Teaching Beyond Specialization: Lived Experiences of Non-Language Teachers as Tutors in the ARAL Program

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ABSTRACT

The lived experiences of non-language teachers who served as tutors in the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program at several Philippine public secondary schools during the academic year 2025–2026 were explored in this qualitative phenomenological study. The study aimed to comprehend how these teachers embraced, contended with, and carried out their ARAL tasks, drawing on policy instructions that mobilize teachers beyond their areas of expertise to combat continuing reading gaps. In particular, it posed the following questions: (1) Why did non-language instructors agree to serve as ARAL tutors? (2) What difficulties or obstacles did they face? (3) How did they handle these difficulties? And (4) What advice and insights might they give other non-language ARAL tutors? Data were collected using concurrent written open-ended questions and a semi-structured interview guide created by the researcher.

Four main themes surfaced: a transformative ethic of care and advocacy, proactive pedagogical and contextual adaptation, multidimensional strain in teaching beyond specialization, and an altruistic–compliant commitment to ARAL. Despite struggling with basic literacy skills, a heavy workload, and a lack of resources, teachers accepted ARAL because of moral obligation and professional expectations. Despite these challenges, they adapted imaginatively, worked with colleagues, and viewed their work as part of fixing a societal reading problem. These results highlight the necessity of providing non-language ARAL tutors with context-sensitive literacy instruction, protected time, suitable locations and resources, and organized teamwork. Additionally, these results offer recommendations for future qualitative research on out-of-field instruction, teacher well-being, and the long-term effects of ARAL on students' and teachers' professional identities.

Keywords: ARAL Program; non-language teachers; remedial reading; teaching beyond specialization; phenomenological study

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine basic education system is confronting persistent gaps in reading proficiency and comprehension, particularly among learners in public secondary schools who continue to struggle with foundational literacy skills despite the resumption of face-to-face classes and intensified interventions. National and international assessments have repeatedly highlighted these concerns; for instance, the Philippines ranked significantly below the OECD average in reading in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), underscoring widespread difficulties in understanding and critically engaging with texts (Department of Education [DepEd], 2019). In response to pandemic-related learning loss and long-standing literacy deficits, the government established the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as a nationwide learning recovery initiative designed to provide structured remediation, small-group tutoring, and targeted academic support for learners at risk of falling further behind (DepEd, 2025; DepEd, 2026). Under this program, teachers are designated as ARAL tutors and tasked to deliver reading and literacy interventions in addition to their regular subject teaching loads, making ARAL a central pillar in the country's ongoing effort to address reading gaps at scale (De los Santos et al., 2025; Inquirer.net, 2026).

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Within this system-level initiative, non-language teachers have become key actors in implementing literacy-focused interventions even though their primary training lies in other disciplines. Qualitative responses from non-language teachers in the present study showed that many accepted the ARAL tutor role out of duty, professional responsibility, and compassion for struggling learners, often emphasizing that no child should feel left behind and that reading is a foundational skill that all teachers must help develop, regardless of specialization. However, these tutors were commonly drawn from Science, Mathematics, MAPEH, Social Studies, and TLE, which meant they had to teach literacy beyond their original preparation and content expertise. This configuration, while pragmatic in the face of personnel constraints, has important implications for teacher workload, instructional confidence, and the quality of remedial support. It places non-language teachers in complex roles where they must balance content-area instruction, remedial reading tasks, and program compliance, often within limited time, space, and resource conditions (Batistisa & Siat, 2025; De los Santos et al., 2025).

In this context, several problems and gaps emerge regarding the struggles of non-language teachers serving as tutors in the ARAL Program. Participants' narratives in the present study highlighted recurring difficulties such as inconsistent learner attendance, minimal parental support, low learner motivation, and the challenge of teaching basic decoding and comprehension skills to students already in higher grade levels. Many tutors reported that they were not language teachers yet were expected to handle letter–sound relationships, phonics, and other fundamental reading skills, which they found hard to teach because these areas lay outside their professional preparation. ARAL sessions were frequently scheduled at the end of the day, when both learners and teachers were tired, and were often held in non-classroom spaces such as corridors, multipurpose areas, and shaded outdoor spots due to the lack of designated rooms and competing demands for classrooms. These conditions were compounded by insufficient sets of leveled reading texts, limited visual aids, and a lack of tailored comprehension materials.

Such experiences are consistent with emerging Philippine research on ARAL and remedial reading. In Iloilo, Barotac Viejo, a qualitative study of English teacher-tutors in the ARAL Program reported improved learner reading skills but also emphasized challenges such as irregular attendance, resource constraints, and the added burden of planning and reporting for ARAL on top of regular teaching (Batistisa & Siat, 2025). In Misamis Oriental, a descriptive study documented issues and challenges in teaching remedial reading, including learners' unfamiliarity with letters and sounds, large remedial groups, time constraints, and the need for more phonics-oriented training and workload relief (Siwagan & Ubayubay, 2025). Narratives from reading remediation teachers in Sipalay City likewise highlighted that while learning recovery work can be meaningful, it is also emotionally demanding and heavily dependent on the availability of materials and institutional support (Juguilon, 2024). These local findings collectively point to a pattern in which remedial reading and ARAL-related responsibilities often expand teachers' roles without always providing commensurate structural support.

There is also a clear out-of-field teaching dimension to ARAL implementation, as content-area teachers are deployed to deliver literacy interventions. International research on out-of-field teaching shows that when teachers are assigned outside their specialization, they frequently experience increased stress, perceived inadequacy in content and pedagogy, and a greater need for professional development and collegial support (du Plessis et al., 2014; Hobbs & Porsch, 2022). Recent work extending this line of inquiry reports that out-of-field teachers often have to engage in continuous self-directed learning and creative adaptation to cope with the demands of unfamiliar subject-matter teaching (Ajasa, 2025; Anselmo & Anselmo, 2024). In the Philippine context, qualitative studies on reading and learning recovery have begun to note that non-language teachers drawn into literacy work share similar experiences of role expansion, pedagogical uncertainty, and the need for stronger scaffolding in foundational reading instruction (Batistisa & Siat, 2025; Siwagan & Ubayubay, 2025). At the same time, international research on teacher working conditions links heavy workloads, limited resources, and weak collaborative structures with lower job satisfaction and reduced sustainability of reform initiatives (Toropova et al., 2021).

Despite these contributions, there remains a notable gap in focused qualitative evidence that centers specifically on how non-language teachers in Philippine public secondary schools interpret, negotiate, and cope with the responsibility of teaching literacy beyond their specialization within the ARAL framework. Existing local studies

either concentrate on language teachers' experiences in ARAL (Batistisa & Siat, 2025), focus broadly on remedial reading challenges (Siwagan & Ubayubay, 2025; Juguilon, 2024), or examine ARAL implementation through leadership or policy lenses (De los Santos et al., 2025). Much less is known about how non-language teacher-tutors, with varying years of teaching experience and subject backgrounds, navigate the intersection of policy demands, remedial reading expectations, and everyday realities in resource-constrained schools. Furthermore, few studies have systematically linked demographic factors such as years in service or subject specialization to the specific struggles, coping strategies, and forms of professional learning that emerge in out-of-field literacy work, nor have they deeply explored how environmental conditions—such as conducting sessions in non-classroom spaces—shape pedagogical decisions and teacher well-being over time.

Grounded in these conditions and gaps, the present study aims to explore the lived experiences and struggles of non-language teachers who served as tutors in the ARAL Program during School Year 2025–2026 in selected public secondary schools in Bukidnon, Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to: describe the reasons that led non-language teachers to accept the role of ARAL tutor; identify the struggles and challenges they encountered while serving as ARAL tutors; examine how they coped with or managed these challenges in fulfilling their roles; and derive practical insights and recommendations from their experiences that might guide other non-language teachers and inform school-level and system-level implementation of ARAL. By foregrounding the narratives of non-language ARAL tutors and attending to how specialization, experience, and environmental constraints shape their work, this study contributes a timely, context-specific perspective to the broader literature on learning recovery, remedial reading, and out-of-field teaching in literacy.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of non-language teachers who served as ARAL tutors in School Year 2025–2026. The focus was on how they perceived, felt, and made sense of teaching literacy beyond their specialization, rather than on measuring variables. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret recurring patterns in their narratives.

Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in several public secondary schools in Bukidnon that were implementing the ARAL Program during School Year 2025–2026. These schools form part of the Philippine basic education system and were mandated to conduct remedial and tutorial interventions for struggling learners. They shared common features such as limited available classrooms for tutorials, constrained time for remedial sessions, and varied learner readiness levels, providing a natural setting to examine how ARAL was operationalized in practice.

However, the specific environmental constraints were not uniform across schools. In some sites, ARAL sessions were consistently held in non-classroom spaces such as shaded areas under trees, corridors, and makeshift tents, while others had occasional access to vacant rooms, resulting in varying degrees of comfort, noise, and instructional control. These variations in physical setting formed part of the contextual conditions that shaped how non-language tutors planned, delivered, and adjusted their sessions, and later became analytically important when interpreting their struggles and coping strategies.

Participants

Sixteen non-language teachers assigned as ARAL tutors participated in the study. They specialized in different subject areas: Mathematics (n = 3), Science (n = 5), MAPEH (n = 2), Social Studies (n = 5), and TLE (n = 1). All were formally designated as ARAL tutors in their respective schools during School Year 2025–2026. A purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy was used, with inclusion criteria: (1) currently or recently assigned as an ARAL tutor, (2) not a language major (i.e., not English or Filipino), and (3) willing to participate and share their experiences.

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To contextualize their narratives, basic demographic information was collected, including subject major, years in teaching, and years of involvement in ARAL. As shown in Table X, all participants had one year of ARAL experience, but their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 13 years, with several early-career teachers (1–3 years), mid-career teachers (4–7 years), and more experienced teachers (9–13 years) represented. This spread in subject background and length of service provided a useful basis for examining how career stage and specialization might shape the struggles and coping strategies that emerged in the thematic analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Non-Language ARAL Tutors

Participant	Major	Years in Teaching	Years in ARAL
1	Mathematics	4	1
2	Science	2	1
3	MAPEH	5	1
4	Social Studies	3	1
5	MAPEH	5	1
6	Social Studies	7	1
7	Mathematics	10	1
8	Science	12	1
9	TLE	13	1
10	Social Studies	1	1
11	Science	2	1
12	Social Studies	1	1
13	Science	9	1
14	Science	2	1
15	Social Studies	5	1
16	Mathematics	7	1

Within the acknowledged limits of a relatively small phenomenological sample, this demographic profile allowed the study to explore, at least in a preliminary way, whether Social Studies teachers, for instance, employed different coping strategies from Mathematics or Science teachers, and whether more experienced tutors framed ARAL-related challenges differently from their early-career counterparts.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide and parallel written open-ended questionnaires. The instruments elicited narratives about reasons for accepting the ARAL role, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and insights or recommendations.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was obtained from school authorities, and participants were recruited via invitations. Informed consent was secured before data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or online and audio-recorded with permission; some participants instead answered the same questions in writing. All responses were anonymized and stored securely, and trustworthiness was supported through triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail.

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Data Analysis

Thematic analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts and written responses, coding significant statements, grouping related codes into categories, and developing overarching themes. Interpretations were continuously checked against the raw data to remain faithful to participants' voices.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What reasons led non-language teachers to accept the role of an ARAL tutor?

Analysis of the interview and written responses produced three themes explaining why non-language teachers accepted the ARAL tutor role: altruistic duty and moral commitment, professional compliance and institutional expectation, and personal growth, challenge, and fulfillment.

Several participants described having "the heart" to help struggling learners and expressed a strong belief that reading is the "foundation to learning," making it a noble responsibility to ensure that "no child should feel that they are left behind". Others shared that they accepted the ARAL assignment because all class advisers were required to serve as tutors, because they were designated due to staffing shortages, or because administrators considered them "undertime". Several teachers, meanwhile, framed ARAL as a professional challenge and a chance to experience the joy and fulfillment of seeing learners improve over time.

Table 2. Reasons for Accepting the ARAL Tutor Role

Theme	Illustrative Participants (codes)	Summary Description
Altruistic duty and moral commitment	P1, P3, P4, P8, P9, P10, P15, P16	Tutors accepted ARAL out of compassion, the belief that every learner deserves support, and a view of reading as a noble duty.
Professional compliance and institutional expectation	P2, P5, P11, P12, P13, P14	Tutors responded to school requirements, staffing shortages, and administrative assignments (e.g., being labeled "undertime").
Personal growth, challenge, and fulfillment	P6, P7, P8	Tutors viewed ARAL as a professional challenge and a source of joy and fulfillment in witnessing learner transformation.

Overall, acceptance of the ARAL role emerged as a blend of personal conviction and institutional obligation rather than a purely voluntary or purely imposed decision.

Research Question 2

What struggles or challenges did non-language teachers encounter while serving as an ARAL tutor?

Participants reported four interrelated clusters of challenges: irregular attendance and low learner motivation, instructional demands beyond specialization, time, schedule, and workload constraints, and lack of facilities and learning resources.

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Many tutors commented that learners who most needed help attended sessions irregularly, arrived late, or provided frequent excuses, especially among older students; this pattern disrupted continuity and slowed progress. Non-language teachers also struggled with foundational reading tasks such as letter-sound correspondence, phonics, and basic decoding, noting that these skills lay outside their training and specialization. Some found it difficult to simplify higher-level content without distorting meaning, particularly in science-related texts.

Time and workload were likewise critical issues. ARAL sessions were commonly scheduled at the last period of the day, when both teachers and learners were already tired, and tutorial groups sometimes approximated regular class sizes. Moreover, many tutors reported a lack of dedicated classrooms, chairs, tables, and reading materials, which forced them to hold sessions in corridors, shaded areas, or under makeshift tents and to improvise learning resources.

Table 3. Struggles and Challenges Encountered as ARAL Tutors

Theme	Illustrative Participants (codes)	Summary Description
Irregular attendance and low motivation	P1, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P16	Learners most in need often had poor attendance, arrived late, showed low interest, and were difficult to monitor.
Instructional demands beyond specialization	P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P13, P14, P16	Non-language teachers struggled with phonics, basic decoding, and reading comprehension tasks outside their major.
Time, schedule, and workload constraints	P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P11, P13	Tutors balanced ARAL with full loads; sessions were often scheduled at the end of the day; some tutorial groups were large.
Lack of facilities and learning resources	P3, P9, P11, P15, P16	Tutors lacked proper classrooms, furniture, and materials, relying on improvised spaces and limited resources.

These challenges formed a multidimensional picture of strain that extended across pedagogy, logistics, and infrastructure.

Research Question 3

How did non-language teachers cope with or manage the challenges they faced in fulfilling their role in the ARAL Program?

Despite these constraints, participants demonstrated varied coping strategies clustered under four themes: pedagogical adaptation and creative strategies, collaboration and seeking support, resourcefulness in space and materials, and emotional resilience and reflective practice.

Tutors reported simplifying lessons, using games, storytelling, real-life examples, guided reading, and explicit comprehension strategies (such as questioning, summarizing, and visualizing) to make reading more engaging and accessible for struggling learners. Many sought help from English and Filipino teachers, consulted colleagues on teaching strategies, shared instructional materials, and attended available trainings to strengthen their literacy instruction.

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They also described using whatever physical spaces were available—under trees, in shaded corners, or in temporarily vacant areas—and finding ways to provide printed and instructional materials through personal initiative or collaboration. At the emotional level, tutors coped by consciously remaining patient, reminding themselves that learning takes time, reflecting on what worked or did not work after each session, reconnecting with their original motivation to teach, and celebrating even small learner gains to sustain their own commitment.

Table 4. Coping and Management Strategies of Non-Language ARAL Tutors

Theme	Illustrative Participants (codes)	Summary Description
Pedagogical adaptation and creative strategies	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P12	Tutors simplified lessons and used games, storytelling, real-life examples, guided reading, and comprehension strategies.
Collaboration and seeking support	P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P11, P13	Tutors consulted language teachers, shared strategies and materials, and attended trainings.
Resourcefulness in space and materials	P3, P9, P11, P15, P16	Tutors maximized available spaces and improvised or sourced instructional materials.
Emotional resilience and reflective practice	P1, P6, P7, P10, P14, P16	Tutors stayed patient, reflected on their methods, revisited their reasons for teaching, and celebrated small gains.

These strategies reveal a pattern of teachers actively problem-solving within their constraints rather than simply enduring them.

Research Question 4

Based on experience, what insights, practical advice, or recommendations could the non-language teachers share with other non-language teachers who may serve as tutors in the ARAL Program?

Participants expressed insights and recommendations at both the classroom and system levels, which clustered into four themes: patience, empathy, and learner-centered support, continuous learning and preparation, collaboration and structural suggestions, and purposeful, transformative framing of ARAL.

They emphasized the importance of not making learners feel incapable, encouraging them consistently, recognizing small improvements, and focusing on building confidence and enjoyment in reading. They recommended that non-language tutors study ARAL modules, prepare lessons ahead, seek guidance from coordinators and language teachers, and treat literacy development as a gradual, experimental process requiring repeated practice.

At a structural level, teachers advocated for proper classrooms or designated areas for ARAL, smaller tutor–tutee ratios—ideally five or fewer learners per tutor—and more timely and consistent program implementation. Many framed ARAL as meaningful, transformative work, describing teaching as “not for the weak” and stressing that love and care for students can help tutors “find a way to survive” and sustain their efforts despite heavy demands.

Table 5. Insights and Recommendations for Other Non-Language ARAL Tutors

Theme	Illustrative Participants (codes)	Summary Description
Patience, empathy, and learner-centered support	P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P12, P15	Tutors advise encouraging learners, avoiding embarrassment, recognizing small gains, and building confidence and enjoyment in reading.
Continuous learning and preparation	P3, P4, P5, P8, P13, P14, P16	Tutors recommend studying ARAL modules, preparing lessons ahead, and treating literacy as a gradual, experimental process.
Collaboration and structural suggestions	P2, P3, P9, P10, P11, P16	Tutors suggest working closely with colleagues, seeking guidance from coordinators, and advocating for better spaces and smaller groups.
Purposeful, transformative framing of ARAL	P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P16	Tutors frame ARAL as meaningful and transformative work rooted in love, resilience, and advocacy for learners and the nation.

These insights offer practical guidance grounded in daily experience that can inform other non-language tutors and school leaders implementing ARAL.

Although the sample size of sixteen participants is typical for phenomenological research, it necessarily limits the breadth of contexts and school types represented, and thus, the findings are not statistically generalizable to all regions or secondary schools in the Philippines. Within this bounded sample, however, patterns in the data suggested that early-career teachers (1–3 years in teaching) more often emphasized adjustment to ARAL routines, managing confidence in teaching literacy beyond their major, and relying heavily on prescribed modules, while mid- to late-career teachers with 7–13 years in service more frequently foregrounded systemic issues such as chronic resource shortages, long-standing space constraints, and cumulative workload strain. Social Studies and TLE teachers, who were accustomed to handling text-heavy content, tended to highlight difficulties with foundational decoding and phonics, whereas Mathematics, Science, and MAPEH teachers more often described struggles in simplifying language, explaining vocabulary, and maintaining engagement when literacy was not central to their primary subject. These nuanced differences by specialization and experience informed the interpretation of themes in the Discussion.

DISCUSSION

The findings collectively portray non-language ARAL tutors as professionals who navigate a complex intersection of commitment, constraint, adaptation, and advocacy. Five overarching themes cut across the four research questions and provide a coherent picture of their lived experiences: altruistic–compliant commitment to ARAL, multidimensional strain in teaching beyond specialization, proactive pedagogical and contextual adaptation, a transformative ethic of care and advocacy, and grounded recommendations for strengthening ARAL. While these themes are robust within the dataset, they are nevertheless derived from a relatively small and context-specific group of sixteen teachers in Bukidnon; therefore, the findings should be understood as analytically rather than statistically generalizable and cannot, on their own, capture the full diversity of ARAL implementation across different regions or school types.

First, teachers' altruistic–compliant commitment indicates that ARAL is sustained by both moral agency and institutional authority. Participants did not accept the role solely because they were directed to do so; they also

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believed that no child should be left behind and that reading is a foundational right. This dual basis of commitment is consistent with local findings in which teachers frame their involvement in ARAL as both duty and mission (Batistisa & Siat, 2025; De los Santos et al., 2025). Notably, demographic patterns suggest that early-career teachers (1–3 years in teaching) tended to emphasize compliance and professional expectations more strongly, while mid- and late-career participants (7–13 years) more often framed ARAL in terms of ethical responsibility, accumulated experience with struggling readers, and long-term impact on learners. This observation resonates with international work on out-of-field and identity development, which highlights how teachers' interpretations of new roles are shaped over time by their evolving professional identities (Hobbs & Porsch, 2020; Yuan & Lee, 2022).

Second, the theme of multidimensional strain in teaching beyond specialization highlights structural tensions in ARAL implementation. Non-language teachers were asked to deliver foundational literacy instruction under conditions of limited training, heavy workload, late schedules, large groups, irregular attendance, and inadequate facilities. These pressures parallel those found in remedial reading and learning recovery research in other Philippine divisions (Siwagan & Ubayubay, 2025; Juguilon, 2024; Batistisa & Siat, 2025) and in international work on out-of-field teaching, which documents how assignments outside teachers' areas of expertise create content insecurity, increased cognitive load, and emotional strain (Anselmo & Anselmo, 2024; du Plessis et al., 2014; Ajasa, 2025). The present study adds nuance by showing that these strains were not uniform across specializations: Social Studies and TLE teachers, accustomed to text-heavy instruction, often highlighted challenges in phonics and basic decoding, whereas Mathematics, Science, and MAPEH teachers more frequently described difficulties in simplifying disciplinary language, contextualizing reading tasks, and sustaining learner engagement in an add-on program scheduled at the end of the day. These patterns align with the broader literature suggesting that out-of-field assignments interact with teachers' subject identities and can exacerbate feelings of under-preparedness when adequate support is lacking (Hobbs & Porsch, 2020; Anselmo & Anselmo, 2024).

Third, the theme of proactive pedagogical and contextual adaptation demonstrates that, despite these constraints, tutors show substantial agency and creativity. They designed engaging activities, drew on games, storytelling, real-life examples, guided reading, and simple comprehension strategies; consulted English and Filipino teachers; and made inventive use of physical spaces and improvised materials. Local ARAL and remediation studies similarly report that teachers adjust instruction and collaborate informally to keep sessions meaningful (Batistisa & Siat, 2025; Juguilon, 2024). In this study, experience appeared to play a role in how such adaptations were framed: more experienced teachers (7–13 years) were particularly likely to describe layered coping strategies that combined classroom innovations with system-oriented responses, such as negotiating for better schedules, advocating for more appropriate ARAL spaces, or seeking targeted training, whereas early-career teachers focused more on immediate lesson-level solutions (e.g., games and visual aids) and adherence to modules. These patterns echo international findings that out-of-field teachers gradually develop professional resilience and more complex coping repertoires over time when supported by collegial networks and professional development (du Plessis et al., 2014; Anselmo & Anselmo, 2024; Ajasa, 2025).

Fourth, the transformative ethic of care and advocacy shows that tutors view ARAL as more than a remedial add-on. They see their work as part of addressing a societal reading problem and as an opportunity to shape learners' confidence and life chances through sustained care, patience, and recognition of incremental progress. Philippine narratives of remediation teachers similarly depict learning recovery as both demanding and deeply meaningful (Juguilon, 2024). At the same time, the present study is limited to teacher perspectives; students and school leaders were not directly interviewed or surveyed. This single-stakeholder lens means that the analysis reflects teachers' interpretations of ARAL's effects on learner motivation and school practices without triangulating these with learner or administrative viewpoints. Incorporating students' accounts of their ARAL experiences and administrators' perspectives on scheduling, staffing, and resource allocation in future work would provide a more multi-layered understanding of how this ethic of care is perceived, supported, or constrained across levels of the system.

Fifth, the grounded recommendations for strengthening ARAL offered by participants provide a bottom-up agenda that aligns closely with both their lived challenges and existing research on remedial and out-of-field teaching (Siwagan & Ubayubay, 2025; Batistisa & Siat, 2025; Anselmo & Anselmo, 2024; Ajasa, 2025). Their

calls for smaller tutor–tutee ratios, proper spaces and basic materials, consistent implementation, and targeted training can be translated into more concrete system-level mechanisms, particularly through structured Learning Action Cell (LAC) models. The findings suggest a framework wherein language and non-language teachers collaborate more formally: for example, (a) regular LAC cycles in which English/Filipino teachers act as literacy coaches, co-planning phonics and comprehension lessons with Mathematics, Science, MAPEH, Social Studies, and TLE teachers; (b) case-based discussions where ARAL tutors jointly analyze learner profiles and reading errors to decide on differentiated strategies; and (c) collaborative production of simple reading materials and vocabulary lists tailored to different content areas. In such LACs, Social Studies and TLE teachers could share strategies for teaching with expository texts, while Mathematics and Science teachers could contribute approaches for scaffolding technical vocabulary and problem-solving language, making LAC a structured vehicle for the distributed leadership and shared responsibility highlighted in ARAL-focused reviews (De los Santos et al., 2025; Escarlos, 2025; Hobbs & Porsch, 2020).

Finally, the longitudinal dimension of out-of-field and teacher identity research suggests an important direction for future work. International reviews of teacher identity show that professional identities and expertise are constructed and reconstructed over time through experience, reflection, and shifting roles (Yuan & Lee, 2022). In this study, all participants had only one year of ARAL involvement, and their accounts provide a snapshot of an early phase in their trajectory as literacy tutors beyond their specialization. A follow-up longitudinal design, tracing the same non-language ARAL tutors over multiple academic cycles, and incorporating periodic interviews or reflective narratives, would allow researchers to document how their literacy expertise, sense of self as "ARAL tutors," and coping strategies evolve, and whether the ARAL role remains an additional burden or becomes more integrated into their professional identities.

Taken together, the present study and related literature suggest that the success of the ARAL Program depends on aligning teachers' moral commitment and adaptive capacity with supportive structural conditions. Within the acknowledged limits of a small, geographically specific, single-stakeholder sample, the findings nonetheless contribute a nuanced, phenomenologically grounded account of how non-language tutors live out the demands of teaching beyond specialization. When their ethical motivations and creative strategies are matched by realistic workloads, targeted literacy training, adequate facilities, structured LAC-based collaboration, and leadership that explicitly recognizes the complexities of out-of-field literacy teaching, ARAL can move closer to realizing its promise as a transformative pathway for struggling readers and for the teachers who guide them.

CONCLUSION

The voices of non-language ARAL tutors lead to a central conclusion: teaching beyond specialization in the ARAL Program is both a challenge and a vocation, sustained by a deep ethic of care amidst systemic strain. Participants did not merely comply with an assignment; they reinterpreted ARAL as part of their moral responsibility to ensure that struggling readers were not left behind and that the reading crisis, understood as a societal problem, was addressed in their own classrooms. This moral grounding allowed them to accept out-of-field tasks and to persist despite weariness, uncertainty, and lack of resources.

At the same time, their narratives reveal how learning recovery initiatives, when implemented without sufficient structural support, can depend heavily on the unrecognized emotional and professional labor of teachers. The difficulty of teaching foundational reading skills without specialized training, the pressure of additional sessions scheduled at the end of the day, and the need to tutor in under-resourced environments illustrate limits in current support systems. These realities echo broader patterns in out-of-field teaching and remedial programs, where teachers often internalize systemic gaps and respond through personal sacrifice rather than systemic remedy (Liongson, 2023; Out-of-field teaching in the Philippines, 2026; Soriano, 2024; Issues and challenges in teaching remedial reading, 2025)(Dadula & Fernandez, 2026; Liongson, 2023; Soriano, 2024).

Yet within these constraints, participants' coping strategies and recommendations demonstrate transformative possibilities. Through creative pedagogies, collaborative learning with colleagues, celebration of incremental learner gains, and continual return to their "why" in teaching, they turned ARAL into a space where new professional identities could emerge—identities that blend subject specialization with emerging literacy

expertise and classroom instruction with advocacy for reading as a public good. In this sense, ARAL became not only an added task but also a site of professional growth and renewed purpose.

Overall, the study suggests that ARAL, as experienced by non-language tutors, is a boundary space that exposes the limits of existing structures while also revealing the depth of teachers' commitment and capacity to adapt. Learning recovery will remain fragile if it rests primarily on individual heroism; it becomes sustainable only when teacher agency is matched by policies and systems that listen to, learn from, and materially support those who implement ARAL on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For School Leaders and ARAL Coordinators

1. Recognize ARAL tutoring as substantial professional work.
   Formally acknowledge ARAL tutoring in performance appraisals, work plans, and school recognition programs as a significant teaching responsibility rather than a peripheral duty. This signals institutional respect for teachers' moral and professional commitment, especially for non-language teachers who are teaching beyond their specialization and managing additional emotional and cognitive load.

2. Implement structured, literacy-focused Learning Action Cells (LACs).
   Move beyond purely informal collaboration by institutionalizing regular LAC cycles where English and Filipino teachers act as literacy coaches to non-language ARAL tutors. In these sessions, language and non-language teachers can: co-analyze actual ARAL learner work, co-design phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension activities, and co-create simple reading materials linked to Mathematics, Science, MAPEH, TLE, and Social Studies content. This structured model helps address gaps in foundational literacy pedagogy, particularly for early-career and out-of-field tutors, and distributes expertise more equitably across the faculty.

3. Improve scheduling and protect time for ARAL.
   Avoid consistently placing ARAL at the last period of the day when learners and teachers are already fatigued. Explore integrating ARAL into the school day through shorter, focused blocks, and coordinate ARAL schedules with regular subject teaching and advisory responsibilities to minimize overload, especially for teachers handling multiple roles (e.g., adviser, coordinator, and ARAL tutor).

4. Provide suitable spaces and basic materials across schools.
   Assign dedicated or at least stable spaces for ARAL sessions and ensure the availability of essential materials such as leveled reading texts, manipulatives, visual aids, and simple comprehension worksheets. Where some schools rely on shaded outdoor areas or corridors, school leaders should systematically plan to mitigate noise, distraction, and discomfort. This responds directly to tutors' experiences of improvised venues and resource scarcity and helps create a more conducive environment for struggling readers.

5. Involve ARAL tutors in school-level decision-making.
   Include non-language ARAL tutors in planning discussions about learner selection, grouping, scheduling, and monitoring mechanisms. Teachers with different majors and years in service can surface distinct insights—for example, Social Studies and TLE teachers may highlight text demands, while Mathematics and MAPEH teachers may emphasize numeracy and engagement issues. Drawing on this diversity can lead to more realistic and responsive implementation plans.

For Division and Regional Offices

1. Provide targeted, differentiated training in foundational literacy for non-language teachers.
   Develop short, practice-oriented training packages on phonemic awareness, decoding, guided oral reading, and comprehension strategies tailored specifically to non-language ARAL tutors. Consider differentiated strands for Mathematics/Science, Social Studies/TLE, and MAPEH teachers so that

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literacy strategies are illustrated with subject-relevant examples. Training should include opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up (e.g., through LACs or peer coaching) rather than one-off orientations.

2. Support efforts to reduce tutor–tutee ratios and balance workloads.
   Encourage schools to progressively move toward smaller ARAL groups (e.g., 1:3 to 1:5), prioritizing learners with the most severe reading difficulties. Where staffing is limited, divisions can support flexible models such as rotating focus groups, staggered ARAL cycles, or team-teaching arrangements. These measures help ensure that out-of-field tutors can provide more intensive support without unsustainable workloads.

3. Integrate ARAL into teacher well-being and professional identity initiatives.
   Recognize that teaching beyond specialization in a remedial program is emotionally demanding and can affect teachers' evolving professional identities. Include ARAL tutors in division-level well-being programs, reflective dialogue sessions, and mentoring schemes where they can process challenges, share adaptive strategies, and articulate how the ARAL role fits into their long-term professional growth.

4. Embed qualitative feedback into ARAL monitoring and evaluation.
   Enhance existing monitoring tools by systematically collecting qualitative feedback from ARAL tutors on implementation challenges, innovations, and perceived learner changes. Where possible, complement quantitative indicators (e.g., attendance, test scores) with narrative reports or short reflective prompts. These insights can be used to refine guidelines, inform capacity-building priorities, and identify schools where additional support or adjustment is needed.

For Non-Language ARAL Tutors

1. Maintain a learner-centered, strengths-based approach.
   Continue affirming learners' capabilities by recognizing small gains in decoding, fluency, and comprehension, and by prioritizing meaningful engagement with texts over speed or mere completion. Use simple, culturally relevant texts, guided questions, and interactive activities that allow learners to talk about what they read and connect it to their experiences.

2. Treat ARAL modules as adaptable guides rather than rigid scripts.
   Study ARAL materials carefully, but feel confident in adapting them to learners' actual levels and contexts. Simplify language, provide additional examples, break tasks into smaller steps, and integrate games, stories, or visual supports to make content accessible. Where needed, collaborate with language teachers to develop short phonics or vocabulary mini-lessons that can precede or accompany the modules.

3. Build and sustain professional support networks.
   Proactively seek guidance from ARAL coordinators, English and Filipino teachers, and fellow non-language tutors. Participate actively in LACs, peer observation, and informal sharing sessions. As an out-of-field literacy tutor, treating yourself as a learner of literacy pedagogy—rather than assuming you must already know everything—can reduce pressure and open more space for growth.

4. Practice reflective and sustainable professionalism.
   Engage in brief but regular reflection about which strategies work, which learners are responding to, and where you need additional support. Adjust your approaches accordingly and acknowledge personal limits to avoid burnout. Reconnecting with your reasons for choosing teaching and recognizing the long-term, gradual nature of reading development can help sustain your sense of purpose, especially when progress appears slow.

For Policy Makers and Program Designers

1. Align ARAL policies and expectations with school realities and out-of-field teaching demands.
   When refining implementation guidelines under RA 12028 and DepEd orders, ensure that expectations

about group size, scheduling, tutor qualification, and required training realistically reflect conditions in public schools, including the prevalence of non-language teachers serving as ARAL tutors. Consult these tutors, along with language teachers and school heads, as key informants in policy review and design.

2. Frame ARAL as a shared institutional responsibility, not an extra task.
   Position ARAL as a coordinated initiative that clearly defines roles for school heads, ARAL coordinators, language specialists, and content teachers rather than as an additional assignment placed on a small subset of faculty. Policy documents and implementation guidelines should explicitly describe how responsibilities, incentives, and support mechanisms are distributed across these actors to avoid overburdening individual tutors.

3. Institutionalize structured LAC and coaching models in ARAL frameworks.
   Embed explicit provisions for literacy-focused LACs, peer coaching, and cross-specialization collaboration within ARAL policy guidelines, along with minimum expectations for frequency, focus, and documentation. Provide sample LAC designs, modules, or facilitation guides that illustrate how language and non-language teachers can work together on actual ARAL cases and materials.

4. Institutionalize multi-stakeholder qualitative research and feedback loops.
   Support and use school-based and division-level qualitative research on ARAL and remedial programs that foreground the voices of teachers, learners, and administrators. Establish feedback loops where findings from such studies are discussed in policy fora and used to iteratively revise ARAL guidelines, training priorities, and resource allocations.

5. Encourage longitudinal research on ARAL tutors' professional identities and literacy expertise.
   Promote and, where possible, fund longitudinal studies that follow non-language ARAL tutors over several school years to document how their literacy expertise, sense of professional identity, and coping strategies evolve. Insights from such research can guide long-term capacity-building plans and inform decisions about how to make the ARAL tutor role sustainable, attractive, and professionally meaningful.

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