



Teacher-tutors' experiences in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program: Bases for school-based enhancement program

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the teacher-tutors' experiences in the implementation of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as bases for a school-based enhancement program in the secondary schools in the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, during the school year 2025–2026. Findings of the study revealed that the experiences of teacher-tutors were: improved learners' reading skills and comprehension, enhanced learners' mastery of academic tasks, provision of instructional materials, and strengthened learners' interest. The themes for challenges encountered by the teacher-tutors were: learners' absenteeism, lack of manipulative materials, lack of parental support, time constraints, weak reading and vocabulary skills, and teachers' workload burden. The teacher-tutors overcome the challenges by giving rewards and incentives, using interactive and gamified activities, incorporating realia and audio-visual materials, employing peer tutoring and teacher teamwork, and involving parents for follow-up. A school-based enhancement program was designed by the researcher as a result of the study.

Keywords: Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning program, teacher-tutors, experiences, enhancement program

Introduction

Reading literacy remains a critical concern in the Philippine education system, particularly in the context of post-pandemic learning recovery. Persistent gaps in foundational reading skills have placed significant pressure on schools to implement effective intervention programs that address learners' academic needs.

International assessments continue to highlight the urgency of this issue. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed that Filipino learners obtained an average reading score of 347, which is substantially lower than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 476. This performance reflects long-standing challenges in literacy development and underscores the need for strengthened instructional support within schools (OECD, 2023) ^[41].

In response to learning losses and widening academic gaps, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced recovery initiatives such as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. The ARAL Program is designed to provide targeted remediation and enrichment through structured learning sessions, with teacher-tutors playing a central role in its implementation. As frontliners of the program, teacher-tutors are expected to employ interactive instructional practices that foster learner engagement, comprehension, and participation. Consequently, the success of the ARAL Program largely depends on how teacher-tutors facilitate learning interactions and address challenges encountered during implementation.

However, existing literature suggests that the implementation of school-based reading and recovery programs is often accompanied by practical and instructional difficulties. Soria (2024) ^[65], in a study examining teachers' assessment of a reading program under the National Learning Camp (NLC), reported that while teachers utilized varied interactive strategies to support reading development, they also faced challenges related to

limited instructional resources, diverse learner abilities, and classroom management concerns. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of academic recovery programs is influenced not only by program design but also by the interactive practices and experiences of teachers responsible for implementation.

Despite the implementation of national recovery initiatives, there remains limited empirical research focusing on the implementation challenges of teacher-tutors within the ARAL Program, particularly at the school level. Understanding how teacher-tutors engage learners, adapt instructional strategies, and navigate implementation constraints is essential in identifying areas for program improvement.

Hence, this study sought to explore the experiences and implementation challenges encountered by teacher-tutors in the ARAL Program as bases for a contextualized, school-based enhancement program.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore teacher-tutors' experiences in the implementation of the ARAL Program in the secondary schools in the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, during the School Year 2025^[70]–2026.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of teacher-tutors in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program?
2. What challenges do teacher-tutors encounter in the conduct of the ARAL Program?
3. How do teacher-tutors overcome the challenges encountered in the implementation of the ARAL Program?
4. What school-based enhancement program can be designed based on the findings of the study?

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is grounded in learning theories that provide insight into how tutoring and instructional support enhance student learning outcomes and illuminate the experiences of teacher-tutors in implementing the ARAL Program.

The research draws on Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978), which asserts that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. As explained by McLeod (2025) [16], cognitive development is shaped through engagement with more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, peers, or parents, with learning initially taking place on a social level before being internalized by the learner. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance, emphasizing the importance of collaborative and guided learning for academic growth.

The study is also informed by Carol Ann Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Theory (2014, as cited in Flordelyn *et al.*, 2023) [29], which highlights the necessity of tailoring teaching strategies to accommodate students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.

Additionally, the research draws on Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997, as cited in Hendricks, Olawale, & Saddiq, 2024) [33], which posits that teachers' confidence in their instructional abilities affects how they navigate challenges and facilitate student learning.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how teacher-tutors support learners through guided instruction, differentiated strategies, and professional self-efficacy in the implementation of the ARAL Program.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research focused on the experiences, challenges encountered, and how teacher-tutors overcome these challenges in the implementation of the ARAL Program in the secondary schools in the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, during the school year 2025^[70]–2026.

The participants in the study were the ten (10) teacher-tutors assigned to the ARAL Program in the selected schools.

A researcher-made semi-structured interview guide, validated by a panel of expert jurors in the fields of research, testing, assessment, and English, was used in this study.

The data gathered were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis. Moreover, the study aimed to design a school-based enhancement program based on the findings.

Research Methodology

This study employed the qualitative research method, which is suitable for exploring lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals in real world contexts (Given, 2023). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate when the goal is to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2023) [13]. In this study, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to deeply understand teacher tutors' experiences, challenges encountered, and strategies used in implementing the ARAL Program.

Research Design

A phenomenological research design was adopted in this study. Phenomenological research design is a qualitative approach that aims to explore and describe individuals'

lived experiences of a particular phenomenon in order to understand the meanings they assign to those experiences (Daruhadi, 2024) [14]. This design focuses on participants' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences to reveal the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants. Nikolopoulou (2023) [55] defined purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers intentionally select participants who possess specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the study in order to obtain rich and meaningful information.

In this study, only secondary English teacher-tutors conducting ARAL remedial reading sessions during the School Year 2025–2026^[24, 53] were included. This ensured the data collected was rich, relevant, and meaningful.

Respondents

The participants in the study were the ten (10) English teacher-tutors assigned to the ARAL Program in the secondary schools of the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, School Year 2025^[24]–2026. All the participants shared their experiences, the challenges they encountered, and how they overcame these challenges in the implementation of the ARAL Program through semi-structured interviews. The participants were assigned numbers for anonymity and confidentiality. They were named Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Data Gathering Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-made semi structured interview guide. The researcher utilized this to allow participants to express their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe for further clarification and depth.

The researcher-made semi structured interview guide contained three (3) main questions on teacher tutors' experiences, challenges encountered, and how to overcome those challenges in the implementation of the ARAL Program.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher began by obtaining the necessary permission from key authorities, including the Dean of the Graduate School, the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the Office of the District Supervisor, School Heads, and the individual participants. Once permissions were granted, the researcher personally visited the participants to facilitate the interview process.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher provided the participants with a detailed orientation of the study's purpose and procedures to establish rapport and encourage open dialogue. Participants were informed that the interviews would be accurately transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted.

The participants were then asked to sign a consent form, indicating their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's requirements.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a time convenient for each participant to ensure comfort and genuine responses.

Data Analyses

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data (Nowell, *et al.*, 2023) ^[56].

Thematic analysis is suitable for phenomenological studies because it allows the researcher to capture the lived experiences of participants while organizing data into meaningful categories.

The process includes: Familiarization by reading and re-reading transcripts to gain an initial understanding, Coding by assigning labels to meaningful units of data, Theme Development by grouping codes into broader patterns and themes, Theme Refinement by reviewing themes to ensure coherence and distinction, and Defining Themes by clearly describing what each theme represents.

Summary

This study aimed to explore teacher-tutors' experiences, challenges encountered, and how to overcome these challenges in the implementation of the ARAL Program in the secondary schools of the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, during the school year 2025^[70]–2026, as bases for a school-based enhancement program.

The participants in the study were the ten (10) secondary English teacher-tutors who provided insights through semi-structured interviews.

A researcher-made semi-structured interview guide was used to gather the data. The instrument was validated and found by the experts to be appropriate for use.

The study utilized thematic analysis to interpret and analyze the participants' responses.

The following were the findings of the study

Regarding the participants' experiences in the implementation of the ARAL Program, they included improved learners' reading skills and comprehension, enhanced learners' mastery of academic tasks, provision of instructional materials, and strengthened learners' interest.

The challenges encountered by the participants were: learners' absenteeism, lack of manipulative materials, lack of parental support, time constraints, weak reading and vocabulary skills, and teachers' workload burden.

Teacher-tutors overcome the challenges encountered by giving rewards and incentives, using interactive and gamified activities, incorporating realia and audio-visual materials, employing peer tutoring and teacher teamwork, and involving parents for follow-up.

A school-based enhancement program was designed based on the findings of the study.

Insights

The ARAL Program serves as a significant instructional intervention capable of elevating learners' foundational literacy and academic engagement. Participants consistently observed that structured remediation through ARAL not only improved learners' reading skills and comprehension but also fostered stronger mastery of academic tasks. The availability of instructional materials and the program's targeted support further strengthened learners' interest, suggesting that ARAL effectively addresses learning gaps by providing differentiated and scaffolded learning experiences. These positive outcomes affirm the program's alignment with the broader goal of reducing learning loss and accelerating skill acquisition among struggling learners.

Despite these gains, the challenges encountered indicate that the success of ARAL is influenced by several contextual and systemic factors. Issues such as chronic absenteeism, limited manipulative materials, weak vocabulary skills, insufficient parental support, and time constraints highlight barriers rooted in learner motivation, home environment, and resource availability. Additionally, teachers' workload burden suggests that while ARAL is pedagogically beneficial, it also adds operational pressure on educators who must balance regular teaching duties with remedial tasks. These challenges underscore the need for holistic support structures to ensure sustainability and effectiveness. In response, the strategies employed by teachers demonstrate adaptive and innovative problem solving. Reward systems, gamified activities, realia, and audiovisual materials indicate a shift toward more engaging, learner-centered approaches designed to increase participation and intrinsic motivation. Peer tutoring, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement address the socio-academic ecosystem surrounding each learner, showing that improved outcomes require coordinated effort beyond the classroom. These strategies reflect a strong teacher agency and capacity to tailor interventions to context-specific barriers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and insights of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

ARAL learners should attend sessions consistently and participate actively in the learning activities provided by their tutors. Regular engagement in vocabulary-building exercises, reading tasks, and peer-assisted activities can help reinforce the skills developed during the program. Strengthening their commitment to the intervention will ensure that they fully benefit from the scaffolding and differentiated instruction offered.

Teacher-tutors are advised to continue utilizing interactive, gamified, and multimodal strategies that have been shown to enhance learner interest and comprehension. Teachers should integrate vocabulary-focused routines and develop improvised or low-cost manipulative materials to address resource shortages. Collaboration among tutors—particularly through peer tutoring systems and shared planning—can help ease workload burdens and improve the consistency of instructional delivery. Furthermore, maintaining regular communication with parents is crucial in encouraging home-based follow-up and extending the learning process beyond the classroom.

School heads should institutionalize a structured school-based enhancement program anchored on the research findings to ensure continuity and improvement of ARAL implementation. Providing adequate materials, allocating protected time for remedial sessions, and supporting teachers by reducing unnecessary administrative tasks will help strengthen the program's delivery. School leaders should also reinforce monitoring and evaluation systems to track learner attendance, performance gains, and challenges encountered during the program.

DepEd officials should increase resource allocation for reading materials, manipulative tools, and audiovisual equipment, since they are essential in enhancing the program's effectiveness. Continued training for ARAL tutors on remediation strategies, differentiated learning, and learner engagement techniques is also recommended. Policies that minimize teacher workload and promote

stronger parent and community engagement should be prioritized, alongside division and regional-level monitoring mechanisms that ensure consistent and high-quality implementation of ARAL across schools.

Parents and guardians should actively support the learners by ensuring consistent attendance, providing a conducive learning environment at home, and reinforcing reading and vocabulary activities. Regular communication with teachers and participation in school-led orientations or activities related to ARAL will further strengthen the home-school partnership and improve learner outcomes.

The enhancement program formulated by the researcher should be implemented at the school level, across the Schools District of Barotac Viejo, and throughout the Schools Division of Iloilo.

Future researchers and educators, should conduct studies exploring additional variables such as home literacy environment, parental attitudes, or socio-economic factors to deepen the understanding of challenges affecting ARAL implementation. Longitudinal inquiries that investigate the lasting impact of the intervention, as well as research on the effectiveness of specific strategies such as gamification and peer tutoring, would be beneficial.

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