Implementing Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Programs: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program is a targeted educational initiative designed to support learners in recovering academic skills and enhancing learning accessibility. This study explores the dynamics of implementing targeted educational programs in Philippine primary schools. Using a case study research design, the study was conducted at Aloran Central School in the Division of Misamis Occidental. It involved three participant groups: 10 teachers, five school heads, and five learners. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviewguides. The study identifies eight emerging themes: navigating instructional and curricular constraints and managing learner diversity; addressing institutional-level challenges; adapting instructional practices to sustain academic recovery; cultivating collaborative learning communities; and confronting multi-level constraints, systematizing core structures, and intensifying learner-centered practice. Effective implementation of ARAL Programs and sustained academic recovery requires addressing classroom and institutional challenges, integrating collaborative and adaptive instruction, and ensuring coordinated, systemic support through consistent, learner-centered practices.Recommendations include providing targeted professional development and resources, implementing structured peer collaboration and differentiated instruction, ensuring systemic support for learner-centered practices, and conducting future research on the long-term effects of integrated ARAL strategies.

KEYWORDS: *Academic recovery, ARAL Programs, collaborative learning, educational challenges, learner-centered instruction.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a core foundation for personal growth and national development (Sayfullayeva, 2025; Maidugu& Isah, 2024). However, the world's challenges have profoundly derailed conventional learning mechanisms, leaving countless students academically lagging (Naik, 2025). To counteract the setbacks, schools and policymakers have introduced numerous learning recovery measures to help close the gaps created by extended school closures and public health measures (Fahey IV, 2024). These programs involve targeted reading interventions, differentiated instruction, and greater stakeholder engagement, all aimed at helping students catch up to pre-pandemic learning levels (Swargiary, 2024; Lopez &Bauyot, 2025). The efficacy of these approaches, however, largely hinges on whether teachers can undertake them effectively despite their own difficulties.

Teachers in the Philippines face considerable challenges in implementing academic recovery and accessible learning programs (Pagatpat, 2025). They often encounter systemic barriers, such as inadequate resources, limited training, large class sizes, and minimal parental support, which hinder their ability to provide effective instruction. Despite adopting various strategies and approaches, many educators experience burnout and frustration when they are unable to fully address their students' diverse needs (Boison& Burke, 2025; Dor-Haim, 2025; Swargiary, 2024). These circumstances highlight the urgent need to better understand teachers' lived experiences to create stronger support systems and achieve more effective program outcomes.

Pagatpat's (2025) study focused on identifying the difficulties teachers encounter when implementing literacy recovery programs in the Daraga North District. Using a descriptive, quantitative approach, the research identified the most common challenges and the interventions teachers employ. The findings revealed that resource shortages, excessive student numbers, and insufficient professional development significantly affected teaching quality. While the study provided valuable data on the prevalence and nature of these challenges, it did not explore teachers' personal perceptions, emotional responses, or the meanings they attach to their experiences. This leaves a gap in understanding the deeper, more subjective dimensions of teaching under such conditions.

Building on Pagatpat's (2025) work, the present study examines the phenomenological experiences of teachers involved in both literacy and broader academic recovery initiatives. Specifically, it aims to uncover how teachers personally interpret their challenges, the coping strategies they adopt, and the sense of resilience and professional efficacy they develop through daily teaching interactions. By focusing on teachers' subjective experiences, the study aims to offer a more holistic understanding that can inform the design of targeted support programs. Such an approach is essential for developing interventions that genuinely respond to teachers' needs and contribute to sustainable improvements in educational delivery.

Furthermore, this research broadens the scope beyond literacy to include other academic areas and inclusive classroom contexts that require tailored recovery strategies. While Pagatpat (2025) focused solely on literacy recovery, there is an urgent need to examine how teachers address learning gaps across subjects and adapt to students' diverse learning needs. Addressing this gap can lead to the development of integrated approaches that enhance teaching effectiveness across disciplines.

By capturing teachers' lived experiences, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the professional and emotional aspects of implementing academic recovery and accessible learning programs. This deeper understanding can guide the creation of policies and initiatives that are empathetic, contextually relevant, and aligned with the realities teachers face. While Pagatpat's research provided essential baseline data, it did not delve into the personal and interpretive dimensions of teachers' work. The present phenomenological study addresses this gap by giving voice to teachers' stories, thereby contributing to more responsive and effective educational recovery efforts.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore teachers' experiences in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Programs at Aloran Central School in the Misamis Occidental Division. Focusing on the school as a bounded case, the research examined how ARAL Programs were implemented in authentic classroom contexts, the challenges encountered, and the strategies teachers employed, with complementary perspectives from school heads and learners. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers, five school heads, and five learners, following ethical clearance and informed consent procedures. Guided by Yin's case study framework, data were systematically planned, collected, analyzed, and validated through thematic analysis, triangulation, and member checking. The approach generated in-depth, context-specific insights into instructional practices, administrative support, and learner experiences, offering practical implications for strengthening academic recovery and ensuring accessible learning in post-pandemic elementary education settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There were eight emerging themes in the study: navigating instructional and curricular constraints; managing learner diversity; addressing institutional-level challenges; adapting instructional practices to sustain academic recovery; cultivating collaborative learning communities; confronting multi-level constraints; systematizing core structures; and intensifying learner-centered practice.

Theme 1. Navigating Instructional and Curriculum Constraints

The findings reveal that navigating instructional and curricular constraints is a persistent challenge in implementing ARAL programs, particularly due to limited instructional time, large class sizes, inconsistent learner attendance, and restricted access to instructional materials. Teachers consistently described a tension between curriculum coverage and meaningful learning, noting that the short duration of ARAL sessions often forced them to prioritize speed over depth, thereby limiting opportunities for individualized scaffolding and conceptual understanding (TP1; TP2). This challenge was especially evident in subjects requiring concrete representations, such as science and mathematics, where time and material constraints hindered hands-on learning (TP4; TP10). School heads corroborated these concerns, emphasizing rigid pacing guides, fragmented schedules, and limited collaborative planning time, which resulted in generalized rather than targeted remediation (SH1; SH2; SH5). Learners similarly experienced fatigue, difficulty keeping pace, and diminished confidence when sessions were scheduled after regular classes or disrupted by absences (L1; L4). These findings align with research indicating that compressed schedules and prescriptive curricula often reduce opportunities for differentiated and inquiry-based instruction (Leek, 2024; Ketonen, 2025). From a theoretical perspective, Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory underscores the need for developmentally appropriate, scaffolded learning experiences that allow learners to actively construct understanding, even within constrained contexts (Piaget, 1972; Mishra, 2023). Additionally, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explain how teachers cognitively appraise these constraints and employ problem-focused strategies such as micro-scaffolding and curriculum prioritization to manage instructional stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wambua et al., 2024). Collectively, the findings highlight the need for flexible scheduling, protected ARAL time, and systemic support that enables teachers to balance curricular demands with meaningful learning.

Theme 2. Managing Learner Diversity

Managing learner diversity emerged as a central challenge in ARAL implementation, as teachers encountered wide disparities in foundational literacy skills, cognitive readiness, language proficiency, and socio-emotional regulation. Participants reported that while some learners entered

ARAL sessions with strong decoding and comprehension skills, others began at the most basic levels, requiring intensive scaffolding and differentiated instruction (TP1; TP5). Teachers also observed that many learners could memorize information but struggled to apply concepts or engage in higher-order thinking due to limited experiential learning opportunities (TP4; TP8). Behavioral regulation and emotional readiness further complicated instruction, particularly among younger learners still adjusting to post-pandemic school routines, necessitating predictable structures, movement breaks, and tactile materials (TP1; TP7). School heads echoed these findings, emphasizing that learner progress was often non-linear and sensitive to disruptions in routine or health (SH1; SH3; SH5), while learners highlighted additional challenges such as limited access to technology for home practice (L5). These findings are supported by research on differentiated instruction, which emphasizes tailoring content, process, and assessment to learners' readiness and profiles to promote engagement and equity (Bunga et al., 2025; Ramilo & Ting, 2025). Universal Design for Learning further reinforces the importance of proactively designing instruction that anticipates learner variability through multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Chick et al., 2025). Anchored in Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory, the findings affirm that learner diversity is not a deficit but a signal for responsive instructional design that builds on prior knowledge and supports active meaning-making (Piaget, 1972; Siregar et al., 2024). Overall, managing learner diversity in ARAL requires flexible pacing, small-group instruction, and integrated socio-emotional supports to ensure inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

Theme 3. Addressing Institutional-Level Challenges

Institutional-level challenges significantly shaped the quality and sustainability of ARAL implementation, particularly in relation to scheduling, resource availability, infrastructure, and coherence across grade levels. Teachers reported that the lack of level-appropriate decodable texts, unprotected ARAL schedules, and frequent disruptions undermined instructional continuity and daily practice (TP1; TP2). Resource constraints, including limited manipulatives, devices, and recurring infrastructure issues such as brownouts, forced teachers to rely on improvised materials that were time-consuming and insufficient to meet systemic needs (TP4; TP6; TP9). These challenges were compounded by large class sizes and inconsistent attendance, which repeatedly reset learner progress and limited opportunities for deep instruction (TP2; TP10). School heads reinforced these observations, noting that institutional gaps in language alignment, scheduling consistency, and administrative support often hindered sustained recovery efforts (SH2; SH3; SH5), while learners experienced these constraints through interrupted sessions and limited access to learning tools (L2; L4). Consistent with existing literature, inadequate infrastructure, weak governance, and limited professional

development constrain instructional effectiveness, particularly in under-resourced contexts (Rafique, 2025; Dadirai & Chauke, 2025). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a valuable lens for understanding how these systemic stressors influence teacher resilience and decision-making, as educators continuously appraise environmental demands and deploy coping strategies to sustain instruction (Lazarus &Folkman, 1984; Pelloth, 2025). The findings underscore that without coordinated institutional support, such as protected schedules, aligned curricula, and adequate resources, classroom-level innovations may struggle to produce lasting impact.

Theme 4. Adapting Instructional Practices to Sustain Academic Recovery

Adapting instructional practices emerged as a critical strategy for sustaining academic recovery, as teachers intentionally modified instruction to address diverse learning gaps and re-engage learners. Participants described implementing small-group rotations, peer-assisted learning, and targeted phonics and comprehension activities to provide focused support while maintaining engagement (TP1; TP5). Close monitoring of micro-skills enabled teachers to diagnose specific gaps and adjust instruction responsively, while literacy strategies such as multi-pass close reading, structured writing workshops, and the use of locally relevant texts enhanced comprehension and relevance (TP3). Teachers also emphasized the importance of emotional check-ins, predictable routines, and individualized supports, including IEPs, visual schedules, and tactile materialsto promote motivation and behavioral regulation (TP5; TP7). These practices were reinforced by school heads and learners, who recognized structured routines and scaffolded instruction as key to sustaining progress (SH1; SH3; SH5; L1; L3). Research supports the effectiveness of adaptive instructional approaches, highlighting that flexible grouping, diagnostic assessment, and scaffolded interventions accelerate learning recovery and support diverse learners (Hamoc, 2025; Carbonari, 2024; Brookings Institution, 2025). Grounded in Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory, these findings affirm that learning recovery is most effective when instruction builds on learners' prior knowledge, supports active engagement, and allows incremental skill development (Piaget, 1972; Mishra, 2023). Overall, sustaining academic recovery requires intentional, responsive teaching that integrates cognitive and socio-emotional supports within flexible instructional designs.

Theme 5. Cultivating Collaborative Learning Communities

The findings indicate that cultivating collaborative learning communities is a central strategy for enhancing learner engagement, comprehension, and sustained academic growth within ARAL implementation. Teachers intentionally structured peer-assisted learning through strategic pairing, small-group discussions, think-pair-share activities, math

circles, and collaborative storytelling, allowing learners to verbalize thinking, negotiate meaning, and build confidence through social interaction (TP1; TP3; TP5; TP6; TP9). Collaboration was also extended beyond the classroom through family involvement in take-home exercises, progress updates, and showcase activities, creating a shared support system that reinforced learning continuity at home. School heads and learners echoed these practices, highlighting consistency in collaborative routines, peer modeling, and shared responsibility for learning across roles (SH2; SH3; SH4; L3; L5). These findings align with research on professional learning communities and collaborative pedagogy, which emphasize shared problem-solving, reflective practice, and collective efficacy as drivers of instructional improvement and learner-centered innovation (Stoll et al., as cited in Vossen et al., 2025; Brand et al., 2024). Anchored in Social Constructivism and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the results demonstrate that learning is strengthened when knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with peers, teachers, and families, enabling learners to progress beyond what they can achieve independently (Vygotsky, 1978; Pan, 2023). Overall, intentional collaboration within and beyond classrooms fosters resilient learning communities that support both academic recovery and holistic development.

Theme 6. Confronting Multi-Level Constraints

The findings reveal that ARAL implementation is shaped by interconnected constraints operating at the classroom, school, and system levels, creating layered challenges that influence instructional depth and learner engagement. Teachers identified short instructional sessions, large class sizes, diverse learner needs, inconsistent attendance, and limited home support as immediate barriers that restricted individualized instruction and continuity of learning (TP1; TP2; TP10). These challenges were compounded by meso- and macro-level constraints, including shared or insufficient instructional materials, language shifts between Filipino and Visayan, unreliable internet access, brownouts, and institutional pressures that favored speed and memorization over deep understanding (TP4; TP8). School heads and learners corroborated these experiences, emphasizing that time constraints, material shortages, and infrastructure issues consistently disrupted planned instruction and limited meaningful engagement with complex texts and concepts (SH1; SH4; L1; L4). Consistent with multi-level analyses of instructional systems, these findings underscore that classroom challenges cannot be isolated from broader institutional and policy conditions (Bernárdez-Gómez, 2025). The alignment of perspectives across teachers, school heads, and learners highlights that ARAL constraints are system-wide realities requiring coordinated, context-sensitive responses. Addressing these interconnected pressures necessitates flexible scheduling, equitable resource provision, strengthened school–family partnerships, and policy alignment to ensure that instructional expectations match on-the-ground realities.

Theme 7. Systematizing Core Structures

The results emphasize that systematizing core instructional structures is essential for ensuring coherence, consistency, and sustainability in ARAL implementation. Participants highlighted the importance of closely tracking foundational micro-skills, such as letter recognition, sound mastery, and blending, to guide targeted interventions and monitor learner progress (TP1). Teachers and school heads stressed the value of standardized, school-wide routines—aligned curricula and consistent instructional representations across grade levels — to reduce learner confusion and strengthen continuity (TP5; TP9; TP10; SH3; SH5). The development of structured ARAL frameworks supported by shared resource kits and performance-based assessments further reinforced instructional alignment and purposeful monitoring (TP8; SH4). Learners' accounts highlighted the benefits of predictable routines, frequent feedback, and clear progression across grade levels (L1-L5). These findings align with research emphasizing curriculum coherence, aligned learning outcomes, and systematic assessment as foundations for instructional quality and institutional accountability (Derouich, 2025; Pinheiro et al., 2025). By embedding systematized structures into daily practice and leadership frameworks, schools can reduce fragmentation, enhance instructional clarity, and sustain long-term academic recovery.

Theme 8. Intensifying Learner-Centered Practice

The findings demonstrate a strong commitment to intensifying learner-centered practice through structured flexibility, differentiated instruction, and responsive support tailored to learners' academic, emotional, and social needs. Teachers consistently employed small-group rotations, multisensory strategies, peer-assisted learning, and contextualized tasks to maintain engagement and address diverse readiness levels (TP1; TP5; TP7; TP9). Predictable routines, visual schedules, token systems, and clearly defined group roles were used to reduce anxiety, promote motivation, and sustain focus, while formative strategies such as exit tickets enabled timely regrouping and reteaching (TP2; TP5; TP7). School heads and learners affirmed these practices, highlighting the value of contextualized examples, supportive classroom systems, and family-oriented take-home activities that reinforced learning beyond school (SH1; SH2; L2; L5). These findings align with learner-centered pedagogy, which emphasizes active participation, differentiation, and meaningful engagement as drivers of deeper understanding and learner agency (Palompon, 2025; Che Mat & Azhar Jamaludin, 2024). Grounded in learner-centered theory, the results show that intensifying responsive, student-focused practices fosters confidence, sustained engagement, and holistic development, particularly in diverse, recovery-focused learning contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the effective implementation of ARAL Programs and the attainment of equitable,

meaningful learning experiences require a holistic approach that addresses both classroom-level and institutional challenges. Sustained academic recovery is most achievable when teachers intentionally adapt instruction and foster collaborative learning environments that respond to diverse learner needs. Moreover, the long-term effectiveness of ARAL Programs depends on coordinated systemic support, including consistent instructional structures, aligned resources, and responsive, learner-centered teaching practices that collectively strengthen instructional coherence and promote continuous student progress.

Recommendation

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that school administrators provide targeted support through professional development, adaptive instructional materials, and adequate resources to help teachers manage classroom and institutional demands during ARAL implementation. School leaders and teachers are encouraged to strengthen structured peer collaboration and differentiated instructional strategies to sustain academic gains and nurture supportive learning communities. At the policy level, continuous professional development, alignment of instructional frameworks, and the promotion of flexible, learner-centered approaches should be prioritized to enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Future research may further examine the long-term effects of integrated ARAL strategies on learner achievement and engagement across varied educational contexts.

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