



INSTRUCTIONAL FIDELITY AND THE SPECIALIST GAP: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF NON-ENGLISH ARAL PLUS TUTORS IN MARIKINA

Imelda C. Alcanzo¹, Dr. Ligaya Z. Del Rosario², Dr. Vivian Buhain³,
Dr. Bernie P. Ibanez⁴

New Era University, Philippines
New Era University, Philippines
New Era University, Philippines
New Era University, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This study examines Instructional Fidelity and the Specialist Gap experienced by non-English major tutors implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading-Plus Program in Marikina City. Guided by Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge and García's Translanguaging Theory, the study explores how tutors navigate the challenges of delivering a specialized literacy program outside their field of expertise. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, data are collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving (6) purposively selected tutors. Data are analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and cross-case analysis. Findings reveal six major themes: Procedural Fidelity as a Pedagogical Safety Net; Negotiated Fidelity through Strategic Translanguaging; Learner-Centered Adaptation of Instruction; Self-Directed Pedagogical Compensation and Teacher Agency; Contextual Barriers and Dilution of Instructional Dosage; and The Specialist Gap as a Lived Experience of Professional Adjustment. The study concludes that while instructional fidelity is initially maintained through structured module adherence, the presence of the Specialist Gap compels tutors to adopt adaptive, learner-centered, and context-responsive practices, thereby redefining fidelity as a negotiated and dynamic process. The study recommends targeted professional development, strengthened collaborative support systems, and the institutionalization of translanguaging as an instructional strategy.

KEYWORDS: Instructional fidelity, specialist gap, ARAL Program, translanguaging, ARAL plus tutors.

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Educational equity refers to the principle of fairness in education, ensuring that every learner has access to the resources, opportunities, and support necessary to reach their full academic potential regardless of their socio-economic background or personal circumstances. This mandate for educational equity is firmly anchored in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2020). A key component of this agenda is Target 4.c which emphasizes the recruitment and continuous development of qualified teachers as a central driver of improved learning outcomes. However, recent global monitoring reports indicate that achieving this target remains a persistent challenge, particularly in the context of post-pandemic learning recovery in developing countries (UNICEF, 2024). Despite international efforts, disparities in teacher preparation and instructional quality continue to hinder the realization of equitable education.
2. In the Philippine context, this global commitment is operationalized through the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program under Republic Act No. 12028 (DepEd, 2024). This initiative aims to address learning poverty by strengthening foundational literacy among Filipino learners. However, despite this

structured national initiative designed to mitigate perennial gaps in basic literacy and learning performance, reflecting on the pedagogical challenges remains essential for the program's long-term success.

3. In response to these perennial gaps, systemic issues in program implementation persist. Specifically, the deployment of teachers outside their field of specialization remains a widespread practice, raising significant concerns about the quality and consistency of literacy instruction across schools. At the core of this study is a critical practical problem identified by Miles (2017) as a practical gap, which refers to the disconnect between intended program outcomes and actual classroom implementation.
4. In the case of the ARAL Program, this gap is manifested as a specialist divide, where non-English major teachers are tasked with delivering intensive reading interventions. This misalignment creates significant challenges in maintaining instructional fidelity, as teachers must balance strict adherence to prescribed modules with the need to make pedagogical adjustments due to limited subject-specific expertise. Consequently, the delivery of instruction becomes a negotiated process rather than the consistent and standardized practice envisioned by SDG 4's mandate for quality and equitable education.



5. Supporting studies further highlight the implications of this issue. For instance, recent research indicates that out-of-field teaching is strongly associated with reduced teacher confidence and compromised instructional quality (Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 2024). Similarly, studies by Bunaen et al. (2023) and Mello (2025) reveal that in resource-constrained environments, teachers often prioritize procedural compliance over conceptual depth, leading to an instructional deficit. Despite this, Carroll et al. (2007) emphasize that instructional fidelity remains crucial, as it directly influences the effectiveness of any educational intervention.
6. Specifically, within the Schools Division Office of Marikina, this practical gap is evident in the lived experiences of ARAL tutors who are non-English majors. These educators navigate the complexities of delivering structured literacy interventions while compensating for their limited disciplinary background. As a result, they develop adaptive strategies, such as translanguaging and contextualized instruction, to sustain classroom engagement and comprehension. This localized reality highlights how instructional fidelity is not strictly implemented but rather negotiated within the constraints of actual teaching conditions.
7. Despite existing literature on out-of-field teaching, there remains a limited body of research focusing specifically on the ARAL Reading-Plus Program using a multiple case study approach. This gap underscores the need for context-specific and experience-driven investigations that capture how teachers navigate instructional challenges in real settings. Therefore, this study aims to examine the lived experiences of non-English ARAL tutors in Marikina, with the goal of providing empirical insights into how instructional fidelity can be sustained amid the specialist divide. In doing so, the study aligns with a qualitative multiple case study design, contributing to both local policy improvement and the broader discourse on achieving SDG 4 in resource-constrained educational systems.

2.METHODS

Research Design: This study employed a multiple-case study design following Yin's framework. This approach was selected to facilitate an in-depth, contextual analysis of how non-specialist tutors navigated the instructional demands of the ARAL program. By utilizing six (6) distinct cases, the study enhances analytic generalization; unlike statistical generalization, analytic generalization sought to expand and refine theoretical concepts specifically Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) by comparing patterns across multiple instances.

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, instructional practices, and meaning-making processes within their natural teaching contexts. This method enabled the researcher to capture rich, descriptive data through participants' narratives, classroom interactions, and contextual conditions influencing instructional delivery. Specifically, the

study utilized a multiple case study design guided by Yin (2018), wherein each participant was treated as a bounded case. This design allowed for detailed within-case analysis of individual instructional practices, as well as cross-case comparison to identify patterns, similarities, and variations across participants. Replication logic was applied to examine whether consistent or contrasting findings emerged across cases: thereby, strengthening the analytical rigor of the study. By examining six cases, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of how instructional fidelity is enacted and negotiated by non-specialist tutors across different instructional contexts.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was systematically carried out to capture the authentic experiences of non-English ARAL tutors in implementing the ARAL Reading-Plus Program. Prior to data gathering, the researcher secured formal approval from the Schools Division Office of Marikina and the respective school heads. Participants were identified through purposive sampling based on the established criteria. Each participant was informed about the purpose, scope, and ethical considerations of the study, and informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and permission for audio recording.

Data were collected using three primary methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

For the semi-structured interviews, an interview guide composed of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives was used. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and comfortable setting within the school premises at a time convenient for the participants. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. During the interview, the researcher asked follow-up or probing questions to clarify responses and elicit deeper insights. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and were transcribed verbatim immediately after each session to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

For the classroom observations checklist, the researcher conducted non participant observations checklist during actual ARAL sessions. An observation guide was utilized to systematically record key aspects of instructional practice, including instructional routines, language use (English and Filipino), teacher-learner interactions, learner engagement, and adherence to program procedures. The researcher remained unobtrusive throughout the session and documented observations through detailed field notes. Where possible, multiple observation sessions were conducted to ensure consistency of observed practices.

For the document analysis, relevant instructional and program-related documents were collected, including ARAL modules, activity sheets, progress reports, and monitoring records. These documents were examined to identify alignment between prescribed instructional guidelines and actual teaching practices. Notes were taken to highlight



recurring patterns, instructional modifications, and evidence of program implementation.

All data gathered from interviews, observations, and documents were organized, coded, and securely stored. These multiple sources of data were triangulated to validate findings, ensure credibility, and provide a comprehensive understanding of how non-English tutors implement the ARAL Reading-Plus Program.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected in this study were analyzed using a systematic and iterative process to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the instructional practices, challenges, and contextual experiences of non-English ARAL tutors. The analysis was primarily guided by the thematic analysis framework of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006), complemented by case study analytic techniques proposed by Robert K. Yin (2018).

The entire process of data analysis was carried out in several interconnected stages, allowing the researcher to move from raw data to meaningful interpretations while ensuring that the findings remained grounded in the participants' actual experiences.

Data Familiarization

The analysis began with data familiarization, wherein the researcher immersed in the collected data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, reviewing field notes from classroom observations, and examining relevant documents. This process allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' responses and to identify initial patterns and significant statements.

During this stage, the researcher carefully noted recurring words, phrases, and ideas that appeared across participants. Attention was also given to contextual and behavioral details captured through observation, such as instructional routines, teacher and learner interactions, and learner engagement. This initial engagement with the data provided a strong foundation for the subsequent stages of analysis.

Initial Coding

Following familiarization, the researcher proceeded with the coding process by identifying meaningful units of data within the transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials. Words, phrases, and statements that were relevant to the research questions were highlighted and assigned initial codes.

The coding process was inductive and data-driven, meaning that the codes were derived directly from the participants' responses rather than being based on pre-existing categories. The researcher manually organized the data by highlighting key statements and grouping similar responses across participants. Codes were continuously compared and refined through repeated review of the transcripts, field notes, and documents to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Through this iterative process, a total of 230 codes were generated, reflecting patterns related to instructional routines, language use, learner-centered practices, adaptive strategies, contextual challenges, and professional experiences.

Categorization of Codes

The initial codes generated from the data were systematically organized into broader categories based on shared meanings and recurring patterns across participants. After generating the initial codes, the researcher examined the relationships among them by grouping similar codes into broader categories through a process of constant comparison. In this process, codes were analyzed in relation to one another to identify common patterns and shared meanings, allowing for the formation of more coherent and meaningful groupings.

A total of 230 initial codes were identified and consolidated into 20 categories. These categories represent key aspects of instructional practices, challenges encountered, and adaptive strategies employed by non-English ARAL tutors. As intermediate analytical groupings, these categories helped organize the data into more coherent and meaningful clusters, serving as a bridge between the raw data and the subsequent development of broader themes.

Theme Development

Building on the identified categories, the researcher proceeded with the development of themes by identifying overarching patterns that capture the essence of the participants' shared experiences. This stage involved careful examination of how the categories were related to one another and how they collectively addressed the research questions.

The development of themes was guided by the recurrence, consistency, and significance of the codes and categories across multiple participants and data sources. Through an iterative process of analysis and refinement, the categories were synthesized into six major themes, each representing a meaningful pattern supported by sufficient evidence from the data.

The (6) themes that emerged from the analysis include: (1) Procedural Fidelity as a Pedagogical Safety Net; (2) Negotiated Fidelity through Strategic Translanguaging; (3) Learner-Centered Adaptation of Instruction; (4) Self-Directed Pedagogical Compensation; (5) Contextual Barriers and Dilution of Instructional Dosage; and (6) The Specialist Gap as a Contextual Experience

These themes were not predetermined; rather, they emerged from the data as recurring and significant patterns. This approach ensured that the findings remained grounded in the participants' actual experiences and reflective of the realities within their instructional contexts.

Within-Case Analysis

Within-case analysis was conducted by examining each participant's data individually to gain an in-depth understanding of their unique instructional practices, challenges, and lived experiences in implementing the ARAL Reading-Plus Program. Each participant was treated as a



bounded case, allowing the researcher to develop detailed case descriptions grounded in their specific instructional contexts. This process involved careful analysis of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence to identify patterns, strategies, and issues specific to each case.

Through within-case analysis, the researcher was able to capture the depth and complexity of each participant's experience, highlighting how instructional fidelity is interpreted and practiced at the individual level. This approach ensured that each case was understood on its own terms before making broader comparisons across cases.

Cross-Case Analysis

Following the within-case analysis, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns across the six cases. Guided by Yin (2018), this process involved comparing findings from individual cases to determine whether consistent or contrasting themes emerged. Cases were also examined based on their academic specialization to explore how disciplinary background influenced instructional fidelity and responses to the Specialist Gap.

Through cross-case analysis, the researcher was able to synthesize shared experiences and common instructional practices, which contributed to the development of codes, categories, and overarching themes. This comparative approach strengthened the analytical rigor of the study by ensuring that findings were not limited to individual cases but were supported by patterns observed across multiple participants.

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Operational Data Collection

The data collection procedures were carefully designed and systematically implemented to capture the authentic experiences of non-English ARAL tutors in the implementation of the reading program. Prior to the actual data gathering, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from school authorities and ensured that all ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Following approval, six participants were purposively selected based on the criteria of the study. These participants were non-English major teachers assigned to implement the ARAL Reading Class program. The use of purposive sampling ensured that each participant could provide relevant and experience-based insights grounded in their actual teaching practices.

The primary method of data collection was the semi-structured interview. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was conducted individually in a setting that was convenient and comfortable for the participants to encourage openness and honest responses. The interview guide was aligned with the research questions and focused on instructional practices, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms related to the specialist gap. During the

interviews, the researcher maintained a respectful and conversational tone, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences. Probing questions were used when necessary to clarify responses and to obtain deeper insights.

To complement the interview data, Classroom Observations were conducted to examine how instructional fidelity was enacted in actual teaching situations. The researcher observed instructional routines, facilitation strategies, and learner interactions during ARAL sessions. Field notes were taken to document observable behaviors, classroom dynamics, and any instructional adaptations.

In addition, Document Analysis was carried out by reviewing relevant materials such as lesson plans, instructional guides, progress reports, and ARAL reading materials. These documents provided insight into the intended structure and expectations of the program and served as a basis for comparing prescribed procedures with actual classroom implementation.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy in capturing responses. The recorded data were transcribed verbatim to preserve the original meaning of the participants' statements. The researcher carefully reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy and completeness prior to data analysis.

To establish credibility, Member Checking was employed. The transcribed interviews were returned to the participants for verification, allowing them to confirm whether the transcripts accurately reflected their intended meanings. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify, revise, or affirm their responses.

Furthermore, Peer Debriefing was conducted, wherein a colleague reviewed portions of the transcripts, coding, and initial interpretations. This process helped ensure consistency in the analysis and minimized potential researcher bias.

Through the use of multiple data sources, the study achieved Data Triangulation, strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher maintained ethical standards and established rapport with participants, fostering a supportive environment that encouraged honest and meaningful responses.

Operational Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures were conducted after the completion of all interviews, observations, and document collection. All gathered data were systematically organized and prepared for analysis to ensure accuracy, consistency, and completeness. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents were compiled and organized into individual case folders for each participant (Participants 1 – 6). This organization enabled the researcher to examine each participant's data as a distinct case prior to comparison.



Each transcript was read multiple times to allow the researcher to become familiar with the data and to identify significant statements related to instructional practices, challenges, and adaptive strategies in implementing the ARAL Reading-Plus Program. Initial coding was carried out manually by highlighting recurring words, phrases, and meaningful statements from the data. These were assigned descriptive codes such as “module reliance,” “code-switching,” “repetition strategy,” and “instructional adjustment,” which served to capture key ideas directly from the participants’ responses.

Following the initial coding process, similar codes were systematically grouped into twenty (20) refined categories to ensure analytic clarity and reduce redundancy. These categories represent clustered patterns of instructional practices, challenges, and adaptive strategies observed across participants. The refinement process involved merging overlapping concepts while preserving the integrity of the original data.

These categories were subsequently organized into six (6) overarching themes, which capture the shared and distinct experiences of non-English ARAL tutors in implementing instructional fidelity and navigating the Specialist Gap.

Guided by Yin’s (2018) case study analytic techniques, the researcher first conducted a within-case analysis by examining each participant’s data individually to develop an in-depth understanding of their instructional practices and experiences. This was followed by cross-case analysis, wherein patterns and variations across participants were compared to identify common themes and shared experiences.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data from interviews were compared with observation notes and documentary evidence. This triangulation process was used to verify the consistency between participants’ reported practices and their actual classroom behaviors.

Through this iterative and comparative process, final themes were generated based on patterns consistently supported across multiple data sources. This systematic approach ensured that the findings were grounded in the data and reflective of recurring patterns across cases.

Within-Case Analysis

This section presents the within-case analysis of each participant, identifying patterns and interpreting how each tutor navigates instructional fidelity and the Specialist Gap. While Chapter 3 presented the cases descriptively, this section provides a deeper level of analysis by examining how a participant’s professional background and confidence levels serve as the catalyst for their specific instructional practices.

Participant 1

Participant 1 demonstrates a strong reliance on structured instructional routines, characterized by strict adherence to module-based teaching. This behavior suggests that procedural fidelity functions as a compensatory mechanism; in

the absence of subject-matter specialization, the participant leans on their extensive professional experience to maintain order and flow. Their high level of professional confidence allows them to view the curriculum as a “Pedagogical Safety Net” rather than a constraint. Rather than feeling limited by the prescribed structure, the participant uses it to minimize instructional uncertainty, ensuring that despite the Specialist Gap, the delivery remains consistent and stable.

Participant 2

Participant 2 exhibits a pattern of repetitive instruction and simplified guided practice. Unlike Participant 1, this participant’s actions are heavily influenced by a lower confidence level in content delivery, leading to a Learner-Centered Adaptation that prioritizes mastery over complexity. This choice is rooted in their immediate context—facing the day-to-day struggle of learner comprehension. Their pedagogical behavior is reactive; they negotiate instructional fidelity by simplifying the curriculum to bridge the gap between the material and the learner’s current level. This suggests that for early-career educators, the Specialist Gap is bridged not through procedural strictness, but through an intuitive, empathetic focus on learner comprehension to mask their own content-area limitations.

Participant 3

Participant 3 exhibits a pattern defined by a collaborative and resource-dependent approach, frequently seeking peer support and external guidance to navigate the ARAL Reading-Plus Program. This behavior indicates a reliance on social and professional networks as a vital form of pedagogical compensation. This strategy is deeply rooted in the participant’s awareness of the Specialist Gap; recognizing their own content-area limitations, they maintain high instructional fidelity by leveraging the collective expertise of their department. Their confidence is not derived from individual mastery of the English curriculum, but from their ability to facilitate Self-Directed Pedagogical Compensation. This suggests that for some educators, successfully bridging the specialist gap depends on a communal rather than an individual effort, transforming instructional delivery into a shared professional responsibility.

Participant 4

Participant 4 demonstrates a strong dependence on instructional modules, treating them as the primary and immutable guide for lesson delivery. This suggests a form of rigid instructional fidelity, where strict adherence to program materials serves to mask limited confidence in content knowledge. For this participant, the module acts as a shield against the Specialist Gap; however, this reliance also functions as a constraint, limiting instructional flexibility and responsiveness to real-time learner needs. This pattern reflects both “Procedural Fidelity as a Pedagogical Safety Net” and “Contextual Barriers,” as the participant uses the provided structure to manage both their internal instructional demands and the environmental limitations of the reading program. Their behavior highlights a trade-off where fidelity is maintained at the high cost of pedagogical agility.



Participant 5

Participant 5 demonstrates a strategic and sophisticated use of translanguaging as a key instructional tool. By fluidly integrating both English and Filipino, the participant enhances learner comprehension and engagement in ways that a rigid adherence to English-only instruction might prevent. This reflects a negotiated form of instructional fidelity, where language adaptation is seen as a necessary bridge rather than a deviation. This choice is driven by a high level of pedagogical confidence; the participant feels secure enough in their teaching identity to "bend" the linguistic rules of the program to ensure meaningful learning occurs. Their approach, aligned with "Negotiated Fidelity through Strategic Translanguaging," illustrates how linguistic flexibility can effectively support instructional effectiveness even when a specialist gap is present.

Participant 6

Participant 6 exhibits a distinctive pattern of adaptive teaching that persists despite significant internal hurdles, including instructional pressure and acute self-doubt. This psychological context is critical; unlike more confident participants, Participant 6's instructional decisions are characterized by a high degree of "Professional Resilience." Their tendency to actively modify strategies, adjust explanations, and pivot based on real-time learner needs indicates a dynamic approach born from necessity.

This behavior suggests that the Specialist Gap serves as a catalyst for professional growth; the participant's lack of specialized content knowledge forces a continuous state of pedagogical adjustment. Rather than retreating into rigid adherence to the module, Participant 6 negotiates their self-doubt by focusing intensely on the Lived Experience of the classroom. This results in a highly responsive instructional style that values learner comprehension as the ultimate validation of their effectiveness. For Participant 6, fidelity to the program is not found in following a script, but in the resilient pursuit of learner engagement in the face of their own perceived limitations.

Cross-Case Thematic Analysis

This section presents the cross-case analysis of the six participants, focusing on identifying patterns, similarities, and variations across cases. While Chapter 3 presented the individual cases and emerging themes descriptively, this section provides a deeper level of interpretation by explaining how and why these patterns occur. Through cross-case comparison, the study examines how non-English ARAL tutors collectively navigate instructional fidelity in the presence of the Specialist Gap.

Across all six participants, consistent similarities were observed in their reliance on structured routines, use of translanguaging, learner-centered instructional adjustments, and shared challenges related to the Specialist Gap. Despite differences in teaching experience and background, these common patterns indicate that tutors employ similar adaptive strategies in navigating instructional fidelity within constrained instructional contexts.

THEME 1: *PROCEDURAL FIDELITY AS A PEDAGOGICAL SAFETY NET*

Across all six participants, a consistent pattern of reliance on structured instructional routines was observed. Regardless of differences in teaching experience and background, participants demonstrated a tendency to adhere strictly to module-based instruction and step-by-step procedures. This shared behavior suggests that procedural fidelity functions as a pedagogical safety net, allowing tutors to maintain instructional consistency despite limited specialization in English.

This pattern can be explained by the participants' need to reduce uncertainty in instructional delivery. By following prescribed routines, tutors are able to compensate for gaps in content knowledge, ensuring that lessons are delivered in a structured and predictable manner. This finding aligns with the concept of pedagogical content knowledge proposed by Lee Shulman, where teachers rely on available instructional structures when content mastery is limited.

Furthermore, this pattern reflects a form of risk management, where tutors prioritize procedural accuracy over instructional flexibility. While this supports consistency, it may also limit opportunities for deeper learner engagement and conceptual understanding.

THEME 2: *FLEXIBLE FIDELITY THROUGH STRATEGIC TRANSLANGUAGING*

A recurring pattern across participants is the strategic use of translanguaging to facilitate comprehension. Tutors consistently shifted between English and Filipino to explain concepts, clarify instructions, and support learner understanding. This indicates that instructional fidelity is not strictly implemented as prescribed, but rather negotiated based on learners' linguistic needs.

The use of translanguaging reflects an adaptive response to both the Specialist Gap and learner comprehension challenges. Rather than strictly adhering to English-only instruction, tutors modify language use to ensure accessibility of content. This aligns with the principles of Ofelia García, which emphasizes the fluid use of multiple languages as a resource for meaning-making.

Across cases, this strategy was not a deviation from fidelity but a necessary adjustment to maintain instructional effectiveness. It highlights how fidelity becomes a dynamic and context-sensitive process.

THEME 3: *LEARNER-CENTERED ADAPTATION OF INSTRUCTION*

Across participants, instructional decisions were consistently influenced by learner needs, abilities, and engagement levels. Tutors modified pacing, simplified explanations, and adjusted activities to accommodate varying levels of comprehension. This demonstrates a shared pattern of learner-centered adaptation.



This pattern suggests that instructional fidelity is not rigidly followed but is continuously adjusted in response to real-time classroom conditions. Tutors prioritize learner understanding over strict adherence to program structure, indicating a shift from procedural fidelity to responsive teaching.

This aligns with sociocultural perspectives of learning, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and interaction in supporting learner development. The findings suggest that tutors actively engage in scaffolding practices despite their lack of specialization.

THEME 4: SELF-DIRECTED PEDAGOGICAL COMPENSATION AND TEACHER AGENCY

A strong pattern of self-directed learning and professional initiative emerged across cases. Participants engaged in advance preparation, consulted peers, and utilized online resources to improve their instructional delivery. This indicates that tutors actively compensate for their lack of specialization through independent learning and collaboration.

This behavior reflects teacher agency, where individuals take responsibility for their professional growth despite limited institutional support. The findings suggest that the Specialist Gap does not lead to passive instructional practices but instead encourages proactive adaptation.

This aligns with theories of teacher self-efficacy, particularly Albert Bandura, which highlights the role of belief in one's capability to perform tasks effectively. Tutors' willingness to learn and adapt reflects their commitment to instructional success.

THEME 5: CONTEXTUAL BARRIERS AND DILUTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL DOSAGE

Across all participants, contextual challenges such as time constraints, learner absenteeism, fatigue, and limited instructional resources were consistently reported. These factors significantly affected the depth and continuity of instruction.

This pattern suggests that instructional fidelity is not only influenced by teacher competence but also by external conditions. Even when tutors attempt to follow program guidelines, contextual barriers often lead to shortened lessons, simplified activities, and reduced instructional depth.

The findings indicate that fidelity is constrained by real-world conditions, highlighting the need to consider contextual factors in evaluating program implementation.

THEME 6: THE SPECIALIST GAP AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

Across all cases, the Specialist Gap emerged as both a professional challenge and a lived experience. Participants expressed feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and uncertainty in teaching English literacy, yet also demonstrated resilience and adaptability.

This duality suggests that the Specialist Gap is not merely a structural issue but a deeply personal and professional

experience that shapes instructional behavior. Tutors continuously negotiate their roles, balancing limitations with adaptive strategies.

The findings highlight that despite the absence of specialization, tutors remain committed to delivering instruction, reflecting both vulnerability and professional growth.

While similarities were evident, variations were also observed across cases. Differences emerged in the level of instructional confidence, degree of reliance on modules, and extent of adaptive strategies. More experienced tutors demonstrated greater flexibility and confidence, while less experienced participants showed stronger dependence on structured routines. These variations highlight how individual background and experience shape the enactment of instructional fidelity.

The findings of this multiple case study illustrate a definitive analytical link between the participants' demographic profiles—specifically their professional designation and years of teaching experience—and their navigation of instructional fidelity within the ARAL Reading-Plus Program. Participants with more extensive professional "mileage," such as those holding the Teacher III position, demonstrated a tendency to utilize procedural fidelity as a structural safety net to compensate for a lack of content-area specialization. Their reliance on established instructional routines and module-based teaching provided a sense of pedagogical security, ensuring a stable delivery of the curriculum despite the Specialist Gap. In contrast, early-career educators or those experiencing higher levels of instructional pressure often engaged in reactive adaptations, such as content simplification or strategic translanguaging, to bridge the gap between the material and the learners' comprehension levels. These patterns suggest that while experience fosters a reliance on structure, pedagogical confidence and resilience allow for a more negotiated and flexible approach to fidelity, ensuring that instructional goals are met even when teaching outside of one's primary area of expertise.

4.DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This study explored how non-English ARAL tutors in Marikina implement instructional fidelity, the challenges they encounter, and how they negotiate the Specialist Gap within the ARAL Reading Class program. Using a qualitative case study approach, the findings were analyzed through thematic analysis, which revealed patterns that reflect both the instructional realities and lived experiences of the participants. The summary of findings is presented according to the research questions to ensure alignment between the objectives of the study and the results obtained.

1. What instructional fidelity practices do non-English ARAL tutors in Marikina demonstrate during program implementation?

The findings revealed that instructional fidelity among non-English ARAL tutors is both procedural and adaptive in



nature. On one hand, teachers consistently rely on structured routines such as following modules, implementing step-by-step instructional sequences, and conducting guided reading activities. These routines serve as a form of instructional stability, especially for teachers who are handling content outside their field of specialization. In this sense, procedural fidelity functions not merely as compliance with program requirements but as a practical support system that helps teachers navigate unfamiliar instructional content.

On the other hand, the findings also show that teachers do not rigidly adhere to prescribed instructional guidelines. Instead, they actively modify and adjust their practices in response to the needs of their learners. One of the most evident forms of adaptation is the use of translanguaging, where teachers combine English and Filipino to facilitate comprehension. This practice reflects a deeper understanding of learner realities, particularly in contexts where strict English-only instruction may hinder rather than support learning.

Taken together, these findings suggest that instructional fidelity is not a fixed or purely technical construct. Rather, it is a dynamic process that involves both adherence to instructional structure and responsiveness to learner needs. Teachers demonstrate the ability to balance program expectations with contextual realities, highlighting their role as active decision-makers in the teaching-learning process.

2: What challenges do non-English ARAL tutors encounter that affect their instructional fidelity in the ARAL Reading Class program?

The findings revealed that the challenges encountered by non-English ARAL tutors are both internal and external in nature, and these challenges significantly influence how instructional fidelity is implemented. Internally, teachers experience limitations related to content knowledge, confidence, and familiarity with English instruction. These limitations create a sense of uncertainty, requiring teachers to exert additional effort in preparing for lessons and delivering instruction effectively.

In response to these internal challenges, teachers engage in self-directed pedagogical compensation. They invest time in studying lesson materials, conducting independent research, and seeking assistance from colleagues, particularly English teachers. These actions demonstrate strong professional agency, as teachers take initiative to bridge their knowledge gaps and sustain instructional delivery.

Externally, the findings highlight the presence of contextual constraints such as learner absenteeism, fatigue, limited instructional time, and lack of resources. These factors affect not only the delivery of instruction but also the extent to which instructional fidelity can be maintained. Even when teachers follow structured procedures, the effectiveness of instruction is often reduced due to these conditions, leading to what can be described as a dilution of instructional dosage.

These findings indicate that instructional fidelity is not solely determined by teacher effort or competence. Instead, it is

shaped by a complex interaction of individual capabilities and contextual conditions. This underscores the importance of viewing instructional fidelity within the broader realities of the classroom environment.

3. How do non-English ARAL tutors negotiate the Specialist Gap in implementing the ARAL Reading Class program?

The findings revealed that the Specialist Gap is not only a structural issue but also a deeply personal and professional experience for teachers. Participants expressed feelings of difficulty, lack of confidence, and perceived inadequacy in teaching English-related content. These experiences highlight the emotional dimension of teaching outside one's specialization, where teachers must navigate both instructional demands and internal uncertainties.

Despite these challenges, teachers actively negotiate the Specialist Gap through a combination of adaptive strategies and professional commitment. They rely on structured instructional routines to maintain consistency, use translanguaging to support learner comprehension, and engage in continuous learning to improve their instructional competence. These practices demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of responsibility toward their learners.

More importantly, the findings suggest that the Specialist Gap does not necessarily prevent effective instruction. Instead, it reshapes how instruction is delivered, prompting teachers to become more resourceful and reflective in their practice. This highlights the capacity of teachers to function effectively even in less-than-ideal conditions, provided that they are supported by appropriate structures and opportunities for professional development.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that instructional fidelity, teacher challenges, and the Specialist Gap are interconnected. Teachers do not simply implement instructional programs; they interpret, adapt, and negotiate them within the realities of their context. This emphasizes the need to recognize teacher agency and contextual factors in understanding instructional practices.

The study revealed a significant analytical connection between the participants' demographic profiles and their implementation of instructional strategies. Specifically, participants with more extensive teaching experience, such as those holding Teacher I or Teacher III positions, demonstrated greater adaptive strategies when navigating the challenges of the ARAL Reading Class. While early-career teachers strictly adhered to the literal steps of the curriculum, seasoned educators utilized their professional intuition to modify pacing and tactile engagement based on real-time learner frustration levels. Furthermore, the data suggests that participants with advanced graduate studies showed a higher propensity for instructional fidelity; their academic background allowed them to understand the theoretical why behind the reading interventions, leading to a more disciplined and consistent application of the program's core components. By linking



these demographic details to the findings, it becomes evident that professional maturity and pedagogical training are key determinants in the successful execution of learner-centered reading programs.

Implications

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the implementation of literacy intervention programs, providing both *theoretical and practical* contributions to the field of education. From a *theoretical perspective*, this study reshapes the understanding of instructional fidelity, suggesting that it is not merely a static adherence to prescribed manuals but a dynamic negotiation between teacher agency and contextual realities. The results support the notion that the Specialist Gap can be bridged when pedagogical frameworks account for the adaptive capacity of teachers, implying that theories of instructional implementation should move beyond "strict compliance" models to focus on how educators interpret and adapt programs to meet specific learner needs.

In terms of *practical implications*, these findings suggest that literacy initiatives must provide highly structured yet flexible instructional guides, which is particularly vital for tutors who may not be subject specialists.

To bridge the specialist gap effectively, implications are prioritized across three organizational levels. At the *classroom level*, which is of the highest priority, educators should be empowered to utilize *localized materials* and *strategic translanguaging* to bridge immediate learner gaps, ensuring that instructional goals are met through systematic, well-supported adaptations rather than rigid adherence to a manual. At the *school level*, administrators must provide targeted professional development and sustained mentorship that empowers teachers to utilize materials effectively while maintaining procedural consistency, further fostering collaborative networks where non-specialist teachers can share strategies for overcoming content-specific challenges.

Ultimately, at the *policy level*, the success of these interventions points toward the need for administrative support systems that prioritize *autonomy and resilience*, moving toward frameworks that allow for the professional agency required to bridge learner gaps through systematic and well-supported reading programs.

5.CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Instructional fidelity among non-English ARAL tutors is not purely procedural but inherently adaptive. While teachers demonstrate adherence to structured instructional routines such as following modules and implementing step-by-step teaching strategies, these practices are not applied in a rigid manner. Instead, teachers actively modify their instructional approaches based on the needs and responses of their learners.
2. The challenges affecting instructional fidelity are multifaceted, involving both internal and external factors. Internally, teachers experience limitations in content knowledge and confidence, which require them

to exert additional effort in preparing for instruction. However, these limitations do not necessarily hinder instructional delivery; rather, they prompt teachers to engage in self-directed learning and collaborative practices.

3. The Specialist Gap is both a structural and experiential phenomenon that significantly influences teachers' instructional practices and professional identity. While teachers assigned outside their area of specialization frequently experience challenges related to confidence, content mastery, and instructional delivery, they do not remain passive in the face of these obstacles; instead, they actively negotiate the Specialist Gap by employing various adaptive strategies. These proactive measures include a strong reliance on structured routines, the strategic use of translanguaging, and a consistent engagement in continuous learning and professional collaboration to ensure effective teaching and learning.
4. Instructional fidelity in the ARAL Reading Class program is not a rigid or purely technical construct. Rather, it is a flexible, context-responsive, and teacher-mediated process shaped by instructional demands, learner needs, and environmental realities. This underscores the importance of recognizing teacher agency and providing adequate support systems to enhance instructional effectiveness.

6.REFERENCES

1. Alvarez, M. (2020). *Instructional performance of non-specialist teachers in literacy education*.
2. Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
3. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
4. Berman, P., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1976). *Implementation of educational innovations*. *The Educational Forum*, 40(3), 345-370.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131727609336469>
5. Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). *Defining twenty-first century skills*. In E. Care, P. Griffin, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills* (pp. 17-66). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2324-5_2
6. Bunnaen, P., et al. (2023). *A study of out-of-field teachers in rural schools*. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 4(11), 3968-3978.
<https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.11.23>
7. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
8. Cabardo, J., & Gravoso, R. (2025). *Structured intervention design in literacy programs*.
9. Carroll, C., Patterson, M., Wood, S., Booth, A., Rick, J., & Balain, S. (2007). *A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity*. *Implementation Science*, 2(40). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-2-40>
10. Century, J., Cassata, A., Rudnick, M., & Freeman, C. (2010). *Measuring fidelity of implementation: A conceptual framework for monitoring, outcomes, and contextual factors*. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(2), 199-218.



- <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010366173>
11. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
 12. Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.2167/9781853594748>
 13. Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 300–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285962>
 14. Department of Education (DepEd). (2023). *Learning recovery program guidelines* (Order No. 013, s. 2023).
 15. Department of Education. (2025). *Implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 12028, otherwise known as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act* (DepEd Memorandum No. 058, s. 2025). <https://www.deped.gov.ph/>
 16. Department of Education. (2025). *Implementing guidelines of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program* (DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025). <https://www.deped.gov.ph/>
 17. Durlak, J. A., & DuPre, E. P. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on The influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(3–4), 327–350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0>
 18. Desimone, L. M., & Garet, M. S. (2015). Best practices in teacher professional development. *Educational Psychologist*, 50(3), 252–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2015.1085405>
 19. Flores, M. A. (2021). *Teacher development through experience and reflection*.
 20. Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature* (FMHI Publication No. 231). University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. <https://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo6537>
 21. Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
 22. García, O. (2009). Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/97814405198431.wbeal1223>
 23. Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Kwang, S. Y. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915–945. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915>
 24. Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
 25. Grossman, P. (1990). *The making of a teacher: Teacher knowledge and teacher education*. Teachers College Press.
 26. Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2015). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (4th ed.). Pearson.
 27. Harn, B. A., Parisi, D., & Stoolmiller, M. (2013). Balancing fidelity with flexibility and responsiveness: The dynamics of a tiered system. *Exceptional Children*, 79(2), 181–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291307900204>
 28. Hobbs, L., & Porscht, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Out-of-field teaching across teaching disciplines and contexts*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9328-1>
 29. IJMA BER. (2025). *Instructional deficit in non-specialist teaching*. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. (Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber>)
 30. Javines, F., & Azarias, K. (2024). Teaching outside specialization in the Philippines: A qualitative inquiry into teacher competence. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50(7), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71408>
 31. Kim, J. S., et al. (2020). Improving literacy interventions through structured instruction: Evidence from a randomized orientation. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(S1), S239–S256. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.354>
 32. Kluijtmans, M., et al. (2024). Development of teaching competencies across instructional tasks. *Higher Education Research & Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2312567>
 33. Kyndt, E., et al. (2022). Informal professional learning in teaching practice: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 35, 100424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100424>
 34. Lassila, E., et al. (2023). Teacher identity and professional development in early career stages. *European Journal of Teacher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2023.2238000>
 35. Matalines, R. (2025). Contextualized reading materials and learner engagement in public schools.
 36. Mello, J. (2026). Fidelity and adaptation in reading interventions: A longitudinal study.
 37. Mowbray, C. T., Holter, M. C., Teague, G. B., & Bybee, D. (2003). Fidelity criteria: Development, measurement, and validation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24(3), 315–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109821400302400303>
 38. OECD. (2023). *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13706d3-en>
 39. O'Donnell, C. L. (2008). Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring fidelity of implementation and its relationship to outcomes in K–12 curriculum intervention research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(1), 33–84. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654307313719>
 40. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2024). Republic Act No. 12028: An act establishing an Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program and appropriating funds therefor. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/>
 41. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
 42. Recede, R. A. A., Asignado, R. A., & Castro, M. A. (2023). Out-of-field teaching: Impact on teachers' self-efficacy and motivation. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 4(2), 519–533. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.02.19>
 44. Republic Act No. 12028. (2024). *An Act Establishing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program*. Official Gazette of the Philippines.
 45. Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
 46. Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j463w79r56455411>



47. Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). *Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(7), 783–805.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1) Cited by: 12028
48. UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education – All means all*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.54676/JJNK6927>
49. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press.
50. Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932>
51. Wheeley, E. (2023). *Out-of-field teaching and teacher effectiveness*.
52. Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). *The role of tutoring in problem solving*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x>
53. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.