Guiding the Digital Teacher: Mentors' Perspectives on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Interns' Instructional Delivery

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examines mentors' perspectives on preservice teachers' (interns') use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in instructional delivery during practicum in public schools under the DepEd Division of Bukidnon, Philippines. The study details mentors' views on AI in lesson planning, activities, and assessments. It also identifies challenges from AI reliance, including gaps in content depth, learner adaptation, and classroom dynamics. The study reviews strategies, feedback, and interventions to strengthen interns' pedagogical skills alongside AI. A qualitative design captured the lived experiences of 20 purposefully selected mentor teachers. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire via Google Forms. Thematic analysis included transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development. Mentors observed that AI-enhanced lessons were more efficient and engaging, thanks to professional materials such as visuals, quizzes, and presentations. However, they found it hard to judge interns' real abilities because polished outputs often hid weaknesses in critical thinking, personal explanation, and live delivery. Key strategies were oral explanations, contextual adaptation, manual elements, creativity, and post-lesson reflection methods meant to balance technology with human skills. Mentors advised using AI as a preparation aid, not a classroom replacement, and emphasized qualities like empathy, improvisation, and learner connection that are irreplaceable. The study recommends that teacher education institutions and DepEd collaborate on ethical AI training. It also suggests revising practicum evaluations to focus on delivery over aesthetics, requiring AI disclosure and personalization, and creating peer forums to support human-centered teaching amid digital advances.

Keywords: AI, supervision, practicum, instruction, preservice teachers

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI), including chatbots and content generators, is rapidly changing how preservice teachers plan, deliver, and assess lessons during their practicum. These tools help make lesson planning, creating materials, and conducting assessments easier. Many interns use AI to create polished lesson plans, engaging presentations, and tailored activities. However, AI-generated content may not reflect interns' true understanding of the material. It may also fail to show their ability to adapt to students' needs or foster classroom engagement. Recent studies discuss how AI is used in preservice teacher training and the related benefits and challenges, but rarely address how mentors actually support interns using AI in real classrooms, especially in basic education. This creates a gap in understanding how supervision can preserve the human and relational aspects of teaching as AI becomes more common.

Emerging research reveals that preservice teachers find AI valuable for lesson planning and curriculum design. However, they face limited training, ethical issues, and challenges in matching AI outputs to standards and diverse learners (Lacuna, 2025; Co, 2025). Reports indicate that interns often rely on AI to draft plans, worksheets, and visuals. This reliance can mask gaps in content knowledge, learner adaptation, and classroom skills when evaluations prioritize written work (Alreiahi & Alrwaished, 2025; Seufert et al., 2025). According to Doğan (2026), preservice teachers use AI in microteaching and practicum to plan, provide examples, and

receive feedback. They hold varied views on its effects on creativity, originality, and professional growth. AI interventions show that targeted mentoring, reflection, and AI-TPACK training enable interns to blend AI tools with teaching expertise. However, most efforts occur in university settings rather than in school-based practicum (Antonio, 2025; Liu et al., 2025). Overall, these insights highlight an underexamined dynamic between AI tools, interns' practices, and mentors' guidance.

This study examines mentors' responses to AI's impact on interns' instructional delivery in public schools, focusing on supervision, evaluation, and support. The aims are to: (a) describe mentors' perspectives on interns' AI use in planning, activities, and assessments; (b) identify challenges from AI reliance, such as content depth, learner fit, and classroom dynamics; and (c) analyze mentors' strategies to strengthen interns' pedagogical skills and judgment with AI. The broader goal is to provide insights to improve mentor preparation, practicum protocols, and policies for ethical, effective AI use in teacher training.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a phenomenological research design, a qualitative approach, to explore mentors' perspectives on the use of AI in interns' instructional delivery. The researcher aimed to understand the phenomenon through participants' viewpoints and experiences. Using this design, information was gathered from mentors who handle interns in their schools.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within selected schools under the Department of Education (DepEd) Division of Bukidnon. This locale was specifically chosen due to the presence of established public schools that serve as training grounds for pre-service teachers through established internship programs. These institutions provided a centralized environment where mentor teachers regularly supervised interns as they navigated modern pedagogical challenges.

Selecting this division enabled a comprehensive examination of how mentors integrated emerging technologies into the classroom. Situating the study in these schools enabled mentors to share their authentic experiences regarding the influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on interns' instructional delivery and lesson preparation. This setting allowed observation of the intersection of traditional teaching standards and the shift toward digital tools in Philippine public schools.

Participants of the Study

Participants included 20 mentor teachers from various schools within the DepEd Division of Bukidnon, purposively selected for their active roles in supervising student interns. Representing diverse subjects and teaching experience, they provided a broad perspective on the instructional landscape.

Each of the 20 participants provided detailed responses, sharing professional insights on how to manage the influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on interns' instructional delivery. Their involvement was crucial to understanding pedagogical shifts and balancing traditional standards with emerging digital tools. Data collection focused on mentors' lived experiences navigating the integration of AI in classrooms.

Research Instrument Used

The study used a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument to collect data from the 20 mentor teachers. This instrument was designed to capture mentors' nuanced perspectives and experiences regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in interns' instructional delivery.

The questionnaire featured open-ended questions, allowing participants to provide detailed, thoughtful responses beyond yes/no answers. This semi-structured format enabled exploration of pedagogical challenges

while maintaining research objectives. Participants could share their experiences in their own words, fostering a deeper understanding of mentors' strategies and concerns.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering process began with the systematic development of the semi-structured questionnaire, followed by a formal request for participation from mentor teachers in the DepEd Division of Bukidnon. The researcher personally explained the study's focus on AI in instructional delivery and secured voluntary participation. Upon confirming willingness, the researcher consulted participants about using Google Forms as the distribution medium and deployed the instrument only after the mentors consented to this format.

After all 20 participants submitted their responses online, the researcher gathered the data. Next, the researcher transcribed and organized the qualitative entries. The raw data was then analyzed to identify major themes and insights. The identified themes became the basis for the study's conclusions and recommendations.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the 20 mentors were analyzed using a rigorous thematic method. After transcribing Google Forms data, the researcher coded key phrases and ideas related to AI and intern supervision. Similar codes were grouped together to form emerging themes.

Ethical Considerations

The research followed strict ethical protocols. The researcher secured informed consent and ensured all participation was voluntary. To protect privacy, the study used anonymized data collection and avoided collecting sensitive information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the different results and emerging themes drawn from participants' insights.

On Teacher Interns' AI Integration

Emergent Theme: AI Enhances Lesson Polish and Efficiency

Teacher interns primarily use AI tools during lesson preparation to create professional-looking materials such as lesson plans, presentations, quizzes, and visuals, resulting in more engaging, well-structured classroom delivery compared to manually prepared lessons, which are often plainer and less visually impactful.

Participant responses clearly illustrate this theme. Participant 3 observed AI integration through "professional-looking graphics, instant feedback activities, or creative analogies," such as comparing cumulus clouds to "fluffy cotton balls," contrasting with manual lessons that used "chalkboard sketches and textbook definitions" and felt more traditional. Participant 2 noted interns use AI for "worksheets, quizzes, and PPT presentations, which help save time and improve organization". Participant 7 described AI-generated lessons on dangerous weather with "high-quality visuals and simplified explanations" that were "more polished and comprehensive" than manual lessons based on personal experiences. Participant 16 highlighted AI PowerPoints on Pang-abay as "well-organized" with abundant examples, unlike simpler manual preparations.

This theme suggests teacher training programs should emphasize balanced AI integration that maintains interns' contextual adaptation skills while leveraging efficiency gains. While AI's polished outputs boost novice confidence, they require mentor guidance to ensure cultural relevance and pedagogical depth. According to Lacuna (2025), 72% of pre-service teachers used AI for lesson planning to improve efficiency, but needed training in contextual adaptation. Another study found that although generative AI enhanced interns' instructional materials, they struggled to apply them without mentor support (Cordevilla et al., 2024). National guidelines also promote AI use in preparation, while stressing the importance of teacher mastery of content (Department of Education, 2026). In addition, studies confirm AI tools improve lesson structure in

mathematics education (Alreiahi & Alrwaished, 2025), support professional development via efficient material creation (Tan et al., 2024), and enable teachers to focus on human-centered instruction (United States Artificial Intelligence Institute, 2025).

On Mentors' AI Evaluation Challenges

Emergent Theme: Difficulty Distinguishing Authentic Competence

Mentors struggle to assess interns' genuine teaching skills and content mastery when AI generates polished lesson materials, as these outputs mask gaps in personal understanding, critical thinking, and adaptive delivery during classroom instruction.

Participant responses consistently demonstrate this challenge. For instance, Participant 2 explained, "it is a challenge... to make sure that the interns truly understand the material... interns may struggle to explain ideas deeply... using AI can make it harder to evaluate an intern's real teaching skills." Similarly, Participant 3 noted, "ensuring that they critically evaluate... polished materials may mask gaps in their own content knowledge... challenging to see how well they can explain concepts in their own words." Participant 7 observed, "it may not always clearly reflect the intern's own ability to design instruction... determining whether the intern truly understands the content." Echoing this, Participant 15 highlighted, "determining how much of the lesson truly reflects the intern's own knowledge... difficult to know whether the intern fully understands the concepts."

This emergent theme highlights the need for assessment approaches that go beyond superficial outputs by incorporating oral defenses, analyses of student engagement, and tasks demanding real-time adaptations. These measures help ensure that interns cultivate the independent pedagogical competence vital to sustained teaching effectiveness. Fudalan (2025) states that Filipino educators highlight that, while AI is a supportive tool, it cannot replicate the empathy, mentorship, and moral guidance essential for authentic evaluation. Similarly, pre-service teachers recognize AI's benefits for lesson planning but caution about inadequate training and ethical challenges in discerning genuine mastery (David & Maroma, 2025). Research on teacher readiness further notes that, although AI enhances efficiency, it raises concerns about over-reliance that masks critical reasoning and original thinking (Bautista et al., 2024). Additional studies emphasize the importance of probing more deeply into delivery and interaction skills, as AI-generated content can obscure true proficiency (Nguyen, 2024). Accordingly, experts advocate for approaches such as presentations followed by Q&A sessions and peer teaching to reveal gaps in understanding that polished AI materials can hide (Bower et al., 2024). Hallström et al. (2026) also underscore the critical evaluation of AI outputs, including biases and limitations, as key to assessing students' higher-order skills in the context of generative tools.

On Mentors' Strategies for AI Challenges

Emergent Theme: Structured Guidance for Balanced Development

Mentors address AI overreliance by requiring interns to explain content in their own words, adapt materials to learner context, incorporate personal creativity, and reflect on teaching practice, ensuring technology supports rather than supplants authentic skill development.

Participant responses demonstrate these strategies clearly. Participant 3 requires interns to "critically evaluate and adapt AI-generated materials... create portions of lessons manually, ensuring they practice explanation, creativity, and classroom management skills". Participant 7 guides interns to "explain the lesson plan... revise and contextualize AI-generated materials... reflective practice after each lesson". Participant 15 encourages interns to "review and modify AI-generated materials... describe objectives and activities in their own words... contextualize using real-life examples". Participant 16 asks interns to "explain the concepts in their own words and design some activities independently," alongside feedback emphasizing personal teaching strategies.

This theme underscores mentorship's role in cultivating hybrid competence, where AI enhances efficiency, while interns master irreplaceable human elements such as adaptation, connection, and improvisation, all essential in diverse classroom contexts. Studies support this approach, highlighting risks of AI overreliance

and emphasizing training for critical adaptation and creativity in pre-service teacher education, aligning with mentorship strategies for responsible AI use (David & Maroma, 2025). These findings also echo the need for structured support to maintain empathy and ethical guidance in AI-integrated pedagogy (Fudalan, 2025). Lacuna (2025) states that enhanced induction programs that offer mentorship foster reflective practice and reduce overreliance, thereby supporting novice teachers' professional growth. Further research advocates hybrid models that integrate AI without diminishing agency, creativity, or contextual skills (Rokkones & Giannakos, 2025). According to Courtney et al. (2023), systematic reviews underline the importance of mentor-guided adaptation and reduced workloads in building authentic competencies during technology shifts. Finally, frameworks for sustainable mentorship balance AI efficiency with human-centered practices like reflection and improvisation (Pitso, 2026).

On Mentors' AI Usage Advice

Emergent Theme: AI as Preparation Aid, Not Classroom Replacement

Mentors consistently advise teacher interns to use AI for efficient lesson planning, drafting, and organization, but emphasize that interns must personally master content, adapt to learners, and form authentic connections that technology cannot achieve.

Participant responses articulate this guidance clearly. Participant 1 advised, "Use AI to enhance, not to replace interns' teaching. Think of AI as a tool. Know the limitations of AI". Participant 2 emphasized, "Think of AI as your very good helper rather than a teacher... the teacher remains the human heart of the learning experience". Participant 3 recommended: "Use AI as a supporting tool rather than a substitute... always review, adapt, and personalize AI-generated materials... balance AI with... creativity, critical thinking, and classroom interaction." Participant 7 stressed, "view AI as a supportive tool, not a substitute for their professional judgment and creativity... ensure that they fully understand and can explain the content themselves".

This theme highlights the crucial distinction between AI's preparatory efficiency and the irreplaceable human elements of teaching, empathy, improvisation, and contextual adaptation that define effective classroom practice and foster robust educator competence. Studies underscore that AI-driven tools are best used as preparatory aids for lesson planning, content generation, and assessment design, while teachers retain responsibility for interpretation, contextualization, and live classroom interaction (Rodrigo & Talandron-Felipe, 2024). Educators in recent work similarly describe AI as a supportive assistant that reduces workload but cannot match essential human qualities like empathy, guidance, or relational pedagogy (Fudalan, 2025). This consensus mirrors mentors' advice that interns must "fully understand and can explain the content themselves" and that AI should enhance, not replace, the core instructional space.

Guidelines on AI in education likewise state that AI should function as an auxiliary tool, not as a replacement for teachers' roles in evaluating learners or designing learning experiences, and that human judgment must remain central (Department of Education, 2026). Systematic reviews on AI in education likewise highlight that AI shows greatest promise in drafting lessons and generating materials, but they caution against approaches that diminish teacher-student relationships or critical-thinking development (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). This resonates with the mentors' advice that interns should "review, adapt, and personalize AI-generated materials" and maintain "professional judgment and creativity" in their practice (Participant 3, 7). Organization-level discussions on AI in teaching further advocate hybrid models in which AI supports planning and assessment, while teachers retain control over grading, feedback, and classroom dynamics (UNESCO, 2026; Gravette, 2026). Collectively, these sources reinforce the theme that mentors are translating broader educational and policy norms into situated guidance: AI should enhance preparation, while the human teacher remains the core of the classroom experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that public school mentors see AI as a powerful tool. It helps interns create neat, organized, and attractive lesson materials, such as slides, quizzes, and visuals, making classes more engaging. At the same time, mentors worry that these polished materials can hide interns' weak understanding. Mentors notice interns

struggle to explain lessons in their own words and adjust activities to pupils' needs and levels. Because of this, mentors now require interns to explain concepts without AI support, revise AI-generated materials to fit the local context, and reflect after each class on what succeeded and what did not. Thus, AI supports rather than replaces true teaching skills.

The study finds that mentors advise interns to use AI mostly for planning and preparation. Teaching relies on a teacher's knowledge, judgment, and care for learners. Good teaching depends on human qualities like empathy, clear communication, and decisive action in the classroom, qualities AI cannot fully match. The findings show AI can improve practicum with guidance. Strong mentorship ensures interns become real teachers, not just users of digital tools.

Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that teacher education institutions and DepEd work together to provide simple, clear training for mentors and interns. This training should guide participants on using AI safely, honestly, and in line with national guidelines. Revise practicum rules and rating forms to focus on how interns explain, adjust, and manage their learning, not just what AI-generated outputs look like. Require interns to state when they use AI and to rewrite and localize any AI content in their own words. Have them attend regular meetings where mentors and interns discuss problems and best practices in using AI. This keeps the main focus on human connection and real learning in the classroom.

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