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How Well does Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Align with Classroom Competency Expectations? Evidence from Northern Luzon, Philippines

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Abstract. The persistent learning crisis in the Philippines, underscored by poor performance in international assessments, has intensified scrutiny on teacher quality as a pivotal factor for educational reform. This study explores the alignment between the preparation provided by pre-service teacher education institutions (TEIs) and the practical competency expectations faced by beginning teachers. Using a descriptive qualitative design, this research analyzed data from focus group discussions with 16 key stakeholders from the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and TEIs across Northern Luzon. The findings reveal a significant disconnect between the theoretical knowledge imparted during pre-service teacher education and the multifaceted demands of the contemporary classroom. Key systemic challenges identified include the misalignment of teacher specialization with deployment, the overwhelming burden of non-instructional tasks, and the inadequacy of experiential learning. While TEIs are integrating technology and research into their curricula, graduates still struggle with classroom management and differentiated instruction. The study concluded that bridging the theory–practice gap requires systemic reforms, including a re-engineered internship model, stronger inter-agency collaboration under the Teacher Education Council (TEC), and policies that address the root causes of misalignment to improve teacher readiness and, ultimately, student learning outcomes.

Keywords: teacher education; pre-service teacher preparation; teacher quality; competency standards; curriculum alignment; Philippine education

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1. Introduction

The Philippine education system is navigating a profound learning crisis, a reality starkly illuminated by the nation's performance in recent international large-scale assessments (ILSAs). Results from the 2018 and 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) placed Filipino students at or near the bottom in reading, mathematics, and science, signaling deep-seated deficiencies in foundational learning (Second Congressional Commission on Education [EDCOM II], 2024). This underperformance is not an isolated phenomenon but a symptom of systemic challenges that have long plagued the sector, including fragmented governance, chronic underinvestment, and resource disparities (Albert et al., 2021; Department of Education [DepEd], 2025; Orbeta Jr & Paqueo, 2022).

Amidst a myriad of contributing factors, a broad consensus in educational literature has identified teacher quality as the single most critical school-based variable influencing student achievement (Olvido et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2025; Sinsay-Villanueva & Orbeta Jr, 2023). This has directed significant policy attention toward the state of teacher education and development in the country. The journey of a teacher, from pre-service preparation to in-service practice, is shaped by a complex interplay of policies, institutional capacities, and professional standards. However, evidence suggests a persistent disconnect between the intended outcomes of teacher education and the actual competencies demonstrated in the classroom.

As Generalao et al. (2022) noted, the Philippines faces a "*shortage despite oversupply*" (p. 30). A large number of teacher graduates are produced annually, yet many lack the requisite quality, as evidenced by consistently low passing rates in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET), which averaged only 33% for elementary and 40% for secondary education between 2009 and 2023 (EDCOM II, 2024). This theory–practice gap is a central theme in teacher education research, where the transition from the structured environment of a teacher education institution (TEI) to the complex realities of a real classroom often exposes significant shortcomings in pre-service teacher training (Ormilla, 2025).

The quality of pre-service teacher education, delivered by over 1400 TEIs nationwide, is a primary concern. Studies have revealed wide regional disparities in TEI performance, with a proliferation of low-performing institutions that contribute to a cycle of poor-quality education (Generalao et al., 2022; Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2025). This issue is compounded by challenges within the professional development landscape for in-service teachers, where training is often described as generic, compliance-driven, and disconnected from classroom realities (Rivera et al., 2025). Furthermore, a significant percentage of teachers are assigned subjects outside their specialization, a practice known as out-of-field teaching, which negatively impacts instructional quality and student outcomes (Mejia et al., 2025).

In response, the Philippine government has initiated significant reforms. The Excellence in Teacher Education Act (Republic Act No. 11713) aims to strengthen

the Teacher Education Council (TEC) to foster greater coherence among the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), DepEd, the Professional Regulation Commission, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) (Espinosa & Pacay, 2025; TEC, 2026). Concurrently, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is undertaking a comprehensive national assessment to guide future policy. A central pillar of these reforms is the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which defines the competencies expected of teachers across their career stages and serves as a framework for both pre-service teacher curricula and in-service teacher appraisal (DepEd, 2017).

Despite these frameworks, a critical gap remains in understanding how well pre-service teacher preparation aligns with the practical demands and competency expectations of the modern classroom, particularly within specific regional contexts. This study addresses this gap by providing an evidence-based exploration of the alignment between pre-service teacher preparation and classroom competency expectations in Northern Luzon, a region with its own unique set of educational challenges and resource distributions. By analyzing the lived experiences and insights of educators and administrators from DepEd, CHED, TESDA, and TEIs, this research seeks to contribute actionable insights into the ongoing national dialogue on revitalizing teacher education. This study specifically answers the following research questions:

1. What are the primary forms of preparation provided by pre-service teacher education programs in Northern Luzon?
2. What are the key competencies expected of newly hired teachers by employing agencies?
3. What are the perceived gaps between the preparation received by pre-service teachers and the competency expectations in the field?

Through a qualitative analysis of these interconnected issues, this paper aims to contribute actionable insights into the ongoing national dialogue on revitalizing teacher education and, by extension, the entire Philippine education system.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in a framework that integrates theories of knowledge for teaching, experiential learning, and social cognitive development to analyze the complex relationship between teacher preparation and classroom effectiveness. The central premise is that effective teaching is not merely the application of theoretical knowledge, but a dynamic interplay of content mastery, pedagogical skill, and practical wisdom acquired through reflective experience.

At the core of this framework is Lee Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Shulman (1986, 1987) argued that effective teachers possess a unique form of professional knowledge that goes beyond subject matter expertise. Pedagogical content knowledge is the "amalgam of content and pedagogy" that enables teachers to transform their content knowledge into forms that are pedagogically powerful and adaptive to the diverse needs of learners. It includes an understanding of what makes specific topics easy or difficult to learn,

knowledge of common student misconceptions, and a repertoire of instructional strategies and representations for teaching particular concepts. The persistent issue of "out-of-field" teaching, where teachers are assigned subjects outside their specialization, directly undermines PCK and is a central focus of this study's analysis (Mejia et al., 2025; Sheppard et al., 2020).

Complementing PCK is David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which posits that learning is "*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*" (p. 38). Kolb's four-stage cycle—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—provides a powerful lens for examining the teaching internship. An effective practicum should not be a mere "exposure" but a structured cycle where pre-service teachers engage in actual teaching (concrete experience), reflect on their practice with mentors (reflective observation), connect their experiences to educational theories (abstract conceptualization), and then apply new insights to refine their teaching (active experimentation). The "theory–practice gap" revealed through teachers' reflective accounts in the study by Girvan et al. (2016) of an experiential teacher professional development program in Irish secondary schools suggests a breakdown in this cycle, where internships may lack sufficient opportunities for reflective observation and active experimentation.

Finally, Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy, helps to explain the psychological dimension of teacher readiness. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations. For pre-service teachers, self-efficacy is shaped by mastery experiences (successful teaching episodes), vicarious experiences (observing effective mentors), social persuasion (feedback and encouragement), and physiological states (managing stress and anxiety). A teacher preparation program that provides supportive mentorship and successful, scaffolded teaching experiences is more likely to produce graduates with high self-efficacy, which in turn is linked to greater resilience, instructional effectiveness, and student achievement (Climaco & Barcelona, 2025; Sheokarah, 2025).

Together, these theories provide a multi-dimensional framework for understanding the findings. The disconnects identified in this study can be interpreted as breakdowns in the development of PCK, incomplete cycles of experiential learning, and insufficient cultivation of self-efficacy during pre-service teacher preparation.

2. Literature Review

The discourse on teacher quality in the Philippines is situated within a broader context of a national learning crisis. Despite numerous reforms, student performance remains low, focusing attention on the entire teacher development continuum, from pre-service teacher education to in-service teacher professional development (Sinsay-Villanueva & Orbeta Jr, 2023).

The quality of pre-service teacher education is a primary concern, with studies highlighting significant regional disparities in the performance of TEIs. Generalao et al. (2022) identified a proliferation of underperforming Filipino TEIs, particularly in Mindanao, which contributes to a national "shortage despite oversupply" of qualified teachers. This is corroborated by the consistently low pass rates in the Licensure Examination for Teachers, which signals a fundamental misalignment between TEI curricula, and the competencies required for professional practice (EDCOM II, 2024).

The curriculum itself has been a subject of scrutiny. Cortes et al. (2022) found a structural gap in the secondary teacher education curriculum. It lacks courses relevant to teaching in the senior high school STEM track, forcing many graduates into out-of-field assignments. This issue of teacher–subject mismatch is widespread, with Mejia et al. (2025) reporting that nearly 75% of teachers experience some level of mismatch, negatively affecting instructional quality.

The transition from pre-service to in-service teaching is fraught with challenges, collectively known as the theory–practice gap. Ormilla (2025) and Calapardo et al. (2016) found that while TEI curricula are formally aligned with the PPST, the translation into practice is weak. Pre-service teachers struggle to apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms, a finding supported by Comia et al. (2024), who documented the difficulties experienced by teaching interns with lesson planning and classroom management. The experiential learning component, intended to bridge this gap, is often insufficient.

International research by Girvan et al. (2016) emphasizes that effective practicums require structured reflection and mentorship, elements often lacking in current models. For specialized fields such as technical-vocational education and training (TVET), this gap is even more pronounced. Esparcia and Fajardo (2025) noted that TVET teacher readiness requires deep industry immersion that standard internships do not provide, suggesting that fostering self-regulated learning is crucial for adapting to industry demands.

Once in service, teachers face a host of systemic pressures. The overwhelming burden of administrative and non-instructional tasks is a recurring theme, significantly reducing time for lesson preparation and professional growth (EDCOM II, 2024; IDinsight, 2025). This workload contributes to high levels of stress and burnout, which affects teacher retention and well-being (Rivera et al., 2025; Toropova et al., 2021). The psychological toll is significant, with Sheokarah (2025) linking feelings of unpreparedness to diminished self-efficacy and well-being among new teachers.

In response to these challenges, TEIs are beginning to integrate modern competencies into their curricula. The push for technology and AI integration reflects an adaptation to the demands of Society 5.0 (Amjad et al., 2025). This creates a new gap, however, as many in-service teachers lack the same digital fluency, a phenomenon also observed by Mahmood (2025), where belief in modern pedagogy often outpaces actual practice due to resource and training

limitations. Furthermore, the ethical dimensions of new technologies, such as AI-driven gender bias, require critical examination to ensure equitable implementation (Erogul, 2025).

This body of literature confirms that improving teacher quality is not a simple matter of refining TEI curricula. It requires a systemic approach that addresses the entire teacher lifecycle, from recruitment and pre-service training to deployment, in-service support, and career progression. The establishment of the National Teacher Education Research Agenda (NTERA) 2026–2030 is a strategic step toward coordinating research efforts to address these fragmented and complex issues (TEC, 2026). This study contributes to this agenda by providing a grounded, multi-stakeholder perspective from Northern Luzon, highlighting the specific ways in which national policies and systemic challenges manifest at the regional level.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the alignment between pre-service teacher preparation and classroom competency expectations in Northern Luzon, Philippines. The qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in capturing the rich, contextualized perspectives and lived experiences of diverse stakeholders involved in teacher education (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2025). The primary method of data collection involved a series of focus group discussions (FGDs), which facilitated dynamic interaction among participants and allowed for the emergence of shared themes and divergent viewpoints (Rivera et al., 2025). Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data, providing a rigorous yet flexible framework for interpreting the qualitative findings.

3.2 Data Sources and Participants

The primary data for this study were derived from the transcripts of three separate FGDs conducted online via Zoom in June 2025. These FGDs were organized to cover the Northern Luzon cluster, specifically targeting stakeholders from region 1 (Ilocos Region), Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

Participants were purposively selected to ensure broad and expert representation of the teacher education ecosystem in Northern Luzon. To be selected, participants were required to hold leadership or senior technical roles within their respective organizations and to have direct experience with teacher education policy, curriculum development, or teacher deployment in the region. A total of 16 key stakeholders participated, comprising key officials from CHED, DepEd, and TESDA and TEI administrators. This multi-agency composition was crucial for triangulating perspectives on the preparation–practice continuum. To protect confidentiality, participants are identified only by sector and region (e.g., TEI-CAR, DepEd-R1). See Table 1 for a summary of the participant profile.

Table 1: Profile of the focus group participants

Participant code	Sector/ agency	Region	Area of expertise
TEI-R1-A	TEI	Region 1	University administration, curriculum development
TEI-R1-B	TEI	Region 1	College of teacher education dean, research
CHED-R1	CHED	Region 1	Regional policy and quality assurance
DepEd-R1	DepEd	Region 1	Curriculum and instruction, teacher deployment
TESDA-R1	TESDA	Region 1	TVET program registration, competency standards
TEI-R2-A	TEI	Region 2	University administration, graduate studies
TEI-R2-B	TEI	Region 2	College of teacher education dean, practice teaching
CHED-R2	CHED	Region 2	Regional policy and program monitoring
DepEd-R2	DepEd	Region 2	Teacher professional development, PPST
TESDA-R2	TESDA	Region 2	Competency assessment and certification
TEI-CAR-A	TEI	CAR	University administration, Indigenous people's education
TEI-CAR-B	TEI	CAR	College of teacher education dean, extension services
CHED-CAR	CHED	CAR	Regional policy and institutional development
DepEd-CAR	DepEd	CAR	Field operations school management
TESDA-CAR	TESDA	CAR	Community-based training, industry linkages
TEI-CAR-C	TEI	CAR	Research and development

3.3 Data Collection

The FGDs were conducted online via Zoom, each lasting approximately two to three hours. The discussions were semi-structured, guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit insights on emerging trends, research priorities, institutional challenges, and policy alignment in teacher education. The core questions focused on: (1) current pre-service teacher preparation practices and priorities; (2) competency expectations for new teachers; (3) perceived gaps and misalignments; and (4) recommendations for strengthening the teacher education continuum. All sessions were recorded with the informed consent of the participants and professionally transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy for analysis. The use of online FGDs, while posing potential limitations in rapport-building, was a pragmatic choice that enabled the participation of high-level stakeholders from geographically dispersed locations.

3.4 Data Analysis

The transcribed data from the three FGDs were subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts; (2) generating initial codes by identifying significant statements and concepts related to the research questions; (3) searching for themes by

collating codes into potential overarching patterns; (4) reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represent the data; (5) defining and naming the final themes; and (6) producing a report. No qualitative data analysis software was used; the coding and theme development were conducted manually to ensure a deep and nuanced engagement with the data.

The analysis focused on identifying themes related to the forms of pre-service teacher preparation, the competencies expected of beginning teachers, and the perceived gaps between these two areas. To enhance validity, themes were triangulated by cross-referencing the FGD data with policy documents (e.g., PPST, CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines) and recent national reports (e.g., EDCOM II, Philippine Institute for Development Studies). Direct quotations from the participants, tagged by sector and region, were used to substantiate the analysis and provide an authentic voice to the findings.

4. Results and Findings

The thematic analysis of the FGDs with educational stakeholders from Northern Luzon revealed a complex and often contradictory landscape of pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher competency expectations. While TEIs are proactively adapting their curricula, a significant disconnect persists between their outputs and the demands of employing agencies. The findings are organized according to the three primary research questions.

4.1 Forms of Preparation in Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs

The participating TEI stakeholders described a curriculum that is actively evolving to meet contemporary educational demands. The preparation of future teachers is no longer confined to traditional pedagogical theories but extends to technology integration, research competency, and alignment with professional standards.

4.1.1 Integration of technology and artificial intelligence: A forward-looking curriculum adapting to digital demands

A prominent sub-theme was the deliberate integration of modern technology into teacher training. The participating TEI stakeholders reported that the pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital tools, and this has become a permanent fixture in their curriculum. This push for technological fluency is a direct response to the evolving educational landscape.

> *"One of the research priorities that we have identified is the integration of AI and digital tools in education .... We are really pushing for that, not just in the College of Teacher Education but university wide."* (TEI-R1-A)

> *"Our research outputs have focused on technology integration, including studies on the use of AI-generated materials and the exploration of hybrid learning models."* (TEI-CAR-C)

This proactive approach by TEIs contrasts with the reality on the ground, where, as noted by participating DepEd stakeholders, many in-service teachers still

struggle with basic information and communications technology (ICT) skills, suggesting a gap that pre-service teacher programs are now trying to fill.

4.1.2 Development of research competencies: Equipping future teachers as producers of knowledge

Teacher education institutions are increasingly emphasizing the development of research skills among pre-service teachers. The goal is to foster a culture of evidence-based practice, enabling future educators to systematically address classroom challenges. This is what participants said:

> *"We are trying to build the research competency of our students as early as now because when they go to DepEd, they are expected to do action research .... We are trying to revise our curriculum to address that."* (TEI-R2-B)

> "*Our student research is aligned with the PPST …. We want to equip them to be not just consumers but also producers of knowledge, capable of conducting action research to address real classroom problems.''* (TEI-CAR-B)

However, participants also acknowledged the practical difficulty for students in conducting meaningful action research during their limited internship period. This focus is seen as crucial, though the DepEd representatives noted that research utilization remains a challenge among in-service teachers, indicating a potential disconnect between training and application.

4.1.3 Alignment with professional standards and experiential learning: Bridging policy and practice through curriculum and internship

Participants from the TEIs reported a conscious effort to align their curricula with national frameworks such as the PPST, primarily through coursework and experiential learning programs like the student teaching internship. This alignment is intended to ensure that graduates meet national competency standards.

> *"There is a strong push to integrate the PPST as early as pre-service education ... to help students align their professional growth with expected competencies."* (CHED-R2)

> *"There is a mismatch between theoretical training and real classroom realities .... New teachers are often idealistic but not adequately prepared for real-world teaching challenges."* (DepEd-R1)

This is where the first signs of a disconnect appear. The participating stakeholders from employing agencies observed that despite this formal alignment, new teachers often struggle to translate their theoretical knowledge into effective practice, suggesting that the practicum experience may not be sufficient to bridge the theory–practice gap.

4.2 Key Competencies Expected of Newly Hired Teachers

Participating stakeholders from employing agencies such as DepEd and TESDA articulated a set of expectations for beginning teachers that extends far beyond

content knowledge. These competencies are practical and context-dependent and reflect the complex realities of the Philippine education system.

4.2.1 Practical skills and industry readiness: A demand for demonstrable, hands-on competence

For TESDA, the primary expectation is practical, demonstrable competence. This emphasis on applied competency is critical in a sector where instruction is demonstration-based.

> *"The main issue with new teachers is their readiness ... to demonstrate actual skills. For TVET trainers, a key requirement is industry experience."* (TESDA-R1)

> *"We need trainers to be certified skilled workers, preferably with a National Certificate (NC) level higher than what they teach. This ensures they have the practical skill to back up their instruction."* (TESDA-R2)

This expectation of industry immersion and practical skill is a significant pressure point, as many TEI programs, particularly for technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) tracks, struggle to provide authentic industry exposure, highlighting a clear gap between academic preparation and vocational field requirements.

4.2.2 Adaptability to curricular reforms and diverse learners: The need for flexibility in a dynamic environment

DepEd and TESDA participants consistently highlighted the need for teachers to be adaptable to ongoing curricular changes and diverse learner populations. This includes managing new curricula, such as K-12 and MATATAG, as well as catering to learners in alternative delivery modes and who are from marginalized communities.

> *"We have concerns about teacher readiness for the new MATATAG curriculum. Are short trainings sufficient to prepare them for these major reforms?"* (DepEd-R1)

> *"We cater to a wide range of clients, from inmates to Indigenous peoples .... This demands flexible and inclusive teaching methods that are often not covered in standard pre-service training."* (TESDA-CAR)

The expectation is that teachers should be able to modify their instructional strategies on the fly, a skill that requires deep pedagogical understanding and practical experience beyond what standard pre-service teacher training may offer.

4.2.3 Resilience and professional values: A call for mental and emotional fortitude

Beyond pedagogical skills, there is a growing expectation for teachers to possess emotional resilience and a strong professional ethos. Participants observed a high turnover rate among new teachers, who seem unprepared for the non-instructional challenges of the profession, such as heavy workloads and bureaucratic demands.

> *"The mental health and well-being of teachers is a pressing concern … linked to heavy workloads and teacher attrition. This should be a research priority."* (TEI-R2-A)

> *"Many new teachers are idealistic, but they often resign quickly when faced with difficulties in the field. It seems to be a values issue and a lack of mental and emotional preparation for the realities of public-school teaching."* (DepEd-CAR)

This suggests an expectation that TEIs should not only build skills but also cultivate the resilience and professional commitment needed to sustain a career in a demanding environment.

4.3 Perceived Gaps between Teacher Preparation and Field Expectations

The most powerful theme emerging from the discussions was the pervasive and multilayered gap between how teachers are prepared and what the profession demands. These gaps are not isolated incidents but appear to be systemic, stemming from misalignments in policy, curriculum, and resource allocation.

4.3.1 The misalignment of specialization and deployment: A critical disconnect between training and teaching assignment

A recurring and critical issue is the mismatch between a teacher's field of specialization and their actual teaching assignment. This misalignment, often driven by administrative needs at the school level, forces teachers to handle subjects they were not trained for, undermining instructional quality.

> *"This is a major issue. We have biology majors being asked to teach physics .... This was exacerbated by the K-12 curriculum, where science teachers are expected to teach integrated science strands regardless of their major."* (DepEd-R2)

> *"We conducted training to address this, but a few days of training cannot replace years of academic preparation. It directly impacts pedagogical content knowledge and student outcomes."* (DepEd-R1)

This practice creates a ripple effect of learning gaps and highlights a systemic failure to align teacher deployment with pre-service specialization, rendering parts of the specialized training provided by TEIs ineffective.

4.3.2 The burden of workload and administrative tasks: An overwhelming reality that stifles quality instruction

Teacher workload was identified as a critical barrier to quality instruction and professional development. The immense pressure of non-teaching tasks detracts from the time that could be spent on lesson preparation, professional development, and addressing individual student needs.

> *"The heavy workload – comprising contact hours with students, administrative designations, and paperwork – is a major concern and a reason why teachers leave the profession."* (TEI-R1-B)

> *"Conducting research is an additional task performed on top of a teacher's current workload, with no load reduction. This discourages many from engaging in it, even if they are capable."* (DepEd-CAR)

This reality contrasts sharply with the expectation that teachers should be reflective practitioners and researchers, revealing a systemic contradiction where the conditions of employment hinder the very professional growth that is expected.

4.3.3 The theory–practice divide in experiential learning: An internship experience that falls short of full immersion

While TEIs provide internships to bridge theory and practice, stakeholders perceive a persistent divide. The lack of authentic, hands-on experience during the practicum phase means that many graduates enter the profession without the practical readiness and deep industry exposure that their roles require.

> "*Pre-service teachers struggle with research, yet action research is expected once they enter service. The internship may not be adequately preparing them for all in-service demands.*" (TEI-CAR-A)

> "*In TVET, students on OJT (on-the-job training) are not fully immersed in the actual skills of their specialization. They may end up doing clerical work instead, which defeats the purpose of the immersion.*" (TESDA-CAR)

The experience is often superficial, failing to simulate the full spectrum of a teacher's responsibilities, thus perpetuating the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application.

5. Discussion

The findings from the FGDs with educational stakeholders in Northern Luzon provide a granular view of the systemic challenges confronting Philippine teacher education. The identified gaps between pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher expectations are not merely operational issues but are deeply rooted in policy, curriculum design, and inter-agency coordination. The challenges identified—such as the theory–practice divide, resource limitations, and curriculum misalignment—are consistent with international literature on teacher education, which highlights the universal difficulty of preparing teachers for the complex and dynamic nature of real-world classrooms (Girvan et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2023).

The persistent misalignment between teacher specialization and deployment is a critical finding that corroborates national-level studies. EDCOM II's Year 2 report (2025) reveals that 62% of high school teachers are assigned subjects outside their college majors, a problem exacerbated by the demand of the K-12 curriculum for broader subject matter expertise (Rivera et al., 2025). This practice fundamentally undermines the principle of PCK—a cornerstone of effective teaching—and directly impacts student learning (Shulman, 1986). While short-term training is offered as a remedy, its inadequacy, as noted by DepEd participants, underscores the need for a more strategic approach to teacher deployment. This problem is not unique to the Philippines; international studies also report the negative effects of out-of-field teaching on student outcomes, particularly in specialized subjects such as science and mathematics (Sheppard et al., 2020). Cortes et al. (2022) further illustrated this gap by showing that the revised secondary teacher education

curriculum in the Philippines excludes courses relevant to senior high school STEM teaching, creating a structural misalignment that forces graduates into out-of-field roles.

Furthermore, the overwhelming workload of in-service teachers emerges as a central obstacle to both quality teaching and professional growth. A recent study by IDinsight (2025) found that teachers work an average of 52 hours per week, with 55% of that time dedicated to non-teaching tasks. The expectation that teachers engage in action research and continuous professional development while simultaneously managing heavy teaching loads and administrative tasks is unrealistic. This finding aligns with Rivera et al. (2025), who identified workload concerns as a significant deterrent to participation in professional development.

The current system, as described by the participants, inadvertently positions professional development as a burden rather than an opportunity, thereby stifling the very culture of lifelong learning it aims to promote. The emotional and psychological toll of these demands on pre-service and beginning teachers cannot be understated, as feelings of being unprepared and overwhelmed can lead to anxiety and diminished self-efficacy, ultimately affecting their retention and well-being (Sheokarah, 2025; Toropova et al., 2021).

The integration of technology and AI into TEI curricula reflects a forward-looking response to the demands of Society 5.0. However, the simultaneous observation that many in-service teachers lack basic ICT skills highlights a generational and training gap. Teacher education institutions are preparing a new cohort of digitally native teachers, but the broader system must also address the upskilling of the existing workforce. As noted by Mahmood (2025), while lecturers may believe in the effectiveness of modern pedagogical approaches, traditional instruction often predominates in practice due to limited resources and training. Integrating new technologies such as gamification requires not only technical skills but also pedagogical innovation, a challenge that both pre-service and in-service teacher training must address (Amjad et al., 2025). Moreover, the ethical implications of AI must be critically examined to ensure that technology is used in a way that promotes equity and social justice (Erogul, 2025).

A significant theme is the theory–practice divide, particularly evident in the experiential learning or internship phase. The participating stakeholders noted that the practicum often fails to provide authentic, immersive experiences. This finding is echoed by Comia et al. (2024), who documented pre-service teachers' struggles with adjusting to new environments and classroom management. The lack of hands-on experience in areas such as differentiated instruction, as identified by Rubio and Saenz (2023), means that many graduates enter the profession without practical readiness.

For TVET, the need for industry-relevant skills is even more pronounced. Esparcia and Fajardo (2025) highlighted that readiness for Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED) graduates extends beyond teaching to include roles as TVET trainers and TESDA assessors, which require deep industry

immersion that current internship models may not provide. This suggests that cultivating self-regulated learning could be a key mechanism for bridging this gap, as it empowers pre-service teachers to take ownership of their professional development and adapt to diverse industry demands (Esparcia & Fajardo, 2025).

6. Implications of the Study

This study contributes to the body of literature on teacher education by providing a context-specific analysis of the theory–practice gap in the Philippines. It reinforces the notion that policy frameworks such as the PPST, while essential, are not sufficient to ensure teacher quality without effective implementation and alignment across the educational ecosystem. The findings underscore the importance of a systems-thinking approach to teacher development, where pre-service teacher education, in-service teacher training, and professional standards are viewed as interconnected components of a single continuum. Furthermore, the study highlights the need to integrate sociological and organizational perspectives into teacher education research, particularly in understanding how factors such as workload, institutional culture, and inter-agency dynamics shape teacher effectiveness and well-being.

For TEIs, the findings call for a critical review of their curricula, particularly the student teaching internship. Teacher education institutions must move beyond superficial alignment with standards and create more authentic, immersive, and challenging practicum experiences. This includes forging stronger partnerships with DepEd schools and industry partners (for TVET) to ensure that internships provide genuine exposure to the complexities of the teaching profession, as supported by the experiences documented by Comia et al. (2024). The financial implications of such programs, especially for private TEIs, must be considered, but the long-term benefit to teacher quality justifies the investment.

For DepEd and TESDA, the study underscores the need for more strategic teacher deployment and a more supportive environment for beginning teachers. In this regard, DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, which mandates the immediate removal of administrative tasks from public school teachers to enable them to maximize their time for actual classroom teaching, represents a critical step toward protecting teacher welfare and improving instructional quality (DepEd, 2024). Building on this policy direction, it is equally imperative to provide beginning teachers with structured mentoring and to ensure that they are assigned to their areas of specialization, as these measures are essential to sustaining both instructional effectiveness and teacher retention.

The most significant implications are for policymakers. The study provides strong evidence for the need to strengthen the TEC as a coordinating body to harmonize the policies of CHED, DepEd, the Professional Regulation Commission, and TESDA. A unified national framework for teacher education and development is urgently needed to address the fragmentation and misalignment identified by stakeholders. Policies should be developed to institutionalize a "bottom-up" approach to research and planning, ensuring that the voices of teachers and local stakeholders inform national priorities, as advocated by the National Teacher

Education Research Agenda (NTERA) 2026–2030 (TEC, 2026). Furthermore, policies related to teacher workload, compensation for non-teaching tasks, and support for professional development must be reviewed and effectively implemented to create a more enabling environment for teachers to thrive.

7. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the state of teacher education in Northern Luzon, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative nature of the research, while providing depth, limits the generalizability of the findings to the entire Philippines. The perspectives gathered are specific to the context of regions 1 and 2 and the Cordillera Administrative Region and may not fully capture the unique challenges faced in other regions. Second, the data is based on the perceptions and self-reports of the FGD participants.

While these stakeholders are experts in their respective fields, their views are subjective. The study did not include direct classroom observations or quantitative analysis of student outcomes, which could provide a more objective measure of the impact of pre-service teacher preparation. Third, the participant pool, while diverse in terms of agency representation, was limited in number. A larger sample size, including more voices from private TEIs, parents, and students, could have provided a more comprehensive picture. Finally, the reliance on online FGDs may have limited the depth of interaction and rapport among participants compared to face-to-face discussions.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms a significant and multifaceted gap between the preparation of teachers in Northern Luzon and the competencies required for effective practice in the field. While TEIs are making strides in modernizing their curricula with technology and research, their efforts are often out of sync with the systemic realities of deployment, workload, and inter-agency fragmentation. The insights from stakeholders across DepEd, CHED, TESDA, and TEIs converge on a central conclusion: improving teacher quality requires more than just enhancing pre-service teacher programs; it demands a systemic reform that aligns policy, curriculum, and practice across the entire teacher development pathway.

The disconnect between theory-rich pre-service teacher education and the practical, often overwhelming, demands of the classroom remain the core challenge. Beginning teachers are expected to be adaptable, technologically adept, and resilient, yet their preparation often lacks the depth of practical experience needed to meet these expectations. The misalignment of specialization, the burden of non-teaching tasks, and the lack of authentic experiential learning are critical pressure points that must be addressed through shared responsibility and collaborative action among all educational agencies.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to bridge the gap and strengthen teacher education in the Philippines:

1. **Strengthen the alignment of curriculum, deployment, and professional development (immediate):** CHED and DepEd, under the coordination of the

TEC, must collaborate to ensure that TEI curricula are directly responsive to the realities of K-12 instruction. This includes reviewing specialization tracks to match DepEd's deployment needs and developing pre-service teacher training for integrated subjects. Furthermore, a national policy on teacher deployment should be strictly enforced to minimize the practice of out-of-field teaching.

2. **Re-engineer the teaching internship program into a mentored apprenticeship (long-term):** The student teaching experience must be transformed into a more robust and authentic apprenticeship. This involves extending the duration of field exposure to a full year, ensuring immersion in a wider range of school activities beyond classroom teaching, and establishing stronger mentorship structures with trained and incentivized cooperating teachers. Partnerships with industry, as suggested by TESDA, should be integrated into technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) teacher training to ensure practical readiness.

3. **Invest in holistic teacher well-being and resilience (immediate):** Teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, must go beyond pedagogy to include programs on mental health, stress management, and professional ethics. Cultivating resilience and a strong sense of professional identity is crucial for teacher retention and effectiveness in a demanding public school system.

4. **Foster a coherent and harmonized policy ecosystem (long-term):** The trifocalized education system requires deliberate and sustained coordination. EDCOM II and the strengthened TEC provide a critical opportunity to harmonize the standards, policies, and programs of the CHED, DepEd, Professional Regulation Commission, and TESDA. This includes aligning the PPST, CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines, and the Licensure Examination for Teachers to ensure a seamless and logical progression from pre-service teacher preparation to professional practice. Integrating AI ethics into the curriculum should also be a priority.

5. **Promote and incentivize action research (immediate):** To foster a culture of evidence-based practice, DepEd should provide dedicated time and resources for teachers to conduct action research. This could include load reduction, research grants, and recognition for impactful studies that contribute to school improvement.

6. **Conduct longitudinal research (long-term):** A national longitudinal study should be commissioned to track the career trajectories of teacher graduates from different TEIs. This would provide invaluable data on the long-term impact of pre-service teacher preparation on teacher effectiveness, retention, and career progression.

Ultimately, bridging the gap between teacher preparation and practice is a shared responsibility. It requires a commitment from all stakeholders to move beyond

siloed efforts and work collaboratively toward a common goal: nurturing a generation of competent, resilient, and effective Filipino teachers.

9. Disclosure of AI Use

In the course of preparing this manuscript, the authors utilized several AI-powered tools to enhance the quality and clarity of the research. NotebookLM was employed for an initial review of related literature to identify key themes and sources. ChatGPT was used to assist in clarifying complex concepts and refining the wording of certain sections for greater precision. Finally, QuillBot was used for grammar checking and improving sentence structure. All AI-assisted outputs were meticulously reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors to ensure the accuracy, originality, and academic integrity of the final text.

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