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Towards a Place-Informed Analysis of Trainee Teacher Recruitment: Rural-Coastal England as a Case Study for International Considerations

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Abstract

This study investigates place-based barriers to initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment in rural-coastal regions of England, focusing on Cornwall as a case study. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with nine ITT provider leaders and nine trainee teachers, the research applies the concept of educational isolation to ITT providers in areas that are geographically remote, socioeconomic disadvantaged, and culturally isolated. The analysis is framed by the critical pedagogy of place and social capital theory, moving beyond deficit-based interpretations of rurality to critically examine how place-based inequities are produced through urban-normative policy and resource allocation. Primary data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Four substantive themes emerged: transport dependency and accessibility constraints that structurally exclude lower-income and disabled trainees; housing displacement driven by the tourist economy, which compounds financial insecurity; an “employment precarity problem” where localized primary school oversaturation coexists with secondary teacher shortages; and cultural and professional isolation that disproportionately impacts ethnically diverse trainees in demographically homogeneous communities. The research further identifies that community resilience, while enabling individuals to navigate structural barriers, can obscure infrastructural inadequacy and diminish impetus for systemic policy reform. This paper contributes to international scholarship on spatial justice and rural teacher education by presenting an integrated conceptual framework with transferable relevance to similar rural-coastal and peripheral contexts globally and by offering policy recommendations for place-weighted ITT funding, infrastructure investment in educationally isolated areas, and the development of collaborative provider models.

Keywords: educational isolation; initial teacher training; place-based inequity; rural-coastal education; spatial justice; social capital; critical pedagogy of place; teacher recruitment



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1. Introduction

The recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers represents one of the most sustained challenges facing education systems internationally, with rural and/or coastal areas experiencing disproportionately acute difficulties (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; McPherson et al., 2024; Macdonald et al., 2025; See et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2025). In England, approximately one-third of teachers leave the profession within their first five years, rising to 52% within the first decade (McLean et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2025). For rural and coastal schools and colleges, these recruitment and retention challenges are intensified by additional place-based barriers extending beyond those faced by urban

settings (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Tran, 2023), including housing displacement, transport dependency, and scarce access to professional development (Bartlett et al., 2025; Jiang & Yip, 2024; Huan et al., 2025). Yet despite the scale of this challenge, teacher education policy in England continues to be predominantly urban-normative, treating all places as essentially equivalent and failing to recognize the specific infrastructural, economic, and cultural elements that shape rural-coastal education contexts (Brooks & Perryman, 2024; Tran, 2023).

This paper contends that rural-coastal trainee teacher recruitment cannot be sufficiently understood, nor can its challenges be addressed, through deficit-based frameworks that conceptualize rurality as merely lacking urban resources. Instead, theoretically robust approaches are necessary to recognize how place-based inequities are actively generated through policy decisions, resource allocation, and systems that privilege urban geographies (Soja, 2010). The critical synthesis presented positions educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) as the conceptual framework for understanding compound place-based disadvantage and employs the critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) as the theoretical lens to reveal how these issues reflect broader systems of spatial injustice. Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory is applied to analyze how networks and resources differentially enable or constrain rural-coastal trainee teacher recruitment. This tripartite theoretical structure facilitates a shift beyond deficit models toward recognition of the systematic production and maintenance of place-based inequities.

The Cornwall Case Study

Cornwall, as England's most southwestern rural-coastal county, presents a compelling case study to understand rural-coastal ITT recruitment challenges. Serving 75,718 pupils across 295 schools (approximately 239 primary, 39 secondary, and 17 special/alternative provision schools) with twelve ITT providers, Cornwall functions within a highly academized system where 80% of state-funded schools belong to multi-academy trusts (MATs) (Cornwall Association of Primary Heads, 2025). MATs are state-funded bodies containing multiple schools with their own governance arrangements, existing alongside state-funded and state-run schools overseen by Cornwall Council. Cornwall illustrates the compound challenges facing rural-coastal ITT: a population of 570,305 spread across 1376 square miles, ranking 83rd of 326 areas for deprivation (Cornwall Council, 2019), with average salaries approximately 12% below the national average (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2024) and 26.5% of the population earning below the real living wage (Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, 2025). Housing displacement driven by second-home ownership and the tourist economy, poor transport infrastructure creating private motor vehicle dependency, and demographic homogeneity (93.6% White British in 2021) further characterize the county's educational context (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2023).

These place-based characteristics manifest through the combined elements of geographical remoteness, socioeconomic deprivation, and cultural isolation, thereby establishing what Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019) conceptualize as educational isolation. Cornwall illustrates a rural-coastal teacher supply situation that questions the conventional understanding of teacher recruitment and retention. The consequence of educational isolation results in limited employment opportunities in Cornish primary schools (pupils aged 4–11) (Cornish Times, 2025), where primary teachers training close to where they live, being employed in those schools, and remaining there for extended periods creates an "employment precarity problem": rural-coastal areas experience fewer opportunities for new primary teachers despite having teacher shortages in secondary schools, and there are greater difficulties recruiting early career teachers and school leaders (Stone, 1990; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). This problem discloses fundamental failures in

urban-normative recruitment approaches that presume uniform teacher workforce dynamics throughout all geographies.

It is important to situate this study within the wider international context of rural teacher recruitment challenges. Research from Australia, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand consistently identifies geographic isolation, monetary limitations, and limited career progression as primary barriers to rural teacher recruitment (Downes & Roberts, 2018; Monk, 2007; Tran, 2023; Klar et al., 2024). However, as Brooks and Perryman (2024) and Tran (2023) emphasize, place-specific policy responses remain underdeveloped, and the spatial injustices embedded in teacher recruitment systems persist across national contexts. This paper aims to contribute to the international literature by presenting case study findings from Cornwall, which are analyzed through theoretical lenses to achieve a greater understanding of place-informed trainee teacher recruitment.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Positioning

The theoretical positioning of this research's findings is deliberate. Educational isolation provides the conceptual architecture for understanding how multiple dimensions of disadvantage compound, critical pedagogy of place offers the critical viewpoint for recognizing these patterns as products of spatial injustice rather than inevitable features of geography, and social capital theory illuminates the mechanisms through which place-based disadvantage operates through differential access to networks and resources. This examination enables analysis that is simultaneously descriptive (what challenges exist), analytical (how they operate as compound systems), and critical (why they express broader patterns of spatial injustice requiring systemic transformation).

Educational isolation, as conceptualized by Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019), provides the core framework to understand how place-based factors generate system-wide barriers in rural-coastal education. Educational isolation occurs when schools or colleges have limited access to resources owing to the compound effect of three place-based elements: geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation. Cultural isolation, in this system, encompasses not only ethnic and demographic homogeneity but also restricted access to professional networks, limited exposure towards diverse cultural experiences, professional isolation from subject-specialist networks, and constrained career progression pathways (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). These three dimensions compound rather than simply add together to reduce conditions for institutional agency for improvement—that is, the capacity of schools and colleges to participate meaningfully with professional development, systemic improvement initiatives, and knowledge networks. Together, these dimensions create conditions in which individual and institutional strategies to address disadvantage are constrained by the compound weight of place-based barriers.

It is important to clarify how individual challenges identified in this study map onto the three core dimensions of educational isolation and why the framework's breadth reflects its theoretical contribution. Transport infrastructure inadequacy, limited placement options, and restricted professional development access constitute expressions of geographic remoteness. Housing displacement, income uncertainty, bursary inequity, and the employment precarity problem are expressions of socioeconomic disadvantage. Demographic homogeneity, professional isolation, limited career progression, and the challenges facing ethnically diverse trainees are expressions of cultural isolation. Crucially, these dimensions do not operate in parallel to compound the place-based challenges. For example, transport dependency exacerbates professional isolation; financial insecurity limits social capital accumulation; demographic homogeneity makes worse the professional marginalization experienced by ethnically diverse trainees. It is this compounding interaction, not the presence of any single dimension within the place, that constitutes educational isolation

as a theoretically distinct construct. This holistic architecture is consistent with Soja's (2010) theorization of spatial justice, in which overlapping spatial, economic, and cultural inequities cannot be meaningfully disaggregated without losing explanatory power.

Geographic remoteness encompasses not simply spatial distance but also the adequacy of transport infrastructure, the accessibility of professional development opportunities, and the concentration of educational resources. In rural-coastal contexts, this is expressed through insufficient public transport creating private vehicle dependency, extended travel times due to poor road networks, and limited placement options for trainees (Jiang & Yip, 2024; Bartlett et al., 2025). Socioeconomic disadvantage goes beyond individual economic circumstances to encompass regional patterns of employment precarity, housing affordability challenges driven by tourism and second-home markets, and scarce economic opportunities that affect both recruitment and retention (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Cheng et al., 2023). Cultural isolation, while linked to demographic homogeneity, also encompasses professional isolation from specialist networks and restricted career progression pathways (Macdonald et al., 2025; See et al., 2020a).

2.1. Critical Pedagogy of Place as Theoretical Lens

To advance beyond a descriptive application of educational isolation, Gruenewald's (2003) critical pedagogy of place serves as the primary theoretical lens. Critical pedagogy of place represents a convergence of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and place-based education, synthesizing critical pedagogy's focus on oppressive social structures with place-based education's attention to geographic context. Gruenewald (2003, p. 3) argues that "places are profoundly pedagogical" and that educative experiences cannot be understood apart from the places in which they occur, what Freire termed "situationality" (Freire, 1970). This recognition establishes pathways for admitting critical social and environmental issues into the understanding of place and its function in education.

Critical pedagogy of place operates through two complementary goals: reinhabitation and decolonization. Reinhabitation entails identifying, recovering, and creating material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (Rodewald, 2025), learning to inhabit places in socially and ecologically sustainable ways (Gruenewald, 2003). Applied to ITT, reinhabitation requires creating material conditions—transport infrastructure, affordable housing, and professional development access—that enable sustainable inhabitation of rural-coastal teaching roles. Decolonization involves identifying and changing ways of thinking that harm and exploit other people and places (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). For trainee teacher recruitment, decolonization requires challenging urban-normative assumptions that position rural-coastal areas as deficient rather than different—assumptions that, as Roberts and Green (2013) identify in the Australian context, operationalize a metropolitan norm that renders rural conditions invisible in policy formulation.

The synthesis with the educational isolation framework becomes apparent: if educational isolation describes compound place-based disadvantage, critical pedagogy of place illuminates why this disadvantage exists (spatial injustice through urban-normative policy) and what is required to address it (both material reinhabitation and ideological decolonization). This conceptual linkage transforms educational isolation from a descriptive framework into a critical analytical tool, enabling recognition that addressing rural-coastal ITT challenges requires transforming both material conditions and the ideological assumptions underpinning current policy.

2.2. Social Capital Theory: Mechanisms of Place-Based Disadvantage

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital provides the third theoretical component, offering a framework to understand how place-based disadvantage operates through

differential access to networks, resources, and opportunities. Bourdieu conceptualized social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Bourdieu viewed social capital as primarily serving to reproduce existing social inequalities, with middle- and upper-class individuals utilizing social networks to maintain their advantage (Lareau, 2003).

Applied to rural-coastal ITT, social capital theory illuminates multiple crucial dynamics that operate as mechanisms of educational isolation. Geographic remoteness limits social capital accumulation by restricting access to professional networks, limiting peer communities, and constraining mentoring opportunities (Byun et al., 2012). Socioeconomic disadvantage limits the ability to maintain and activate social capital networks: travel costs to access professional development, inability to attend networking events, and monetary constraints on sustaining professional memberships all compound the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by limiting social capital accumulation. The tension between Bourdieu’s (1986) emphasis on social capital’s reproductive function and Coleman’s (1988) view on its productive potential—enabling educational mobility for marginalized groups through community networks—manifests directly in the findings of this research, as discussed in Section 5.

2.3. Towards an Integrated Conceptual Framework

The synthesized conceptual framework positions educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) as a conceptual architecture to understand place-based ITT challenges, employs critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) as the theoretical lens illuminating how these problems mirror broader systems of spatial injustice, and utilizes social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) to analyze ways through which place-based inequity operates using differential access to networks and resources. Together, the frameworks provide analytical approaches for examining how trainee teacher experiences echo larger patterns of spatial injustice (Soja, 2010), how “reinhabitation” of rural-coastal teaching requires both material infrastructure enhancements and ideological challenges to urban normativity, and how social capital operates differently in rural-coastal contexts in which tight community networks coexist with professional isolation. This assimilation is consistent with international scholarship linking rural education to spatial justice and place-consciousness (Tran, 2023; Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Macdonald et al., 2025).

3. Methods

This research considers four interconnected questions studied through the synthesized conceptual framework: (1) How do place-based factors generate system-wide barriers to ITT recruitment in rural-coastal contexts, and how do these reflect the three dimensions of educational isolation? (2) In what ways do geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation compound to create conditions analyzed through the critical pedagogy of place as requiring both reinhabitation and decolonization? (3) How do ITT providers and trainees deal with these place-based challenges, and what does their navigation reveal about differential access to social capital? (4) What conceptual models can advance understanding of place-based inequity in teacher recruitment beyond deficit models towards recognition of spatial injustice?

This research adopted a critical realist qualitative approach, acknowledging that while objective social structures exist, they are mediated by subjective experiences and interpretations (Bhaskar, 2008). This epistemological stance is particularly suited to investigating place-based challenges, as it recognizes both the material realities of geographic and economic constraints and the ways these are experienced and interpreted by individuals in

specific contexts. Although the original research design included a secondary quantitative data collection phase, this component was not implemented; consequently, the study is classified as an exploratory qualitative design. The initial mixed-methods framing reflected design intentions rather than actual implementation, and this paper reports findings from the qualitative phase exclusively.

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection

The research was conducted between April 2024 and September 2025. Cornwall was selected as the case study place for the following reasons: (a) funder requirements, (b) the prior agreement of the ITT providers in Cornwall to support primary and secondary data collection, (c) the predominant coastal-rural geography of the county. Cornwall provided the bounded place to enable an in-depth research design within a real-life context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The research design incorporated two intended data collection phases: secondary data collection from ITT providers, schools, colleges, and local authorities; primary data collection through semi-structured interviews with ITT provider leaders and trainee teachers.

Secondary data collection sought quantitative information on trainee demographics, recruitment patterns, and employment outcomes. Data requests were sent to all twelve ITT providers, twenty-one multi-academy trusts, further education colleges, and Cornwall Council. These requests were necessary because ITT-specific trainee recruitment and employment outcome data are not centrally published at the local authority level. While national School Workforce Census data is published annually by the [Department for Education \(2025\)](#), this relies on returns from individual schools and MATs and does not enable disaggregation to ITT provider or sub-regional level nor does it capture ITT-specific trainee data. Despite simplified data-collection templates, poor response rates were encountered (5 of 21 MATs responded; no further education colleges replied), and system changes affected local authority data availability. These challenges are not unique to Cornwall: fragmentation of data systems in England's academized landscape is a national issue ([Department for Education, 2025](#)), and similar difficulties have been reported by researchers in other regions. However, the limited administrative capacity characteristic of educationally isolated areas may exacerbate these challenges. The paucity of secondary quantitative data led to this element being removed from the analysis and to a refocus on the primary qualitative data.

The inability to complete the planned triangulation strategy warrants explicit methodological reflection and consideration of three epistemological dimensions. First, the data inaccessibility is best understood as a structural characteristic of England's academized education system rather than a solely local problem: ITT-specific data are not centrally published at sub-regional level, and the fragmentation of governance across MATs, SCITTs, universities, and local authorities creates systemic barriers to data aggregation. This gap in data collection is itself a finding of policy significance in England, enabling the Department for Education to review requirements for the collection and sharing of local data on the teacher workforce. Second, the absence of quantitative corroboration means that interpretations of systemic patterns rest on qualitative evidence and published national data; this is acknowledged as a limitation in scope. Third, and most theoretically significant, the data inaccessibility is not simply a methodological constraint but an empirical finding in its own right: it illustrates how educational isolation extends to data governance, making evidence-based place-sensitive planning structurally difficult in rural-coastal contexts. This strengthens rather than undermines the paper's central argument. As [Denzin \(2009\)](#) originally established, triangulation is a strategy for strengthening confidence rather than

a methodological requirement; qualitative research achieving theoretical coherence and evidential richness within a single-method design retains full scholarly validity.

Primary data collection employed semi-structured interviews with nine ITT provider leaders or senior staff (representing 75% of the population, across multi-academy trust, university, School-Centred Initial Teacher Training [SCITT], and further education provision) and nine trainee teachers across different training routes, subjects, stages of training, and personal circumstances. A purposive sampling approach recruited trainees through ITT provider mediation, with providers sharing participation requests via email and interested trainees responding directly through a booking system. This method enabled geographic and demographic diversity within the trainee sample while respecting institutional gate-keeping arrangements. Table 1 provides an overview of the eighteen participants.

Table 1. Interview participant summary.

Participant Code	Role	Provider/Route Type	Stage/Phase
P1	ITT provider leader	SCITT	
P2	ITT provider leader	University	
P3	ITT provider leader	MAT (school direct)	
P4	ITT provider leader	MAT (school direct)	
P5	ITT provider leader	Further education	
P6	ITT provider leader	SCITT	
P7	ITT provider leader	University/MAT partnership	
P8	ITT provider leader	MAT	
P9	ITT provider leader	SCITT/MAT	
T1	Trainee teacher	University PGCE	Secondary—mathematics
T2	Trainee teacher	SCITT	Primary—mid training
T3	Trainee teacher	MAT school direct	Primary—final term
T4	Trainee teacher	University PGCE	Secondary—science
T5	Trainee teacher	SCITT	Primary—mid training
T6	Trainee teacher	MAT school direct	Primary—final term
T7	Trainee teacher	University PGCE	Primary—early training
T8	Trainee teacher	SCITT	Secondary—MFL
T9	Trainee teacher	FE-based PGCE	Primary—mid training

Interview protocols explored the three dimensions of educational isolation and their intersection with critical pedagogy of place concerns, addressing: transport and accessibility challenges (geographic remoteness); financial pressures, housing challenges, and employment concerns (socioeconomic disadvantage); community integration, professional isolation, and diversity experiences (cultural isolation); provider strategies for addressing place-based barriers (rehabilitation efforts); and assumptions about rural teaching embedded in policy and practice (decolonization concerns). All interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, enabling participation from across Cornwall. Interviews lasted 45–90 min, were recorded with informed consent, and were transcribed verbatim.

3.2. Analytical Approach

The primary data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, providing a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes. Reflexive thematic analysis positions the researcher as actively engaged in meaning-making from data, acknowledging that themes are interpreted constructions rather than simply emerging entities (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analytical process involved: (a) familiarization through repeated reading and re-reading of all eighteen transcripts split by population; (b) systematic line-by-line coding across all transcripts, capturing both semantic content and latent meaning; grouping of codes into candidate themes through iterative clustering; a two-stage theme review, first against coded extracts and second against the full dataset; (c) theme definition with clear naming and articulation of inter-theme relationships; and (d) report writing weaving analytical narrative with data extracts. This followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase model throughout.

The educational isolation framework provided an organizing structure for initial thematic categories; however, the reflexive nature of the analysis allowed identification of cross-cutting themes for each population and across populations extending beyond the initial framework, most significantly the employment precarity problem and the masking of infrastructural inadequacy by community resilience. The analytical approach thus combined theoretical sensitivity with genuine openness to the data, avoiding simple confirmation of the pre-existing framework while maintaining analytical coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Both ITT provider leader and trainee teacher data contribute to the thematic analysis throughout all findings sections.

3.3. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations included informed consent procedures, anonymization of participants and institutions, secure data storage, and transparency about research purposes and potential uses. The research received ethical approval from the researcher's University ethics committee. Particular attention was given to the challenges of conducting research in a small, geographically bounded region where institutions and individuals may be identifiable despite standard anonymization measures. This is a recognized challenge in rural educational research (Downes & Roberts, 2018; Israel, 2013), and the decision to anonymize provider types generically rather than name specific organizations reflects the need to balance methodological transparency with participant protection in small regional contexts. The lead researcher's institutional position within the study region is acknowledged as a factor shaping access and interpretation, requiring reflexive awareness throughout analysis.

Limitations of this study include the small purposive sample of eighteen participants, which, although consistent with exploratory qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021), does not permit broad statistical generalization. The inability to access comprehensive workforce data at the county level reflects national fragmentation of data systems rather than a solely local issue. Additional limitations include temporal constraints during a period of significant policy change and the focus on a single regional context.

In line with the epistemological principles of case study research, the study produces analytic generalization in the extension of theoretically grounded propositions rather than statistical generalization from sample to population (Yin, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Theoretical interpretations are offered as analytically grounded propositions consistent with a substantial body of convergent international evidence, requiring further empirical validation across multiple contexts before claims of universal applicability can be made.

4. Findings

This section presents empirical evidence of the three dimensions of educational isolation operating in Cornwall's ITT landscape, analyzed through a critical pedagogy of place lens, with attention to social capital mechanisms. To maintain clarity between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation, data extracts are distinguished from analytical commentary throughout. Participant codes (P1–P9 for ITT provider leaders; T1–T9 for trainee teachers) are used to identify sources of data extracts.

4.1. Geographic Remoteness and Transport Dependency

Geographic remoteness emerged as the most pervasive challenge across all participants, encompassing inadequate transport infrastructure, accessibility constraints, and opportunity structures that fundamentally shape trainee experiences. The finding that the majority of trainees require private vehicles for school placements reveals a fundamental inadequacy of public transport for sustaining rural-coastal teacher training. As one provider leader observed, transport distance operates not only as an inconvenience but as a structural barrier to recruitment:

Even not very far away, like 15 miles takes so long for our trainees to commute, that actually they wouldn't look for a job that far away in Cornwall because it just takes so long to get there because of the road network. (P2)

This transport reality effectively fragments Cornwall's labor market (Ovenden-Hope et al., 2025), creating isolated pockets where teacher recruitment operates independently rather than as part of a unified regional system. Another provider confirmed the following: "Trainees based in Penzance can't commute to Newquay—we lose strong applicants who can't relocate" (P1). The impact on trainees was equally significant. One described a placement commute that took almost two hours each way, characterizing this as clearly unsustainable and detrimental to health and wellbeing (T3). Another reflected that the experience helped them understand "how much travelling would be too much and actually would destroy my love for teaching" (T5), a comment that foreshadows why geographical remoteness can reduce retention.

The accessibility dimensions of transport challenges extended to disabled trainees. One trainee with a physical disability requiring wheelchair use described:

There aren't a lot of buses that come to where we live and I've had issues before where if the road is too steep, if there's not a dropped curb, that kind of thing, I can't actually get on buses with my chair, which is really frustrating. (T7)

This experience illustrates how inadequacies in transport infrastructure compound existing accessibility barriers, creating structural exclusion from training for disabled trainees in rural-coastal areas. Examined through the critical pedagogy of place framework, this constitutes a failure of reinhabitation (Gruenewald, 2003): the material conditions necessary for sustainable participation in rural-coastal teacher training are absent. Australian research identifies similar dynamics, suggesting that travel subsidies may help but that without adequate infrastructure and useful routes, financial incentives have limited impact (Bartlett et al., 2025; Jiang & Yip, 2024). Geographic remoteness also affected the diversity of professional experiences available, with placement options restricted by commuting distance. One trainee noted that suitable schools are "few and far between" (T2), meaning rural-coastal trainees access fewer diverse placement experiences than urban peers, potentially limiting professional development and career preparation (Downes & Roberts, 2018).

4.2. Socioeconomic Disadvantage: Housing and Financial Precarity

Socioeconomic disadvantage operated at multiple levels, affecting individual trainee sustainability and the broader system infrastructure supporting teacher training. Cornwall's ranking of 83rd out of 326 areas for deprivation (Cornwall Council, 2019), combined with average salaries approximately 12% below the national average (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2024), placed additional financial strain on trainees, who must balance training costs with reduced earning potential. This reinforces the extent to which rural-coastal teacher training depends on existing social capital and family resources. Provider leaders identified the income replacement challenge as the central financial barrier:

The sticking point is the income reduction, not so much the fees or taking a loan, because they all recognise they'll pay that back once they get their teaching job. It is the lack of income for the year. (P5)

The same ITT provider leader identified that successful trainees typically fell into two categories: mature adults with a secondary household income or young trainees living in the family home. This stratification is consistent with international research on rural teacher recruitment, which identifies family support as a critical enabler of training participation in areas with low wages and high living costs (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Cheng et al., 2023). Theoretically, this dependency reveals the reproductive function of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986): training access is conditioned by existing family networks and resources, creating additional barriers for first-generation participants and those without local support, potentially limiting workforce diversity.

Housing emerged as one of the most significant barriers to ITT recruitment, with the tourism economy and second-home ownership creating acute affordability challenges:

The majority of the properties are converted into holiday rentals . . . We were very lucky. We managed to secure a part-rent/part-buy property, but it was the only one that appeared within a two-year period when we were looking. (T4)

ITT provider leaders described trainees spending an entire year living in a caravan because affordable accommodation could not be found (P3), while others reported losing early career teachers to international posts because "I can't afford to buy a house unless I save, and I can't save if I live in Cornwall" (P4). These housing pressures reflect not inevitable features of rural geography but products of policy decisions around second-home ownership, tourist economy governance, and affordable housing provision, spatial injustices that, examined through the critical pedagogy of place, require what Gruenewald (2003) terms decolonization of policy treating them as natural market outcomes (Hayes et al., 2025; Soja, 2010). Subject-specific bursary disparities exacerbated inequities: one provider noted that "Primary trainees need financial help—it is unfair they receive nothing while secondary trainees receive up to 30,000 pounds" (P6), a disparity particularly significant in rural areas, where small primary schools form the backbone of educational provision.

International trainees faced additional financial barriers through bursary exclusions based on immigration status. Despite training in shortage subjects, some were ineligible for bursaries because they did not have indefinite leave to remain, creating heightened debt pressures (T1). This policy gap has been identified across multiple national contexts as disproportionately affecting diverse trainees and limiting workforce diversification in demographically homogeneous rural areas (McPherson et al., 2024; McLean & Worth, 2025).

4.3. The Employment Precarity Problem

Perhaps the most striking finding was the identification of an employment precarity problem articulated through Cornwall's experience of localized teacher oversaturation in primary schools coexisting with secondary school teacher and leader shortages. Despite

national recruitment challenges, trainees reported limited job opportunities in the primary sector, contrary to their expectations:

There's almost a false narrative that there are so many positions becoming available. Particularly in Cornwall, jobs tend to be a lot more scarce and harder to come by, particularly in rural areas. (T6)

I thought it was a given that at the end of this training process, there would be a job. That's the one thing that does now worry me. (T2)

ITT provider leaders confirmed this reality, with one raising concerns about “so much competition [for primary teaching jobs] in Cornwall now” and the sustainability of the primary ITT provider market (P1). Teaching vacancies exist in England (the most recent national record was 0.5% of the workforce in 2024 (Long & Bridges, 2026), but trainee teachers already living and established in educationally isolated locations are not able to access these, as they would require moving home. Trainee teachers observed that established teachers in Cornish schools rarely left their positions due to limited alternative employment within a commutable distance, one exemplifying this when they said, “the teachers at the school will stay put” (T9).

Social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) can explain the mechanisms underlying this “lack of teacher churn” (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) in contexts with limited alternative employment, suggesting that teachers invest heavily in place-based social capital within local communities, making geographic mobility less attractive even when professional advancement opportunities arise elsewhere (Byun et al., 2012). This creates a self-perpetuating cycle where low teacher turnover limits employment opportunities for new entrants. In addition, a concerning trend towards short-term contracts was seen, with trainee teachers reporting that “the jobs being advertised do not offer the secure entry into the profession I was hoping for” (T3), which is consistent with international evidence that temporary contracts are used in rural places and can contribute to early attrition from the profession due to dissatisfaction with teaching (Downes & Roberts, 2018).

4.4. Cultural Isolation and Professional Identity

Cultural isolation emerged as the most complex dimension of educational isolation, encompassing challenges related to demographic homogeneity, access to professional development, community integration, and professional identity formation. Cornwall's demographic profile (93.6% White British in 2021) created particular challenges for ethnically diverse trainees:

It's a bit of a challenge . . . if there is a reason for me to leave Cornwall, it will be because I want to work where I'm not the only different person. (T1)

As much as you can teach diversity within the curriculum, not being able to fully experience it does disadvantage the children. (T1)

This trainee teacher experience illustrates how cultural isolation operates not through a single barrier but through the cumulative effects of demographic homogeneity on professional identity formation and sense of belonging (Macdonald et al., 2025). It also creates a cycle in which sparsely populated rural and coastal communities, which are predominantly White British communities, experience fewer applications from minority ethnic group trainees and teachers, reinforcing existing demographic homogeneity. International research consistently highlights this dynamic in rural contexts (Arinaitwe & Corbett, 2022; Seelig & McCabe, 2021), emphasizing that addressing diversity in rural teaching is both an equity issue for educators and an educational quality issue for students.

Professional isolation manifested through limited access to subject-specialist networks, career progression pathways, and professional development opportunities. Provider lead-

ers reported that trainees were experiencing professional isolation due to distance from professional networks (P6). The size of small schools (in England, from 40 pupils to 210 pupils in primary schools (Ovenden-Hope, 2024)) created particular vulnerabilities for trainee teachers when in school placement practice, with one saying: “In small schools, you can’t be anonymous” (T7). An Australian study found that it was not ITT preparation but inadequate mentoring, social-geographic isolation, and complex working conditions that caused teacher attrition in rural settings (James et al., 2025), which is consistent with ITT provider findings in this study. ITT provider leaders identified virtual professional learning communities (V-PLCs) as an innovative response to professional isolation, with research confirming that V-PLCs can be “as effective as, and potentially easier to access than, face-to-face PLCs” (Klar et al., 2024, p. 1). However, V-PLCs cannot fully replace face-to-face professional networks and mentorship, and relying solely on technological solutions risks normalizing professional isolation as inevitable rather than recognizing it as a product of an urban-normative professional development infrastructure (where networks and development opportunities are expected to be within easy reach).

4.5. Community Resilience and Its Relationship to Structural Need

Complex relationships emerged between community integration and professional sustainability. Rural-coastal communities provided strong social support networks, and trainee teachers reported both positive and challenging aspects of community integration. One trainee noted being “welcomed with open arms” in a small school, creating an immediate sense of belonging (T8). Small schools facilitated rapid professional integration, making trainee teachers “feel a little bit more like a teacher from day dot because there are so few adults in the school” (T9). These findings resonate with international research demonstrating that building teacher–community relationships improves retention in rural settings (Cheng et al., 2023; Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

The finding that trainees consistently relied on family and community support in order to participate and complete their teacher training becomes theoretically significant when examined through the synthesized framework proposed by this paper. Through Coleman’s (1988) social capital lens, community support represents productive social capital enabling ITT continuation. Yet through Bourdieu’s (1986) lens, this reliance reproduces inequality by favoring those with existing local connections and family support. Through the critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), this situation exemplifies an ideological condition requiring decolonization. In other words, while strong family support enables training to happen, it masks fundamental infrastructural inadequacies in transport and housing provision. Community resilience can obstruct recognition of spatial injustice by enabling individuals to navigate structural inadequacies through personal resources, reducing pressure for policy transformation—a dynamic identified in other rural contexts internationally (Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Macdonald et al., 2025). The importance of this finding is that it illuminates the specific place-based constructs impacting ITT recruitment and retention.

4.6. Place-Based Assets: Environment, Community, and Alternative Pathways

Despite significant challenges, substantial assets emerged uniquely in rural-coastal teacher training. Trainee teachers consistently identified Cornwall’s natural environment as a significant asset for both personal satisfaction and professional practice:

Not only do I get to teach amazing children, but I’m also surrounded by absolutely lovely, beautiful landscapes that make me feel so much better . . . to be living where we live and on top of that, to get to do the job that I absolutely love doing, just feels like a privilege. (T8)

Schools recognized that being outside has real benefits for children's academic performance and mental health and wellbeing (P7), with outdoor learning described by both trainee teachers and ITT provider leaders as much more prevalent in Cornish schools than in urban contexts. Through a critical pedagogy of place lens, connection to the natural environment represents a crucial aspect of place-based professional identity formation (Gruenewald, 2003; Macdonald et al., 2025), challenging deficit frameworks that position rural-coastal teaching as simply accepting hardship.

The finding that a significant proportion of trainees entered teaching via alternative pathways, including teaching assistant roles and career changes, suggests that Cornwall's limited employment diversification makes teaching a particularly attractive career option for mature residents. This aligns with "grow your own" strategies evidenced in the international rural recruitment literature (Barnes et al., 2024; McPherson et al., 2024). Mature trainees bring diverse life experiences and demonstrate strong commitment to place, which are both assets in areas with educational isolation challenges. However, "grow your own" strategies alone cannot substitute for addressing fundamental infrastructural inadequacies of a place. Without parallel investment in transport and housing and without recognition of the additional cost to participate in professional development, they risk reinforcing demographic homogeneity and normalizing inadequate infrastructure.

4.7. Provider Innovation: Collaborative Responses to Place-Based Challenges

ITT providers developed comprehensive strategies to address place-based challenges, most notably through the county level ITT Provider Network established in 2023 by the Department for Education-funded Teaching School Hub, OneCornwall. This collaborative approach brought all twelve ITT providers together for coordinated recruitment rather than competing for the limited trainee numbers. Key collaborative elements included joint recruitment events and information sessions, coordinated school placement arrangements, and a shared collaborative webpage providing links to all ITT provision.

Despite these collaborative developments, competitive fragmentation nationally for ITT provision created some system-level challenges, including ITT providers from outside of Cornwall offering training placements in Cornish schools:

Nobody has an overview of who's doing what . . . Providers contact schools directly, promising the earth, but they don't understand local needs. (P1)

This competition in the system to recruit trainee teachers was seen to duplicate outreach efforts, cause confusion among prospective trainees, and result in inequitable resource allocation. Even at a local level in Cornwall, the tension between competition and collaboration was acknowledged, with one ITT provider leader saying, "the elephant in the room is the fact that we can only collaborate to a certain degree because the reality is we're all hoping that the same people are going to apply" (P3). However, local areas need to work collaboratively in order to succeed, both for the providers and for the trainees (Malone, 2020).

Innovative delivery models emerged in Cornwall to mitigate the effects of educational isolation on trainee teacher experience. These models included hub-based approaches that reduced travel requirements by delivering training across multiple locations and hybrid delivery combining online and face-to-face elements. One ITT provider described allowing students to stay local and complete their theoretical element from home online, coming to campus only as needed (P2), while another described going to trainees to deliver cross-phase training to minimize travel demands. Integrated training-employment models also emerged, treating trainees as colleagues within the school from the start of training (P8), creating clear employment pathways and reducing uncertainty. These locally driven, integrated provision models are particularly effective in rural contexts where geographical

isolation limits the reach of traditional university-based training (Eaton et al., 2015; Bartlett et al., 2025).

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Cornwall's ITT recruitment challenges fundamentally arise from the compound interaction of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation—the three dimensions of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). The synthesized tripartite conceptual framework offered in this paper reveals that these dimensions do not simply add together but interact, creating place-based challenges qualitatively different from those in urban contexts. Transport dependency exacerbates socioeconomic disadvantage for lower-income trainees, housing displacement driven by tourism economies compounds financial pressures, cultural isolation intensifies for ethnically diverse educators in demographically homogeneous areas, and professional development becomes doubly constrained by geographic distance and limited local networks.

5.1. Critical Pedagogy of Place: From Description to Critique

Applying a critical pedagogy of place framework transforms analysis from descriptive to critical, revealing how ITT challenges in Cornwall reflect broader patterns of spatial injustice requiring both reinhabitation and decolonization (Gruenewald, 2003). Reinhabitation requires fundamental infrastructure improvements to address transport inadequacy, housing affordability, and access to professional development. Current conditions force trainees into unsustainable arrangements, including extended daily commutes, temporary accommodation, and reliance on family support, which should be understood as policy failures rather than inevitable features of rural-coastal geography (Hayes et al., 2025; Tran, 2023).

Examined through the critical pedagogy of place framework, this suggests that urban-normative policy assumptions actively produce rather than merely fail to address these conditions. The employment precarity problem exemplifies the need for decolonization—identifying and changing ways of thinking that damage and exploit places (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). A policy that assumes uniform teacher workforce dynamics across all geographies represents urban-normative thinking that requires decolonization. Similarly, expecting trainees to have private vehicles normalizes economic barriers; the absence of place-weighted funding formulas treats geographic differences as an individual problem rather than a structural inequity requiring a policy response. This pattern of normalizing rural disadvantage through urban-normative policy has been documented across multiple national contexts: in Australia (Downes & Roberts, 2018; Roberts & Green, 2013), the United States (Tran, 2023; Monk, 2007), and more broadly across the Anglosphere (McPherson et al., 2024).

Critical pedagogy of place emphasizes that experience has a geographical dimension, with Freire's (1970) "situationality" proving crucial for interpreting these findings. Trainee teacher experiences cannot be understood apart from the specific places in which they train: transport challenges, housing displacement, employment precarity, cultural isolation, and community integration all reflect particular characteristics of Cornwall's geographic, economic, and demographic context. Yet these place-specific conditions themselves reflect broader policy patterns systematically privileging urban geographies (Brooks & Perryman, 2024; Soja, 2010). Addressing ITT recruitment, therefore, requires simultaneously attending to Cornwall's (and other similarly located places) specific conditions and challenging broader patterns of spatial injustice.

5.2. Social Capital: Reproduction, Resistance, and the Limits of Resilience

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital illuminates how place-based disadvantage operates through differential access to networks and resources, while also revealing tensions between reproduction and resistance. The finding that trainees consistently relied on family support demonstrates how rural-coastal ITT depends on existing social capital, creating barriers for first-generation participants and those without family support networks, confirming Bourdieu's analysis of social capital primarily serving to reproduce inequality (Lareau, 2003).

However, findings also reveal how social capital can enable educational mobility through community-based "grow your own" strategies and alternative pathways leveraging local knowledge that is more aligned with Coleman's (1988) perspective on social capital's productive potential. The success of providers in recruiting trainee teachers through alternative pathways suggests rural-coastal contexts offer specific affordances for mature trainees with strong community connections. Yet examined through the critical pedagogy of place, this creates a crucial tension. While community resilience enables ITT continuation (productive social capital), it simultaneously masks infrastructural inadequacy and risks reinforcing demographic homogeneity (reproductive social capital). This tension reflects broader findings from international rural education research, which show that social capital embedded in rural communities can be both an asset and a constraint (Byun et al., 2012; Macdonald et al., 2025).

5.3. Spatial Justice and Policy Implications

The concept of spatial justice (Soja, 2010) emphasizes how geographic location shapes the experience of justice and access to opportunity. The findings reveal multiple dimensions of spatial injustice in ITT provision, from transport infrastructure inadequacy that creates cascading inequities, to housing displacement driven by tourism and second-home economies, to the employment precarity problem, to funding formulas that fail to account for the additional costs of rural-coastal provision, and to data governance inadequacy that prevents workforce understanding and planning.

These spatial injustices reflect what Hayes et al. (2025) term normalization of urban geography, whereby rural places are framed as too distant from cities, less populated than cities, and too difficult to access from cities, situating urban geography as normal and "blaming people who live outside of normalized urban spaces for their own disadvantage" (p. 2). Applied to ITT, policies designed for urban contexts are applied universally without recognition that rural-coastal areas require different approaches and additional resources to achieve equitable outcomes, a finding with strong parallels in Australian, US, and New Zealand rural education contexts (Tran, 2023; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

Achieving spatial justice requires, as Preston (2015, drawing on Massey, 1994, 2005) argues, understanding that places are constructed through networks of social relations that extend beyond the local, are continuously changing, and are immersed in broader processes. For ITT policy, this means recognizing that Cornwall's challenges cannot be solved locally, it needs national policy reform addressing how infrastructure investment, funding formulas, and regulatory frameworks systematically privilege urban geographies while disadvantaging rural-coastal areas.

5.4. Theoretical Contribution

This paper advances conceptual understanding of place-informed education through several interconnected contributions. First, it demonstrates the analytical power of synthesizing educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) with critical pedagogy of place

(Gruenewald, 2003) and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), moving beyond deficit-based frameworks to recognize how place-based inequities are actively produced through policy and resource allocation. The synthesis is suggested to be more powerful than any single framework: educational isolation without critical pedagogy of place remains descriptive; critical pedagogy of place without educational isolation lacks empirical specificity; social capital theory without both risks naturalizing disadvantage.

Second, the employment precarity problem, the counterintuitive finding that areas with the greatest need for teachers simultaneously have the fewest opportunities due to low turnover in contexts with limited alternative employment, is identified as a significant contribution to the field. This problem reveals fundamental failures of urban-normative assumptions about teacher workforce dynamics and exemplifies how spatial injustice operates through policy, treating urban patterns as universal. The problem has implications that extend beyond Cornwall to any rural-coastal, rural, or periphery context where limited economic diversity affects teacher workforce dynamics and is consistent with evidence from comparable contexts in Australia and the United States (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Downes & Roberts, 2018).

Third, illuminating community resilience as potentially masking infrastructural inadequacy contributes to understanding the agency–structure relationship in educational isolation. Individual and community agency enables navigation of structural barriers, which is crucial for immediate sustainability. Yet this same agency risks diminishing public awareness of the need for system-level transformation. Critical pedagogy of place helps interpret this tension, recognizing that both individual resilience and structural transformation are necessary, but conflating them treats resilience as a solution rather than as an adaptive response to inadequate structures.

5.5. Implications and Recommendations

5.5.1. Policy Implications for Place-Sensitive ITT

The following policy implications are presented as theoretically grounded propositions derived from convergent qualitative evidence from this study and a substantial body of international evidence on spatial justice and rural teacher recruitment (such as, Brooks & Perryman, 2024; Tran, 2023; McPherson et al., 2024; Downes & Roberts, 2018). They are exploratory in the sense that implementation and validation at national scale requires further empirical work; however, their evidential foundation is robust enough to warrant serious policy consideration rather than deferral pending additional research.

The findings presented in this paper have significant implications for trainee teacher recruitment policy at international, national, regional, and local levels. National policy must move beyond “one-size-fits-all” approaches typically based on high density populated urban areas. The following policy reforms are recommended to move governments towards a place-informed education, starting with ITT:

- Place-weighted funding formulas reflecting the true costs of ITT provision in educationally isolated areas, including additional transport, accommodation, and professional development expenses. Current funding formulas treat geographic context as cost-neutral, forcing trainees and providers to absorb additional costs through individual resources.
- Regulatory reform addressing bursary requirements for place-specific barriers in training requirements. Current regulations assume uniform conditions, creating inadvertent barriers when applied to rural-coastal contexts.
- Infrastructure investment in public transport and affordable housing as education policy priorities. Treating transport and housing as separate policy domains from

education exemplifies problematic policy siloing. If sustainable rural-coastal teaching requires adequate infrastructure, their absence constitutes educational policy failure.

- Data collection systems enabling local-level workforce profiling to support place-based planning. Without adequate data infrastructure at county or regional level, evidence-based place-sensitive policy remains impossible.
- Support for regional collaborative approaches addressing provider fragmentation while maintaining diversity of pathways. The OneCornwall initiative provides a model for collaborative working that addresses multiple dimensions of educational isolation simultaneously. However, local collaboration cannot substitute for national policy transformation addressing underlying spatial injustice.

5.5.2. Practice Recommendations for ITT Providers

For providers operating in rural-coastal contexts, recommendations include:

- Hub-based and hybrid delivery models reduce travel requirements while maintaining placement quality. Research in comparable contexts confirms that flexible, locally adapted delivery models are more effective than traditional campus-based provision for rural trainees (Eaton et al., 2015; McPherson et al., 2024).
- Enhanced support systems addressing rural-specific challenges, including mentoring programs accounting for professional isolation, peer networks connecting trainees across providers and routes, and financial support for transport and housing. The most effective approaches build place-consciousness for rural teachers (Macdonald et al., 2025).
- “Grow your own” strategies leveraging local connections, alternative pathways, and mature trainees, while attending to diversity implications. These approaches offer significant advantages but require deliberate strategies for recruiting diverse trainees to avoid reinforcing demographic homogeneity (Barnes et al., 2024; Arinaitwe & Corbett, 2022).
- Virtual professional learning communities addressing professional isolation, combined with periodic face-to-face interactions to create hybrid professional communities that leverage technology without treating it as a complete solution (Klar et al., 2024; Carpenter & Munshower, 2019).
- Authentic recruitment communications representing both challenges and assets of rural-coastal teaching, emphasizing the lifestyle dimension that many trainees identify as a key motivation for choosing rural-coastal training (Leach & Bradbury, 2024).
- ITT providers should document place-based challenges systematically to build an evidence base for policy advocacy.

5.6. Further Research

Further research is required to explore:

- Longitudinal retention patterns of rural-coastal trained teachers, examining whether training in a coastal-rural (or rural or peripheral) place affects long-term retention and professional satisfaction.
- Comparative analysis of ITT challenges across different rural-coastal contexts nationally and internationally, determining which aspects reflect general patterns versus local specificities, enabling refinement of the educational isolation framework across diverse geographic contexts.
- The effectiveness of specific interventions addressing educational isolation dimensions, particularly hub-based delivery, place-weighted funding, and enhanced support systems.

- Experiences of diverse trainees in demographically homogeneous areas, examining how cultural isolation operates for ethnically diverse, LGBTQ+, disabled, and other minoritized trainee teachers.
- The role of technology in addressing professional isolation, guided by the critical pedagogy of place, questions whether technology represents genuine reinhabitation or merely compensation for inadequate infrastructure.
- Policy analysis examining how educational isolation is developed and maintained through funding formulas and regulatory frameworks, extending decolonization to policy design.

5.7. International Transferability

While this research focuses on Cornwall, the synthesized analytical framework of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019), critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to position the findings within spatial justice (Soja, 2010) offers a transferable conceptual tool for rural-coastal, rural, and peripheral areas internationally facing similar compound challenges (Grinshtain, 2022). The employment precarity problem, community resilience masking infrastructure inadequacy, and urban-normative policy failures represent patterns evident across diverse geographic contexts in the Anglosphere and beyond (McPherson et al., 2024; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Klar et al., 2024). International comparative research could examine how these patterns manifest in different national policy contexts, educational systems, and geographic configurations, providing the foundation for comparative work that is simultaneously theoretically grounded and context-sensitive.

6. Conclusions

This research demonstrates that ITT recruitment challenges in Cornwall fundamentally arise from the compound interaction of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation, the three dimensions of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). By synthesizing the concept of educational isolation with the theoretical critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) and social capital framework (Bourdieu, 1986), the analysis reveals how place-based inequities are actively produced through policy decisions and resource allocation that systematically privilege urban geographies as normative. The findings challenge deficit-based understandings of rural-coastal education, identifying both significant assets—including natural environment, community connections, alternative pathways to training to teach—and systemic barriers, such as transport dependency, housing displacement, and the employment precarity problem, in shaping ITT experiences. These findings are consistent with, and contribute to, the growing international literature on place and rural teacher education (Tran, 2023; McPherson et al., 2024; Macdonald et al., 2025).

The theoretical contribution of this research is in demonstrating the analytical power of a synthesized conceptual framework, moving beyond description to illuminate the mechanisms through which spatial injustice operates in trainee teacher recruitment. The identification of the employment precarity problem advances understanding of how place-based challenges operate differently than urban-normative assumptions suggest. The recognition that community resilience can mask infrastructure inadequacy reveals a crucial tension between individual and institutional agency and structural transformation, with implications for rural education policy internationally.

Critical pedagogy of place requires both reinhabitation, by creating material conditions enabling sustainable rural-coastal (rural and periphery) teaching through infrastructure investment, place-weighted funding, and coordinated support systems, and decoloniza-

tion through challenging ways of thinking that position rural-coastal areas as deficient deviations from urban norms rather than recognizing diversity of places requiring equitable treatment (Gruenewald, 2003). Until policymakers recognize and address these dual imperatives, rural-coastal ITT will continue to depend on community resilience and provider innovation to mask system-wide spatial injustice. The call to action is clear: education policy must become place-sensitive, recognizing place-based complexity and addressing spatial justice, or it will continue to perpetuate urban-normative assumptions that systematically disadvantage rural-coastal areas and the communities and children they serve.

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