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EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC RECOVERY AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING (ARAL) READING TEACHERS IN TEACHING READING TO IDENTIFIED STRUGGLING LEARNERS: BASIS FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATION

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers in teaching reading to identified struggling learners, with the aim of providing a basis for policy recommendations for Igbaras Central Elementary School in the District of Igbaras during the 2025-2026 school year. The research employed a descriptive method using in-depth interviews. The study involved ten selected participants, with the ARAL Reading Teachers representing a diverse group in terms of age, qualifications, and employment status, offering a mix of experience and preparation to effectively support struggling learners. The findings revealed that the ARAL Reading Teachers' experiences in teaching struggling learners included deep emotional investment, pedagogical adaptation, evolving teacher identity, and ongoing challenges. The strategies used by the ARAL Reading Teachers to support struggling learners included differentiated instruction, embedding reading support in classroom discussions, small-group scaffolding, and peer-assisted learning.

Keywords: *Experiences, ARAL Reading Teacher, Struggling Readers, Policy Recommendation*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Reading proficiency is a fundamental cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning. It is through reading that learners gain access to knowledge, develop critical thinking, and build communication skills necessary for success across all subject areas. However, despite the recognized importance of reading, many elementary learners continue to struggle with basic literacy skills, such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension (Capin et al., 2022). These struggling readers require targeted and systematic instruction that addresses their individual learning gaps through explicit and evidence-based reading strategies (Main, 2023).

To respond to the growing issue of learning loss and reading difficulties—especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic- the Department of Education (DepED) in the Philippines launched Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program.

The ARAL-Reading component specifically aims to support identified struggling readers by providing intensive remediation sessions facilitated by teachers or tutors (DepEd, 2025). However, due to teacher shortages and limited manpower, many of those assigned as an Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers are non–Language or non–English majors, whose fields of specialization differ from literacy instruction. This misalignment between teachers' area of expertise and their assigned tasks poses unique instructional, emotional, and professional challenges.

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Recent studies have shown that teachers who are tasked to teach subjects outside their specialization often experience feelings of inadequacy, low self-efficacy, and anxiety about instructional effectiveness (Villanueva, 2023). These teachers may lack the pedagogical content knowledge and reading intervention strategies required to effectively support struggling learners (Swaby-Bell, 2024). As a result, they must rely on self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and trial-and-error approaches to deliver reading lessons. In the Philippine context, this issue is compounded by large class sizes, limited access to reading materials, and minimal professional development opportunities (Astle, 2024).

Moreover, the demands of the ARAL program—such as learner diagnosis, progress monitoring, and remediation documentation—add to the workload of teachers whose primary specialization may be in other disciplines. Despite these challenges, many teachers demonstrate remarkable adaptability and resilience, developing creative strategies to help learners improve their reading skills.

However, while numerous studies have explored reading difficulties and intervention strategies, few have specifically examined the lived experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers who teach reading to struggling learners outside their area of specialization. Understanding their perspectives is vital to identify the support they need, such as targeted training, mentoring, and instructional resources.

The researcher observed that some of the teachers face a lot of challenges like how to teach reading, reading intervention strategies to be used, limited access to reading

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materials and lack of trainings. Other teachers experience the feelings of inadequacy, low self-efficacy, and anxiety about instructional effectiveness.

This study sought to explore the experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading teachers in teaching reading to identified struggling learners when their teaching assignment is not aligned with their field of specialization. By giving voice to these teachers, the research aims to illuminate the realities they face, the strategies they employ, and the support systems necessary for effective reading instruction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter shows the research method, research design, the participants of the study, data-gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis employed in this study. This study was done to identify the experiences of the Academic Recovery and Achievable Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers in teaching reading to the identified struggling learners as Basis of policy recommendation in Igbaras Central Elementary School, District of Igbaras in school year 2025-2026.

Research Method

The research was based on the qualitative research design in which the researcher used in-depths interviews to understand the experiences of Aral Reading Teachers in teaching identified struggling learners.

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The qualitative approach was suitable since it enables a researcher to have a deep insight into human experiences, behaviors, and perceptions in their natural environments.

Creswell and Poth (2023) explain that qualitative research is a method that is applied to study and learn about the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue. It entails the gathering of rich and descriptive data in order to view the experience of the participants on their own perceptions. In this study, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers in teaching struggling learners.

This approach focuses on the how and why behind teachers' actions and decisions, providing insights that reflect their real classroom experiences. Such understanding helped generate meaningful findings that can guide evidence-based policy recommendations for improving reading instruction.

The interviewer and the interviewee in the interview were allowed to sit together in a distance and cogitate over the set of questions on a given issue. The goal was to obtain the primary or required perceptions of the participants in a particular dilemma within a social setup by means of the replies of the respondents to the queries.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers in teaching struggling learners. The phenomenological design was

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appropriate because it focuses on the participants' real-life experiences and the meanings they attached to them.

In this study, the descriptive phenomenological design provided an avenue to capture the authentic voices of Aral Reading Teachers as they implemented reading interventions for struggling learners. Moustakas (2020) emphasized that phenomenology seeks to understand human experiences as they are lived, without imposing preconceived theories or assumptions. This aligns with the study's goal of documenting teachers' actual classroom experiences, challenges, and strategies in addressing reading difficulties.

Furthermore, Sandelowski (2021) noted that qualitative descriptive research is useful when the researcher aims to obtain straightforward descriptions of phenomena as experienced by participants. It enables the presentation of findings in a clear, organized, and factual manner—qualities that are essential in forming evidence-based policy recommendations.

By using this design, the researcher can accurately portray the teachers' shared experiences and derive meaningful insights for enhancing reading instruction within the Aral Program.

Overall, the descriptive qualitative design provided a systematic framework for exploring and analyzing the complex realities of ARAL Reading Teachers' experiences, ensuring that their voices contribute meaningfully to improving reading instruction and policymaking within the Department of Education.

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Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of ten (10) selected ARAL Reading Teachers who were actively involved in implementing reading interventions for struggling learners during the School Year 2025–2026.

Among them, five (5) were permanent teachers employed under the Department of Education (DepEd), three (3) were teachers from the Provincial Internship Program (PIP), and two (2) are teachers assigned through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) program.

Sampling Design

This study used purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where participants were intentionally chosen based on specific characteristics that were relevant to the research objectives.

In this study, the participants were Aral Reading Teachers who had direct experience in teaching identified struggling readers under the Department of Education's Aral Program. This sampling method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to select individuals who could provide rich, detailed, and meaningful insights about the phenomenon being studied.

(Creswell & Poth, 2023) emphasized that in phenomenological research, participants must be carefully chosen because they should have personally experienced the phenomenon under investigation. This ensures that the data gathered truly reflect authentic and meaningful insights. In this study, Aral Reading Teachers are selected because they have firsthand

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experience in teaching identified struggling learners and implementing reading interventions under the Aral Program. Their direct involvement allows them to provide rich, detailed accounts of their teaching practices, challenges, and strategies, making them the most credible and relevant sources of information for understanding this educational experience.

Through purposive sampling, the study ensured that the data collected were rich, relevant, and reflective of the actual experiences of those teaching in the Aral reading context, thereby providing a strong foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made instruments was used to gather comprehensive and reliable data through in-depths interview, which allowed the researcher to collect detailed qualitative data from the participants.

A voice and video recorder were used for data collection and documentation, with the participants' permission.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before determining the validity of the interview schedule created by the researcher, the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, and a panel of jurors with expertise in research, testing and assessment, and English were asked to review and validate each question for possible revisions.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the study subjected the interview guide to expert validation by professionals in the field of education, language, and research.

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Validity referred to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), establishing validity in qualitative research involves ensuring that the data collection tools effectively capture participants' genuine experiences and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied.

The aim of the study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Aral Reading Teachers in teaching identified struggling learners, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the strategies they employed, and the implications of these experiences for policy formulation. By ensuring the validity of the research instrument, the study sought to guarantee that the interview guide accurately elicited relevant and meaningful responses that truly reflected the teachers' experiences within the context of the Aral Reading Program.

The comments, corrections, and suggestions from the panel of validators regarding the interview schedule were assessed based on the eight criteria for instrument evaluation proposed by Good and Scates (Appendix F).

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher obtained permission from the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisors, School Heads, and individual participants to conduct the study.

The interviews were carried out at locations that were most convenient for the participants. Before the interviews, the researcher asked participants to sign a consent form granting permission for their involvement in the study.

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In-depth interviews were conducted using both a voice recorder and a video recorder to ensure a full and accurate capture of the interviewees' responses. After completing a series of interviews, the researcher consolidated all the collected data for further analysis.

This systematic process ensured that the data collected were authentic, comprehensive, and ethically obtained. The qualitative nature of the data gathering procedure allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of ARAL Reading Teachers, which later served as the foundation for thematic analysis and formulation of policy recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program.

Data Analysis

After the completion of data collection, the researcher proceeded with a systematic process of qualitative data analysis to interpret the experiences and insights shared by the ARAL Reading Teachers. The goal was to identify emerging themes and patterns that reflect the teachers' lived experiences, strategies, challenges, and recommendations in teaching reading to struggling learners.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after data gathering to ensure accuracy and retention of participants' original statements. Each transcript was carefully read and reread to achieve a deep understanding of the data. The researcher then applied thematic analysis, a commonly used qualitative approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data, as recommended by Braun and Clarke(2021).

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the researcher employed member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation. Member checking involved asking

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participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions and interpretations. Peer debriefing allowed external reviewers to assess the logic and consistency of the findings, while triangulation compared responses across different participants to ensure consistency.

The insights obtained from the thematic analysis served as the foundation for the formulation of policy recommendations that address the challenges faced by ARAL Reading Teachers and enhance the effectiveness of reading instruction among struggling learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study determined the experiences of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Teachers in teaching reading to identified struggling learners as Basis for policy recommendation in Igbaras Central Elementary School, District of Igbaras during the school year 2025-2026.

The study employed a qualitative research method, utilizing in-depth interviews. The research design was descriptive phenomenology, analyzed through thematic analysis.

The participants of the study consisted of ten (10) selected ARAL Reading Teachers who are actively involved in implementing reading interventions for struggling learners during the School Year 2025–2026.

Among them, five (5) are permanent teachers employed under the Department of Education (DepEd), three (3) are teachers from the Provincial Internship Program (PIP), and two (2) are teachers assigned through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) program.

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The researcher-made research questionnaires was used and validated by the experts. The interview was scheduled during the teachers' vacant time and after class hour.

Formal letter was delivered personally and via email to the school heads, of whom, would approve and assign the participants for the said interview.

The researcher personally visited the schools to conduct in-depth interviews, utilizing a voice recorder and voice recordings for data collection, with participants' permission for photo documentation.

After a series of interviews, the researcher consolidated all collected data. The narratives were then gathered, transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted using a thematic approach.

The following are the findings of the study:

ARAL Reading Teachers profile demonstrates the equal distribution of age, qualifications, and employment status. They are between 26 and 59, which adds both the youthfulness of early careers and the professional outlook of teaching. There are half masters and half bachelors holding degrees with half being permanent and contractual teachers keeping equal numbers. This variety aids effective and receptive reading teaching among the struggling learners.

The results of the study demonstrate that the experiences of an ARAL Reading Teacher who taught reading to struggling learners are characterized by a profound emotional investment, pedagogical adaptation, the development of an identity of the teacher, and constant challenges.

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Regarding the outcome, the ways in which ARAL Reading Teachers supported the education of struggling learners were characterized by differentiated instruction, reading support integrated into classroom dialogue, scaffolding in small groups, and peer-supported learning.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

Reading teachers demonstrate a high level of adaptability and commitment in teaching struggling learners, particularly through instructional modifications and individualized support.

The study revealed that ARAL Reading Teachers play a crucial role in aiding struggling learners through a combination of emotional dedication, pedagogical flexibility, and professional growth. Teachers demonstrated deep emotional investment, showing genuine care and commitment to learners' progress. They employed adaptive strategies such as differentiated instruction, embedding reading support in classroom discourse, small-group scaffolding, and peer-assisted learning to meet diverse learner needs.

Through these practices, teachers' professional identities evolved, reflecting continuous reflection and growth in their instructional expertise. However, they faced persistent challenges, including limited resources, large class sizes, learner absenteeism, and gaps in professional development.

These findings highlight the need to support teachers through enhanced reading intervention programs, enhanced training, adequate resources, and sustainable support systems, ultimately fostering more effective literacy outcomes for struggling learners.

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Conclusion

Based on the findings and insights gained from this study, the following recommendations are emphasized:

The schools and education authorities provide sustained professional development focused on reading instruction, particularly for teachers whose specialization is outside literacy.

Training should emphasize practical strategies such as differentiated instruction, phonics intervention, and comprehension scaffolding.

Schools should also strengthen institutional support systems by allocating adequate instructional materials, reading resources, and time for small-group interventions. Providing access to leveled texts, multisensory materials, and technology-based reading tools can enhance instructional effectiveness.

In addition, administrators are encouraged to promote collaborative practices among teachers through mentoring, peer coaching, and professional learning communities. Sharing effective strategies can reduce teacher burnout and improve instructional consistency.

Lastly, future programs should integrate learner-centered and emotionally supportive practices into reading interventions. Encouraging positive reinforcement, creating safe learning environments, and involving parents or guardians in reading support can further improve learners' reading outcomes.

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