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Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning: Teachers' Experiences in the Implementation

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored teachers' experiences in implementing Reading Recovery through the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program at Panalsalan Integrated School, Plaridel, Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. Using a qualitative design, data were gathered from twelve purposively selected teacher-participants through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Findings showed that teachers observed improvements in learners' reading skills, confidence, participation, and movement from non-reader or frustration levels toward instructional and, in some cases, independent reading. Teachers used phonics-based instruction, differentiated and individualized teaching, guided and repeated reading, interactive learning materials, and assessment-guided progress monitoring. Implementation was constrained by limited intervention time, workload and role overload, insufficient instructional resources, learner absenteeism and low motivation, hunger and low reading readiness, and limited parental or home reinforcement. The study concludes that reading recovery under ARAL can provide meaningful support to struggling readers when evidence-based instruction is matched with adequate time, resources, teacher support, and active school-family collaboration.

Keywords: ARAL Program, reading recovery, instructional strategies, teachers' experiences, literacy intervention, thematic analysis

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Introduction

Reading recovery programs provide structured and targeted support to learners who struggle with foundational literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. International reports continue to identify foundational literacy as a major educational priority, particularly after pandemic-related learning disruptions (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Early intervention is important because persistent reading difficulty can affect later learning across subject areas.

In the Philippine context, schools continue to respond to literacy gaps through school-based remediation and national learning recovery initiatives. The ARAL Program provides a framework for targeted academic support to learners who are below expected proficiency levels. Its implementation places teachers at the center of identifying learner needs, delivering intervention, monitoring progress, and adjusting instruction.

The effectiveness of reading recovery depends not only on the existence of a program but also on how teachers translate it into classroom practice. Literature emphasizes guided reading, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, formative assessment, and sustained teacher support as important components of early literacy intervention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Kim & Quinn, 2022; Graham, 2020; OECD, 2023). These practices allow teachers to respond to differences in learners' readiness, pace, language exposure, and reading profiles.

The study is anchored on Sociocultural Theory, associated with Vygotsky (1978), which explains learning as a socially mediated process shaped by interaction, language, culture, and guidance from more knowledgeable others. The Zone of Proximal Development supports the use of scaffolding, guided practice, teacher modeling, questioning, and feedback. In literacy instruction, these forms of assistance help learners perform reading tasks that they may not yet accomplish independently (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2023; Garcia, 2020; Mendoza, 2022).

The school and home environments also influence reading development. Learners benefit when reading support is reinforced through meaningful texts, interactive classroom discourse, and home literacy practices (Cruz & Bautista, 2021; Navarro, 2024). Consequently, the success of a reading recovery program cannot be separated from teacher capacity, instructional materials, school support, learner attendance, and family participation.

This study therefore examined the implementation of Reading Recovery through the ARAL Program at Panalsalan Integrated School. Specifically, it explored teachers' experiences, identified the instructional strategies used during intervention sessions, determined the challenges encountered, and developed recommendations for improving implementation. The study focused on the realities of one school context and did not quantitatively measure learner performance or evaluate the ARAL Program across other schools or districts.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' experiences in implementing Reading Recovery through the ARAL Program. The participants were twelve teachers of Panalsalan Integrated School who were directly involved in ARAL reading intervention during School Year 2025–2026. Purposive sampling was used. Participants were required to be currently teaching in the school, directly involved in the program, to have at least one semester of experience conducting ARAL reading sessions, and to be willing to participate. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed and modified semi-structured interview guide aligned with the statement of the problem. The guide covered teachers' implementation experiences, instructional strategies, implementation challenges, and recommendations. It underwent adviser review, expert validation by specialists in education, literacy instruction, and qualitative research, and pilot interviewing before final use. After securing the necessary permissions, individual interviews were conducted in a private setting. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was observed. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and supported by field notes. The responses were transcribed, reviewed, coded, grouped into recurring patterns, and organized into themes through thematic analysis. Ethical safeguards were maintained throughout data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and reporting.

Results and Discussions

The analysis produced three major areas corresponding to the research questions: teachers' experiences in implementing Reading Recovery under the ARAL Program, instructional strategies used in delivering reading

recovery sessions, and challenges encountered in implementation. Across these areas, the findings show that the program produced perceived gains in reading while requiring substantial teacher adaptation and institutional support.

Table 1. Codes and Themes: Teachers’ Experiences in Implementing Reading Recovery

Codes / Indicators	Theme
Improved reading skills; confidence and engagement; progress from non-reader to instructional/independent reader	Positive Impact on Learners’ Reading Development
Differentiation; patience and flexibility; data-driven decisions; attention to individual needs	Adaptive and Learner-Centered Teaching Practices
One-on-one/small-group teaching; phonics/Marungko/CVC; guided and repeated reading; interactive activities	Use of Targeted Reading Strategies and Interventions
Limited time; workload; delayed or insufficient materials; scheduling conflicts	Implementation Challenges and Constraints
Absenteeism; low motivation; hunger; low readiness; need for parental support	Learner-Related Difficulties and Need for Support Systems

Teachers’ Experiences in Implementing Reading Recovery

Positive Impact on Learners’ Reading Development

Teachers consistently described visible progress among struggling readers. Improvements included letter recognition, decoding, fluency, comprehension, confidence, and participation. The intervention gave teachers dedicated opportunities to address reading gaps through repeated exposure, guided instruction, and targeted practice. Some participants described movement from non-reader or frustration levels toward instructional and independent reading.

“Out of ten struggling learners, eight became instructional and only two remained struggling readers.” (P4)
“I have observed significant improvements in learners who were previously unable to recognize letters or read simple words.” (P11)
“Some learners can now read sentences and short stories, step by step they are improving.” (P5)

These narratives suggest that reading development is gradual and cumulative. Progress becomes more visible when learners receive consistent reinforcement and instruction matched to their current skill level. The finding is consistent with literature emphasizing systematic early literacy intervention and repeated guided practice (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2023).

Adaptive and Learner-Centered Teaching Practices

Teachers also described becoming more flexible, patient, and responsive to individual learner needs. They used assessment results to identify specific reading difficulties and adjusted the pace, materials, grouping, and level of assistance. This reflects differentiated instruction, where teaching decisions are modified according to learner readiness and performance.

The experience of implementing ARAL therefore influenced not only learner outcomes but also teachers’ instructional decision-making. Teachers increasingly relied on learner data, observation, and immediate feedback rather than using a single approach for all struggling readers. This learner-centered orientation is consistent with the sociocultural view that effective support should be responsive to what learners can accomplish with appropriate guidance.

Use of Targeted Reading Strategies and Interventions

Teachers reported using one-on-one instruction, small-group sessions, phonics, the Marungko approach, consonant-vowel-consonant patterns, guided reading, repeated reading, flashcards, visual aids, stories, and game-based activities. These targeted interventions were selected according to learners’ specific difficulties. The combination of explicit foundational skills instruction and interactive activities helped maintain

engagement while strengthening decoding and fluency.

The use of targeted interventions supports the principle that struggling readers need instruction that is intensive, focused, and responsive. Guided reading and teacher modeling provide scaffolded assistance, while repeated reading allows learners to practice accuracy and fluency. Interactive materials can also reduce anxiety and make intervention sessions more engaging.

Implementation Challenges and Constraints

Despite positive experiences, teachers described structural constraints that affected the consistency and intensity of intervention. Limited time was one of the most frequently mentioned concerns. Participants indicated that short sessions were not always sufficient for learners who required extensive practice and individualized attention.

“The time is not enough. Thirty minutes is not sufficient to help struggling readers improve.” (P4)

“We only have a short time for ARAL, but learners need more time to understand.” (P6)

“Because of limited time, we cannot fully focus on each learner.” (P10)

Teachers also carried regular teaching, reporting, and administrative responsibilities while conducting ARAL sessions. The additional workload could reduce energy, preparation time, and instructional focus. Participants further reported that materials were sometimes insufficient, delayed, or not ready for immediate use, requiring them to print, download, or develop resources independently.

Learner-Related Difficulties and Need for Support Systems

Teachers identified learner absenteeism, irregular attendance, low motivation, hunger, weak reading readiness, comprehension difficulties, and poor retention as barriers to progress. These factors interrupted continuity and required teachers to repeat lessons or provide additional support. Learners who missed sessions had difficulty maintaining the sequence of skills being developed.

The findings also point to the importance of support beyond the classroom. Teachers observed that limited parental follow-up reduced opportunities for practice at home. Reading recovery requires repeated exposure and reinforcement; when support ends after the school session, learners may have fewer opportunities to consolidate skills.

Overall, teachers’ experiences reveal a dual reality. The ARAL reading intervention is perceived as capable of improving reading performance and confidence, yet implementation depends heavily on teachers’ adaptability and willingness to compensate for constraints. The program therefore operates through the interaction of instructional competence, learner participation, available time, materials, and stakeholder support.

Instructional Strategies Used in Reading Recovery

Table 2. Codes and Themes: Instructional Strategies Used in Reading Recovery

Codes / Indicators	Theme
Letter-sound relationships; decoding; blending; phonemic awareness; Marungko and CVC patterns	Phonics-Based and Foundational Reading Instruction
One-on-one teaching; small groups; peer tutoring; scaffolding; level-based tasks	Individualized and Differentiated Instruction
Guided reading; repeated reading; echo reading; continuous drills	Guided, Repetitive, and Practice-Based Strategies
Flashcards; visual aids; stories; games; digital resources	Use of Instructional Materials and Interactive Activities
Checklists; oral reading tests; continuous assessment; progress tracking	Assessment-Guided Instruction and Progress Monitoring

Phonics-Based and Foundational Reading Instruction

Phonics-based instruction emerged as a core strategy. Teachers focused on letter-sound relationships, phonemic awareness, blending, decoding, and word recognition. Approaches such as Marungko and CVC patterns provided structured sequences for learners who had difficulty reading basic words. Explicit instruction in foundational skills is especially important for learners who have not yet developed automatic word recognition.

Individualized and Differentiated Instruction

Teachers adjusted intervention according to learners' reading levels and specific needs. One-on-one instruction was used when a learner required intensive support, while small-group instruction and peer tutoring allowed teachers to address similar difficulties efficiently. Scaffolding enabled teachers to provide prompts, modeling, and guided practice before gradually reducing assistance as learners became more independent.

Guided, Repetitive, and Practice-Based Strategies

Guided reading, repeated reading, echo reading, and drills were used to strengthen accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Repetition was particularly important for learners who had difficulty retaining skills. Through teacher modeling and repeated practice, learners received multiple opportunities to apply reading skills in increasingly independent ways. This is consistent with research describing fluency as a bridge between decoding and comprehension (Rasinski, 2020; Kim & Wagner, 2022).

Use of Instructional Materials and Interactive Activities

Teachers used flashcards, visual aids, stories, games, and available digital resources to make reading sessions engaging. These materials helped make abstract sound-symbol relationships more concrete and supported learner motivation. However, the usefulness of these strategies depended on the availability of suitable, level-appropriate resources.

Assessment-Guided Instruction and Progress Monitoring

Assessment was integrated into instruction through oral reading checks, checklists, observation, and continuous progress monitoring. Teachers used results to identify gaps, select appropriate tasks, and determine whether learners were ready to move to more difficult material. This reflects a data-driven cycle in which assessment informs teaching and teaching generates new evidence of learner progress.

Challenges Encountered in ARAL Reading Recovery

Table 3. Codes and Themes: Challenges Encountered in Implementing ARAL

Codes / Indicators	Theme
Limited intervention time; insufficient session duration; conflict with regular classes; preparation and assessment time; late implementation	Time Constraints and Scheduling Issues
Heavy teaching load; multiple responsibilities; balancing ARAL and regular duties; limited energy; need for additional personnel	Workload and Role Overload of Teachers
Lack of ready-to-use materials; limited books/leveled readers; dependence on printed/downloaded materials; preparation burden	Insufficient Resources and Instructional Materials
Absenteeism; low motivation; hunger; low readiness; comprehension difficulty; weak retention	Learner-Related Challenges Affecting Progress
Limited parental follow-up; minimal home reading practice; weak school-community collaboration; responsibility concentrated on teachers	Limited Stakeholder Support and Home Reinforcement

Time Constraints and Scheduling Issues

Time limitations affected the intensity and continuity of reading intervention. Teachers reported that thirty-

minute sessions could be insufficient for learners who needed repeated modeling, individual practice, and corrective feedback. Scheduling ARAL alongside regular teaching also created conflicts. Preparation and assessment added further demands, while late program implementation shortened the intervention period.

Workload and Role Overload of Teachers

“It adds to our workload because aside from teaching, we also handle ARAL sessions.” (P3)

“We have many responsibilities, so it is difficult to focus on ARAL alone.” (P2)

“Sometimes we are tired already, but we still need to conduct reading sessions.” (P6)

These responses show that ARAL is implemented within an already demanding professional workload. Excessive role demands may affect preparation, consistency, and teacher well-being. The finding supports literature connecting heavy workload with reduced instructional effectiveness and teacher strain (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Insufficient Resources and Instructional Materials

Teachers reported a lack of ready-to-use materials and limited access to books and leveled readers. They often relied on downloaded, personally printed, or teacher-made resources. Although this demonstrated resourcefulness, it also increased preparation time and could create inconsistency in the materials available to learners.

“We do not have ready materials, so we need to prepare our own.” (P1)

“We lack books and leveled readers for our learners.” (P6)

Adequate instructional resources are essential because reading recovery requires materials matched to learner level and skill. Institutional provision of structured, engaging, and accessible resources can reduce teacher burden and strengthen consistency.

Learner-Related Challenges Affecting Progress

Absenteeism and irregular attendance interrupted the sequence of intervention. Low motivation reduced participation, while hunger and unmet basic needs affected concentration. Some learners entered the program with weak phonemic awareness, vocabulary, decoding, or comprehension skills, and others had difficulty retaining previously learned content.

“If learners are always absent, they cannot improve because they miss the sessions.” (P1)

“If they are hungry, they cannot focus on reading.” (P6)

“Even if they learn today, they forget the next day.” (P5)

These difficulties show that reading problems are connected with broader learner conditions. Literacy intervention therefore requires both instructional responses and learner-support mechanisms, including attendance monitoring, motivation strategies, and attention to basic needs.

Limited Stakeholder Support and Home Reinforcement

Teachers emphasized that limited parental support and lack of reading practice at home hindered sustained progress. When responsibility for literacy development is concentrated mainly on teachers, the gains achieved during intervention may be difficult to reinforce outside school.

“It seems that the responsibility is only on teachers.” (P3)

The finding highlights the need for stronger school-family partnerships. Parents do not need advanced technical knowledge to support reading; consistent encouragement, monitoring, shared reading, and communication with teachers can help reinforce skills. Literature likewise identifies home literacy environments and school-family collaboration as important influences on reading achievement and motivation (Hill & Tyson, 2020; Jaynes, 2021; Epstein, 2020; Goodall, 2021).

Conclusions

The study concludes that Reading Recovery through the ARAL Program at Panalsalan Integrated School serves as a responsive intervention for struggling readers. Teachers perceived improvements in learners' foundational reading skills, confidence, participation, and movement toward higher reading levels. These gains were supported by explicit phonics instruction, differentiated and individualized teaching, guided and repeated reading, interactive materials, and assessment-guided decision-making. At the same time, the effectiveness and sustainability of implementation are constrained by limited intervention time, scheduling conflicts, heavy teacher workload, insufficient resources, learner absenteeism and low motivation, unmet basic needs, low reading readiness, and limited home reinforcement. These challenges are interconnected and cannot be addressed through teacher effort alone. The findings affirm that sustainable reading recovery requires a holistic and context-sensitive system in which strong instructional practice is supported by adequate resources, realistic schedules, teacher development, learner-support mechanisms, and meaningful collaboration among school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community.

Recommendations

Teachers should continue strengthening evidence-based reading practices, particularly phonics-based instruction, differentiated teaching, guided reading, and assessment-guided intervention. Peer collaboration and development of localized materials should be encouraged to help teachers respond to diverse reading needs. School administrators should provide sufficient and protected intervention time, review workload distribution, ensure the availability of appropriate and ready-to-use reading materials, and organize regular monitoring, coaching, and professional development. Additional reading facilitators or support personnel may be considered where feasible. Learner support should include attendance monitoring, motivation activities, supportive reading environments, and coordination with existing programs that address nutrition and other barriers to participation. Parents should be oriented on simple home-based reading support and encouraged to maintain regular communication with teachers. The Department of Education may strengthen ARAL implementation through timely resource provision, sustained teacher training, clearer scheduling and workload guidance, and systematic monitoring of implementation conditions. Future researchers may examine ARAL using larger or multiple-school samples, mixed methods, longitudinal designs, or quantitative reading measures to complement the teachers' qualitative accounts.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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