

# A POLICY BRIEF IN THE MAKING: THE CHALLENGES AND MENTORSHIP QUALITY OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN CONTRASTING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined how school placement context—rural versus urban—influences the quality of student-teacher mentorship to inform more equitable educational policies. Utilizing a three-phase mixed-methods design, the research first quantitatively compared mentorship across five dimensions: instructional guidance, community engagement, technology integration, professional growth, and collaboration. Phase 2 qualitatively explored the lived experiences of student teachers to highlight context-driven challenges, while Phase 3 synthesized these findings into equity-focused recommendations.*

*Quantitative results revealed consistently high mentorship quality in both settings, with no statistically significant differences in support, environment, or professional growth. However, a significant digital divide emerged, with urban placements favoring technology integration. Qualitative findings illustrated that rural mentorship is defined by strong community ties and instructional adaptability despite resource constraints. Conversely, urban mentorship is characterized by navigating large class sizes and learner diversity through structured feedback and classroom management guidance.*

*The study concludes that while geographical context shapes the external conditions of a placement, the core of effective mentorship is rooted in the quality, consistency, and responsiveness of the human connection between mentor and mentee. Rather than uniform approaches, equitable mentorship requires context-sensitive designs. Recommendations include strengthening mentor preparation, bridging the rural technological gap, and formalizing collaborative practices. Ultimately, high-quality mentorship is driven not by location, but by purposeful and supportive professional relationships that empower future educators to thrive in any environment.*

**Keyword:** *Mentorship quality, student teachers, rural and urban education, mixed-methods, educational equity, resource allocation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of education is not uniform. Across the globe, student teachers navigate diverse learning environments shaped by factors like location and population density. This disparity presents both challenges and opportunities, impacting not only the development of future educators but also the quality of education delivered in these contrasting settings. Research suggests that mentors who actively participate in their responsibilities and dedicate ample time to mentoring endeavors significantly improve the educational experience for student teachers [Glover et al., 2024; Cutter, 2007]. A solid relationship between mentors and student teachers is essential for successful mentoring, fostering transparent communication and support [Glover et al., 2024].

The differences between rural and urban schools is particularly pronounced in the Philippines, notably within Davao City. Urban schools are fortunate to have a wealth of educational resources at their disposal, such as skilled teachers and up-to-date teaching materials, which can greatly enhance the learning experience, especially when compared to the challenges faced in rural areas [Fu & Hashim, 2024]. The uneven allocation of resources significantly contributes to achievement gaps, and it is important to recognize that rural schools are bravely navigating challenges such as crowded classrooms and limited facilities [Alviola, 2025].

This noticeable difference can be observed within the city itself. Although urban centers might offer various resources and a diverse array of students for aspiring teachers, rural areas might present a rather different picture. These differing settings certainly influence the experiences of student teachers during their important

mentorship period. This study explored the contrasting experiences of student teachers in rural and urban schools. By examining their actual experiences within Davao City, the research identified the distinct challenges and opportunities associated with each educational setting. For example, rural teachers frequently face a lack of technological tools and infrastructure, hindering effective technology integration [Abykanova et al., 2024; Mustafa & Nguyen, n.d.].

Despite the growing body of research on student-teacher mentorship, a gap exists in understanding how location and its associated factors influence this mentorship experience. Student teachers in contrasting environments face unique challenges, such as classroom management and administrative tasks, which are not always addressed by existing mentorship programs [Mpisi & Zoutendijk, 2022]. This study addressed this gap by providing context-specific insights from the Philippines. Through an in-depth analysis, the research hopes to contribute to the development of more effective mentorship programs that cater to the diverse needs of student teachers across different school environments. By understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by student teachers in both rural and urban settings, we can work towards creating a more equitable and supportive learning experience for future educators across the Philippines.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a comparative case study design through a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach to examine mentorship experiences in contrasting school environments. This framework allowed for a systematic quantitative comparison of mentorship quality while simultaneously enabling an in-depth qualitative exploration of the contextual challenges and mentoring practices that shaped these experiences [Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018]. By integrating statistical findings with narrative data, the design captured both the consistency of mentorship quality and the specific influences—such as technological access and localized school conditions—that affected mentoring outcomes [Yin, 2018].

The research was localized within the Davao City Division of Region XI, selected for its diverse distribution of rural and urban institutions. The primary participants consisted of 400 student teachers, with an even distribution of 200 from rural and 200 from urban host schools. To achieve a representative sample, stratified random sampling was employed across various academic backgrounds [Creswell, 2014]. From this larger cohort, a subset of 14 participants (7 from each setting) was purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to capture the personal narratives and interpersonal dynamics that standardized surveys might overlook.

Data collection involved a triangulation of researcher-made instruments, including structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and classroom observations. The quantitative phase utilized a validated survey examining five core dimensions: mentor support, school environment, technology integration, professional growth, and collaboration frequency. To ensure content validity and reliability, the instrument underwent formal expert validation and rigorous pilot testing. Qualitative data were gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and a review of institutional documents, such as practicum guidelines, to provide a holistic view of how mentoring was implemented in the field.

The analysis phase employed both descriptive and inferential statistics alongside thematic analysis. Quantitative survey data were processed using weighted means to describe mentorship quality, while Welch's *t*-test was used to identify statistically significant differences between the rural and urban groups [Field, 2018]. Simultaneously, qualitative data from interviews and observations were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and shared experiences [Braun & Clarke, 2006]. The integration of these findings allowed numerical trends to be deeply explained through the lived experiences of the student teachers. Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study by securing formal permissions from institutional authorities and obtaining written informed consent from all participants. The research protocol underwent ethical review to ensure compliance with standards regarding participant safety and well-being. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly enforced through the use of participant coding and restricted data access. Participation remained entirely voluntary, with respondents informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the process without consequence.

To summarize the quantitative distribution, descriptive statistics—including means and standard deviations—were used to evaluate central tendencies across the five key mentorship dimensions. Independent Samples *T*-tests were then conducted to compare the means of the rural and urban cohorts, identifying where the location of a teaching placement significantly impacted the mentorship experience. By calculating *p*-values for each dimension, the study provided a data-driven understanding of where the professional experiences of student teachers converged or diverged based on their environment.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The quantitative findings reveal that mentorship quality remains consistently high across both urban ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ) and rural ( $\bar{x} = 4.10$ ) school settings, with no statistically significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the domains of mentor support, school environment, professional growth, or frequency of collaboration. As shown in **Table 1**, the only area of significant divergence is Technology Integration ( $p = 0.001$ ), where urban placements

significantly outperform rural ones, illustrating a pronounced digital divide that limits rural mentors' ability to model tech-integrated pedagogy [Escala et al., 2024]. This gap highlights the resource scarcity and isolation inherent in rural districts, where inadequate access to digital infrastructure directly impacts the practical training experience of student teachers [Fu & Hashim, 2024].

Qualitative narratives further humanize these trends, with urban student teachers describing their environment as a fast-paced "stabilizing support system" where they navigate high academic expectations and large class sizes through structured routines. One participant noted, "*I expected teaching in an urban school to be challenging due to large class sizes... but my mentor modeled effective classroom management strategies*" [Informant 9 & 11]. These experiences suggest that while urban settings offer a wealth of educational resources, the complexity of diverse student populations requires a mentoring framework that prioritizes systematic support and explicit pedagogical guidance [Gardiner, 2011].

Conversely, rural mentorship is defined by resourcefulness and deep relational ties, where the lack of facilities is mitigated by instructional improvisation and community connectedness. As one informant shared, "*The limited availability of resources... required me to adjust my lesson plans and use improvised materials,*" while another emphasized that the "*smaller school environment made it easier to build close and meaningful relationships*" [Informant 1 & 2]. This underscores the strength of rural placements in fostering professional resilience and adaptability, as student teachers learn to connect instruction with the lived experiences of their learners through culturally responsive pedagogy [Gay, 2023].

The high scores for collaboration in both settings—rated as "Often" (Urban M = 4.09; Rural M = 4.07)—indicate that regular professional contact is a localized standard. This consistent interaction is vital for building the trust necessary for successful mentoring, allowing student teachers to apply theoretical knowledge to authentic classroom challenges [Calamlam, 2016]. Whether navigating the "digital divide" in rural areas or the "workload pressures" of urban centers, student teachers perceive their mentors as essential foundations for their future careers, providing the emotional support and encouragement required to navigate the profession [Wildman et al., 1992].

Ultimately, as summarized in **Table 2**, these findings suggest that while urban mentorship thrives on pedagogical structure to manage complexity, rural mentorship succeeds through relational trust and adaptability. High-quality mentorship is shown to be a deeply human endeavor that is not determined by geography or material infrastructure, but by the purposeful and responsive professional relationships established between mentor and mentee. These results advocate for context-sensitive policies that move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, instead focusing on bridging technological gaps in rural areas and supporting classroom management strategies in urban centers to ensure equitable professional growth for all future educators.

Table 1. Summary of the descriptive and inferential statistics (Welch's t-test) comparing the two environments

Factor	Urban Mean (M)	Rural Mean (M)	t-value	p-value	Significant
1. Mentor Support & Instructional Guidance	4.26	4.32	-0.65	0.516	No
2. School Environment & Community Engagement	4.02	4.10	-0.996	0.32	No
3. Technology Integration	4.04	3.75	3.254	0.001	Yes
4. Professional Growth and Future Readiness	4.28	4.25	0.365	0.715	No
5. Frequency of Collaboration	4.09	4.07	0.31	0.757	No

**Statistical Significance Legend:**

Significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

Not Significant ( $p > 0.05$ )

Table 2. Thematic Comparison of Mentorship Realities and Challenges

Context	Primary Challenges	Mentorship Strengths	Qualitative Evidence
Urban	Large class sizes, high documentation, student diversity	Structured feedback, pedagogical modeling	"My mentor modeled effective classroom management strategies and gave regular feedback."
Rural	Digital divide, resource scarcity, student absenteeism	Relational trust, community integration	"The limited availability of resources... required me to adjust my lesson plans and use improvised materials."

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that mentorship quality for student teachers is fundamentally defined by the caliber of professional relationships rather than geographical location. While urban and rural environments present distinct contextual hurdles—ranging from the digital divide and resource scarcity in rural areas to large class sizes and instructional complexity in urban centers—the core experience of mentorship remains consistently high across both settings. The quantitative data confirms that there are no statistically significant differences in mentor support, professional growth, or collaboration between the two environments. This suggests that the effectiveness of teacher preparation is rooted in the consistency and responsiveness of mentor-mentee interactions, which effectively function as a stabilizing support system that mitigates the various environmental challenges student teachers encounter.

Furthermore, the research highlights that achieving equity in teacher education requires a move away from standardized, one-size-fits-all program designs in favor of context-specific adaptation. For rural placements, this means leveraging strong community ties and fostering instructional adaptability to compensate for technological gaps. For urban placements, it necessitates structured mentoring systems focused on classroom management and differentiated instruction to handle high-density learner populations. Ultimately, the study underscores that meaningful professional development and resilience are cultivated when mentoring practices are purposeful and tailored to the unique realities of the school environment, ensuring that all prospective educators receive the guidance necessary to thrive in the diverse landscape of the teaching profession.

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