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Preparing Teachers for the Margins? Contested Readiness, Mentoring, and Institutional Mismatch in Marginalized Philippine Teacher Education

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Abstract

Teacher readiness for marginalized educational contexts is often treated as a stable product of formal preparation, yet it is in practice a contested construct shaped by multiple institutional and field-based actors. This study interrogates the central tension between institutional definitions of readiness and its re-interpretation, mediation, and reassessment across mentoring and field experience in rural, Indigenous Peoples, and conflict-affected schools in the Philippines. Using a qualitative comparative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants drawn from four key actor groups: interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and deans/administrators. This multi-actor structure enables a layered comparison of how readiness is defined, mediated, experienced, and retrospectively evaluated across the teacher education continuum. Findings reveal a persistent misalignment across four interpretive sites of readiness: institutions formalize readiness through curriculum and practicum expectations; cooperating teachers translate and adapt these expectations into situated mentoring practices; interns confront and test preparedness against complex classroom realities; and novice teachers retrospectively reassess preparation gaps through early career experience. Rather than a fixed outcome, readiness emerges as a continuously negotiated and relational construct shaped by institutional mediation and field dissonance. The study foregrounds mentoring and institutional translation as critical sites where readiness is both enacted and destabilized, and argues for reconceptualizing teacher readiness as a context-responsive, developmentally extended process requiring stronger alignment between institutional design, mentoring practice, and early-career support in marginalized settings.

1. Introduction

Teacher education programs aim to prepare future teachers for diverse and inclusive classrooms. Yet readiness for marginalized schooling remains uncertain when institutional preparation confronts multilingual learners, resource scarcity, geographic isolation, learner precarity, and limited support systems (Azano, 2015; Kitooke & Mahon, 2024; Thorpe et al., 2021). Research consistently shows that conventional preparation inadequately addresses these conditions, leaving pre-service teachers underprepared for contextually complex classrooms (Toker-Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak, 2025).

In the Philippines, this tension is most evident during practicum in rural, Indigenous Peoples, island, and conflict-affected schools, where mismatches between university preparation and classroom realities become apparent. As the bridge between institutional preparation and professional practice (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013), practicum provides opportunities for learning through mentoring and supervision (Beckmann & Ehmke, 2023; Matsumura & Tatsuyama, 2024). However, inconsistent support intensifies practice shock and exposes preparation gaps (Ormeño & Rosas, 2023; Petit et al., 2023), suggesting that readiness develops through institutional and contextual mediation rather than as a fixed outcome.

Despite growing interest in teacher preparation, existing research typically examines program design, mentoring, or individual experiences separately, offering limited insight into how readiness is negotiated

across the teacher education continuum (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013; Murtagh, 2022; Souto-Manning, 2022). This gap is particularly evident in marginalized Philippine contexts, where competing institutional and field expectations shape teacher development.

This study addresses that gap by examining how readiness is negotiated across four actor groups—interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and deans/administrators. It advances readiness as a contested, relational, and institutionally mediated process shaped through interactions among institutional expectations, mentoring, practicum, and early professional practice. The findings inform the redesign of practicum, mentoring, and early-career induction for marginalized educational contexts.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Teacher Readiness as a Teacher Education Construct

Teacher readiness is commonly viewed as the outcome of coursework, practicum, and supervision, reflected in competence in content, pedagogy, and professional standards. Although competency-based models provide useful benchmarks, they often overlook the linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, and material realities of marginalized settings, leaving teachers technically competent but contextually underprepared (Kitooke & Mahon, 2024; Thorpe et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship instead conceptualizes readiness as socially and institutionally mediated. Administrators emphasize curriculum and compliance, cooperating teachers prioritize contextual judgment, interns experience readiness as developing, and novice teachers reassess it through professional practice (Biesta et al., 2015; Toker-Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak, 2025). These perspectives position readiness as a contested construct, yet little is known about how they interact within the practicum. This study addresses that gap by examining readiness as a multi-actor process shaped through institutional, mentoring, practicum, and early-career experiences.

2.2 Practicum as a Site of Transition, Dissonance, and Learning

The practicum bridges teacher preparation and classroom practice, providing pre-service teachers with their first sustained engagement with school realities (Beattie et al., 2023; Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). In marginalized settings, resource scarcity, linguistic diversity, and socio-emotional complexity often expose gaps between institutional preparation and classroom demands (Matsumura & Tatsuyama, 2024).

Effective practicum experiences are immersive, scaffolded, and reflective, enabling interns to move from observation to active participation (Agusdinata, 2022; Koerner & Harris, 2007). Their effectiveness depends on mentoring, institutional coordination, and feedback, as exposure alone rarely produces professional growth (Petit et al., 2023; Ormeño & Rosas, 2023). Yet practicum research offers limited

insight into how readiness is negotiated across multiple actors. This study addresses that gap by examining readiness as a co-constructed process.

2.3 Mentoring and Cooperating Teachers as Mediators

Mentoring links institutional preparation with classroom practice. Cooperating teachers translate curricular expectations into context-responsive guidance, fostering interns' adaptability, reflection, and professional identity (Beckmann & Ehmke, 2023; Murtagh, 2022). This role is especially important in marginalized settings, where uncertainty and resource constraints intensify the need for contextual support.

Effective mentoring relies on structured engagement and feedback that help interns navigate classroom complexity (Thompson & Schademan, 2019; Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013), whereas weak mentoring increases practicum stress and limits professional learning (Petit et al., 2023). Yet mentoring is rarely examined within the broader interactions among institutions, practicum, and early-career teaching. This study addresses that gap by positioning mentoring as a key process in the development of teacher readiness.

2.4 Preparation for Marginalized Contexts

Marginalized educational settings are characterized by limited infrastructure, linguistic and cultural diversity, learner precarity, and heightened socio-emotional demands (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kitooke & Mahon, 2024). Conventional teacher preparation often leaves pre-service teachers underprepared for these realities.

Immersive and culturally responsive approaches—including co-teaching, structured reflection, and community engagement—strengthen adaptability, relational sensitivity, and context-responsive teaching while improving readiness and retention in underserved settings (Thorpe et al., 2021; Koerner & Harris, 2007; Agusdinata, 2022; Beattie et al., 2023; Azano & Stewart, 2015). However, this literature emphasizes program design over how readiness is negotiated among institutional and field actors. This study addresses that gap by examining readiness as a socially negotiated process emerging through practicum interactions.

2.5 Research Gap

Although teacher readiness, practicum, mentoring, and preparation for marginalized contexts have been widely studied, these areas remain fragmented. Existing research typically examines institutional design, mentoring, or intern experiences separately, offering limited insight into how readiness is negotiated across the teacher education continuum (Souto-Manning, 2022; Murtagh, 2022; Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). This gap is particularly evident in marginalized Philippine schools, where structural inequities produce competing understandings of readiness. Accordingly, this study examines readiness as a relational, multi-actor construct shaped by institutional, mentoring, and practicum experiences.

3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the analytical framework of teacher readiness in marginalized Philippine contexts. It conceptualizes readiness as a relational, recursive, and developmental process emerging through interactions among institutional expectations, mentoring, practicum experiences, novice teachers' retrospective reflections, and curriculum feedback. Rather than following a linear sequence, readiness evolves through a continuous cycle in which professional experience reshapes teacher education.

The framework begins with institutional expectations reflected in curriculum, practicum structures, professional standards, and supervision policies. These are mediated through mentoring as cooperating teachers contextualize institutional expectations through guidance and feedback. During practicum, interns test and refine their readiness while navigating authentic teaching demands, learner diversity, and community realities. As novice teachers reflect on their transition into professional practice, their experiences inform curriculum and practicum redesign, reinforcing a recursive cycle of institutional learning.

The framework also anticipates that interactions among these domains may generate tensions, particularly between institutional expectations and school realities, mentor mediation and contextual demands, and classroom experiences and pre-service preparation. These interactions served as sensitizing concepts that guided the inquiry and were subsequently refined through the empirical findings into the study's Negotiated Readiness Model of Teacher Preparation in Marginalized Contexts.

3. Research Questions

Guided by the study’s purpose, conceptual framing, and comparative orientation, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and deans/administrators differently construct teacher readiness for marginalized school placements?
2. Where do tensions and mismatches emerge across these actors regarding preparation, mentoring, supervision, and institutional support during practicum?
3. How do practicum and early-career teaching experiences reshape understandings of teacher readiness across the teacher education continuum?

4. Method

This study employed a multi-actor qualitative comparative design to examine how teacher readiness is constructed, mediated, and contested across different participant roles within marginalized educational contexts. Rather than treating readiness as a fixed or individually possessed attribute, the study approached it as a relational and contextually negotiated phenomenon shaped by institutional expectations, mentoring practices, practicum experiences, and retrospective professional reflection. The design was selected to capture participants’ lived experiences, professional interpretations, and situated meanings rather than to measure predefined variables.

4.1 Design

The study utilized a multi-actor qualitative comparative approach, primarily relying on key informant interviews (KIIs) to generate in-depth narratives from four participant groups: interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and deans/administrators. The comparative logic of the study centered on examining how these actor groups differently construct and interpret teacher readiness within the practicum ecology. Specifically, the design enabled comparisons across institutional, mentoring, experiential, and retrospective constructions of readiness while identifying tensions, mismatches, and mediating practices across the teacher education continuum. This approach allowed the study to trace how readiness is shaped, negotiated, and reassessed within marginalized Philippine school contexts characterized by uneven resources, contextual constraints, and varied support structures.

4.2 Context

The study was conducted in marginalized educational settings across the central and southern Philippines, including rural and remote schools, Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools, and conflict-affected communities. These sites were selected because structural inequities, institutional fragility, and educational disadvantage create constrained teaching and practicum conditions. Geographic isolation, limited resources, linguistic and cultural diversity, and uneven institutional support further complicate classroom practice and teacher development.

Because practicum and early-career teaching in the Philippine education system frequently occur in these settings, they provide a critical context for examining how readiness develops under conditions of institutional asymmetry and contextual complexity.

4.3 Participants and Recruitment

The study involved two participant groups: 19 primary participants (13 teacher interns and 6 novice teachers) and 6 triangulation informants (3 cooperating teachers and 3 deans/administrators), yielding a total sample of 25. Participants were drawn from rural, Indigenous Peoples (IP), and conflict-affected schools across the central and southern Philippines to ensure representation of marginalized placement contexts.

Purposive criterion-based sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants aligned with the study's focus on teacher readiness, mentoring, supervision, and institutional mediation. Teacher interns had completed at least one practicum with instructional responsibility in marginalized schools, while novice teachers had 1–3 years of teaching experience in similar settings. Cooperating teachers had served as practicum mentors, and deans/administrators were responsible for practicum oversight, placement, or mentoring policy implementation.

4.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) using role-specific protocols covering institutional expectations, mentoring practices, practicum experiences, and early-career reflections. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on participant availability and geographic constraints, and lasted 35–60 minutes.

Interviews were conducted in English or Cebuano according to participants' language preference. English–Cebuano code-switching was retained during transcription, and all interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English to preserve meaning and contextual nuance. Throughout data collection, the researchers maintained a neutral, non-directive stance while probing for clarification when necessary.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided written informed consent after receiving information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To ensure confidentiality, interview transcripts were anonymized using participant codes, and identifying information was removed from all records and reports. Audio recordings, transcripts, and research files were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Given the involvement of marginalized educational communities, additional care was taken to prevent the identification of individuals, schools, or communities. The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative, multi-step qualitative process from descriptive coding to thematic abstraction. The analysis was researcher-led and supported by AI-assisted tools for data organization, coding, and pattern identification (Anito, 2025; Nguyen-Trung, 2025). Figure 2 summarizes the analytic procedure. Triangulation was applied throughout by comparing accounts from interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and administrators during coding, theme development, and refinement.

Analysis began with repeated reading of transcripts to identify recurring patterns related to teacher readiness, mentoring, institutional expectations, supervision, and preparation–practice mismatches in marginalized schools.

Step 1: Familiarization

The researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to achieve immersion in the data and identify recurring patterns related to teacher readiness, mentoring, institutional expectations, supervision, and preparation for teaching in marginalized contexts. Particular attention was given to participants' accounts of

preparedness, support, institutional requirements, and perceived mismatches between teacher preparation and field realities.

Step 2: Neutral Case Synopsis

In the second stage, each case was summarized into a neutral case synopsis with AI-assisted support used for organizing and structuring descriptive information. The synopsis focused on five descriptive domains aligned with the study's analytic framework: teacher readiness experiences, mentoring and supervisory interactions, institutional expectations, support structures, and perceived mismatches between preparation and actual teaching conditions in marginalized school contexts.

To ensure descriptive integrity, randomly selected synopsis entries were validated against the original transcripts using the following criteria: (1) traceability to the original excerpt, with no added interpretation; (2) accuracy, with no distortion or loss of contextual qualifiers; (3) neutral wording free from theoretical labeling; (4) correct categorization under the study's analytic domains; and (5) sufficient completeness to support subsequent coding and thematic development.

Step 3: Initial Coding

The third stage involved initial coding, supported by AI-assisted organization and subsequent team validation. Coding was conducted in a low-inference manner and remained closely grounded in participant language. Codes were generated to reflect units of meaning related to teacher readiness, mentoring experiences, institutional expectations, supervision practices, and perceived mismatches between preparation and actual teaching conditions in marginalized school contexts.

To ensure analytic consistency, coding outputs were validated using the following criteria: (1) fidelity to the original transcript language or closely paraphrased expressions; (2) adherence to a single-code assignment per excerpt; (3) avoidance of added interpretation or theoretical labeling; (4) alignment with the study's operational coding domains; (5) consistency between code labels and their definitions; and (6) accurate code identification and matching to the corresponding excerpt reference.

Step 4: Code Normalization

In the fourth stage, the researchers reviewed the full code set to ensure consistency, clarity, and conceptual alignment with the study's analytic framework. Functionally similar codes were compared and either retained in their original form or consolidated to reduce redundancy while preserving meaning.

Normalization decisions were categorized into three types: *Accept*, when a code was distinct and retained without modification; *Aggregate*, when closely related codes were merged into a refined, unified code reflecting shared meaning; and *Merged*, when a code had already been incorporated into a broader category during earlier stages of analysis. This process enhanced analytical coherence while maintaining semantic precision across codes related to teacher readiness, mentoring experiences,

institutional expectations, supervision practices, and perceived mismatches in preparation for marginalized school contexts.

Step 5: Thematic Clustering

The fifth stage involved clustering normalized codes into broader thematic groupings. This process identified patterns across cases while considering differences among interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and administrators. The resulting themes focused on teacher readiness, mentoring experiences, institutional expectations, and mismatches between preparation and actual teaching conditions in marginalized contexts.

Step 6: Theme Definition

The final stage involved formulating operational definitions for each theme based on clustered codes and supporting excerpts. These definitions clarified each theme's meaning and ensured alignment between evidence, interpretation, and reporting, anchored on teacher readiness, mentoring, institutional expectations, and preparation–practice mismatch.

4.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, transparent documentation of the analytic process, validation of codes against supporting excerpts, and regular team discussions to resolve discrepancies. Coding initially emphasized low-inference description to minimize premature interpretation. Together, these strategies enhanced the credibility and consistency of the findings.

4.8 Declaration of AI Use

ChatGPT 5.2 (OpenAI) was used only as a bounded analytic support tool during the neutral case synopsis and initial coding stages. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, validated, and finalized by the research team, and all interpretive decisions remained fully researcher-led.

5. Findings

Research Question 1: How do interns, novice teachers, cooperating teachers, and deans/administrators differently construct teacher readiness for marginalized school placements?

The analysis showed that teacher readiness in marginalized Philippine contexts is interpreted differently across actors. Administrators/deans emphasized institutional expectations and program compliance, cooperating teachers highlighted adaptation to local classroom realities, interns viewed readiness as emerging through practicum, and novice teachers evaluated it retrospectively through independent

teaching. Together, these perspectives indicate that readiness is not a fixed outcome of teacher preparation but a negotiated construct shaped across the teacher education continuum.

Table 1 presents the cross-actor construction of readiness and illustrates how each participant group emphasized different dimensions of preparedness in marginalized educational contexts.

Table 1
Cross-Actor Construction of Teacher Readiness in Marginalized Contexts

Actor Group	Construction of Readiness	Key Focus	Illustrative Evidence
Deans/Administrators	Compliance-based institutional readiness	curriculum completion, practicum requirements, institutional procedures, supervision structures	Readiness demonstrated through completion of required hours, adherence to practicum guidelines, and fulfillment of institutional expectations
Cooperating Teachers	Contextualized adaptive readiness	mentoring, classroom adjustment, localization, responsive teaching practices	Readiness requires the ability to adapt institutional preparation to learner needs, available resources, and community contexts
Teacher Interns	Emerging and fragile readiness	practicum exposure, uncertainty, confidence development, classroom encounters	Readiness is experienced as developing but challenged by unfamiliar classroom realities and limited preparation for contextual demands
Novice Teachers	Retrospective evaluative readiness	workload demands, early career challenges, preparation gaps, reality shock	Readiness is reassessed after entering full-time teaching, revealing differences between internship experiences and professional responsibilities

The findings indicate that institutional preparation provides the formal foundation for readiness; however, its meaning changes as it moves across mentoring relationships, practicum experiences, and early professional practice. The subsequent themes describe how these constructions emerge and interact within the teacher preparation system.

Theme 1: Readiness as Institutional Promise

Teacher readiness was initially constructed as an institutional promise embedded in curriculum design, practicum requirements, and formal support mechanisms. Administrators and interns frequently associated readiness with the completion of institutional expectations, whereas cooperating teachers and novice teachers emphasized the limitations of formal preparation when confronted with classroom

realities. This theme addresses how readiness is institutionally defined before it is tested in marginalized school contexts.

5.1.1 Readiness as Curricular Coverage

Curricular preparation emerged as the primary institutional indicator of readiness. Administrators and deans associated readiness with completing required coursework and practicum requirements: “They must complete the required hours and follow all practicum guidelines to be considered ready.” (Dean 01).

Interns similarly viewed the curriculum as the foundation of teaching competence: “We are trained in pedagogy and content, so the curriculum is supposed to prepare us for the classroom.” (I03_Rural). However, cooperating teachers argued that readiness also required adapting knowledge to learners and local conditions: “You cannot rely only on what they learned in school; they need to adjust to the learners and available resources.” (CT01_IP). Novice teachers echoed this view, recognizing gaps between coursework and professional practice: “During internship I thought I was ready, but when I started teaching full-time, I realized I wasn’t.” (N02_IP).

Together, these accounts position curriculum as the foundation—but not the completion—of readiness in marginalized contexts.

5.1.2 Readiness as Placement and Procedural Compliance

Readiness was also defined through completion of practicum requirements and institutional procedures. Administrators viewed compliance as evidence that interns had met professional expectations before deployment: “Interns must complete the required hours and follow all practicum guidelines to be considered ready.” (Dean 02).

Interns similarly regarded completing practicum requirements as confirmation of readiness: “As long as we complete the required hours, we are considered ready for deployment.” (I07_Rural). In contrast, cooperating teachers distinguished procedural compliance from classroom competence: “Some interns finish all requirements but still struggle when handling actual classrooms.” (CT03_Rural). Novice teachers echoed this distinction: “Even if we completed all practicum requirements, real teaching was completely different.” (N01_IP).

These accounts suggest that procedural compliance certifies readiness institutionally but does not necessarily translate into classroom competence.

5.1.3 Readiness as Institutional Support Design

Institutional support through supervision, observation, mentoring, and feedback was identified as a key dimension of readiness. Administrators described these structures as deliberate scaffolds for interns' transition into classroom practice: “We designed post-conference and observation schedules to guide interns properly.” (Admin 02).

Cooperating teachers acknowledged these mechanisms but noted that workload often limited consistent feedback: “We try to guide them, but sometimes time and class demands limit proper feedback sessions.” (CT02_IP). Interns similarly reported uneven opportunities for reflection: “Wala gyud

post-conference… we just go back to class without feedback." (I12_Rural). Novice teachers described a similar lack of support after practicum: "After internship, there was no one to guide me anymore in handling real classes." (N03_IP).

Together, these accounts reveal a gap between formally designed support structures and their consistent implementation in practice.

Theme 2: Readiness as Mentor-Mediated Translation Between Institutional Expectations and Classroom Realities

This theme examines how mentoring mediates the translation of institutional expectations into classroom practice. Across participant groups, mentoring was viewed as a key mechanism for bridging university preparation and context-responsive teaching. Administrators emphasized institutional coordination, cooperating teachers highlighted contextual adaptation, interns described mentoring as essential during practicum, and novice teachers reflected on the consequences of limited support after graduation.

5.2.1 Mentoring as Contextual Translation

Participants described cooperating teachers as translating institutional preparation into classroom practice. Administrators viewed mentoring as a means of aligning practicum expectations with classroom realities: "Nagaconnect gihapon mi sa cooperating teachers to ensure ma-align ang practicum requirements ug ang actual classroom situation." (Dean 01).

Cooperating teachers emphasized adapting institutional expectations to learners, available resources, and community contexts: "What they learned in campus is important, but they also need to understand how to adjust based on the learners and the situation of the school." (CT01_IP). Interns likewise valued this guidance: "They told me how to teach considering the local culture and available resources… it was different from what we learned on campus." (I01_IP). Novice teachers similarly reflected that mentoring eased their transition into teaching, although support was often not sustained beyond practicum.

Collectively, these findings position mentoring as the process through which institutional preparation is adapted to marginalized classroom realities.

5.2.2 Mentoring as Stabilizing Practicum Transition

Participants consistently described mentoring as a key support during the transition from university preparation to classroom practice. Administrators viewed it as a way to reduce interns' uncertainty: "Ang amo intent sa mentoring kay para dili sila mabigla sa field experience." (Dean 02).

Cooperating teachers extended this support beyond instruction by helping interns manage learners and respond to unfamiliar situations: "Sometimes they know the lesson, but they need guidance on how to handle the learners, especially when the situation is different from what they expected." (CT02_Rural). Interns likewise credited mentoring with building confidence during practicum: "Ma-mentor ko sa akong Cooperating Teacher, so kahit nahirapan ako, may guidance ako." (I12_Rural). However, novice teachers reported that such support diminished after they entered independent teaching: "During internship, there

was someone checking and guiding me, but when I became a teacher, I had to decide on my own." (N03_IP).

The findings indicate that mentoring stabilized practicum transition but was rarely sustained into early-career teaching.

5.2.3 Post-Conferencing and Reflective Feedback Gaps

Although post-conferencing and reflective feedback were identified as important components of practicum supervision, participants reported differences between institutional expectations and actual implementation. Administrators described post-conferencing as an established component of supervision intended to support intern development: "Required man gyud ang post-conference after observation." (Dean 03).

Cooperating teachers acknowledged the importance of reflective discussions but explained that implementation was sometimes affected by workload, teaching responsibilities, and limited time: "We want to discuss their teaching after observation, but sometimes there are many responsibilities that prevent longer conversations." (CT03_IP).

Interns reported inconsistent access to feedback opportunities. Some described receiving guidance informally, while others experienced limited opportunities to discuss their teaching performance:

"Wala gyud post-conference… we just go back to class without feedback." (I12_Rural).

Novice teachers identified similar concerns regarding the lack of sustained feedback beyond the practicum period. They described entering the teaching profession with limited opportunities for structured reflection and professional guidance.

Across accounts, post-conferencing was recognized as an intended institutional practice; however, its implementation varied across contexts. The difference between formal expectations and actual experiences demonstrates that mentoring effectiveness depends not only on institutional design but also on the availability of time, resources, and sustained relational support.

Research Question 2: Where do tensions and mismatches emerge across these actors regarding preparation, mentoring, supervision, and institutional support during practicum?

Theme 3: Readiness Disrupted by Practicum Realities in Marginalized Contexts

This theme examines how practicum experiences in marginalized schools challenged assumptions about teacher readiness. Although institutional preparation established expectations, classroom realities exposed gaps between anticipated and actual teaching demands. While all participant groups viewed marginalized placements as valuable learning experiences, they differed in how exposure shaped readiness.

5.3.1 Reality Shock During Marginalized Placement

Participants described marginalized school placements as contexts where assumptions about readiness were tested. Administrators viewed practicum exposure as an opportunity for interns to encounter authentic teaching conditions: “Kani nga stage important para ma-expose jud sila sa real classroom setup.” (Dean 01).

Cooperating teachers emphasized that exposure required adjustment because marginalized schools presented conditions different from those commonly experienced during university-based preparation:

“They need to learn that teaching is not only about delivering lessons but also understanding the situation of the learners.” (CT01_IP).

Interns described experiencing uncertainty when confronted with cultural, linguistic, and material realities unfamiliar to them. One intern explained: “Being in the IP community, teaching is not just academics… you need to understand the learners and the community.” (I10_IP).

Novice teachers reflected that these experiences became more meaningful after they entered full-time teaching, when they encountered similar challenges with greater responsibility and fewer support mechanisms.

The accounts indicate that marginalized placements functioned as significant testing environments for readiness. However, participants’ experiences suggest that exposure alone did not automatically result in preparedness; rather, readiness depended on how experiences were interpreted, supported, and connected to professional learning.

5.3.2 Institutional Preparation and Field Conditions

Participants identified a persistent tension between institutional preparation and the realities of marginalized schools. Administrators viewed coursework, practicum, and contextualized training as adequate preparation: “Gina-preparare na nato sila sa different contexts.” (Dean 02).

Cooperating teachers, however, emphasized that interns often had to adapt university-based strategies to local conditions: “Sometimes they come prepared with strategies, but when they see the actual situation of the learners, they need to adjust and find other ways.” (CT02_IP). Interns likewise encountered material constraints that had not been anticipated during training: “The classroom had no electricity, and we had to think of other ways to continue the lesson.” (I07_Rural). Novice teachers similarly reflected that independent teaching introduced greater responsibility, workload, and accountability than they had experienced during practicum.

These findings highlight a mismatch between institutional assumptions of preparedness and the adaptive demands of marginalized classrooms.

5.3.3 Exposure Without Guided Interpretation

Although practicum exposure was widely valued, participants emphasized that experience alone did not guarantee professional learning. Administrators viewed field immersion as essential for developing teaching competence: “Through actual exposure, ma-develop nila ang teaching competence.” (Dean 03).

However, cooperating teachers argued that its value depended on guided reflection and feedback: “They experience the classroom, but they also need someone to explain why certain approaches work in that situation.” (CT03_Rural).

Interns similarly described encountering challenges without sufficient guidance: “There were times when we experienced problems, but there was no proper explanation on what we should do next.” (I11_IP). Novice teachers likewise reflected that structured reflection during practicum could have better prepared them for early-career teaching.

These findings suggest that practicum strengthens readiness when supported by mentoring and reflection; without guided interpretation, exposure alone rarely translates into professional confidence and capability.

Research Question 3: How do practicum and early-career teaching experiences reshape understandings of teacher readiness across the teacher education continuum?

Theme 4: Readiness as Retrospectively Reconstructed in Novice Teaching

This theme examines how readiness was reinterpreted after the transition from supervised practicum to independent teaching. Whereas administrators and interns viewed readiness primarily through preparation, novice teachers assessed it against the realities of professional responsibility, workload, and sustained classroom demands. Their reflections suggest that readiness continues to evolve beyond initial teacher preparation.

5.4.1 Internship Was Different from Real Teaching

Participants differed in how they evaluated the extent to which internship prepared teachers for professional responsibilities. Administrators generally viewed practicum as a sufficient foundation for entering the teaching profession: “Ang practicum is enough foundation because they already experience actual classroom teaching.” (Dean 01).

Cooperating teachers recognized the value of internship but emphasized that practicum remained a supported environment where interns had access to supervision and guidance. They noted that independent teaching involved additional responsibilities beyond those experienced during internship.

Interns generally perceived practicum as their primary preparation for professional teaching. Through classroom exposure and mentoring, they developed confidence in their ability to manage teaching tasks.

However, novice teachers described differences between internship experiences and full-time teaching responsibilities. One novice teacher stated: “Training during internship was very different from reality because when you become a teacher, all decisions depend on you.” (N02_IP).

In these, readiness was interpreted differently depending on participants’ position in the teacher education continuum. While practicum represented preparation and exposure for institutions and interns, novice teachers evaluated readiness through the demands of independent professional practice.

5.4.2 Professional Unpreparedness Under Workload and Responsibility
Novice teachers identified workload and professional responsibility as major areas where their preparedness was challenged. Administrators emphasized that teacher education programs provided comprehensive preparation: “Comprehensive ang atong training because we prepare them in different areas of teaching.” (Dean 02).

Cooperating teachers acknowledged that interns developed foundational skills during practicum but observed that managing full teaching responsibilities remained challenging for beginning teachers.

Interns reported gaining experience in lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional delivery; however, they had limited exposure to the broader responsibilities associated with full-time teaching.

Novice teachers highlighted workload intensity as a significant factor affecting their sense of readiness. One participant explained: “I have six subjects every day, and aside from teaching, there are many other responsibilities.” (N01_IP).

Thus, readiness involved not only pedagogical competence but also the ability to manage the broader demands of the teaching profession. The transition to independent teaching revealed areas of preparation that were less visible during practicum.
5.4.3 Enduring Consequences of Incomplete Pre-Service Preparation
Participants also described how preparation gaps continued to influence early-career teaching experiences. Administrators viewed readiness as a continuing process rather than a condition fully achieved at graduation: “Ang readiness is continuous because teachers continue learning even after preparation.” (Dean 03). Cooperating teachers similarly observed that beginning teachers continued to encounter difficulties after entering the profession, particularly when dealing with complex learner needs and limited school resources.

Interns generally focused on immediate practicum requirements and had limited awareness of challenges that might emerge after deployment.

In contrast, novice teachers described how unresolved preparation gaps continued to affect their teaching decisions and professional adjustment. One novice teacher reflected: “The challenges are still present because every class and every situation is different.” (N03_IP).

The retrospective accounts of novice teachers demonstrate that readiness extends beyond the completion of teacher preparation programs. Instead, readiness continues to develop through professional experiences, institutional support, and ongoing engagement with classroom realities.

6. Discussion

The findings show that teacher readiness in marginalized Philippine settings is not a fixed outcome of coursework or practicum completion but is shaped through the interaction of institutional expectations,

mentoring, field experiences, and early professional practice. Across participant groups, readiness was understood differently, reflecting varying expectations and responsibilities. This finding aligns with Alexander's (2018) argument that readiness remains a contested concept marked by competing understandings and the absence of a shared definition. Similar to Alexander's observation of misaligned expectations surrounding initial teacher education, the present study found that administrators, mentors, interns, and novice teachers construct readiness in different ways. Extending this scholarship, the study demonstrates how these competing constructions are negotiated in marginalized contexts, revealing readiness as a mediated and developmental process rather than a condition achieved upon graduation.

6.1 Readiness as a Contested Construct Rather Than a Settled Outcome

The findings demonstrate that readiness is interpreted differently across actors. Administrators emphasized curricular and institutional expectations, cooperating teachers highlighted contextual judgment, interns viewed readiness as developing through practicum, and novice teachers reassessed it through early professional experience. These perspectives suggest that readiness cannot be understood as a uniform standard but as a contextually negotiated construct.

This finding aligns with scholarship that critiques checklist-based conceptions of readiness and emphasizes the situated nature of teacher preparation (Biesta et al., 2015; Toker-Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak, 2025). The present study extends this work by showing that readiness is negotiated not only conceptually but also institutionally and experientially, as each actor interprets preparedness through different responsibilities and contexts.

Accordingly, readiness in marginalized settings is best understood as a negotiated process: institutionally defined, mentor-mediated, tested through practicum, and reinterpreted during early professional practice.

6.2 Mentoring as the Critical Mediation Between Preparation and Practice

The findings show that mentoring is the primary mechanism linking institutional preparation with classroom practice. Cooperating teachers translate institutional expectations into context-responsive guidance, helping interns interpret local conditions and apply professional knowledge. Where mentoring is consistent, interns report a clearer connection between preparation and practice; where it is limited, readiness remains uncertain.

This extends research that recognizes mentoring as an important component of teacher preparation but often treats it as supplementary rather than structurally central (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). The present study positions mentoring as the mediating layer through which readiness is translated, tested, and refined in practice. Variations in mentoring quality therefore shape whether readiness develops into professional capability or remains incomplete.

6.3 Field Exposure Alone Does Not Produce Readiness

The findings also show that exposure to marginalized school settings, by itself, does not produce readiness. Interns encounter reality shock, resource scarcity, cultural complexity, and classroom conditions that differ sharply from campus-based expectations. Novice teachers later recognize that these experiences exposed gaps that were not obvious during practicum. In other words, field exposure reveals mismatch, but it does not automatically resolve it.

This is consistent with work arguing that experience becomes meaningful only when it is supported by structured reflection, guided interpretation, and contextual feedback (Capello, 2020; Lindström, Löfström, & Londén, 2026). The present study adds that exposure without mediation can become fragmentary: interns may be placed in complex settings, but without adequate interpretive support, the experience remains disorienting rather than developmental.

The manuscript therefore extends scholarship on practicum by showing that the issue is not simply whether students are exposed to difficult contexts, but whether they are helped to interpret those contexts in ways that build readiness over time. Readiness emerges through the combination of experience, reflection, and guided support, not through exposure alone.

6.4 Institutional Mismatch Redistributes the Burden of Preparation

A major finding of the study is that when teacher education programs do not fully align preparation with marginalized school realities, the burden of adaptation shifts downward. Cooperating teachers absorb additional mentoring work, interns carry the burden of adjustment during practicum, and novice teachers continue to compensate for preparation gaps once they enter full employment.

This deepens existing literature on institutional mismatch in teacher education, which often notes that schools and universities are not perfectly aligned but does not always trace how that misalignment redistributes labor across actors (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Zeichner, 2010; Çakar, & Boydak Özan, 2025). The present study shows that mismatch is not neutral. It creates uneven demands on those closest to the field, especially cooperating teachers and early-career teachers, who must repair gaps that should ideally be addressed within institutional preparation.

The conceptual contribution here is that readiness should not be treated as an individual achievement. It is an outcome of an interdependent system. When that system is misaligned, the cost of readiness is transferred to the people least protected by it. This is why readiness in marginalized contexts must be understood alongside mentoring load, institutional design, and the realities of field placement.

6.5 A Negotiated Readiness Model of Teacher Preparation in Marginalized Contexts

The preceding discussion converges into a Negotiated Readiness Model of Teacher Preparation in Marginalized Contexts, which synthesizes the study's conceptual arguments into a single developmental framework. Rather than viewing teacher readiness as a fixed outcome of completing coursework or practicum, the model conceptualizes readiness as a contested, mediated, and developmental process that evolves across the preparation-to-practice continuum. This proposition is consistent with the study's central finding that readiness is constructed differently by administrators, cooperating teachers, interns, and novice teachers, reflecting their distinct positions within teacher education. This supports scholarship that views teacher development as longitudinal and context-sensitive rather than event-based (Zeichner, 2010; Le Maistre, & Paré, 2010; Schatz-Oppenheimer, & Dvir, 2014; Riccio, Cook, Fenning, & Harris, 2015).

The model begins with institutional expectations, where readiness is framed through curriculum, practicum requirements, professional standards, and accountability mechanisms. At this stage, readiness is treated as the intended outcome of teacher education. The first tension emerges when these expectations confront the realities of marginalized school placements, where learner diversity, limited resources, and contextual challenges often exceed institutional preparation. As a result, readiness becomes an institutional aspiration rather than a fully developed professional capacity.

The second stage highlights mentor mediation, the model's central mechanism. Rather than simply supervising interns, cooperating teachers translate institutional expectations into context-responsive practice through feedback, pedagogical guidance, and support in interpreting unfamiliar situations. In doing so, mentoring reshapes institutional preparation rather than merely implementing it, explaining why variations in mentoring quality strongly influence readiness and position mentoring as the critical bridge between teacher education and classroom practice. Readiness is subsequently field-tested during practicum encounters, where interns confront authentic teaching demands in marginalized schools. Here, classroom realities expose preparation gaps that may remain invisible during university training. However, the model emphasizes that exposure alone does not produce readiness. Rather, readiness develops when field experiences are accompanied by mentoring, reflective dialogue, and guided interpretation that enable interns to transform challenging experiences into professional learning. Without these mediating processes, practicum experiences may reveal difficulties without necessarily strengthening professional competence.

Following practicum, readiness is retrospectively reconstructed during novice teaching. As beginning teachers assume independent responsibility for instruction, classroom management, and professional decision-making, they reassess the adequacy of their preparation in light of everyday teaching realities. Readiness therefore becomes an evolving professional judgment rather than a condition achieved at graduation. This developmental transition explains why interns generally describe readiness as emerging through supervised practice, whereas novice teachers redefine readiness through lived professional experience.

Unlike traditional models of teacher preparation, the proposed framework is recursive rather than linear. Experiences from novice teaching inform curriculum revision, practicum redesign, mentor preparation, and institutional policy, enabling teacher education to respond to the realities of marginalized schools. Accordingly, readiness is understood not as an individual achievement but as a system-level construct emerging from the dynamic interplay of institutions, mentoring, practicum experiences, and professional practice.

The model also explains the theoretical value of comparing teacher interns and novice teachers. Rather than distinct groups, they represent successive developmental stages along the same professional trajectory. Interns experience readiness as provisional and scaffolded through institutional and mentoring support, whereas novice teachers reconstruct it through independent practice. Integrating these perspectives demonstrates that readiness is not a fixed endpoint but a continuous process negotiated across institutional preparation, mentoring, classroom practice, and professional experience. This perspective offers a more comprehensive account of readiness in marginalized contexts and underscores the need to strengthen both institutional structures and contextual support throughout the preparation-to-practice continuum.

7. Implications

The findings indicate that strengthening teacher readiness in marginalized contexts requires coordinated action across teacher education institutions, practicum systems, mentoring, and induction. Because readiness develops through the interaction of institutional preparation, mentoring, field experience, and early-career practice, improvements should address the entire preparation-to-practice continuum.

Teacher Education Institutions. Teacher education institutions should redesign curricula to better prepare future teachers for rural, Indigenous Peoples (IP), multilingual, and conflict-affected contexts. This includes integrating modules on contextual realities, resource-constrained teaching, cultural and linguistic diversity, and community engagement, alongside structured reflection that connects theory with practicum experiences.

Practicum Coordinators and Teacher Education Leaders. Practicum systems should prioritize mentoring quality alongside placement. Coordinators should orient and support cooperating teachers, establish clear mentoring expectations, and implement structured pre- and post-conference protocols. Regular monitoring can strengthen reflective learning rather than mere field exposure.

Cooperating Teachers and Mentors. Mentors should provide contextual guidance, timely feedback, and reflective dialogue that help interns interpret classroom realities, respond to contextual challenges, and adapt instruction to local conditions. Strengthening this mediating role can narrow the gap between institutional preparation and classroom practice.

Schools and Induction Providers. Induction programs should align with challenges encountered during practicum, particularly those related to workload, limited resources, cultural diversity, and community

engagement. Structured mentoring, collaborative reflection, and targeted professional support can strengthen continuity from pre-service preparation to professional practice while improving teacher retention and effectiveness in marginalized settings.

8. Conclusion

Teacher readiness for marginalized schooling should not be viewed as the automatic outcome of formal teacher education. Rather, it is shaped through institutional design, mentoring, practicum, and early professional experience. This shifts the focus from whether beginning teachers are ready enough to whether teacher education, mentoring, and practicum systems are aligned with the realities of marginalized schools.

By conceptualizing readiness as an emergent, contextually mediated construct, this study demonstrates the interdependence of curriculum, mentoring, field experience, and early-career support. Readiness develops across the transition from pre-service preparation to practicum and novice teaching, underscoring the need for greater coherence across teacher education systems serving rural, Indigenous, multilingual, and conflict-affected communities.

This study has several limitations. Participant representation was uneven, with stronger accounts from interns than from cooperating teachers, administrators, and novice teachers. The findings are also situated within selected marginalized Philippine contexts, limiting transferability to other settings. In addition, the study relied primarily on interviews without classroom observations or document analysis, and novice teachers' retrospective accounts may have been influenced by recall.

Future research should examine readiness across ASEAN and other Global South contexts to determine whether similar patterns emerge under different institutional conditions. Longitudinal studies following teacher candidates from practicum into early-career teaching could further illuminate readiness development, while research on mentor preparation and practicum design may clarify how mentoring quality and institutional alignment shape readiness in marginalized settings.

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Figures

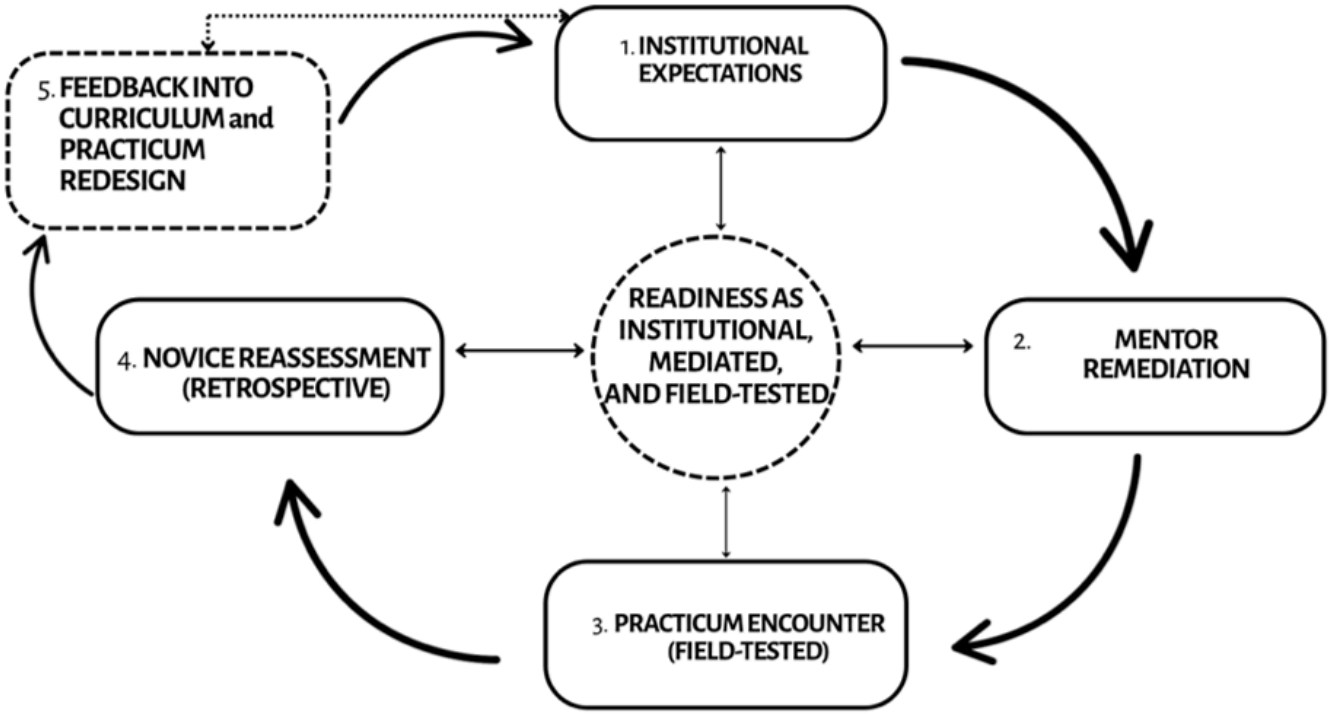


Figure 1

Preliminary Analytical Framework of Teacher Readiness in Marginalized Philippine Contexts

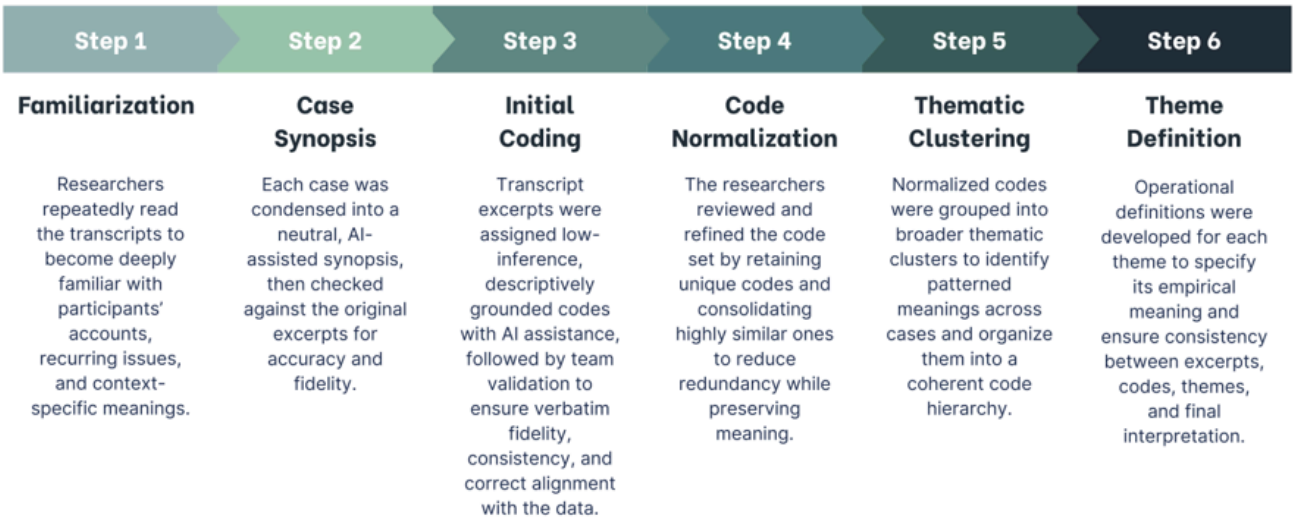


Figure 2

The Six-Step Data Analysis Procedures