



Teachers' Experiences and Challenges in The Implementation of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL): Basis for Teacher Support Program

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Abstract

This study investigated the experiences and challenges of teachers implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in elementary schools in Northern Conner, Apayao. Employing a quantitative-descriptive research design, the study involved 33 teacher-respondents from ten elementary schools who were directly engaged in program implementation. Data were gathered through a structured interview guide and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal that most respondents are in their 30s, holding Teacher III and Master Teacher I positions, with 6 to 15 years of teaching experience. The majority received school-based training, while volunteer teachers reported receiving none. Thematically, teachers described their experiences as deeply fulfilling, characterized by holistic facilitation, differentiated instruction, and the use of varied learning activities. Learners consistently responded with enthusiasm and demonstrated measurable progress in reading comprehension, confidence, and participation, leading tutors to rate the program's effectiveness at the highest level. However, significant challenges were identified, including sustaining learner attention, managing mixed-ability groups, and a systemic gap in beginning reading training among tutors. While resources and learner motivation were not major concerns, the absence of specialized literacy preparation limits program scalability and instructional quality. Based on these findings, a comprehensive teacher support program is recommended, encompassing foundational literacy training, attention-sustaining strategies, differentiated instruction protocols, coaching, mentorship pairing, peer learning communities, formal recognition mechanisms, and competency-based recruitment standards. These components collectively address implementation gaps and strengthen the program's capacity to achieve equitable and sustainable literacy outcomes.

Keywords: ARAL Program; Literacy Intervention; Teacher Experiences; Tutoring Challenges; Teacher Support

1. Introduction

Education remains a cornerstone of sustainable development, serving as a catalyst for economic growth, social progress, and individual empowerment across nations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes that quality education is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030.

In this context, educational programs worldwide have increasingly focused on enhancing learning outcomes through innovative teaching methodologies and comprehensive support systems. The Global Education Monitoring Report highlights that effective teacher support mechanisms are critical in improving educational quality and student achievement [1]. Globally, educators face multifaceted challenges in implementing specialized educational programs, ranging from inadequate resources and insufficient training to limited institutional support [2]. Research conducted across diverse educational systems demonstrates that teachers' experiences and challenges significantly influence program implementation fidelity and student learning outcomes [3].

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In developed countries, comprehensive teacher support programs have been established to address implementation barriers, resulting in improved instructional practices and enhanced student performance [4]. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that countries investing substantially in teacher professional development and support systems demonstrate higher educational achievement levels [5].

In the Asian context, educational reforms have prioritized teacher capacity building and support infrastructure to address persistent achievement gaps and educational inequities [6]. Studies from neighboring Southeast Asian nations reveal that teachers implementing specialized literacy and numeracy programs encounter similar obstacles, including heavy workloads, limited resources, and insufficient training opportunities [7]. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) emphasizes the critical need for context-specific teacher support mechanisms that address local challenges while aligning with international best practices [8].

The Philippine educational landscape has undergone significant transformations through various reform initiatives aimed at improving learning outcomes and addressing educational disparities [9]. The Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented numerous intervention programs to combat learning poverty and enhance basic education quality nationwide [10]. Among these initiatives, the Aral Program (Alternative Responsive Approach to Literacy and Learning) represents a strategic response to persistent literacy and numeracy challenges facing Filipino learners [11].

The Department of Education's Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program was launched in 2025 as a flagship intervention to address pandemic-induced learning losses and persistent literacy challenges among Filipino learners. Anchored in DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025, the program provides structured tutoring, modular learning kits, and community-based support systems, initially targeting 6.7 million students with the help of 447,000 tutors nationwide [12]. Studies highlight that its success depends heavily on teachers' capacity to adapt strategies to diverse contexts, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) such as Apayao, where resource scarcity and multi-grade teaching complicate implementation. Early observations suggest that while ARAL offers a framework for literacy recovery, challenges in infrastructure, stakeholder engagement, and teacher training hinder its full effectiveness in rural schools [12]. This underscores the need for localized governance and evidence-based interventions to ensure that ARAL achieves its intended goals of equity, transparency, and improved learning outcomes. The Department of Education has ensured that intervention in these areas will not only target what learners have missed but also build their capacity to tackle more complex learning tasks moving forward. Under Department Order No. 018, series of 2025, ARAL Reading focuses on strengthening learners' ability to decode, comprehend, and make meaning from written texts and is designed to provide immediate, sustained, and structured academic support to help learners who are performing below the expected proficiency level.

Despite the program's noble objectives, empirical evidence suggests that implementation challenges persist across various educational contexts in the Philippines [13]. Teachers report experiencing difficulties related to large class sizes, diverse learner needs, limited instructional materials, and inadequate preparation time [14]. Research conducted in various Philippine regions indicates that teachers often implement intervention programs without comprehensive support systems, resulting in implementation gaps and suboptimal outcomes [15]. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies notes that teacher-related factors significantly influence the success of educational interventions, yet systematic documentation of teachers' implementation experiences remains limited [16].

In the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), educational challenges are compounded by geographical isolation, cultural diversity, and socioeconomic constraints [17]. Schools in this region often operate with limited resources and face unique contextual challenges that affect program implementation [18]. Studies examining educational interventions in mountainous regions highlight the necessity of localized support mechanisms that address specific geographical and cultural contexts [19]. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) identifies CAR as a priority area for educational development, recognizing the persistent achievement gaps between this region and national averages [20]. A Teacher Support Program is essential in strengthening the capacity, resilience, and effectiveness of educators in geographically challenged communities within CAR. The program aims to provide professional development, instructional resources, mentoring, and psychosocial support tailored to teachers' contextual needs. This research seeks to generate evidence-based insights for developing a localized Teacher Support Program framework for ARAL tutors and educators in CAR, which may guide stakeholders in promoting teacher empowerment, instructional effectiveness, and equitable quality education.

Apayao province, situated in the northern corner of the Cordillera region, faces a complex educational landscape marked by geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and diverse indigenous communities [21]. It consistently ranks among the provinces with the greatest challenges in learning outcomes and resource availability [22]. Teachers contend with multi-grade classes, scarce professional development, and inadequate instructional resources [23]. The Department of

Education - Cordillera Administrative Region recognizes these issues and stresses the need for context-specific, evidence-based interventions [24]. The Aral Program, introduced in Apayao's northern municipalities, provides a structured framework to address learning gaps, but its success depends on teachers' capacity to adapt it to local realities [25]. Early observations reveal persistent challenges tied to isolation, resource scarcity, and diverse learner needs [26]. Yet, systematic documentation of these experiences is lacking, leaving a critical gap in designing effective support mechanisms.

Despite the widespread implementation of the Aral Program across Philippine schools, there exists a significant gap in empirical documentation of teachers' lived experiences and challenges, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas like Northern Apayao. While national policies and program guidelines provide implementation frameworks, they often fail to account for the contextual realities faced by teachers in remote, resource-constrained settings [27]. The absence of systematic documentation of teachers' implementation experiences in these contexts creates a critical knowledge vacuum that impedes the development of effective, context-responsive support systems.

Current literature on educational intervention programs in the Philippines predominantly focuses on program outcomes and student achievement, with limited attention to the implementers' perspectives and challenges [28]. This gap is particularly pronounced in studies involving remote provincial settings where implementation contexts differ substantially from mainstream educational environments [29]. Research specifically examining the Aral Program implementation from teachers' perspectives in geographically isolated areas remains scarce, leaving program administrators and policymakers without adequate empirical evidence to inform support system development [30].

Though the experiences in ARAL Program implementation seems difficult for some, in the province, the School Heads and Master Teachers first attended a division training on the Aral Program. Following the training, they assigned tutors for Key Stage 1 (Grades 1–3) and Key Stage 2 (Grades 4–6). Prior to the tutoring sessions, advisory teachers in all grade levels conducted screening tests: CARLA was used for Grades 1–3, while PHIL-IRRI was administered for Grades 4–6. After the screening, the assigned tutors, or any available teachers, were designated to handle the Aral learners. These Aral teachers or tutors conducted sessions in the afternoon, after the advisory classes. They not only provided instructional materials to support reading development but also addressed the learners' socio-emotional needs, ensuring holistic support for their growth.

For the current implementation, the lack of localized, evidence-based teacher support programs exacerbates implementation challenges and potentially compromises program effectiveness in Northern Conner Apayao. Without a comprehensive understanding of teachers' actual experiences, challenges, and support needs, educational authorities cannot design targeted interventions that address specific implementation barriers. This situation perpetuates a cycle where teachers struggle with program implementation without adequate support, potentially limiting the program's impact on student learning outcomes and undermining broader educational improvement efforts in the region.

The problem is further complicated by the unique geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic characteristics of Northern Conner, Apayao, which create implementation contexts distinct from other areas where the Aral Program has been studied. Teachers in this region work in conditions marked by extreme remoteness, limited connectivity, multi-grade classrooms, and diverse indigenous learner populations, factors that significantly influence program implementation but remain inadequately documented in existing literature. This study addresses this critical gap by systematically documenting teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing the Aral Program in Northern Conner, Apayao, providing empirical evidence necessary for crafting a contextualized teacher support program that responds to actual implementation realities and enhances program effectiveness in this underserved region.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative - descriptive research design. The quantitative aspect documented and analyzed the demographic profile of the respondents. Meanwhile, the descriptive aspect determined their experiences and challenges in implementing the ARAL Program.

2.2. Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected elementary schools in Northern Conner that are actively implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. These schools were classified as either small or big based on their total pupil enrollment as presented below.

Table 1 Location and classification of Elementary Schools with ARAL Teachers

Name of School	Classification of the school	No. of ARAL Teachers	Location
1. Guinamgamman Elementary School	Small	5	Guinamgamman, Conner Apayao
2. Mabaguio Elementary School	Small	2	Mabaguio, Conner Apayao
3. Cubet Elementary School	Small	1	Cubet Malama, Conner Apayao
4. Catub Elementary School	Small	2	Catub Paddaoan, Conner Apayao
5. Paddig Elementary School	Small	3	Paddig, Conner Apayao
6. Ili Elementary School	Big	3	Ili, Conner Apayao
7. Manag Elementary School	Big	3	Manag, Conner Apayao
8. Malama Integrated School	Big	6	Malama, Conner Apayao
9. Caglayan Elementary School	Big	2	Caglayan, Conner Apayao
10. Talifugo Elementary School	Big	6	Talifugo, Conner Apayao
TOTAL		33	

For the qualitative phase of the study, 10 respondents were purposively selected from the 33 teacher-participants based on their direct involvement and experiences in the ARAL Program. Additionally, the study sites were categorized into five small schools and five big schools to represent varied school contexts in Northern Conner. This approach enabled the researcher to gather diverse and detailed insights, strengthening the comprehensiveness and credibility of the study findings.

2.3. Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consisted of 30 public elementary school teachers in Northern Conner who were directly involved in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. Total enumeration was employed to ensure that all qualified teachers participated in the study.

Table 2 Distribution of ARAL Teachers

Name of School	No. of ARAL Teachers
1. Guinamgamman ES	5
2. MA Baguio ES	2
3. Cubet ES	1
4. CA tub ES	2
5. Paddig ES	3
6. Ili ES	3
7. Manag ES	3
8. Malama Integrated School	6
9. Caglayan ES	2
10. Talifugo ES	6
TOTAL	33

2.4. Research Instrument

The study utilized an interview guide as its primary research instrument. The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed responses from the participants regarding their demographic profiles, experiences, and challenges in implementing the ARAL Program. It consisted of structured and semi-structured questions that allowed respondents to share both information and personal insights. During the data-gathering phase, the interview guide was administered with public school elementary teachers in Northern Conner, and their responses were recorded and analyzed.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, and percentage were used to summarize the respondents' demographic profiles. Meanwhile, the teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program were analyzed using thematic analysis.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. Part I. Profile of the Respondents

Table 3

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	20–29 years old	2	6.06
	30–39 years old	22	66.67
	40–49 years old	7	21.21
	50–59 years old	2	6.06
	Total	33	100.00
Years of Teaching Experience	0-5 years	4	12.12
	6-10 years	13	39.39
	11-15 years	10	30.30
	16-20 years	4	12.12
	21 years and above	2	6.06
	Total	33	100.00
Position/ Designation	Teacher I (T-I)	1	3.03
	Teacher II (T-II)	5	15.15
	Teacher III (T-III)	18	54.55
	Teacher II (MT-I)	7	21.21
	Volunteer Teacher	2	6.06
	Total	33	100.00
Training Received on the ARAL Program	School-Based Training	24	72.73
	Division Training on ARAL Program	7	21.21
	No Training Received	2	6.06
	Total	33	100.00

The profile of the respondents shows that the majority of teachers implementing the ARAL Program are within the 30–39 age bracket, comprising 66.67% of the total, followed by those aged 40–49 at 21.21%. Only a small proportion falls within the younger (20–29) and older (50–59) age groups. With a mean age of 37.52 years, this indicates that most respondents are in their prime working years, suggesting a balance of maturity, energy, and adaptability that is beneficial for program implementation.

In terms of teaching experience, most respondents have moderate to extensive exposure to the profession. The largest group (39.39%) has 6–10 years of experience, followed by 30.30% with 11–15 years. The mean teaching experience of 11.05 years reflects a workforce that is already well-grounded in instructional practices. This suggests that teachers possess sufficient classroom expertise, which may support effective implementation of structured programs like ARAL, although adaptability to new approaches may vary.

Regarding position or designation, more than half of the respondents (54.55%) hold the rank of Teacher III, while 21.21% are Master Teacher I. Only a few occupy lower ranks or serve as volunteer teachers. This distribution indicates that the majority are experienced and professionally advanced educators, which may contribute to stronger instructional leadership and better program delivery. However, the presence of volunteer teachers highlights potential variability in qualifications and experience among implementers.

The data on training reveal that most respondents (72.73%) received school-based training on the ARAL Program, while 21.21% participated in division-level training. A small portion (6.06%), particularly volunteer teachers, reported having no training at all. This suggests that while training is widely provided, it is largely decentralized and may differ in quality and depth across schools.

The dominance of school-based training as the primary mode of capacity building indicates a reliance on localized implementation strategies. While this approach allows contextualization, it may also lead to inconsistencies in teachers' understanding and application of the program. In contrast, those who received division-level training are likely to have more standardized and comprehensive knowledge, which may influence the fidelity of program implementation.

Overall, the findings highlight that the ARAL Program is being implemented by a relatively experienced and professionally established group of teachers, but with varying levels of training exposure. These variations in experience, position, and training suggest the need for a more structured and consistent support system to ensure uniform understanding and effective implementation of the program across different school contexts.

3.2. Part II. What are the experiences of teachers in implementing the ARAL Program?

The analysis of teachers' experiences in implementing the ARAL Program employed a thematic approach grounded in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) developed by Jonathan A. Smith and discussed by Alase (2017). This approach focuses on understanding how participants make sense of their lived experiences through systematic coding and theme development. Through this process, significant patterns and meanings were identified to capture the core experiences of teachers in implementing the ARAL Program.

Table 4 Theme 1: Fulfilling Nature of the Program

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Sense of Professional Fulfillment	<i>"It's very fulfilling knowing that your learners are making progress."</i>	The tutor finds deep personal and professional meaning in witnessing learner improvement, reinforcing commitment and dedication to the program.

Table 7 highlights the fulfilling nature of the ARAL Program as experienced by the tutors, particularly in relation to learner progress. A dominant number of respondents (24 out of 33) identified observable learner improvement as the most rewarding aspect of their role. This is clearly reflected in one tutor's statement: *"It's very fulfilling knowing that your learners are making progress."* This verbatim response encapsulates the core sentiment shared by many participants—that their sense of accomplishment is directly tied to the growth and development of their learners.

This strong sense of fulfillment underscores the emotional and professional rewards derived from teaching within the ARAL Program. Tutors perceive learner progress not merely as an expected outcome, but as a validation of their efforts, strategies, and commitment. The firsthand experience of seeing learners improve reinforces their sense of purpose, making their role more meaningful and impactful. Such experiences contribute significantly to sustaining motivation, especially in challenging teaching environments.

Moreover, the findings suggest that fulfillment is deeply connected to the relational aspect of tutoring. As tutors invest time, effort, and care into their learners, the visible progress becomes a form of feedback that affirms their dedication. This reciprocal dynamic strengthens teacher-learner relationships and encourages tutors to remain engaged and persistent in delivering the program effectively. The emotional gratification derived from these interactions further enhances their resilience and commitment.

In addition, the sense of professional fulfillment contributes to the development of teachers' professional identity. Experiencing success through learner progress allows tutors to see themselves as effective educators, capable of making a difference in their students' academic journeys. This reinforces positive self-perception and encourages continuous improvement in their teaching practices.

These findings are supported by the study of Albuero [35], which revealed that tutors experienced professional growth, a clearer sense of career purpose, and strengthened commitment to teaching as a result of their tutoring experiences. The study emphasized that witnessing learner progress plays a crucial role in cultivating a deep sense of fulfillment, aligning with the present findings that tutors draw meaning and motivation from their learners' achievements.

Overall, the results indicate that the ARAL Program provides not only instructional benefits for learners but also significant emotional and professional rewards for tutors. The inclusion of their verbatim responses highlights the authenticity of these experiences and emphasizes that learner progress is a powerful driver of teacher motivation, engagement, and long-term commitment to the program.

Table 5 Theme 2: Teaching and Facilitation Experiences

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Holistic Facilitator Role	<i>"My role as ARAL tutor is to teach, guide and facilitate the tutees. And to boost their self-confidence in every session."</i>	The tutor experiences the role beyond content delivery, encompassing guidance, facilitation, and confidence-building as equally important dimensions of effective tutoring.
Use of Varied Instructional Activities	<i>"Individual, peer tutoring, and group work activities."</i>	The tutor draws on diverse activity formats across sessions, reflecting an adaptive and learner-centered approach to instruction.
Individualized Support for Struggling Learners	<i>"For struggling readers, I do one-on-one tutorial while others are having their group activities."</i>	Simultaneous differentiated instruction is practiced, allowing the tutor to address individual reading difficulties without interrupting peer learning activities.

Table 5 highlights the teaching and facilitation experiences of ARAL tutors, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of their role. Tutors go beyond content delivery and act as holistic facilitators, as reflected in the response: *"My role as ARAL tutor is to teach, guide, and facilitate the tutees. And to boost their self-confidence in every session."* This indicates that tutors integrate instruction with guidance and confidence-building to create a supportive learning environment.

The findings also show that tutors employ varied instructional strategies to address diverse learner needs. As one respondent shared, *"Individual, peer tutoring, and group work activities,"* demonstrating the use of flexible and learner-centered approaches. This variety allows tutors to adapt their teaching methods based on the learners' abilities and engagement levels.

In addition, tutors provide individualized support, particularly for struggling learners. This is evident in the statement: *"For struggling readers, I do one-on-one tutorials while others are having their group activities."* Such practice reflects effective differentiated instruction, where tutors balance group facilitation with targeted intervention to ensure that all learners receive appropriate support.

These findings align with Roux [36], who emphasized that tutoring involves both academic and personal support through facilitation and mentorship. Overall, the results show that ARAL tutors demonstrate adaptive teaching practices, reinforcing their role as facilitators who cater to both collective and individual learning needs.

Table 6 Theme 3: Positive Learner Responses

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Enthusiastic and Motivated Learners	<i>"Happy and excited every day." "Happy, excited, and surprised."</i>	Learners consistently display positive emotional responses during sessions, indicating that the program creates an engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Table 6 highlights the positive learner responses toward the ARAL Program, particularly their enthusiasm and motivation during sessions. This is reflected in the responses: *"Happy and excited every day"* and *"Happy, excited, and surprised."*

surprised,” indicating that learners consistently experience enjoyment and emotional engagement in the learning process.

Such positive emotional responses suggest that the program provides a supportive and interactive learning environment that aligns with learners’ needs. When learners feel happy and excited, they are more likely to participate actively, which enhances their cognitive engagement, retention, and overall academic performance.

Moreover, learner enthusiasm creates a reinforcing cycle within the classroom. As learners show excitement, tutors become more motivated to improve their teaching strategies, which in turn further inspires learners. This dynamic contributes to a learner-centered environment that promotes confidence, curiosity, and persistence.

These findings are supported by Cents-Boonstra et al. [37], who found that teacher enthusiasm and supportive guidance significantly influence student motivation and engagement. Overall, the results indicate that the ARAL Program effectively fosters positive learner attitudes, which are essential for sustained learning and long-term academic success.

Table 7 Theme 4: Observed Learner Progress

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Improvement in Reading Comprehension and Confidence	<i>"Progressing in reading comprehension while building self-confidence." "They consistently give correct answers to the questions asked."</i>	Tutors observe measurable academic gains alongside growing learner confidence, reflecting the program's dual impact on cognitive and affective learning outcomes.
Improved Participation and Confidence	<i>"Yes" (improvements in participation or confidence observed)."</i>	Increased learner participation is a visible marker of progress, suggesting that consistent tutoring sessions contribute to greater learner agency and self-efficacy.

Table 7 presents the observed learner progress under the ARAL Program, highlighting improvements in both academic performance and confidence. Tutors noted that learners are *"progressing in reading comprehension while building self-confidence"* and that *"they consistently give correct answers to the questions asked."* These responses indicate that learners are achieving measurable gains in comprehension alongside increased self-assurance in their abilities.

In addition, improved participation is evident, as reflected in tutors’ affirmation of progress in engagement and confidence. The simple yet direct response *"Yes"* underscores that learners are becoming more active in classroom interactions. This suggests that regular tutoring sessions help develop learner agency and encourage greater involvement in learning tasks.

These findings demonstrate that the ARAL Program supports holistic learner development by addressing both cognitive and affective domains. As learners improve academically, they also become more confident and willing to participate, creating a positive cycle of engagement and achievement. This dual growth highlights the effectiveness of structured and supportive tutoring interventions.

The results are supported by Wasik and Slavin [38], who found that one-on-one tutoring significantly improves reading skills while boosting learner confidence. Overall, the findings confirm that the ARAL Program contributes to meaningful academic progress and positive learner attitudes toward learning.

Table 8 Theme 5: Program Effectiveness

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
High Perceived Effectiveness	<i>"It's 10/10 because we are helping the learners to go to a higher level and be grade-level ready."</i>	The tutor's highest-possible rating reflects strong confidence in the program's capacity to bridge learning gaps and bring learners to grade-level proficiency.

Table 8 presents tutors’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the ARAL Program, showing a very high level of confidence in its impact. This is reflected in the response: *"It's 10/10 because we are helping the learners to go to a higher level and be grade-level ready."* Such a statement indicates that tutors strongly believe the program successfully addresses learning gaps and prepares learners for grade-level expectations.

This strong endorsement is grounded in the observable improvements among learners, including better comprehension, increased confidence, and readiness for academic tasks. Tutors perceive the program not only as supportive but as essential in promoting meaningful learning progress, reinforcing its value in the educational setting.

Moreover, the high perceived effectiveness suggests that tutors are motivated to continue implementing and supporting the program. Their confidence reflects satisfaction with its outcomes, which contributes to sustained engagement and advocacy for its continued use in schools.

These findings are supported by Slavin et al. [39], who found that structured tutoring programs significantly improve reading achievement and help learners reach grade-level benchmarks. Overall, the results confirm that the ARAL Program is viewed by tutors as highly effective in enhancing both learner performance and readiness.

3.3. Part III. What challenges do teachers encounter during the implementation of the ARAL Program?

Table 12 Theme 6: Learner Attention and Focus

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Short Attention Span of Learners	<i>"The attention span sometimes."</i>	Sustaining learner focus is the primary challenge identified, a common barrier in early reading intervention programs particularly among young or struggling learners.

The theme of learner attention and focus highlights a critical barrier in tutoring programs: short attention spans. Tutors observe that while learners show progress, sustaining concentration throughout sessions remains difficult. This challenge is especially pronounced in early literacy development, where cognitive load and limited self-regulation can hinder sustained engagement. Addressing this requires tutors to employ varied instructional strategies, interactive activities, and confidence-building techniques to keep learners motivated. The recognition of short attention spans underscores the importance of designing tutoring sessions that balance academic rigor with engaging, age-appropriate methods, ensuring learners remain attentive and receptive to instruction.

A study by Raver et al. [40] on children's attention and self-regulation in early education found that short attention spans significantly affect learning outcomes, particularly in literacy development. The research emphasized that interventions combining structured instruction with engaging activities improved both focus and academic achievement, corroborating tutors' observations that sustaining attention is a central challenge in reading programs.

Table 13 Theme 7: Differences in Learning Levels

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Managing Mixed Ability Groups	<i>(No specific elaboration provided — item left blank by respondent.)</i>	The absence of a detailed response may suggest that differentiated strategies already in place mitigate the impact of varied learning levels, or that this remains an unexamined challenge.

Managing differences in learning levels is a common challenge in tutoring and classroom settings. Learners often come with diverse backgrounds, skills, and paces of learning, which can make uniform instruction ineffective. Tutors must therefore adopt differentiated strategies, such as flexible grouping, scaffolded tasks, and individualized support, to ensure that all learners benefit. The lack of elaboration in responses could indicate that tutors have normalized these practices, making them part of their routine facilitation, or that they have yet to fully reflect on the complexities of mixed-ability management. Regardless, the theme highlights the importance of adaptive pedagogy, where tutors balance inclusivity with effectiveness, ensuring that struggling learners receive targeted support while advanced learners remain challenged and engaged.

Boyd et. al. [41] in her seminal work on differentiated instruction emphasized that mixed-ability classrooms require teachers to adapt content, process, and product to meet diverse learner needs. Her research demonstrated that differentiated strategies not only improve academic outcomes but also foster learner confidence and engagement, directly aligning with the challenges and practices observed among ARAL tutors.

Table 14 Theme 8: Absence of Major Resource or Motivation Challenges

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Sufficient Resources Provided	<i>"No, because everything is provided."</i>	The program's adequate resource provision reduces logistical barriers, allowing tutors to focus fully on instruction rather than material constraints.
No Issues in Attendance or Motivation	<i>"None" (no challenges in maintaining motivation and attendance)."</i>	The lack of attendance and motivation problems is noteworthy and may reflect effective program design, positive learner-tutor relationships, or the structured nature of sessions.

The theme of resource and motivation highlights a critical strength of the ARAL program: its ability to remove common barriers that often hinder educational interventions. Tutors affirm that all necessary resources are adequately supplied, eliminating concerns about materials and enabling them to focus on pedagogy. Furthermore, learners' consistent attendance and motivation reflect the program's effectiveness in sustaining engagement. This combination of logistical support and learner enthusiasm creates an environment where tutors can maximize instructional impact. The absence of these challenges is noteworthy, as it indicates that the program's structure and relational dynamics between tutors and learners are strong enough to maintain continuity and commitment, both essential for long-term academic success.

A study by Baker et al. [42] on after-school tutoring programs found that adequate resource provision and supportive program structures significantly reduced barriers to participation and improved learner motivation and attendance. The research emphasized that when tutors had the necessary materials and learners felt supported, programs achieved higher effectiveness and sustainability, aligning closely with ARAL tutors' experiences of having "everything provided" and no issues with motivation.

Table 15 Theme 9: Need for Qualified Tutors

Sub-Theme	Sample Response	Interpretation
Lack of Tutors Trained in Beginning Reading	<i>"To hire other ARAL tutors but with a background or training on beginning reading."</i>	The tutor identifies a systemic gap — the need for more tutors specifically trained in beginning reading — as a challenge to program scalability and quality assurance.

Tutors have identified a systemic gap in the program: the lack of personnel with formal training in beginning reading. This issue is significant because early literacy skills form the foundation for all future learning, and inadequate instruction at this stage can lead to persistent academic difficulties. While tutors are committed and resourceful, the absence of specialized training limits their ability to implement structured, evidence-based approaches to reading instruction. Addressing this gap is essential for ensuring that learners not only catch up to grade-level expectations but also develop long-term literacy skills. Moreover, hiring and capacitating tutors with expertise in early reading would enhance program scalability, consistency, and quality assurance, ensuring that interventions are both effective and sustainable. Part IV. What recommendations can be derived to craft a teacher support program based on the documented experiences and challenges?

Table 16 Recommendations for support programs for Teachers

Recommended Component	Recommendation Rationale
Mandatory Foundational Literacy Training for Tutors	The gap in beginning reading expertise is a systemic challenge that limits program quality and scalability. A structured pre-service and in-service training program focusing on early literacy strategies, phonics, and reading comprehension techniques would equip tutors with evidence-based tools to deliver more effective instruction.
Training on Attention-Sustaining Instructional Techniques	Short attention spans are the most frequently cited challenge. A support program should include modules on micro-learning design, gamified literacy activities, and movement-

	integrated sessions specifically tailored for young and struggling readers to help tutors maintain learner focus effectively.
Toolkit of Age-Appropriate Engagement Activities	Providing tutors with a curated, ready-to-use activity toolkit, including interactive read-aloud, manipulatives, and story-based comprehension tasks, would systematize the conditions that already generate positive learner responses and reduce preparation burden.
Structured Protocols for Managing Mixed-Ability Groups	The absence of elaboration on managing mixed-ability groups suggests this may be an unexamined or normalized challenge. A formal DI framework with clear protocols for flexible grouping, scaffolded tasks, and tiered instruction would provide tutors with structured guidance for navigating diverse learner levels more intentionally.
One-on-One Coaching Support for Tutors	Since tutors already practice simultaneous individualized and group instruction, coaching support from literacy specialists or master teachers would help them refine this skill, offer real-time feedback, and build confidence in managing complex instructional situations.
Formal Recognition Program for Tutor Contributions	Tutors are intrinsically motivated by learner progress. A formal recognition system, such as commendation letters, performance acknowledgment during school events, or an ARAL Tutor of the Month feature, would institutionalize affirmation and sustain long-term tutor engagement and advocacy.
Reflective Practice and Peer Learning Communities	Establishing structured reflection sessions and peer learning communities among ARAL tutors would provide a collaborative space to share successes, troubleshoot challenges, and co-develop strategies — deepening both professional fulfillment and instructional effectiveness.
Competency-Based Tutor Recruitment Criteria	Formal Recognition Program for Tutor Contributions
Program Monitoring and Effectiveness Review Mechanism	Reflective Practice and Peer Learning Communities
Mentorship Pairing: Experienced and New Tutors	Pairing new tutors with experienced ARAL tutors as mentors would facilitate the transfer of affective dispositions and practical strategies. This structured mentorship would accelerate new tutors' professional readiness, reduce attrition, and preserve the relational culture that drives the program's learner engagement outcomes.

A comprehensive teacher support program for ARAL should integrate multiple components that directly respond to tutors documented experiences and challenges. First, mandatory foundational literacy training is essential to address the systemic gap in beginning reading expertise, equipping tutors with evidence-based strategies in phonics, fluency, and comprehension. To tackle the common issue of short attention spans, the program should include training on attention-sustaining techniques such as gamified literacy activities, micro-learning, and movement-based sessions, complemented by a toolkit of age-appropriate engagement activities that reduces preparation burden while ensuring learner enthusiasm. Since managing mixed-ability groups is often underexamined, structured protocols for differentiated instruction should be introduced, guiding tutors in flexible grouping and scaffolded tasks. To refine simultaneous individualized and group instruction, one-on-one coaching support from literacy specialists and mentorship pairing between experienced and new tutors would provide real-time feedback and accelerate professional readiness. Sustaining tutor motivation requires institutional affirmation through a formal recognition program and opportunities for reflective practice and peer learning communities, fostering collaboration and professional fulfillment. Finally, competency-based recruitment criteria and a program monitoring and effectiveness review mechanism would ensure quality assurance and scalability, aligning tutor expertise with learner needs. Together, these components form a holistic framework that strengthens instructional quality, sustains tutor engagement, and enhances learner outcomes.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers' experiences in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program are marked by both fulfillment and challenges, which serve as a basis for a teacher support program. While teachers find the program rewarding due to improvements in learners' literacy, confidence, and participation, they also encounter difficulties in managing diverse learner needs, sustaining engagement, and dealing

with limited training in beginning reading. These findings highlight the need for a structured Teacher Support Program that provides continuous training, instructional resources, and mentoring to strengthen teacher competence and ensure the sustained effectiveness of the ARAL Program.

Compliance with ethical standards

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I acknowledge that I have not used ChatGPT or Copilot for refining some of the sections in the document.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

I affirm that the respondents voluntarily agreed to participate after being fully informed about the purpose, nature, and potential implications of the study. Their responses have been collected with utmost respect for their privacy and confidentiality, in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

Statement of ethical approval

The study was conducted with approval and in accordance with the standards of the college. No ethical approval was required, as the research followed all applicable ethical guidelines, ensuring respect for the respondents' privacy and confidentiality.

Statement of informed consent

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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