



**TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE ACADEMIC RECOVERY AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING (ARAL)
PROGRAM: BASIS FOR IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the challenges and coping strategies of teachers in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in the Schools District of San Joaquin South during the School Year 2025–2026. Using a descriptive method with in-depth interviews, eight (8) participants reported several challenges, including lack of instructional materials, conflicting schedules, irregular learner attendance, learner behavioral issues, difficulties in learner comprehension, limited parental involvement, and gaps in teachers' pedagogical training. Teachers addressed these challenges through various coping strategies such as resourcefulness, effective time management, motivating learners, implementing learner-centered assessments, encouraging parental involvement, utilizing teacher aides, and maintaining a strong sense of purpose. The findings highlight the importance of teacher resilience in sustaining effective instruction and learner engagement, and they provide valuable insights for designing targeted in-service training programs aimed at strengthening teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes.

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Keywords: *Teachers' Challenges, Coping Strategies, Implementation of ARAL Program, In-Service Training*

INTRODUCTION

Education remains a key driver of national development, yet the Philippines continues to face challenges in ensuring quality and equitable learning. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the education system, exacerbating existing learning gaps and leading to what many scholars call a "learning crisis." International assessments confirm this reality. The 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that Filipino learners scored significantly below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average in mathematics, reading, and science, with only a small proportion reaching the minimum proficiency level (OECD, 2023). Likewise, the World Bank (2022) emphasized that the Philippines has one of the highest rates of "learning poverty"—with over 90% of 10-year-olds unable to read and understand a simple text. To address this, the Department of Education (DepEd) crafted comprehensive learning recovery frameworks. DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2023 established the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP), while DepEd Order No. 014, s. 2023 launched the National Learning Camp (NLC) as a structured approach to remediation and enrichment (DepEd, 2023a; DepEd, 2023b). Similarly, DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024 introduced Catch Up Fridays to strengthen foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

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Most recently, DepEd institutionalized the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program through DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025 and reinforced its mandate under Republic Act No. 12028, the ARAL Program Act (DepEd, 2025a; DepEd, 2025b). These policies demonstrate the government’s strong commitment to recovering lost learning opportunities through structured, school-based, and data-driven interventions.

While these initiatives offer great promise, their success largely depends on teachers, who serve as the primary implementers of learning recovery programs. Research indicates that teacher readiness—encompassing pedagogical competence, access to instructional materials, and willingness to adapt to new strategies—is essential for successful program delivery (Bautista & Tan, 2024). However, implementation is often constrained by challenges such as large class sizes, insufficient training, heavy workloads, and limited resources (Castroverde & Acala, 2021). For instance, studies on the NLC revealed that while teachers observed improvements in learner engagement, they also struggled with time management and lack of program-aligned materials (RCTQ, 2023).

Given these realities, it is important to examine the challenges and coping strategies of the teachers in the implementation of the ARAL program. In District of San Joaquin South, the program is being introduced to support learners in bridging their academic gaps, particularly in literacy. Investigating the lived experiences of teachers may provide basis for program recommendation.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, study participants, data-gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis. The study seeks to identify the challenges encountered by teachers and the coping strategies they use in implementing the ARAL Program as a basis for program recommendations in the District of San Joaquin South during the School Year 2025–2026.

Research Method

The study employed a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews. The descriptive research method focused on systematically describing a phenomenon as it exists in its natural setting, without manipulating variables. According to McCombes (2023), descriptive research is a systematic approach that aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon as it exists without manipulating variables. It focuses on what exists, how, where, and when by using observations, surveys, and other data collection techniques to provide a detailed snapshot of the current state of affairs.

During the interview, the interviewer and interviewee were allowed to sit at an appropriate distance to reflect on the series of questions concerning a particular issue. The purpose was to obtain the participants' main or essential views on the issue within a social context through their responses.

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Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' challenges and coping strategies in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it seeks to understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings they attach to their experiences. Through this approach, rich and in-depth data were gathered to capture the realities encountered by teachers implementing the ARAL Program.

Specifically, the study utilized a phenomenological approach, which focuses on understanding the common experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon explored is the implementation of the ARAL Program from the perspective of teachers. Recent scholarship emphasizes the continued relevance of phenomenology in qualitative inquiry. For instance, Hossain, Alam, and Ali (2024) highlight the importance of methodological rigor in phenomenological studies, particularly in achieving data saturation to authentically represent shared experiences. This updated perspective strengthens the study's design by ensuring that the lived realities of teachers are systematically and meaningfully captured.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were ARAL Program teachers assigned to four designated big schools in the District of San Joaquin South during the school year 2025-2026.

A total of eight (8) participants were considered in the study. Two (2) ARAL program teachers for each selected school. These teachers must be assigned in a Primary School

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located in the schools District of San Joaquin South, specifically; Lawigan Elementary School, Sinogbuan Elementary School, Valverde Elementary School and San Joaquin South Central Elementary School. The participants were informed about their consent prior to taking part in the study.

Sampling Design

The study employed a purposive sampling design. According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are intentionally selected because they possess the specific characteristics needed for the sample. In other words, individuals are chosen deliberately based on their relevance to the study. Also known as judgmental sampling, this method depends on the researcher's discretion in identifying and selecting the individuals, cases, or events that can provide the most useful information for achieving the objectives of the study.

Research Instrument

The research instrument utilized in the study was a researcher-made interview schedule.

An interview schedule in qualitative research is a structured or semi-structured guide comprising a list of questions or topics that the interviewer intends to cover during the interview process. Its primary purpose is to ensure that all relevant areas are systematically explored across interviews, enhancing consistency, rigor, and comparability of data, while still allowing flexibility for in-depth probing and adaptation to emerging insights (Morris, 2025).

The interview schedule consisted of three questions that are centered on the purpose of the study.

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Voice and video recorders were also used for data gathering and documentation, subject to the participants' permission.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before the validity of the researcher-made interview schedule was established, the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, and a panel of jurors recognized for their expertise in research, testing and assessment, and English were asked to review and validate each question for possible revision and improvement.

Validity is an important measure of the trustworthiness of research findings. In qualitative research, which relies on rich and narrative-based inquiry, special standards are needed to ensure validity. The concept of validity in qualitative studies relates to the credibility, dependability, and depth of the data. Establishing validity means making sure that the findings accurately represent the phenomena being studied. It also highlights the researcher's responsibility to present an authentic account of the participants' experiences and insights (Stewart, 2024).

The comments, corrections, and suggestions provided by the panel of validators regarding the interview schedule were taken into consideration.

Data Gathering Procedures

Approval to conduct the study was secured from the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the Office of the District Supervisors, the School Heads, and the individual participants. The researcher personally visited the

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schools, community, or any other location convenient for the participants to carry out the interviews.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher requested the participants to sign a waiver or consent form related to the study. Through the use of in-depth interviews, voice and video recorders were also utilized to fully capture the interviewees' responses. After completing the series of interviews, the researcher compiled and organized all the data gathered.

Data Analysis

The data were collected through the interview schedule and were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method designed to identify, interpret, and report recurring patterns or themes within narrative data. This approach enables the researcher to uncover meaningful insights into the responses of the participants on the AI applications commonly used, how it was being used, and the advantages and disadvantages in the use of AI in language learning.

According to Braun and Clarke (2023), thematic analysis offers a flexible yet systematic framework for examining qualitative data, enabling researchers to identify both the explicit and underlying meanings found in participants' narratives. It is especially appropriate for educational research that aims to explore complex social and organizational processes. Likewise, Nowell et al. (2021) emphasized that thematic analysis strengthens the transparency and credibility of qualitative studies through systematic coding and careful interpretation of data.

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The transcribed interview data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2023), since this method is suitable for identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns or themes within qualitative data.

The analysis followed a systematic six-phase process. First, familiarization with the data was carried out through repeated reading and rereading of the transcripts in both the local language and their English translations. Next, initial codes were generated by assigning short phrases or labels to meaningful segments of the data, such as “low self-esteem,” “fear of judgment,” or “poor signal.” These codes were then organized during the searching for themes phase, where related codes were grouped into potential overarching themes and sub-themes that captured significant patterns—for example, codes like “no insult” and “private correction” were clustered under a broader theme. In the reviewing themes phase, these groupings were refined and checked against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected participants’ meanings and the study’s focus. The defining and naming themes phase followed, where clear, concise, and academically sound names were developed for the final emergent themes, which would later be presented in Chapter 4. Finally, the producing the report phase involved weaving the themes into a narrative structure, supported by direct quotes, to present, analyze, and interpret the data in Chapter 4, while linking the findings to the theoretical framework.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' challenges and coping strategies in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as basis for In-service Training in the Schools District of San Joaquin South during the School Year 2025-2026.

The participants of this study were eight (8) purposively selected ARAL Program teachers from the District of San Joaquin South. These teachers handle students under the ARAL Program.

A purposive sampling design was employed in this study. The researcher used a researcher-developed interview guide to gather relevant information regarding the challenges encountered and coping strategies used by ARAL Program teachers.

Open-ended questions were utilized during the interviews. The researcher asked the participants to respond to the interview questions and then posed follow-up questions whenever necessary based on their answers. Voice and video recorders were also used for data collection and documentation, subject to the participants' consent.

The results of the in-depth interviews were summarized and interpreted through thematic analysis.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the results of the study, the challenges experienced by teachers in the implementation of the ARAL Program include lack of instructional materials, conflicting

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schedules, irregular learner attendance, learners' behavioral issues, limited learner comprehension, low parental involvement, and gaps in teachers' pedagogical training.

Furthermore, the results revealed that ARAL Program teachers employ several coping strategies to address these challenges. These strategies include resourcefulness, effective time management, motivating learners, implementing learner-centered assessments, encouraging parental involvement, utilizing teacher aides, and maintaining a strong sense of purpose.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

To address the challenges encountered in the implementation of the ARAL Program, it is recommended that flexible learning schedules be implemented to accommodate learners' work and household responsibilities. Enhancing instructional resources and providing learner-centered materials may improve learners' comprehension and engagement. Strengthening parental involvement through regular communication, workshops, and participation in learning activities may also help support learner motivation. Additionally, integrating behavioral support strategies, such as positive reinforcement, mentorship, and guidance sessions, may improve classroom management and learner discipline.

To further strengthen coping strategies among both learners and teachers, promoting resourcefulness and self-directed learning is essential. Learners may be trained in time management, study skills, and goal setting, while peer-support systems such as study groups

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or learning buddies may reinforce motivation and academic engagement. Teachers may also be provided with structured support, including collaborative planning opportunities, access to teaching aids, and mechanisms to manage conflicting schedules and workloads. Encouraging a culture of feedback and reflection, where learners and teachers regularly assess progress and adjust strategies, may further enhance overall learning outcomes.

Regarding in-service training programs for ARAL teachers, it is important to design specialized training modules focused on learner-centered pedagogy, classroom management, and assessment strategies appropriate for ARAL learners. Training programs may also include sessions on teachers' coping strategies, covering stress management, adaptive instruction, and conflict resolution. Continuous professional development opportunities, such as workshops, mentoring, and peer observation, should be provided to sustain and enhance teachers' instructional competencies. Incorporating digital literacy and innovative teaching approaches may further improve learner engagement, particularly in resource-limited and flexible learning environments.

Future researchers may conduct longitudinal studies examining the effectiveness of ARAL Program interventions in improving learners' academic outcomes. They may also explore additional coping strategies and innovative practices used by teachers to address systemic challenges in program implementation.

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