who reported that insufficient mentoring often leads to uncertainty and stress among pre service teachers. Finally, cultural differences also influenced classroom dynamics. Students' behavior, attitudes, and responses to instruction differed from what pre-service teachers were familiar with. This finding is in line with (Chasanah & Sumardi, 2022) and supported by (Kusuma et al., 2025), who noted that cultural differences and communication gaps require teachers to adjust their instructional approaches and communication styles. Similarly, (Hidayatulloh & Sugirin, 2022) emphasized that teaching practices are strongly influenced by contextual differences across countries.

However, the findings indicate that challenges in teaching English to young learners in international contexts are complex and interconnected. Learner-related difficulties, teacher-

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

related limitations, and contextual constraints influence one another in shaping teaching experiences. These findings are also consistent with (Kusuma et al., 2025), who argue that teaching in international contexts requires adaptability in dealing with linguistic, cultural, and resource-related challenges. From a TEYL perspective, this study highlights the importance of using interactive, simple, and context-sensitive teaching approaches that align with young learners' characteristics. From a teacher education perspective, the findings suggest the need for more practical preparation, including classroom management skills, cross-cultural communication, and strategies for teaching in low-resource environments. This study contributes to the ELT and TEYL literature by providing empirical evidence from an international practicum context, particularly demonstrating how learner-related, teacher-related, and contextual challenges interact in shaping pre-service teachers' experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that teaching English to young learners in an international practicum context involves a set of interconnected challenges that extend beyond individual classroom issues. Rather than functioning as isolated problems, learner-related, teacher-related, and contextual challenges interact dynamically and shape the overall teaching experience of pre-service teachers in Thailand's elementary schools. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings indicate that many of the observed difficulties such as low participation, discipline issues, and uneven learning outcomes are not solely caused by students' characteristics, but are closely linked to language barriers, limited exposure to English, and the use of less adaptive teaching strategies. This suggests that effective TEYL practices in international settings require flexible, interactive, and context-sensitive approaches that are responsive to both learners' developmental needs and classroom realities.

From a teacher education perspective, this study underscores the importance of bridging the gap between theoretical preparation and real classroom demands. The challenges related to limited teaching experience, difficulty in applying TEYL methods, and low confidence indicate that pre-service teachers need more practice-oriented training. In particular, teacher education programs should better prepare students for managing mixed-ability classrooms, adapting teaching materials, and teaching in multilingual environments. At the institutional level, the findings suggest that stronger support systems are needed to enhance the quality of international teaching programs. This includes clearer practicum guidelines, more structured mentoring systems, and better coordination between host schools and sending institutions. In addition, providing orientation related to local language use and school culture may help pre-service teachers adapt more effectively to foreign teaching contexts.

This study contributes to the ELT and TEYL literature by providing empirical insights from an international pre service program setting, particularly demonstrating how teaching challenges are shaped by the interaction of pedagogical, linguistic, and contextual factors. It also extends previous research by focusing on pre-service teachers' actual teaching experiences rather than perceptions alone. However, this study has several limitations. It is

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

based on a small number of participants within a single international placement program, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study focuses primarily on challenges and does not explore in depth the strategies used to overcome them.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants across different international contexts, as well as to examine how pre-service teachers develop and implement strategies to address these challenges. Comparative studies between local and international practicum settings may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher readiness in diverse educational environments.

REFERENCES

Alikhanova, M. (2024). Dealing with Multilevel English Teaching Classes: Approaches, Challenges, and Solutions. *International Scientific-Online Conference*, 19–22. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14177398

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge University Press.

Camlibel-Acar, Z. (2016). Teaching English to Young Learners: Some Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers. *ICRES 2016: International Conference on Research in Education and Science*, *5*, 323–327. www.isres.org

Chasanah, I., & Sumardi, S. (2022). a Retrospective Narrative Study of Pre-Service Teachers' Language Barrier Experiences in International Teaching Practicum. *LLT Journal: Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, *25*(2), 410–420. https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i2.4489

Copland, F., Garton, S., & Burns, A. (2014). Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, *48*(4), 738–762. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.148

Dorsah, P., Abdullai Abukari, M., Nipielim Tindan, T., & Nyaaba Akanzire, B. (2023). Mentor Wasn't Always Available: Challenges of Pre-Service Teachers on Supported Teaching in Schools. *American Journal of Education and Information Technology*, *February*. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajeit.20230701.11

Fikri, D., & Widowati, D. R. (2024). *Problems faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers while teaching English at Islamic Boarding School in Thailand and their coping strategies*. 1–8.

Garton, S. (2014). Unresolved issues and new challenges in teaching English to young learners: the case of South Korea. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *15*(2), 201–219. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2014.858657

Ghufron, M. A. (2024). Pre-service English Teachers in the Teaching Internship Program (TIP). *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, *13*(4), 671–681. https://doi.org/10.23887/jpiundiksha.v13i4.83811

Haryadi, D. (2024). 'I feel like I am more respected here in Thailand': Indonesian EFL Teachers' Experiences and Challenges in Thai Elementary Schools. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, *8*(2), 173–197.

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.v8i2.20873

Hidayatulloh, S. M. M., & Sugirin, S. (2022). *Indonesian EFL Teachers Teaching Reading to English Young Learners in Indonesia and Thailand*. *25*(2), 395–409.

Jannah, L. M. L. (2021). *The Challenges In Teaching English To Young Learners In Antasari State Islamic University Faculty Of Tarbiyah And Teacher Training*. Antasari State Islamic University.

Kizildag, A. (2019). *Teaching English in Turkey : Dialogues with teachers about the challenges in public primary schools*. *1*(3).

Kuadnok, K. (2017). *Pedagogies and Power Relations in Thai English Foreign Language Writing Classrooms: A Critical Ethnography*.

Kusuma, N. M., Nur'Aini, S., & Theresia Cicik Sophia Budiman. (2025). *Exploring Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers' Strategies During Practicum in Thai Schools*. *11*(1), 53–66.

Kyeyune, R. (2025). Challenges of Using English as a Medium of Instruction in Multilingual Contexts: *New Language Bearings in Africa*, *6*(2), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.27710931.9

Luangkrajang, M. S. (2023). Situation and Professional Development Needs of Foreign Teachers in Thailand. *Liberal Arts*, *15*(2), 1–18.

Lubis, W. W., Harahap, E. M., Sri, H., Purba, R., & Kemal, I. (2025). The Impact of Latin Alphabet Instruction on Thai Vocabulary Writing Skills and Science Understanding of Thai-Malay Junior High School Students (Study Case at Padung Mat School Narathiwat Thailand. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, *11*(6), 927–931. https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v11i6.11733

McCloskey. (2014). *Teaching Young Learners of English: Integrating Principles and Practices.*

Meha, A. M., & Bullu, N. I. (2021). Hubungan Kesiapan Mengajar Dan Proses Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan Dengan Keterampilan Dasar Mengajar Mahasiswa Pendidikan Biologi. *Edukatif : Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, *3*(2), 412–420. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v3i2.323

Nilsson, M. (2024). Challenges and Teaching Materials in English for Young Learners in Sweden. *Educare*, *3*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.24834/educare.2024.3.941

Noom-Ura, S. (2013). English-teaching problems in Thailand and Thai teachers' professional development needs. *English Language Teaching*, *6*(11), 139–147. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n11p139

Oktavia, D., Mukminin, A., Fridiyanto, Hadiyanto, Marzulina, L., Harto, K., Erlina, D., & Holandyah, M. (2022). Challenges and Strategies Used by English Teachers in Teaching English Language Skills to Young Learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(2), 382–387. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1202.22

Petrovska, S., Sivevska, D., Popeska, B., & Runcheva, J. (2018). Mentoring in teaching

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol.7, No. 2, April 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

profession. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, *6*(2), 47–56. https://doi.org/10.5937/ijcrsee1802047P

Pinter, A. (2011). *Children Learning Second Languages*. Palgrave Macmillan London. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccs009

Prasongporn, P. (2016). *English Education at Primary Level in Thailand*. 1–11. https://www.nier.go.jp/06_jigyou/symposium/i_sympo27 /pdf/E03.pdf.

Prihatin, Y., Ekawati, Y. N., Rosdiana Ihda, & Sakinatulhaq, A. (2020). Challenges In Teaching English to Young Learners In Southern Thailand (A Case Study of Indonesian Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives). *Psychology and Education*, *58*(2), 6098–6107.

Ramirez, I. A. L. (2020). Pre-Service Teachers' Perceived Level of Teaching Skills. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, *6*(1), 97–109. https://doi.org/10.31578/jebs.v6i1.222

Scott, W. A., & Ytreberg, L. H. (2001). *Teaching English to Children* (N. Grant (ed.)). Longman.

Setiadewi, I. (2019). *Pre-Service Teachers' Problems During Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Thailand*. *1*(April), 83–86.

Songbatumis, A. M. (2017). Challenges in Teaching English Faced by English Teachers at MTsN Taliwang, Indonesia. *Journal of Foreign Languange Teaching and Learning*, *2*(2). https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.2223

Sukkhapatvara, M. (2023). *Non-Thai EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Problems in Integrating Content into Language Instruction in a Thai Primary School*. Thammasat University.

Suparma, K., Ratminingsih, N. M., & Adnyani, L. D. S. (2018). Challenges Encountered by Indonesian Pre-Service English Teachers in Thailand. *Proceedings 4th International Conference on English Across Culture 2018*, 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1002/jctb.5000423502

Tantiwich, K., & Sinwongsuwat, K. (2021). Thai university students' problems of language use in english conversation. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, *14*(2), 598–626.

Trisoni, R., Fadriati, E., Herlina, E., & Chandra, A. N. (2020). *Buku pedoman pelaksanaan dan penilaian praktek pengalaman lapangan (PPL)*. IAIN Batusangkar.

Truscott de Mejía, A.-M. (2009). Teaching English to young learners in Colombia: Policy, practice and challenges. *MEXTESOL Journal*, *33*(1), 103–114. http://mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id_article=1212

Ulla, M. B. (2018). English language teaching in Thailand: Filipino teachers' experiences and perspectives. *Issues in Educational Research*, *28*(4), 1080–1094.