

Lived Experiences of Mentor Support Among BTVTEd Pre-Service Teachers During Their Teaching Internship: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in shaping the professional readiness, emotional resilience, and instructional competence of pre-service teachers. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTEd) pre-service teachers as they navigated the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers and pre-service coordinators during their teaching internship. Guided by Husserlian transcendental phenomenology and grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study sought to uncover the essence and meaning of mentor support as experienced by six (6) pre-service teachers deployed in three public secondary schools in Misamis Oriental during the first semester of SY 2024–2025. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and reflective accounts, and analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, which involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and describing the textural–structural essence of the phenomenon.

Four major themes emerged: Instructional Guidance and Emotional Support, Holistic Mentorship Support, Motivational Guidance and the Need for Monitoring, and Close Instructional Monitoring and Advisory Support. For the second research question, participants emphasized the importance of Holistic Mentorship Support and Motivational Guidance with Consistent Monitoring as additional supports they find necessary for their growth.

The findings reveal that cooperating teachers served as the primary source of instructional scaffolding and emotional reassurance, while pre-service coordinators often provided limited, primarily administrative supervision. The essence of the phenomenon highlights mentorship as a paradoxical experience of "supported autonomy" feeling instructionally safe within the classroom due to the cooperating teacher, yet institutionally invisible due to the absence of the coordinator. This dual dynamic fosters teaching confidence and professional identity formation while simultaneously creating gaps in formal institutional accountability. The study recommends the strengthening of institutional monitoring systems, enhanced mentor training, and deeper collaboration between teacher education institutions and cooperating schools to ensure more holistic, relational, and sustained mentorship experiences.

Keywords: BTVTEd pre-service teachers, lived experiences, mentor support, teaching internship, technical-vocational education

INTRODUCTION

Teaching internships consistently provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings, fostering professional growth, confidence, and practical teaching skills. Interns report significant development in content delivery, classroom management, adaptive teaching, and student engagement, as well as increased self-efficacy and professional identity formation (Nacion, et al., 2025; Cheung, Wong, Wang, & Dai, 2023; Ugalingan, Bautista, & Lucas, 2022). Technical-vocational teacher education, such as the Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTEd) program, requires pre-service teachers to integrate advanced pedagogical strategies with specialized technical competencies. Interns must not only teach effectively but also demonstrate up-to-date industry skills, often aligned with national standards and certifications (e.g., Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) National Certificate (NC)

II in the Philippines) (Bangayan, Navasca, Navasca, Abaquita-Espiritu, & Calaranan, 2025; Aqli, Hasan, & Sucita, 2019). This dual expectation intensifies the transition from theory to practice, as interns must adapt to real-world technical environments and rapidly evolving workplace demands (Klee & Andar, 2019; Bangayan, Navasca, Navasca, Abaquita-Espiritu, & Calaranan, 2025).

Literature consistently affirms the centrality of mentoring in shaping pre-service teachers' professional readiness, efficacy, and emotional stability (Cavanagh & King, 2020; Phuc, 2025). In vocational and technical education settings, mentors serve as role models who help interns bridge the gap between content knowledge, technical proficiency, and pedagogy (Nugumanova, Shaykhudinova, & Yakovenko, 2020). Mentors use modeling, dialogue, guidance, and feedback to help pre-service teachers learn both what and how to teach in dynamic classrooms (Kurti, 2023; Nesje & Lejonberg, 2022; Mafugu, 2022; Phuc, 2025).

Beyond instructional support, mentoring plays an important psychosocial role. Emotional reassurance, empathy, and encouragement contribute to pre-service teachers' resilience and persistence during challenging moments of the internship (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021; Gecolea & Buenvenida, 2021). For many interns, these affective dimensions of mentoring shape their emerging identity as teachers and influence whether they experience their internship as empowering, overwhelming, or uncertain.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks that provide the conceptual foundation for understanding mentor support experiences.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development

At the core of this study is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which posits that learning and development occur through social interaction and cultural mediation (Vygotsky, 1978; White, et al., 2020). Specifically, the theory introduces the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the gap between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with the guidance and support of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the context of BTVTEd pre-service teachers, the ZPD represents the space between their current teaching abilities (what they can do with lesson plans alone) and their potential teaching competence (what they can accomplish with mentor guidance). Within this zone, scaffolding—the temporary support provided by a mentor that is gradually reduced as the learner gains competence—becomes the mechanism through which professional growth occurs (Loughran, 2014; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021).

The cooperating teacher in these functions as the "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO), the experienced practitioner who understands both the content and the pedagogy and can provide real-time feedback, modeling, and graduated support. When the cooperating teacher provides scaffolding—such as observing the pre-service teacher's lesson, providing feedback, and then stepping back to allow independence—they are effectively expanding the intern's ZPD and facilitating professional development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Conversely, when pre-service coordinators are absent or minimally involved in direct mentoring, this represents a loss of social support and institutional scaffolding (Barry, 2022; Zhang, 2023). The intern is left with fewer "knowledgeable others" to access (Vygotsky, 1978; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021), potentially limiting their capacity to develop complex teaching competencies (Loughran, 2014) or to receive validation of their emerging professional identity from multiple institutional perspectives (Torres-Cladera, Simó-Gil, Domingo-Peñafiel, & Amat-Castells, 2021).

Phenomenological Inquiry as an Epistemological Lens

Phenomenology, specifically Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, is the research philosophy underlying this study. Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the lived experiences of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon—in this case, mentor support (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than asking whether mentor support matters (a quantitative question), phenomenology asks how mentor support is experienced, what it means, and what constitutes its essence in the lived reality of BTVTEd interns.

Key phenomenological principles guiding this research include bracketing (Epoché), the intentionality of consciousness, and the development of textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Together, these theoretical lenses create a robust framework for understanding mentor support not merely as a policy requirement or institutional practice, but as a meaningful, multidimensional phenomenon that shapes professional identity and teaching efficacy.

Mentoring in Technical-Vocational Education

Technical-vocational teacher education is uniquely positioned at the intersection of pedagogy and technical expertise. Nugumanova, Shaykhutdinova, and Yakovenko (2020) underscore that mentoring in this context requires mentors who can model not only instructional strategies but also the technical competencies and problem-solving approaches specific to TVET domains. Mentors in vocational education are essential in connecting theoretical instruction with practical, real-world application. This bridging role requires a unique combination of pedagogical knowledge (how to teach) and technical mastery (subject-specific expertise) (Esmond, 2020; Hobson & Maxwell, 2020).

Research on teacher mentoring in TVET contexts reveals that effective mentoring encompasses multiple dimensions: subject matter guidance, pedagogical modeling, workplace-specific problem-solving, and the cultivation of a professional identity aligned with vocational education values (Cavanagh & King, 2020). Pre-service teachers in BTVTEd programs benefit from mentors who can demonstrate how to teach technical content in ways that are both accurate and accessible to diverse learners, many of whom may lack prerequisite academic preparation.

Psychosocial and Emotional Support in Internships

Beyond instructional guidance, the psychosocial dimensions of mentoring have emerged as critical to pre-service teacher success. Sugano and Mamolo (2021) and Gecolea and Buenvenida (2021) identify that emotional reassurance, empathy, and encouragement are essential in helping pre-service teachers navigate the stress, self-doubt, and anxiety inherent to their first teaching experiences. The affective dimension of mentorship shapes not only immediate emotional well-being but also long-term professional identity formation (White, et al., 2020).

Institutional Gaps in Monitoring and the Coordinator's Role

While much research highlights the critical importance of cooperating teachers (Goldhaber, Krieg, Naito, & Theobald, 2020; Norville & Park, 2021; Aydin & Ok, 2019), fewer studies examine the intended but often underrealized role of institutional coordinators (Massouti, 2021; White, Timmermans, & Dickerson, 2020; Manton, Heffernan, Kostogriz, & Seddon, 2020). The CHED-DepEd Joint Memorandum No. 01, s. 2021, envisions a collaborative model where cooperating teachers provide day-to-day classroom mentoring while coordinators ensure systemic consistency, monitor intern progress, and bridge institutional and classroom-level expectations (CHED, 2017).

However, empirical evidence suggests implementation gaps. Bihasa, Madrigal, and Ladia (2024) report that coordinators' involvement often diminishes to administrative tasks rather than ongoing developmental mentoring. The absence or limited involvement of coordinators creates what Orland-Barak and Wang (2021) term a "structural vulnerability" in pre-service teacher support.

Research Objectives

This study addresses the research gap on pre-service teacher mentoring by exploring the forms and types of support from mentors experienced by BTVTEd pre-service teachers during their teaching internship. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What forms of mentor support do BTVTEd pre-service teachers experience during their teaching internship?
2. What other types of support do BTVTEd pre-service teachers identify as necessary during their teaching internship?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of BTVTEd pre-service teachers concerning the support provided by mentors during their internship. Specifically, the study employed Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, which emphasizes the investigation of conscious experience and the essence of a phenomenon as it appears to the individual (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand the meanings individuals assign to shared experiences, focusing on depth, interpretation, and the essential structure of the phenomenon. Rather than measuring the frequency or impact of mentor support, this design captures *how* pre-service teachers experience mentoring, what it means to them, and what conditions and contexts shape these experiences.

Participants

Participants were six (6) BTVTEd pre-service teachers from three (3) cooperating schools in Misamis Oriental who completed their teaching internship during the first semester of SY 2024–2025. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich and relevant accounts of their mentorship experiences (Campbell, et al., 2020). The sample size of six participants is consistent with phenomenological research standards; Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) demonstrated that saturation in in-depth interviews occurs within 12 interviews, with basic elements for meta-themes present as early as six interviews.

Inclusion Criteria for Participants:

- Recently completed the BTVTEd program
- Completed a full teaching internship (minimum 6 weeks) during the first semester of SY 2024–2025
- Deployed in a public secondary school in Misamis Oriental
- Willing to participate in semi-structured interviews
- Able to communicate experiences in English, Filipino, or Bisaya

To triangulate perspectives and validate pre-service teacher experiences, data from cooperating teachers and coordinators were also reviewed where available, as mentorship involves both classroom-level and institutional support dimensions (Calamlam & Mokshein, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Formal approval was obtained from the Department of Education, Division of Misamis Oriental, and permission letters were distributed to pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and coordinators, explaining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality measures. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, confirming their understanding of the study's objectives, procedures, and right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through pseudonyms (P1–P6), with all recordings and transcripts securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Participants were allowed to respond in the language they were most comfortable with—Bisaya, Filipino, or English—ensuring cultural and linguistic sensitivity. To enhance rigor, the researcher engaged in Epoché (bracketing) prior to data collection, documenting personal assumptions, such as the belief that coordinators are “absent” or that cooperating teachers are always “good mentors,” and intentionally setting them aside to allow participants' authentic experiences to emerge.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through multiple sources to ensure richness and triangulation:

Semi-Structured Interviews (Primary Data Source): Semi-structured interviews were selected to enable participants to narrate experiences in depth while keeping focus on the study objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were guided by open-ended questions on how cooperating teachers and coordinators supported them in lesson planning, classroom management, demonstration teaching, and professional development. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent from participants. The interviews were conducted in a mix of English, Filipino, and Bisaya to allow participants to express themselves comfortably and authentically.

Field Notes: Field notes were taken after each interview to capture contextual details, participants' non-verbal responses (facial expressions, gestures, tone), and researcher reflections that supported data interpretation. The field notes enriched the data by capturing nuances not always evident in transcripts, thus strengthening the interpretation process (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Supplementary Data: Supplementary data such as feedback notes and group chat reminders were also reviewed (with consent) to validate responses and triangulate perspectives. These documents provided additional context about institutional communication patterns and the nature of coordinator-intern interactions.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, adapted to Creswell's (2013) descriptive phenomenological approach. Analysis began with a process of familiarization, in which the researcher repeatedly read and reread the interview transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Significant statements—phrases or sentences that directly related to the phenomenon of mentor support—were identified and extracted from each transcript.

The extracted significant statements were then subjected to the formulation of meanings, wherein each statement was interpreted to capture its underlying meaning relevant to the phenomenon. These meaning units were coded using concise, descriptive labels that reflected participants' experiences. The formulated meanings were subsequently clustered into broader thematic categories by grouping related codes and meaning units together, developing emergent themes to represent shared patterns across participants' accounts.

Both textural and structural descriptions were developed: textural descriptions focused on what the participants experienced in relation to mentor support, while structural descriptions captured how these experiences occurred, including the contextual conditions, interpersonal dynamics, and emotional climate surrounding mentoring interactions. Finally, all themes, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions were synthesized into a unified statement of the essence of the phenomenon.

Throughout the analysis process, bracketing and reflexivity were rigorously maintained to minimize the influence of the researchers' prior assumptions and professional experiences. The researcher engaged in continuous reflexive journaling to document personal reflections, methodological decisions, and emerging interpretations.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed multiple quality assurance strategies to establish credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data triangulation was conducted across all six participants by comparing their experiences to identify shared patterns and variations, while methodological triangulation was achieved through the integration of semi-structured interviews, field notes, and supplementary documents (Patton, 2015). Member checking was also undertaken, wherein selected participants (P2 and P5) reviewed preliminary thematic descriptions to verify that the researchers' interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences, with revisions made based on their feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing further strengthened the analysis, as the research team engaged in regular discussions of coding decisions, emerging themes, and interpretations, and sought input from

colleagues outside the immediate research team to provide external perspectives and challenge potential biases or premature conclusions. In addition, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained, documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytical processes throughout the study, thereby enhancing transparency and supporting the confirmability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

RESULTS

Overview of Findings

This study explored two research questions: (1) What forms of mentor support do BTVTEd pre-service teachers experience during their teaching internship? and (2) What other types of support do BTVTEd pre-service teachers identify as necessary during their teaching internship? Analysis of participants' lived experiences revealed four major themes that reflect both the support they received and the gaps that need to be addressed.

Theme 1: Instructional Guidance and Emotional Support

Participants consistently highlighted that cooperating teacher (CTs) provided both instructional guidance and emotional reassurance, which were crucial in building their teaching confidence and developing pedagogical competence. Instructional guidance included lesson plan feedback, demonstration teaching preparation, and classroom management strategies, while emotional support helped them manage stress and develop independence.

Participants reported receiving feedback on lesson plans, with mentors helping them refine objectives, learning activities, and assessment strategies. One participant shared: "The reason she wouldn't stay in the classroom while I was teaching was so I wouldn't feel pressured... She said that by letting me handle everything on my own, I would get used to it" (P1). This illustrates not only instructional scaffolding but also a deliberate pedagogical choice to foster independence.

Another participant emphasized the emotional dimension: "I would open up to my CT... she'd tell me, 'You can do it, don't stress too much. If you feel like you can't handle it, stop for a bit and just tell me.' She would take over for the meantime" (P3). The mentor creates psychological safety—the intern knows that if they become overwhelmed, there is a safety net.

Structurally, the theme reveals a relational dynamic of trust and graduated autonomy. Interns felt safe—supported enough to take risks in the classroom. Instructionally, they experienced guided independence—given freedom to teach but with the assurance that feedback and intervention were available. This combination of freedom and safety created what participants described as confidence-building.

Theme 2: Holistic Mentorship Support

Participants described mentorship as multi-dimensional, encompassing lesson planning, demonstration preparation, classroom management, and assessment support. While cooperating teachers provided comprehensive, integrated support, pre-service coordinators' involvement was mostly limited to technical evaluation or administrative reminders.

One participant stated: "During the final, my CT gave me full support, from lesson plan to demo" (P2), reflecting the breadth of support. Another highlighted the absence of emotional support from institutional coordinators: "We didn't receive any emotional or psychological support [from the coordinator]. It was mostly just checking on us administratively" (P3).

Experientially, holistic mentorship is characterized by integration and presence. When support is truly holistic, the mentor is a consistent, present figure who understands the intern's full experience and responds to multiple dimensions of need. When support is limited to administrative functions, it feels incomplete and disconnected from the lived reality of classroom teaching.

Theme 3: Motivational Guidance and the Need for Monitoring

Motivational encouragement from cooperating teachers was identified as essential for sustaining confidence and perseverance. Participants described how mentor encouragement shaped their resilience: “He gives guidance and stories that can lift you up... When things get tough, he reminds me why I’m doing this and helps me see the progress I’ve made” (P4).

Another participant recalled receiving specific affirmation: “I’m so proud of you... You’re the student teacher with the highest grade I’ve ever had” (P5). However, this same participant also identified a gap: “It would be better if we could see [the coordinator] on-site... not always just through chat. There should be monitoring. Even just once a month, someone should visit and ask how we are” (P6).

This need signals not a demand for surveillance but rather for institutional presence—evidence that the broader educational system is invested in their development. From a developmental perspective, this gap creates a single-mentor dependency.

Theme 4: Close Instructional Monitoring and Advisory Support

Frequent instructional check-ins and advisory guidance were described as instrumental in helping participants plan lessons, manage classrooms, and learn from feedback. One participant explained: “My CT would always check on me, asking how my lesson preparations were going... She also asked what help she could offer” (P6).

This proactive, ongoing inquiry shaped the intern’s sense of being monitored for growth rather than monitored for failure. Another participant reflected on how feedback was contextualized: “You shouldn’t take negative feedback to heart... You will definitely receive it at first, but that’s how you learn... My CT explained that feedback is a gift” (P6).

Experientially, effective monitoring is characterized by proactivity, interpretive guidance, and developmental intention. The mentor’s role includes contextualizing feedback—helping the intern understand that feedback is normal, necessary, and oriented toward improvement.

Table 1. Thematic Table of the Lived Experiences of Mentor Support Among BTVTEd Pre-Service Teachers

CORE THEME	KEY Characteristics	PRIMARY SOURCE
Instructional Guidance and Emotional Support	Lesson plan feedback; demo teaching guidance; classroom management strategies; emotional reassurance	P1, P2, P3
Holistic Mentorship Support	Multi-dimensional support; integration of instructional and emotional components; limited affective support from coordinators	P2, P3, P4
Motivational Guidance and the Need for Monitoring	Praise and recognition; uplifting stories; desire for regular coordinator presence	P3, P4, P5, P6
Close Instructional Monitoring and Advisory Support	Frequent check-ins; ongoing feedback; proactive guidance; growth-oriented feedback framing	P2, P6

The Essential Structure of the Phenomenon: "Supported Autonomy" and Institutional Invisibility

Analysis and synthesis of all four themes reveal the essence of mentor support as experienced by BTVTEd pre-service teachers:

The lived experience of mentor support is paradoxical: a simultaneous experience of being deeply supported within the classroom and institutionally invisible beyond it. At the classroom level, cooperating teachers function

as the “More Knowledgeable Other,” providing graduated scaffolding that expands the pre-service teacher’s Zone of Proximal Development. Through lesson feedback, classroom presence when needed and intentional absence when not, motivational affirmation, and regular check-ins, the CT creates a zone of safety within which the intern can practice, fail, reflect, and grow.

However, this rich relational experience exists within an institutional context characterized by limited coordinator engagement. The result is a form of “institutional invisibility” despite classroom-level “supported autonomy.” This paradox is neither entirely negative nor positive. On one hand, it affords the intern genuine autonomy and freedom. On the other hand, it leaves the intern vulnerable to variations in CT quality and without institutional backup if the relationship is inadequate.

Essence Statement: “Mentor support for BTVTEd pre-service teachers is the paradoxical experience of being profoundly guided and emotionally held within the classroom by a mentor who intentionally fosters independence, while simultaneously navigating a broader institutional context in which one’s growth and needs remain largely unmonitored and unvalidated by formal institutional structures.”

DISCUSSION

This study examined the forms of mentor support experienced by BTVTEd pre-service teachers and the additional support they perceived as necessary during their teaching internship. The four major themes reveal both the strengths of classroom-level mentoring and the need for stronger institutional coherence.

Scaffolding and the Centrality of the Cooperating Teacher

Cooperating teachers functioned as “more knowledgeable others” in Vygotsky’s framework, providing scaffolding that expanded interns’ Zone of Proximal Development. Participants consistently reported receiving guidance on lesson planning, classroom management, and reflective practice—support that combined technical instruction with emotional reassurance.

A particularly salient finding is that cooperating teachers deliberately created space for autonomy: they provided intensive guidance during preparation phases but intentionally withdrew during classroom teaching. This graduated release of responsibility aligns with research on effective mentoring and resonates with Vygotsky’s principle that authentic development occurs when the mentor calibrates support to foster both competence and independence.

This mentoring approach was experienced as confidence-building because it integrated two dimensions: interns felt both instructionally safe (knowing support was available) and professionally empowered (given genuine responsibility). However, this strength is also context-dependent—it relies heavily on individual cooperating teacher skill and commitment.

The Multidimensional Nature of Effective Mentorship

Participants emphasized that mentorship encompasses technical instruction, emotional support, and professional identity affirmation. Cooperating teachers typically provided this integrated support across lesson planning, demonstration preparation, classroom management, and reflective feedback. Pre-service coordinators, by contrast, engaged primarily in administrative functions (final evaluations, deployment logistics).

This finding highlights a structural distinction: classroom-level mentorship and institutional oversight are not redundant—they serve complementary functions. While cooperating teachers excel at relational, personalized guidance, institutional coordinators can provide consistency across interns, connect individual experiences to program-wide learning goals, and ensure systemic accountability. The current implementation in this study’s context shows a significant imbalance, with the institutional layer largely absent from interns’ lived experience.

Important caveat: This observation pertains specifically to the three schools in Misamis Oriental during SY 2024–2025. Whether this pattern generalizes to other regions, institutions, or time periods requires further investigation.

Motivation, Recognition, and the Visibility Gap

Participants identified affirmation and encouragement as critical to their resilience and sense of professional belonging. Cooperating teachers provided this recognition. However, participants also articulated an unmet need: visible, ongoing monitoring and recognition from institutional coordinators.

This need signals not a demand for surveillance but rather for institutional presence, evidence that the broader educational system is invested in their development. From a developmental perspective, this gap creates a single-mentor dependency. While a strong cooperating teacher relationship is valuable, its absence of institutional reinforcement or backup leaves interns vulnerable. If a cooperating teacher is ineffective or unavailable, there is limited institutional intervention or alternative support.

“Supported Autonomy”: An Emergent Analytical Framework

Drawing the themes together, this study proposes “supported autonomy” as a conceptual lens for understanding the paradoxical quality of the mentorship experiences documented here.

Definition: Supported autonomy describes a mentoring dynamic in which interns experience genuine independence and agency within the classroom (through intentional mentor withdrawal and encouragement to practice) while simultaneously benefiting from consistent relational support, feedback, and guidance that makes that independence meaningful rather than isolating.

This represents the optimal balance that cooperating teachers in this study achieved: providing the conditions for authentic professional risk-taking while ensuring psychological and instructional safety.

Analytical significance: The concept clarifies why interns in this study reported simultaneously feeling confident and valued, their autonomy was supported. This framework moves beyond a simple presence/absence model of mentoring to describe a relational quality that shapes how interns experience their independence.

Important clarification: Supported autonomy as identified in this study is a characteristic of effective cooperating teacher mentorship, not a systemic diagnosis or institutional prescription. It describes what worked well at the classroom level, not what the institution as a whole is delivering.

Institutional Invisibility: A Bounded Observation

While interns experienced rich classroom-level support, they also reported limited institutional presence. Coordinators’ involvement was primarily administrative, leaving interns without formal institutional validation or backup.

This observation is significant within the scope of this study: three schools in Misamis Oriental with six participants during one semester. However, this does not constitute a systemic diagnosis. Whether this pattern reflects:

- A widespread implementation gap across teacher education in the region
- A specific institutional challenge at these three schools
- A limitation of the coordinator role as currently conceptualized nationally
- Individual variation in coordinator engagement

these questions extend beyond this study’s scope and would require comparative, multi-site, or longitudinal investigation.

The finding is valuable as a local documentation of how current practices are experienced by interns, and it points to a feasible area for institutional improvement. It should not be generalized as a universal institutional failure.

Synthesis: Towards Coherent Mentorship Systems

The four themes collectively suggest that effective pre-service teacher mentorship requires:

1. Classroom-level excellence: Cooperating teachers trained in scaffolding, emotional attunement, and graduated autonomy (as demonstrated in this study).
2. Institutional coherence: Coordinators trained for developmental mentoring, not merely administrative functions, to provide consistency, backup support, and systemic accountability.
3. Integration: Clear collaboration between classroom mentors and institutional coordinators to ensure that the interns' experience is coherent rather than fragmented.
4. Attention to emotional and relational dimensions: Recognition that professional development is not purely technical; it is intertwined with confidence-building, identity formation, and emotional resilience.

These elements are not novel; they reflect longstanding principles in mentoring research. This study's contribution is documenting, through interns' lived experiences, how these principles operate in BTVTEd contexts in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

BTVTEd pre-service teachers in this study identified mentor support—specifically instructional guidance, emotional reassurance, holistic attention to their needs, and consistent monitoring—as essential to their teaching readiness and professional confidence.

Cooperating teachers served as the primary source of this support, providing integrated guidance and creating conditions for “supported autonomy.” Within the classroom, interns felt known, challenged, and empowered.

However, institutional monitoring and affirmation were largely absent. While interns did not report acute crisis due to this gap, they articulated it as a missed opportunity for systemic validation and backup support.

The essence of the phenomenon is best captured as “classroom-level supported autonomy embedded within institutional invisibility.” This paradox is neither wholly positive nor negative; it reflects the reality that local mentoring relationships can be exceptionally strong while institutional systems remain underdeveloped.

With intentional coordinator training, regular institutional presence, and clearer collaboration between classroom and institutional mentors, the internship program could integrate the strengths already evident at the classroom level with stronger institutional support, creating a more coherent and resilient mentorship ecosystem.

RECOMMENDATION

Teacher Education Institutions are encouraged to strengthen internship programs by institutionalizing developmental mentoring through regular coordinator monitoring, aligned mentor training grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and clear mentorship rubrics that address instructional competence, emotional support, and professional identity development. Cooperating teachers should be supported to sustain effective scaffolding and motivational practices while engaging in continuing professional development and coordinated documentation with institutional mentors. Pre-service coordinators are recommended to move beyond administrative functions toward active developmental roles through regular observations, reflective dialogue, and consistent emotional support, ensuring coherence between schools and institutions. At the policy level, CHED and DepEd may address gaps between intended and enacted mentoring roles by establishing TVET-specific mentorship standards, allocating resources for mentor development, and providing support mechanisms for interns experiencing inadequate mentoring. Future studies may explore the long-term impact of mentoring on career persistence, coordinators' lived experiences, mentor emotional intelligence, and institutional cultures that facilitate or hinder effective mentoring.

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