



Research paper

Teaching physical education abroad: Perspectives from host cooperating teachers, local students and Australian pre-service teachers using the social exchange theory

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ABSTRACT

Research on pre-service teachers (PSTs) in international teaching practicums often focus on their experiences rather than how it ameliorates the host communities. Constructs of Social Exchange Theory were used to explore benefits and challenges experienced by four Australian PSTs, two Chinese cooperating teachers (CTs) and 169 local students. The PSTs experienced personal and professional growth, the CTs gained new pedagogical insights, and local students experienced cultural immersion with improved engagement in physical education. Despite mutual benefits, challenges emerged from teaching differences, language barrier, and personal obstacles. These underscore the necessity of investing time and resources to minimise such challenges.

1. Introduction

Initial teacher education programs have incorporated international teaching practicum as part of teacher education courses since the 1970s (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2014; Parr & Chan, 2015). These experiences away from home countries to live and teach abroad enhance pre-service teachers' (PSTs) understanding of learning and teaching through multi-cultural contexts and develop cultural awareness which contribute to their personal and professional growth (Jin, Cooper, & Golding, 2016; Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2004). The demographics of Australian schools are changing, with the Australian classroom made up of students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, reflecting the culturally and linguistically diverse student population. School profile data across states and territories show that the proportion of students with a language background other than English averaged 27%, ranging from 8% in Tasmania to 47% in the Northern Territories (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021). The national accreditation body for teacher education mandates that initial teacher education programs need to "demonstrate teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018). Furthermore, embedded within the curriculum are cross-curriculum priorities in Asia

and Australia's engagement and understanding of Asian societies, and its connection with Australia and the rest of the world (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021).

These agendas highlight the need for teachers to be equipped with cultural competency skills to manage cultural and social variations in how students learn (Shay, 2014). Moule (2012) defines cultural competence as the capacity to effectively educate students from diverse cultural backgrounds that differ from the teacher's own. Achieving cultural competence entails developing personal and interpersonal awareness, acquiring new cultural knowledge, and keeping abreast in cross-cultural teaching strategies. Additionally, it involves confronting one's own biases and embracing multiple worldviews to create an inclusive and effective learning environment. Smolcic and Katunich (2017) emphasise the importance of continuous and active efforts in developing cultural competency skills among teachers throughout their careers and argue that being culturally competent should not be viewed as a one-time achievement but rather as an ongoing process that requires consistent dedication and learning.

Winslade (2016) highlights that universities have recognised the significance of preparing PSTs to be culturally competent, but there is a shortage of programs that provide them with immersive experiences in real-life contexts (Cross et al., 2020). These experiences are essential in expanding their cultural knowledge base and fostering cultural

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competency. Simply learning about cultural diversity in a classroom setting may not fully equip PSTs with the practical skills and insights needed to effectively engage with students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, an international teaching practicum offers valuable opportunities for them to enhance their cultural competency. By immersing themselves in different cultural contexts and interacting with students from diverse backgrounds, they can gain first-hand experience and develop a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities involved in working with diverse student populations, leading to the development of personal and professional growth, appreciation, respect for cultural differences, and building of cultural awareness and sensitivity (Fitzgerald, Parr, & Williams, 2017; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). This practical exposure also enables them to apply their knowledge in real-world situations and adapt their teaching approaches to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners.

Although a plethora of studies (Ateşkan, 2016; Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner, & Lundahl, 2014; Kim & Choi, 2019; Oh & Nussli, 2014; Salmons, Partlo, Kaczynski, & Leonard, 2015) have reported positive outcomes from an international teaching practicum experience, Zhu, Peng, Wandix-White, Walters, and Deng (2019) highlight in their systematic review that most literature on international teaching practicum have been conducted in western societies that are predominantly English-speaking. This may implicate how English native speaking PSTs espouse their educational philosophies and professional identities, embracing them to form a distorted and monolithic worldview around education and diversity in pedagogies, prompting the need for PSTs to be exposed to, and immerse in other non-Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American cultural contexts (Ateşkan, 2016).

While many of the learning outcomes of how an international teaching practicum translates into a PST's personal and professional life have been reported in the literature (Hepple et al., 2017; Lickteig, Rozell, & Peterson, 2019; Santoro, 2014; Talbot & Thomas, 2021), few studies examine if these experiences are reciprocated by the host institution and communities. For example, Aamaas, Nodeland, and Duesund (2020) found that Indian CTs who supervised Norwegian PSTs for over 20 years reported gaining insights into new pedagogies, widening their horizons to a foreign culture, and witnessing changes in their students' attitude towards learning. As local students' views were not sought, it might be worthwhile examining their perspectives on the impact of learning and teaching from these interactions. In another study examining the impact of a short-term international teaching practicum, Jin et al. (2016) found that Chinese CTs and local students highly valued the experience and differences in pedagogical approaches brought by Australian PSTs. This study also underscored the importance of future research in amplifying the voices of local students to enhance the learning experience for all participants. Beyond the field of initial teacher education, Kemp et al. (2021) examined the perceived worth of dietic students to host placement organisations and found that supervising placement educators valued their contributions. They commented that students actively participated in their organisation's work and action plans, resulting in increased productivity.

The mutual goal of developing PSTs in cultural competency skills while benefiting host communities must not be understated as evidence suggests that international teaching practicum learning outcomes are often focused on PSTs and neglect the voices and perspectives of CTs and local students (Jin, Parr, & Cooley, 2020; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). Critical to successful international teaching practicums between universities and host communities, are how the hosts' voices support the planning, implementation, and evaluation (Dharamsi et al., 2010). To allow such partnerships to flourish and be sustained by universities with host local communities, there is a need to examine how these experiences provide a reciprocal exchange between PSTs and host communities in which they are placed.

1.1. Social exchange theory (SET)

In this study, we used the SET to investigate the exchanges between PSTs, host CTs and local students. The SET suggests that social interaction between different parties contain benefits and costs, and behaviour is driven by the anticipated exchange of benefits, which can either be tangible or intangible (Blau, 1986; Homans, 1958). The SET is also a key theoretical construct used in workplace behaviour to understand benefits and costs through a series of interactions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which can result in direct and indirect exchanges between two or more parties (Molm, 2014). Since schools can be viewed as workplaces (Newman, 1995), we propose that an international teaching practicum provides opportunities for exchanges through interactions between PSTs and host communities. In this context, the simplest form of exchange takes place in the form of a direct exchange between two parties, i.e., between the Australian PSTs and the host CTs: and the Australian PSTs and the host local students, with each party's outcome mutually dependent on their behaviours and interactions whereas an indirect exchange can take place among three parties where each party gives benefits to another, but the exchange of benefits is not reciprocated directly (Molm, 2014). The costs in these contexts refer to non-monetary challenges experienced by all parties. Fig. 1 illustrates the various forms of direct and indirect exchanges among the main parties within this international teaching practicum.

Data analyses using the SET thus provide insights into the perceptions of benefits and costs between all involved to leverage future relationships and continued partnership between universities and host communities. Using a social exchange lens and drawing from the voices from PSTs, CTs and local students, this study aims to investigate the exchange of benefits and costs (challenges) of an international teaching practicum by Australian PSTs teaching Physical Education (PE) in China.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative thematic inquiry approach (Butler-Kisber, 2010) to explore the experiences of different stakeholders in an international teaching practicum. This methodology focuses on delving into intricate phenomena by examining themes or patterns present in the data, aligning with the study's objective of exploring the exchange of interactions and experiences between PSTs, CTs, and local students, and the mutual benefits they gained from one another. Reflexive thematic analysis, a process involving reflexive, recursive engagement with the dataset was utilised to systematically identify, analyse, and interpret themes within the qualitative data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This recursive and iterative analytical process involves a series of six distinct steps, commencing with familiarising oneself with the data, followed by the generation of codes, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and naming of the themes, and ultimately, providing illustrative exemplars to reinforce their significance and contextualise their meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019).

2.1. Setting

A key direction of the first author's institution's strategic plan was to engage with Asia and prepare graduates for the globalised world of work through well-developed cross-cultural skills and competencies to navigate a borderless workforce. Concurrently, to fulfil the Australian government's strategic intent to foster a deeper understanding of the Indo-Pacific region among young Australians, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade initiated the New Colombo Mobility Program Plan, which provides generous support and funding for undergraduate students to undertake internships in the Indo-Pacific region (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). This initiative enabled the Australian PSTs to undertake the teaching practicum as a practical component of a

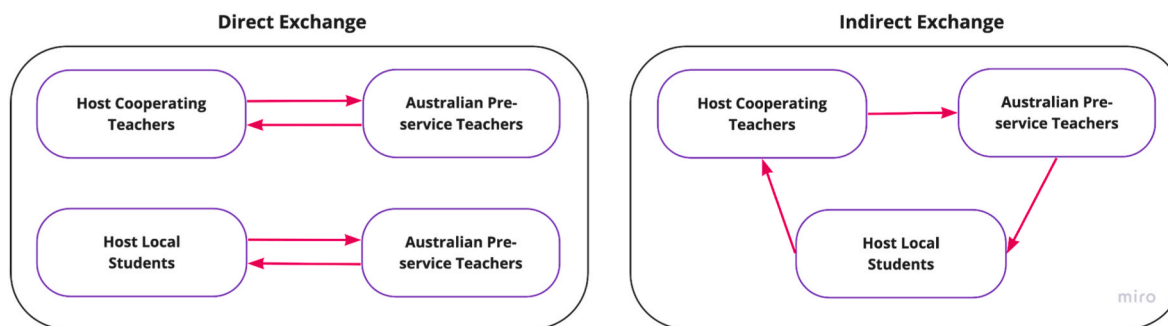


Fig. 1. Direct and Indirect Exchanges within the International Teaching Practicum
Note. Adapted from Molm's (2014) direct and indirect exchange structures.

credit-bearing academic pedagogy unit in their degree which enabled them to immerse themselves in captivating cross-cultural learning experiences.

The international teaching practicum program in this study lasted for 4 weeks and took place in a secondary school in Guangdong, a coastal province in southeast China. The school offers the Chinese national curriculum and an international division offering the Cambridge IGCSE curriculum and International Baccalaureate Diploma programme (Grade 7–12), where the Australian PSTs were placed. The medium of instruction for the curriculum at the international division was in English except for PE which was taught in English and Mandarin. Prior to the teaching practicum, a partnership agreement was signed between the university and the school.

2.2. Participants

Two male and two female Australian PSTs (age: 22 ± 1.8 years) from the Bachelor of Health and Physical Education program participated in the international teaching practicum. “Zach” and “Owen” were in fourth year while “Olivia” and “Emma” were in second year. Before this international teaching practicum, Zach and Owen had completed six teaching practicum blocks, while Olivia and Emma had completed two blocks each in Australian primary and secondary schools. These prior practicum blocks, lasted from two to three weeks each, provided them with valuable teaching experience. The selection process was based on their academic performance, previous practicum reports, and a written statement expressing their motivations for participating in the program. It is worth noting that all four participants were middle class English-speaking Caucasian born in Australia and had limited familiarity with China and its education system, as this was their first trip to the country.

The Australian PSTs taught under the guidance of one expatriate and two local CTs (Teacher K, Teacher C and Teacher S, thereafter, referred to as TK, TC and TS) who supervised them individually and as a team. The partnership between the university and the school was established by the first author, who was a bilingual academic. This international teaching practicum was made possible through TK, who served as a personal contact and the Head of Department in PE at the school. The first author and TK had previously undergone postgraduate training together in Australia, forming their relationship. TC and TS were trained in Chinese universities and majored in PE. TK had been teaching at the school for five years, while TC and TS had three and seven years of teaching experience at the school, respectively. All CTs had previous experience supervising local PSTs. While TK taught PE in English, TC and TS chose to teach the subject in Mandarin.

2.3. Context of teaching practicum

During the first week of the teaching practicum, the Australian PSTs shadowed and observed TK to familiarise themselves with the school and the local Chinese students. Due to TK's leadership responsibilities

within the school, TC and TS were appointed to be the CTs for the Australian PSTs and were primarily responsible for providing supervision and guidance for the remainder three weeks. The Australian PSTs were subsequently assigned to teach classes led by TC and TS, comprising Year 7 to Year 11. Each class had approximately 25 students and they taught an average of 3 periods daily, with each period lasting 50 min. As TS and TC were not confident in communicating in the English language, TK assisted with the translation during their daily debrief session.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

Six months after the Australian PSTs returned home, the first author organised a 60-min online focus group interview to gather insights on various aspects of their experience, including pedagogy, lesson planning, instructional and classroom management, as well as personal challenges. Additionally, a separate 60-min online focus group interview was conducted with TC and TS using their native language, Mandarin, allowing for a more comfortable and authentic expression of their thoughts (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008). In this focus group interview, they discussed their experiences as mentors to the Australian PSTs, covering topics such as their observations of the PSTs' professional knowledge and skills, positive experiences they've encountered, challenges faced during the mentoring process, the influence of the Australian PSTs on the local students' learning, and any issues encountered in their mentorship role. The questions used in these focus group interviews were adapted from Jin, Parr, and Cooley (2020) and were specifically designed to elicit responses regarding the Australian PSTs and host CTs' experiences in the program focusing on perceived value, benefits, and challenges of the international teaching practicum. All focus group interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. An important point to highlight is that TK was not present during the focus group interview as he had already left the school to pursue other interests.

To expand the scope of insights and help triangulate the findings of the study, the local Chinese students who were taught by the Australian PSTs were surveyed regarding their experiences and interactions with the Australian PSTs. To ensure a wider reach and practicality, an open-ended free text online questionnaire (Bartram, 2019) in Chinese was disseminated to the students from the classes of the two local CTs. The questionnaire, adapted from Jin, Parr, and Cooley (2020) contained items designed to elicit the local students' perspectives and experiences about attending the lessons conducted by the Australian PSTs and included inquiries about what the students liked or disliked about them, their impressions of their teaching, the contributions they made to their school life, memorable moments or experiences, and any suggestions they had for the teacher to improve their teaching. This format allowed the students to freely express themselves and provided an opportunity to collect rich, meaningful, and authentic free-text data. A total of 169 students voluntarily participated in the study.

Following the data collection process, data from the focus group

interviews and online questionnaire surveys were transcribed verbatim and translated into English by the two authors who are bilingual. Based on recommended protocols for qualitative analyses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020), the authors listened to the audio recordings, read the interview and survey transcripts, and took notes independently. All transcribed data were then compiled and analysed using NVivo 12 software. Following that, they discussed and agreed on the extent of responses by all three parties within the themes of social exchange regarding reciprocity, benefits and costs related to the international teaching practicum. Key themes supplemented by participant quotes were used to illustrate and provide evidence of data. Pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure anonymity. This research project was approved by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 2020-23215-10696) and the host Chinese school’s principal.

3. Results

The analyses of the data were interpreted through the lens of the SET to examine and triangulate the dynamic exchanges of benefits and costs (challenges) between the Australian PSTs, host CTs and local students. Themes related to the benefits, and costs (challenges) for each group of participants are shown in Table 1 and discussed in detail in the proceeding section.

3.1. Benefits to Australian pre-service teachers

Contextualising Theory with Practice. The significance of the international teaching practicum and how it benefited their professional and personal development emerged as main themes among the Australian PSTs. Participants all agreed that teaching PE in an international setting provided them with new learning opportunities beyond what they have learnt in the classroom in Australia. The PSTs highlighted how they were able to apply pedagogical theories and concepts learnt at university in a real-world setting, which enabled them to contextualise the links between theory and practice in relation to pedagogy, instructional approach, lesson planning and classroom management.

For instance, they were introduced to the concepts of *Games Sense* approach during their university studies, which is a learner-centred instructional approach that uses modified games and decision-making to promote critical thinking and engagement (Light, 2013). This instructional approach is predominantly used in Australia to teach game development (Breed & Spittle, 2020; Jarrett & Harvey, 2016). Emma, who only had two prior teaching practicum experience shared how this approach was an “eye opener” when she observed TK utilising modified

Table 1
Themes emerging from analyses of data.

	Benefits	Costs (Challenges)
Participants	Themes	
Australian pre-service teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualising theory with practice • Cultural immersion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Adapting of teaching pedagogies o Interaction with local students o Engagement with popular Chinese sports • Stepping out of comfort zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic differences in the teaching of Physical Education • Language barrier
Cooperating teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New pedagogical insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language barrier
Local students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced engagement during Physical Education • Cultural immersion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o New pedagogies o More exposure to English language use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to learning

games to teach Year 10 students the concept of spatial movement during a rugby lesson. This instructional approach, along with other pedagogical approaches prompted the PSTs to reflect on their own teaching practices. For example, they highlighted how it made them appreciate and think about the use of appropriate visual demonstrations to ensure that movement concepts were understood. As evidenced by Zach, who reflected on a basketball lesson he taught to Grade 8 students:

I knew how it worked in Australia as I’ve used this approach [Game Sense] in my previous teaching rounds, but not in an international context. I dug into the concept a lot more and thought about appropriate modifications to my lessons, activities, breaking down of a skill and adapting my teaching styles to cater to their learning needs. It made me think deeper into what modifications are going to work.

This use of visual demonstration is key, as the nature and notion of embodied learning in PE which focuses on how students construct their learning physically through their bodies (Aartun, Walseth, Standal, & Kirk, 2022), may also be used to overcome language or cultural barriers when teaching movement skills. Owen explained:

What I learnt very quickly was the power of doing a visual demonstration to students who do not understand English [reference to Grade 7 students who had just transitioned from primary school and were not proficient in English yet]. It will take too long to explain a concept but all I had to do was to demonstrate which made me a better teacher to cater to visual learners and conquer cultural and social barriers.

Zach reiterated this viewpoint, emphasising how this international teaching experience underscored the significance of catering to visual learners. It enhanced his instructional abilities when teaching students who rely on visual cues because of cultural and language disparities. Concurrent to the discussion around modification of pedagogies, the Australian PSTs observed how PE was taught differently by TC and TS who were trained locally and were more structured in their instructional approach, which impacted students’ interest in physical activity. This was in contrast with TK who encouraged them to use instructional approaches learnt at university and apply them in sports and games to sustain students’ interest in PE. As Olivia commented:

Using the Games Sense approach was really good, especially what Jennifer [university lecturer] taught us this year. It cemented that as one of the best ways to teach. Students tend to be disengaged if I do not use this pedagogy. It caters to non-sporty kids as they are having fun. They may not necessarily like soccer/basketball, but because they are in teams playing small-sided games, they are with friends and that keeps them engaged.

Cultural Immersion - Adapting of Teaching Pedagogies. Beyond the opportunity to contextualise theory with practice, the cultural immersion provided the Australian PSTs an opportunity to broaden their pedagogical repertoire. This expansion allowed them to engage in deep reflection on their teaching practices and enhance their ability to adapt and customise their teaching styles. Other cultural musings included the need to consider cultural differences in learning and teaching, particularly for students whose English is not their first language and recognise the importance of delivering clear and concise instructions. Furthermore, the experience prompted them to re-evaluate the words used, reminding themselves to speak slowly and avoid using Australian slang that could potentially confuse or exclude non-native English speakers. Zach, for example, reflected:

When you get yourself into an environment where the kids don’t speak English as their first language, you have to change it completely. It made me think deeper about what modifications are going to work, how I will be able to demonstrate this activity to

students who may have limited English comprehension and to slow down when I'm giving instructions.

Cultural Immersion - Interaction with Local Students. Owen added that when teaching in a non-English speaking environment, he had to "change the questioning completely" and "rephrase his questioning" to make it understandable for the Chinese students and to get the response he wants. In addition, Zach also described the ways in which he addressed the barriers created by the power dynamics between teachers and students that commonly exist in collective cultures (Wong, 2016) and said:

Chinese students are less expressive and will maintain a certain distance from the teacher. The teacher is someone that they always look up to ... When I asked questions or spoke to students, I was not getting a lot of engagement. There was this barrier, and it was initially hard to connect so I added a bit of humour to break the ice ... I gave them a lot more encouragement and feedback and let them know that I'm not just a teacher but someone who can provide emotional support as well.

This contrasted with his experience in Australia, as feedback and encouragement from teachers are frequently provided and the Australian culture tends to embrace more expressive and affectionate behaviours (Geng, Smith, Black, Budd, & Disney, 2019). The PSTs also experienced first-hand on the differences in culture on classroom management. Although the local Chinese students were exposed to western philosophies where engagement with teachers and the proactive participation in classroom discussions are encouraged, many ancient philosophical and intellectual traditions continue to influence and shaped their behaviours in the classroom (Ryan, 2019). Therefore, in terms of classroom management, all PSTs reflected that there were no issues and that the local students were more respectful to teachers and valued education a lot more compared to Australian students. As Owen shared:

I do not have to worry about disciplining anyone. So, because of the minimal management that I had to do, it allowed me or rather it ended being more beneficial for the students because they got more out of it (the lessons), rather than me telling them off half the time.

By directly experiencing the differences in student behaviours influenced by cultural upbringing, the Australian PSTs became better prepared to engage students from a different cultural background. Their observations were mediated by classroom practices and student behaviour underpinned by core values of traditional Confucianism where respect is afforded to teachers who hold all knowledge paralleled with unquestioned authority (Jin, Parr, & Cooley, 2020; Leng, 2005). As a result of minimal management, it allowed them to focus on lesson content which benefited students' learning.

Cultural Immersion - Engagement with Popular Chinese Sports. As part of their cultural immersion experience, the Australian PSTs emphasised that engaging in popular Chinese sports such as badminton, dancing and volleyball (Fan, Liu, Min, & Guan, 2013) broadened their awareness of the diverse range of games played in other cultures which also provided opportunities for them to teach sports and games less commonly played in Australia. Olivia noted that while tennis is the main net and wall game in Australia due to its popularity (Australian Sports Commission, 2019) and was confident in teaching the sport, she discovered numerous effective teaching methods for sports that are particularly popular in China, such as volleyball. Zach shared his teaching approach for volleyball sets, emphasising the importance of visual cues:

You didn't realise that obviously different countries play different sports and what they teach in schools. I learnt about sports that are more commonly played in China. The main thing I learnt was that there are a lot of ways to teach volleyball.

He then demonstrated the action by putting his hands together to show that the arms should go straight, ensuring that his students could clearly see and understand the desired movement.

Stepping Out from Comfort Zone. Finally, all the Australian PSTs shared their perspectives of being challenged due to the language barrier, adjustment to a new culture and environment, and the stress of teaching in a foreign school. While they indicated that they have travelled overseas previously, they also commented that the international teaching practicum, unlike other trips, was high stakes and challenging since they had to uphold the university's reputation and expectations coupled with close interactions with Chinese CTs and local students. As the following quote by Zach shows, they viewed the international teaching practicum as a learning experience to complement their university experience and an opportunity for personal growth, whereby they could reflect on this experience and bring those practices into an Australian classroom.

The word "growth" comes to mind. It really helped me break out of my shell a little bit more. I got to do this [teach in China] at university and this pushed me a little further ... I could not recommend the experience enough to anyone. It was one of the greatest highlights. I learnt a lot about myself and teaching. It is the most eye-opening thing; you get to see the world ... you can't replace the sort of memories ... it's educational. That sums up everything: the growth, the professional and personal development.

Emma and Olivia also shared they stepped out of their comfort zone and grew from wanting to go back home badly due to the cultural shock to eventually overcoming it. Their transformation is summed aptly by Emma who shared:

When I first came to China, I had culture shock and I just want to go home. I was just bawling my eyes out for three days straight. But I got over it and now, I can pretty much do anything ... It was difficult but I'm glad I did it.

These quotes from the preceding sections encapsulated the PSTs' international teaching practicum experiences, which align with previous studies highlighting the positive outcomes of such experiences. These benefits include increased confidence and self-efficacy (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), a deeper appreciation for different cultures (Cushner, 2014) and the development of a diverse repertoire of teaching strategies to enhance their professional and personal development (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). Taken together, they benefited immensely from the experience through their interactions with the CTs and teaching PE to local students. The international teaching practicum juxtaposed traditional philosophical core values in education with contemporary instructional approaches also provided opportunities for them to deliberate their learning and teaching practices. They were able to adapt pedagogies, contextualise and apply instructional approaches in an international setting and view this experience as a revelation to their teaching aspirations.

3.2. Benefits to cooperating teachers

New Pedagogical Insights. The international teaching practicum benefited the CTs who perceived it as an excellent opportunity for their professional development, which emerged as the main theme. They also spoke about gaining new pedagogical insights through their interactions and mentorship of the PSTs. When asked about their mentoring experience of the Australian PSTs, both CTs who were mentoring overseas PSTs for the first time asserted positive impressions and remarked on their professionalism, preparedness, and enthusiasm. This can be attributed to the motivations of the Australian PSTs who were keen to experience teaching in an international setting and the high expectations placed on them. TS commended:

Her [Emma] professionalism was evident, and it left a deep impression on me. For example, she observed that there was a boys' soccer team at the Chinese division of the school who was training and took initiative to get involved by joining their training as she also wanted to learn about what they did for their training. I spoke to the coach, and he shared that her training and coaching methods were new to him and, he too, learnt from this experience. This mutually benefited both parties.

One of the main observations they noted was the differences in pedagogies which contributed to students' learning and positive engagements during lessons. Specifically, the use of game-based instructional approach, interaction and autonomy given to students in learning sports and games seemed to engage them during PE. These pedagogies were unfamiliar to them as their only exposure to other pedagogies has been limited to games-based approaches used by TK in his teaching. TC and TS also reflected on their own training and experience, which was centred around examination-oriented educational outcomes and directed towards preparation of high school examination (Meng, Horrell, McMillan, & Chai, 2021), and it was refreshing to observe a different instructional approach. As PE is not one of the examinable subjects in the curriculum under the international division, the CTs felt that it was opportune for them to think progressively and adapt new pedagogies so that their students enjoy physical activity. The systemic shift in China's PE curriculum reforms from performance orientation to health promotion and regular physical activity participation (Jin, 2013) also prompted them to want to adapt pedagogies that enhanced students' engagement. TS reflected:

I do not want to be stuck using just one teaching style or a teaching model and not change. Students will get bored after a while; they would also like to experience different teaching pedagogies. This is what I have learnt.

Among the teaching traits exhibited by the Australian PSTs, the CTs commented on the high level of engagement with students during the lessons and observed how that increased their interest during basketball and rugby lessons. This level of interaction is attributed to the Games Sense approach, where questioning and social interaction are used to stimulate communication and dialogue from which learning about game concepts emerges and contributes to students' enjoyment (Light, 2013). As evidenced by TC:

But the way they deliver, like an interactive style ... I have not experienced this type of teaching model. One lesson that left a very deep impression was during a basketball lesson. The way they teach basketball is different from the way we teach it here. They focused on passing, throwing, and catching; like a teaching model to pass knowledge to students. This style of pedagogy [reference to Game Sense approach] was refreshing ... I will also try this pedagogy that they brought over.

Overall, this international teaching practicum proved to be a mutually beneficial experience, enabling CTs to enhance their professional growth while providing Australian PSTs with a valuable international teaching opportunity. While TC and TS noted that they did not perceive significant differences in teaching philosophies and culture, this collaborative exchange of knowledge and teaching practices has the potential to foster continuous improvement in educational settings, benefiting both teachers and students alike.

3.3. Benefits to local students

Enhanced Engagement during Physical Education Lessons. The local Chinese students' perception of the international teaching practicum experience were mostly positive, and their views often aligned with the CTs. They felt that they derived tremendous joy from attending their lessons. This positive experience can be attributed to the Australian

PSTs' dispositions which were described by the local students using words such as "enthusiastic", "friendly", "approachable", "cheerful", and "patient".

Another contributing factor was the positive atmosphere that the Australian PSTs created in the classroom. Indeed, many of the students reflected and shared excitedly about the fun and joy experienced in the classroom with one Year 8 student commenting that "the lesson will always be filled with laughter". The local students enjoyed the lessons so much that they expressed a desire for more interaction with the Australian PSTs when asked about their preferences for the international teaching practicum experience. A Year 11 student remarked, "The Australian teachers allowed us to experience different styles of PE lessons. For the first time, I realised that PE lessons can be so interesting. Every lesson is filled with novelty, and the atmosphere is invigorating."

The feedback from the local students indicated a significant improvement in their attitude and feelings towards PE lessons. This positive sentiment was also observed by the CTs, TS and TC, who noted that the positive rapport facilitated better learning experiences. As evidenced by TC:

They were able to sustain students' interest and allowed them to learn at their own pace. Our students really liked them. Every time when they see them [PSTs], they will be very happy and welcoming towards them. My students always anticipate and look forward to PE lessons.

Culture Immersion - New Pedagogies. Beyond the personalities of the Australian PSTs, the positive experience by the local students can also be contributed to the new pedagogies introduced in their classroom. They noted the differences in teaching pedagogies when compared to their teachers as they drew contrasts with their own experience at school and acknowledged that the differences in pedagogical styles were refreshing. As evidenced by a Grade 8 student who prefers the style of the Australian PSTs, shared that "it is completely different from our teachers who are more structured. For example, they will patiently explain in the middle of a game and will also use demonstrations".

Many of the students also reflected on how the novel approaches, especially through the Games Sense approach, meshed with scaffolding as an instructional method when introducing new concepts and skills aided their learning and understanding of games concepts. They commended how the Australian PSTs would stop and ask them for opinions or ideas during game play which enabled them to grasp the movement concepts quickly. This is evidenced by a Grade 11 female student who commented that "the game approach is more immersive and allows for better understanding of the teaching contents and playing small-sided games with my classmates brought joy to the learning". Thus, application of such instructional approach not only benefited students' learning but also enhanced their interest in PE. The CTs acknowledged the positive impact of the program on their students, as evidenced by TS who commented:

They [PSTs] brought with them novel pedagogies ... My students have provided feedback to me that they like this style of pedagogy. It is student-centred and focused on having fun. This allowed them to sustain interest in PE which also promotes physical literacy.

Concurrently, many local students also expressed their gratitude to be given the opportunity to be acquainted with foreign sports and games. The Australian PSTs, among the many sports taught during their short stint, introduced Australian rules football and its connection to Australian culture, which was well received by them. The CTs were equally impressed by the PSTs' enthusiasm to impart their culture when Zach and Owen donated twenty footballs through their local football club back home and used them in their teaching. The following quote from a Grade 11 male student sums up:

Their teaching adopted a step-by-step approach. For example, when they taught football [AFL], they introduced the background and rules of the sport for us to develop a basic understanding of the sport. Thereafter, they taught us how to master the basic skills required for the sport and allow us to practise repeatedly. The last part would be a game. This type of teaching method was very interesting.

Cultural Immersion - More Exposure to English Language. The additional opportunity to be exposed to the English language was another highlight described by the local students as a benefit in their studies since their curriculum, assessments and project work are taught and delivered in English. Apart from TS and TC who taught PE in Chinese, some Grade 7–8 students who have transitioned from primary school where the curriculum were taught in Chinese, expressed gratitude for opportunities to communicate with native English speakers as this helped them become more confident and proficient in English. Indeed, a Grade 7 female student commented that “I like it because I can learn English while having PE lessons. It created an English-speaking environment, and this will improve our English proficiency”.

This exposure to native speakers also benefited the older students who were already proficient in the English language by exposing them to technical terms used specifically in PE. A Grade 11 student commented:

Our PE lessons are conducted using Mandarin. One of the greatest take-away was having more opportunities to be exposed to technical English terms which are used and related to PE. The arrival of the Australian per-service teachers enhanced our English vocabulary and oral communication skills.

Previous studies on international teaching practicums have reported positive impact on participants’ attitude toward the English language (Jin et al., 2016; Kabilan, 2013), further supporting the observations made in this program. The cooperative teachers recognised that their students derived significant benefits from the program, both in terms of learning outcomes and overall engagement in PE. The insights gained by the local students resonate with Giroux’s (2005) notion of ‘border crossing.’ As the Australian PSTs taught them, the students needed to navigate various borders, such as communicating in both English and Chinese languages, adapting to teaching approaches different from their regular teachers, and understanding the dynamics between Australian and Chinese cultures (Jin, Parr, & Hui, 2020). These experiences prompted the students to engage in a process of crossing boundaries and embracing diverse perspectives. Although there were exchanges and reciprocity of benefits for all participants, the data also uncovered substantial challenges in relation to differences in teaching pedagogies in PE, language barrier and personal challenges.

3.4. Costs (challenges) to Australian pre-service teachers

Systemic Differences in the Teaching of Physical Education. The Australian PSTs observed how PE was taught differently by their CTs who were trained locally and were more structured in their approach. The contrasting teaching practices led to a cognitive dissonance (Eisenhardt, Besnoy, & Steele, 2012) as they tried to reconcile the differences between what they’ve learnt at university and the realities they encountered during their international teaching practicum. It was a revelation experience for Emma who shared:

There’s a whole different world out there that does things differently, like the opposite. Completely different from what I’ve learnt. It made me think that there is so much more to PE than what they teach you at university. So, it was mind blowing.

In contrary, this also meant that precious time was spent on observing PE teaching pedagogies which might not be applicable in the PST’s home country. Emma revealed instances where she felt that she was not learning much because “that is not the typical way we do it in Australia.” She cited the example of warm-up exercises, where the local

approach involved static stretches rather than the dynamic movement she was accustomed to. The systemic differences in the structure of the PE classes were also noted by Owen who elaborated further:

A lot of their physical activity is based around structure, very structured, like military drill, if I must casually explain it. A lot of just running laps, doing star jumps, bouncing a ball on the spot. More like fundamental motor skills-based stuff, but not necessarily learning how to be successful in games and strategies, and concepts that build successful athletes in team sports.

Overall, the Australian PSTs encountered a significant contrast in teaching methods during their observation of PE classes, prompting them to reflect on the broader scope of PE and the diverse approaches followed worldwide. This observation can be attributed to the differing aims for the conduct of PE in different countries. Tsai and Zhou (2017) argues that PE in China traditionally tend to focus on improving physical fitness of students, while western countries tend to promote sports and physical activities to enhance quality of life. For example, in Australia, the primary aim is to foster lifelong engagement in physical activity (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022), while in the UK, it is to develop competencies for lifelong participation in physical activities (Long & Roberts, 2022).

Language Barrier. As PE classes taught by TS and TC were conducted in mandarin, the difference in the medium of instruction proved to be challenging for the Australian PSTs who were observing their CTs’ lesson. Emma summed it aptly when asked about her least valuable experience during the international teaching practicum:

Because they spoke Chinese to the kids, I was kind of sitting there thinking, what are they doing? And try to figure it out myself but then they would go and do things completely different ... When they spoke in Chinese, I was lost, and I’ll be asking the students, “What did she just say?”. The kids will just laugh.

Being able to observe how CTs manage and teach have been highlighted as key constructs to experiencing unfamiliar pedagogies (Amaas et al., 2020), and is especially important for PSTs as they develop their pedagogical skills (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005).

3.5. Costs (challenges) to cooperating teachers

Language Barrier. When the CTs were asked about the main challenges faced during the international teaching practicum, both mentioned “language barrier” as a significant challenge. As the Australian PSTs could only communicate in English, this created additional workload and inconveniences for the CTs, who struggled to communicate effectively and confidently in English. They relied on TK for translation to guide and facilitate the PSTs’ learning, resulting in the need for more time to organise feedback sessions. TC expressed difficulty in communicating and clarifying details, while TS remarked that the language barrier limited his interaction and communication with the Australian PSTs. It is important to note that this experience is not unique, as CTs often encounter various emotions directly linked to their mentoring role, and the challenge is further amplified when mentoring international PSTs, given the limited time available to provide effective support (Hastings, 2004; Spooner-Lane et al., 2009).

3.6. Costs (challenges) to local students

Disruption to Learning. While most of the local students had positive perceptions about the international teaching practicum experience, a small minority brought up the issue of the disruptions to their learning progress due to the perceived teaching competency of the PSTs. One student from Grade 10 commented that the PSTs did not account for differentiated learning while two students from Grade 9 commented about the poor teaching quality and expressed concerns about their lack of teaching experience; but they did not elaborate further. Given that the

PSTs are at the stage of learning and refining their pedagogical competencies, and coupled with cultural differences, these responses are to be expected (Macqueen, Reynolds, & Ferguson-Patrick, 2020).

The data also revealed the possibility of the local students' resistance toward another culture that is imposed upon them by the international teaching practicum. A Grade 10 student commented that "the new games and sports being taught were not interesting at all" and another Grade 9 student commented that she is "not interested in other foreign sports at all." Although such responses can be considered as outliers, it served as a reminder of the importance of cultural sensitivities and not to assume the superiority or embossment of one culture over another.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the impact of an international teaching practicum on various stakeholders, including Australian PSTs, host CTs, and local students. Employing a lens grounded in the SET, this study probed the perspectives of these three groups to derive nuanced interpretations which deepened our understanding of the outcomes of a teaching practicum that transcends national boundaries, cultural disparities, and language barrier. The results highlighted the concept of SET involving exchange and reciprocity (Molm, 2014), which was evident in the actions and responses of all parties engaged in this international teaching practicum, consistent with outcomes from previous studies (Jin et al., 2016; Jin, Parr, & Cooley, 2020). These exchanges, both direct and indirect, occurred without explicit negotiation, as showcased by the CTs who provided guidance to the Australian PSTs without certainty about the extent of reciprocity. Similar dynamics were observed in the direct interactions between local students and the Australian PSTs.

Through these direct exchanges, the Australian PSTs were able to contextualise theory with practice, immerse in the Chinese culture and experienced professional and personal growth. The CTs gained new pedagogical insights while the local students experienced new instructional approaches from English native speakers. Our data suggest that the investment of time and resources for this program demonstrated a fruitful exchange for the outcomes achieved and are congruent with related studies investigating the outcomes of international teaching practicums for PSTs (Kim & Choi, 2019; Santoro, 2014; Winslade, 2016) which contribute to the ongoing scholarship on the complexities and benefits of international teaching practicums for PSTs and host communities (Fitzgerald et al., 2017).

While the benefits received by the host community were within expectations, one novel and interesting finding to note in this study would be the presence of the reciprocal exchanges of benefits between the three parties even though the CTs and the Australian PSTs taught PE using different languages. This might be attributed to the notion of embodied learning pedagogy in PE which explains how the language barrier when teaching movement skills can be overcome as the students' exploration of (new) movements can contribute to their learning by the development of body awareness and meaningful experiences (Aartun et al., 2022).

It is essential to note that the attainment of benefits for all parties in an international teaching practicum is not automatic. The CTs and local students can only benefit if the PSTs are well-prepared, approach the experience with a positive attitude, and are committed to learning and contributing professionally to the classroom (Major, 2020). While the Australian PSTs in this study were deemed by the CTs to be skilled and competent, this cannot be assumed for all PSTs participating in an international teaching practicum. Additionally, CTs themselves must be open to learning from the PSTs to obtain mutual learning benefits (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009). While Winslade (2016) argues that an international teaching practicum experience can enhance PSTs' cultural competence and awareness of cultural beliefs, there are limited studies on the perceived value of cultural development through PE teaching. Given that PE involves teaching content related to the impact of culture on young people's lives in

contemporary societies, this research becomes especially relevant and timely.

The results also suggest potential indirect exchanges among the three parties. Notably, six months after the program, positive attitude towards PE were still maintained by the local students. This can be attributed to the innovative teaching methods by the Australian PSTs which indirectly benefited the CTs. However, the sustainability of these positive attitude in the local students beyond the study's duration remains unclear as prior research have only emphasised on the long-term impact of an international teaching practicum on PSTs as they transition into their teaching careers (Gaudino & Wilson, 2019; Kim, Yun, & Sol, 2021). This experience has been instrumental in fostering deep respect for students' unique differences and diverse cultures. Additionally, it has facilitated the acquisition of adaptability in teaching approaches and notable improvements in classroom management skills. Since this study did not focus on capturing the long-term effects of an international teaching practicum, future research is necessary to confirm the presence of indirect exchanges of the costs and benefits among the different parties, especially host communities (Kemp et al., 2021).

Beyond the benefits, the study also identified challenges, including systemic differences in pedagogies and language barrier between Australian PSTs and CTs, as well as the perception of disruption to learning by local students. To overcome these challenges, universities and host communities need to form partnerships to ensure that reciprocity of exchanges of benefits are met by all parties (Kemp et al., 2021). Forming a partnership requires establishing relationships, and the presence of exchanges with mutual benefits is crucial for maintaining a strong and sustainable partnership. Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell, and Cherednichenko (2009) emphasise the importance of learning for all parties as a priority for an effective partnership, with reciprocity being a key aspect for a sustainable relationship between universities and schools.

Considering the importance of exchanges in influencing relationship, Molm (2014) argues that indirect exchange has the strongest effect on building trust, solidarity and affective relations, followed by reciprocal direct exchange, and negotiated exchange. The exchanges observed in this study were mainly direct and reciprocal in nature; organisers of future international teaching practicums should explore indirect exchange dynamics to forge strong relationships with host communities as it leads to mutual benefits despite the costs and challenges involved (Molm, 2014). For example, future organisers of such programs might evaluate potential PSTs based on their ability to effectively engage students within a multicultural setting. This proactive approach can enhance the likelihood of a positive learning experience for local students, indirectly benefitting CTs through heightened student engagement in the subject matter. The concept of dialogue and reciprocity, as highlighted by Parr, Faulkner, and Rowe (2017), plays a central role in establishing meaningful connections with host communities during international teaching practicums. Since academics and PSTs are accustomed to university spaces and their own country's familiar environments, dialogue, collaboration and learning from those in schools beyond the university walls and outside their comfort zones become crucial in this context.

In addition to the exchange dynamics and dialogue, Barton, Hartwig, and Cain (2015) recommend organising information and workshop sessions that incorporate cultural and colloquial considerations awareness into the pre-trip planning process for both CTs and PSTs prior to their placement. Doing this will help to establish robust relationships with host communities and ensure mutual benefits. To further enhance the international experience, Major (2020) also advocates for the inclusion of pre-departure learning, reflections during the practicum and formal post-trip evaluations and assessments.

4.1. Strengths and limitations

This study is limited in that data was only collected from the two

local CTs with the absence of TK, and the lack of direct access to interview local students to gain insights about their experiences. We were also unable to interview TK who played a key role in setting up this international practicum as their views may have provided insights into some of the challenges identified by the Australian PSTs and CTs. However, a strength of this study was the considerable number of student responses ($n = 169$) who were given free rein to express their thoughts though the open-ended text questionnaire. In addition, they, together with the CTs were given the freedom to express their responses in either their native language, Mandarin or in English. The flexibility in the choice of language strengthened the rapport between the researchers and the CTs and enhanced the authenticity and accuracy of the data collected (Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

Another strength of this study was the use of the SET theoretical framework which took into consideration the context and role of social interactions to analyse the potential outcomes of a PE international teaching practicum. While we are mindful that the contexts and outcomes might be different in other international teaching practicums, our findings demonstrated how mutual benefits can be obtained for all parties involved and highlighted the importance of reciprocity in fostering a strong relationship between institutions and the local host communities. Further research can explore the possibilities and benefits of having an international teaching practicum in other teaching subjects where language proficiency is a barrier.

5. Conclusion

The data and quotes from the Australian PSTs, CTs and local students verified how the international teaching practicum mutually benefited them, and how these benefits were reciprocated among the three parties. Cultural nuances in teaching and learning were examined which provided opportunities for each party to reflect on their learnings. The Australian PSTs took away important pedagogical revelations related to their professional growth as teachers-to-be, while the CTs observed how the Games Sense approach assisted with students' conceptual understanding of sports and games, which sustained their interest in PE. It also benefited the local students' learning in PE as they learnt about Australian sports and culture, with opportunities to engage with native English speakers. However, when examined using lenses of social exchange theory, the benefits received were not without its costs. In exchange for the benefits, all parties need to recognise the challenges imposed by the differences in culture and language and invest time and resources to consider minimising the costs.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT in order to improve on language and readability. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

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