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Teaching Experiences in Physical Education within a Cross-Cultural Context: A Case Study of Dutch Students in the Indonesia–Netherlands Daya Krida Internship Program

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Abstract

Physical Education (PE) plays an essential role in supporting students' holistic development; however, its implementation is strongly shaped by cultural, structural, and pedagogical contexts. This study aims to explore the pedagogical experiences and perceptions of Dutch international students teaching PE in Indonesian elementary schools through the Indonesia–Netherlands Daya Krida Internship Program. A qualitative case study design was employed involving 13 Dutch international students with a background in physical education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and reflective documents, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four main themes: pedagogical adaptation in contexts of limited facilities, language barriers leading to embodied and demonstration-based instructional strategies, positive teacher–student relational dynamics, and reflective comparisons between Indonesian and Dutch PE systems. Despite constraints related to infrastructure, time allocation, and language, international students perceived these challenges as catalysts for professional learning and pedagogical creativity. The study highlights that cross-cultural teaching experiences foster pedagogical adaptability, relational competence, and intercultural awareness, which are essential components of physical education teacher professionalism. These findings underline the strategic potential of international internship programs in preparing reflective, adaptive, and globally oriented prospective PE teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education has led to increasing cross-national student mobility, including in teacher education and physical education (Darani, 2021; Dayanti & Sumaryanto, 2021). International internship programs serve as an important platform for prospective educators to develop professional, pedagogical, and intercultural competencies through teaching experiences in different educational contexts (Karo Karo et al., 2024; Mustafa & Dwiyogo, 2020). In physical education, cross-cultural experiences are particularly significant because teaching practices are strongly influenced by cultural values, social conditions, as well as the availability of facilities and educational policies in each country (Arisandi et al., 2023).

Physical Education (PE) in Indonesia has contextual characteristics that differ from physical education systems in European countries, including the Netherlands. These differences include curriculum orientation, time allocation, availability of facilities, and the role and autonomy of teachers in designing instruction. When international students are directly involved in teaching PE in Indonesian schools, they function not only as teachers but also as learners who must negotiate their existing pedagogical knowledge with the realities of classroom practice (Tekel et al., 2025).

The Indonesia–Netherlands Daya Krida Internship Program is a form of cross-national educational collaboration that places Dutch students with a background in physical education in private elementary schools in North Semarang District. This program provides opportunities for students to implement pedagogical knowledge while simultaneously facing challenges related to cultural, linguistic, and educational system differences. These experiences create a rich learning space for understanding the dynamics of physical education teaching in a cross-cultural context.

The teaching experiences of international students in PE not only influence students' learning processes but also contribute to the development of professional identity and global competence among prospective teachers. Therefore, examining cross-cultural teaching experiences is essential to understanding how international students adapt their pedagogical practices, overcome barriers, and reflect on differences in educational systems as part of their professional learning process. This study aims to explore the pedagogical experiences of Dutch international students teaching PE in Indonesian elementary schools and to analyze the processes of adaptation and professional learning that occur within a cross-cultural context.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was selected to explore in depth the experiences, meanings, and pedagogical reflections of international students participating in the Indonesia–Netherlands Daya Krida Internship Program. The case study focused on a specific context, namely the experience of teaching PE in private elementary schools in North Semarang District.

The participants consisted of 13 Dutch international students with a background in physical education who were directly involved in PE teaching during the internship period. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in the teaching process and their ability to reflect on pedagogical experiences.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation during PE lessons, and document analysis in the form of reflective reports and students' field notes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving data reduction, coding, theme development, and interpretation of meaning. To ensure credibility, methodological and source triangulation as well as member checking were conducted. All research procedures adhered to ethical research principles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis produced four main themes representing the pedagogical experiences of international students in teaching PE: (1) Pedagogical adaptation in contexts of limitation, (2) Language barriers and instructional communication strategies, (3) Relational experiences and teacher–student interaction dynamics, and (4) Reflective comparisons between the Indonesian and Dutch PE systems.

Pedagogical Adaptation in Contexts of Limitation

International students reported that teaching PE in Indonesia required significant pedagogical adaptation. Lesson plans developed based on the Dutch education system had to be modified to suit the conditions of partner schools. One participant stated:

"I had to change almost all of my lesson plans because the situation here is very different from what I am used to." (P2)

These adaptations included simplifying activities, modifying game rules, and creatively utilizing available space and equipment. Students perceived this process as both a challenge and an opportunity for professional learning:

"It was challenging, but it made me more creative as a teacher." (P8)

Language Barriers and Instructional Communication Strategies

Language barriers emerged as a major challenge, particularly during the early stages of the internship. Limited proficiency in Indonesian affected instructional clarity and classroom management:

"At the beginning, I felt frustrated because I couldn't explain things clearly." (P6)

To address this issue, students developed non-verbal communication strategies, such as movement demonstrations and visual cues:

"I learned that showing is much more effective than talking in PE." (P13)

Relational Experiences and Teacher–Student Interaction Dynamics

Interactions with students were perceived as meaningful experiences that contributed to creating a positive learning environment. International students described Indonesian students as friendly, open, and respectful toward teachers:

"The students are very respectful and eager to connect with the teacher." (P4)

These positive pedagogical relationships enhanced students' confidence in teaching and encouraged greater student engagement in PE activities.

Reflective Comparison of Indonesian and Dutch PE Systems

International students reflected on fundamental differences between the Indonesian and Dutch PE systems. The Dutch system was perceived as more structured, supported by adequate facilities, and providing greater teacher autonomy:

"In the Netherlands, PE is more structured and focused on skill development." (P10)

In contrast, PE in Indonesia was perceived as more flexible and adaptive to limitations:

"*Here, teachers have to adapt all the time because of the limitations." (P1)*



Figure 1. Pedagogical Experiences of International Students in Physical Education

The findings indicate that Dutch international students were required to engage in significant pedagogical adaptation when teaching PE in Indonesian elementary schools. This aligns with the view that teaching practices are

inseparable from the social, cultural, and structural contexts in which learning occurs (Sembiring et al., 2024). According to situated learning theory, pedagogical knowledge is constructed through direct engagement in authentic social practices rather than through the transfer of theory from one context to another (Rubiana et al., 2025). The students' experiences in adjusting lesson plans to limited facilities and school conditions reflect a contextual and continuous professional learning process (Ramadani, 2020).

In physical education, pedagogical adaptation is particularly critical because instruction is highly dependent on space, equipment, and student characteristics (Zulna et al., 2024). Effective physical education teachers in resource-limited environments tend to develop pedagogical creativity through activity modification and flexible planning (Zabidi et al., 2023). This study reinforces this argument by demonstrating that international students perceived limitations as catalysts for professional growth rather than merely technical obstacles.

Language barriers experienced by international students led to a shift in instructional strategies from verbal approaches to embodied pedagogy (Siljamaki & Anttila, 2024). Within this framework, the body is understood as a primary medium of learning and meaning-making. Embodied learning theory emphasizes that cognitive understanding in physical education develops through movement experiences and bodily interaction with the environment. When verbal language was limited, movement demonstrations, imitation, and direct experience became effective pedagogical strategies (Dias et al., 2025; Moon, 2022).

International research in cross-cultural physical education contexts shows that demonstration-based instruction can bridge linguistic and cultural gaps (Adhikari, 2024). This study extends that understanding by indicating that language limitations can strengthen the experiential nature of physical education. Thus, language barriers do not necessarily have negative implications but can act as catalysts for pedagogical transformation toward more inclusive and universal learning practices.

Positive interactions between international students and Indonesian pupils emerged as a key finding. Warm and supportive pedagogical relationships were perceived to contribute to increased student engagement in PE lessons (Nugraha et al., 2024). Within pedagogical caring and teacher–student relationship theory, relationship quality is a key determinant of motivation, engagement, and students' willingness to participate in physical activity, particularly at the elementary level (Dai et al., 2022).

Udhayachandran (2025) highlight the importance of emotionally safe learning environments in physical education, as anxiety and fear of failure often inhibit student participation (Udhayachandran & Sreenivasulu, 2025). The findings suggest that the friendly attitudes and relational approaches adopted by international students helped create a conducive learning climate despite language and facility limitations. This underscores relational competence as a crucial component of physical education teacher professionalism, alongside technical and pedagogical competencies.

Teaching PE in Indonesia encouraged international students to reflect on pedagogical assumptions they previously considered universal. This process aligns with the concept of intercultural competence, which includes self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability in cross-cultural contexts (Udhayachandran & Sreenivasulu, 2025). According to Xia (2024), intercultural competence develops not solely through theoretical learning but through direct experience accompanied by critical reflection (Xia et al., 2024).

Based on Wong (2023) teacher education indicates that cross-cultural experiences significantly contribute to professional identity formation and the development of global perspectives among prospective teachers (Wong & Oh, 2023). International students not only learned about the Indonesian PE system but also developed critical insights into their own educational system (Nopembri et al., 2024).

Cross-cultural experiences thus function as pedagogical mirrors that enable reflective reconstruction of professional understanding (Komalasari, 2023).

Reflections on differences between Indonesian and Dutch PE systems reveal contrasting curriculum paradigms. The Dutch system, perceived as more structured and skill-oriented, aligns with models-based practice, whereas Indonesian PE tends to reflect a multi-activity model. According to critical curriculum theory, no physical education model is neutral or universal, as curricular practices are products of specific social, economic, and policy contexts.

According to Dania et al. (2025) that cross-national transfer of physical education practices often fails when local contexts are not considered. The findings highlight the importance of contextual and reflective approaches in PE development (Dania et al., 2025). International students act as knowledge mediators who do not merely transfer practices from their home systems but negotiate them with the realities of Indonesian schools. The findings demonstrate that international internship programs have strategic potential in the development of physical education teacher education.

Teaching experiences in cross-cultural contexts enable students to simultaneously develop pedagogical, relational, and intercultural competencies. From an experiential learning perspective (Kolb), the cycle of experience, reflectio, conceptualizatio, experimentation experienced by international students forms the foundation of meaningful and sustainable professional learning (Passarelli & Kolb, n.d.). These findings emphasize the importance of designing international internship programs that not only focus on student placement but also provide structured spaces for pedagogical reflection. In this way, cross-cultural experiences can be maximized as a means of preparing adaptive, reflective, and globally minded physical education teachers (Zhou et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teaching PE in a cross-cultural context encourages Dutch international students to develop pedagogical adaptation, contextual communication strategies, and intercultural competencies essential to teacher professionalism. Language barriers, facility limitations, and differences in educational systems were perceived not only as challenges but also as valuable learning resources that enriched students' pedagogical experiences. Reflective comparisons between Indonesian and Dutch PE systems affirm that physical education is inherently contextual and requires flexibility and cultural sensitivity in instructional practice. Consequently, international internship programs such as the Indonesia–Netherlands Daya Krida Program hold strategic potential in preparing adaptive, reflective, and globally oriented prospective physical education teachers.

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