

Dissertation Title Teaching Practicum in Thai Rural Schools: Pre-service English Teachers' Self-efficacy and Identity Construction

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how pre-service English teachers (PSETs) in Thailand develop teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and construct teacher identity (TI) during their teaching practicums in rural school contexts, with particular attention to the demands of English language teaching (ELT) in under-resourced environments. Although rural schools constitute nearly half of Thailand's educational institutions, empirical research remains limited on how rural practicum experiences shape PSETs' efficacy, professional identity, and instructional practices as English teachers. This gap is especially significant in English as a foreign language (EFL) context, where limited student exposure to English, low proficiency levels, and scarce instructional resources place distinctive pedagogical and emotional demands on novice teachers. Addressing this gap, the study was guided by three research objectives: (1) to examine how PSETs' self-efficacy develops during rural practicums; (2) to investigate how TSE contributes to the construction of English TI; and (3) to identify the ELT-specific challenges and opportunities within rural practicums that influence both processes.

Adopting a social constructivist perspective, the study employed a qualitative case study design involving three fourth-year PSETs enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (English) program at a university in northern Thailand. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations focusing on ELT practices, and reflective narratives. Using the three-phase coding method, the findings revealed that PSETs' self-efficacy developed in a nonlinear, context-sensitive manner. At the outset of the practicum, participants entered rural schools with optimism shaped by university coursework and aspirations to teach English, alongside anxiety related to classroom English use, pronunciation, spontaneous interaction, and teaching learners

with very low English proficiency. These initial beliefs were quickly challenged by a period of reality shock as participants encountered multi-grade classrooms, minimal ELT resources, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and expectations to perform both instructional and non-instructional roles.

Over time, English teaching self-efficacy was gradually strengthened through small but meaningful mastery experiences, such as successfully managing classroom interaction in English, adapting ELT activities for mixed-ability learners, improvising teaching materials, and observing incremental student engagement and progress. Vicarious experiences emerged through informal learning from mentor teachers and colleagues, particularly in navigating classroom management and localized ELT practices. Social persuasion, especially encouragement, trust, and recognition from students, mentor teachers, and community members, played a critical role in validating participants' identities as English teachers. Participants' emotional and physiological responses, including stress, exhaustion, pride, and renewed efficacy, served as key interpretive cues for evaluating their instructional competence and professional growth.

The findings further indicate that TSE and TI are developed through a reciprocal but uneven process. While increased efficacy in English lesson delivery, classroom interaction, and student engagement strengthened participants' sense of themselves as English teachers, identity development did not continually advance in parallel with instructional efficacy. In some cases, participants demonstrated growing ELT competence while simultaneously questioning their long-term commitment to the profession due to emotional exhaustion, institutional pressures, and limited structural support. Notably, social persuasion and community recognition played a more decisive role in shaping English TI than mastery experiences alone. The rural practicum thus functioned not merely as a testing ground for pedagogical skills but as a transformative ELT identity space in which autonomy, emotional labor, and close community relationships accelerated professional growth. Contrary to deficit-oriented assumptions, resource-scarce rural contexts both constrained and strengthened PSETs' self-efficacy and identity by fostering adaptive, context-responsive ELT practices.

This study contributes to ELT scholarship by advancing an integrated understanding of the reciprocal relationship between TSE and TI in rural EFL

practicum settings. It highlights how English teacher development is shaped through interactions among linguistic competence, emotional resilience, social validation, and contextual realities. The study offers practical implications for English teacher education, including the need for rural-focused ELT preparation, intensified training in classroom English use, structured mentorship with experienced rural English teachers, and systematic reflective practices that focus on identity work. These findings underscore the importance of stronger university–school partnerships and targeted policy support to enhance the preparation, retention, and professional sustainability of English teachers in underserved rural communities.

Keywords: Teaching Practicum, Rural Schools, Pre-service English Teachers, Teacher Self-efficacy, Teacher Identity, Teacher Education, Thailand