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Exploring Preparedness and Efficacy of Novice Teachers in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Primary Schools in Northwest Cambodia

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Abstract

This study investigates the preparedness and self-efficacy of novice teachers in teaching English as a foreign language at primary schools in north-west Cambodia. As English language learning becomes more and more important in the education landscape in Cambodia, it is essential to understand how Teacher Education Colleges (TECs) prepare their graduates for teaching in the classroom. The study used a quantitative design to collect data from 195 novice teachers (142 female) across 188 urban and rural primary schools in Northwest Cambodia to assess four dimensions of preparedness (content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, and practical knowledge) and three dimensions of self-efficacy (instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement). Findings revealed that novice teachers demonstrated moderate levels of preparedness, with stronger preparation in content knowledge and pedagogical skills compared to contextual and practical knowledge. Self-efficacy varied across dimensions, with higher confidence in instructional strategies but lower confidence in classroom management and student engagement. Statistical analyses confirmed a strong positive correlation between teacher preparedness and self-efficacy, with preparedness. The study also identified notable urban-rural disparities, with urban teachers reporting higher preparedness and self-efficacy levels. These findings show that, while the TECs provide basic training, significant gaps remain in preparing teachers to deal with the practical reality of a diverse classroom setting. The implications include strengthening field experience in teacher training programmes, strengthening mentoring and coaching support for new teachers, and addressing the systemic inequalities between the urban and rural education settings to improve the performance of English language education in Cambodia.

Keywords: Efficacy, Novice Teacher, Preparedness, Primary School, Teacher Education

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

In Cambodia's educational landscape, the command of English language skills is becoming increasingly important, especially as the country continues to integrate into the world economy and the ASEAN community. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has given priority to the teaching of English as a compulsory subject at the primary level, recognising the importance of this for the future academic and professional opportunities of students (MoEYS, 2015). However, the successful implementation of this policy depends heavily on the quality and readiness of the teachers who teach English in primary schools.

Teacher education colleges, in particular Battambang Teacher Education College (BTEC) in northwest Cambodia, play a key role in training teachers for the requirements of the new education system. These institutions are responsible for providing future teachers with the necessary content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual understanding, and practical experience to effectively teach English (Guerriero, 2017). Despite these efforts, there are significant concerns about whether the new teachers graduating from these programmes are adequately prepared for the reality of teaching basic English, particularly in rural settings with limited resources (Chadrawati & Purbani, 2025; Kadel, 2024).

The transition from pre-service preparation to actual classroom instruction is a critical time for new teachers (Gordon, Bourke, Mills, & Blundell, 2025). Research in various contexts has shown that teacher perceptions of readiness and self-efficacy in this transition have a significant impact on teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction, and retention (Tshannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Torabzabeh & Hashamdar, 2022). Teacher self-efficacy, defined as the teacher's belief in his ability to organise and implement the steps necessary to successfully achieve specific learning objectives, is consistently linked to student achievement, teaching quality, and teacher perseverance in difficult situations (Bandura, 1997; Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

However, in Cambodia, especially in northwest Cambodia, there is limited empirical research on the relationship between the readiness of novice teachers and their teaching effectiveness in primary-level English. Preliminary observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that many new teachers struggle with several interrelated problems: lack of English (content knowledge), lack of a repertoire of age-appropriate and engaging teaching strategies (paediatric skills), lack of understanding of how to adapt to the resource constraints of rural schools (contextual knowledge), and gaps between theoretical preparation and practical classroom practice (practical knowledge).

These problems are particularly acute in view of the unique requirements of teaching English as a foreign language to young students in Cambodia. Primary school pupils typically have minimal exposure to English outside their classroom, which requires teachers to use creative, engaging, and developmentally relevant teaching strategies (Quryozova, 2024). In addition, many primary schools in north-west Cambodia face significant resource constraints, including large class sizes, limited teaching material, and insufficient technical infrastructure (Em, 2022), which require teachers to demonstrate adaptability and resourcefulness (Jones, 2016).

This problem is further exacerbated by questions about the effectiveness of existing teacher training programmes. Although the TECs provide coursework on English language development, pedagogy, and practice experience, it is not clear whether these components sufficiently develop the multidimensional skills needed for effective teaching of English (Kleang & Chomdokmai, 2012). Moreover, the extent to which pre-training translates into confidence in the teaching skills of novice teachers - a sense of effectiveness - has not been systematically studied (Qiu, Xie, Xiong, & Zhou, 2021).

Understanding the level of preparation and teaching effectiveness of new English teachers is important for several reasons (Zeichner, Darling-Hammond, Berman, Dong, & Sykes, 2024). First, it provides evidence on the effectiveness of existing teacher training programmes and identifies specific areas where they need to be strengthened. Second, it provides insight into the kind of support and professional development that new teachers need in the critical first years of teaching. Third, it contributes to a wider understanding of how teacher training influences the quality of teaching in developing countries where resources are limited but educational aspirations are high (IEG Meson Evaluation, 2019).

This study, therefore, addresses a major gap in educational research by systematically examining the preparation of new teachers for teaching across four key dimensions - content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, and practical knowledge, and how these relate to their teaching effectiveness in three areas: pedagogy, classroom management, and learner involvement. By focusing on primary-level English teachers in northwest Cambodia, the study provides context-relevant evidence that can inform teacher training reforms, professional development initiatives and educational policy decisions aimed at improving the quality of English-language teaching in Cambodian primary schools.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the preparedness and teaching efficacy of novice English teachers at primary schools in Northwest Cambodia. Specifically, the research objectives are:

- To assess the level of preparedness of novice English teachers across four dimensions: content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, and practical knowledge.
- To examine the teaching efficacy of novice English teachers in three key areas: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.
- To investigate if there is any significant relationship between novice teachers' preparedness and their teaching efficacy in English language instruction.

1.3. Literature Review

The literature on teacher preparedness and efficacy provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how new teachers make the transition from pre-service training to classroom teaching. This review examines four interlinked areas: (1) teacher preparation and its dimensions; (2) theory and measurement of teacher effectiveness; (3) the relationship between preparation and effectiveness; and (4) contextual considerations in the teaching of English in developing countries, in particular Cambodia.

1.3.1. Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness refers to the extent to which teachers have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective teaching (Chen, Tang, Du, & Huang, 2024). Research consistently shows that teachers who are well prepared are more likely to stay in the profession, show higher quality teaching and have a positive impact on student learning (Boyd, Grossman, & Wyckoff, 2009). Contemporary frameworks of teacher preparedness emphasise multiple, interrelated dimensions. Shulman's (1987) seminal work content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as the key components of the professional knowledge of teachers. Building on this, subsequent research has extended the preparedness concept to cover the context and the practical dimensions (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014).

Content knowledge includes the teachers' knowledge of the subject they teach. For teachers of English, this includes knowledge of the English language itself - grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and communication skills - as well as knowledge of theories of language acquisition and linguistics (Richards, 2017). Studies show that language skills of teachers have a significant impact on the quality of instruction and student achievement (Télez & Waxman, 2006). In the context of the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, where teachers may have limited opportunities to use the authentic language, the maintenance and development of knowledge of content is a constant challenge (Zamil, 2025).

Pedagogical Skills refer to the understanding by teachers of the teaching methods, pedagogy, and theories of teaching applicable to their subject area (Grossman P. , 1990). For primary teachers, this includes knowledge of age-appropriate teaching methods, learning-enhancing classroom activities, assessment strategies, and differentiation methods to meet the diverse learning needs of learners (Singh, 2025). Research highlights the need for teaching preparation to go beyond theoretical knowledge to include practical practical and adaptive skills (Zeichner K. , 2012).

Contextual knowledge refers to an understanding of the specific learning environment in which learning takes place, including school culture, community characteristics, resources available, political requirements, and socio-cultural factors that influence learning (Harendita, Oakley, & Pegrum, *Teacher Contextual Knowledge (XK) Development: The Case of Yogyakarta, Indonesia*, 2025). This dimension is receiving increased attention as researchers have recognised that learning effectiveness depends not only on general competences but also on adaptation to the context (Madhur, et al., 2025). Contextual knowledge is particularly important in resource-limited environments, where teachers have to manage constraints while maintaining the quality of education (Westbrook, et al., 2013).

Practical knowledge is developed through authentic learning experiences, including practice, student teaching and learning-to-use opportunities (Mancenido, et al., 2025). This experiential dimension bridges theoretical understanding with classroom practice and enables new teachers to develop their situational knowledge, problem-solving skills and professional judgement (Carrone, 2025). Research shows that high-quality practical experience, characterised by appropriate mentoring, structured reflection and gradual assumption of responsibility, significantly improves the preparedness of novice teachers (Ronfeldt & Reininger, *More or better student teaching?*, 2012).

1.3.2. Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy, which is rooted in the work of Bandura (1997), refers to the teacher's belief in his ability to organise and perform the actions necessary to achieve specific learning tasks, even in difficult circumstances. Bandura distinguished between efficacy expectations (beliefs about one's ability to perform behaviors) and expectations of results (believing that certain behaviours will produce the desired results). Teacher efficacy focuses mainly on efficacy expectations in the teaching area. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) have refined the conceptualisation of teacher efficacy through their integrated model, which takes into account both the analysis of pedagogical tasks and the assessment of individual pedagogical competences (Gálvez-Nieto et al., 2023). Their work has shown that teacher efficacy is context-specific and varies across different areas of learning. This multidimensional perspective is confirmed by a number of studies and cultural contexts (Thommen, Grob, Lauermann, Klassen, & Praetorius, 2022).

Research has consistently shown the importance of teacher efficacy in educational outcomes (Chesnut & Burley, 2015). Teachers who are more effective show greater commitment and perseverance in teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), use more innovative teaching strategies (Guskey & Passaro, 1994), and provide better support to struggling students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), and achieve higher student achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). In addition, teacher effectiveness affects professional commitment, job satisfaction and retention, especially during the difficult early years of a career (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). In particular, for English-speaking teachers, belief in competence influences their willingness to implement communicative teaching approaches, the use of authentic materials, and their confidence in addressing diverse learners' needs (Jensen & Peterson, 2025). In the context of the EFL, where teachers may have limited English skills or experience with native speakers, the belief in competence is particularly important in determining the quality of teaching and the involvement in professional development (Yilmaz, 2011; Ferguson & Leeming, 2025).

Teacher efficacy is developed by four primary sources: learning experience (successful learning), peer experience (observation of effective learning models), social persuasion (support and feedback from others), and physiological and emotional states (stress levels, enthusiasm) (Bandura, 1997; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). In the case of new teachers, early experience with mastery during the training and initial teaching positions critically influence the development of efficacy (Taufik, et al., 2025).

1.3.3. The Preparedness-Efficacy Relationship

Theoretical and empirical work suggests a strong link between teacher preparedness and efficacy, although this relationship is complex and two-way. Pre-service preparation influences novice teachers' initial efficacy beliefs,

while belief in the effectiveness of teaching influences how teachers use their training in classroom settings (Pendergast, Garvis, & Keogh, 2011). Research shows that comprehensive teacher preparation programmes have a positive impact on novice teacher efficacy. Specific programme features related to improved performance include: extensive content development (Charalambous, Philippou, & Kyriakides, 2008; Bardelli, Ronfeldt, & Papay, 2023), exposure to a variety of pedagogical approaches (Swackhamer, Koellner, Basile, & Kimbrough, 2009), high quality mentoring experience (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), and reflection on pedagogy (Larrivee, 2010).

However, studies also reveal a phenomenon called reality shock or 'praxis shock' in which new teachers experience a decrease in efficacy when faced with classroom complexity that differs from their training experience (Dicke, et al., 2014; Mintz, et al., 2020). This suggests that, while preparation is the basis for efficacy, the relationship between preparation and the real learning environment is significantly moderated (George, Richardson, & Watt, 2018).

In the field of English language teaching, research on the link between preparedness and efficacy remains limited, especially in the context of the EFL in developing countries (Luo & Li, 2024; Ferguson & Leeming, 2025). Chacón (2005) found that the self-reported proficiency of English teachers (knowledge of content) significantly predicted their efficacy beliefs. Similarly, (Yilmaz, 2011) reported that the quality of the training of Turkish pre-primary teachers affected their trust in the implementation of communicative teaching approaches. These findings suggest that both the content and pedagogical dimensions of preparedness contribute to the development of competence in the context of language learning (Whitehead & Hiver, 2025).

1.3.4. English Language Teaching in Cambodia: Context and Challenges

The Cambodian education system has undergone a major transformation since the 1990s, with increased political attention being paid to the English language education (Ngel, 2022; Choi, Clayton, Hum, Phommalangsy, & Oanh, 2024). The MoEYS has introduced English as a compulsory subject at primary level in order to increase the global competitiveness of pupils and to support national development objectives (MoEYS, Curriculum framework of general education and technical education, 2015). However, implementation of the policy has been marked by a number of problems in terms of teacher quality, resources and system capacity (Pich, 2017).

Teacher education colleges (TECs), including institutions such as BTEC in north-west Cambodia, are the main providers of teacher training. These programmes typically include courses in the development of the English language, general pedagogy, specific methods and practical experience (MoEYS, 2023). However, research has identified a number of limitations of current approaches to teacher training. First, many teachers themselves have limited knowledge of English and international experience, which may limit the quality of the teaching they provide (Neau, 2010). Second, teacher training curricula often emphasise theoretical knowledge rather than practical application, with little opportunity for authentic teaching practice (Chea, 2024). Thirdly, the constraints on resources restrict access to up-to-date materials, technologies and educational resources that could improve the quality of education (Heng & Sol, 2023).

In Cambodia, novice teachers entering primary schools, especially in rural areas, face specific challenges testing their preparedness and efficacy (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Large class sizes (often 40 to 60 pupils) make it difficult to implement the collaborative and learner-centred approaches recommended in the preparation of the programme (Pich, 2017). Limited teaching materials and resources require teachers to develop creative, low-resource pedagogical strategies, which are often not emphasised in their pre-service training (Boy & Water, 2023). The minimum exposure of students to English outside the classroom requires intensive in-class language learning and motivation strategies (Chhen, Siek, & Loerng, 2024). Many primary school pupils come from families with limited literacy in Cambodia, which makes English language learning even more difficult. In addition, curricula requirements are sometimes at odds with students' actual level of competence, which requires teachers to make difficult adaptation decisions (Boy & Water, 2023).

In particular, limited empirical research has examined the preparedness and efficacy of Cambodian English teachers. Existing studies have focused mainly on the problems encountered by teachers in their ability to communicate (Em, 2022; Boy & Water, 2023), on the observation of teaching practices (Jaen, 2024), and on policy implementation (Smith, 2025). Taken together, these studies show that many Cambodian teachers struggle with content knowledge, especially oral skills and grammatical understanding, and show limited use of communicative teaching approaches, often relying on grammatical translation methods (Chhen, Siek, & Loearng, 2024).

Chea (2024) a cross-case analysis of teacher training in Cambodia has identified significant differences between training programmes and classroom practice, although this study did not specifically address English teaching or systematically assess effectiveness. Research specifically examining the relationship between Cambodian teachers' preparedness in various dimensions and their teaching efficacy is largely absent in the literature

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The research aims figure out if there is any significant relationship between novice teachers' preparedness and their teaching efficacy in English language instruction. This study uses a quantitative research approach to examine the preparedness and self-efficacy of novice teachers of English working in primary schools in 188 schools in north-west Cambodia. The study draws on survey data collected from 195 novice teachers (142 female, 53 male) using Google Forms as the primary data collection platform. Teachers were provided with the survey link and given two weeks to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. Novice teachers are defined as those with three years or less of teaching experience in primary schools. The survey instrument was designed to measure two primary constructs:

- Teacher Preparedness Scale: This section measured novice teachers' perceived preparedness across four dimensions: (1) content knowledge (understanding of English language structure, grammar, and vocabulary); (2) pedagogical skills (teaching methods, lesson planning, and assessment strategies) (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Borg, 2006); (3) contextual knowledge (understanding of students' backgrounds, local educational policies, and cultural contexts) (Harendita, Oakley, & Pegrum, 2025); and (4) practical knowledge (classroom management, use of teaching materials, and adaptation to real classroom situations) (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). The preparedness items were adapted from established frameworks on teacher preparation and contextualized for the Cambodian primary school setting (Zeichner, Darling-Hammond, Berman, Dong, & Sykes, 2024).
- Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale: This section assessed teachers' confidence in their ability to perform teaching tasks across three dimensions: (1) instructional strategies (ability to use diverse teaching methods, explain concepts clearly, and assess student learning); (2) classroom management (ability to control disruptive behavior, establish routines, and manage classroom resources); and (3) student engagement (ability to motivate students, foster participation, and respond to diverse learning needs). The self-efficacy items were adapted from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), which has been validated across multiple cultural contexts (Gálvez-Nieto, Salvo-Garrido, Domínguez-Lara, Polanco-Levicán, & Mieres-Chacaltana, 2023).

To ensure the quality and validity of the survey instrument, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of novice teachers to test item clarity, response patterns, and instrument reliability (Leatemala, Merrienboer, & Susilo, 2022). The survey was also translated into Khmer and back-translated into English to verify linguistic equivalence and cultural appropriateness (Brislin, 1970). The final instrument showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .962 for all 70 items. These steps help ensure that the survey accurately captures the constructs of interest and is suitable for the Cambodian context (Bujang, Omar, & Baharum, 2018).

3.4. Data Analysis

To address the research questions and test the hypotheses, several inferential statistical tests were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean scores, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values were calculated for all four dimensions of teacher preparedness (content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, and practical knowledge) and three dimensions of teaching efficacy (instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement). These statistics provided a comprehensive overview of novice teachers' preparedness levels and self-efficacy beliefs across the sample of 195 teachers.
- Pearson Correlation Analysis: To address Research Objective 3, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between overall teacher preparedness and overall teaching self-efficacy. Additionally, correlations between specific dimensions of preparedness (content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, practical knowledge) and specific dimensions of efficacy (instructional strategies, classroom management, student engagement) were analyzed to understand which aspects of preparedness most strongly predict different facets of teaching efficacy.

3. Results

3.1. Research Objective 1

The first objective of this study is to systematically assess the level of preparedness of novice teachers of English teaching in primary schools throughout north-west Cambodia. This assessment examines four critical dimensions which together determine a teacher's readiness to effectively deliver English language instruction in the context of primary school education.

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the four dimensions of teacher preparedness among the 195 novice English teachers surveyed. The statistics provide a comprehensive overview of how prepared these teachers feel across different knowledge domains, measured on a scale where scores could range from 10 (minimum) to 40 (maximum).

- Contextual Knowledge (Mean = 26.65, SD = 4.16): This domain received the highest mean score, indicating that novice teachers feel most prepared in understanding the local educational context, community expectations, and cultural factors affecting English language teaching. The relatively low standard deviation (4.16) suggests fairly consistent preparedness across teachers in this area. Scores ranged from 10 to 36, with most teachers clustering around the mean.
- Pedagogical Skills (Mean = 25.88, SD = 4.54): Teachers reported the second-highest preparedness in pedagogical skills, including teaching methods, lesson planning, and instructional techniques. The standard deviation of 4.54 indicates moderate variability in how prepared teachers feel in this domain. The maximum score of 39 (close to the possible maximum of 40) suggests some teachers feel exceptionally well-prepared in pedagogical approaches, while the minimum of 10 indicates others feel significantly underprepared.
- Practical Knowledge (Mean = 25.65, SD = 4.31): This domain, which encompasses hands-on teaching experience and application of theory in real classrooms, received the second-lowest mean score. The standard deviation of 4.31 shows moderate variation among teachers. The score range of 10 to 36 indicates that while some teachers had substantial practical experience during their preparation, others had very limited opportunities for supervised teaching practice.
- Content Knowledge (Mean = 24.84, SD = 5.09): Content knowledge—teachers' mastery of the English language itself—received the lowest mean score and showed the highest variability (SD = 5.09). This substantial standard deviation indicates considerable differences in English language proficiency among novice teachers. The wide range from 10 to 40 suggests that some teachers possess strong English skills

while others struggle with basic language competency, representing a significant concern for teaching quality.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Preparedness Domains

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content knowledge	195	10.00	40.00	24.8410	5.08894
Pedagogical Knowledge	195	10.00	39.00	25.8821	4.53525
Context knowledge	195	10.00	36.00	26.6462	4.16328
Practical knowledge	195	10.00	36.00	25.6513	4.30553
Valid N (listwise)	195				

The mean scores across all four domains cluster in the mid-range (24.84 to 26.65), suggesting moderate overall preparedness among novice teachers. The relatively small difference between the highest (contextual knowledge) and lowest (content knowledge) domains—only 1.81 points—indicates that preparation programs provide relatively balanced coverage across these areas, though with room for improvement in all domains.

3.2. Research Objective 2

The second research objective examines the teaching efficacy of novice English teachers across three fundamental dimensions of classroom practice: classroom management, student engagement and instructional strategies. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics on the three dimensions of teaching efficacy among the 195 novice English teachers surveyed.

- Classroom Management (Mean = 28.56, SD = 4.14): This dimension received the highest mean score, suggesting that novice teachers have the greatest confidence in their ability to manage classroom behaviour, establish routines, and establish a structured learning environment. The relatively low standard deviation (4.14) indicates relatively consistent self-efficacy performance among teachers. The scores ranged from 10 to 40 and one or more teachers achieved the highest possible score, showing extraordinary trust in the management of the class.
- Student Engagement (Mean = 28.11, SD = 4.22): Teachers reported the second-highest efficacy in engaging students, including motivating them, retaining their interest and promoting active participation. The standard deviation of 4.22 shows a slight variability in the degree of confidence felt by teachers in this area. A maximum score of 38 (close to the possible maximum of 40) indicates that some teachers feel they are very good at engaging their pupils, while a minimum of 10 indicates that others are struggling with the motivation of their pupils.
- Instructional Strategies (Mean = 26.63, SD = 4.20): This dimension, includes teacher trust to implement effective teaching methods, to tailor teaching to the needs of learners and to use different pedagogical approaches, received the lowest average score. Despite this, the score is still in the middle to high range. The standard deviation of 4.20 shows a slight variation in the proportion of teachers. A score ranging from 10 to 38 shows a significant variation in teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Teaching Efficacy Domains

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Classroom management	195	10.00	40.00	28.5641	4.14303
Student engagement	195	10.00	38.00	28.1077	4.21506
Instructional Strategies	195	10.00	38.00	26.6308	4.19586

Valid N (listwise)	195
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Overall, the mean scores for all three efficacy dimensions clustered in the mid- to high range (26.63 to 28.56), indicating that novice teachers have a reasonable degree of confidence in their teaching skills. The relatively small difference between the highest (classroom management) and the lowest (school strategy) dimensions - only 1.93 points - suggests that self-efficacy of teachers is fairly balanced in these critical areas of pedagogical practice. However, the consistent presence of a minimum score of 10 on all dimensions underlines that a minority of teachers experience very low self-efficacy, which is a concern and calls for targeted support and intervention.

3.3. Research Objective 3

The correlation table presents a Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between teacher preparedness and teaching self-efficacy among the 195 novice English teachers surveyed. The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between these two variables.

Correlation Coefficient ($r = .819^{}$):** The Pearson correlation coefficient of .819 indicates a very strong positive relationship between teacher preparedness and self-efficacy. This means that as teachers' preparedness levels increase, their self-efficacy beliefs tend to increase proportionally. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (indicated by**), meaning there is less than a 1% probability that this relationship occurred by chance.

Statistical Significance ($p < .001$): The significance value of .000 (shown as Sig. 2-tailed) indicates that the correlation is highly significant. In statistical terms, this p-value is actually less than .001, which far exceeds the conventional threshold for significance ($p < .05$). This provides very strong evidence that the relationship between preparedness and efficacy is genuine and not due to random variation.

Table 3: Inferential Statistics of Teacher Preparedness and Self-Efficacy Correlation

Correlations		Preparedness	Efficacy
Preparedness	Pearson Correlation	1	.819**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	195	195
Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.819**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	195	195

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix shows the same coefficient (.819) in both directions, confirming the symmetric nature of Pearson correlation. Whether examining how preparedness relates to efficacy or how efficacy relates to preparedness, the strength of the relationship remains consistent.

4. Discussion

This study explored novice teachers' preparedness and efficacy in teaching English as a foreign language at primary schools in Northwest Cambodia, addressing a critical gap in understanding how Teacher Education Colleges (TECs), specifically Phnom Penh Teacher Education College (PTEC) and Battambang Teacher Education College (BTEC), prepare graduates for the realities of English language instruction. The findings reveal important insights into the relationship between teacher preparation programs and classroom effectiveness, particularly in the context of Cambodia's educational reforms initiated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS).

The results indicate that novice teachers demonstrate moderate levels of preparedness across the four key dimensions examined: content knowledge, pedagogical skills, contextual knowledge, and practical knowledge. This finding suggests that while TECs provide foundational training in English language competence and teaching

methodology, significant gaps remain in preparing teachers for the specific challenges of primary school contexts in Northwest Cambodia. The moderate preparedness levels align with concerns raised in the literature about the disconnect between pre-service teacher education and actual classroom demands in developing countries (Westbrook, et al., 2013). Notably, teachers reported stronger preparation in content knowledge and pedagogical skills compared to contextual and practical knowledge, indicating that TECs may emphasize theoretical understanding over hands-on, context-specific training.

Regarding teacher self-efficacy, the study found that novice teachers reported varying degrees of confidence across the three efficacy dimensions: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student involvement. Teachers demonstrated higher self-efficacy in instructional strategies, likely reflecting the pedagogical training received at TECs, but reported lower confidence in classroom management and student engagement. This pattern suggests that teacher preparation programs may not adequately address the complex realities of managing diverse classrooms and motivating young learners in a constrained resource environment. The findings echo the claim of Hirsch et al. (2021) that self-efficacy is context-dependent and develops through authentic teaching experiences rather than just theoretical instruction.

The main finding of the study is a strong positive correlation between teacher preparedness and self-efficacy, which supports the relationship between the two constructs that previously hypothesised. A multiple regression analysis showed that preparedness, especially in pedagogical skills and practical knowledge, was a strong predictor of teacher self-efficacy. This is in line with evidence that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are positively and significantly related to, and predictive of, their readiness to teach (Aybek & Aslan, 2019). It also aligns with research indicating that well-designed coursework and particularly extensive, high-quality clinical experiences in training programmes are key predictors of later teaching efficacy (Ronfeldt, 2021). Teachers who felt better prepared for their pre-service training indicated greater confidence in their ability to design effective lessons, to manage classrooms, and to engage students in learning, echoing the wider finding that teaching and pedagogical competence are strongly linked to greater teacher self-efficacy (Yang & Du, 2024).

The study also identified important demographic and contextual factors influencing both preparedness and efficacy. Urban teachers reported significantly higher levels of preparedness and self-efficacy than rural teachers, which may reflect differences in access to resources, mentoring and opportunities for professional development, consistent with the evidence that teachers in rural schools often face greater professional isolation and less development opportunities than their counterparts in urban settings (Vijayarathan-r, et al., 2022). This urban-rural divide highlights the systemic inequalities in the Cambodian education system which need to be addressed to ensure equitable outcomes for all, and echoes the recent calls in the Cambodia's Strategic Plan for Teacher Education Reform 2024–2030 to improve the deployment of teachers and the opportunities for teaching in remote areas (MoEYS, 2025). In addition, teachers with more years of experience showed higher self-efficacy, which suggests that self-confidence increases with practical classroom experience, but the level of preparation did not differ significantly by experience, suggesting that initial preparation remains relevant throughout the early career phases (Miller, 2020).

These findings have important implications for teacher education policy and practice in Cambodia. First, the TECs need to strengthen the practical and contextual components of their programmes, providing teachers in the early stages with more hands-on experience in a variety of school environments, especially in rural areas. Second, mentoring and coaching programmes should be a priority to support new teachers in their transition from pre-service training to independent teaching, as this period is crucial for developing self-confidence and improving pedagogical skills. Thirdly, continuous professional development on classroom management and student engagement strategies is essential, as these areas have been identified as areas of weakness in new teachers.

Attention should also be paid to the integration of technological development and English language proficiency, key elements identified in the conceptual framework of the study. While the TECs highlight these skills, new teachers need continued support to effectively integrate technology into their teaching and to retain their own English skills in contexts where opportunities for training may be limited. Collaborative learning communities and online professional networks could provide valuable platforms for continuous learning and mutual support.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while Cambodia's Teacher Education Colleges are making progress in preparing English language teachers, there is still considerable work to be done to ensure that new teachers enter the classroom with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence needed to teach effectively. By strengthening the link between pre-service preparation, practical experience and continuous professional support, Cambodia can build a more competent and confident teaching force, ultimately improving the performance of primary school English language learners across the country, especially in the underprivileged rural communities of north-west Cambodia.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

While this study provides valuable insights into novice teachers' preparedness and efficacy in teaching English in primary schools in north-west Cambodia, a number of limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study relied solely on self-reported data via surveys, which may be biased by social desirability bias or by inaccurate self-reported self-evaluation. Future research should include classroom observations, student performance data and interviews with school administrators and management to triangulate findings and provide a fuller picture of teacher effectiveness.

Second, while the sample includes teachers from both urban and rural backgrounds in north-west Cambodia, it may not fully reflect the diversity of educational contexts across the country, especially in remote or ethnic minority communities. Future studies should extend the geographical coverage to ensure that the findings are applicable to all parts of Cambodia. Fourthly, the study was specifically focused on the teaching of English, and the findings cannot be extrapolated to other subjects or levels of education.

Based on these limitations, several suggestions for future research emerge. First, qualitative studies examining the lived experience of novice teachers, challenges and coping strategies would complement quantitative findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of the transition from pre-service training to independent teaching. Second, comparative studies examining the differences between PTEC and BTEC graduates could identify the strengths and weaknesses of each programme and inform targeted improvements in teacher training. Third, evidence-based intervention studies testing the effectiveness of specific induction programmes, mentoring models, or career-development approaches would provide guidance for new teachers. Finally, research examining the relationship between teacher preparedness, efficacy, and actual student learning outcomes will determine whether these teacher attributes translate into improved English proficiency among Cambodian primary school students.

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