
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Readiness of Practice Teachers in Early Childhood Education Professional Competence at Cebu Technological University-Main Campus

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| ABSTRACT

This study examined how prepared practice teachers in Bachelor of Early Childhood Education program felt regarding their professional competence and whether this preparedness differed by respondents' demographic factors or program affiliation. The research took place at the College of Education, Cebu Technological University–Main Campus a premier public institution in Cebu, using a descriptive-correlational design. The respondents were consisted of sixty-two (62) fourth-year students whom becoming a practice teacher were selected using convenience sampling. The main instrument was a self-assessment questionnaire adapted and anchored on established ECE professional standards, which measured readiness in planning the learning process, implementing the learning process, and evaluating the learning process and student learning and growth. The data were analyzed using frequency, weighted mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, simple percentage, standard deviation, and the t-test for independent samples. The results showed that ECE practice teachers rated themselves as Proficient in all areas of competence. Statistical analysis also found that their readiness was consistent, and that demographic factors and program affiliation did not have a significant effect on their professional skills. The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education program prepares graduates well for professional practice, but there are still areas of concerns that could be improved. The main result of this study is a Practice Teacher Competency Plan that provides an evidence-based actionable framework guide to improve the ECE curriculum, teaching methods, and teacher development at the university.their effectiveness.

| KEYWORDS

Early childhood education, practice teaching, teacher readiness, professional competence

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is globally recognized as the cornerstone of human development. It fosters children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth during their most formative years (OECD, 2021). A strong foundation in early learning leads to better academic outcomes and improved long-term life chances. Research confirms that investments in early childhood yield high returns, especially for disadvantaged populations (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring the quality of ECE programs, and their competencies directly affect learning experiences. As such, teacher quality must be prioritized, especially during pre-service training, which builds the foundation for future classroom practices. For developing countries like the Philippines, high-quality teacher preparation is essential to achieving broader education goals and national development. Globally, the importance of ECE teacher competence has been heightened by efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education (UNESCO, 2022). Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) are thus expected to prepare teachers who can respond to the needs of diverse learners in increasingly complex early learning

environments (Dinehart & Manfra, 2022). Competent ECE teachers must integrate theoretical understanding with practical skills in child development, pedagogy, assessment, and family engagement. According to Taguma and Litjens (2021), practice-based learning experiences, including internships, significantly contribute to teacher readiness. Hence, the practice teaching phase is not only a requirement but also a critical period where prospective educators apply knowledge and develop confidence in managing real classroom situations.

In the Philippines, early childhood education is gaining recognition as a key lever for improving education outcomes and reducing long-term inequality (UNICEF Philippines, 2021). National policies, such as the Early Years Act and CHED guidelines, emphasize teacher quality and professional development. However, the gap between policy and implementation persists. Studies show that many pre-service teachers feel underprepared in managing real classrooms and applying assessment strategies effectively (Navarro & Santos, 2020). The quality of practice teaching is inconsistent across institutions, often depending on mentorship and school partnerships. This is particularly problematic in ECE, where specialized knowledge is needed. Addressing these challenges requires data-driven insights into the current competence of pre-service teachers, particularly in local contexts.

CTU-Main Campus plays a vital role in developing early childhood educators in Central Visayas, yet no formal research has evaluated the readiness of its practice teachers in ECE. While faculty ensure theoretical instruction, the practical application of skills such as curriculum planning, classroom management, child assessment, and stakeholder communication needs assessment. According to Boeren et al. (2021), localized evaluations of teacher preparedness are essential for quality assurance and curricular reform. Without such evaluations, TEIs may struggle to identify whether pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for the professional demands of ECE settings. CTU-Main must establish a benchmark to ensure its graduates align with both national and global professional standards, which are increasingly focused on practical competence and responsiveness to diverse learner needs. The literature reveals a clear research gap in assessing the practice teaching phase of pre-service ECE teachers in the Philippine context. Most studies have focused on in-service teachers or general education, often overlooking the specific competencies needed in early childhood settings (Flores & Suba, 2021). Moreover, few localized studies examine how ECE students perceive their readiness in key areas like planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process. This limits the capacity of institutions like CTU to adapt programs based on actual student needs. Addressing this gap is urgent given the evolving nature of early childhood education, the increasing use of play-based and inclusive pedagogies, and the growing accountability placed on TEIs to produce classroom-ready graduates (Salvador et al., 2023).

This study seeks to fill that gap by systematically assessing the perceived readiness of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) practice teachers at CTU-Main Campus. It focuses on their competence in instructional planning, implementation, assessment, and communication with learners, families, and colleagues. The findings will serve as the basis for developing a Practice Teacher Competency Plan, which aims to strengthen curriculum design, enhance supervisory practices, and support student self-assessment. In doing so, the study contributes to improving institutional accountability and educational quality. It also provides future researchers and policymakers with a localized, data-driven model for evaluating ECE teacher readiness, aligned with national priorities and international frameworks such as SDG 4 and the Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards.

Literature Review

The quality of early childhood education (ECE) is deeply influenced by the professional competence of its educators. Globally, teacher quality is considered the most significant school-related factor affecting student learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2022). In early childhood settings, teachers require specialized competencies in pedagogy, child development, classroom management, and assessment (Taguma & Litjens, 2021). Slot (2021) emphasized that responsive and emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions are vital for promoting cognitive and social-emotional development in early learners. However, developing such competencies requires comprehensive teacher education programs that integrate theory with practice. Dinehart and Manfra (2022) assert that practice-based experiences, including student teaching, are essential for cultivating confidence and professional identity in pre-service teachers. In addition, Flores and Suba (2021) identified the lack of context-specific evaluations in teacher education programs in the Philippines as a critical gap, especially in ECE where pedagogical approaches must be developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant. Practice teaching serves as a critical bridge between coursework and professional practice, allowing pre-service teachers to apply learned concepts in real classroom settings. Navarro and Santos (2020) noted that many pre-service teachers in the Philippines experience a disconnect between theoretical training and actual teaching responsibilities, particularly in classroom management and assessment. Boeren et al. (2021) advocate for localized assessment tools to measure teacher readiness more accurately and inform curriculum adjustments in teacher education institutions (TEIs). Salvador et al. (2023) support this view, highlighting competency gaps among ECE practice teachers and the need for data-driven reforms. Moreover, the OECD (2021) recommends a stronger focus on professional reflection, supervision, and feedback during the practicum phase to improve teaching quality. Yoshikawa et al. (2020) further argue that competent ECE teachers are instrumental in advancing educational equity, especially in low-resource contexts. Thus, systematic evaluations of pre-service teacher readiness such as the one proposed

in this study are essential to inform teacher preparation programs and contribute to the long-term improvement of early childhood education.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between the readiness and professional competence of Early Childhood Education (ECE) practice teachers at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus. A descriptive-correlational design is a non-experimental approach that describes the characteristics of a population and examines the relationships between variables without manipulating them (Bhandari, 2023). The study specifically sought to identify whether a significant relationship exists between practice teachers' perceived readiness and their professional competencies in the areas of instructional planning, implementation, and evaluation. This design allowed the researchers to explore existing conditions and measure associations without establishing causality. The research was conducted at the College of Education, CTU–Main Campus, a leading public institution in Central Visayas known for its quality teacher education programs. The study focused on fourth-year Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) students enrolled as practice teachers during the Academic Year 2025–2026. A researcher-adapted questionnaire based on Mansur et al. (2023) was used as the primary data-gathering tool. The questionnaire was composed of four parts: demographic profile, readiness in planning the learning process, implementation of the learning process, and evaluation of learner outcomes. Parts II, III, and IV were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, where responses ranged from 1 (Novice) to 5 (Expert). The data were analyzed using Weighted Mean for descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests to determine significant differences based on grouping variables, such as program schedule (day and evening).

Table 1. Age and Gender

| Age (in years) | Female | | Male | | Total | |
|----------------|--------|-------|------|------|-------|--------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| 20-26 | 58 | 93.55 | 4 | 6.45 | 62 | 100.00 |
| Total | 58 | 93.55 | 4 | 6.45 | 62 | 100.00 |

Results

The data presents the age distribution of the respondents by sex, focusing on the 20–26 age group. All 62 respondents fall within this age range, indicating a relatively homogeneous age profile typical of undergraduate students nearing completion of their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) program. Of these, 58 respondents (93.55%) are female, while only 4 respondents (6.45%) are male. This significant disparity reflects a common trend in the field of Early Childhood Education, which is predominantly female both in the Philippines and globally. The data suggests that ECE continues to be a female-dominated profession, likely due to traditional gender roles and societal expectations surrounding caregiving and teaching young children. The uniformity in age suggests that most participants are in the typical age bracket for graduating pre-service teachers, which supports the reliability of the sample in representing the readiness and competence of BECEd practice teachers at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus. The gender imbalance may also have implications for teaching dynamics, classroom management styles, and the need for increased efforts to attract more males into the ECE profession to promote diversity and inclusivity.

The data in Table 2 presents the level of readiness of practice teachers in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in terms of planning the learning process. All indicators received a verbal description of "Proficient," indicating a generally strong self-perceived competence among respondents. The highest rating was observed in the indicator, "The ability to define individualized goals of the learning process and plan learning activities according to the achievable learning results," with a Mean = 3.77 and Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.96. This suggests that most practice teachers feel confident in identifying and addressing the unique learning goals of young children an essential skill in early childhood pedagogy. Similarly, high ratings were also given to "The ability to purposefully choose and create clear and appropriate assessment criteria for children's achievable learning goals" with Mean = 3.75, SD = 0.94, and "The ability to analyze and interpret educational policy documents and curriculum standards" with Mean = 3.59, SD = 1.01.

Table 2. Level of Readiness of Practice Teachers in Early Childhood Education Professional Competence in Terms of Planning the Learning Process

| S/N | Indicators | WM | SD | Verbal Description |
|-----|---|------|------|--------------------|
| 1 | The ability to assess the needs of individual development, learning, personality and social growth according to the approach of inclusive education. | 3.57 | 0.94 | Proficient |
| 2 | The ability to analyze and interpret educational policy documents and curriculum standards. | 3.59 | 1.01 | Proficient |
| 3 | The ability to plan an interdisciplinary, individualized and personalized, flexible learning process, ensuring the achievement of the child's individual learning goals. | 3.57 | 0.90 | Proficient |
| 4 | The ability to define individualized goals of the learning process and plan learning activities according to the achievable learning results. | 3.77 | 0.96 | Proficient |
| 5 | The ability to systematically evaluate the course of the learning process and plan learning content, methods, means and resources for the implementation of the learning process that meets the needs of children's individual development. | 3.62 | 0.86 | Proficient |
| 6 | The ability to purposefully choose and create clear and appropriate assessment criteria for the children's achievable learning goals. | 3.75 | 0.94 | Proficient |
| 7 | How well can you respond to defiant students? | 3.52 | 0.89 | Proficient |

These results demonstrate the respondents' readiness to plan instruction that aligns with standards and individual developmental needs. The lowest-rated item was "How well can you respond to defiant students?" which, while still rated Proficient with a Mean = 3.52 and SD = 0.89, indicates a potential area for improvement. Behavior management is a known challenge for beginning teachers, particularly in early childhood settings where emotional regulation is still developing. Overall, the aggregate results suggest that the respondents are adequately prepared in planning effective, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

The data in Table 3 shows the level of readiness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) practice teachers in terms of implementing the learning process. All nine indicators were rated as "Proficient," with Weighted Means (WM) ranging from 3.61 to 3.89, reflecting a high level of perceived competence in applying instructional plans into classroom practice. The highest-rated indicator was "The ability to proactively cooperate with colleagues and children's parents or guardians," which received a Mean = 3.89 and Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.91. This emphasizes the practice teachers' strong readiness in building collaborative relationships—a critical skill in early childhood settings where parent-teacher communication and teamwork are vital. The next highest ratings were for "The ability to act in emergency situations" with Mean = 3.82, SD = 0.97, and "The ability to develop children's and own social and emotional competences" with Mean = 3.72, SD = 0.97.

Table 3. Level of Readiness of Practice Teachers in Early Childhood Education Professional Competence in Terms of Implementation of the Learning Process

| S/N | Indicators | WM | SD | Verbal Description |
|-----|--|------|------|--------------------|
| 1 | The ability to create an inclusive, intellectually stimulating and emotionally safe, cooperative learning environment that meets the learning and development needs of children. | 3.61 | 0.99 | Proficient |
| 2 | The ability to develop children's and own social and emotional competences. | 3.72 | 0.97 | Proficient |
| 3 | The ability to appropriately resolve conflict situations by identifying the risks of children's behavior, communication and violence. | 3.64 | 0.91 | Proficient |
| 4 | The ability to act in emergency situations. | 3.82 | 0.97 | Proficient |
| 5 | The ability to quickly define the goals of the individualized learning process and plan learning activities according to the learning outcomes to be achieved. | 3.66 | 1.01 | Proficient |
| 6 | The ability to diagnose children's needs and provide support. | 3.67 | 1.04 | Proficient |
| 7 | The ability to proactively cooperate with colleagues and children's parents or guardians. | 3.89 | 0.91 | Proficient |
| 8 | The ability to use factual, theoretical, regularity and technology knowledge in an integrated manner for the implementation of a learning process appropriate to the needs of children's individual development and the achievable learning outcomes and close to life situations. | 3.62 | 0.99 | Proficient |

| S/N | Indicators | WM | SD | Verbal Description |
|-----|--|------|------|--------------------|
| 9 | The ability to implement learning activities that stimulate the development of children's competencies, the transfer of knowledge in different contexts and practical application. | 3.67 | 0.94 | Proficient |

These findings highlight that the respondents are confident in managing real-life classroom challenges and in promoting social-emotional learning. Additionally, indicators related to diagnosing children's needs, planning goal-oriented activities, and resolving conflicts all showed strong proficiency, with mean scores consistently above 3.60. The lowest-rated indicator, though still categorized as Proficient, was "The ability to create an inclusive, intellectually stimulating and emotionally safe, cooperative learning environment," with Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.99. This suggests that while implementation skills are strong overall, there may still be room to strengthen classroom environment strategies. Overall, the data reflects that CTU-Main's ECE practice teachers possess a solid foundation for effectively implementing learning in diverse early childhood settings.

Table 4 presents the level of readiness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) practice teachers in terms of evaluating learner performance and growth. All five indicators were rated as "Proficient," with Weighted Means (WM) ranging from 3.56 to 3.67, indicating a consistent level of self-assessed competence in monitoring and supporting children's learning progress. The highest-rated indicator was "The ability to recognize different learning needs and provide support to both gifted and children with learning difficulties," which obtained a Mean = 3.67 and Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.98. This result implies that practice teachers feel prepared to address the diverse learning profiles of students a crucial skill in inclusive early childhood settings.

Table 4. Level of Readiness of Practice Teachers in Early Childhood Education Professional Competence in Terms of Evaluation of the Learner's Learning Performance and Growth

| S/N | Indicators | WM | SD | Verbal Description |
|-----|--|------|------|--------------------|
| 1 | The ability to purposefully carry out a systematic and systematic evaluation of the dynamics of the individual development of children and the results achieved, using appropriate methods and taking into account the different abilities and needs of the learners. | 3.56 | 0.94 | Proficient |
| 2 | The ability to critically evaluate children's assessment information in the context of their pedagogical practice. | 3.57 | 0.97 | Proficient |
| 3 | The ability to improve one's pedagogical competence to purposefully improve children's achievements. | 3.56 | 0.98 | Proficient |
| 4 | The ability to provide timely, understandable, specific and usable feedback to children in the learning process about their performance and growth, involving learners in the evaluation of their work and offering appropriate opportunities and support for improving performance. | 3.61 | 0.95 | Proficient |
| 5 | The ability to recognize different learning needs and provide support to both gifted and children with learning difficulties. | 3.67 | 0.98 | Proficient |

Other indicators such as "The ability to provide timely, understandable, specific and usable feedback to children in the learning process" also received favorable ratings (**Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.95**), reflecting the respondents' awareness of how feedback plays a central role in motivating and guiding young learners. Meanwhile, indicators related to evaluating developmental progress and improving pedagogical competence both had a **Mean = 3.56**, suggesting a solid but slightly lower confidence level in these areas. The consistent ratings across all items indicate a well-rounded level of readiness, although the slightly lower means may point to a need for more targeted training on assessment strategies and reflective teaching practices. Overall, the data shows that CTU-Main Campus BECED practice teachers possess a competent level of readiness in evaluating learner performance and growth, supporting their preparedness to implement child-centered assessment practices in real classroom contexts.

Table 5. Test of Significant Difference on the Respondents' Readiness of Practice Teachers in Early Childhood Education Professional Competence When Grouped by Program

| Variables | Source of Difference | Mean | SD | Mean Diff. | t-value | p-value | Decision | Result |
|----------------|----------------------|------|------|------------|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|
| Planning | Day | 3.61 | 0.87 | -0.12 | -0.419 | 0.677 | Do not reject Ho | Not Significant |
| | Evening | 3.73 | 0.76 | | | | | |
| Implementation | Day | 3.69 | 0.91 | -0.05 | -0.153 | 0.879 | Do not reject Ho | Not Significant |

| Variables | Source of Difference | Mean | SD | Mean Diff. | t-value | p-value | Decision | Result |
|------------|----------------------|------|------|------------|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|
| Evaluation | Evening | 3.74 | 0.77 | | | | | |
| | Day | 3.58 | 0.92 | -0.07 | -0.246 | 0.806 | Do not reject Ho | Not Significant |
| | Evening | 3.65 | 0.85 | | | | | |

Table 5 shows the test of significant difference in the level of readiness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) practice teachers when grouped by their program schedule—Day or Evening. The results reveal no statistically significant differences across all three domains of professional competence: planning, implementation, and evaluation of the learning process. Specifically, in the area of planning, the Day program had a Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.87, while the Evening program had a slightly higher Mean = 3.73, SD = 0.76, resulting in a mean difference of -0.12, t-value = -0.419, and p-value = 0.677. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating no significant difference in planning competence based on program schedule. Similarly, for the implementation domain, the Day group reported a Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.91, while the Evening group had a Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.77, with a mean difference of -0.05, t-value = -0.153, and p-value = 0.879, again confirming no significant difference. Lastly, in terms of evaluation, the Day group had a Mean = 3.58, SD = 0.92, and the Evening group had a Mean = 3.65, SD = 0.85, with a mean difference of -0.07, t-value = -0.246, and p-value = 0.806—also not statistically significant. Overall, the results suggest that both Day and Evening program students at CTU–Main Campus demonstrate comparable levels of readiness in all assessed domains of professional competence. This implies that the quality of training and experiences provided in both schedules are consistent and equally effective in preparing practice teachers for the demands of early childhood education.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that practice teachers in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECed) program at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus demonstrate a proficient level of readiness across all three areas of professional competence: planning, implementation, and evaluation of the learning process. In the domain of planning, the respondents showed strong confidence in setting individualized learning goals, aligning activities with curriculum standards, and preparing assessments that cater to the developmental needs of children. The results also reveal that practice teachers are well-prepared in implementing the learning process, particularly in fostering inclusive, emotionally safe classroom environments, collaborating with colleagues and families, and responding to real-life teaching challenges. In terms of evaluating learner performance and growth, they exhibited readiness in providing meaningful feedback, identifying learning difficulties and strengths, and using assessments to guide instruction. These findings suggest that the pre-service teachers are equipped with the foundational competencies needed to deliver quality early childhood education. In addition, the analysis found no significant difference in readiness levels when comparing students from the Day and Evening programs. This suggests that the teacher education program at CTU–Main Campus provides equally effective training regardless of class schedule. Both groups of students received similar levels of academic preparation, field experience, and supervision, which led to consistent outcomes in their self-assessed competencies. These results reflect positively on the institution's ability to maintain instructional quality and learning outcomes across different program formats. However, some aspects such as managing challenging student behavior were rated relatively lower compared to others, indicating the need for strengthened focus in classroom management and behavioral support strategies. Overall, the results support the conclusion that CTU is successfully preparing future early childhood educators with the skills and readiness required for effective teaching practice.

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