

A Phenomenological Study on the Removal of Administrative Tasks of Teachers at Milagros East District

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Abstract

The teaching profession in the Philippines has long been burdened with administrative tasks that detract from teachers' primary role of facilitating student learning. In response, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, mandating the removal of non-instructional duties from public school teachers to allow them to refocus on classroom instruction, professional development, and well-being. This study explores the lived experiences of secondary teachers in Milagros East District, Masbate Province, as they navigate the implementation of this policy. Guided by a phenomenological research design, the study sought to answer how teachers describe their experiences in terms of classroom instruction, professional development, and well-being; what benefits they perceive; what challenges they encounter; and what support systems they consider essential. A purposive sample of ten Junior and Senior High School teachers was selected, and data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis to ensure rigor while preserving the authenticity of teachers' voices. Key findings revealed that teachers experienced improved instructional planning and delivery, greater participation in professional development activities, and enhanced well-being through reduced stress and better work-life balance. They also reported renewed passion for teaching and stronger learner engagement. However, challenges persisted, including managing diverse learners, limited instructional resources, and heightened expectations for innovative teaching. The study concludes that DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 positively impacted instructional quality, professional growth, and teacher well-being, but its sustainability depends on adequate support systems. Major recommendations include strengthening institutional support through additional staffing and resources, enhancing professional development programs, establishing monitoring mechanisms, promoting teacher wellness initiatives, and integrating technology solutions to further reduce residual workload. This research contributes localized, phenomenological evidence to the discourse on teacher workload reform, offering insights that inform policy refinement and advance SDG 4: Quality Education by empowering teachers to focus on their core instructional role.

Keywords: Teacher Workload Reform, Non-Instructional Duties, Classroom Instruction, Teacher Well-Being, Professional Development, Phenomenological Research, Philippine Basic Education, SDG 4 (Quality Education)

1. Introduction

The teaching profession has long been burdened by non-teaching administrative tasks that detract from classroom instruction, contribute to burnout, and diminish overall educational quality—a issue directly linked to the realization of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education. Globally, initiatives such as Malaysia's union lobbying and Australia's Quality Time Action Plan have sought to restore teachers' instructional focus and professional autonomy. In the Philippines, this movement materialized through DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 under the MATATAG Agenda, which mandates the transfer of non-instructional duties to school heads and support personnel. Grounded in literature addressing "time poverty," RPMS/PPST documentation strains, and the need for meaningful professional development, this policy aims to alleviate excessive workload and empower educators to prioritize effective teaching and student learning. Despite the promise of such policy interventions, existing literature remains largely quantitative, prescriptive, or focused on school administrators, failing to capture how classroom teachers subjectively experience and adapt to these changes in practice. This study addresses these gaps through a localized phenomenological lens, centering on the lived experiences of public school teachers in the resource-constrained Milagros East District, Masbate. By moving beyond policy design to explore ground-level realities, the research provides crucial practical and theoretical insights into how administrative task removal influences instructional quality, professional growth, and teacher well-being. Ultimately, these localized findings inform more responsive support systems and contribute to global and national efforts to build a more empowered, focused, and effective teaching workforce.

2. Material and method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological approach, to capture and describe the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding the removal of administrative tasks in the Milagros East District. Phenomenology was chosen because it emphasizes understanding the essence of experiences from the perspective of those who live them, making it appropriate for exploring how teachers interpret and make sense of the changes brought about by DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024. Unlike quantitative designs, which focus on numerical data and statistical testing, the phenomenological approach seeks to uncover meanings, insights, and shared realities through in-depth engagement with participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this research, phenomenology enables the exploration of how teachers experience the removal of administrative tasks in relation to their classroom instruction, professional development, and overall well-being. This design also allows for the careful analysis of teachers' subjective accounts to highlight both common themes and unique perspectives, aligning with the study's objective of giving voice to educators as primary stakeholders in the implementation of educational reforms. Furthermore, phenomenology provides the flexibility to interpret complex, real-world issues in education, such as teacher workload and instructional focus, in ways that purely quantitative methods may not fully capture (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

2.2 Locale of the Study

This study is situated in Milagros East District, one of the key educational districts in the municipality of Milagros, Province of Masbate. Milagros is recognized as one of the largest municipalities in the province, known for its rich cultural history, agricultural resources, and dynamic local economy. According to historical records, the town traces its roots back to pre-colonial settlements, with evidence of human habitation dating as far back as 5,000 years. Officially mentioned in a Royal Decree in 1866, Milagros evolved through Spanish colonization, American occupation, and the Japanese era of World War II, all of which shaped its governance, social structures, and education system. Today, it stands as a first-class municipality comprising 27 barangays, where farming, cattle raising, and fishing remain the primary sources of livelihood. The town also celebrates its identity through the Pagdangan Festival and other local traditions (Municipality of Milagros, 2024). Within its education sector, Milagros East District plays a crucial role in delivering basic education under the supervision of the Department of Education (DepEd). The district manages a network of schools consisting of 24 elementary schools, five secondary schools, and one integrated school. For this study, the focus is placed exclusively on the secondary level, which includes Junior High Schools (JHS) and Senior High Schools (SHS) in the district. Based on recent records, the teaching force is composed of approximately 91 JHS teachers and 14 SHS teachers, distributed across schools such as Gulapo-Jumao-As High School, Mary Perpetua High School, Melchor B. Burlaos Memorial High School, Jamorawon National High School, Revil-Bajar National High School, and Magsalangi Integrated School. The selection of Milagros East District as the research locale is significant because it reflects both the opportunities and challenges of implementing DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, which mandates the removal of administrative tasks from teachers. Given the district's composition, secondary school teachers often face heavier administrative workloads due to the demands of national assessments, performance-based reporting, and preparation for higher education or technical-vocational pathways. By focusing on 15 purposively chosen JHS and SHS teachers, the study aims to capture rich, first-hand narratives about how the reduction of administrative workload is experienced at the ground level. Elementary teachers are excluded to narrow the scope to the secondary context, where the intersection of administrative work and instructional demands is most pronounced. Geographically, Milagros East District lies within a municipality that covers 188 square kilometers with a population of over 104,000 residents (PhilAtlas, 2020). Its diverse geography, which includes fertile lands and the expansive Asid Gulf, influences the daily lives of its people and contributes to the character of its schools and communities. The setting provides an appropriate backdrop for the study as it represents both the realities of rural education and the aspirations of national reforms aimed at easing teacher workload.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants of this study consisted of fifteen (15) Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) teachers currently employed in public secondary schools within the Milagros East District. They served as the primary sources of data because they had direct and relevant experiences concerning the removal of administrative tasks mandated under DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024. Their experiences provided valuable insights into how the policy affected their professional responsibilities, instructional practices, opportunities for professional growth, and overall well-being. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: a. currently employed as a Junior High School (JHS) or Senior High School (SHS) teacher in any public secondary school within the Milagros East District; b. have rendered at least three (3) years of experience performing administrative task(s) assigned by the school prior to or during the implementation of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024; and c. willing to voluntarily participate in the study by providing informed consent and sharing their lived experiences through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Teachers who did not meet the specified criteria or who declined to participate were excluded from the study. The inclusion of participants with at least three years of administrative task experience ensured that they had sufficient exposure to administrative responsibilities, enabling them to meaningfully compare their experiences before and after the removal of such tasks. Their

prolonged engagement with administrative work allowed them to provide rich narratives regarding the policy's impact on classroom instruction, workload, professional development, and teacher well-being. Consistent with phenomenological inquiry, the participants were not selected to statistically represent the entire teaching population but rather to provide deep, detailed, and authentic accounts of their lived experiences. Their narratives served as the primary basis for identifying common themes and describing the essence of the phenomenon under investigation, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the policy within the context of the Milagros East District (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019).

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research to deliberately select participants who possess firsthand knowledge and lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling enables researchers to identify information-rich cases that can provide detailed and meaningful insights relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since this study sought to explore the lived experiences of teachers regarding the removal of administrative tasks, it was essential to recruit participants who had substantial experience performing such responsibilities before the implementation of the policy. A total of fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected from Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) teachers within the Milagros East District. The selected participants were considered capable of providing rich, comprehensive, and reflective descriptions of how the removal of administrative tasks influenced their instructional practices, professional development, and overall well-being. The sample size is consistent with recommendations for phenomenological research, which generally involves a relatively small number of participants to facilitate in-depth exploration of shared experiences rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). The use of purposive sampling ensured that every participant had direct experience with administrative responsibilities and was therefore able to articulate the realities, challenges, and perceived outcomes associated with the implementation of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024. This approach strengthened the credibility and richness of the data by focusing on individuals who were most knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research tool used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide, which was self-made by the researcher to elicit detailed accounts of teachers' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide a balance between consistency in questioning and flexibility for participants to elaborate, allowing deeper exploration of complex issues (Kallio et al., 2016). This tool was carefully designed after reviewing existing studies on teacher workload, professional development, and phenomenological methodologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher also consulted experienced faculty members and research advisers to refine the tool. To ensure validity and reliability, the interview guide underwent several revisions and was pilot-tested with two secondary teachers outside the research locale. This process allowed the researcher to check the clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensiveness of the questions. Feedback from the pilot test helped refine wording and sequencing, ensuring that the questions were both understandable and capable of capturing the intended data. The validated tool was then presented to the research adviser and approved by the panel before actual data collection. As to the structure of the Interview Guide, the finalized interview guide was divided into a preliminary section and four major sections, closely aligned with the Statement of the Problem: 1. Preliminary Section: Demographic Information. This section gathered contextual information such as teaching level (Junior High School or Senior High School), years of teaching experience, and subject area handled. Collecting demographic data ensured that responses could be interpreted in light of participants' professional backgrounds and contexts (Patton, 2015). 2. Section One: Classroom Instruction. Questions in this section elicited how teachers' lesson preparation, teaching delivery, and classroom interactions were affected by the removal of administrative tasks. This aligned with the first sub-question of the research problem, which sought to explore how workload reduction reshaped teachers' instructional practices. 3. Section Two: Professional Development. This section focused on whether teachers gained more time and energy to engage in professional learning, training, or reflective practices. The questions sought to determine the extent to which reduced administrative responsibilities enhanced or limited teachers' opportunities for growth. 4. Section Three: Teacher Well-being. Questions here investigated teachers' stress levels, work-life balance, morale, and overall satisfaction with the profession after the policy's implementation. Since teacher well-being is a key indicator of workload policy success (Wahab et al., 2023), this section provided valuable insights into its broader effects on personal and professional life. 5. Section Four: Perceived Benefits, Challenges, and Support Systems. The final section asked teachers to identify the benefits they experienced, the challenges they still face despite the policy, and the forms of support they believe are necessary to sustain the positive outcomes of reduced administrative workload. This directly addressed the remaining research questions on policy outcomes and sustainability. The interview guide was designed to allow in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives, consistent with the phenomenological approach, which prioritizes participants' lived experiences as the central data source (Vagle, 2018). The tool emphasized open-ended questions to encourage narrative responses while maintaining focus on the research objectives. The use of semi-structured interviews also permitted probing questions and clarifications, enabling the researcher to uncover meanings beyond surface-level responses.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

In qualitative research, interviews are regarded as invaluable tools for eliciting rich and in-depth accounts of participants' experiences. Potter (1996) emphasizes that interviews facilitate interactive engagement between the researcher and participants, allowing both verbal responses and non-verbal cues to be considered in the interpretation of data. In this study, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection. The modality was selected based on participants' preferences and accessibility, ensuring a more natural interaction compared to online alternatives. Respondents were interviewed at times most convenient to them, and the same interview guide was used across sessions to maintain consistency and comparability in the data collected. The interview guide was structured into four key areas aligned with the study's research questions: 1. Demographic information of the participants; 2. Experiences of classroom instruction following the removal of administrative tasks; 3. Perceptions of professional development opportunities created or constrained by the policy; 4. Insights on teacher well-being, perceived benefits, challenges, and support systems after the implementation of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. To complement interview data, field notes were taken by the researcher during and after the interview sessions. These notes captured contextual details, participant emotions, and researcher reflections, thereby enriching the narrative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike the earlier design that included classroom observations and journals in the context of technology integration, this study focused exclusively on interviews and researcher notes, as these were deemed most appropriate for capturing the lived experiences of administrative task removal.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the process of thematic analysis, which is widely used in phenomenological research to systematically identify, analyze, and report recurring themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). It allows flexibility in uncovering shared meanings while staying grounded in participants' perspectives. The researcher applied the following steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Caulfield, 2019): a. Familiarization. Transcribing interview recordings, reading transcripts multiple times, and noting preliminary insights. b. Coding. Highlighting significant statements and assigning labels ("codes") that represent their meaning. c. Generating themes. Grouping related codes to identify broader themes that reflect the essence of participants' experiences. d. Reviewing themes. Refining and validating the themes to ensure they accurately represent the dataset. e. Defining and naming themes. Clarifying the scope and content of each theme in relation to the research questions. f. Writing up. Integrating the themes into a coherent narrative that answers the research questions, supported by direct quotations from participants. This approach ensured that the lived experiences of teachers regarding the removal of administrative tasks were analyzed holistically and rigorously. The researcher acted as the primary instrument of analysis, maintaining reflexivity throughout the process to minimize bias and to authentically represent participants' voices (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, by ensuring that all personal information collected from participants was processed lawfully, fairly, and solely for legitimate research purposes. Appropriate measures were implemented to safeguard the confidentiality, integrity, and security of participants' data throughout the research process. The study likewise adhered to the ethical standards prescribed under CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 15, Series of 2019, which establishes the Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) for Graduate Programs in the Philippines and emphasizes the conduct of responsible and ethical research. In accordance with these guidelines, participants' rights, welfare, and privacy were prioritized at all stages of the study. Data gathered were used exclusively for academic purposes and were handled with strict confidentiality. Compliance with these legal and institutional frameworks further strengthened the ethical rigor, credibility, and integrity of the research.

1. Results and Discussion

3.1 1. Lived Experiences of Teachers Regarding the Removal of Administrative Tasks

The removal of administrative tasks under DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, has significantly transformed teachers' lived experiences by allowing them to refocus on classroom instruction, professional development, and personal well-being. By shifting their time from clerical paperwork to primary teaching responsibilities, educators reported improved instructional planning, enhanced learner engagement, and greater pedagogical innovation, which allowed them to adopt learner-centered, technology-integrated strategies. This reduction in non-teaching workload also fostered a culture of continuous learning, enabling teachers to strengthen their competence through increased participation in webinars, action research, graduate studies, and collaborative practices like peer coaching and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. Crucially, relief from administrative burdens drastically improved teachers' psychological health and work-life balance, alleviating stress and emotional exhaustion while restoring personal time for family, self-care, and professional fulfillment. Supported by

relevant literature, these collective findings demonstrate that relieving teachers of non-instructional duties not only boosts teaching quality and student outcomes but also cultivates a healthier, more motivated, and highly effective teaching force.

3.2 Teachers' Perceived Benefits on the removal of administrative tasks from their responsibilities

Study revealed that teachers perceive the removal of administrative tasks under DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, as a transformative reform that restores their primary identity as educators by redirecting their time and energy toward classroom instruction, individualized learner support, and proactive remediation. Relieved of heavy non-teaching duties, educators report lower stress levels, improved emotional health, and higher job satisfaction, which directly enhances their daily instructional preparedness, feedback delivery, and overall teaching effectiveness. The policy has also created vital opportunities for continuous professional growth—allowing teachers to engage in graduate studies, webinars, resource development, and reflective practice without the constant pressure of administrative deadlines. Supported by established educational research, these collective findings demonstrate that protecting teachers' instructional time ultimately elevates the overall quality of basic education, fostering richer, more responsive, and learner-centered environments that drive student achievement.

3.3 Challenges Experienced by the Teachers Despite the Implementation of the Policy Removing Administrative Tasks

Although the implementation of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, successfully removed non-teaching administrative duties, teachers continued to face significant instructional, professional, and systemic challenges in their daily practice. With non-instructional workload reduced, educators experienced a distinct shift in focus that heightened their responsibility to address increasing classroom complexities, such as large class sizes, literacy and numeracy gaps, and diverse learner profiles requiring differentiated instruction. Furthermore, this reduction in paperwork raised professional expectations regarding teaching quality, performance targets, and learner outcomes, compelling teachers to adapt their daily routines toward rigorous lesson preparation, instructional documentation, collaborative planning, and continuous reflective practice. Supported by educational frameworks like Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction and Fullan's Theory of Educational Change, these findings illustrate that workload reduction redirected teachers' efforts toward pedagogical excellence rather than eliminating professional demands entirely. Beyond classroom instruction, teachers also had to navigate emerging expectations surrounding digital transformation, professional development, and systemic limitations. While educators gained the time to explore artificial intelligence tools, digital resources, and action research, they frequently encountered persistent systemic barriers, including unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and limited instructional resources. Additionally, managing time across continuous professional development—such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, coaching, and mentoring—required disciplined time management to balance instructional needs with continuous growth. Grounded in the TPACK framework and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), these findings emphasize that maximizing the policy's benefits requires sustained institutional support, including improved educational infrastructure, robust ICT resources, and ongoing professional training to help teachers effectively meet the demands of modern, learner-centered education.

3.4 Perceived Support do Teachers Consider Essential to Sustain the Positive Outcomes of a Reduced Administrative Workload

The qualitative investigation into the essential institutional support required to sustain the policy removing administrative tasks from teachers yielded four major themes: Strengthening Administrative Support Systems, Sustaining Policy Implementation through Monitoring and Accountability, Promoting Teacher Support and Professional Development, and Fostering Collaborative Governance and Resource Provision. Participants consistently reported that the long-term success of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, relies heavily on the continuous deployment and capacity-building of qualified non-teaching staff, sufficient funding for administrative positions, clear task delegation from school heads, and adequate ICT infrastructure to prevent clerical duties from reverting to educators. Furthermore, participants highlighted that sustaining these instructional gains requires systematic division-level monitoring, continuous technical assistance, open communication, and structured feedback mechanisms to ensure uniform policy compliance across schools while actively reinvesting freed-up time into Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, action research, and mentoring. Grounding these findings in Chapter II's literature, the participants' experiences directly align with the core mandates of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024, DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 (LAC Policy), and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), all of which emphasize that protecting teachers' instructional time and fostering continuous professional learning are vital for educational quality. Theoretical frameworks further validate these empirical results: DiMaggio and Powell's Institutional Theory supports the necessity of stable organizational structures, clearly defined roles, and monitoring systems for policy fidelity; Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory underscores how supportive, participative school leadership drives teacher motivation and collaborative governance; and RA 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001) reinforces the structural imperative of clear role delineation within basic education. Collectively, these findings and supporting literature confirm that removing administrative burdens is not a one-time structural adjustment, but a continuous, resource-backed, and collaboratively governed process essential for safeguarding teachers' professional identity and improving learner outcomes.

2. Conclusion & Recommendations

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 in Milagros East District has effectively transformed teachers' professional lives by removing administrative burdens and allowing them to refocus their energy on classroom instruction and meaningful professional growth. Aligning closely with the MATATAG Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), this workload reduction has markedly enhanced teacher well-being—reducing stress, boosting morale, and improving work-life balance. Consequently, a healthier, more motivated teaching workforce is directly enhancing instructional quality. However, the study concludes that these positive outcomes require sustained institutional support, adequate staffing, clear resource frameworks, and digital innovation to ensure administrative burdens do not resurface over time.

To preserve and build upon these gains, the Department of Education, school heads, and local division offices must take concrete, proactive measures. Schools should immediately reinforce administrative support by hiring additional non-teaching staff, deploying digital tools for record-keeping, and clustering rural schools for shared administrative resources. Furthermore, educational leaders must maximize teachers' newly reclaimed time by institutionalizing wellness initiatives, expanding Learning Action Cells (LACs), and delivering targeted professional development in learner-centered and ICT-integrated instruction. Finally, Educational Program Supervisors should establish robust monitoring mechanisms to connect reduced workload to measurable instructional improvements, while continuously refining policy implementation based on feedback from diverse school contexts.

While these findings offer vital qualitative insights into secondary teachers' lived experiences during the 2024–2025 school year, several constraints limit the broader application of this study. Anchored in a qualitative, phenomenological design with a purposive sample of ten secondary (JHS and SHS) teachers in Milagros East District, the findings privilege deep narrative depth over statistical generalizability, meaning they may not fully capture the experiences of elementary educators or teachers in other geographical regions. Additionally, because the study relied strictly on subjective teacher perceptions rather than objective quantitative metrics—such as standardized test scores or tracked administrative hours—it does not provide a direct empirical measurement of policy efficacy. Nevertheless, these contextualized insights serve as a compelling foundation for understanding teacher workload and well-being in rural secondary education.

Compliance with ethical standards

To guarantee the integrity, credibility, and ethical soundness of this study, strict adherence to institutional ethical standards and research protocols was maintained throughout all phases of the inquiry. Formal institutional ethical approval and administrative clearances were secured from Osmeña Colleges and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)–Masbate Provincial Office prior to field entry. Voluntary participation was strictly observed, with explicit written informed consent obtained from all participating TVET administrators, instructors, and industry partners, who were fully briefed on the study's scope and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. To uphold the confidentiality of information and non-maleficence, all personal identities and institutional datasets were anonymized through coded identifiers or presented in aggregate form to prevent professional or organizational harm. The author declares no potential conflict of interest regarding the conduct or publication of this research, ensuring complete objectivity free from commercial or institutional bias. Deep gratitude and proper acknowledgement of contributions are extended to the TVET administrators, instructors, industry partners, thesis panel, and research adviser whose cooperation and expertise enriched this work. Finally, regarding authorship responsibility and copyright ownership, the author asserts full responsibility for the manuscript's content, maintaining copyright ownership in compliance with academic policies while ensuring that all literature, tools, and institutional data are meticulously cited to reflect authentic, original academic research.

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