ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

TWICE THE COMMITMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A PROVINCIAL-PAID TEACHER'S LIVED EXPERIENCES AS AN ARAL PROGRAM TUTOR

Lyka Mae A. Gonzales, Naika Patrice A. Ladic, Estelita A. Madriaga
Eastern Samar State University

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra31852
DOI No: 10.36713/epra31852

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of a non-permanent, provincially paid public school teacher serving repeatedly as a tutor under the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program (RA 12028; DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025). Grounded in Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological framework, this study explores how Local Government Unit (LGU)-funded educators navigate the intersection of acute post-pandemic learning recovery demands and structural employment precarity across two implementation cycles. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document analysis were analyzed using modified van Kaam psychological reduction. The findings reveal four overarching themes: Operational and Pedagogical Realities, Navigating Precarity and Policy Incongruity, Strategic Commitment and Future Aspirations, and The Core Essence of "Twice-Committed" Under Precarity. The central essence of the participant's experience is characterized by Pragmatic Dedication – a dynamic balance where vocational commitment and care for struggling learners coexist with calculated self-preservation, out-of-pocket resource improvisation, and the strategic accumulation of portfolio credentials for future permanent Department of Education (DepEd) plantilla appointments. The study offers recommendations for revising local school board resource allocations, recalibrating inclusive support guidelines under CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020, and rationalizing teacher workloads to better support non-permanent educators in national learning recovery initiatives.

KEYWORDS*: Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program, LGU-paid teacher, employment precarity, transcendental phenomenology, learning recovery, teacher workload, pragmatic dedication*

INTRODUCTION

The persistent post-pandemic learning crisis in basic education has compelled educational systems worldwide to execute targeted recovery measures to address severe gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy. Globally, interrupted schooling has led to substantial declines in foundational learning, reduced student engagement, and widening inequality (World Bank et al., 2022). In the Philippines, international large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) have underscored widespread learning poverty, where a majority of 10-year-old learners struggle to read and comprehend age-appropriate texts (World Bank, 2021; DepEd, 2019). In response to this national crisis, the Philippine government enacted Republic Act No. 12028, institutionalizing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as a nationwide intervention. Operationalized through its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) and DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025, the ARAL Program establishes structured, high-dosage tutorial interventions in reading, mathematics, and science across public basic education and the Alternative Learning System (ALS).

While national recovery frameworks, including the broader National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP) and National Learning Camp (NLC), define the policy logic of remediation, the operational success of such programs depends heavily on the educators who facilitate these sessions. Among these facilitators are provincially funded or Local Government Unit (LGU)-paid teachers. Financed through local school board appropriations or the Special Education Fund (SEF) pursuant to the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160), these educators occupy a distinct position within public schools. Regulated by guidelines such as CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020, LGU-paid personnel often carry teaching loads and responsibilities comparable to regular Department of Education (DepEd) plantilla teachers but operate without permanent status, standard benefits under the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (RA 4670), or long-term security of tenure (Tarraya, 2023).

Research on remedial education and tutoring demonstrates that high-dosage, small-group instruction yields significant learning gains when supported by consistent attendance, aligned instructional materials, and trained educators (Nickow et al., 2020; Kraft, 2015). However, the efficacy of these programs relies on the working conditions of the tutors. Empirical studies on Philippine educators serving as ARAL tutors highlight that while teachers display a strong ethic of care and professional dedication (Noddings, 2013), they simultaneously face multidimensional strain, time constraints, resource shortages, and pedagogical demands outside their specialization (Adlawan &

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Paglinawan, 2026). These challenges occur alongside systemic efforts to manage teacher workload, such as DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2024 (immediate removal of administrative tasks) and DepEd Order No. 5, s. 2024 (rationalization of workload and overload compensation), creating an operational tension between policy protections and added tutorial expectations (Tarraya, 2023).

When non-permanent, provincially paid teachers take on the role of ARAL tutors on multiple occasions ("twice-committed"), they navigate a complex intersection of professional dedication, role strain, and employment precarity. According to Organizational Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), individuals holding multiple organizational roles frequently experience role conflict, role ambiguity, and workload overload when demands from different authorities overlap. Through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), tutorial duties present additional job demands—such as preparation time, emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), and potential work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)—that require structural and administrative resources to maintain well-being and prevent burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) suggest that a teacher's willingness to commit to remedial programs despite job precarity may reflect a combination of affective commitment (vocation and care for learners), normative duty, or continuance motives related to contract renewal and career advancement. Understanding these dynamics requires a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016) that examines how educators make sense of their professional identity, agency (Priestley et al., 2015), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) within specific local governance contexts.

Although emerging literature has examined learning loss, tutoring efficacy, teacher workload, and the experiences of regular DepEd teachers acting as ARAL tutors (Adlawan & Paglinawan, 2026; Tarraya, 2023; Nickow et al., 2020), there remains a critical research gap regarding how provincially funded employment status intersects with repeated participation as an ARAL tutor. Existing policy documents prescribe tutor qualifications and administrative mechanisms, yet they do not capture how LGU-paid teachers experience, interpret, and manage their dual roles in daily practice.

Specifically, scholarship has not adequately addressed how job insecurity, local governance structures, compensation arrangements, and aspirations for national DepEd plantilla appointment influence an educator's decision to commit to the ARAL program across multiple implementation cycles. A qualitative phenomenological study is therefore necessary to uncover how structural precarity and professional dedication interact within the lived experience of a non-permanent teacher.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of a provincial-paid teacher serving as an Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program tutor. Specifically, it seeks to uncover the meaning of their commitment to learning recovery despite non-permanent employment status.

This study addresses the following central research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of a provincial-paid teacher serving as an ARAL Program tutor across two implementation periods?
    1.1. How does the teacher navigate the dual responsibilities and expectations of being an LGU-funded educator and an ARAL tutor?
    1.2. What pedagogical, logistical, and personal challenges are encountered during tutorial sessions?
2. How does the participant make sense of their professional commitment and identity given their non-permanent employment status?
    2.1. How do job insecurity and provincial-paid status influence their motivation and dedication to the program?
    2.2. What drives the decision to commit to the ARAL program on multiple occasions despite employment precarity?
3. What is the central essence ("core meaning") of being a "twice-committed" non-permanent teacher in the context of post-pandemic learning recovery?
4. Based on the findings, what insights or recommendations can be proposed to better support LGU-paid tutors and non-permanent educators in learning recovery initiatives?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research design based on the framework developed by Moustakas (1994). Qualitative phenomenology is appropriate for understanding the essence and underlying structure of human experiences regarding a specific phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation is the lived experience of being a non-permanent, provincial-paid teacher who repeatedly serves as an Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program tutor ("twice-committed"). Transcendental phenomenology was chosen because it emphasizes setting aside pre-understandings, judgments, and bias through epoché (phenomenological reduction) to describe the phenomenon as fresh eyes see it (Moustakas, 1994). This design allows the researcher to extract the textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) dimensions of navigating dual teaching responsibilities, structural job precarity, and pedagogical challenges, ultimately synthesizing them into the core essence of the participant's commitment.

Research Participant and Sampling

A purposive, single-case phenomenological sampling strategy was utilized to select an informant capable of providing a rich, detailed, and first-hand account of the phenomenon. Single-case or single-participant phenomenological designs are well-established when the goal is to provide a deep, idiographic,

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and nuanced textural-structural description of a unique lived reality within a specific organizational context (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

The study's key participant was selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Employment Status: Currently employed as a non-permanent, provincially paid/LGU-funded educator under Special Education Fund (SEF) or local school board financing (RA 7160; CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020).
2. ARAL Involvement: Has served as an active tutor in the ARAL Program (RA 12028; DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025) across two distinct implementation cycles ("twice-committed").
3. Institutional Context**:** Teaching in a public secondary school setting (Junior High School) where the ARAL intervention is actively implemented.

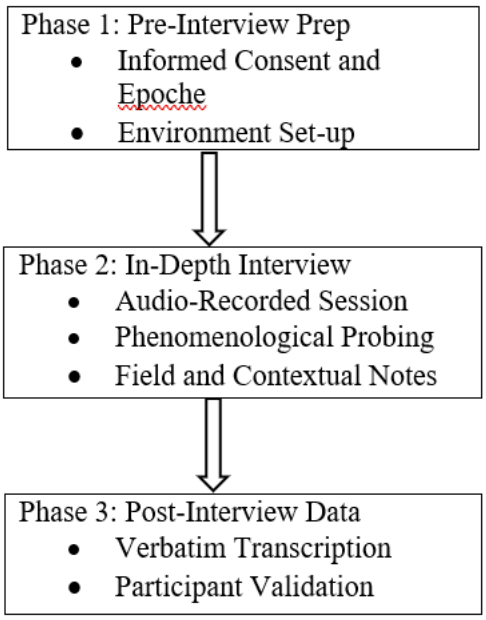
Research Setting and Context

The study was contextualized within a public secondary school—Can-avid National High School—operating under the Department of Education (DepEd). Public schools in this provincial context rely heavily on locally funded teachers to address teacher shortages and manage learner-to-teacher ratios. In this environment, provincially paid teachers carry instructional workloads similar to regular DepEd plantilla teachers but navigate employment precarity, contract renewals, and non-entitlement to regular Magna Carta benefits (RA 4670). This context provides the structural backdrop against which the participant's engagement with the ARAL Program unfolds.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through an in-depth, semi-structured phenomenological interview, complemented by field notes and document reflection. The primary instrument was an open-ended, researcher-developed Phenomenological Interview Guide designed to align directly with the central research questions.

Figure 1. Data Collection Procedure



Steps in Data Collection:

1. Ethical Pre-Clearance and Consent: Permission was secured from school authorities, and written informed consent was obtained from the participant. The participant was fully briefed on the study's scope, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances.
2. Semi-Structured Interview: A 60- to 90-minute face-to-face, audio-recorded interview was conducted in a quiet, neutral environment conducive to reflective dialogue. The guide incorporated broad, non-leading questions structured across four main domains:
   Domain 1: Operational & Pedagogical Realities (Navigating LGU duties vs. ARAL tutoring demands, workload, and session logistics).
   Domain 2: Structural & Employment Context (Perceptions of job security, provincial funding, and compensation under CSC-COA-DBM guidelines).
   Domain 3: Motivation & Professional Identity (Drivers behind committing to multiple ARAL cycles, sense of vocation, and career aspirations).
   Domain 4: Core Meaning & Essence (The lived personal meaning of being "twice-committed" despite precarity).
3. Probing and Field Notes: Follow-up probes were used to capture emotional nuances, tacit meanings, and concrete lived examples. Field notes were recorded during and immediately following the interview to capture non-verbal cues and contextual reflections.

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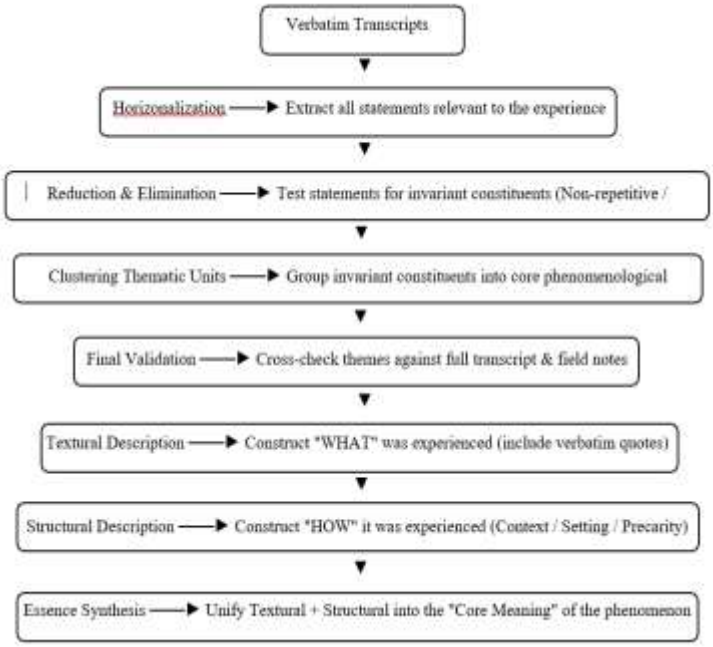
4. Transcription: Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in the original language spoken (Tagalog/English) to preserve authenticity and natural expressions.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of psychological phenomenological analysis. This systematic, multi-step reduction process was executed as follows:

Figure 2. The Procedure for Data Analysis



1. Epoché (Bracketing): The researcher actively recognized and set aside personal assumptions, past teaching experiences, and theoretical expectations regarding teacher workload and employment precarity to engage purely with the participant's account.
2. Horizonalization: Every statement in the transcript was initially treated with equal value. Key statements relevant to the lived experience of ARAL tutoring and provincial employment were highlighted.
3. Reduction and Elimination: Each statement was evaluated against two criteria: (a) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary for understanding it? and (b) Can it be abstraction-labeled? Overlapping, vague, or repetitive statements were eliminated, leaving invariant constituents.
4. Clustering and Thematizing: Invariant constituents were clustered into core thematic units that represented the broader structural and textural patterns of the participant's narrative.
5. Final Validation: The clustered themes were cross-referenced with the complete transcript to ensure they accurately reflected the participant's statements.
6. Constructing Textural and Structural Descriptions:
   - *Textural Description:* A detailed narrative describing *what* the teacher experienced (specific pedagogical challenges, student interactions, administrative demands, emotional moments).
   - *Structural Description:* A narrative describing *how* the experience was shaped by context and environment (the influence of job precarity, local governance dynamics, contract timelines, and professional identity).
7. Synthesis of Essence: The textural and structural descriptions were integrated into a unified statement representing the universal core essence of being a "twice-committed" provincial-paid ARAL tutor.

Research Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure scientific rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry, this study applied the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- Credibility (Truth Value): Enhanced through member-checking, where the transcript, preliminary thematic clusters, and summary descriptions were returned to the participant to verify accuracy and fidelity to their lived experience.
- Transferability (Applicability): Supported by providing a thick, rich description of the participant's organizational, legal, and instructional setting (e.g., LGU-paid status, DepEd ARAL guidelines). This enables future researchers to evaluate applicability to similar educational environments.
- Dependability (Consistency): Maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting every stage of the research process, including raw interview recordings, verbatim transcripts, horizonalization tables, and thematic clustering logs.
- Confirmability (Neutrality): Reinforced through continuous reflexive journaling during the *epoché*

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process, ensuring that the final interpretations were rooted strictly in the participant's narrative rather than researcher bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process:

1. Informed Consent: The participant was provided with a comprehensive consent form outlining the study's purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary, with explicit freedom to withdraw at any stage without prejudice.
2. Anonymity and Confidentiality: To protect the participant's identity and professional standing, pseudonyms were assigned, and all identifiable details regarding specific administrative officers or local government figures were anonymized.
3. Data Security: Audio recordings, transcripts, and analysis files were encrypted and stored in password-protected digital storage, accessible only to the primary researcher. Data will be retained in compliance with standard institutional data privacy protocols before permanent deletion.
4. Do No Harm: Interview scheduling was arranged flexibly to avoid adding stress or interfering with the participant's official teaching and tutorial duties.

RESULTS

Through phenomenological reduction following Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method, four overarching themes and eight subthemes emerged from the verbatim transcript and field notes. These themes encapsulate the textural and structural realities of a provincial-paid teacher navigating dual instructional expectations under job precarity across two ARAL Program implementation cycles.

Theme 1: Operational and Pedagogical Realities

This theme captures the day-to-day instructional demands, logistical hurdles, and physical strains experienced by the teacher as they shoulder learning recovery responsibilities alongside regular duties.

Subtheme 1.1: Workload Overload and Time Crunch

The participant described the intense operational strain of balancing a full regular teaching schedule with the rigorous demands of high-dosage tutoring, which frequently encroached upon personal preparation time and led to physical and emotional exhaustion.

"My official teaching load is already full from 7:30 AM to 3:00 PM. ARAL sessions are scheduled right after, or during what should be my preparation period. You don't just teach for an hour; you prepare diagnostic sheets, track attendance, and monitor progress individually. By the time I finish, I am emotionally and physically drained." (Participant, Lines 42–47)

Subtheme 1.2: Resource Improvisation and Out-of-Pocket Expenditures

Instructional materials specifically tailored for low-performing readers or struggling numeracy learners were frequently delayed or insufficient. To ensure session efficacy, the tutor relied on personal funds to print learning activity sheets and purchase basic incentives.

"The materials sent down from the central office don't always match the functional literacy level of my ARAL learners. I had to contextualize and print my own worksheets. Since I am an LGU-paid teacher, there is no MOOE allocation directly accessible for my tutorial materials, so I pay for the printing out of my own pocket." (Participant, Lines 88–93)

Theme 2: Navigating Precarity and Policy Incongruity

This structural theme illustrates how non-permanent employment status under local government funding (RA 7160 / CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020) shapes the experience of serving in a national DepEd initiative.

Subtheme 2.1: The "Volunteer-Obligation" Paradox

While official guidelines present tutoring participation as voluntary, the participant expressed feeling a implicit institutional expectation to accept the assignment across multiple implementation cycles.

"On paper, serving as an ARAL tutor is voluntary. But in reality, when the school administration asks who can handle the remedial reading groups, LGU-paid teachers feel they cannot say no. Refusing might look like a lack of commitment when evaluation time comes for contract renewal." (Participant, Lines 115–120)

Subtheme 2.2: Systemic Exclusion from Magna Carta Protections

The participant highlighted a felt sense of institutional marginalization when comparing their benefits with regular DepEd plantilla teachers performing identical tutorial duties.

"We do the exact same work as plantilla teachers during ARAL sessions—sometimes even more. But because of Joint Circular No. 2, we don't receive overload pay under DepEd Order No. 5, s. 2024 or Magna Carta benefits. We give full commitment, but our structural security remains non-existent." (Participant, Lines 142–148)

Theme 3: Strategic Commitment and Future Aspirations

This theme explains why the teacher chose to commit to the ARAL Program for two consecutive implementation cycles despite ongoing job insecurity and physical fatigue.

Subtheme 3.1: Contract Renewal and Plantilla Leverage

Participation in nationwide learning recovery programs is viewed strategically as a critical mechanism for professional survival, contract security, and accumulating points for future regular DepEd ranking.

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"I accepted the second cycle because I need to build my portfolio. Every certificate from a national program like ARAL gives me a better chance when a DepEd plantilla item opens up. It is a sacrifice I make now so I can hopefully secure a permanent position later." (Participant, Lines 176–181)

Subtheme 3.2: Vocation and Relational Care for Struggling Learners

Beyond strategic career motives, the decision to remain "twice-committed" is deeply rooted in affective commitment and a sense of moral obligation toward post-pandemic learning recovery.

"When a Grade 7 student who couldn't decode multi-syllable words finally reads a paragraph on their own during our ARAL session, that joy is genuine. Beyond the contract and the points, you realize these children will fall completely behind if someone doesn't step in." (Participant, Lines 205–210)

Theme 4: The Core Essence: "Twice-Committed" Under Precarity

Synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions reveals the core essence of being a twice-committed provincial-paid ARAL tutor.

Subtheme 4.1: Professional Endurance

The essence of the experience is characterized by Pragmatic Dedication—a dynamic balance where vocational commitment to student recovery coexists with calculated self-preservation in an insecure employment system.

"It's a heavy compromise. You endure the exhaustion and the lack of security because you know the kids need help, but at the same time, you are silently hoping that all these sacrifices and certificates will finally be counted when the time comes for a permanent appointment." (Participant, Lines 230–235)

Subtheme 4.2: Reclaiming Professional Agency

Despite working within rigid administrative boundaries and contract insecurity, the teacher reclaims professional agency by delivering tailored remedial instruction, adapting scarce learning tools, and converting structural vulnerabilities into stepping stones for long-term career stability.

"Even if our status as LGU teachers feels temporary and unsupported by regular benefits, inside that tutorial room, I am the teacher. I find ways to make it work, I create the materials, and I make sure these learners get what they deserve. In the end, we author our own professional worth." (Participant, Lines 265–271)

Synthesis of Essence

The essence of being a 'twice-committed' provincial-paid ARAL program tutor is the lived reality of navigating Pragmatic Dedication. It is the experience of standing at the intersection of acute instructional demand and structural employment precarity. The tutor's commitment across multiple cycles is neither pure altruism nor passive compliance; rather, it is an active, agentic strategy to manifest professional care for learning recovery while building the requisite credentials to transcend non-permanent LGU status into permanent DepEd tenure.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study reveal that serving as a provincially paid teacher and a "twice-committed" ARAL Program tutor involves a complex interplay between intense vocational dedication and structural precarity. Aligned with Organizational Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the participant experienced acute role conflict and workload overload. The additional demands of diagnostic preparation, contextualizing instructional materials out-of-pocket, and managing remediation sessions outside regular teaching hours create heavy physical and emotional strain.

Furthermore, the tension between the nominal "voluntary" nature of the ARAL Program and the implicit institutional obligation felt by LGU-paid personnel illustrates the precarity of non-permanent employment under local government funding (RA 7160; CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020). Despite being systematically excluded from regular DepEd Magna Carta benefits (RA 4670) and teaching overload compensation (DepEd Order No. 5, s. 2024), the participant exercised professional agency by transforming these structural vulnerabilities into strategic opportunities. Committing to multiple implementation cycles serves as a vital mechanism for accumulating career credentials, building portfolios, and enhancing prospects for future permanent Department of Education (DepEd) plantilla appointments, all while driven by a deep ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) for learners struggling with post-pandemic learning poverty.

Conclusion

This study concludes that being a "twice-committed" provincial-paid ARAL tutor is defined by the core essence of Pragmatic Dedication. Rather than operating as passive volunteers or pure altruists, non-permanent LGU-funded educators navigate an intricate dual reality: they shoulder the heavy instructional burden of national learning recovery initiatives while operating within an insecure employment structure. Their sustained participation across multiple cycles represents an active, agentic resolution where moral commitment to student learning recovery coexists with calculated self-preservation and the pursuit of long-term career stability in the public school system.

Recommendations

Based on the lived experiences and insights generated by this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

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- Policy Revision on Resource Allocation: The Department of Education and local government units should establish dedicated Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) allocations specifically for non-permanent and LGU-paid tutors to cover contextualized learning activity sheets and session materials, eliminating out-of-pocket expenditures.
- Inclusive Incentive and Support Frameworks: Educational policymakers should review and recalibrate guidelines such as CSC-COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2, s. 2020 and DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025 to explore equitable compensation, hardship allowances, or service credits for non-permanent educators undertaking high-dosage tutoring loads equivalent to regular plantilla staff.
- Workload Rationalization and Mental Health Support: School administrators should implement balanced scheduling that protects LGU-paid teachers from administrative and instructional overload, ensuring that tutorial duties do not encroach upon mandatory preparation periods or induce chronic burnout.
- Future Research Directions: Subsequent researchers should conduct broader multi-case or regional phenomenological studies examining how provincially funded teachers across various divisions experience learning recovery programs, as well as investigate the long-term career trajectories of non-permanent educators transitioning into permanent DepEd positions.

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ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

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