

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Education Students in the Tara, Basa! Tutoring Program at a Local University

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Abstract. The persistent literacy crisis in the Philippines remains a pressing concern, as highlighted by the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which reported a continued decline in learners' reading proficiency. To help address this issue, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) launched a Tutoring Program designed not only to support struggling elementary learners but also to provide pre-service teachers with early teaching exposure and financial assistance. This study examined the lived experiences of education students from a local university who served as facilitators in the program, focusing on how they navigated their dual roles as tutors and developing educators. Adopting a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and were analyzed thematically. Education students engaged in daily tutoring sessions with elementary learners over 20 days, guided by standardized modules. The research explored their preparation, challenges, coping strategies, and personal and professional growth as they fulfilled their tutoring responsibilities. Findings revealed that while participants faced obstacles such as limited instructional resources, time constraints, insufficient coaching support, classroom management difficulties, and learner diversity, they demonstrated resilience by adapting strategies, employing motivational approaches, and maximizing available materials. These experiences enhanced their teaching competence, boosted their confidence, and strengthened their professional identity in preparation for future classroom practice. The study recommends reviewing program implementation policies, enhancing training and mentoring support, and ensuring adequate provision of teaching resources. Overall, the results highlight the dual value of literacy tutoring initiatives: they not only contribute to improving learner outcomes but also serve as a critical platform for equipping future educators with essential skills and dispositions.

Keywords: Tutoring program; Policy enhancement; Reading program; Literacy program development; Professional development.

1.0 Introduction

Education serves as a vital foundation for both individual and societal progress, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking necessary for personal growth and meaningful participation in the economy and society. The United Nations, through Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education as a global priority to foster economic development, social mobility, and democratic ideals (United Nations, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Despite these universal efforts, disparities in educational outcomes remain a pressing concern, particularly in developing countries such as the Philippines. The 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results revealed that Filipino students scored well

below the international average in reading proficiency, underscoring persistent literacy challenges that impede academic achievement and future opportunities.

Functional illiteracy among Filipino children remains a critical concern, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic's prolonged school closures that disrupted learning and worsened reading outcomes globally (Kuhfeld et al., 2023). In response, the Philippine government launched the "Tara, Basa!" tutoring program, a literacy campaign led by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) that mobilizes youth tutors to support struggling readers from low-income families while providing economic assistance to tutors themselves (DSWD, as cited in Sapid et al., 2024). This initiative is particularly timely given the alarming PISA findings that highlight Filipino learners' underperformance in reading and the urgent need to bridge literacy gaps intensified by the pandemic. Comparable challenges have also been observed in other ASEAN contexts. For example, in Indonesia, studies show that many Grade 1 and Grade 2 pupils experience significant reading difficulties due to both internal and external factors—including physical health, motivation, limited concentration, inadequate parental support, and lack of engaging reading materials (Rohimah, 2021; Putri & Rati, 2021; Annela & Safran, 2023). These findings emphasize that early reading challenges across Southeast Asia are systemic, rooted not only in classroom instruction but also in home environments, school resources, and community conditions.

Meanwhile, decades of research on reading interventions underscore the efficacy of systematic, explicit phonics instruction and tailored support to improve literacy, especially among at-risk elementary students (Hall et al., 2023; Tomas et al., 2021). However, evidence from Indonesia reveals that even with instructional interventions, children still struggle with decoding, fluency, and comprehension due to recurring issues such as mispronouncing letters, difficulty with digraphs and affixed words, halting or stuttering reading, and lack of understanding of punctuation and meaning (Annela & Safran, 2023; Putri & Rati, 2021). These regional insights affirm that literacy development requires multifaceted approaches: effective pedagogy in schools, consistent parental engagement at home, and adequate provision of appropriate reading materials. While early literacy has been extensively studied, less is known about the influence of community-based programs like Tara, Basa! that simultaneously address learner outcomes and tutor development in real-world contexts.

Additionally, empirical evidence on effective reading materials—such as decodable texts versus leveled readers—continues to evolve, pointing to the necessity of aligning instructional tools with pedagogical goals (Birch et al., 2022). The ASEAN-based findings highlight the urgent need for integrated interventions that strengthen teacher preparation, parental involvement, and policy support to address the root causes of reading difficulties. Given these challenges and gaps, this study seeks to explore the multi-dimensional impacts of the "Tara, Basa!" program by examining the lived experiences of education students who participated as tutors. Specifically, it aims to understand how involvement in the program influences their professional growth, coping strategies, and instructional practices, while simultaneously addressing the urgent need to remediate reading deficits worsened by the pandemic and to inform the design of literacy interventions that are contextually relevant, sustainable, and supportive of future educators' development.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study explored the impact of the national government tutoring program on students of education at a locally funded university in the Philippines. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing focus group discussions guided by a semi-structured interview protocol to gather non-numerical data such as narrative responses and personal accounts. This design was guided by the principles of Bhandari (2025), who emphasized that qualitative research enables researchers to obtain in-depth insights through textual, audio, and video data, which are essential in capturing lived experiences and personal perspectives. The method was chosen to understand better the personal, pedagogical, and emotional experiences of student tutors involved in the program.

To enhance the credibility and richness of the data, thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns, meanings, and recurring themes from participant responses. As qualitative design allows for open-ended exploration, this approach ensured that the voices of the participants were meaningfully represented, especially regarding their challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceived professional growth. Moreover, the study aligns with the broader

goal of informing future literacy intervention programs by providing evidence-based insights into the practical outcomes and experiential learning gained by education students in community-based initiatives.

The Tutoring Program

The Tara, Basa! Tutoring Program is a national initiative of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), implemented in partnership with local government units and higher education institutions. It was designed as a community-based literacy intervention to address persistent reading difficulties among elementary learners, particularly those from low-income households, while simultaneously providing pre-service teachers with meaningful teaching experiences and financial assistance. Under the program, each education student is assigned at least five elementary learners identified as struggling readers. Tutors facilitate daily literacy sessions lasting two to three hours over a period of twenty (20) days, guided by structured learning modules prepared by the DSWD and the Department of Education (DepEd). The modules emphasize foundational reading skills such as decoding, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension, and incorporate learner-centered strategies including story reading, guided oral reading, and interactive literacy games.

What makes the program unique is its dual intervention. First, it directly supports elementary learners through structured and sustained reading tutorials that extend beyond regular classroom instruction. Second, it provides education students with early field exposure and experiential learning, allowing them to practice classroom management, develop adaptive teaching strategies, and strengthen their professional identity. In addition, the program integrates a financial aid component, ensuring that tutors receive compensation for their service, thereby reducing the economic burden on pre-service teachers while they engage in training. By embedding literacy support within community contexts, the Tara, Basa! Tutoring Program exemplifies a holistic approach that combines educational intervention with socio-economic support. This makes it an important case study for understanding the dual benefits of literacy programs—improving learner outcomes and preparing future educators for real-world teaching practice.

2.2 Research Participants

The study involved six (6) education students enrolled in teacher education programs who participated in the tutoring program. This national government initiative aims to address reading difficulties among struggling learners while providing financial support to education students and empowering future educators through practical experiences. Participants were purposively selected based on their actual involvement in the program, availability, and willingness to share their experiences. This purposive sampling ensured that participants could provide meaningful insights into the program's implementation and its personal and professional impact. Guided by the principle of data saturation, the inclusion of six participants was deemed sufficient to achieve depth and reliability of findings. This sample size allowed for a focused yet comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and reflections, forming a strong basis for evaluating and improving literacy intervention programs at the pre-service level.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary data-gathering tool for this study was a semi-structured, in-depth interview guide developed to explore the experiences of education students who participated in the Tutoring Program. The instrument was designed to capture participants' personal narratives and reflections on how the program influenced their personal and pedagogical development. The interview guide centered on four key areas: (1) participants' experiences and roles in the program, (2) their preparation and teaching strategies, (3) the challenges they encountered and the coping mechanisms they employed, and (4) their insights and recommendations for improving similar initiatives. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility during the interviews, enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probe for deeper insights when necessary. To ensure the instrument's content validity and alignment with the study's objectives, it was reviewed and validated by experts in higher and basic education, as well as a professional in social welfare and development. The final version of the interview guide served as the primary tool for collecting rich, qualitative data on the lived experiences of the student facilitators. All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of the participants, in full adherence to ethical standards, including confidentiality and voluntary participation. The data gathered through this process were analyzed thematically to construct a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences within the Tara, Basa! Program.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the local university, specifically the College of Education. Each participant received a consent letter outlining the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the assurance of confidentiality, in full compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participation was voluntary. Data were gathered through individual interviews lasting approximately 40 minutes, using open-ended questions designed to explore participants' personal experiences, the perceived impact of the program on their academic and professional development, the challenges they encountered, and their recommendations for improving similar initiatives. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researchers to probe deeper and uncover emergent themes beyond the original scope of the guide. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy of transcription and analysis. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant insights across participants' responses. This approach enabled the researchers to construct a rich, nuanced understanding of how the Tara, Basa! Program contributed to the pedagogical growth and professional readiness of the participating pre-service teachers.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical research standards. All participants were involved voluntarily, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. They were clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequence. All personal data was treated with the highest level of confidentiality and anonymity, securely stored, and used exclusively for academic research purposes. These measures ensured the protection of participants' rights and the overall integrity of the research process.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1. Readiness for Facilitation

Readiness for facilitation emerged as a central theme in understanding the experiences of student-facilitators in the Tara, Basa! program. This readiness encompasses the holistic preparation of facilitators in terms of their physical, mental, and pedagogical capacities. Since Tara, Basa! aims to improve literacy and motivation among struggling readers, facilitators need to be proactive, resourceful, and flexible. Their readiness served as the foundation for meaningful engagement with learners and was essential for managing challenges and ensuring effective instruction.

Physical Preparation

Physical readiness was emphasized as crucial to the facilitators' ability to engage learners. This included preparing instructional materials, establishing routines, and maintaining a professional appearance. Facilitators recognized that these actions created an environment that motivated children to participate and learn. Examples of their responses include:

"I prepared materials such as the learning materials and instructional materials I would use. You also need to get active physically, not just for yourself but also for your learners, for you to better engage them." (P1)

"Before the start of the Tara, Basa! Program and materials were provided, so I made sure to prepare them along with myself. I slept early to ensure that I would be ready once the program began. As I mentioned earlier, I organized the materials to show the kids that I was excited to teach them." (P2)

"I made sure that all of my materials are already prepared." (P4)

"Physical appearance is also important in performing our roles. I collected all necessary documents and carefully chose my professional attire. Naniniwala kasi ako na we are one of the best visuals, kaya kailangan disente tayo when it comes to wearing clothes." (P6)

These responses highlight that physical readiness is not limited to organizing materials but also involves projecting professionalism and enthusiasm. Hall et al. (2023) emphasized that structured preparation, including material organization and physical presentation, improves the effectiveness of literacy interventions. In Tara,

Basa!, such preparation also modeled discipline and commitment for learners, creating a positive learning environment.

Mental Preparation

Mental readiness involved emotional regulation, focus, and developing a strategic mindset to meet the needs of diverse learners. Facilitators described:

"You need to be mentally prepared since every student has different behavior; you need to know how to manage them." (P1)

"I did rest because this is the most important thing. I always make sure my brain is not preoccupied so that I am totally prepared and can teach the lesson properly to the children." (P2)

"I prepared myself for the challenges of teaching by thinking about how I would engage with and guide my students. I worked on developing a positive attitude, making sure that I was prepared to encounter various learning situations and communicate well with my students." (P3)

"I had to prepare myself and condition my mind for the time when I would be dealing with children. It was my first time teaching children, so I had to adjust and develop a lot of skills and strategies." (P5)

"I focused on developing patience and a positive attitude. I knew I would face various learning situations and needed to communicate effectively." (P6)

These accounts show that mental readiness extends beyond managing stress; it is about fostering adaptability, patience, and a positive outlook. Facilitators recognized that sustaining mental balance allowed them to remain focused and effective, particularly when addressing the diverse behavioral and learning needs of young students. Kuhfeld et al. (2023) similarly highlighted the importance of anticipating learner diversity and the emotional demands of teaching in under-resourced contexts. In Tara, Basa!, mental readiness shaped not only facilitator effectiveness but also created an environment of encouragement and resilience for learners.

Pedagogical Preparation

Pedagogical readiness encompassed attending training sessions, developing lesson plans, applying classroom strategies, and using assessments to monitor learning progress. Facilitators emphasized the importance of preparation and skill development:

"We attended training and seminars to teach us how to handle the students well and the things that we need to do. You need to know the subject, the sequence, so that students can easily understand it... and the assessment that we need to do to really assess if there is progress in our students." (P1)

"I attended training because they provide it, and also I attended the training for me to become fully equipped during the implementation of the program. I read the book and then just discussed it with the kids. However, as the days went by, I established more routine, rules, and more play-based learning since it is part of the pedagogical strategies, so the kids can learn to focus during class." (P2)

"I went through several seminars and training sessions prior to taking up my role as a learning facilitator. These sessions addressed important topics like the correct use of assessment tools, student behavior, and the role's responsibilities." (P3)

"I reminded myself of the objectives that needed to be achieved." (P4)

"We attended several training sessions, such as seminars on how to handle children's behavior and how to manage reading requirements, especially in assessing the students' reading skills." (P5)

"I attended numerous seminars and training sessions." (P6)

Pedagogical readiness allowed facilitators to integrate theory and practice, applying learned strategies effectively during Tara, Basa! sessions. Llego (2022) and Sapid et al. (2024) emphasize that ongoing professional development,

orientation, and familiarity with learner profiles strengthen instructional competence. In this program, pedagogical preparation enhanced facilitators' confidence, ensured that teaching strategies were responsive to learners' needs, and contributed to a structured and engaging learning environment.

3.2. Positive Emotional Outcomes

Positive emotional outcomes emerged as a key theme in understanding the experiences of student-facilitators in the Tara, Basa! program. Beyond the development of pedagogical skills and instructional competence, facilitators reported significant emotional benefits derived from participating in the program. These outcomes encompassed feelings of personal fulfillment, satisfaction, joy, and a reaffirmation of their professional calling as future educators. In the context of Tara, Basa!, where facilitators worked closely with struggling readers in underserved communities, these emotional experiences were closely tied to witnessing tangible student progress, receiving validation from learners and guardians, and engaging meaningfully in literacy development. The emotional rewards enhanced facilitators' motivation, strengthened their commitment to teaching, and fostered a sense of purpose that extended beyond the classroom. The facilitators described multiple instances of emotional gratification:

"First, I want to say that I am happy because we were given a chance to teach, because it is the problem of our country that most of the students do not know how to read." (P1)

"This one is a big help not just for us tutors but also to those students who were given a chance to be tutored on how to read." (P2)

"The positive one here is that you can see your student knows how to read – there is progress. From a non-reader to a student who knows how to read, even though it is just simple words, they can now create simple sentences." (P3)

"At the end of the day, it was fulfilling to witness their progress and improvement in reading, both in English and Tagalog. Most of all, I felt happy to help kids enjoy reading, which made me even more excited to become a teacher." (P5)

"Aside from always playing with children, there was one time when someone who was a guardian of a student approached me very randomly and gave me positive feedback about my teaching of the child. I considered it a positive experience because it was a sign for me to pursue my passion to teach and mold young minds, and it was one of the highlights I focused on when I was part of the program." (P2)

"Tara, Basa! program is a deeply rewarding experience. I saw firsthand how education could change lives, especially when I focused on managing the classroom. The most meaningful part of the program was seeing the children enjoy reading." (P6)

These reflections demonstrate that emotional outcomes were closely linked to both student progress and community recognition. Facilitators emphasized the joy of seeing learners improve, the satisfaction of fostering a love for reading, and the pride derived from being able to make a tangible difference. In Tara, Basa!, these positive emotional experiences not only reinforced facilitators' motivation but also contributed to the cultivation of professional identity, resilience, and a strong sense of social responsibility. Engaging in meaningful teaching within a supportive program framework enabled facilitators to see the real-world impact of their efforts, which deepened their commitment to education and literacy advocacy.

The emotional gains reported in this study are consistent with findings by Kuang-yun Ting (2023), who highlighted that tutorial teaching supported by reflective practice fosters both pedagogical growth and emotional development among student teachers. Ting's study similarly noted that initial teaching anxiety gradually transformed into confidence and fulfillment as student teachers witnessed learners' progress and applied individualized strategies. In Tara, Basa!, facilitators experienced analogous rewards: the transformation of non-readers into emerging readers provided tangible evidence of their effectiveness, reinforcing their belief in their teaching capabilities.

Furthermore, emotional outcomes such as joy, motivation, and a sense of purpose were strengthened by positive feedback from learners and their families, which served as external validation and recognition of facilitators' efforts. These experiences mirror Ting's findings, where emotional satisfaction emerged as a critical component of

professional growth, enhancing student teachers' confidence and identity as educators. Collectively, the facilitators' emotional experiences in Tara, Basa! illustrate how community-based literacy programs can serve as transformative platforms that nurture both the pedagogical and emotional development of future teachers, reinforcing their dedication to fostering meaningful learning outcomes.

3.3. Academic Gains and Learning Enhancement

Academic gains and learning enhancement emerged as a central theme in understanding the experiences of student-facilitators in the Tara, Basa! program. Beyond the development of content knowledge, the program provided opportunities for participants to strengthen key competencies essential for effective teaching, including communication, collaboration, classroom management, lesson planning, learner engagement, and the application of varied instructional strategies. Facilitators also reported a heightened awareness of learner diversity and the development of adaptability and resourcefulness—skills that are indispensable for navigating the complexities of real-world classrooms. By bridging theory and practice, Tara, Basa! offered participants a form of early field exposure, allowing them to translate pedagogical concepts from coursework into practical teaching experiences while interacting with students in authentic learning contexts. The facilitators described multiple ways in which the program enhanced their academic and professional development:

"Most of all, the interaction I made during those sessions – we really learned how to communicate with them, especially for us education students. It really helps us to know how to collaborate with them." (P1)

"Overall, these things helped me because I became more aware of the possible instances I would encounter now that I am in practice teaching." (P2)

"I learned a lot about teaching by working with real students." (P5)

These responses illustrate how Tara, Basa! facilitated experiential learning, enabling participants to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. The program fostered not only cognitive understanding but also practical pedagogical skills, reinforcing the connection between coursework and authentic teaching contexts. Participants emphasized that exposure to real students helped them anticipate challenges, adjust strategies, and cultivate reflective teaching practices, providing a foundation for their subsequent experiential learning courses and eventual classroom careers.

Classroom management emerged as another critical area of growth. Facilitators reported learning to handle diverse behaviors and varying learning needs, developing strategies to foster a conducive environment for student engagement and learning:

"I managed to establish good classroom management and utilized different ways to handle the children based on their differences and for the challenges." (P4)

"I became more confident in handling a classroom and explaining lessons in a way that children could understand." (P5)

Engagement strategies, including the purposeful use of icebreakers and interactive activities, were consistently applied to reinforce lesson content and maintain student attention:

"I think the most useful technique that I got here is the use of icebreakers, especially for young students. We need to catch their attention and engage them. The icebreaker that I used is not just a game; it is connected to the past lesson, so that we can remind them. We need to activate not just their body but also their mind." (P1)

Participants also highlighted how working with learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds enhanced their sensitivity and adaptability as future educators:

"The program also helped me see how different students learn in different ways." (P5)

"I learned that children have unique learning styles. I gained confidence in managing classrooms and making lessons easy for children to understand." (P6)

These experiences resonate with the findings of Wang (2022), who demonstrated that teacher emotional intelligence, work engagement, and self-efficacy are closely linked to student academic achievement. Wang's study emphasized that emotionally intelligent teachers, who are attuned to learner needs and can regulate their own responses, create more effective learning environments. In Tara, Basa!, facilitators exhibited similar traits: heightened communication skills, empathetic engagement, reflective practices, and confidence in lesson delivery, all of which contributed to meaningful student learning experiences.

Furthermore, Wang (2022) highlighted the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating effect of teacher self-efficacy on student outcomes. Tara, Basa! Participants similarly reported that their engagement in authentic teaching scenarios increased their motivation and sense of professional competence. Early exposure to classroom dynamics allowed facilitators to develop adaptive strategies—such as differentiated instruction, purposeful use of icebreakers, and responsive classroom management—enhancing both their pedagogical skillset and confidence. These findings collectively underscore the transformative impact of Tara, Basa! in bridging theory and practice, fostering emotional intelligence, promoting professional engagement, and preparing pre-service teachers for the multifaceted demands of real-world educational settings.

3.4 Challenges

While the Tara, Basa! program offered valuable opportunities for learning and professional growth. Student facilitators also encountered a range of challenges that tested their adaptability, problem-solving skills, and resilience. These challenges encompassed logistical, behavioral, financial, and instructional dimensions, highlighting the complexities of implementing a literacy-focused tutoring program in real-world contexts. Understanding these difficulties provides insight into the multifaceted demands of teaching young learners and underscores the importance of providing pre-service teachers with sufficient training, resources, and support systems.

Logistical constraints were among the first challenges mentioned by facilitators. Limited access to classroom spaces, particularly during vacation periods when facilities were locked, initially hindered program implementation. Facilitators noted the difficulty of coordinating sessions and establishing a structured learning environment under these circumstances:

"I think the availability of rooms was an issue because the classrooms were locked during vacations, so it was tough to find a room. However, once we got settled, the other challenge was the students' behavior. It was hard for us since we are secondary education students – we did not know how to handle them since they were very different from high school students." (P1)

"The most challenging thing was my classroom management strategies because they were young and naturally playful." (P2)

Financial and resource-related difficulties further compounded these challenges. Some facilitators faced unexpected personal expenses due to the unavailability of promised instructional materials, which placed additional pressure on them while attempting to deliver practical lessons:

"One of the most challenging things I faced was the unavailability of materials required for the program. Although I was promised that all the resources would be available without personal expenditure, this was frustrating and put extra financial pressure on me." (P3)

Instructional challenges emerged primarily from the diverse learning abilities and behavioral characteristics of young learners. Facilitators needed to adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate varying levels of readiness, learning pace, and literacy skills:

"One of the challenges that I experienced is that children have different abilities to grasp the sessions." (P4)

"It was actually challenging to face the diversity among students. I had to deal with some students who were fluent in speaking but struggled with reading, often mispronouncing words. I had to correct them in a way that would not embarrass them." (P5)

"Some grasped the lessons quickly, while others needed more time and help. This difference in learning abilities was a significant challenge for me." (P6)

These testimonies underscore the need for pre-service teachers to cultivate flexibility, patience, and differentiated instructional strategies when faced with heterogeneous groups of learners. The challenges also reflect the broader structural and pedagogical issues inherent in educational programs that aim to serve underserved populations.

The difficulties reported by Tara, Basa! facilitators closely align with the findings of Kilag et al. (2023), who investigated learners' perceived challenges in reading and the implications for school-based reading programs. Both studies emphasize that while tutorial and literacy programs provide enriching experiences for participants, they are frequently constrained by systemic and logistical limitations. In Tara, Basa!, issues such as limited classroom access, inadequate teaching materials, and the need to accommodate diverse learner abilities mirror the challenges highlighted by Kilag et al., where learners reported limited access to age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and engaging reading resources. Participant 3's experience of financial strain reflects a broader concern in program implementation, where insufficient infrastructure and support can compromise both facilitator performance and learner outcomes.

Furthermore, the instructional challenges associated with learner diversity and classroom management are particularly salient. Facilitators in Tara, Basa! reported navigating differences in reading fluency, comprehension, and engagement, requiring them to implement differentiated instruction and flexible pacing. Kilag et al. (2023) similarly noted that learners often struggle with decoding, fluency, and comprehension, and that culturally relevant reading materials in learners' native languages significantly enhance engagement and learning outcomes. These findings collectively highlight the necessity for literacy programs to prioritize facilitator preparation, provide adequate materials, and adopt learner-centered approaches that respond to behavioral, cognitive, and linguistic diversity. Addressing these challenges is critical not only for effective program delivery but also for supporting the professional growth and confidence of pre-service teachers engaging in early literacy interventions.

3.5 Coping Mechanisms

Despite the challenges encountered during the Tara, Basa! program, learning facilitators demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability by implementing a variety of teaching strategies aimed at supporting student learning. These strategies encompassed motivational techniques, creative instructional approaches, structured classroom management practices, and resourceful solutions to material limitations. Such approaches not only enabled facilitators to sustain learner engagement but also reinforced their professional growth, pedagogical competence, and problem-solving abilities in authentic classroom settings.

Facilitators acknowledged that maintaining the attention and motivation of young learners demanded significant energy and effort. They actively employed strategies to captivate learners' interest while ensuring that the lessons remained meaningful and instructional:

"I had to exert extra energy just to engage them and catch their attention while I was teaching, and at the same time get them to follow along." (P2)

A strong sense of responsibility further motivated facilitators to ensure continuity of instruction, even in the absence of provided resources. Some went as far as personally financing learning materials to guarantee that learners remained engaged and supported:

"Other facilitators and I used to spend our own money to provide the materials required for the students' learning. I just had to adapt and control the situation as well as I could. For the benefit of my students, I adjusted accordingly and developed strategies to continue the program even without adequate resources. My passion for their learning motivated me to be resourceful and resilient, making sure that they still got the support they deserved." (P3)

Creativity emerged as a central component of instructional strategies. Facilitators incorporated songs, dance, and interactive activities to sustain attention and encourage active participation:

"I had to come up with different strategies, such as incorporating singing and dancing, to catch their attention." (P5)

In addition to creative methods, establishing structured classroom routines played a critical role in promoting engagement, autonomy, and self-regulation among learners:

"Have strict rules and routines within the class – like giving the children the chance to arrange their own seats and not letting them open the food. By this, I help the children to have a sense of independence." (P2)

The strategies observed in Tara, Basa! facilitators parallel the coping mechanisms described in Kilag et al. (2023), where learners faced challenges in reading but adapted through peer support, material selection, and self-practice. Similarly, facilitators demonstrated flexibility, resourcefulness, and creativity in response to program constraints. For example, P2's exertion to maintain attention mirrors the learners' effort to stay engaged despite challenges, highlighting the reciprocal dynamic between teacher strategies and student responsiveness. Participant 3's personal investment in instructional materials exemplifies the proactive adaptation observed in learners who sought accessible resources to overcome barriers.

Furthermore, facilitators' use of songs, games, and structured routines echoes research emphasizing learner-centered and culturally responsive strategies. Hall et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of small-group, explicit interventions, instructional dosage, and fidelity of implementation, all of which were reflected in facilitators' creative and adaptive practices. Tomas et al. (2021) similarly stressed the value of combining foundational instruction with strategic activities, which the tutors effectively implemented through contextualized games and interactive exercises to reinforce comprehension.

The facilitators' experiences also underscore the dual impact of the program: it supported student literacy while simultaneously cultivating tutors' professional identity and teaching competence. Sapid et al. (2024) noted that real-world teaching experiences develop reflective, adaptive, and socially responsive educators. The Tara, Basa! program reinforced these qualities by requiring facilitators to navigate classroom challenges, engage diverse learners, and implement strategies with limited resources. In doing so, the program served as both a literacy intervention and a transformative teacher training platform, preparing future educators to respond flexibly and creatively to the dynamic demands of the classroom while nurturing learner motivation, engagement, and achievement.

3.6. Recommendations to Enhance Support and Strategies for Education Students in Literacy Programs

Based on insights from the facilitators, several recommendations emerged to strengthen both the implementation of the Tara, Basa! program and the professional development of education students. These recommendations aim to address logistical challenges, enhance teaching practices, and foster a more conducive and engaging learning environment. They reflect a shared understanding among facilitators that well-prepared tutors, sufficient resources, and structured guidance are critical for improving student outcomes and ensuring a positive teaching and learning experience.

Provision of Adequate Resources

The facilitators consistently emphasized the importance of having sufficient and varied learning materials to support effective instruction. They highlighted that integrating both traditional books and digital resources can enrich literacy sessions, particularly for young learners who are often audio-visual learners. Examples include interactive e-books, phonics-based games, and vibrant, hands-on flashcards for vocabulary, storytelling, and sequencing. Facilitators noted that well-prepared, engaging materials not only help students grasp concepts but also allow tutors to experiment with innovative teaching strategies:

"I think additional learning materials, not just books, but also e-books that can be used on computers or gadgets... Especially for young students, who are more audio-visual learners, they engage more when they see pictures and hear sounds... It is also helpful for us, education students, as it allows us to explore and learn how to implement technology in teaching." (P1)

"I think if they provide us with better learning materials, like a well-constructed guide, it would really help students grasp the lessons... Especially as education students, when we are already in the field, we are not just teaching reading. This foundation is crucial for us, so when they give us a better guide, we can truly learn how to implement it the right way." (P1)

"Another recommendation is to provide more teaching materials and resources to make lessons more engaging for young learners... Incorporating interactive flashcards not just for vocabulary, but for storytelling and sequencing... Phonics-based games could turn the often-tedious process of learning letter sounds into a playful adventure." (P6)

"Make sure to prepare everything that is required for the program and distribute it to the educators." (P2)

Availability of Mentors

Facilitators also recommended having accessible mentors or experienced teachers in each school. This support would provide guidance, immediate feedback, and practical strategies, particularly in managing classroom behavior and facilitating young learners. Mentorship ensures that tutors gain confidence, ask questions freely, and learn from seasoned educators:

"Add teachers aside from the coordinator in each school... Tutors will have a chance to gain enough knowledge about facilitating young learners because they will have many questions to ask and many strategies to learn from teachers who are with them in the program." (P2)

"I would also suggest having mentors or experienced teachers guide them during the program to offer advice and feedback." (P5)

Time Allotment

Participants emphasized the need for careful planning and pacing of program activities. Assigning specific letters and competencies to achieve gradually, and extending the duration of sessions, would allow tutors to deliver content more effectively while ensuring learners grasp the material fully:

"The program should assign letters and competencies to be achieved day by day, and not be at a fast pace, and the hour per session should be longer to achieve the goals that the program has." (P4)

Enhanced Capability Training

Ongoing professional development, workshops, and pre-program training were identified as crucial for preparing education students to handle diverse learning needs and classroom challenges. Facilitators suggested more structured training sessions to strengthen teaching skills, lesson planning, and classroom management strategies:

"Ongoing professional development in supporting extra training and workshops that prepare future teachers to enhance their teaching capability and knowledge." (P2)

"Providing more training sessions before the program starts so that education students feel more prepared to teach and handle different learning styles." (P5)

The recommendations provided by the participants of the Tara, Basa! program aligns strongly with the findings and suggestions of recent studies. For instance, Sapid et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of improving the tutor-to-learner ratio, offering consistent mentorship from experienced educators, and providing timely access to instructional materials – all of which were echoed by the participants. Several respondents suggested the need for additional training, structured guides, and support from teachers or mentors during the program, highlighting that future educators benefit significantly from guided experience. Moreover, the call for more engaging and interactive learning materials, including the use of digital tools and flashcards, reflects the need for differentiated instruction to accommodate varied learning styles – another point emphasized by Sapid and colleagues.

In addition, Hall et al. (2023) and Kuhfeld et al. (2023) both advocate for sustained professional development and explicit training in foundational literacy skills, which supports Participant 3's recommendation for ongoing workshops and skills enhancement. Kuhfeld et al. also underscore the need for tailored interventions using screening tools to address learning gaps – this complements suggestions from the participants to provide more

targeted support for learners and allow tutors to adapt their instruction accordingly. Furthermore, Hall et al.'s recommendation to integrate MTSS frameworks aligns with Participant 4's call for a clear day-by-day structure in literacy content delivery, as both approaches aim to optimize learning outcomes through strategic, incremental teaching.

Finally, Tomas et al. (2021) recommend extending the duration and intensity of interventions while integrating both foundational and comprehension strategies. This is reflected in Participant 5's and Participant 6's calls for longer sessions, varied teaching strategies, and broader reading materials that are developmentally appropriate and engaging. The participants' insights reveal a clear understanding of effective teaching practices and the necessity of scaffolded support, which coincides with Tomas et al.'s emphasis on progress monitoring and instructional fidelity. Overall, these correlations underscore the importance of grounding literacy programs in research-based practices while incorporating feedback from those directly involved in implementation.

4.0 Conclusion

The Tara, Basa! program significantly contributed to the professional growth of education students by preparing them across physical, mental, and pedagogical dimensions of teaching. Participants demonstrated readiness through advanced lesson preparation, the application of effective classroom strategies, and a noticeable shift from module-dependent instruction to more interactive, student-centered approaches. This transition reflected their adaptability and willingness to innovate in response to learners' needs, suggesting that programs emphasizing experiential learning can effectively cultivate pedagogical flexibility among pre-service teachers.

Although participants encountered challenges—such as managing diverse student behaviors, accommodating various learning abilities, and navigating resource limitations—they responded with resilience. They employed creativity, flexibility, and patience to overcome obstacles and maintain positive learning environments. These experiences underscore the importance of reflective practice and adaptive teaching strategies, which are critical competencies for educators operating in dynamic classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). For practice, this suggests that teacher education programs should intentionally integrate problem-solving scenarios and real-world teaching opportunities to strengthen pre-service teachers' capacity to respond to classroom variability.

Moreover, the program enhanced participants' confidence and classroom management skills. By incorporating games, clear behavioral expectations, and learner-centered techniques, education students effectively engaged young readers and fostered curiosity. From a research perspective, these findings highlight the value of structured yet flexible literacy interventions in promoting both teacher and learner engagement. Future studies may examine the longitudinal impact of such programs on teaching efficacy, student literacy outcomes, and the sustained use of interactive strategies in formal school settings.

Participants recommended further improvements to program implementation, including more comprehensive tutor training, early and sufficient access to teaching materials, the integration of digital tools, and mentorship from experienced teachers. These recommendations indicate that sustained support and continuous professional development are essential for maximizing the long-term benefits of literacy programs. Future iterations of the Tara, Basa! program could incorporate technology-enhanced instruction and collaborative mentorship models further to strengthen pre-service teachers' pedagogical competencies and adaptability.

Ultimately, the Tara, Basa! program laid a strong foundation for the participants' teaching journey, reinforcing the critical role of experiential, student-centered approaches in teacher education. Its outcomes have meaningful implications for both practice and research, suggesting that integrating hands-on literacy interventions, reflective exercises, and mentorship can contribute to the development of resilient, innovative, and practical future educators.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Joshua Jay O. Eden – editing, writing, supervising, data analysis, encoding, etc
Ramona A. Prado, editing, data analysis, supervising
Rosalie D. Esteban – editing, supervising

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The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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