Teachers Carrying a School: The Lived Experiences of Teachers-in-Charge of Small Public Elementary Schools

A Basic Research

[Copy for blind review: the researchers' names, positions, and schools division are removed. The final copy lists them here.]

Conducted April to November 2026

Abstract

In School Year 2024–2025, 18,576 public schools had no principal item and relied on teachers-in-charge (TICs), teachers designated as school heads. This descriptive phenomenological study asked what it is like to serve as the teacher-in-charge of a small public elementary school. Ten TICs of schools with three to six teachers in one schools division, chosen by criterion and maximum-variation sampling, were interviewed once each from July 20 to August 14, 2026. The transcripts were analyzed with Colaizzi's seven steps: 162 significant statements yielded 64 formulated meanings, grouped into 17 theme clusters and five themes. Interviews 9 and 10 added no new meaning. The themes were (a) two jobs in the same hours, (b) authority on loan, (c) learning the job alone, (d) the cost carried home, and (e) reasons to stay. The fundamental structure describes serving as a TIC as carrying a whole school's accountability on a teacher's footing: holding a class and a school in the same hours, signing for the school on a designation that can end at any time, learning the work after receiving it, paying for it in one's own money, time, and health, and staying for the learners, the community, and a growing sense of being a leader. Nine of the 10 participants reviewed it; seven agreed as written, and two asked for changes, which were made. The findings suggest designation orders that state the TIC's authority and teaching load, an orientation and a mentor for every new TIC, and clerical help for small schools.

Keywords: teachers-in-charge, descriptive phenomenology, Colaizzi's method, school leadership, small schools

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Introduction of the Research

The rules implementing the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9155) provide that "There shall be a school head for all public elementary schools and public high schools or a cluster thereof" (Department of Education [DepEd], 2003, Sec. 6.1), and they name "principals, school administrators and teachers-in-charge" together as school heads (Rule I, Sec. 1.2). Neither the law nor its rules require that the school head hold a principal's position. Many schools depend on the last of these. Based on SY 2024–2025 data, 18,576 schools, 48% of all schools, "have no principal items and rely on teachers-in-charge" (Second Congressional Commission on Education [EDCOM II], 2026, p. 390), and the Commission recommends deployment policies that "avoid overreliance on teacher-in-charge arrangements" (p. 300).

A teacher-in-charge (TIC) is a teacher whom the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) designates to run a school. Since 2024 the TIC has been relieved of teaching: "TICs shall be relieved of teaching and other related duties and perform fully the function of a school head," except that "in the exigency of service, TICs may be given teaching loads on the condition that all teachers in the school have been assigned the maximum teaching overload of two (2) hours" (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. V.A.1, item 5). The same item requires a designation order "specifying duties and functions, authority, accountability, and responsibility, among others." A TIC keeps a teacher's position and pay,

and receives "regular monthly salary like non-teaching personnel" in place of the vacation pay classroom teachers receive (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. V.B.3); as of November 2026, no DepEd issuance grants an allowance for the designation.

What the designation is like to live has been studied in other places. Philippine studies have described TICs and other school heads who teach: in multigrade schools of Davao del Sur and Aklan (Bojos et al., 2025; Nival & Orbista, 2026), and in small schools of Zamboanga Sibugay and Bohol, where each also taught a class of one grade (Gitgano & Ramada, 2026; Torrino & Naparan, 2024). Studies abroad have described rural teaching principals (Newton & Wallin, 2013; Taole, 2022). These studies centered on TICs who teach full classes; none asked how the 2024 rule relieving TICs of teaching is lived in schools of three to six teachers, and none was done in this division, where TICs serve small schools on islands, in the uplands, and near the town.

This study therefore asked 10 of the division's TICs to describe their experience in their own words, and described its essential structure with Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. It addresses the Human Resource Development theme of the Basic Education Research Agenda, under Career Development: "How can selection, retention, assessment, development, promotion, and recognition be enhanced to support DepEd employees in different career stages?" (DepEd, 2016, p. 12).

Literature Review

The literature reviewed here follows the study's three concerns: the TIC's position in DepEd's rules, what is known of teachers who lead schools while they teach, and the method used to describe a lived experience.

The Teacher-in-Charge in DepEd's Rules

A TIC holds a designation, not a position. For the purposes of DepEd's workload rules, "a duly designated Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) is considered a School Head" (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. III.e), and the TIC is relieved of teaching unless every teacher already carries the maximum overload (Sec. V.A.1, item 5). TICs who keep a teaching load "shall earn vacation and sick leave credits only" (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. V.A.3). In the career progression system, "Teachers with designation as Teacher-in-Charge (TIC)" who apply for higher teaching positions are assessed on both classroom and non-classroom observable indicators, like other non-teacher applicants (DepEd, 2025a, para. 20). The TIC thus answers for a school while remaining, in pay and position, a teacher.

Teachers Who Lead Schools While Teaching

Studies of teachers who run small schools while teaching describe divided time. Among 12 TICs who were also class advisers in Zamboanga Sibugay, "time was their biggest battle in having this dual role" (Torrino & Naparan, 2024, p. 22); one left pupils "in the school with seatwork" to submit reports in town (p. 22). A multigrade school head in Davao del Sur said, "I am both the teacher and the administrator, which makes it overwhelming" (Bojos et al., 2025, p. 579), and another that "schoolwork is also homework" (p. 579). In Bohol, a school-in-charge said, "Sometimes, I can't make a good preparation for my class because of some urgent administrative callings" (Gitgano & Ramada, 2026, p. 524). A descriptive phenomenological study of six TICs in Aklan concluded that "TICs are left with a fragmented identity:

neither fully teacher nor fully administrator, only caught somewhere in between" (Nival & Orbista, 2026, p. 375).

Studies abroad describe the same strain. A rural teaching principal in Canada said that the learners "pay the price" when the principal leaves class for a crisis (Newton & Wallin, 2013, p. 61), another spoke of "a lot of guilt" over doing no job well (Wallin et al., 2019, p. 25), and the teaching load limited the time left for instructional leadership (p. 30). Teaching principals of multigrade schools in South Africa said "we are not trained and it's like we are on our own," and all reported that "their family time was compromised" (Taole, 2022, pp. 17, 19).

Describing a Lived Experience

Descriptive phenomenology "is concerned with revealing the 'essence' or 'essential structure' of any phenomenon under investigation" (Morrow et al., 2015, para. 1). Colaizzi's (1978, as cited in Morrow et al., 2015) method has seven steps: familiarization, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing an exhaustive description, producing the fundamental structure, and seeking verification of that structure from the participants. Its end result is "a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants that created it" (Morrow et al., 2015, para. 2). Shosha (2012) applied the steps to 22 interviews, extracting 410 significant statements and grouping their meanings into 14 theme clusters and four themes (p. 35).

The researcher's own assumptions are set aside by bracketing, "deliberate putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under

investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 1), often with a reflexive diary (p. 3). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), by contrast, pairs the participants' accounts with "the researcher's own interpretation, which is an expression of double hermeneutics in practice" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 7), and examines each case before drawing general statements (p. 8). The trustworthiness of such a study rests on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981, p. 80), and Guba (1981) called member checks "the single most important action inquirers can take" for credibility (p. 85).

Synthesis

The studies agree that teachers who lead schools carry two roles in the same hours, learn the work alone, and pay for it in time and family life. They leave three gaps that this study addresses: how TICs experience the designation itself (its authority, its accountability, and its end), how the 2024 rule relieving TICs of teaching is lived in schools of three to six teachers, and what keeps TICs in the post.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer one central question: What is the lived experience of serving as the teacher-in-charge of a small public elementary school? Four questions guided the interviews and the analysis:

1. How do TICs describe the daily work of running a school while holding a teacher's position?

2. What do they find hardest in the designation, and how do they deal with it?
3. How did they learn the work, and what support do they draw on or ask for?
4. What meaning do they find in the experience?

The study tested no hypotheses. A descriptive phenomenological study sets out to describe an experience as those who live it describe it, not to test a relationship stated in advance.

Scope and Limitation

The study covered TICs of public elementary schools in one schools division with no principal item and six or fewer teaching personnel, the TIC included, who had served at least one full school year as TIC by June 2026. Each took part in one interview of 44 to 68 minutes from July to August 2026 and was asked to review the study's description of the experience in September 2026. The study did not cover head teachers, principals, or TICs of secondary schools, and it did not include TICs whom any of the researchers supervises.

The study has limits. First, it describes the experience of 10 TICs in one division; readers judge whether the description fits their own setting from the description of the schools and the participants. Second, each participant was interviewed once; a second interview could have deepened some accounts. Third, the lead researcher was a TIC for four years, which helped the interviews but could have shaped what she heard; the methodology describes how her assumptions were set aside. Fourth, the participants spoke of

matters that the rules govern, such as their pay and their designation orders; the study reports how they experience these rules, and the discussion sets the rules beside them, but it did not examine any participant's records.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used a descriptive (Husserlian) phenomenological design. Phenomenology fits a question about what an experience is like for those who live it, here serving as a TIC; a survey would count what TICs do but not describe what it means to them, and a case study would describe one school or district rather than an experience shared across schools. Descriptive phenomenology was chosen over interpretative phenomenological analysis because the study set out to describe the experience the TICs share, its essential structure, close to their own words, rather than to interpret each case in depth; IPA's double hermeneutic suits a question about how individuals make sense of an experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Colaizzi's method was chosen because its seven steps keep each finding traceable to the participants' statements and end by returning the description to the participants (Morrow et al., 2015).

The Researchers' Position

The three researchers are a School Principal I, who served as a TIC for four years before her appointment and conducted every interview; a Master Teacher II, who served as the second reader of the transcripts; and a Teacher III, who kept the audit trail, the consent forms, and the data. None of them supervises, rates, or works in the same district as any participant. Before the

first interview, the lead researcher wrote down what she expected to hear (Appendix C): that money and the liquidation of the school's funds would dominate, that TICs would resent the lack of an allowance, and that they would describe the division as neglecting small schools. She kept a reflexive journal through the analysis and returned to these expectations at each step.

A. Sampling

The participants were chosen by criterion sampling with maximum variation. A TIC was eligible if (a) the SDS had designated them TIC of a public elementary school with no principal item; (b) the school had six or fewer teaching personnel, the TIC included; (c) they had served as TIC for at least one full school year by June 2026; and (d) none of the researchers supervised them. The division's list of TICs gave 31 who met the criteria. To hear the experience as widely as it is lived, the researchers invited 14 of them, chosen for variety in sex, years as TIC, teaching load, and distance from the district office; 12 agreed.

The number of interviews was not fixed in advance. The proposal planned 10 to 14 interviews and set a stopping rule: after at least eight interviews, recruitment would stop once two interviews in a row added no new formulated meaning. Empirical tests of saturation have found it within 9 to 17 interviews in studies "with relatively homogenous study populations and narrowly defined objectives" (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022, abstract), and within the first 12 interviews, with "basic elements for metathemes" present as early as six (Guest et al., 2006, abstract). Interviews 9 and 10 added no new formulated meaning, so recruitment stopped at 10. The two TICs who had

agreed but were not yet interviewed were thanked and told that the study had heard enough.

B. Data Collection

Recruitment of Participants

The SDS allowed the study in the division in April 2026. The researchers wrote to each invited TIC directly, not through the district supervisors, and the division and the districts were not told who agreed or who declined, so that no TIC would feel pressed by a supervisor to take part (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board [PHREB], 2022, Health Policy and Systems Research, item 9.2, pp. 253–254). Each TIC who replied received the informed consent form in English and Filipino and a call from the lead researcher to answer questions before agreeing.

Data Collection Instruments

Interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) asked seven open questions, from the day of the designation to what the participant would tell the division, each with probes for an example, a feeling, and what the participant did. The guide was written in English and Filipino and tried out in May 2026 with two principals who had served as TICs before their appointment; two questions were reworded after the tryout, and the tryout interviews were not analyzed.

Field notes and reflexive journal. After each interview, the lead researcher wrote field notes on the setting and on what was said off the recording, and a journal entry on her own reactions.

Trustworthiness

The study followed the four criteria of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For credibility, the second reader extracted significant statements from the first two transcripts independently of the lead researcher, every formulated meaning was discussed by both, a researcher from another division debriefed the team twice, and the fundamental structure was returned to every participant (step 7). For transferability, the report describes the schools and the participants in enough detail, in bands that protect their identities, for readers to judge whether the findings fit their own setting. For dependability, the team kept an audit trail of every decision in the coding workbook, and an external auditor traced the themes back to the transcripts in October 2026. For confirmability, every theme is traced to statements with their transcript lines, and the lead researcher's expectations were written down before the interviews and checked against the findings.

Data Collection Setting

Each interview was held in person at the participant's school, after the learners had gone home, in a room where no other teacher could hear. Two researchers traveled together to the island and upland schools.

Data Collection Timeline

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Activity	Dates
Permission of the SDS and approval of the grant	April 6 to 24, 2026
Review by the research ethics committee	April 13 to May 22, 2026
Tryout of the interview guide with two principals	May 25 to 29, 2026
Invitation and consent of participants	June 15 to July 10, 2026
Interviews	July 20 to August 14, 2026

Activity	Dates
Transcription, translation, and analysis (steps 1 to 6)	July 21 to September 4, 2026
Member checking of the fundamental structure (step 7)	September 16 to 21, 2026
Peer debriefing	August 18 and October 12 to 16, 2026
External audit	October 12 to 16, 2026

Note. The interviews were held on class days of Term 1 of SY 2026–2027, after classes (DepEd, 2026b).

Data Recording and Storage

Each interview was audio-recorded, with the participant's separate consent, on a researcher's phone set to airplane mode with cloud backup turned off; the recording was moved the same day to an encrypted drive and deleted from the phone. The researchers transcribed every interview themselves within three days, word for word and in the language spoken, and replaced names of people, schools, and places with bracketed labels such as [teacher]. The lead researcher translated the Filipino passages into English, and the second reader, also bilingual, checked each translation against the recording. Participants and their transcripts carry codes (P01 to P10) in the order of the interviews; the list linking codes to names was kept by the third researcher, apart from the data, in a locked box. The recordings were deleted after the member check; the coded transcripts will be destroyed three years after the study ends.

C. Ethical Issues

The study followed DepEd's Research Management Guidelines, which call for "confidentiality in handling data of respondents and providing consent forms where necessary" (DepEd, 2017, Sec. VI.C), the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants (PHREB, 2022), and

the Data Privacy Act of 2012. A research ethics committee accredited by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board reviewed and approved the protocol before recruitment.

Every participant signed an informed consent form in English or Filipino that stated the study's purpose, what taking part involved, the right to refuse or to withdraw at any time "without penalty or loss of benefits" (PHREB, 2022, item 12.3), how the interview would be recorded and kept, and how long the records would be kept and when destroyed (PHREB, 2022, Appendix O, p. 362). Consent was asked separately for taking part, for the audio recording, and for quoting the participant's words under a code, since "Vague or blanket consent is prohibited" (National Privacy Commission [NPC], 2023, Sec. 8[C]). Participants could review their remarks and erase part or all of the recording (PHREB, 2022, p. 364); none did. No payment was offered; snacks were served during the interview.

Because some participants spoke of their health, the transcripts hold sensitive personal information (Data Privacy Act of 2012, Sec. 3[l]). The codes do not make the transcripts anonymous: "Pseudonymized or coded information remains personal data and continues to be subject to the DPA" (NPC, 2026, p. 4). The report therefore describes the participants in bands, quotes no detail that would identify a school, and submits the coded transcripts and the coding workbook to the research committee as the executive data set (DepEd, 2017, Sec. V.B.vii), with a request that they not be released, since they hold personal information. No transcript, recording, or other personal information was entered into any artificial intelligence (AI) tool

(DepEd, 2026a, Sec. VI.1.3); the researchers' use of an AI tool is declared in Appendix E.

D. Plan for Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed with Colaizzi's seven steps, as Morrow et al. (2015) and Shosha (2012) describe them, in a spreadsheet workbook that holds every transcript line, statement, meaning, cluster, and theme:

1. **Familiarization.** Each researcher read every transcript at least three times, once while listening to the recording.
2. **Identifying significant statements.** Each statement of direct relevance to the experience of serving as TIC was copied with its participant code and transcript lines. The second reader independently marked the first two transcripts; the two readers compared their marks and settled each difference by discussion, and the second reader then checked the lead researcher's statements in the other eight transcripts.
3. **Formulating meanings.** Each significant statement was given a formulated meaning, a sentence stating what the statement means for the experience, kept close to the participant's words. Statements that meant the same thing were given the same formulated meaning.
4. **Clustering themes.** The formulated meanings were grouped into theme clusters, and the clusters into themes; each formulated meaning belongs to one cluster only (Shosha, 2012, p. 35).
5. **Developing an exhaustive description.** The themes were written into a full description of the experience.

6. **Producing the fundamental structure.** The exhaustive description was condensed into a short statement of what is essential to the experience.
7. **Seeking verification.** The fundamental structure, in English and Filipino, was returned to every participant, who was asked whether it described their experience and what it missed; the analysis was revised with their answers.

Saturation was tracked as the analysis went on: after each interview, the team counted the formulated meanings that no earlier interview had given.

Discussion of Results and Recommendations

The Participants

The 10 participants were five women and five men, TICs for one to 11 years, of schools with three to six teachers; every school had at least one combination (multigrade) class. Four taught a full class every day, two taught part of the day, and four had no teaching load (Table 2). The interviews lasted 44 to 68 minutes, 54.4 on average.

Table 2

Profile of the Participants

Code	Sex	Age	Position	Years as TIC	Teachers in the school	Learners	Teaching load	Interview (minutes)
P01	Female	45-54	Teacher III	6 or more	6	100-199	None	44
P02	Male	25-34	Teacher II	1-2	3	Under 100	Full	61
P03	Female	35-44	Teacher III	3-5	5	100-199	Part	52
P04	Male	55-64	Teacher III	6 or more	4	Under 100	Full	68
P05	Female	25-34	Teacher I	1-2	3	Under 100	Full	47
P06	Male	45-54	Teacher III	3-5	6	100-199	None	55

Code	Sex	Age	Position	Years as TIC	Teachers in the school	Learners	Teaching load	Interview (minutes)
P07	Female	45-54	Teacher II	3-5	4	Under 100	Part	58
P08	Male	35-44	Teacher III	3-5	5	100-199	None	50
P09	Female	45-54	Master Teacher I	1-2	6	100-199	None	63
P10	Male	25-34	Teacher II	1-2	3	Under 100	Full	46

Note. Ages and years are given in bands and schools are not named, so that no participant can be identified. Teachers in the school include the TIC. Teaching load: Full, a class all day; Part, a class for part of the day; None, no load assigned.

Saturation

The first interview gave 18 formulated meanings; later interviews added fewer, and interviews 9 and 10 added none (Table 3). The fifth interview added seven meanings after the fourth had added six: the count does not fall in a smooth line. With two interviews in a row adding nothing new, the stopping rule was met at the 10th interview.

Table 3

New Formulated Meanings by Interview

Interview	Participant	Date	Formulated meanings	New	Cumulative
1	P01	July 20	18	18	18
2	P02	July 22	17	15	33
3	P03	July 24	16	12	45
4	P04	July 29	16	6	51
5	P05	July 31	16	7	58
6	P06	August 4	15	3	61
7	P07	August 6	16	1	62
8	P08	August 10	16	2	64
9	P09	August 12	15	0	64
10	P10	August 14	16	0	64

Note. New: formulated meanings that no earlier interview gave. Cumulative: distinct formulated meanings so far, of 64 in all.

From Significant Statements to Themes

The two readers marked 39 lines as significant in the first two transcripts, 31 of them (79.5%) in common; four were marked by the lead

researcher only and four by the second reader only. Discussion kept 36 of the 39 lines and set three aside; the reasons are in the audit trail. Across the 10 transcripts, the analysis identified 162 significant statements, 15 to 19 per participant, which yielded 64 formulated meanings, 17 theme clusters, and five themes. Table 4 traces six statements through steps 2 to 4, and Table 5 lists the themes and their clusters.

Table 4

Six Significant Statements and Their Formulated Meanings, Theme Clusters, and Themes

Significant statement	Formulated meaning	Theme cluster	Theme
"At first it was hard. Two of the teachers were older than me and had been in the school longer. When I gave out the class programs for the new school year, one of them said, 'TIC ka lang naman, Ma'am.' ['You're only a TIC, Ma'am.'] I was hurt, but I understood." (P01, line 18)	Senior teachers resist directions from a teacher-in-charge who is their peer or their junior.	Seen as "just a teacher"	Authority on loan
"The problem is the phone. The district sends a message to the group chat at nine in the morning: 'Submit by ten.' I am in the middle of a Math lesson. Ano'ng gagawin ko, iiwan ko ang mga bata? [What will I do, leave the children?]" (P02, line 6)	Calls, messages and visitors from the district and the division come during class hours and expect an answer at once.	The day split between the class and the office	Two jobs in the same hours
"Ako ang pumipirma sa lahat. Para akong principal sa papel, pero teacher sa sahod." (I sign everything. I am like a principal on paper, but a teacher in pay.) (P04, line 11)	The teacher-in-charge signs vouchers, liquidation reports and school forms and answers for them as a school head would.	Accountable for money and papers	Authority on loan

Significant statement	Formulated meaning	Theme cluster	Theme
"There was no orientation. They gave me the keys, the old files and the password of the school's email. That was my training." (P05, line 4)	No orientation or training on running a school was given at the start.	Designated without preparation	Learning the job alone
"I keep the receipts, but some I never claim. Nahihiya na ako. [I feel embarrassed to.] The MOOE is small, and the school needs it more." (P07, line 16)	Personal money spent on the school is seldom recovered or never claimed.	Money from their own pockets	The cost carried home
"And I cannot leave them. If I ask to be relieved, it is like leaving the children in the middle of the sea." (P10, line 22)	Refusing felt like abandoning the school and its learners.	A duty they accepted	Reasons to stay

Note. Filipino passages are followed by the researchers' English translation in square brackets, or in parentheses where the whole statement is in Filipino.

Table 5

Themes and Theme Clusters

Theme	Theme cluster	Formulated meanings	Significant statements	Participants
1. Two jobs in the same hours	The day split between the class and the office	5	14	10
	The learners pay for the teacher-in-charge's absences	4	8	6
	Work that follows them home	3	9	5
	Relieved of teaching on paper	3	5	4
	All of theme 1	*15*	*36*	*10*
2. Authority on loan	Seen as "just a teacher"	4	11	8
	Accountable for money and papers	4	11	6
	A designation that can end at any time	3	8	5
	All of theme 2	*11*	*30*	*10*
3. Learning the job alone	Designated without preparation	4	13	7

Theme	Theme cluster	Formulated meanings	Significant statements	Participants
	Learning from other teachers-in-charge and the district	4	9	9
	Learning from costly mistakes	3	5	4
	The help they ask for	3	5	5
	All of theme 3	*14*	*32*	*10*
4. The cost carried home	Money from their own pockets	4	11	6
	Fatigue, health and family	4	10	6
	More work without more pay or recognition	4	12	6
	All of theme 4	*12*	*33*	*10*
5. Reasons to stay	The learners and the community	4	10	7
	Growing into a leader	4	12	6
	A duty they accepted	4	9	6
	All of theme 5	*12*	*31*	*10*

Note. Participants: the number of the 10 participants with at least one significant statement in the cluster or theme.

Every theme was voiced by all 10 participants; the clusters within them were not, since each describes one part of the experience that some TICs lived and others did not. A cluster voiced by few participants was kept when it described the experience of those who lived it: "Relieved of teaching on paper," for instance, comes from the four TICs without a teaching load.

Theme 1. Two Jobs in the Same Hours

The TICs carry a class and a school in one working day, and on most days one of them gives way. Those who teach do the school's work at recess, at lunch, and after the learners go home. A TIC who teaches two grades all day put the experience in a few sentences:

> I teach Grades 3 and 4 together the whole day. So in one day I am a teacher and a school head, but honestly I am not fully either. When I

> am teaching, I am thinking of the report. When I am doing the report, I am thinking of my class. (P05, line 9)

Calls and requests for reports arrive during lessons: "The problem is the phone. The district sends a message to the group chat at nine in the morning: 'Submit by ten.' I am in the middle of a Math lesson. Ano'ng gagawin ko, iiwan ko ang mga bata? [What will I do, leave the children?]" (P02, line 6). The learners pay for these absences, as the TICs see it. A TIC who taught Grade 4 in the mornings saw more of her learners fall short of their reading level than when she was in class all day: "Napansin ko po na ang Grade 4 ko noong nakaraang taon, mas marami ang hindi nakaabot sa reading level nila kaysa noong buong araw pa ako sa klase. Hindi ko masisisi ang mga bata. Ako ang laging wala." (I noticed that my Grade 4 last year had more learners who did not reach their reading level than when I was still in class the whole day. I cannot blame the children. I am the one who is always away.) (P03, line 7).

Being relieved of a teaching load did not take the TICs out of the classroom. In schools of five or six teachers, the TIC included, the TIC took the class of any teacher on leave:

> On paper, none. Since the workload order of 2024, TICs are relieved of teaching. But last school year I was in a classroom for maybe sixty days. A teacher was on sick leave for a month, another went to a training, another had a seminar. Who teaches? Me. (P08, line 5)

Where the relief held, it gave time to observe and coach teachers, until the paperwork took it back: "But the administrative work takes most of it. I

am trained in instruction, not in procurement. I spend more time on canvass sheets than on the teachers' lessons." (P09, line 6).

Theme 2. Authority on Loan

The TICs answer for the school as a school head does, from a teacher's position and on a designation that can end at any time. Teachers who were their seniors or peers tested their directions:

> At first it was hard. Two of the teachers were older than me and had been in the school longer. When I gave out the class programs for the new school year, one of them said, 'TIC ka lang naman, Ma'am.' ['You're only a TIC, Ma'am.'] I was hurt, but I understood. (P01, line 18)

Three learned to lead by asking: "Kaya natuto akong makiusap. Hindi ako nag-uutos. Sinasabi ko, 'Ma'am, puwede po ba nating gawin ito? Ano po sa tingin ninyo?'" (So I learned to ask nicely. I do not give orders. I say, 'Ma'am, could we do this? What do you think?') (P03, line 11). They sign what a principal signs, and fear it: "Ako ang pumipirma sa lahat. Para akong principal sa papel, pero teacher sa sahod." (I sign everything. I am like a principal on paper, but a teacher in pay.) (P04, line 11); "I am afraid of COA. Baka ako ang makasuhan. [I might be the one who gets charged.] I have three children, and my husband works abroad. If I get a case, who will take care of them?" (P07, line 8). The end of the designation is always in view: "That it is not mine. I am a designee. Tomorrow the SDS can sign another order. So you build something, and you wonder whether it will last." (P06, line 14). One TIC described his authority as given in full, since his teachers and his district

supervisor treated him as their head (P06, lines 5 and 12); his account led to a change in the fundamental structure at step 7 (Appendix D).

Theme 3. Learning the Job Alone

The TICs learned to run a school after they were designated, without an orientation: "There was no orientation. They gave me the keys, the old files and the password of the school's email. That was my training." (P05, line 4). They learned from each other in group chats, from a district supervisor where one coached, and from former school heads:

> Our PSDS made a big difference. Every month she visited, sat with me and went through my papers. When something was wrong, she showed me how to fix it. She would say, 'Better I find it now than COA later.' (P06, line 5)

Their mistakes came to light only afterward:

> Many times. The worst was our school's data in the LIS. I did not know that the end-of-year updating had a deadline. I found out only when the division called to say our school was not updated. Nobody told me before. (P05, line 22)

What they asked for was an orientation and a mentor for every new TIC, administrative help, and a designation order that says what they may decide and sign:

> What I wish for is a clear designation order. Mine says 'to perform the functions of a school head.' Which functions? Can I approve a teacher's leave? Can I sign the purchase order? I had to ask the division each time. (P06, line 16)

Theme 4. The Cost Carried Home

The work is paid for in the TICs' own money, time, health, and family life. They pay the fares to the district and the division, "The boat is forty minutes, then a jeep to the town. That is two hundred pesos going and back, from my pocket, every time." (P02, line 10), and advance the school's bills when its funds are late; some expenses they never claim: "I keep the receipts, but some I never claim. Nahihiya na ako. [I feel embarrassed to.] The MOOE is small, and the school needs it more." (P07, line 16). Family life gives way: "Dalawa po ang anak ko, at ako lang ang magulang nila. Minsan sinasabi ng panganay ko, 'Ma, mas mahal mo pa ang school kaysa sa amin.'" (I have two children, and I am their only parent. Sometimes my eldest says, 'Ma, you love the school more than us.') (P03, line 19). One wrote a letter asking to be relieved: "There was a time, last October, when I wrote a letter asking to be relieved of the designation. Hindi ko ipinasa. [I did not submit it.] I still have it in my drawer." (P05, line 26). The designation brings no additional pay, "Walang dagdag na sahod. Wala ni isang sentimo. Labing-isang taon." (No additional pay. Not a single centavo. Eleven years.) (P04, line 12), and two did not know whether their years as TIC would count when they applied for promotion: "At hindi ko alam kung bibilangin ang labing-isang taon kong pagiging TIC kapag nag-apply ako. Sabi ng iba, oo. Sabi ng iba, hindi. Wala akong mahawakang papel." (And I do not know whether my eleven years as TIC will be counted when I apply. Some say yes. Some say no. I have no paper to hold on to.) (P04, line 15).

Theme 5. Reasons to Stay

What keeps the TICs in the post is the learners and the community, a growing sense of themselves as leaders, and a duty no one else would take. For a TIC of an upland school, the school's survival was the reason: "Ito lang ang paaralan sa barangay. Kapag nagsara ito, maglalakad ang mga bata nang dalawang oras pababa. Hindi ko iyon hahayaan." (This is the only school in the barangay. If it closes, the children will walk two hours down the mountain. I will not let that happen.) (P04, line 19). For one TIC, the designation changed how she sees her school: "Because I started to see the school differently. Before, I saw only my class. Now I see the whole school: the Kinder, the toilets, the water, the parents. I cannot unsee it." (P05, line 28). And for many, there was no one else: "And if I give it up, who will take it? The others have small children, or they are new. Somebody has to do it. Ako na lang. [I'll just do it.]" (P01, line 32); "And I cannot leave them. If I ask to be relieved, it is like leaving the children in the middle of the sea." (P10, line 22).

The Exhaustive Description

Serving as the teacher-in-charge of a small public elementary school means holding a class and a school in the same hours, and on any given day being fully neither a teacher nor a school head. The TIC who teaches does the school's work at recess, at lunch, after the learners go home, and at night, and is called away from lessons by messages, visitors, and meetings that the class pays for in lost time and that the other teachers pay for by watching the TIC's class. The TIC without a teaching load still teaches whenever a teacher is absent or on leave, because a school of five or six teachers has no one else;

where the relief holds, it gives time to observe and coach teachers, which paperwork then takes back.

The TIC's authority is borrowed. Teachers who are the TIC's seniors or peers may question directions from someone who is "just a teacher," and parents, banks, and suppliers ask for "the principal" or for proof that the TIC may sign. The TIC learns to lead by asking and persuading, and comes to involve the teachers in decisions. Yet the TIC signs the school's vouchers, liquidation reports, and forms, answers for the learners' safety in storms and floods, and fears an audit finding or a case over the school's money, while knowing that the designation can be withdrawn at any time and will end when a principal is appointed. How far others grant the TIC's authority depends on the teachers and on the district: where the district supervisor coaches and the teachers accept the TIC as head, the authority feels whole.

The TIC learns the work after receiving it. The designation comes suddenly, without the teacher being asked and without an orientation, and the first months are frightening. The TIC learns the forms, the funds, and the plans from fellow TICs in group chats, from a district supervisor, from retired or former school heads, and from mistakes that come to light only when a report or liquidation is returned. The TICs ask for an orientation and a mentor for new TICs, clerical help, and a designation order that says what they may decide and sign.

The work is paid for at home. The TIC pays fares, sometimes a boat crossing, mobile data, and printing, advances the school's bills when its funds are late, and leaves some of this money unclaimed. The TIC is tired, sleeps

little, falls ill, works through the breaks other teachers take, and has less time for family; one has written, but not sent, a letter asking to be relieved. The designation brings no additional pay, the TIC's work is seldom credited, and the TIC does not know whether the years as TIC will count toward promotion.

The TIC stays. The learners and their families are known by name, the school is often the community's only school, and the parents and the barangay help when asked. The TIC discovers the skills of leading people, comes to see the school as a whole, and for some the experience becomes the reason to seek a principalship. And the TIC accepted, and stays, because no one else in the school could or would, because refusing would feel like abandoning the learners and the teachers, and, for some, because it is a calling.

The Fundamental Structure

Serving as the teacher-in-charge of a small public elementary school is carrying a whole school's accountability on a teacher's footing. The TIC holds the class and the school in the same hours; in schools with few teachers, the TIC teaches whether or not a load is assigned, and each day one of the two roles gives way, at a cost the learners and the other teachers also bear. The TIC's authority is borrowed: the TIC signs and answers for the school's money, papers, and safety as a school head does, yet how far others grant that authority depends on the teachers and the district, and the designation can end at any time. The TIC learns the work after receiving it, from other TICs, a district supervisor, or a former school head, and from mistakes that come to light afterward. The TIC pays for it in money, time, health, and family life,

without additional pay or a clear place in the career ladder, and stays for the learners and the community, for a leader the TIC did not know was there, and because no one else would carry the school.

Verification by the Participants

The fundamental structure was sent to all 10 participants from September 16, 2026; nine replied, four in person, three by text message, one by phone, and one by email, and one did not reply after a reminder. Seven agreed with the structure as written. Two agreed and asked for a change. P06 said that his authority did not feel borrowed, because his teachers and his district supervisor treated him as their head; the structure now says that how far others grant the TIC's authority depends on the teachers and the district. P08 said that being relieved of teaching "depends on how many teachers you have"; the structure now says that in schools with few teachers, the TIC teaches whether or not a load is assigned. P02 asked that the description keep the boat trips, and P07 that it keep the fear over the school's money; both stayed in the exhaustive description.

Discussion

The TICs of this division describe the same divided day that TICs who teach described in Zamboanga Sibugay, Aklan, and Bohol (Gitgano & Ramada, 2026; Nival & Orbista, 2026; Torrino & Naparan, 2024), and that teaching principals described in Canada and South Africa (Newton & Wallin, 2013; Taole, 2022). Like the Aklan TICs, who were "neither fully teacher nor fully administrator" (Nival & Orbista, 2026, p. 375), they could be fully

neither, and like the Canadian principals, they felt that their learners paid for their absences (Newton & Wallin, 2013, p. 61).

Two findings add to this literature. The first concerns the 2024 rule that relieves TICs of teaching. In schools of three or four teachers, four TICs taught a class all day, and two of the TICs with no load described teaching whenever a teacher was away (P01, line 14; P08, line 5). The rule allows a load only in the exigency of service, after all teachers carry the maximum overload (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. V.A.1, item 5); in the smallest schools the exigency does not end, and none of the participants said that their designation order addressed it.

The second concerns the designation itself. The TICs felt the authority they hold as borrowed, and two said that their designation orders did not say what they could approve or sign. DepEd requires an order "specifying duties and functions, authority, accountability, and responsibility, among others" (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. V.A.1, item 5). Two participants' uncertainty about whether years as TIC count toward promotion meets rules they did not mention. The qualification standards for School Principal I ask for "5 years teaching experience and 1-year relevant experience in any of the following: learning area coordination, subject area supervision, school management and operations, instructional supervision" (DepEd, 2025b, Encl. No. 3); they do not name the TIC designation, though running a school is school management and operations. The rules implementing the career progression law do not count a TIC as a school leader, "without prejudice to the rights granted to them by law and the creditable relevant experience entitled to them" (Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 12288, 2026, Sec.

4[o]). For higher teaching positions, TICs are assessed on both classroom and non-classroom observable indicators (DepEd, 2025a, para. 20).

The lead researcher's expectations were partly borne out. Money weighed heavily, in the liquidation, the fear of an audit, and personal spending, and the lack of additional pay was raised by four participants. But the TICs spoke as much of the class they leave behind and of why they stay, which she had not expected; the theme "Reasons to stay" was voiced by all 10 participants. No participant described the division as neglecting small schools, though one asked the division to visit.

Recommendations

1. **Designation orders that state the TIC's authority and load.** Each designation order should state what the TIC may approve and sign, and whether the TIC carries a teaching load in the exigency of service, as DO 005, s. 2024 requires an order to specify the TIC's duties, authority, accountability, and responsibility (DepEd, 2024a).
2. **An orientation and a mentor for every new TIC.** The division should orient each newly designated TIC within the first month on the school's funds, forms, and reports, and pair the TIC with a principal or an experienced TIC; the district TIC group chats show how much TICs already learn from each other.
3. **Fewer urgent requests, and help with the paperwork.** The division and the districts should give schools at least three working days for routine reports, consolidate requests, and consider sharing clerical help among small schools.

4. **Clear information on careers.** The division's human resource office should tell TICs in writing how the designation is assessed when they apply for higher positions or reclassification.
5. **Further study.** Studies of TICs in secondary schools, of the teachers who work under TICs, and of TICs who ask to be relieved would extend this description.

Dissemination and Advocacy Plans

The findings will be shared first with the participants and then with those who can act on them (Table 6).

Table 6

Dissemination and Advocacy Plan

Audience	Purpose	Channel	Timeline
The 10 participants	Return the findings to those who gave them	A copy of the report and a meeting, at their choice	November 2026
Schools Division Superintendent and the human resource office	Designation orders, orientation, career information	Division management committee meeting; a two-page policy brief	December 2026
Public schools district supervisors	Coaching and fewer urgent requests	District supervisors' meeting	January 2027
Teachers-in-charge of the division	Share what other TICs found helpful	Division TICs' conference; the policy brief	February 2027
Researchers in the region	Share the method and the findings	Regional research congress; the division's research journal	March to June 2027

Note. The policy brief was paid from the grant's dissemination line (Financial Report). Presentation or publication requires the written permission of the research committees (DepEd, 2017, Sec. VI.B).

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Financial Report

The study received a division-level Basic Education Research Fund grant of PhP 25,000.00, released in tranches: 40% (PhP 10,000.00) on the submission of the work plan and the instruments, 40% (PhP 10,000.00) on the submission of the data collection, analysis, and initial findings, and the last 20% (PhP 5,000.00) on the acceptance of this report (DepEd, 2017, Sec. V.C.i.5). Expenses totaled PhP 23,150.00, PhP 1,850.00 less than the grant. The researchers transcribed and translated the interviews themselves, since the grant does not pay service providers (Sec. V.C.i.4), and the analysis used a spreadsheet already on their computers.

Table 7

Statement of Expenses

Date	Particulars	Receipt or document	Amount (PhP)	Category
2026-06-15	Printing of invitation letters, consent forms in English and Filipino, and interview guides (14 sets)	OR 4412	750.00	Reproduction
2026-07-20 to 2026-08-14	Transportation to the 10 schools for the interviews, including a boat crossing for two researchers	Itinerary and receipts	6,800.00	Transportation
2026-07-20 to 2026-08-14	Snacks for participants and researchers at the 10 interviews	OR 2290	3,000.00	Food
2026-05-25 to 2026-10-16	Mobile data and load for the three researchers (six months)	Receipts	4,500.00	Communication
2026-06-15	Encrypted flash drive, a lockable document box, folders and envelopes	OR 1187	2,300.00	Supplies
2026-09-16 to 2026-09-21	Transportation and snacks for the in-person member checks (four schools)	Itinerary and receipts	2,600.00	Transportation

Date	Particulars	Receipt or document	Amount (PhP)	Category
2026-09-16	Printing of the member-check summaries in English and Filipino (10 copies)	OR 4530	500.00	Reproduction
2026-10-12 to 2026-10-16	Snacks for the peer debriefing and the external audit meetings	OR 2377	1,200.00	Food
2026-11-09	Printing of the policy brief (60 copies)	OR 7204	1,500.00	Dissemination
	Total		23,150.00	

Note. Summary by category: transportation, PhP 9,400.00; communication, PhP 4,500.00; food, PhP 4,200.00; supplies, PhP 2,300.00; dissemination, PhP 1,500.00; reproduction, PhP 1,250.00.

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide

The guide asks seven open questions, in English or Filipino as the participant prefers, each with probes for an example, a feeling, and what the participant did.

1. Please tell me about the day you were designated teacher-in-charge. What happened, and what was it like?
2. Walk me through a typical day for you now, from the time you arrive.
3. Tell me about a time when being the teacher-in-charge was especially hard.
4. How do the people around you, the teachers, the parents, the barangay, the district and the division, see you as the one in charge?
5. What have you had to learn on the job, and how did you learn it?
6. What does being a teacher-in-charge cost you, and what does it give you?
7. If you could tell the division, or a teacher about to be designated, one thing about this experience, what would it be?

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

The form, in English and Filipino, states the study's title and purpose; who the researchers are and that none of them supervises the participant; what taking part involves (one interview of about an hour at the participant's school after classes, and a later reading of the study's description); the risks (tiredness and recalling difficult events) and the benefits; that taking part is voluntary and that refusing or withdrawing carries no penalty; how the

interview is recorded, transcribed, coded, stored, and destroyed; that the coded transcripts are submitted to the research committee as the executive data set, with a request that they not be released; that no payment is given; the participant's rights under the Data Privacy Act; and the researchers' and the ethics committee's contacts. It asks for three separate consents: to take part, to be audio-recorded, and to be quoted under a code.

Appendix C. Before the First Interview: The Lead Researcher's Expectations

From the reflexive journal, July 18, 2026: "I was a TIC for four years. I expect to hear that the money is the heaviest part, the cash advance and the liquidation. I expect resentment that there is no allowance. I expect them to say the division forgets small schools. I must listen for what I do not expect, and not finish their sentences for them." From the journal, September 4, 2026: "The money is there, but they spoke just as much about the class they leave. I nearly merged 'Reasons to stay' into 'Growing into a leader' because I did not expect it to be so strong. All ten spoke of why they stay."

Appendix D. The Audit Trail

The coding workbook's Audit trail sheet records each decision with its date, its step, and the reason. Among them: the second reader's independent marking of P01 and P02 and the settlement of the eight differences (July 21 to 27); the merging of the clusters "Signing everything" and "Fear of the auditors" into "Accountable for money and papers" (August 7); the stopping rule met after P10 (August 14); the theme names revised after peer debriefing (August 18); the revisions after the member check, and a line of P06's

interview that step 2 had left unmarked (September 23); and the external audit (October 12 to 16, 2026).

Appendix E. Declaration of AI Use

We, the researchers, declare that we used [the name of the AI tool, as the researchers would give it] only to check the grammar of the English text of this report, for the purpose of finalizing the research study. The prompt used was: "Check the grammar of this paragraph. Do not change its meaning or add content." We have reviewed, edited, and understood all the content, and we take full accountability for it. No transcript, recording, quotation, or other data from the study was entered into the AI tool.