



STAKEHOLDERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN IMPLEMENTING ACADEMIC RECOVERY AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING (ARAL) PROGRAM: BASES FOR ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the stakeholders' lived experiences in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program among six (6) ARAL teachers, six (6) learners, six (6) parents, one (1) school head, and one (1) Local Government Unit (LGU) as bases for an enhancement program. Results revealed that the learners' experiences were: improved reading skills, enhanced reading comprehension, increased confidence, and developed positive attitude toward reading while those experienced by the teachers were: increased commitment to learners' improvement, honed skills in using engaging and supportive teaching strategies, overcome workload challenges, and developed understanding of struggling learners. From the school head's observations, there were improved learners' reading skills and secured collaboration among teachers, parents and LGU. Parents' observations included increased children's confidence, improved in children's reading skills, and secured collaboration among stakeholders. Meanwhile, the LGU's observations revealed identified significant change in children's reading skills, improved skills and able to catch up with class activities.

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Keywords: *ARAL Program, Lived Experiences, Reading Skills, Stakeholders, Enhancement*

Program

INTRODUCTION

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program was introduced by the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) as a flagship initiative to help learners recover from the deep learning gaps left by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippine News Agency (PNA) published in 2025 highlighted that the gaps in reading and numeracy were not only due to prolonged school closures but also long-standing systemic challenges in the education sector. De Los Santos, Montecillo, and Escarlos (2025) emphasized that ARAL seeks to bridge these gaps through structured remediation, tutorials, and flexible learning approaches, these enabling learners to catch up to grade-level competencies. Yet, the program’s success depends on more than policy; it rests on the collective effort of teachers, school heads, parents, learners, and local government units (LGUs) who, together shape the reality of learning recovery.

On the ground, however, the story of ARAL is complex. According to DepEd-CAR and Manila Bulletin (2025), millions of learners have been reached through tutorials, instructional resources, and parent orientations. Prosia, et al. (2025) observed that teachers face heavier workloads as they juggle ARAL sessions with regular classes; school heads manage the coordination of people, resources, and monitoring systems across large populations; parents participate to varying degrees depending on their time and capacity to support learning at

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home; and learners show mixed responses—some thrive with the extra support, while others continue to struggle due to logistical barriers or lack of motivation.

Scholars argue that these realities must be understood if ARAL is to succeed. Momo (2024) situates ARAL within broader ASEAN recovery frameworks, emphasizing sustainability and equity, while Prosia, et al. (2025) highlight the importance of listening to teachers' workload concerns, learners' engagement challenges, and parents' ability to provide support. These perspectives underscore the need for a qualitative exploration of stakeholder experiences as basis for program enhancement.

This study is therefore grounded in the recognition that ARAL's effectiveness is shaped not only by its design but by the human realities of those who implement and benefit from it. By exploring these lived experiences, this study aimed at providing insights that can guide responsive strategies by reducing teacher workload pressures, improving learner engagement, and strengthening parental and community involvement. In doing so, ARAL can move closer to its vision of equitable and sustainable learning recovery.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants in the study, research instrument, data procedures, and data analyses.

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Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design, a methodological approach well-suited for examining lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives within authentic social contexts (Given, 2023). Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate when the objective is to explore how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2023). In this study, the researcher was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' lived experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they adopted in implementing the ARAL Program.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers, learners, principal, parents, and LGU directly involved in the ARAL Program. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals perceive, interpret, and give meaning to their experiences within a specific phenomenon, making it ideal for capturing stakeholders' firsthand accounts of ARAL implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Through this design, the study sought to collect rich and detailed descriptions of the challenges, strategies, and adaptations experienced by the participants. By analyzing these experiences, common themes and insights emerged, which served as empirical bases for developing improvements in instructional strategies, professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and overall program support. This design ensured that program enhancements are grounded in the actual experiences of those directly involved in ARAL implementation.

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Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the participants had direct experience with the ARAL Program. Creswell & Poth (2021, defined purposive sampling as a non-probability technique appropriate for qualitative phenomenological research, that allows the deliberate selection of individuals with relevant knowledge and exposure.

Participants were drawn from a public elementary school in Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, and included six teachers (ARAL implementers/tutors), six learners (one per teacher), six parents or guardians actively supporting their children, the school head, and a representative from the LGU. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, ensuring rich and meaningful insights into ARAL implementation.

Participants in the Study

The participants in this study consisted of six (6) teachers, six (6) learners, one (1) school head, six (6) parents, and one (1) Local Government Unit (LGU) who were directly involved in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in one of the public Schools in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo, during the Schoolyear 2025–2026.

The participants were assigned number for anonymity and confidentiality. They were Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19, and 20.

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Research Instrument

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

The researcher-made semi-structured interview guide contained one (1) main question on learners, teachers, school head, parents, and LGU's experiences, challenges encountered, and how to overcome those challenges in the implementation of the ARAL Program.

Validity of the Research Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the semi-structured interview guide underwent content - and - face validation by experts in education and qualitative research. These experts reviewed the questions to determine their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives and conceptual framework. Their feedback was used to revise and refine the interview guide to ensure that the questions effectively capture stakeholders' lived experiences in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program.

In addition, pilot interviews were conducted with selected participants who were not parts of the actual study to assess the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the questions. This process helped identify ambiguous or leading questions and ensured that the instrument elicits rich, meaningful responses. These validation procedures strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected in the study.

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Data - gathering Procedures

The study collected qualitative data to explore the lived experiences and perceived challenges of stakeholders implementing the ARAL Program. Following standard qualitative research protocols, data gathering proceeded through purposive sampling, interviews, and focus group discussions to ensure depth and relevance of responses from all stakeholder groups.

First, formal permission was secured from the school head. Purposive sampling was then implemented to identify participants across the five stakeholder categories—learners, teachers, school head, parents, and LGU, to ensure that participants had firsthand experience of ARAL implementation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and parental consent was secured from parents of learners below the age of 18.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, conducted in face-to-face set up. These methods allowed participants to express their perspectives, challenges, and reflections in their own words, thus providing rich, contextual data relevant to the research questions. All interviews and discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to maintain data integrity and enhance analytic accuracy.

Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respectful engagement with participants were strictly observed throughout the data gathering process.

Data Analyses

To interpret and make sense of the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed, which is a systematic yet flexible method for identifying, organizing, and offering insights into

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patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Thematic analysis enabled researchers to capture commonalities and variations in participants' lived experiences while preserving the richness and complexity of their accounts. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that provides a clear roadmap for analyzing textual data and deriving meaningful themes.

In this study, thematic analysis was conducted through a rigorous multi-step process adapted from the established framework of Braun and Clarke (2021). The process began with data familiarization and transcription, wherein the researchers immersed themselves in the dataset by repeatedly reading the transcripts and noting initial impressions. This was followed by the systematic generation of initial codes, thus identifying text segments relevant to the research questions across all interviews and discussions. The next step involved searching for themes, where codes were examined for recurring patterns and organized into candidate themes that captured significant aspects of stakeholders' experiences. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and checked against the dataset to ensure coherence and distinction. Subsequently, each theme was clearly defined and named to encapsulate its essence and relevance to the research objectives. Finally, the themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative, supported by illustrative quotations that provided evidence and depth to the interpretations.

This analytic procedure ensured systematic processing of qualitative data in support of the study's aim to uncover meaningful insights into the challenges faced by ARAL

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stakeholders. Strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and rich, thick description were applied to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the stakeholders' lived experiences in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) program as bases for enhancement program. The participants in the study were a total of 20 stakeholders from one of the public elementary schools in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo.

A researcher-made interview guide was used to collect the responses of the participants regarding their lived experiences with the ARAL program. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the interview guide was reviewed and validated by experts in the field of education and research. Thematic analysis was used to interpret and analyze the responses of the participants.

The following findings emerged from the study:

As regards the learners' experiences in the implementation of the ARAL program, four major themes emerged: Improved Reading Skills, Enhanced Reading Comprehension, Increased Confidence, and Development of a Positive Attitude toward Reading.

On the teachers' experiences in implementing the ARAL program, four themes were generated: Increased Commitment for Learners' Improvement, Honed Skills in Using Engaging and Supportive Teaching Strategies, Overcome Workload Challenges, and Developed Understanding of Struggling Learners.

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For the experiences of the school head, two themes emerged: Improvement of Learners' Reading Skills and Collaboration Among Teachers, Parents, and the LGU.

For the parents' experiences in supporting the ARAL program, three themes were identified: Increased Children's Confidence, Improvement in Children's Reading Skills, and Collaboration Among Stakeholders.

For the experiences of the Local Government Unit (LGU), two themes were generated: Significant Change in Children's Reading Skills and Improved Skills and Ability to Catch Up in Class Activities.

A proposed enhancement program was designed as a result of the study.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program significantly enhances learners' literacy development through structured reading interventions, consistent teacher support, and a positive learning environment. The program promotes improvement in reading skills, confidence, motivation, and classroom participation, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted instructional strategies and regular practice.

The study also highlights the critical role of teachers in ensuring program success. Despite challenges related to workload and resource preparation, teachers showed commitment and adaptability in delivering appropriate interventions for struggling learners.

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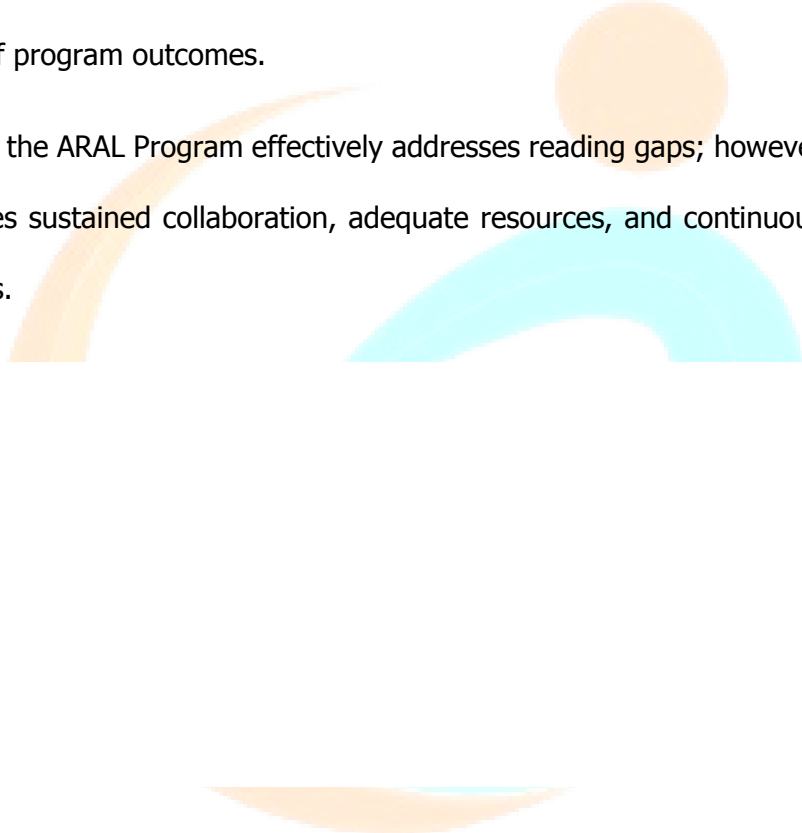
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This underscores the fact that effective literacy programs depend largely on professional dedication and instructional flexibility.

Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of collaboration among school leaders, parents, and community stakeholders, including the Local Government Unit (LGU). Strong partnerships support continuous monitoring, reinforcement of learning at home, and sustainability of program outcomes.

Overall, the ARAL Program effectively addresses reading gaps; however, its long-term success requires sustained collaboration, adequate resources, and continuous support from all stakeholders.



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