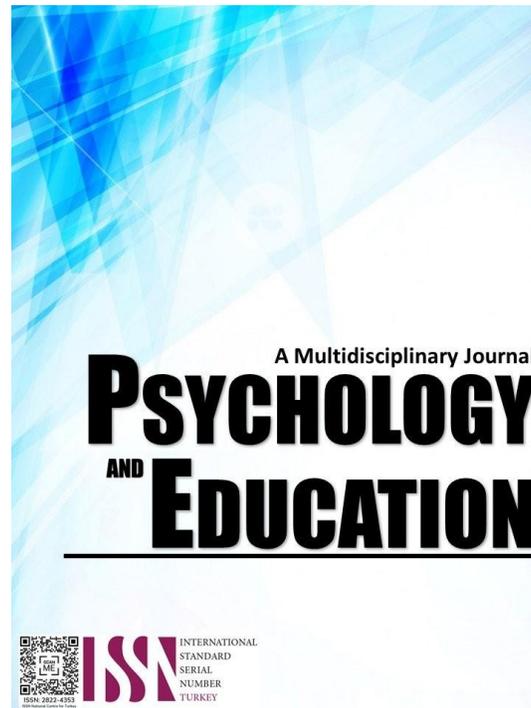


**FROM TUTORS TO TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE
PERCEIVED ACADEMIC AND CAREER IMPACT OF THE
TARA BASA TUTORING EXPERIENCE AMONG
HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS**



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 48

Issue 4

Pages: 611-620

Document ID: 2025PEMJ4673

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.480407

Manuscript Accepted: 09-22-2025

From Tutors to Teachers: A Qualitative Study on the Perceived Academic and Career Impact of the Tara Basa Tutoring Experience Among Higher Education Students

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of academic and career pursuits among higher education student tutors who participated in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program. Employing a descriptive phenomenological design, the research examined how tutoring engagement influenced their academic experiences, career aspirations, and personal and professional growth. Using purposive sampling, fifteen (15) student tutors from a state university in Southern Cebu, Philippines, were selected to participate in focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Through thematic analysis, the study generated key themes under three main domains of inquiry. For academic experiences, the themes identified were Academic Transformation, Professional Growth, and Self-Awareness and Maturity. Regarding career aspirations, the themes included Clarity of Career Calling and Nurtured Commitment to the Teaching Profession. For personal and professional insights, four themes emerged: Sense of Social Responsibility, Character Development, Resilience and Confidence in Teaching, and Professional Fulfillment. The findings revealed that the Tara Basa Tutoring Program fostered improved academic engagement, strengthened professional readiness, clarified career pathways, and cultivated a more profound sense of social responsibility among tutors. The program played a crucial role in developing both instructional competence and personal values, making a meaningful contribution to the holistic formation of future educators. Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating service-learning initiatives, such as Tara Basa, into teacher education programs, emphasizing their dual role in enhancing learner outcomes and shaping the professional identity of student tutors.

Keywords: *Tara Basa Program, service-learning, student tutors, academic transformation, career aspirations, professional growth, thematic analysis*

Introduction

Globally, service-learning has been widely acknowledged as a transformative educational practice that enhances student learning while addressing community needs. It allows students to apply academic knowledge in real-world contexts, promoting civic responsibility, interpersonal development, and deeper academic engagement (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Research has demonstrated that students involved in service-learning often show increased motivation, critical thinking, and improved academic outcomes (Celio et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019). Meta-analyses by Yorio and Ye (2012) and Celio et al. (2011) confirm the positive cognitive, social, and personal outcomes of service-learning across multiple disciplines. Specifically, in the field of teacher education, service-learning has been shown to foster pedagogical competence, professional identity, and social awareness (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2020). Lo et al. (2022) further found that the quality of learning experience and intrinsic motivation significantly influence the benefits gained from such experiential learning programs.

In Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines, service-learning has been integrated into many higher education programs as a way to enrich learning and instill Filipino values of bayanihan (communal unity) and civic engagement. Villaluz et al. (2018) emphasized that community-engaged teaching fosters both academic relevance and social responsibility, especially in teacher education programs where future educators are being trained to be responsive to the needs of local communities. At the national level, the Tara Basa Program was launched by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in response to alarming national literacy data. According to the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 8 out of 10 Filipino 15-year-olds could not identify the main idea of a simple text, which placed the Philippines at the bottom among participating countries in reading performance (OECD, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic further widened this learning gap, disproportionately affecting students from low-income households and limiting access to foundational literacy instruction (UNICEF Philippines, 2022).

With this, the DSWD designed the Tara Basa initiative not only to help young learners recover reading skills but also to empower university students through financial aid and civic involvement. This dual-purpose design reflects the agency's commitment to promoting youth development, educational access, and nation-building (DSWD, 2023). By involving university tutors, the program also serves as a platform for experiential learning and values formation among pre-service teachers. The perceived academic and career performance of tutors participating in community literacy initiatives provides insight into the broader impacts of such programs. The Tara Basa Program emphasizes peer tutoring among higher education students, aiming not only to enhance literacy skills among young learners but also to foster developmental competencies. Through qualitative analysis, the researcher examined how these experiences contribute to tutors' academic influence, career affirmation, and personal and professional engagement in their teaching careers.

Two recent studies on Tara Basa provide context for the evolving understanding of the tutor experience. A phenomenological study conducted at one of the universities in Cebu (Sapid et al., 2024) explored the lived experiences of Tara Basa tutors, revealing themes

of both "chances and challenges." The study found that tutors developed personally and professionally, gained community support and motivation, yet also faced challenges such as classroom management and limited resources. Meanwhile, a mixed-methods study at Quezon City University (Estacio, 2025) investigated the self-efficacy of Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers after participating in Tara Basa. The study concluded that the program had a positive impact on students' confidence and perceived teaching competence, particularly in areas such as classroom management and instructional strategies.

However, despite these contributions, a limited understanding remains of how Tara Basa's tutoring experiences shape the academic direction and long-term career aspirations of higher education students. While prior studies focus on teaching confidence or lived tutoring experiences, few have examined how these experiences influence internal motivation, educational self-concept, and the decision to pursue teaching or related careers. This gap is particularly crucial in the context of pre-service teacher education, where students are not only academically preparing but also forming their career identity. Programs like Tara Basa may serve as catalysts for academic self-regulation, professional commitment, and identity formation, yet these transformative aspects remain underexplored in both local and international literature.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program on university tutors' perceived academic development and career aspirations. By adopting a qualitative lens, it hopes to highlight how national service-learning models can be intentionally structured to support not only educational access but also the holistic formation of the future Filipino teaching workforce.

Research Questions

This study examined the lived experiences of university student tutors to illuminate the perceived academic and career implications of their participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program. It aimed to deepen understanding of how community-based tutoring influences tutors' academic motivation, professional identity development, and future career aspirations, thereby contributing to the improvement of service-learning practices in higher education. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do higher education student tutors perceive the influence of the Tara Basa Tutoring Program on their academic experience?
2. In what ways has participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program shaped or influenced their career aspirations?
3. What personal and professional insights have student tutors gained through their involvement in the program?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design, as it explored the lived experiences of university student tutors who participated in the Tara Basa Program. This qualitative approach is structured to understand and describe the subjective meanings of the informants' narratives in uncovering how their experiences affect their academic development, career aspirations, and professional or personal identity. Descriptive phenomenology is particularly suited for this study, as it aims to capture the essence of a shared understanding among participants, especially regarding their perceptions of personal and academic transformation following their tutoring engagement (Giorgi, 2009).

Respondents

Purposive sampling was employed in this study. Fifteen (15) students from a state university in Southern Cebu, Philippines, were purposefully selected based on their direct involvement as tutors in the Tara Basa Program, initiated by the DSWD. Each participant is currently enrolled in the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year and has completed one full cycle of the program. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to deliberately select participants who possess rich, relevant experiences necessary to address the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide. The instrument was developed in alignment with the three main domains of inquiry: Academic Experience Influence, Career Aspirations Influence, and Personal and Professional Growth. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to reflect deeply on their tutoring experiences in the Tara Basa Program. This approach enabled the researcher to guide the conversation while providing participants with the flexibility to elaborate on their insights and perspectives (Kallio et al., 2016). Prior to its administration, the interview guide underwent expert validation to ensure content validity. Three experts in education and qualitative research reviewed the instrument to assess its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were incorporated.

Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained approval from the College Dean through the Program Chair and the Coordinator of the Tara Basa Program. Once approval was granted, the researcher arranged an orientation meeting with the prospective participants.

During this orientation session, the informed consent form was provided to participants in printed form. The form outlined the purpose and objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any point without any consequences. Informants were given ample time to review the study's purpose and nature, ask any questions, and sign the consent form before participating. After securing informed consent, participants were scheduled for individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions guided by a validated interview guide.

The interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and Semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions were widely used in qualitative research as they enable the researcher to guide the conversation while allowing participants to express their experiences freely (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kallio et al., 2016). Participants were encouraged to be open and honest in sharing their experiences during the interviews.

Following the data collection, a brief debriefing session was conducted to allow participants to reflect on their participation, raise any concerns, and ask questions about the study. The researcher remained available for any follow-up queries and ensured participants understood the confidentiality and academic purpose of the study. All collected data were securely stored and used exclusively for educational research purposes.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis, a widely recognized method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach enables flexibility in interpreting meaning across participants' experiences while maintaining methodological rigor. The process involved the following six phases: (1) Familiarization with the Data, (2) Generating Initial Codes, (3) Searching for Themes, (4) Reviewing Themes, (5) Defining and Naming Themes, (6) Producing the Report. To ensure credibility, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review a summary of their transcribed responses and confirm whether they accurately reflected their intended meaning.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, their right to decline or withdraw from participation at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained through a signed consent form before participation. Anonymity was ensured by assigning participant codes (e.g., T1, T2, and T3), and all data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. The researcher ethically disseminates the findings, ensuring that data, conclusions, and suggestions are disseminated appropriately while maintaining participant anonymity.

Results and Discussion

The Tara Basa Program was more than just a way for young learners to strengthen their reading skills. However, it was also a transformative experience for the university student tutors involved in its implementation. The curriculum provided student tutors with significant academic, personal, and professional development, fostering growth that extended beyond the classroom. The DSWD program's framework exposed students to real-world teaching experiences, social interactions, and mentorship responsibilities, all of which helped strengthen their academic motivation, career aspirations, and professional and personal growth. In this context, the following section presents the themes that emerged from student tutors' lived experiences, put together through the three key domains of inquiry: (1) their academic experiences, (2) the influence on their career aspirations, and (3) the personal and professional insights gained from participation. These themes demonstrate how the Tara Basa Program improved not only the tutees' learning outcomes but also the tutors' educational endeavors. In response to the first research question, the analysis revealed three major themes: academic transformations, professional growth, and self-awareness and maturity.

Theme 1: Academic Transformation

Participants consistently expressed that the Tara Basa Tutoring Program transformed their academic experience by enhancing their instructional skills and deepening their understanding of the material. This aligns with Leung (2018), who emphasized how student tutors develop educational facilitation and leadership competencies through structured literacy engagements. Similarly, Mauer & Swanson (2024) highlighted how tutors sharpen their pedagogical strategies while attending to diverse learner needs, a process echoed in participants' narratives. The experiences of the tutors significantly transformed their academic habits and productivity. Many shared that the responsibility of teaching others motivated them to be more organized, focused, and committed to their own studies. The responses of the following supported these:

"Tutoring in the Tara Basa has motivated me to be more disciplined and organized in my own studies. Also, seeing my students' progress has increased my own motivation to learn and grow." - T10

"Tutoring has improved my focus and motivation by making me more responsible and patient. It also strengthened my learning habits" - T13

"My motivation has also increased seeing their progress and excitement about reading has inspired me to approach my own studies with renewed enthusiasm and a deeper appreciation for the learning process." - T5

This also supports Mauer & Swanson's (2024) assertion that tutoring encourages pre-service teachers to refine their own learning processes through the preparation and engagement required in literacy instruction. Leung (2018) expresses that the experience of teaching non-readers sharpened the tutors' academic commitment, reinforcing the role of reciprocal learning where the act of teaching reinforces the tutor's own academic discipline. The sense of fulfillment derived from helping learners succeed appeared to fuel greater perseverance in their own studies, marking a clear academic transformation grounded in improved study habits and productivity.

Theme 2: Professional Growth

Beyond skill development, participants consistently expressed how the Tara Basa Tutoring Program inspired them on a deeper professional growth level, nurturing a sense of purpose as future educators. This played a pivotal role in developing the professional competencies of higher education student tutors. One participant shared,

"It's given me a sense of purpose as I witness my learners' progress and growth." - T14

This sentiment aligns with Sapid et al. (2024), who emphasized that student tutors in literacy programs often experience enhanced professional identity and a strengthened sense of teaching purpose through active engagement in community-based tutoring. Participants also reported marked improvements in communication, teaching strategies, classroom management, and adaptability. It showcases how tutoring pushed them to be responsive to diverse learner needs. One tutor described:

"It improved my time management, enhanced my communication skills, patience, and understanding of diverse learning styles" - T10

"The Tara Basa Program has significantly enhanced my academic life by allowing me to develop my teaching skills, gain confidence, and connect with students on a deeper level" - T14

These reflections align with Mauer & Swanson (2024), who argue that the interactive and reflective nature of tutoring enhances tutors' mastery of the subject while simultaneously developing practical teaching skills. The requirement to plan lessons, engage with diverse learners, and adjust strategies based on real-time feedback not only facilitated the development of technical skills but also nurtured critical attributes essential for future educators. The participants' responses further validate the idea that tutoring acts as a bridge between theory and practice, enabling pre-service teachers to experience firsthand the complexities of the teaching profession. As one tutor noted,

"Tutoring in the Tara Basa program has a positive impact on my academic life. It enhances my communication and teaching skills, as well as strengthens my patience in communicating with kids with different abilities" - T3

This aligns with Markovitz et al. (2021), who emphasized that tutoring provides a dual learning process that not only imparts knowledge but also engages in self-reflection and self-assessment. These reciprocal dynamics foster greater professional maturity and readiness by helping tutors critically evaluate their instructional methods and understand the evolving needs of their learners. Through these active engagements, student tutors experience professional growth that extends beyond the classroom, shaping them into more reflective, adaptable, and practical future educators.

Theme 3: Self-Awareness and Maturity

Participants consistently reported that the Tara Basa Tutoring Program made a significant contribution to their self-awareness and personal maturity, enabling them to develop discipline, patience, and practical time management skills. The experience allowed them to reflect on their habits, adapt to the demands of tutoring, and grow into more responsible individuals. This finding is supported by Salam et al. (2019), who noted that structured service-learning experiences foster personal growth, self-reflection, and enhanced self-regulation among participants in higher education contexts. Similarly, Neitzel et al. (2021) noted that experiential learning environments enable pre-service teachers to confront real-world challenges, leading to improved decision-making skills and increased self-discipline.

Many tutors reported that the program challenged them to evaluate and improve their personal attitudes and behaviors, resulting in increased patience, organization, and being proactive. Several reflected on becoming more positive individuals and better role models, as reflected in these statements:

"It shapes me to become a positive person, stretching my patience, and becoming a better individual." – T15

"It changed my perspective and enhanced my skills in dealing with young minds." – T9

Other participants emphasized how tutoring helped them develop better self-regulation, particularly in time management and prioritization of responsibilities. They shared how they learned to balance both academic and tutoring commitments by practicing better time management and organization.

"Since we no longer had classes during the tutoring, I focused on managing my time effectively by prioritizing my tutoring responsibilities. I prepared materials in advance, stayed organized, and made sure to use my free time wisely to fulfill all my tasks without feeling overwhelmed." – T1

"I created a schedule and stuck to it. I avoided procrastinating and made sure to prioritize tasks based on deadlines and importance." –

T8

"To manage both my classes and tutoring responsibilities, I made a few key adjustments by being intentional with my time and seeking support, I was able to balance my responsibilities effectively." – T14

These responses validate Branham et al. (2019), who emphasized that authentic teaching experiences lead to deeper personal reflection and maturity, as tutors navigate both academic demands and the developmental needs of their learners. Overall, the reflections of the tutors highlight how the Tara Basa Program fostered not only teaching competencies but also self-awareness and life skills, helping them grow into more mature, self-disciplined, and empathetic individuals.

In addition to determining the impact of the Tara Basa Tutoring Program on the academic experiences of university student tutors, the study also explored how their participation shaped their career aspirations. To address the second research question, the analysis focused on how involvement in the program influenced the tutors' perceptions of their future career paths. The findings indicated two major themes: clarity of career calling and nurtured commitment to the teaching profession. These themes demonstrate how tutoring not only improved their academic and professional skills, but also gave them a better sense of direction for their future role as educators.

Theme 1: Clarity of Career Calling

Participants frequently stated that their participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program contributed to greater clarity of their career calling, particularly their desire to become educators. Many tutors stated that the experience validated their enthusiasm for teaching and helped them understand their ability to make a significant impact in the classroom. This finding is consistent with Ebrahim et al. (2024), who stated that early field experiences, such as systematic tutoring, play a crucial role in developing pre-service teachers' career orientation by providing real-life exposure to the teaching profession. Similarly, Hechanova et al. (2018) demonstrated that experiential learning enhances career preparedness by providing students with confidence and the necessary competencies, motivating them to pursue careers relevant to their field of specialization. Student reflections clearly demonstrated how tutoring fostered a stronger commitment to teaching. Several participants described how their experiences helped them gain confidence and satisfaction while dealing with students.

"My tutoring experience has made me more confident and passionate about teaching. It helped me realize that I enjoy working with learners and guiding them patiently, which strengthened my desire to pursue a career in education." – T11

"This program made me more eager to become a teacher in the future. It gave me confidence and made me enjoy guiding and supporting learners." – T5

"I became more determined to ignite my passion in teaching." – T7

"Yes, it inspired me to think more of becoming a teacher or working with children." – T8

"As an education student, it really inspired me because it focuses on personalized learning and also the rewarding experience of helping learners to learn." – T6

The rewarding moments of witnessing learners' progress were described as a motivating force in shaping their professional aspirations. This is consistent with Sapid et al. (2024), who stated that tutoring programs, such as Tara Basa, promote both career clarity and professional growth among university student tutors by allowing them to experience the actual responsibilities of teaching, as well as the rewarding feeling of contributing to student learning.

"Yes, this experience has refined my professional goals, solidifying my desire to work on education and community development" – T10

These insights demonstrate how participation in the Tara Basa Program not only sharpened practical teaching skills but also strengthened the tutors' commitment to pursuing a career in education. Overall, these findings confirm that structured tutoring programs, such as Tara Basa, are important platforms for fostering career clarity, especially among education students beginning to enter the teaching profession.

Theme 2: Nurtured Commitment to the Teaching Profession

Participants stated that their participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program not only clarified their career calling but also strengthened their commitment to the teaching profession. This commitment was reflected in their growing enthusiasm for education, a deeper understanding of learners' needs, and a stronger conviction in their ability to make a positive difference in students' lives. These findings are consistent with Salam et al. (2019), who noted that structured service-learning experiences enhance engagement and professional responsibility among pre-service teachers by providing immersive educational experiences. Similarly, Branham et al. (2019) argued that experiential learning fosters professional accountability, empathy, and adaptability —essential attributes for effective educators. Several participants highlighted how tutoring inspired them to embrace the responsibilities and burning sensation of the teaching profession.

"Tutoring made me more confident and passionate about teaching. It showed me the impact I can make in students' lives." – T12

"My tutoring experience has profoundly shaped my thoughts about my future career as a teacher. It's deepened my passion for education and reinforced my desire to make a positive impact on students' lives." – T3

"As I've worked with students, I've discovered a passion for teaching and mentoring. I've gained valuable insights into child development, learning styles, and effective teaching strategies." – T7

These findings are consistent with those of Ebrahim et al. (2024), who stated that community-based teaching engagements improve career readiness by giving practical insights into lesson planning, classroom management, and differentiated instruction. Other participants stated that tutoring allowed them to see personally the value of early childhood education and tailored learning, which strengthened their commitment to the teaching profession.

"This experience has given me a deeper understanding of the importance of early education and the impact that educators can have on young minds." – T4

"Tutoring taught me that being a teacher means more than teaching lessons, it's about patience, compassion, and guiding students with care." – T12

Villaluz et al. (2018) confirm these claims, finding that participating in community engagement programs increases pre-service teachers' professional commitment by exposing them to experiential learning and stressing their role in the development of learners. Overall, the findings suggest that the Tara Basa Program enabled student tutors to develop a long-term commitment to the teaching profession. Participants developed a renewed love for education and gained a deeper understanding of the duties and joys of teaching through hands-on experiences, enhanced self-confidence, and meaningful interactions with students.

After investigating how the Tara Basa Tutoring Program influenced the student tutors' academic experiences and career aspirations, the study delved deeper into the personal and professional insights they gained as a result of their participation in the program. To address the third research question, the analysis focused on the tutors' deeper personal growth and reflective learning experiences, which went beyond academic and career achievements. The results revealed four key themes: sense of social responsibility, character development, resilience and confidence in teaching, and professional fulfillment. These themes demonstrate how the Tara Basa Tutoring Program helped participants not only develop their professional skills but also enhance their overall personal development as future educators and responsible individuals.

Theme 1: Sense of Social Responsibility

Participants repeatedly stated that their participation in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program fostered an intense sense of social responsibility, broadening their awareness of community service beyond the classroom. The tutoring experience allowed them to see directly the impact of educational support on young learners, which strengthened their dedication to community involvement. This finding is supported by Celio et al. (2011) in their meta-analysis, which found that service-learning experiences positively influence students' social outcomes, including fostering a greater sense of social responsibility and civic engagement. Similarly, Salam et al. (2019) emphasized that service-learning enhances civic attitudes and social competencies by engaging students in meaningful community interactions, allowing them to experience the social relevance of their academic knowledge.

"This experience has instilled in me a sense of purpose and responsibility to continue serving others. I've learned that community service is not just about giving back, but also about growing as a person and creating a ripple effect of kindness." – T13

"My tutoring experience profoundly impacted my perspective on community service and helping others. Witnessing the growth and progress of my students firsthand instilled a deep sense of purpose and a desire to contribute more broadly to my community." – T1

"This experience showed me that helping others, especially through education, can make a real difference. It made me value community service more and inspired me to keep supporting others in any way I can." – T14

"This experience influenced my view in helping our community especially to our young people." – T9

Authentic teaching experiences foster an understanding of the social dimensions of education, encouraging pre-service teachers to see themselves as catalysts for change in their communities. Additionally, Villaluz et al. (2018) found that community engagement initiatives in teaching-learning processes improve not only academic outcomes but also cultivate social awareness and responsibility among pre-service teachers by directly exposing them to community realities. Overall, the results indicate that the Tara Basa Tutoring Program fostered in student tutors a sense of social responsibility, reinforcing both their commitment to education and their dedication to community service.

Theme 2: Character Development

Another essential takeaway from the participants' experiences was the significant character development facilitated by the Tara Basa Tutoring Program. Tutors repeatedly emphasized how the experience helped students develop important personal qualities, including patience, empathy, responsibility, and adaptability. Immersive teaching experiences help pre-service teachers develop essential characteristics by exposing them to real-world classroom dynamics and a diverse learning environment. Neitzel et al. (2021) stated that experiential learning environments promote the development of skills, which are equally essential as academic expertise in forming

holistic educators. Many tutors reflected on how their involvement in tutoring led to improvements in their character formation:

"Through tutoring, I've developed strong communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills. I've also become more patient, empathetic, and adaptable. These skills have enhanced my tutoring abilities and will benefit me in future professional endeavors." – T15

"I developed more patience, confidence, and better communication skills. I also learned how to manage my time and be more responsible." – T7

"Through this program, I've developed several valuable skills. Working with students who struggle with certain concepts has taught me to be more patient and understanding" – T12

The interactive nature of tutoring allows university student tutors to develop not only technical skills, but also emotional intelligence and personal discipline. This validates Leung's (2018) conclusion, which said that involvement in literacy programs improves not only teaching competencies but also interpersonal skills, which are critical for professional success. The Tara Basa

Tutoring Program facilitated meaningful character development among pre-service teachers, providing them with lifelong personal and professional skills that will be useful in their future roles as educators and community members.

Theme 3: Resilience and Growth in Teaching

The study found that student tutors who participated in the Tara Basa Tutoring Program developed resilience and growth in teaching. Tutors discussed how the program pushed them to adapt to diverse learner needs, manage behavioral issues, and improve their educational approaches. Through these experiences, they developed patience, adaptability, and self-confidence in their teaching roles. This finding is consistent with the study by Celio et al. (2011), who found that service-learning activities significantly enhance personal growth, social skills, and problem-solving abilities by engaging students in real-world educational settings. Participants' narratives reflected a journey of overcoming classroom challenges while learning to manage their responsibilities. As tutors expressed:

"During the tutoring session, I noticed they were struggling in identifying letters. Instead of simply telling them the correct answer, I used multi-sensory approaches. This experience highlighted the importance of understanding specific learning challenges and applying different strategies." – T3.

"In my class, I have five tutees with different characteristics... As days went by, I learned how to manage them effectively through songs, games, and interactive activities." – T7

Chiva-Bartoll et al. (2020) found that service-learning fosters reflective teaching methods, adaptability, and emotional resilience, all important qualities for future educators. These examples demonstrate how the tutoring program encouraged student tutors to go beyond basic instruction and instead promote creative, engaging techniques tailored to their learners' needs. The ability to adapt strategies based on learner responses is a crucial skill in real-world classroom settings, indicating the early development of professional teaching competency. Furthermore, the tutors' perspectives indicate that their confidence was not based solely on routine responsibilities but also on critical decision-making and adaptive teaching approaches, which strengthened their readiness for their student internship or real-world application. Furthermore, tutors acknowledged that the program enhanced their classroom readiness and ability to respond to unpredictable situations with resilience and growth in their teaching. The participants noted:

"At first it was hard managing eight tutees, but I realized some things are out of our control and as tutors, we act as their second parents." – T9

"Through tutoring I developed strategic planning skills, differentiated instruction, and creativity." – T2

These experiences correspond with the findings of Salam et al. (2019), who concluded that structured service-learning not only improves academic engagement but also promotes important professional qualities, including resilience, adaptability, and reflective teaching practices. Participants' tutoring experiences enhanced their ability to remain composed in the face of teaching challenges, thereby facilitating the teaching and learning process. This resilience in dealing with challenging circumstances, together with their development of teaching skills, provides a foundation for future educators to be effective and innovative.

Theme 4: Professional Fulfillment

This study's findings demonstrated that the Tara Basa Tutoring Program promoted a strong sense of professional fulfillment among university student tutors. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of witnessing their students' academic improvement and how this experience strengthened their personal and professional identities. Many tutors recounted times of personal excitement and satisfaction, notably when they witnessed their tutees overcome reading issues and improve their learning performance during the program's duration. These emotionally satisfying experiences contributed to the tutors' internal sense of accomplishment, which they referred to as "fulfillment".

Chiva-Bartoll et al. (2020) found that service-learning programs improve pre-service teachers' subjective well-being, professional satisfaction, and happiness by providing opportunities to engage in socially meaningful events. Student tutors in the current study

reported similar experiences, highlighting that their satisfaction stemmed not only from the technical aspects of teaching but also from the emotional impact of guiding learners to succeed. The participants shared that:

"It was truly fulfilling seeing learners improve and knowing I was part of that process." – T6

"I was brought by a genuine joy when I found my tutees learned effectively." – T16

"When a non-reader started reading simple words, I felt proud and realized I was truly making a difference." – T11

The sense of fulfillment extended beyond academic outcomes, as several participants highlighted how patience and empathy also became sources of personal satisfaction. As one tutor expressed,

"It was when my one tutee already knew how to read. Also, when I was able to stay patient when they were hard to handle, distracted, and couldn't easily understand." – T3

These findings support Salam et al.'s (2019) conclusion that service-learning promotes personal growth in pre-service teachers by enhancing empathy, reflective practice, and emotional engagement. Breakthrough teaching moments were commonly described as enriching experiences. Participants described how guiding a struggling learner to understand a complex idea became a pivotal occasion in their tutoring careers.

"I recall a moment when a learner finally understood a difficult concept. Seeing their excitement and confidence made me proud and fulfilled. It showed me I'd grown as a tutor and could make a real difference." – T14

Another participant shared,

"The breakthrough moment came when he finally grasped a difficult concept. His face lit up, and he exclaimed, 'I did it!' In that instant, I realized I'd grown professionally." – T11

I'd learned to connect with a struggling student, build trust, and help him overcome frustration." – T12

These experiences enhance the hands-on practical learning, intrinsic motivation, and personal growth among university student tutors. The understanding that they had helped a learner succeed not only validated their efforts but also strengthened their confidence and dedication to the teaching profession. Furthermore, numerous tutors reported a stronger sense of career commitment, as the program enabled them to pursue their passions for teaching and community service. Muñoz-Fernández et al. (2025) found that intrinsic motivation, social responsibility, and positive teaching experiences are important determinants for educators' professional fulfillment and long-term career satisfaction. Seeing learners make progress enhanced the student tutors' identity, self-efficacy, and resilience in the face of classroom challenges, all of which are important attributes for future educators to develop.

To sum up, the results indicate that professional fulfillment among the university student tutors was achieved through both the academic milestones of their learners and personal growth in handling educational challenges. The Tara Basa Tutoring Program offered tutors the opportunity to experience the authentic rewards of teaching, thereby reinforcing their passion for education, sense of purpose, and identity as future professionals.

Conclusions

This study examined the academic, personal, and professional experiences of student tutors participating in the DSWD Tara Basa Program. Findings revealed that the program enriched tutors' academic knowledge, shaped their career aspirations, and fostered personal growth through enhanced teaching skills, improved communication, and increased resilience. Beyond individual development, tutors also gained a stronger sense of social responsibility and affirmed their commitment to the teaching profession.

To strengthen the program, it is recommended that structured training be provided on classroom management, differentiated instruction, and inclusive teaching strategies. Regular reflection sessions, mentorship, and adequate learning resources should also be incorporated to maximize impact. Future research may examine the long-term effects of the program as tutors transition into professional teaching roles.

In sum, the Tara Basa Program not only advances literacy among young learners but also cultivates socially committed and resilient future teachers, underscoring its dual benefit to both communities and higher education.

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