



## Pre-Service Teachers' Preparedness in Early Childhood Education: Disposition, Cognition, and Self-Reflection

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**Abstract.** *This study examined pre-service teachers' dispositions and cognitions and their implications for preparedness in teaching early childhood education. The descriptive research design involved 160 Bachelor of Elementary Education students from a private teacher education institution in Northern Mindanao, selected through simple random sampling. Primary data were collected through researcher-made questionnaires on expectations, self-reflection, and teaching competencies, while secondary data were obtained from the Philippine Aptitude Test for Teachers. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the relationships among variables. Findings revealed that, regardless of specialization, pre-service teachers exhibited varying levels of teaching potential, with scholars showing higher readiness to teach. Intrinsic and altruistic motivations led them to view teaching as fulfilling and impactful, while extrinsic motivations led them to associate it with job security. Preschool Education majors and scholar students showed greater preparedness to teach young children. However, the majority were least prepared in the domains of Physical and Natural Environment and Language, Literacy, and Communication. The study concludes that pre-service teachers' content and pedagogical competencies are still developing, underscoring the need for enhanced early childhood training in teacher education programs.*

**Keywords:** cognition; disposition; early childhood education; pre-service teachers; teaching preparedness



## **A. Introduction**

The first years of life are critical in shaping a child's attitudes, values, and learning dispositions, which influence lifelong cognitive, socioemotional, and academic development (UNESCO, 2024). Early childhood education (ECE) teachers play a vital role in providing supportive learning environments that foster holistic growth (AEDC, 2014). In the Philippines, while Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) are mandated by the Commission on Higher Education to deliver quality preparation for future educators, there remains a pressing concern regarding the limited number of teachers with specialized training in early childhood education. The Department of Education has attempted to close this gap through bridging programs and policy interventions, such as Department of Education Order Numbers 32 series 2012 (sections 10, 11, 16.2, and 16.3 of the IRR) (April 17, 2012) and 81 series 2012 (October 29, 2012), yet teacher readiness and competence remain uneven across regions and institutions.

Recent findings from the Second Congressional Commission on Education (Second Congressional Commission on Education [EDCOM II], 2024) underscores these persistent challenges in teacher preparation and deployment. The report revealed that TEIs across the country exhibit significant misalignment between their curricula and the competency standards prescribed by the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, resulting in pre-service teachers who are insufficiently prepared to meet the demands of early childhood classrooms. EDCOM II likewise found that many teacher education programs continue to operate despite chronically low or even zero licensure examination passing rates, reflecting systemic weaknesses in the quality assurance of teacher training. Moreover, the same report noted the prevalence of teacher-subject mismatches, where educators are assigned to levels or subjects outside their specialization – an issue that underscores the lack of alignment between pre-service preparation and actual teaching needs (EDCOM II, 2024).

These structural problems contribute to a deeper learning crisis, as revealed by the widening literacy and numeracy deficits among Filipino

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learners. EDCOM II noted that Filipino students are performing several years behind expected curriculum levels, particularly in reading and numeracy, a concern that is intricately linked to the competence and preparation of teachers in foundational learning stages. Despite this, very few empirical studies have investigated the preparedness of pre-service teachers in the early childhood domain, especially in terms of their disposition, cognition, and reflective capacities. Existing research in the Philippine context has largely centered on general education or secondary-level teaching, leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges of those preparing to teach young children (Alvarez & Galman, 2025).

Furthermore, while national reforms like EDCOM 2 provide broad policy directions for improving teacher education—such as curriculum redesign, strengthened field exposure, and performance accountability, there remains limited evidence from the local or institutional level that captures the lived experiences and self-perceptions of pre-service teachers as they prepare for early childhood teaching roles. The COVID-19 pandemic has also compounded these challenges, exposing weaknesses in teacher preparation programs' ability to equip students for flexible and technology-enhanced instruction in the early grades. This contextual and temporal gap heightens the need to reexamine how teacher education institutions develop not only pedagogical skills but also the dispositions and cognitive readiness essential for nurturing young learners.

Given these gaps, this study seeks to examine the preparedness of pre-service teachers in a teacher education institution in Northern Mindanao, focusing on their teaching disposition, cognition, and self-reflection as predictors of their readiness to teach young learners. By situating this investigation within the broader discourse on teacher quality and EDCOM 2's findings, the study aims to contribute localized, evidence-based insights that can inform reforms in teacher education policy and practice, ensuring

that future teachers are better equipped to respond to the developmental and learning needs of Filipino children.

### *Research Objectives*

This study aimed to examine the preparedness of pre-service teachers in teaching early childhood education in a teacher education institution in Northern Mindanao. Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the level of pre-service teachers' teaching disposition, cognition, self-reflection, and preparedness in early childhood education.
2. determine differences in preparedness when grouped according to specialization and scholarship status; and
3. identify which aspects of disposition, cognition, and academic aptitude significantly predict preparedness in teaching early childhood education.

### **B. Methodology**

This study employed a **descriptive research design** to examine the relationships among pre-service teachers' dispositions, cognition, and preparedness for teaching early childhood education. The design was appropriate for identifying existing conditions without manipulating variables and for establishing associations among the factors that influence teacher readiness.

### *Participants and Setting*

The study was conducted in a private Catholic university in Northern Mindanao recognized by the Commission on Higher Education as a Center of Excellence in Teacher Education. The participants were 160 Bachelor of Elementary Education students, selected through simple random sampling from a total population of 179 pre-service teachers. They represented three areas of specialization – General Education, Preschool Education, and Special Education – and included both scholar and non-scholar students.

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Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Ethical clearance was granted by the university's Research Ethics Committee (Approval Code: #PHDED-000175) prior to data collection.

### ***Research Instruments***

Three researcher-developed instruments were used to gather primary data. The Pre-Service Teachers' Expectations (PST-E) scale assessed intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivations for entering the teaching profession. The Pre-Service Teachers' Self-Reflection (PST-SR) questionnaire evaluated confidence, commitment, and self-assessed readiness to teach young learners. The Pre-Service Teachers' Preparedness in Teaching Early Childhood Education (PST-PTECE) tool measured perceived competencies across the developmental domains outlined in the Department of Education's Kindergarten Curriculum Guide, including Language and Literacy, Physical and Motor Development, and Socioemotional Growth. All instruments were reviewed by experts in education and psychology, pilot-tested with 30 comparable respondents, and achieved Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency.

Secondary data were drawn from participants' scores in the Philippine Aptitude Test for Teachers (PATT), which measured teaching disposition across six domains: Verbal English, Verbal Filipino, Numeric Measures, Induction, Situational Judgment, and Information. The use of these standardized results strengthened the validity of the study's assessment of disposition.

Guided by Expectancy-Value Theory, teaching disposition (PATT scores) and teaching cognition (intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivation) were operationalized as indicators of expectancy beliefs and task value, while self-reflection represented teachers' evaluative beliefs about competence.



Preparedness in early childhood education served as the outcome variable reflecting anticipated performance in teaching young learners.

Content validity was established through expert review, and internal consistency reliability was confirmed through pilot testing, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .80 for all researcher-developed instruments.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

After securing administrative approval and ethics clearance, the researcher coordinated with class advisers to schedule data collection. Questionnaires were distributed during class hours and retrieved immediately after completion. The researcher personally administered the survey to ensure instructions were clearly understood and to minimize nonresponse errors. The study relied solely on survey data and standardized test results to examine the relationships among disposition, cognition, and preparedness in early childhood education.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were coded and analyzed using both **descriptive** and **inferential statistics**. Frequency, percentage, and mean were used to describe the respondents' profiles and preparedness levels. To determine significant differences and predictors of preparedness, **t-tests**, **ANOVA**, and **multiple linear regression analyses** were employed. Statistical tests were performed at a 0.05 level of significance. These procedures enabled the identification of key variables influencing pre-service teachers' readiness to teach in early childhood settings.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Results**

#### **1.1. Profile of Respondents**

Table 1 presents the distribution of pre-service teachers according to specialization and scholarship status. A greater proportion of respondents were Special Education majors (42.5%), followed by General Education

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(39.4%) and Preschool Education (18.1%). Most were non-scholars (76.3%), while 23.7% were recipients of institutional or external scholarships.

**Table 1**

*Profile of Respondents by Specialization and Scholarship Status*

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 160)	Percentage (%)
<b>Specialization</b>	General Education	63	39.40
	Preschool Education	29	18.10
	Special Education	68	42.50
<b>Scholarship Status</b>	Scholar	38	23.70
	Non-Scholar	122	76.30

The distribution suggests a concentration of students in special education, a trend observed among TEIs in the region that offer SPED as an elective concentration, driven by perceived employment opportunities. The smaller number of Preschool Education majors reflects the ongoing low student interest in early childhood education, a finding consistent with the shortage of qualified ECE teachers reported in national data (EDCOM II, 2024).

**1.2. Teaching Disposition**

Results from the Philippine Aptitude Test for Teachers (PATT) revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated average aptitude across domains, with strengths in *Induction* and *Information* and weaker performance in *Verbal English* and *Verbal Filipino*.

**Table 2**  
*Mean and Standard Deviation of Teaching Disposition Scores (PATT)*

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Verbal English	71.50	8.34	Average
Verbal Filipino	73.22	7.91	Average
Numeric Measures	76.45	6.83	Average
Induction	84.70	5.76	High
Situational Judgment	80.88	7.10	Average
Information	82.30	6.41	High
<b>Overall</b>	<b>78.84</b>	<b>7.06</b>	<b>Average</b>

*Note. Scores are standardized (M = 100, SD = 15).*

These results imply that respondents have sufficient reasoning ability and general knowledge but need enhancement in communication-related aptitudes, particularly verbal fluency in English and Filipino. These findings parallel Cruz (2019), who identified verbal proficiency as a predictor of teaching effectiveness among Filipino pre-service teachers.

### 1.3. Teaching Cognition

Respondents' motivational orientation toward teaching showed predominance of intrinsic and altruistic values over extrinsic motivations.

**Table 3**  
*Teaching Cognition: Mean Scores by Motivation Type and Self-Reflection Level*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Qualitative Description</b>
Intrinsic Motivation	4.22	0.48	High
Extrinsic Motivation	3.91	0.61	Moderate
Altruistic Motivation	4.35	0.52	High
Self-Reflection	3.47	0.58	Moderate

*Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.*

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Results suggest that pre-service teachers are primarily driven by personal fulfillment and service orientation rather than external rewards. Consistent with Yap and Abdullah (2022), such motivation indicates a strong internalized teaching identity. However, the moderate self-reflection score implies incomplete integration of professional awareness – a possible area for mentoring enhancement during practicum.

**1.4. Preparedness in Teaching Early Childhood Education**

Overall, more than half of the respondents (56.25%) were rated as *poorly prepared*, while only 10.62% were rated as highly prepared. Domain-specific results are summarized below.

Table 4.1.

*Pre-Service Teachers' Preparedness by Early Childhood Learning Domain*

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level of Preparedness</b>
Language, Literacy & Communication	2.35	0.61	Poor
Physical & Natural Environment	2.47	0.58	Poor
Physical Health & Motor Development	3.16	0.52	Moderate
Socioemotional Development	3.08	0.55	Moderate
Aesthetic & Creative Expression	2.89	0.49	Moderate
Cognitive & Numeracy Skills	2.78	0.57	Moderate
<b>Overall Preparedness</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Note.

- Scale: 1 = Not Prepared to 4 = Highly Prepared.
- Mean ranges were interpreted as follows: 1.00–1.75 = Poor, 1.76–2.50 = Low, 2.51–3.25 = Moderate, and 3.26–4.00 = High.

Analysis of variance revealed significant differences in preparedness across specializations ( $F(2, 157) = 5.42, p < .01$ ) and between scholars and non-scholars ( $t(158) = 2.31, p < .05$ ).

**Table 4.2.**

*Comparison of Preparedness by Specialization and Scholarship Status*

Group	Mean Preparedness	SD	Statistical Result
Preschool Education Majors	3.12	0.48	—
Special Education Majors	2.81	0.57	—
General Education Majors	2.66	0.53	$F(2, 157) = 5.42, p < .01$
Scholars	3.05	0.51	—
Non-Scholars	2.73	0.56	$t(158) = 2.31, p < .05$

These findings confirm that specialization and participation in scholarship programs are positively associated with perceived preparedness, likely due to targeted coursework and structured support.

### 1.5. Predictors of Preparedness

A multiple linear regression model was used to determine which factors predicted preparedness.

**Table 5**

*Regression Analysis on Predictors of Teaching Preparedness*

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$p$ Value	Interpretation
Communication Skills	0.29	3.12	.00	Significant
Mathematical Ability	0.22	2.45	.02	Significant
Area of Specialization	0.20	2.11	.04	Significant
Constant / Intercept	—	—	—	—

**Model Summary:** Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.17$ ;  $F(3, 156) = 2.66$ ;  $p < .05$

The results indicate that communication skills are the strongest statistical predictor of preparedness within the regression model, followed by mathematical ability and specialization. Together, these factors explain 17% of the variance in teaching readiness. The relatively modest  $R^2$  suggests

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that other unmeasured influences—such as practicum experiences or mentoring quality—may also play key roles.

## **2. Discussion**

The findings of this study provide a nuanced picture of pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach in early childhood education. Interpreted through Eccles and Wigfield's (2000) Expectancy-Value Theory, the results highlight how teacher disposition, cognition, and contextual supports influence readiness to engage effectively with young learners. This framework posits that individuals' motivation and achievement-related choices are shaped by the value they attach to the task and their expectations of success. Within this lens, pre-service teachers' preparedness reflects not only their skill set and knowledge but also the interplay among self-perception, institutional training, and environmental opportunities.

Beyond academic achievement, Expectancy-Value Theory has been widely applied to understand teacher candidates' career motivations, professional engagement, and instructional readiness. International studies consistently demonstrate that task value and expectancy beliefs are associated with teaching commitment, responsibility, and engagement among pre-service teachers (Paulsen & Svetina Valdivia, 2022; Hails et al., 2023). Longitudinal and cross-national research further indicates that these motivational constructs shape how future teachers interpret their preparedness and professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day, 2020). These findings support the use of Expectancy-Value Theory as a robust lens for examining how dispositions and cognition relate to preparedness in early childhood education.

The data suggest that while pre-service teachers possess moderate to high levels of motivation and positive teaching dispositions, these do not necessarily translate into strong pedagogical competence. This supports

Pinnegar & Dulude Lay (2023) argument that teacher education must go beyond cultivating enthusiasm and provide structured opportunities for reflection and practice. The lowest preparedness scores in Language, Literacy, and Communication and Physical and Natural Environment correspond directly to key competencies outlined in the ECCD Council's National Early Learning Framework (2024) and an issue emphasized by EDCOM II emphasizing the continued misalignment with the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council's professional standards suggest a critical in TEI coursework.

Choy et al. (2020) found that pre-service teachers in Malaysia and Australia exhibited varying levels of reflective practice, with Malaysian pre-service teachers often demonstrating less structured and critical reflection compared with their Australian counterparts, suggesting that motivation alone is insufficient for developing teaching readiness and professional competence. International ECCD frameworks emphasize competencies in communication, social-emotional development, play-based learning, and learning environments as core indicators of quality early childhood education (UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018). Similarly, tools such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2021; Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 2015) underscore the importance of language-rich and developmentally appropriate environments. The lower preparedness observed in Language, Literacy, and Communication and Physical/Natural Environment domains in this study mirrors challenges reported in the United Kingdom and Canada, where pre-service teachers have expressed limited confidence in implementing inclusive and developmentally aligned ECCD practices (Miralles-Cardona, Cardona-Moltó, Tichá, & Aberly, 2025). This convergence suggests that gaps between teacher preparation and ECCD standards may reflect a broader international pattern rather than an isolated institutional concern.

The observed strengths in Induction and Information domains indicate that pre-service teachers can process and apply abstract

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information effectively, yet weaknesses in verbal communication point to a critical shortfall in teaching fundamentals. Verbal aptitude underlies effective early childhood pedagogy because it shapes how teachers scaffold language development, foster socioemotional interaction, and model communicative behavior. Alzahrani & Almalki (2025) argued that linguistic competence forms the “core of enactment” in early literacy instruction. Locally, Dy and Sumayao (2023) reached similar conclusions, noting that pre-service teachers’ language skills strongly predict classroom effectiveness. This alignment suggests that communication training must be emphasized in teacher education curricula, particularly for early childhood specialization.

The findings also reaffirm the importance of reflective practice in developing professional identity. While respondents expressed high altruistic and intrinsic motivation, their moderate self-reflection scores suggest limited internalization of teaching as a transformative vocation. This supports Bradburry et al. (2020), who reported that pre-service teachers often struggle to translate reflective awareness into adaptive teaching behaviors. According to the Expectancy-Value framework, the perceived value of teaching (intrinsic and altruistic motivations) enhances engagement only when combined with positive expectancy—confidence built through authentic experience and feedback. Therefore, enhancing practicum mentorship, supervision, and feedback mechanisms would likely strengthen this expectancy component and, in turn, preparedness.

The significant differences in preparedness across specialization and scholarship status also reveal structural insights. Preschool Education majors’ higher preparedness may reflect the benefits of a more targeted curriculum, whereas scholars’ advantage may be

attributed to the academic support and mentoring often associated with scholarship programs. Alemdar, Cappelli, Gale, et al. (2022) similarly found that scholarship-supported teacher candidates in South Korea displayed greater instructional confidence and professional efficacy. This reinforces EDCOM II's (2024) recommendation to strengthen TEIs' selection and mentoring systems to produce more competent, mission-driven teachers.

Regression analysis confirmed that communication skills, mathematical ability, and area of specialization were the strongest statistical predictors of teaching preparedness within the regression model. This finding echoes OECD (2020) evidence that foundational competencies—particularly literacy and numeracy—are integral to effective teaching performance. The modest proportion of variance explained (17%) indicates that preparedness is influenced by multiple factors beyond those measured in this study, such as the quality of practicum experiences, mentoring relationships, institutional support, and classroom exposure. Future research could extend this work by incorporating longitudinal designs or qualitative inquiry to explore how such contextual factors influence pre-service teachers' development over time.

Overall, the results portray an education system in transition: one where pre-service teacher is highly motivated and value their future profession but are hindered by uneven training quality and limited field-based learning. This condition mirrors EDCOM II's diagnosis of systemic incoherence in teacher education, curricular fragmentation, inconsistent standards, and weak linkages between TEIs and basic education schools. Addressing these requires not only curriculum realignment but also holistic professional formation that integrates disposition, cognition, and reflective capacity.

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Unlike earlier Philippine studies that focused primarily on general teaching efficacy or licensure outcomes, this study integrates motivational (disposition), cognitive, and academic aptitude variables to explain preparedness specifically for early childhood education. By situating these relationships within Expectancy-Value Theory and ECCD standards, the study provides institution-level evidence that highlights where teacher preparation breaks down despite strong motivation.

In essence, this study extends Expectancy-Value Theory by demonstrating that motivation and expectancy operate within institutional ecosystems. When pre-service teachers' intrinsic and altruistic values are reinforced by structured learning environments, accessible mentorship, and communication-centered pedagogy, their preparedness to teach young children significantly improves. Strengthening these conditions aligns with the national imperative to ensure that the first teachers children encounter is not only well-intentioned but also fully competent—a cornerstone for achieving foundational literacy, equity, and the broader Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2022).

**Key Contributions of the Study.**

*This study extends existing literature in several ways:*

1. Contextual specificity. Unlike much of the existing teacher education research that examines general readiness or efficacy, this study focuses specifically on early childhood education preparedness within a Philippine teacher education program — an area with limited prior empirical investigation.



2. Integrated theoretical application. By operationalizing Expectancy-Value Theory in the context of teacher preparedness, this study offers a novel theoretical lens for understanding how motivational beliefs and cognitive orientations interact to shape readiness outcomes.
3. Empirical clarity. Our use of regression modeling to associate specific dispositional and cognitive constructs with preparedness provides a more nuanced understanding than descriptive studies alone, offering empirical evidence of how these constructs relate associatively – rather than causally – to preparedness, with implications for curricular design.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study examined pre-service teachers' disposition, cognition, and preparedness to teach in early childhood education, providing insights into the continuing challenges faced by teacher education institutions in the Philippines. Guided by Expectancy-Value Theory, the study revealed that while pre-service teachers are intrinsically and altruistically motivated to enter the teaching profession, their actual preparedness to teach young learners remains moderate and uneven across domains. The weakest competencies, particularly in language, literacy, and environmental learning, reflect structural misalignments between teacher education curricula and the competency standards required for early childhood education.

These findings underscore that motivation and positive disposition, though necessary, are insufficient to ensure professional readiness. Readiness is most effectively developed through coherent curricular design, structured mentorship, and strengthened practicum experiences that build confidence and reflective capacity. The significant predictive value of communication and mathematical skills further reinforces the importance of strengthening foundational competencies in teacher education programs. In this light, TEIs must reorient their curricula toward practice-based, literacy- and numeracy-intensive formation that reflects the developmental realities of young learners.

At the policy level, the results lend empirical support to the ongoing EDCOM II recommendations for reforming teacher education, particularly

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the alignment of TEI curricula with the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) standards, the enhancement of admission and monitoring mechanisms, and the expansion of scholarships tied to quality assurance. Strengthening these systemic linkages can help ensure that future teachers possess both the professional disposition and pedagogical competence necessary for the foundational years of learning.

Finally, the study contributes to the growing discourse on early childhood teacher education in the Philippines by integrating motivational and cognitive dimensions into the assessment of preparedness. Future research may build on these findings by examining longitudinal trajectories of pre-service teachers' growth, exploring the role of mentoring and institutional culture, and comparing preparedness levels across different regions or TEIs. Ultimately, ensuring that early childhood educators are both capable and inspired to teach is essential not only for individual learners' success but also for the broader pursuit of equitable and high-quality education for all.

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