

# Reimagining Teacher Preparation in the Post-Pandemic Era

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and amplified existing fissures in the Philippine educational system, particularly in the preparation and ongoing development of teachers. This article examines the multifaceted challenge of reimagining teacher preparation in the post-pandemic era, arguing that meaningful reform must address three interconnected domains: the alignment of pre-service education with licensure and classroom realities, the integration of blended and technology-mediated pedagogies into professional practice, and the prioritization of teacher well-being as a foundational element of instructional quality. Drawing on recent policy initiatives including the introduction of specialized licensure examinations, public-private partnerships for teacher upskilling, and grassroots professional development programs in regions such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, this article analyzes both the structural reforms and the cultural shifts necessary to prepare teachers for the complexities of contemporary Philippine classrooms. It concludes that sustainable transformation requires moving beyond one-off training interventions toward coherent systems of support that recognize teaching as simultaneously a technical craft, a relational practice, and a deeply personal vocation.

**Keywords:** Teacher preparation, Philippine education, Professional development, Blended learning, Teacher well-being, Educational policy

## Introduction

The return to physical classrooms following the prolonged disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic has not signalled a return to normalcy for Philippine education. Rather, it has unveiled the depth of the learning crisis that the pandemic exacerbated and, in some cases, created. Functional literacy rates in regions such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao remain sobering, with many children able to read and write but lacking the capacity to comprehend and apply what they read in real-life situations. This gap between basic decoding and genuine understanding represents a crucial failure point in the educational pipeline, one that perpetuates cycles of poverty and limited opportunity.

At the heart of any meaningful response to this crisis lies the teacher. As Education Secretary Sonny Angara observed, “Our schools are only as good as our teachers. They are the heart and soul of our system”. Yet the teaching force that emerged from the pandemic years carries deep scars. Special education educators, already navigating complex instructional demands before 2020, found themselves grappling with unreliable internet connections, scarce resources, and the emotional exhaustion of balancing professional responsibilities with personal well-being. The mental health challenges that surfaced during this period were not aberrations but symptoms of systemic vulnerabilities that continue to shape teachers’ capacity to serve their students.

This article contends that reimagining teacher preparation in the post-pandemic era requires moving beyond piecemeal reforms toward a coherent vision that connects pre-service education, licensure, professional development, and teacher support into an integrated system. The analysis proceeds in four parts. First, it examines structural reforms to teacher education and licensure, including the landmark joint policy aligning the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers with specialized degree programs. Second, it explores the pedagogical shifts demanded by blended

learning environments and the integration of technology into classroom practice. Third, it considers the often-overlooked dimension of teacher well-being, drawing on recent initiatives to provide mental health and psychosocial support. Finally, it discusses the implications of these developments for policy and practice, arguing that the post-pandemic moment offers an opportunity not merely to rebuild but to reimagine what teacher preparation can and should be.

#### Methods

This article employs a policy analysis approach grounded in the examination of recent initiatives, programs, and research studies relevant to teacher preparation in the Philippines. Primary sources include official policy documents issued by the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, and the Professional Regulation Commission, particularly the joint memorandum circular introducing specialized licensure examinations for teacher education graduates. These are supplemented by reports on professional development programs implemented in partnership with international organizations and private sector entities, including the Australian government's support for teacher training in BARMM and the LinkedIn-DepEd partnership for teacher upskilling.

The article also draws on peer-reviewed research examining blended learning interactions in Philippine K-12 settings through the Community of Inquiry framework and qualitative studies investigating the mental and physical health of Filipino special education educators during the pandemic. These scholarly sources provide empirical grounding for claims about the nature of teaching and learning in contemporary Philippine classrooms. Finally, documentation of specific teacher training initiatives, including those focused on the Marungko reading approach in Lanao del Sur and mental health and psychosocial support activities in Southern Leyte, offer granular insights into the forms that professional development is taking at the local level.

This methodological approach necessarily has limitations. The rapid pace of policy development means that some initiatives described here are in early implementation phases, with outcomes not yet fully documented. Moreover, the reliance on published reports and policy documents may underrepresent the experiences of teachers in the most remote and underserved communities. Nevertheless, the patterns observable across these diverse sources illuminate both the challenges facing Philippine teacher preparation and the promising directions emerging in response.

#### Results

##### Structural Reforms in Teacher Education and Licensure

The most significant recent development in Philippine teacher preparation is the joint policy signed in April 2025 by the Commission on Higher Education and the Professional Regulation Commission, aligning the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers with an updated teacher education curriculum. This policy introduces specialized licensure examinations for specific degree programs, including Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Special Needs Education, Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education, Bachelor of Physical Education, and Bachelor of Culture and Arts Education. The shift represents a fundamental reconceptualization of what it means to be a licensed teacher: rather than a one-size-fits-all assessment, the new system aims to evaluate graduates based on the competencies they developed in their chosen specialization.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who had directed the Second Congressional Commission on Education to propose solutions to licensing gaps while awaiting legislative reforms, characterized the policy as a timely intervention that aligns licensure examinations with the actual competencies needed in contemporary classrooms. The implications for the Department of Education, as the largest employer of teachers in the country, are substantial. Teacher Education Council Executive Director Dr. Jennie Jocson noted that the policy has the potential to address longstanding teacher shortages in

specialized learning areas, as graduates will be encouraged to pursue programs aligned with actual demand in public schools.

This structural reform addresses a persistent challenge in Philippine basic education: the mismatch between teacher preparation and classroom assignments. When teachers are licensed in broad, undifferentiated categories, they may find themselves assigned to subjects or grade levels for which their training has not adequately prepared them. The specialized licensure framework creates clearer pathways from pre-service education to classroom practice, enabling DepEd to recruit teachers whose licenses and training match the actual demands of specific positions.

Parallel to these licensure reforms, efforts are underway to ensure the integrity of the credentials that teachers present for hiring and promotion. In November 2025, DepEd announced new guidelines for the national registry of recognized teacher education programs, designed to facilitate the assessment of credentials submitted for hiring and promotion purposes. The guidelines emerge from collaboration with CHED, the Teacher Education Council, the Professional Regulation Commission, and EDCOM II, with the explicit goal of ending “diploma mill” operations that have undermined the quality of teacher preparation. CHED Chair Shirley Agrupis stated that any higher education institution found operating as a diploma mill or offering unrecognized programs shall be subject to cease and desist orders and administrative sanctions including fines, program closure, or revocation of institutional recognition. The Teacher Education Council reinforced this message, emphasizing that when educators are incentivized to pursue paper qualifications over genuine competency, students ultimately pay the price through compromised learning outcomes.

#### Pedagogical Transformation and Technology Integration

The pandemic forced a rapid and often uncomfortable pivot to remote learning modalities, exposing both the possibilities and the limitations of technology-mediated instruction. For teachers of skill-based subjects such as Technology and Livelihood Education, the challenges were particularly acute. As Juanita Asuncion observed, teaching subjects that require students to develop practical competencies became extraordinarily difficult when direct contact between teachers and students was prohibited. Teachers responded with creativity, producing video demonstrations and guiding students to adapt their home environments as laboratories. In teaching hair and scalp treatment, for example, students learned to use local products like kalamansi and coconut milk in the absence of professional cosmetic materials; in carpentry, repairing worn-out household furniture became a concrete application of skills.

These improvised adaptations point toward deeper pedagogical questions about how teacher preparation programs should equip future educators for flexible, context-responsive instruction. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 had already articulated a vision of teaching that encompasses constructive, collaborative, integrative, inquiry-based, and reflective approaches. The pandemic experience reinforced the urgency of preparing teachers who can implement these approaches across diverse modalities and resource constraints.

Recent research on blended learning in Philippine K-12 settings provides empirical grounding for these pedagogical aspirations. A study applying the Community of Inquiry framework to blended learning interactions across three Philippine schools uncovered three themes characterizing successful blended learning experiences: the best of both worlds, learning anytime and anywhere, and learning with technology. The study found high mean ratings across the presences defined by the Community of Inquiry framework, revealing positive experiences afforded by the use of various technologies and social media. Importantly, the research concluded that learning communities are an outcome of blended learning interactions, and recommended a Developmental Model for K-12

Blended Learning Communities to inform teacher professional development on pedagogies and practices supportive of learning community building.

The challenge of translating these findings into widespread practice has been taken up through initiatives such as the instructional design of blended teacher professional development courses. Under the USAID/Philippines All Children Reading task order, a blended learning online course on formative assessment was developed at the request of DepEd, designed to exemplify the transformations called for in the National Educators Academy of the Philippines policy on teacher professional development. These transformations include the use of a wider range of learning modalities such as job-based learning and teacher communities of practice, the adoption of online and blended delivery platforms, and the immediate application of professional development lessons in classrooms. The course was specifically designed to be flexible enough to adapt to the myriad school contexts in the Philippines and ready to be taken to scale by regional DepEd offices.

A significant recent development in scaling teacher professional development is the strategic partnership between DepEd and LinkedIn, announced in March 2025, which aims to provide over 200,000 public school teachers with access to LinkedIn Learning courses mapped to the Philippines Professional Standards for Educators. This initiative focuses on developing competencies in creative thinking, data analytics, and digital skills, areas identified as critical as the country undergoes rapid digitalization accelerated by artificial intelligence. Education Secretary Angara emphasized that the partnership enables DepEd to establish robust professional development programs beyond one-off training initiatives, providing educators with data-driven resources to close skill gaps and improve competencies. The partnership also includes plans to roll out LinkedIn 101 training to senior high school students, ensuring they can effectively use the platform to connect with economic opportunities.

#### Ground-Level Innovation in Teacher Development

While national policy frameworks and large-scale partnerships garner headlines, significant innovation in teacher preparation is also occurring at the regional and local levels. In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, where functional illiteracy rates remain the highest in the country, the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education has rolled out a series of teacher training programs with support from the Australian government. These trainings extend across public schools, madaris, and Abot-Kaalaman sa Pamilyang Bangsamoro learning centers, reaching teachers and learning facilitators in some of the most underserved communities in the nation.

The impact of these programs is evident in the testimony of participants. Armisha Abdilla, a Learning Facilitator from Vendex Learning Center in Tawi-Tawi, described how inclusion sessions in refresher trainings transformed classroom dynamics. Before the training, Badjao children were bullied because of their way of life; after learning strategies to build acceptance, facilitators began pairing Badjao and Tausug learners during activities and play. The bullying stopped, and every child gained a chance to learn and to dream. Abdulrizal Aripin, Education Program Supervisor in Tawi-Tawi, emphasized that refresher workshops make learning facilitators just as capable as licensed school teachers, focusing on numeracy, literacy, socio-emotional learning, child protection, and engaging parent-volunteers to support education.

Similar training initiatives have focused on specific pedagogical approaches. In June 2021, even as the pandemic continued, the MBHTE organized multi-day training for Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers in Marawi City and Lanao del Sur, focusing on the Marungko Approach to reading instruction. This approach is designed to improve students' reading skills through the use of the modern Filipino alphabet, with letters introduced based on their sounds rather than traditional alphabetical order, embedded in localized and contextualized songs and poems. Training instructor

Ashania Paranaag explained that using methods highlighting things already familiar to students makes learning easier and more fun, and that Marungko enables teachers to highlight the mother tongue first before introducing borrowed letters and words. The training also covered foundations of early language and literacy instruction, grammar and oral language development, assessment of reading performance, strategies for teaching K-3 math, social and emotional learning, and inclusive education.

#### The Well-Being Imperative

Perhaps the most profound lesson of the pandemic era has been the recognition that teacher effectiveness cannot be separated from teacher well-being. Research on Filipino special education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic documented the significant stress and anxiety caused by the shift to online teaching, unreliable internet connections, and lack of resources. These educators relied on family, friends, and colleagues for emotional and practical support, sharing teaching materials and developing new routines to manage stress. Hermeneutic analysis revealed a deep connection between their professional roles and their mental and physical health, with their identities as educators, caregivers, and advocates intertwined with their sense of purpose.

This research underscores the need for more comprehensive support systems that consider both professional duties and personal well-being. The study's practical implications include improving access to healthcare, reliable internet, and emotional support, as well as creating strong support networks and providing mental health resources. These findings align with broader recognition that sustainable teacher development requires attention to the whole person, not merely the acquisition of instructional techniques.

Concrete initiatives addressing teacher well-being are emerging. In September 2024, Guadalupe National High School in Maasin City organized a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support activity to address teacher burnout and enhance resilience, recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic and Typhoon Odette had significantly impacted educators with increased stress, emotional strain, and disruptions in teaching methods. The program, developed based on a needs assessment revealing moderate burnout levels and limited coping strategies among teachers, drew from World Health Organization guidelines and the Katatagan resilience intervention for Filipino disaster survivors. Through group discussions and interactive exercises, teachers gained tools to manage stress effectively while fostering a sense of camaraderie and support. Post-assessment results showed significant reductions in stress levels and improvements in coping strategies, though burnout levels remained largely unchanged, highlighting the need for systemic changes such as workload adjustments and enhanced administrative support.

This distinction between immediate stress reduction and persistent burnout is crucial. It suggests that while well-being interventions can provide teachers with valuable coping mechanisms, sustainable change requires addressing the structural conditions that generate chronic stress. The Guadalupe experience underscores the necessity for long-term interventions including continuous mental health training, professional development programs, and institutional reforms to ensure teachers' well-being.

#### Discussion

##### Toward a Coherent System of Teacher Preparation

The developments examined in this article reveal both progress and persistent challenges in reimagining teacher preparation for the post-pandemic era. The specialized licensure policy represents a significant structural reform that aligns pre-service education with the actual demands of classroom practice. By creating clearer pathways from specific degree programs to corresponding teaching assignments, it addresses the longstanding mismatch between teacher preparation and

deployment that has undermined instructional quality. The accompanying efforts to credential the integrity of graduate programs through the national registry of recognized teacher education institutions strike at the heart of the diploma mill problem, affirming that genuine competency rather than paper qualifications must be the basis for hiring and promotion.

Yet structural reforms alone cannot transform teacher preparation. The pedagogical shifts demanded by blended learning environments require sustained investment in professional development that moves beyond one-off workshops toward continuous, job-embedded learning. The LinkedIn partnership's scale - reaching over 200,000 teachers - offers promise, but its impact will depend on how effectively online courses translate into changed classroom practice. The blended learning research's recommendation for a Developmental Model for K-12 Blended Learning Communities points toward the importance of peer learning and communities of practice as vehicles for sustainable improvement. Teachers need not only access to content but also structured opportunities to collaborate, reflect, and adapt new approaches to their specific contexts.

The grassroots initiatives in BARMM and Lanao del Sur demonstrate what context-responsive professional development looks like in practice. These programs succeed because they are grounded in the realities of the communities they serve, whether through the Marungko Approach's emphasis on mother tongue instruction or the inclusion strategies that transformed classroom dynamics in Tawi-Tawi. They also illustrate the importance of partnership, drawing on support from international donors and non-governmental organizations while remaining accountable to local needs and priorities. The challenge lies in scaling such approaches without losing their contextual responsiveness, ensuring that teachers in all regions benefit from similarly thoughtful, well-supported professional learning.

Perhaps the most significant insight to emerge from the post-pandemic moment is the recognition that teacher well-being is not ancillary to instructional quality but foundational to it. The research on special education educators and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support initiative in Maasin City both underscore that teachers who are stressed, exhausted, and unsupported cannot effectively serve their students. This insight has implications that extend beyond the provision of mental health resources to the fundamental organization of teachers' work. If burnout persists even when coping strategies improve, as the Guadalupe experience suggests, then attention must turn to the systemic factors that generate chronic stress: workload, administrative demands, class sizes, and the working conditions that shape teachers' daily experience.

#### Implications for Policy and Practice

Several implications follow from this analysis. First, teacher preparation must be understood as a continuum rather than a sequence of discrete stages. The transition from pre-service education to licensure to classroom practice to ongoing professional development should be seamless, with each phase building on and reinforcing the others. The specialized licensure policy creates conditions for greater coherence, but its impact will depend on corresponding reforms in teacher education curricula and in the professional development opportunities available to practicing teachers.

Second, technology integration in teacher preparation must be approached not merely as the acquisition of digital tools but as the development of pedagogical judgment about when and how to use those tools effectively. The Community of Inquiry research demonstrates that successful blended learning depends on the quality of interactions and the cultivation of learning communities, not simply on the presence of technology. Teacher preparation programs must therefore equip future educators with the conceptual frameworks and practical strategies for designing and facilitating blended learning experiences that genuinely support student learning.

Third, context matters profoundly. The strategies that work in Metro Manila may not translate to remote municipalities in BARMM, and the approaches appropriate for licensed teachers in well-resourced schools may not fit learning facilitators in community-based learning centers. Teacher preparation must therefore cultivate adaptability and responsiveness, preparing educators who can assess their contexts, identify available resources, and design instruction that meets students where they are. The pandemic-era improvisations described by Asuncion, in which teachers guided students to use local materials and home environments as laboratories, exemplify this adaptive capacity.

Fourth, teacher well-being must be systematically addressed through both individual support and structural reform. Mental health and psychosocial support initiatives should be integrated into regular professional development, not reserved for crisis interventions. At the same time, policymakers must examine the conditions that generate teacher stress and burnout, from workload and class size to administrative burdens and compensation. Sustainable improvement in teacher effectiveness requires sustainable improvement in the conditions of teachers' work.

#### Limitations and Future Research

This analysis is necessarily preliminary, capturing a moment of transition in Philippine teacher preparation rather than documenting outcomes of fully implemented reforms. The specialized licensure policy announced in April 2025 is only beginning to be implemented, with phased rollout expected to begin in September 2025. Its long-term effects on teacher quality, recruitment, and retention remain to be seen. Similarly, the LinkedIn partnership and blended learning initiatives will require ongoing evaluation to determine their impact on classroom practice and student learning.

Future research should examine several questions. How do teachers who have completed specialized degree programs and licensure examinations differ in their classroom practice from those prepared under the previous system? What conditions enable online professional development to translate into changed instructional practice, and what barriers impede such translation? How can well-being interventions be designed to address both individual coping and systemic sources of stress? And how can the contextual responsiveness evident in grassroots programs be maintained as initiatives scale?

#### Conclusion

The post-pandemic era offers an opportunity to reimagine teacher preparation in the Philippines, building on lessons learned during crisis while addressing long-standing structural weaknesses. The specialized licensure policy, the expansion of blended and technology-mediated professional development, the grassroots innovations in regions like BARMM, and the emerging attention to teacher well-being all point toward a more coherent and responsive system. Yet these initiatives remain fragmented, their connections not yet fully realized.

The challenge ahead lies in integration: connecting pre-service education to licensure to classroom practice; linking professional development to genuine changes in instruction; recognizing teacher well-being as inseparable from teacher effectiveness; and ensuring that teachers in all contexts, from urban centers to remote villages, have access to the preparation and support they need. This is not merely a technical challenge of policy design and program implementation. It is a moral challenge, rooted in the recognition that the quality of education Filipino children receive depends fundamentally on the quality of the teachers who guide their learning.

As the BARMM teacher training programs demonstrate, investing in teachers is investing in the future. When teacher trainings are placed at the heart of education recovery, they do more than refresh skills. They reignite passion, foster empathy, and help teachers see their roles not just as instructors, but as changemakers who nurture stronger learners, economic prosperity, and lasting peace. The path to better literacy, to progress, and to genuine transformation begins with one teacher,

one training, one learner at a time. Reimagining teacher preparation means ensuring that every teacher along that path has the preparation, support, and recognition they deserve.

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