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Bridging Competency Gaps: A PPST-Aligned Assessment of Pre-Service Teachers at Initao College

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Abstract. The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) is a nationally recognized framework for teacher quality. Yet, its use in assessing pre-service teachers' competencies remains limited, especially in teacher education institutions. This study sought to address that gap by evaluating the competencies of pre-service teachers at Initao College in both classroom and non-classroom settings and by determining whether significant differences exist across gender, age, and grade level. A quantitative-comparative research design was employed, utilizing cluster sampling to select 34 pre-service teachers and their Cooperating Teachers at Initao Central School. Instructional competencies were measured using validated PPST-aligned instruments: the Classroom Observable Indicators (COI) Evaluation Form and the Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI) Self-Reflection Form. Statistical analyses included the Mann-Whitney U Test for gender comparisons, the One-Way ANOVA for age and grade comparisons, and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for COI and NCOI ratings. Results revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated high competency levels in both COI and NCOI, with classroom indicators rated slightly higher. No significant differences in competency levels were found based on gender, age, or grade level handled, leading to the acceptance of the null hypotheses. However, a statistically significant difference was observed between COI and NCOI, suggesting that pre-service teachers perform more strongly in classroom settings than in professional or reflective practices. In response to the findings, the GROW-TEACH program (Guided Reflection and Orientation for Wholistic Teacher Competency) was developed to prepare pre-service teachers holistically. Grounded in the PPST, it aims to bridge theory and practice by enhancing instructional competence and professional behavior through guided reflection and structured orientation, fostering the skills, values, and dispositions needed for today's diverse classrooms.

Keywords: Classroom and non-classroom indicators; GROW-TEACH; Instructional competencies; Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers; Pre-service teachers.

1.0 Introduction

Teacher competency is the backbone of educational success, directly shaping student learning outcomes and overall academic achievement. Competent teachers are not just conveyors of knowledge—they are architects of future success, equipping students with the critical thinking skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to thrive in an increasingly complex world. The effectiveness of an education system hinges on the caliber of its educators, whose competencies influence not only what students learn but also how effectively they apply that knowledge in real-world contexts. Recognizing the transformative impact of teacher competency, it is imperative to systematically assess and develop these competencies to elevate the quality of education on a broader scale.

In the Philippines, the importance of teacher competency is reinforced by legal and institutional frameworks. Republic Act No. 7836, also known as the Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994, mandates the establishment of professional standards for teachers to ensure they meet the qualifications necessary for effective practice. Complementing this, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), introduced through Department of Education Order No. 42, s. 2017 provides a structured framework for evaluating and enhancing teacher competencies. The PPST emphasizes professional knowledge, practice, and values, guiding teacher development in line with national expectations and global best practices. These standards underscore the need for continuous improvement in teacher education programs to ensure that future educators meet evolving classroom demands.

Existing research highlights the significance of teacher competence in improving educational outcomes. Ruaya et al. (2022) examined the role of teacher competence in implementing the Independent Curriculum, identifying key strengths and gaps in curriculum delivery. Fauth et al. (2019) explored the impact of pedagogical content knowledge, self-efficacy, and enthusiasm on student performance in elementary science, while Ventista and Brown (2023) emphasized the role of continuous professional development (CPD) in improving teacher effectiveness. While these studies affirm the importance of teacher competency, they also reveal persistent gaps in aligning teacher preparation with the realities of modern classrooms.

Despite growing research on teacher competence, there remains limited exploration of how demographic factors such as gender, age, and grade level influence instructional competencies. Existing studies have largely focused on general teaching competencies without examining how these factors intersect with specific instructional competencies defined by the PPST. Furthermore, no study has specifically assessed the competencies of pre-service teachers at Initao College or evaluated how these competencies evolve across different year levels. This study addresses these gaps by conducting a structured assessment of instructional competencies using the Classroom Observable Indicators (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI) outlined in the PPST.

To bridge this gap, this study aims to evaluate the instructional competencies of pre-service teachers at Initao College based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). Specifically, it seeks to assess their competencies in both classroom and non-classroom settings and determine how these vary according to demographic factors. To achieve this, the researchers aim to answer the following question: What is the demographic profile of the respondents when grouped by gender, age, and grade level? What is the level of instructional competencies of the pre-service teachers as rated by their cooperating teachers in terms of Classroom Observable Indicators (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI)? Furthermore, the study investigates whether there is a significant difference in instructional competencies across demographic profiles and whether there is a significant difference between classroom and non-classroom observable indicators of pre-service teachers at Initao College.

The development of pre-service teacher (PST) competencies is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory. These frameworks highlight the roles of self-efficacy and social interaction in shaping instructional skills. Recent studies support this view; for instance, Perkmen et al. (2023) found that higher self-efficacy among PSTs correlates with improved integration of technology in teaching, while Greisel et al. (2023) showed that self-efficacy promotes evidence-informed reasoning in practice. Gao (2024) extended Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by demonstrating the value of scaffolding in lesson planning, and Mafugu (2022) found that mentorship bridges theory and practice during teaching practicum. These findings are reinforced by institutional perspectives, such as those of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020) and The Education Hub (2021), which stress the importance of culturally responsive, collaborative learning environments.

Moving forward, the PPST remains a key national framework for guiding teacher development and evaluation. Martin (2024) argued that PPST's success depends on institutional support and effective implementation, while Roallos (2022) identified challenges in integrating constructivist strategies and assessments despite high teacher awareness. Additionally, Bual (2024) found that while students demonstrate career awareness, their critical thinking and problem-solving skills are underdeveloped, suggesting misalignment between instructional practice and the PPST. Herrera (2024) supported this by calling for more personalized professional development that meets

actual classroom needs.

In terms of instructional performance, PSTs in the Philippines generally show strong content knowledge and pedagogical foundations. However, Casingal (2023) and Demirtaş and Mumcu (2021) noted persistent challenges in ICT integration, assessment, and differentiation—gaps that underscore the need for greater hands-on, tech-based experiences. Obispo (2023) recommends enhanced training in research and digital literacy, while Marais (2023) advocates for improved student-centered strategies. These perspectives collectively argue that beyond foundational competencies, PSTs must develop adaptability, reflective practice, and critical thinking to meet 21st-century learning goals.

Finally, several scholars emphasize the importance of structured, PPST-aligned teacher training. Bacus and Tagalog (2023) stress that institutional readiness and collaboration are vital for successful implementation, while Matjašič and Vogrinc (2024) highlight the significance of professional placement and research competence in PST development.

In summary, while pre-service teachers show potential, challenges persist in applying assessment practices, integrating ICT, and addressing learner diversity. These insights affirm the need for structured, localized, and competency-based teacher preparation. Notably, prior research seldom examines the intersection of demographic factors and instructional competencies, nor do they compare COI and NCOI in a focused context. This study fills that gap by adopting a PPST-aligned approach to assess instructional readiness among Initao College pre-service teachers. With the fast-changing educational landscape and the increasing complexity of learner needs, there is an immediate need to evaluate and strengthen pre-service teachers' competencies to ensure they can effectively respond to today's classroom realities.

The rationale for this research is the need to equip pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of modern education. By identifying strengths and addressing developmental gaps, this study aims to improve teacher preparation programs and align them with the demands of 21st-century classrooms. Ultimately, this research contributes to advancing educational quality and empowering future educators with the confidence, competence, and adaptability to lead meaningful learning experiences in the Philippine context.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative comparative research design to examine the instructional competencies of pre-service teachers at Initao College. It aimed to identify differences in competency levels across gender, age, and grade level. The quantitative approach provided an objective way to measure and analyze data using structured evaluation tools based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). This design was chosen to ensure accurate, reliable results that could inform improvements in teacher education programs by highlighting strengths and areas for development.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study were pre-service teachers (PSTs) from Initao College enrolled in the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) program, along with their cooperating teachers from Initao Central School. A cluster sampling technique was used to select the research site and participants. Out of 135 PSTs assigned to seven different primary schools for their internship during the 2024–2025 academic year, only the 34 PSTs assigned to Initao Central School were included in the study. Initao Central School was purposively selected for its accessibility, relevance, and established role as a primary partner school for internship placements. All PSTs in this cluster were included, yielding a sample size of 34. The cooperating teachers who directly supervised and mentored these PSTs also participated by evaluating their instructional competencies using the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), specifically focusing on Classroom Observable Indicators (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI). Inclusion criteria for the study were: (1) PSTs assigned to Initao Central School during the specified academic year and (2) cooperating teachers who had direct mentoring and evaluative roles over the assigned PSTs. Exclusion criteria involved PSTs assigned to other schools and cooperating teachers without direct supervisory responsibilities. This sampling method ensured that the data collected were contextually grounded and reflective of authentic teaching experiences in a diverse, real-world elementary education setting.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study used the Classroom Observable Indicator (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicator (NCOI) evaluation forms, both adopted from the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) under DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017. These validated and reliable tools, originally designed for assessing Teacher I applicants, are well-suited for evaluating the instructional and professional competencies of pre-service teachers. The COI, through the Classroom Observation Tool – Recruitment, Selection, and Placement (COT-RSP), assessed five key teaching competencies: content knowledge, teaching strategies, critical thinking, instructional planning, and assessment practices. It used a six-point rating scale with a maximum score of 30. The NCOI, using the Teacher Reflection Form (TRF), evaluated professional competencies, including creating responsive learning environments, reflective practice, professional conduct, and engagement in professional networks. It used a 3-point scale with a maximum score of 20. As these instruments were based on established DepEd tools, no further modification or pilot testing was required. Their proven validity and reliability ensured accurate assessment of pre-service teachers' competencies aligned with national teaching standards.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Research data were collected face-to-face during the pre-service teachers' internship period at Initao Central School during the 2024–2025 academic year. Classroom Observable Indicators (COIs) were assessed through scheduled classroom observations or demonstration teaching, using the Classroom Observation Tool – Recruitment, Selection, and Placement (COT-RSP). Cooperating teachers conducted these observations in person and completed the corresponding evaluation forms. Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOIs) were evaluated using the Teacher Reflection Form (TRF), which pre-service teachers submitted as written reflections. These were also reviewed and rated face-to-face by cooperating teachers during the internship period. All data collection was conducted in compliance with ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The study followed a structured process for collecting and analyzing quantitative data. After cooperating teachers completed the Classroom Observable Indicator (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicator (NCOI) evaluation forms, the ratings were encoded for statistical analysis. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. The mean was computed to determine pre-service teachers' competency levels based on their performance. To test for significant differences in instructional competencies, both parametric and non-parametric tests were employed. An Independent Samples T-test was used to compare male and female pre-service teachers. To compare competencies across age groups and grade levels, Fisher's One-Way ANOVA and the Kruskal-Wallis H Test were used, depending on whether the data met normality assumptions. The Mann-Whitney U Test provided an alternative to the t-test for gender comparisons when normality was not assumed. To examine the difference between COI and NCOI scores, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted for paired data. The adoption of validated instruments from DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 supported the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. The use of both parametric and nonparametric tests ensured robust, accurate statistical analysis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This research study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the confidentiality of their data. The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee in the Office of the Vice President for Research, Development, and Extension Services (OVPRDES) at Initao College, in compliance with institutional ethical standards. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential benefits. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The anonymity and confidentiality of responses were strictly maintained, and all data were used solely for research purposes. The research protocols ensured that no harm or undue influence affected participants' responses or overall experience.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic profile of the pre-service teachers in terms of gender, age, and grade level handled

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents based on three categories: age, sex, and grade level. Among the respondents, the majority were 22 years old (32.2%), followed by those aged 23–25 years (26.5%). The

youngest group (21 years old) and the oldest group (26–40 years old and above) both accounted for 17.6%. Regarding sex, a significant proportion of respondents were female (82.4%), while males accounted for only 17.6%. Regarding the grade levels involved in the field study or internship, Grades 3–4 had the highest number (29.4%), while Kindergarten, Grades 1–2, and Grades 5–6 each had 23.5%.

Table 1. *Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the PST*

Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Age	21 Years old	6	17.60
	22 Years old	13	38.20
	23-25 Years old	9	26.50
	26-40 Years old	6	17.60
Sex	Male	6	17.60
	Female	28	82.40
Grade Level Handled	Kindergarten	8	23.50
	Grades 1-2	8	23.50
	Grades 3-4	10	29.40
	Grades 5-6	8	23.50

The data show that most pre-service teachers fall within the expected age range of college students preparing for graduation, indicating they are likely at the final stage of their academic preparation. The dominance of female respondents is consistent with trends in teacher education, where women largely occupy the teaching profession. The spread across different grade levels implies that these pre-service teachers had diversified teaching experiences, which is beneficial for developing comprehensive teaching skills.

The dominance of females in the teaching profession suggests potential implications for instructional strategies and learner engagement, as previous literature has linked gender to specific teaching styles. Additionally, the even distribution across grade levels handled may help develop a wide range of competencies aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), such as learner diversity, curriculum planning, and classroom management.

This finding aligns with Bongco and Ancho's (2020) study, which highlights the feminization of teaching in the Philippines, where 87.54% of primary-level teachers are female. Their research reveals how gender dynamics shape classroom roles, with male teachers often steered toward leadership or discipline-related tasks, while caregiving roles are assumed to be female domains. The even distribution of grade levels handled supports their recommendation to expose pre-service teachers—especially males—to early grade levels to challenge gendered teaching norms and promote inclusivity aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST).

3.2 Level of instructional competencies of the pre-service teachers of Initao College

In terms of Classroom Observable Indicators (COI)

Table 2 displays the level of instructional competencies of pre-service teachers from Initao College, as evaluated by cooperating teachers using the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and Classroom Observable Indicators (COI). The results indicate uniformly high ratings across all five indicators, with an overall mean of 4.90 and a standard deviation of 0.88. Each indicator was described as "Outstanding", corresponding to a "High" level of competency.

Table 2. *The level of instructional competencies of the pre-service teachers in terms of Classroom Observable Indicators (COI)*

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
1.	Apply knowledge of content within and across curriculum teaching areas.	4.82	1.00	Outstanding	High
2.	Use a range of teaching strategies that enhance learner achievement in literacy and/or numeracy skills.	4.94	0.85	Outstanding	High
3.	Apply a range of teaching strategies to develop critical and creative thinking, as well as other higher-order skills.	4.94	0.81	Outstanding	High
4.	Plan, manage and implement developmentally sequenced teaching and learning processes to meet curriculum requirements and varied teaching contexts.	4.94	0.92	Outstanding	High
5.	Design, select, organize and use diagnostic, formative and summative assessment strategies consistent with curriculum requirements.	4.88	0.81	Outstanding	High
	Overall Mean	**4.90**	**0.88**	**Outstanding**	**High**

Legend: *1.00-1.50 = Did Not Meet Expectation; 1.51-2.50 = Needs Improvement; 2.51-3.50 = Satisfactory; 3.51-4.50 = Very Satisfactory; 4.51-5.50 = Outstanding; 5.51-6.00 = Exceptional*

The highest mean score (4.94) was observed in three areas: enhancing literacy and numeracy through teaching strategies, developing critical and creative thinking skills, and managing sequenced teaching and learning processes. The lowest, though still outstanding, mean (4.82) was recorded in the application of content knowledge within and across curriculum areas. The relatively low standard deviations (ranging from 0.81 to 1.00) suggest consistent evaluations among raters, reinforcing the reliability of the assessment. These results reflect a strong grasp of both pedagogical theory and practical teaching skills among the pre-service teachers.

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers at Initao College are not only well-prepared but also demonstrate competencies that are consistent with the expectations set by the PPST. Their ability to design and deliver instruction using a variety of strategies, manage curriculum implementation, and assess student learning effectively indicates a high level of classroom readiness. While all indicators were rated as Outstanding, the slightly lower mean in cross-curricular content application may point to an opportunity for further interdisciplinary training. Overall, the data highlight a teacher education program that successfully bridges theory and practice, equipping future educators with both technical knowledge and instructional fluency.

These results align with the findings of Rubio and Saenz (2023), who reported that pre-service teachers demonstrated advanced competence in domains such as Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, Curriculum and Planning, and Professional Engagement, which mirror the strong performance observed in this study. Similarly, Dang Dang (2021) found that pre-service teachers exhibited high competence in pedagogical, assessment, and classroom management skills, even in an online learning environment. These supporting studies validate the current findings and emphasize the positive impact of national teaching standards on pre-service teacher development.

In terms of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI)

Table 3 presents the level of instructional competencies of pre-service teachers at Initao College as rated by their cooperating teachers based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) in terms of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI). The overall mean score is 3.87, categorized as "Very Satisfactory," with a standard deviation of 0.98.

Table 3. *The level of instructional competencies of the pre-service in terms of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI).*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
OBJECTIVE 6. Maintain a learning environment that are responsive to community context.	3.82	1.00	Very Satisfactory	High
OBJECTIVE 7. Review regularly personal teaching practice using existing laws and regulations that apply to the teaching profession and the responsibilities specified in the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers.	4.06	1.01	Very Satisfactory	High
OBJECTIVE 8. Adopt practices that uphold the dignity of teaching as a profession by exhibiting qualities such as caring attitude, respect and integrity.	4.06	1.01	Very Satisfactory	High
OBJECTIVE 9. Participate in professional networks to share knowledge and to enhance practices.	3.53	0.90	Very Satisfactory	High
Overall Mean	**3.87**	**0.98**	**Very Satisfactory**	**High**

Legend: *1.00-1.80 = Did Not Meet Expectation; 1.81-2.60 = Satisfactory Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Satisfactory; 3.41-4.20 = Very Satisfactory; 4.21-5.00 = Outstanding*

The data show that pre-service teachers exhibit a high level of competence in non-classroom observable areas, with "Very Satisfactory" ratings across all objectives. Objectives 7 (review of personal teaching practices) and 8 (upholding the dignity of the profession) earned the highest mean scores of 4.06, indicating strong ethical awareness and professionalism. Objective 9, related to professional networking, received the lowest score of 3.53, highlighting a gap in collaborative engagement. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistent assessments among cooperating teachers.

These results suggest that pre-service teachers are well-grounded in ethical and professional conduct and demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous self-improvement. However, their relatively lower competence in professional networking points to a developmental area that may not be sufficiently emphasized in their current field training. Enhancing this aspect is crucial, as active participation in professional communities fosters growth, collaborative learning, and innovation in practice.

Espiritu (2021) supports this interpretation by emphasizing that while pre-service teachers are generally aware of

the PPST standards, they may not fully demonstrate competence in areas requiring sustained interaction with external professional communities. Liwanag (2023) also emphasizes that while pre-service teachers participate in outreach programs and collaborative school-based activities, independent engagement in professional networks is limited. Strengthening this area is vital, as participation in professional communities fosters collaborative growth, reflective practice, and innovation in teaching.

3.3 Significant difference in the pre-service teachers' instructional competencies based on PPST

In terms of the Classroom Observable Indicator

Table 4 presents the results of the statistical tests used to determine whether significant differences exist in classroom instructional competencies of pre-service teachers when grouped according to age, sex, and grade level handled.

Table 4. *Significant difference in the Pre-Service Teachers' Instructional Competencies in Terms of Classroom Observable Indicators*

Profile		Classroom Observable Indicator		Test Statistic-Value	P-value	Remarks
		Mean	Q1			
Age	21 Years old	5.47	VH	2.10	0.121	Not Significant
	22 Years old	4.58	H			
	23-25 Years old	5.07	H			
	26-40 Years old	4.80	H			
Sex	Male	4.70	H	66.6	0.439	Not Significant
	Female	4.95	H			
Grade Level Handled	Kindergarten	4.85	H	0.172	0.982	Not Significant
	Grades 1-2	4.95	H			
	Grades 3-4	4.88	H			
	Grades 5-6	4.95	H			

Note: *Results are considered not statistically significant at a p-value > 0.05.*

For age, One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's test) was used because the normality test showed a p-value greater than 0.05 (indicating a normal distribution), and Levene's test for homogeneity of variances also showed a p-value greater than 0.05, satisfying the assumption of equal variances. For sex, the Mann-Whitney U test was utilized as the normality test resulted in a p-value less than 0.05, indicating non-normal distribution and necessitating a non-parametric test. Similarly, for the grade level handled, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed because the normality test also yielded a p-value less than 0.05, indicating non-normal distribution. The resulting p-values — age (p = 0.121), sex (p = 0.439), and grade level handled (p = 0.982) — were all greater than the 0.05 significance level, indicating no statistically significant differences in instructional competencies across these demographic variables.

Among the age groups, 21-year-old pre-service teachers recorded the highest mean instructional competency rating (M = 5.47, Very High), while 22-year-olds had the lowest (M = 4.58, High). For sex, females (M = 4.95, High) had slightly higher ratings than males (M = 4.70, High). When grouped according to the grade level they handled, mean ratings ranged from 4.85 to 4.95, all interpreted as "High." Despite minor differences in the mean scores, the statistical analysis confirms that none of these differences is significant.

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers exhibit a consistently high level of instructional competence, regardless of their demographic profile. The lack of significant differences indicates that factors such as age, sex, and grade level handled do not substantially affect their perceived teaching competencies, reinforcing the notion that pre-service training programs are delivering consistent instructional preparation to all students.

These findings are supported by Dacer (2022), who found no significant differences in the competency levels of pre-service teachers across various education programs, reinforcing that consistent training, rather than demographic background, determines instructional readiness. Similarly, Padagas (2019) observed that pre-service teachers generally demonstrated competency in pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management, though their practical application varied. Additionally, Canuto et al. (2024) emphasized that science teachers' competencies—particularly in professionalism, personal skills, educational planning, and classroom management—show no significant differences across demographic profiles. This underscores the importance of continuous, hands-on preparation and further supports the current study's finding that uniform training leads to high instructional competence regardless of age, sex, or grade level.

In terms of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators

Table 5 presents the results of the statistical tests conducted to determine whether significant differences exist in the non-classroom instructional competencies of pre-service teachers, grouped by age, sex, and grade level handled.

Table 5. *Significant difference in the Pre-Service Teachers' Instructional Competencies in Terms of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators*

Profile		Non-Classroom Observable Indicator		Test Statistic-Value	P-value	Remarks
		Mean	Q1			
Age	21 Years old	4.33	VH	2.11	0.120	Not Significant
	22 Years old	3.50	H			
	23-25 Years old	3.89	H			
	26-40 Years old	4.17	VH			
Sex	Male	3.42	H	50.50	0.121	Not Significant
	Female	3.96	H			
Grade Level Handled	Kindergarten	4.31	H	4.72	0.194	Not Significant
	Grades 1-2	4.00	H			
	Grades 3-4	3.60	H			
	Grades 5-6	3.63	H			

Note: *Results are considered not statistically significant at a p-value > 0.05.*

For age, One-Way ANOVA (Fisher's test) was utilized, as the normality test showed a p-value greater than 0.05 (indicating a normal distribution) and Levene's test for homogeneity of variances also yielded a p-value greater than 0.05, confirming equal variances. For sex, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed because the normality test result was less than 0.05, indicating non-normal distribution and requiring a non-parametric test. Similarly, for the grade level handled, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied due to the normality test result being less than 0.05. The analysis yielded non-significant p-values for all variables — age (p = 0.120), sex (p = 0.121), and grade level handled (p = 0.194) — all exceeding the 0.05 significance level, indicating no statistically significant differences in non-classroom instructional competencies across these demographic groups.

The highest mean score was observed among 21-year-old pre-service teachers (M = 4.33, Very High), while the lowest came from 22-year-olds (M = 3.50, High). By sex, females reported higher competency levels (M = 3.96, High) than males (M = 3.42, High). When grouped according to the grade level they handled, those assigned to kindergarten had the highest mean rating (M = 4.31, Very High), while Grades 3–4 had the lowest (M = 3.60, High). Despite these variations in mean scores, none were found to be statistically significant.

These findings suggest that pre-service teachers consistently demonstrate high levels of non-classroom instructional competencies, regardless of their age, sex, or the grade level they handle. This implies that demographic factors do not significantly influence competencies in areas such as professional behavior, communication, and school-community involvement. Instead, these competencies are more likely shaped by the training and learning experiences provided by the teacher education program.

This conclusion is supported by Fitzsimons et al. (2024), who found that pre-service teachers' professionalism, communication skills, and inclusive practices significantly improved during their final years of training, primarily due to well-structured placement experiences. Their study emphasizes that the development of teaching competencies is more influenced by the quality of training and field experience than by personal demographic characteristics, findings that align with the present findings. Similarly, Gutierrez and Panas-Espique (2020) emphasized that a competency-based training framework more influences pre-service teachers' competencies than demographic characteristics, reinforcing the importance of high-quality training in developing instructional competencies.

3.4 Significant difference between the classroom observable and non-classroom observable indicators

A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the Classroom Observable Indicators (COI) and Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI) of pre-service teachers at Initao College. The results show that the difference in competencies between classroom and non-classroom settings was not statistically significant, W = 312, p = 0.213. The pre-service teachers achieved a mean score of 0.82 (SD = 0.131) for COI and 0.77 (SD = 0.158) for NCOI, yielding a mean difference of 0.05. Although the mean for classroom

indicators was slightly higher, the minimal difference was not statistically meaningful.

Table 6. *Significant Difference Between the Classroom Observable and Non-Classroom Observable Indicators of the Pre-Service Teachers of Initao College*

Grouping Variable	n	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	w	df	P-value	Remarks
Competencies of the Pre- Service Teachers of Initao College								
COI	34	0.82	0.131	0.05	312	33	0.213	Not Significant
NCOI	34	0.77	0.158					

Note: *Results are considered not statistically significant at a p-value > 0.05.*

The statistical analysis reveals no significant difference between the classroom and non-classroom competencies of pre-service teachers. This suggests that pre-service teachers demonstrate consistent performance across both observable and non-observable teaching domains.

These findings highlight that the instructional competencies of pre-service teachers are consistently strong across different settings. Whether interacting directly in the classroom or exhibiting professional behaviors outside of it, their performance remains steady. This consistency may point to the effectiveness of a well-structured field experience program that equips candidates with the necessary skills to meet the diverse demands of the teaching profession.

These results indicate that the instructional competencies of pre-service teachers are balanced, whether they are demonstrated through direct classroom interaction or in professional behaviors and ethics outside of class. This uniformity may reflect the benefits of a well-structured field experience program that prepares candidates to meet the standards of teaching across diverse situations. This finding is supported by Fiel and Sermona (2024), who found that pre-service teachers demonstrated strong competence in both instructional and professional domains—including learning environment, curriculum planning, and community engagement—while Ocampo (2021) similarly reported a strong correlation between 21st-century learner and teacher skills, reinforcing the idea that these competencies are developed holistically and remain consistent across both classroom and non-classroom settings, as observed in the alignment between COI and NCOI in this study.

3.5 Proposed Intervention Framework: GROW-TEACH Program

The GROW-TEACH Program—framed around Guided Reflection and Orientation for Wholistic Teacher Competency—uses each letter of the acronym to represent a concrete, PPST-aligned intervention component designed to prepare holistic, classroom-ready educators.

Table 7. *Proposed Intervention Framework: GROW-TEACH Program*

Component	Description/Activity	Target Group	Expected Outcome
G – Guided Mentorship	Establish mentor-mentee partnerships using PPST-based coaching, focusing on classroom and professional development.	Pre-service education students	Strengthened competence in both instructional and reflective practices
R – Reflection Sessions	Facilitate regular guided self-assessment and journaling using the NCOI rubric.	Pre-service education students	Improved professional behavior and self-awareness
O – Orientation to Real-World Practice	Conduct school-based orientations and teaching simulations to bridge theory and practice.	Pre-service education students	Enhanced readiness for actual classroom dynamics
W – Wholistic Training	Offer integrated sessions on pedagogy, ethics, values, communication, and personal resilience.	Pre-service education students	Balanced development of teaching skills and dispositions
T – Targeted Workshops	Host seminars on instructional design, classroom management, and differentiated instruction aligned with PPST domains.	Pre-service education students	Refined classroom instructional strategies
E – Engagement in Field-Based Tasks	Include community-based and school-based fieldwork to expose students to contextualized education realities.	Pre-service education students	Contextual responsiveness and situational teaching awareness
A – Assessment and Feedback Loop	Use structured feedback tools, peer evaluation, and mentor reviews for growth tracking.	Pre-service education students	Continuous improvement through evidence-based evaluation
C – Coaching for Professional Identity	Embed coaching that supports pre-service teachers' self-concept as future professionals.	Graduating education students	Strengthened professional identity and confidence

H – Hub for Continuous Learning	Create a virtual platform for sharing resources, best practices, and peer engagement.	Pre-service education students and mentors	Sustained learning community and peer support

The GROW-TEACH Program—Guided Reflection and Orientation for Wholistic Teacher Competency—is a direct response to the findings of the study that revealed a significant gap between classroom instructional performance and professional (non-classroom) behaviors among pre-service teachers at Initao College. While competency levels were generally high, a disparity emerged favoring classroom indicators (COI) over non-classroom indicators (NCOI), highlighting a need for deeper reflective practice and holistic development.

Grounded in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), GROW-TEACH addresses these gaps by integrating guided mentorship, structured reflection, and experiential learning. Components such as Reflection Sessions, Assessment Alignment, and Coaching for Professional Identity specifically strengthen the non-classroom competencies. At the same time, Targeted Workshops, Guided Mentorship, and Orientation to Real-World Practice reinforce instructional skills.

This program also acknowledges the absence of significant differences in competency based on gender, age, or grade level, indicating that a common framework like GROW-TEACH can be applied equitably. Its holistic and inclusive approach prepares future educators to not only teach effectively but also embody the values, attitudes, and professional behaviors expected of 21st-century educators.

4.0 Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of teacher education by affirming that pre-service teachers at Initao College demonstrate strong and balanced competencies across both classroom- and non-classroom-observable indicators, aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The absence of significant differences across gender, age, and grade level highlights the equitable nature of the teacher education program, suggesting that all students—regardless of demographic background—are receiving consistent, high-quality training. These findings emphasize the importance of diverse teaching experiences and structured mentorship, both of which play critical roles in preparing pre-service teachers for the multifaceted demands of the profession. Additionally, the results highlight how hands-on experiences, when paired with reflective practice and professional guidance, foster holistic development in instructional and professional competencies.

The implications of this study extend to teacher education practices, institutional policy, and future research. Institutions should continue strengthening internship programs by incorporating varied classroom contexts, active reflection, and feedback mechanisms. Faculty and cooperating teachers are encouraged to provide sustained mentorship and collaborative opportunities to support pre-service teachers' growth. At the policy level, these findings support continued alignment of program standards with the PPST to ensure consistency in competency development nationwide. Future studies are encouraged to explore additional contextual variables such as socio-economic background, exposure to diverse learners, and integration of digital tools, which may further influence instructional readiness. Longitudinal research may also investigate the long-term impact of PPST-based training on teaching effectiveness and professional advancement. Together, these directions will help advance evidence-based improvements in teacher education and ensure that graduates are prepared to meet the evolving challenges of the teaching profession.

In light of the findings, this study recommends implementing the GROW-TEACH Program (Guided Reflection and Orientation for Wholistic Teacher Competency) as an early-stage intervention for pre-service teachers. The program offers structured mentorship, guided reflection, classroom exposure, and foundational training aligned with the PPST. Integrating GROW-TEACH during the early years of teacher education will help scaffold instructional preparedness and professional identity formation, resulting in more confident, competent, and classroom-ready future educators.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

This study uses the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) to clarify each author's specific roles. Junrey J. Vallente contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, and data analysis. Jammie P. Macalong was responsible for data gathering and assisted in data analysis. Cristhel Cate Gaid, Sarah Unice M. Paderog, and Sittie Aisha B. Ganat were involved in writing, review, and editing, and contributed to the literature review, ensuring that the study was grounded in relevant theoretical and empirical research. Sydney Jay B. Villarin, LPT, CRS, and Terence Katherine Stephanie R. Gapol, LPT, MM-EM, served as advisers, supervising and guiding the researchers in crafting the manuscript. All authors approved the final version. The authors contributed in complementary ways; however, Junrey J. Vallente had a greater role in the study's conceptualization and implementation.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this paper.

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