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Bridging the Gap: A Qualitative Analysis of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers and Teaching Internship Experiences of Practice Teachers

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Abstract. This qualitative study explored the alignment between the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the actual teaching internship experiences of practice teachers. Anchored on a documentary-analytical qualitative design, the study examined how PPST competencies were reflected in teaching portfolios—comprising lesson plans, observation records, and reflective journals of practice teachers. Data were collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with forty-two (42) practice teachers from Ifugao State University–Potia Campus, Ifugao, Philippines, during the academic year 2023–2024. Findings revealed that while practice teachers demonstrated foundational awareness of PPST competencies, significant gaps were observed in their classroom application. Key themes included strong content mastery and curriculum planning but difficulty in lesson adaptation; efforts to foster positive learning environments hampered by classroom management issues; awareness of learner diversity with limited inclusive strategies; recognition of assessment importance but limited hands-on experience; and commitment to professional growth with restricted access to structured development opportunities. Thus, the study developed the Teaching Internship Enhancement Program (TIEP) based on the SPATRASS model—Support, Preparation, Application, Training, Reflection, Assessment, and Sustainability. This proposed intervention aims to strengthen the alignment of internship practices with the PPST through structured mentoring, capacity-building activities, reflective engagement, and continuous program improvement. This seeks to bridge the gap between policy expectations and actual teaching performance, thereby supporting the development of future-ready professional teachers.

Keywords: teaching internship; practice teachers; experiential learning; teacher education; policy alignment

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1. Background of the Study

The quality of any educational system is intrinsically linked to the capability and effectiveness of its teaching workforce. Teacher competence comprising pedagogical expertise, instructional skills, and professional dispositions has been consistently identified as a critical factor influencing student development and achievement (Mubarok, 2024). Recent studies affirm that the overall quality of education is significantly shaped by the professional readiness of educators, whose competencies directly affect learning outcomes (Hariri et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, enhancing teacher quality has long been a central agenda in education reform.

Various national initiatives have been introduced to strengthen teacher preparation, update training curricula, and implement frameworks aimed at elevating professional standards. These interventions are pivotal in ensuring that Filipino learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in both national and global contexts (UNESCO, 2022). Two major policy frameworks namely the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) have guided these efforts. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), through CMO No. 52, s. 2007, and the Department of Education (DepEd), through DO No. 32, s. 2009, institutionalized the NCBTS as a foundational standard for teacher development and evaluation.

This framework focused primarily on the competencies needed for teachers to be effective in the classroom and emphasized the basic standards that all teachers should meet to ensure quality teaching and learning. To update and enhance these standards, the PPST was introduced through DepEd Order No. 42, series of 2017, focusing on the entire career progression of teachers, from beginning to distinguished teachers. The PPST emphasizes continuous professional development and lifelong learning, supporting teachers at different career stages and serving as a cornerstone for ensuring teacher quality (PPST, 2017).

The PPST is organized into seven domains—Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, Learning Environment, Diversity of Learners, Curriculum and Planning, Assessment and Reporting, Community Linkages and Professional Engagement, and Personal Growth and Professional Development—each specifying the knowledge, skills, and values expected of teachers (DepEd, 2017).

Focusing on these domains is essential because they provide a comprehensive framework for professional teaching practice, guiding teachers in planning, instruction, assessment, and professional growth (Mantos et al., 2020). Emphasizing these fundamental aspects ensures that teacher preparation programs address both the theoretical and practical competencies required in diverse classroom settings. Despite the thorough structure of the PPST, research indicates persistent gaps between policy expectations and actual classroom practice, highlighting the need to examine how pre-service teachers internalize and apply these standards (Gepila, 2020).

The College of Education at Ifugao State University (IFSU) envisions becoming an academic center for producing excellent educators and leaders who drive peace

and progress. A key aspect of this vision is fostering meaningful teaching experiences that prepare future teachers for the profession (IFSU, 2023). The education programs and practices implemented during teaching internships, particularly in the final stage of students' academic journey, aim to determine the extent to which policies are observed and aligned with actual learning experiences. Ensuring this alignment is crucial for adequately preparing students for their transition into the teaching profession.

This study contributes to the continuous enhancement of teacher education by assessing the awareness of practice teachers regarding the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and examining how these competencies are reflected in their actual teaching internship experiences. By identifying strengths and areas for improvement, this research supports the effective implementation of the PPST, ensuring that its objectives are realized in real teaching environments. While the PPST career stages are designed for in-service teachers, fourth-year education students are at a critical transition point, moving from academic preparation to professional practice. Though not yet classified under the PPST career stages, their competencies closely align with the expectations for beginning teachers.

In practice, practice teachers are expected to demonstrate foundational skills such as content knowledge and pedagogy, creating a conducive learning environment, addressing the needs of diverse learners, planning and implementing lessons aligned with curriculum standards, utilizing assessment methods, and engaging in reflective practice for professional growth. These competencies are essential for their progression to the "Beginning Teacher" stage upon graduation and licensure (Belle et al., 2022; Galih et al., 2022; Liwanag, 2023). Given this, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- a. What competencies outlined in the various domains of the PPST are reflected in the actual practice teaching experiences of practice teachers?
- b. What specific gaps exist between the PPST domains and the actual practice teaching experiences of practice teachers?
- c. What intervention can be developed to enhance the alignment of the teaching internship program with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers?

2. Related Literature

The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), introduced by the Department of Education in 2017, provides a comprehensive framework outlining the knowledge, skills, and values expected of teachers at different career stages. It is composed of seven domains—Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, Learning Environment, Diversity of Learners, Curriculum and Planning, Assessment and Reporting, Community Linkages and Professional Engagement, and Personal Growth and Professional Development (PPST, 2017). The PPST is not merely a checklist of competencies but a guiding framework that aligns teacher performance with the nation's goals for quality education. Dacanay (2024) and Gepila (2020) affirm that it serves as a systematic benchmark for teacher preparation, enabling teacher education institutions to design programs that cultivate graduates capable of meeting national teaching standards. As a competency-based framework, it resonates with the principles of experiential

learning theory (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes the integration of concrete experiences with reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—core processes also embedded in the PPST’s vision for professional growth.

Central to the implementation of the PPST in teacher education programs is the teaching internship, often regarded as the capstone experience for pre-service teachers. This practicum immerses student teachers in a real classroom environment, bridging the gap between theoretical coursework and professional practice (Bakija-Haraçija et al., 2024, Rahmawati et al., 2023). Through lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and assessment, interns demonstrate their readiness to assume the responsibilities of licensed teachers. Gorospe (2022) points out, however, that the internship period is not without challenges. Heightened anxiety due to mentor expectations, workload pressures, and classroom realities can negatively impact performance. Without adequate pre-internship preparation and structured mentoring, such challenges may hinder the full realization of the PPST’s intended competencies.

Several studies highlight the importance of aligning teaching internships with professional standards to ensure quality education. Meng (2023) emphasizes that evidence-based instructional strategies, technology integration, and continuous assessment during internships enhance both teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Similarly, Ajani (2023) proposes the Learner-Centered Teacher Professional Development Model (LCTPD) as a means to strengthen the connection between professional growth activities and classroom practice. Gorospe (2022) further establishes that self-efficacy in classroom management significantly correlates with lower teaching anxiety, underscoring the need for targeted preparation in this area. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of teaching internships is not solely a function of the duration of practice but of the degree to which they are intentionally aligned with recognized professional standards.

While research on teaching internships and the PPST exists, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies examining their alignment in specific institutional contexts, particularly within state universities and colleges in the Philippines. No published research to date has focused on the intersection of these elements at Ifugao State University, leaving a contextual gap in understanding how the PPST competencies are demonstrated, supported, or hindered during the internship phase in this locale. Addressing this gap is crucial, as regional and institutional contexts may significantly shape how competencies are developed and applied. This study seeks to fill this void through a combined document analysis of practice teacher portfolios and interviews with student teachers, generating context-specific insights that can inform program enhancement.

By bridging this gap, the study will contribute to both scholarly discourse and policy development, ensuring that the teacher education curriculum is not only compliant with the PPST but also responsive to the lived realities of pre-service teachers in the field. In doing so, it reinforces the broader national agenda of

raising teacher quality as a means of improving educational outcomes across the Philippine basic education system.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a documentary-analytical qualitative design, which was appropriate for exploring how the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) are reflected in the actual teaching practices of pre-service teachers. Through the analysis of teaching portfolios and interviews, the design allowed for an in-depth examination of how policy-based competencies are demonstrated in real classroom settings and where gaps may exist between theory and practice.

3.2 Participants and Research Environment

This study consisted of forty-two (42) practice teachers from Ifugao State University–Potia Campus, Ifugao, Philippines, who completed their teaching internships during the academic year 2023–2024. The participants had originally submitted their teaching portfolios as a requirement for the Teaching Internship course. The research study was initiated only after the completion of the internship program, and the portfolios were accessed for analysis only with the informed consent of the participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure representation across subject areas and grade levels. Participants who consented were also invited to participate in follow-up interviews. Measures were implemented to ensure voluntary participation, emphasizing that their decision to participate or not in the research would have no impact on their academic standing.

3.3 Data Gathering Tool

This study utilized three primary instruments: the teaching portfolios, the PPST document, and a semi-structured interview guide. The portfolios of the practice teachers included lesson plans, reflections in each domain, mentor feedback, and self-assessments, which provide detailed insights into how practice teachers applied PPST competencies. The lesson plans consisted of seven entries per participant covering different subject areas, while the domain-based reflections included six entries corresponding to each PPST domain. Mentor feedback forms were aligned with PPST indicators, and the self-assessment checklists were adapted from the PPST strand descriptors.

Moreover, the semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by three experts in teacher education, captured additional perspectives not fully reflected in the written documents. It consisted of five open-ended questions developed based on the PPST domains, existing literature on teaching internships, and the study objectives, particularly focusing on challenges or gaps encountered by practice teachers. Revisions were incorporated based on expert feedback to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

This study obtained formal approval from the Campus Executive Director before proceeding. After the Teaching Internship course was completed, informed consent was secured from the practice teachers to use their previously submitted

teaching portfolios for research purposes. The portfolios, originally collected as part of academic requirements, were then organized and reviewed for completeness. To supplement the portfolio data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with consenting participants to provide deeper insights. All interview responses were transcribed and, along with the portfolio documents, prepared for thematic analysis. Data triangulation was employed to cross-validate findings among portfolios, interviews, and the PPST framework, enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

A formal request letter was submitted to the Office of the Campus Executive Director seeking permission to conduct the study. Since the teaching portfolios were initially submitted solely for academic evaluation during the Teaching Internship course, this study accessed and used these documents only after obtaining informed consent from the participants following the conclusion of the internship program. Participants were assured that involvement in the study was voluntary, and that confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing all data and would be used solely for academic purposes. The welfare of participants was prioritized throughout the research process to ensure no harm or discomfort occurred.

3.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative data from teaching portfolios and interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. A gap analysis was also conducted by mapping the demonstrated teaching practices against the expected PPST competencies the gaps. Coding was done manually, with peer checking to ensure dependability, and trustworthiness was established through data triangulation and member checking.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 PPST competencies reflected in practice teaching and identified gaps

These were the competencies across the different domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) as reflected in the actual teaching experiences of practice teachers. The findings were organized according to PPST domains, integrating participant responses, document analysis, and relevant literature to ensure triangulation and strengthen the scientific rigor of the analysis.

4.1.1 Mastery of content and curriculum alignment but challenges in lesson adaptation and material development

Practice teachers demonstrated strong competence in Domains 1 and 4 (Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, Curriculum and Planning). They were proficient in aligning lesson plans with curriculum objectives and integrating ICT-based strategies to enhance instruction.

For example, Participant 2 stated:

"I always make sure that my lesson plans are detailed and aligned with the objectives of the curriculum."

While participant 7 added:

"Using ICT in teaching makes my lessons more interactive, and I try to use digital tools whenever possible."

These responses indicate that practice teachers have internalized curriculum requirements and are capable of incorporating technology to facilitate learning. However, document analysis of lesson plans revealed that adaptation for diverse learners was limited, and the creation of engaging instructional materials remained inconsistent. Participant 11 noted:

"It takes too much time to prepare lesson plans, and sometimes I feel like I don't have enough guidance on how to adjust them."

Likewise, he stated that *"Making materials that truly engage*

These findings align with Abedi (2018) and Sebullen (2017), who reported that pre-service teachers are proficient in curriculum alignment but face challenges in lesson adaptation and material development. Xie et al. (2019) further suggest that practice-based teaching strategies, such as repeated teaching and microteaching, can enhance adaptive competence.

4.1.2 Establishing a positive learning environment but struggles in classroom management

In Domain 2 (Learning Environment), practice teachers emphasized respect, inclusivity, and classroom organization. Participant 7 stated:

"I always make sure that my students feel safe and respected in my class."

Similarly, Participant 4 added:

"The physical arrangement of the classroom affects how students behave and participate, so I try to organize it well."

Despite these efforts, classroom management remained a challenge. Participant 10 admitted:

"Managing misbehavior in class is still a challenge for me."

This suggests that while teachers understand the principles of creating positive learning environments, practical challenges such as handling disruptive behavior and large class sizes affect implementation. Study supports this observation; large class sizes and insufficient support structures can hinder the establishment of effective learning environments (Mamaile & Omodan, 2023). A supportive relationship with colleagues and school administrators also plays a crucial role in facilitating positive classroom climates (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

4.1.3 Awareness of diverse learners but limited application of inclusive strategies

For Domain 3 (Diversity of Learners), practice teachers recognized the importance of differentiated instruction.

Participant 4 reported:

"I use different methods to ensure that all students can learn at their own pace."

However, implementation of inclusive strategies was inconsistent. Participant 9 stated:

"I want to accommodate all students, but I sometimes don't know how to adjust my strategies."

Research confirms that pre-service teachers recognize the importance of differentiated instruction (DI) in addressing learner diversity, but face challenges in implementation (Muksalmina et al., 2024; Obrovská et al., 2023). While university courses contribute to positive attitudes towards diversity, they may not provide sufficient practical experience (Obrovská et al., 2023). DI models show potential in enhancing learning experiences for special needs students in inclusive settings, but resource constraints and inadequate training hinder effective implementation (Muksalmina et al., 2024). Inclusive education practices, such as Universal Design for learning and collaborative teaching models, are important for creating equitable learning environments (Ranbir, 2024).

4.1.4 Recognition of assessment importance, but lack of hands-on experience in assessment design

Aligned with domain 5 of the PPST on assessment and reporting, practice teachers acknowledged the significance of assessments in measuring student progress and guiding instruction. As Participant 10 stated:

"Assessments help me understand if students are really learning."

However, a lack of hands-on experience in assessment design was evident. Some student teachers struggled with creating test papers, rubrics, and Tables of Specification (TOS). Participant 1 noted:

"I have not had much practice in creating test papers and rubrics."

These findings suggest that while teachers recognize the importance of assessment, many struggle with practical implementation, particularly in designing and interpreting assessment instruments (Magaji & Ade-Ojo, 2023; Parra & López, 2024). Preservice teachers often find it difficult to embed assessment in learning experiences and facilitate students' understanding of feedback (Moura et al., 2024).

Additionally, there is a misalignment between teachers' recognition of the importance of fostering self-regulated learning and their actual classroom practices, with feedback primarily focused on task and process levels rather than self-regulation (van der Linden et al., 2023). Thus, teacher education programs should consider restructuring assessment content and providing more hands-on experiences to better prepare teachers for classroom assessment challenges (Magaji & Ade-Ojo, 2023; Parra & López, 2024).

4.1.5 Commitment to professional growth and community engagement but limited structured opportunities

Domains 6 and 7 of the PPST on community linkages and professional engagement, personal growth, and professional development were reflected in the way practice teachers actively participated in community-based activities and

professional development programs, recognizing their role in shaping their teaching careers. Participant 9 said:

“Engaging with the community gave me a better understanding of my role as a teacher.”

Similarly, Participant 4 added:

“Attending seminars has helped me improve my teaching skills and confidence.”

However, structured mentorship and formalized professional development opportunities were limited. Participant 3 stated:

“I need more guidance on how to grow professionally as a teacher.”

These results indicate that while teachers are committed to growth, structured support systems such as mentoring and professional learning communities are critical. Previous studies support the importance of mentorship and reflective practice in strengthening teacher identity and professional competence (Chea, 2017; Sánchez-García, 2018; Cheng & Zhao, 2019).

4.2 Development of Teaching Internship Enhancement Program (TIEP) Using the SPATRASS Model

Teaching internships play a significant role in improving pre-service teachers' skills and preparing them for the teaching profession (Lobo, 2023). Studies have emphasized that education students often exhibit moderate needs in areas such as communication skills, classroom management, and instructional strategies (Guerrero, 2024). To enhance the effectiveness of teaching internships, research recommends incorporating reflection-based instruction and extended teaching practice under the guidance of experienced supervisors (Ghufron et al., 2022).

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that although practice teachers possess a foundational awareness of the PPST, significant gaps remain in the practical application of these competencies during teaching internships. To address these gaps, the Teaching Internship Enhancement Program (TIEP) was developed using the SPATRASS model. This intervention provides a structured and comprehensive framework designed to strengthen the alignment between policy and practice.

The TIEP emphasizes structured mentoring (Support) and targeted pre-internship preparation (Preparation), equipping practice teachers with essential knowledge and guidance. Practical opportunities for implementation (Application) and focused skill-building activities (Training) allow interns to translate PPST competencies effectively into real classroom settings. The inclusion of reflective practices (Reflection) and ongoing evaluation (Assessment) fosters professional development, metacognitive awareness, and self-regulated learning, consistent with best practices in teacher education (Ghufron et al., 2022). Finally, embedding sustainability measures (Sustainability) ensures that the program becomes institutionalized and continuously improved, reinforcing alignment with national teaching standards. Overall, the TIEP provides a research-informed framework to

bridge the gap between policy and practice, preparing competent, confident, and classroom-ready future educators.

Table 1: Support, Preparation, Application, Training, Reflection, Assessment, Sustainability for Teaching Internship Enhancement Program (TIEP)

SPATRASS Model	Objective	Key Strategies/Activities	Expected Outcome
S - Support	Provide structured mentoring and institutional guidance	- Assign trained Cooperating Teachers (CTs) - Use Mentorship Logbooks - Establish a Community of Practice (CoP)	Interns receive timely, structured feedback and support, enhancing professional growth
P - Preparation	Equip interns with foundational knowledge and tools	- PPST Orientation Seminar - Workshop on Inclusive Education (Domain 3) - Module-based sessions on Assessment and Classroom Management	Interns start their internship informed and confident in PPST-aligned strategies
A - Application	Implement PPST competencies in real classroom settings	- Adaptation of lessons for diverse learners - Teaching Demonstrations - Use of PPST-based observation rubrics	Interns apply standards-based practices and demonstrate teaching effectiveness
T - Training	Strengthen teaching competencies through focused practice	- Microteaching (e.g., inclusive classrooms, classroom management) - Simulation activities - Assessment design clinics	Improved skills in inclusive strategies, lesson delivery, and learner assessment
R - Reflection	Foster critical reflection on teaching practices	- Weekly Reflective Journals (by domain) - Monthly Reflection Circles - Final PPST-Based Reflective Report	Interns develop metacognitive awareness and professional insight
A - Assessment	Evaluate competency development and program impact	- Formative/Summative PPST Evaluations - Triangulated assessment: self, mentor, peer - Portfolio analysis	Interns receive meaningful evaluation aligned with PPST; program adjustments based on findings
S - Sustainability	Ensure long-term impact and program continuity	- Institutionalize TIEP in internship policies - Annual CT and faculty training - Feedback systems (exit surveys, review cycles)	TIEP becomes an embedded, continuously improving part of the teacher education program

5. Conclusions

This study investigated how the competencies of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) were demonstrated in the teaching internship experiences of practice teachers at Ifugao State University–Potia Campus, using a

documentary-analytical qualitative design. The findings revealed that while practice teachers showed strong awareness of PPST domains—particularly in content mastery, curriculum alignment, and efforts to create inclusive learning environments—there were notable gaps in the practical application of these competencies.

Challenges were observed in areas such as adapting lessons for diverse learners, implementing inclusive strategies, designing assessments, managing classrooms, and accessing structured professional development. To address these gaps, the Teaching Internship Enhancement Program (TIEP) was developed, guided by the SPATRASS model, which emphasizes Support, Preparation, Application, Training, Reflection, Assessment, and Sustainability.

This model provides a structured, research-informed framework that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experiences. Through structured mentoring, targeted workshops, reflective practice, and continuous assessment, TIEP aims to bridge the gap between PPST standards and real classroom application, thereby enhancing the preparedness, competence, and confidence of practice teachers. Finally, the findings offer a practical implication for enhancing teacher education programs in the Philippines and comparable education systems, ensuring stronger alignment between professional standards and classroom practice.

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