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Rebuilding Reading Foundations: Exploring Teachers' Lived Experiences and Instructional Adaptations in Implementing The Aral-Reading Program Among Grades 4–6 Learners

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ABSTRACT

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL)-Reading Program was established to address foundational literacy gaps among Filipino learners through targeted and responsive reading interventions. This study was designed to explore teachers' lived experiences, instructional challenges, adaptive strategies, and professional insights in implementing ARAL-Reading among Grades 4–6 learners in Hingyon, Ifugao, Philippines. The investigation adopted a qualitative research design grounded in Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology. Teachers with direct experience implementing ARAL-Reading were identified through purposive sampling, and the proposed data collection involved semi-structured interviews exploring reading difficulties, instructional differentiation, classroom experiences, and institutional support. The analytical framework comprised phenomenological reduction, horizonalization, clustering of meaning units, imaginative variation, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions. Five analytical domains were developed from the research questions and relevant literature: addressing diverse reading deficiencies, adapting instruction to individual literacy needs, navigating implementation constraints, strengthening collaborative literacy support, and developing professional resilience and instructional competence. These domains provided a framework for examining the relationship between reading remediation and teachers' pedagogical decision-making. The study underscored the importance of investigating how educators interpreted and responded to literacy recovery demands in geographically and linguistically distinctive school contexts. Actual empirical findings and the final phenomenological essence remained dependent on the verified interview data.

Keywords: ARAL-Reading Program; Filipino literacy; Grades 4–6; instructional adaptations; learning recovery; phenomenology; reading intervention; teachers' lived experiences

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading proficiency constituted a fundamental component of educational development because it enabled learners to access information, interpret written materials, construct knowledge, and participate meaningfully in classroom activities. During the intermediate elementary grades, reading competencies became increasingly important as pupils encountered more complex texts and learning tasks requiring comprehension, analysis, inference, and independent study. However, persistent deficiencies in word recognition, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension continued to create barriers to academic participation.

International research established that successful literacy instruction required attention to interconnected reading competencies. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as important components of evidence-based reading instruction. Likewise, the Education Endowment Foundation (2021) emphasized explicit vocabulary instruction, reading fluency, comprehension strategies, and targeted interventions for learners who experienced difficulties in literacy development.

In the Philippines, persistent foundational learning difficulties prompted the government to institutionalize academic recovery through Republic Act No. 12028, otherwise known as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program Act. The legislation established a national framework for providing supplementary educational support to learners who had not attained expected grade-level competencies. The Department of Education subsequently issued DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025 and DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025 to guide program implementation.

ARAL-Reading addressed literacy deficiencies through assessment-informed, structured, and learner-responsive instruction. In Key Stage 2, covering Grades 4–6, reading interventions were intended to respond to learners whose foundational competencies remained below expected standards. The program distinguished between learners requiring foundational decoding instruction and those who could decode written words but continued to experience difficulties in fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension.

Implementation of ARAL-Reading required teachers to perform responsibilities extending beyond conventional classroom instruction. Teachers needed to interpret assessment information, identify learners' reading needs, select appropriate intervention activities, monitor progress, and adjust instructional strategies according to individual learning profiles. These responsibilities required pedagogical competence, instructional flexibility, sustained engagement, and professional judgment.

Within geographically distinctive communities such as Hingyon, Ifugao, reading instruction also needed to be understood in relation to learners' language experiences, home environments, available resources, and educational opportunities. The relationship between Filipino literacy instruction and children's existing language repertoires presented an important area for exploration. However, the specific effects of these contextual conditions could not be presumed without examining teachers' actual experiences.

Teachers implementing reading recovery programs occupied a central position in translating educational policies into meaningful instructional experiences. Their perspectives offered opportunities to understand how intervention guidelines were interpreted, how instructional difficulties were addressed, and how professional support influenced implementation.

Consequently, this study focused on the lived experiences and instructional adaptations of teachers implementing the ARAL-Reading Program among Grades 4–6 learners in Hingyon, Ifugao. It sought to provide a context-sensitive understanding of reading intervention implementation from the perspectives of educators directly engaged in the process.

Existing research provided substantial evidence concerning reading development, structured literacy instruction, and effective intervention strategies. Nevertheless, evidence about instructional effectiveness did not fully explain how teachers experienced the everyday responsibilities associated with implementing nationally mandated learning recovery programs.

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Recent Philippine qualitative research, including Carreon et al. (2026), examined the experiences of Grade 2 teachers implementing ARAL-Reading and highlighted challenges associated with learner diversity, intervention demands, professional support, and instructional adaptation. However, the experiences of intermediate-grade teachers warranted separate investigation because Grades 4–6 learners might require intervention in foundational decoding while simultaneously encountering more advanced curriculum-based reading expectations.

Furthermore, the experiences of teachers in geographically distinct communities required examination within their institutional, linguistic, and cultural contexts. The study therefore addressed a context-specific gap by examining how Grades 4–6 ARAL-Reading teachers understood their responsibilities, adapted instruction, and interpreted the professional significance of literacy recovery.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences and instructional adaptations of teachers implementing the ARAL-Reading Program among Grades 4–6 learners in Hingyon, Ifugao, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to understand the reading-related challenges teachers encountered, the strategies they employed to address differences in learners' proficiency, the contextual and institutional conditions affecting program implementation, and the professional meanings they attached to their experiences.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Sociocultural Theory

The study was informed by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasized the importance of social interaction, guided participation, and cultural context in learning. The theory provided a framework for examining how teachers supported struggling readers through scaffolding, guided reading, instructional modeling, and interaction. Within ARAL-Reading, learners required varying degrees of assistance according to their reading proficiency. The sociocultural perspective offered a basis for interpreting teachers' decisions to modify instructional activities, provide individualized guidance, and connect reading materials with learners' familiar experiences.

2.2 Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework provided another theoretical foundation. The framework emphasized teachers' ability to transform subject matter into instructional representations appropriate to learners' needs. In reading intervention, teachers needed to understand not only the mechanics of literacy development but also the teaching approaches suitable for learners experiencing distinct reading difficulties. The framework informed the examination of instructional differentiation, material selection, assessment interpretation, and pedagogical adaptations employed during ARAL-Reading implementation.

2.3 Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory provided an additional perspective for understanding teachers' professional learning through experience, reflection, and instructional adjustment. The framework emphasized the relationship between concrete experiences, reflective observation, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation. It supported the examination of how teachers interpreted intervention experiences, reconsidered ineffective approaches, and developed alternative instructional strategies. Together, these theoretical perspectives provided sensitizing concepts for understanding teaching practices, learner support, and professional adaptation. They were not intended to predetermine the themes emerging from phenomenological analysis.

3. METHODOLOGY

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The study was framed within a qualitative research design using transcendental phenomenology based on Moustakas (1994). This approach was selected to investigate the meanings teachers attributed to their experiences of implementing the ARAL-Reading Program among Grades 4–6 learners. The research setting was Piwong Elementary School and the relevant local educational context of Hingyon, Ifugao, Philippines. The proposed participants were teachers who had directly implemented ARAL-Reading interventions for Grades 4–6 learners. Purposive criterion sampling was identified as the appropriate technique because phenomenological inquiry required participants with firsthand experience of the phenomenon. The intended inclusion criteria comprised direct engagement in ARAL-Reading implementation, experience supporting intermediate-grade learners with reading difficulties, and voluntary participation. The actual participant count, recruitment locations, and teaching profiles required confirmation from the research records. Participants' identities were to be protected through codes such as T1, T2, and T3.

The study used a semi-structured interview framework comprising open-ended questions about teachers' instructional experiences, reading intervention practices, learner difficulties, implementation challenges, professional support, and reflections on literacy recovery. Where completed in the actual investigation, interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed, reviewed for accuracy, and organized according to participant identifiers. Data analysis was guided by Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological procedures, beginning with epoche to identify researcher assumptions, followed by horizonalization to identify significant statements. Relevant expressions were then clustered into meaning units, from which textural and structural descriptions were developed. Imaginative variation was used to examine how contextual conditions shaped participants' experiences, while synthesis integrated the descriptions into the essential meaning of ARAL-Reading implementation. The analysis prioritized participants' actual accounts rather than themes predetermined by the theoretical framework. The precise procedures reported in the final article must correspond to the research activities actually completed.

Trustworthiness was addressed conceptually through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The research design incorporated transcript verification, contextual description, systematic documentation of analytical decisions, and researcher reflexivity as appropriate quality-assurance procedures. Their actual implementation required verification against the research records. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, secure handling of interview materials, and responsible reporting of potentially identifiable school experiences. Participant identifiers were used to safeguard identity, and any information concerning individual learners required additional privacy protection. The applicable ethical and data protection requirements included the Data Privacy Act of 2012, Republic Act No. 10173.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenological analysis was organized around five thematic areas that reflected the instructional, organizational, and professional dimensions of implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL)-Reading Program among Grades 4–6 learners. These were (1) Confronting Diverse Foundational Reading Difficulties, (2) Adapting Literacy Instruction to Individual Learner Needs, (3) Negotiating Instructional and Implementation Constraints, (4) Strengthening Collaborative and Institutional Literacy Support, and (5) Developing Professional Resilience and Literacy Teaching Competence.

Theme 1. Confronting Diverse Foundational Reading Difficulties

This theme focused on the varied reading difficulties encountered during the implementation of ARAL-Reading among Grades 4–6 learners. The proposed analysis highlighted differences in learners' foundational literacy skills, particularly decoding, word recognition, oral reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. These differences created instructional challenges because learners within the same grade level required varying levels of support. Some learners needed assistance in

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recognizing and pronouncing words, while others required additional guidance in understanding and interpreting written passages. Such diversity emphasized the importance of assessing individual reading proficiency before selecting appropriate intervention activities.

Participant Responses

T3: "Some of my Grade 5 learners could recognize simple words but experienced difficulty reading longer sentences. I needed to guide them repeatedly before they could read independently."

T8: "I encountered learners who could read words correctly but could not explain what they had read. This made me realize that reading was not only about pronunciation but also about understanding the text."

T1: "One of the challenges I experienced was that learners had different reading abilities. Some could already read paragraphs, while others still struggled with basic words and needed individual assistance."

The illustrative responses suggested that reading difficulties among intermediate-grade learners could involve distinct but interconnected literacy competencies. This interpretation was supported by the National Reading Panel (2000), which identified word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as essential components of reading development. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) similarly emphasized the importance of accurately assessing learners' difficulties and providing targeted literacy interventions. These findings were consistent with the ARAL-Reading guidelines under DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025, which differentiated intervention components according to learners' proficiency levels. The theme underscored the need for diagnostic, individualized, and developmentally appropriate instruction instead of uniform reading activities for learners with different literacy needs.

Theme 2. Adapting Literacy Instruction to Individual Learner Needs

This theme concerned the instructional adjustments teachers developed to accommodate learners' varying reading competencies. The proposed analysis emphasized differentiated interventions, explicit teaching strategies, guided oral reading, vocabulary exercises, and contextualized literacy activities. Teachers implementing reading recovery could modify instructional materials, simplify reading passages, provide additional practice, and use familiar examples to make reading tasks accessible. Instructional adaptation also involved adjusting the pacing and complexity of reading activities according to learners' demonstrated abilities, rather than relying exclusively on their assigned grade level.

Participant Responses

T6: "I used short reading passages, flashcards, and repeated reading activities for learners who had difficulty recognizing words. I gradually introduced longer texts when they showed improvement."

T2: "I noticed that learners became more interested when I used stories related to their community and daily experiences. They participated more actively because the situations were familiar to them."

T10: "I grouped the learners according to their reading needs and prepared different activities. Those who struggled with basic words received more guided practice, while others answered comprehension questions."

The illustrative statements reflected the importance of differentiated, scaffolded, and contextually meaningful reading instruction. Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework explained how teachers transformed instructional content into learning experiences appropriate to pupils' abilities. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory likewise emphasized guided learning and scaffolding in helping learners accomplish tasks beyond their independent capabilities. The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that guided repeated oral reading improved word recognition, fluency, and comprehension, while the Education Endowment Foundation (2021) recommended explicit comprehension instruction and structured interventions for struggling readers. Collectively, these studies supported the use of purposeful instructional modifications, particularly when reading activities were aligned with assessed learner needs.

Theme 3. Negotiating Instructional and Implementation Constraints

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This theme examined the organizational and practical challenges associated with ARAL-Reading implementation. The proposed analysis addressed competing teaching responsibilities, intervention schedules, preparation of instructional materials, learner participation, and monitoring of reading progress. Implementing supplementary reading activities could require additional preparation and sustained attention to individual learners' development. Teachers also needed to manage intervention sessions alongside their regular teaching responsibilities. These demands demonstrated how reading recovery depended not only on pedagogical expertise but also on adequate instructional time, resources, and organizational arrangements.

Participant Responses

T5: "Preparing reading intervention materials required additional time because I still had my regular teaching responsibilities. I often prepared the activities after classes."

T9: "There were times when I lacked appropriate reading materials for learners with different abilities. I created flashcards, short stories, and worksheets to continue the intervention."

T4: "Some learners were absent during intervention sessions, so I needed to repeat previous lessons before introducing new activities. This affected the pacing of our reading sessions."

The illustrative accounts suggested that effective implementation could be influenced by institutional conditions, teacher workload, and instructional resources. Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy explained how frontline professionals exercised judgment when implementing institutional programs under practical constraints. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also emphasized that effective instructional improvement required appropriate professional support and sustained opportunities for learning. Similarly, the Education Endowment Foundation (2021) highlighted the importance of structured and targeted literacy interventions. These perspectives suggested that implementation challenges should be understood as the interaction between teachers' instructional responsibilities and the conditions under which interventions were delivered. The theme emphasized the importance of sufficient planning time, suitable materials, and consistent learner participation in supporting reading recovery.

Theme 4. Strengthening Collaborative and Institutional Literacy Support

This theme focused on the role of professional collaboration, instructional leadership, and parental participation in supporting ARAL-Reading implementation. The proposed analysis explored how teachers sought assistance from colleagues, reading coordinators, school heads, and families in addressing learners' literacy difficulties. Collaboration could involve sharing instructional materials, discussing assessment results, exchanging intervention strategies, and encouraging reading practice at home. These forms of support were relevant because literacy recovery extended beyond individual instructional sessions and required coordination among teachers, school leaders, learners, and families.

Participant Responses

T11: "I consulted our school reading coordinator whenever I encountered difficulties in selecting appropriate intervention activities. The suggestions helped me improve my reading sessions."

T7: "Sharing instructional materials with other teachers made the implementation easier. We discussed activities that could help learners who had difficulty reading."

T2: "I encouraged parents to listen to their children read at home. However, some parents had limited time, so I provided simple reading activities that learners could accomplish with available assistance."

The illustrative statements emphasized the possible contribution of collaboration and institutional support to literacy intervention. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identified collaborative learning, coaching, feedback, and sustained professional engagement as important characteristics of effective teacher professional development. Ronfeldt et al. (2015) found that higher-quality teacher collaboration was associated with improvements in teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Epstein's (2011) framework of school, family, and community partnerships also emphasized the role of shared educational

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responsibility in supporting learners. In the Philippine context, DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025 identified parental and community engagement, capacity-building, and monitoring as components of ARAL-Reading implementation. Together, these perspectives highlighted the importance of coordinated literacy support, while recognizing that the effectiveness of specific collaborative arrangements required direct evidence.

Theme 5. Developing Professional Resilience and Literacy Teaching Competence

This theme examined the professional meanings teachers associated with their experiences of implementing reading interventions. The proposed analysis addressed instructional reflection, persistence, professional confidence, and continuing pedagogical development. Supporting learners with persistent reading difficulties could require teachers to reconsider familiar teaching methods, develop alternative activities, and adjust their expectations concerning learning progress. Such experiences could strengthen professional understanding but might also produce frustration, uncertainty, or fatigue. Examining both positive and challenging experiences was therefore important in developing a balanced understanding of teachers' professional development.

Participant Responses

T12: "At first, I found it difficult to handle learners with different reading problems. As I continued the sessions, I became more patient and learned to adjust my teaching strategies."

T4: "I felt encouraged whenever a learner showed improvement, even in recognizing simple words. Those small achievements motivated me to continue helping struggling readers."

T8: "The experience taught me that reading intervention required continuous learning. I needed to reflect on my teaching methods and change activities when learners did not respond well."

The illustrative accounts reflected the relationship between instructional experience, professional reflection, and pedagogical development. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory explained how individuals transformed experiences into knowledge through reflection and subsequent action. Schön (1983) similarly emphasized reflective practice as an important dimension of professional judgment and improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identified reflection, feedback, and sustained professional learning as important components of effective teacher development. These studies provided a basis for understanding how teachers might strengthen their instructional competence through experience. However, professional resilience should not be presumed solely from exposure to challenging teaching assignments. The final interpretation should establish whether participating teachers actually reported increased confidence, continuing difficulties, or mixed experiences.

4.6 Essence of the Lived Experience

The five proposed thematic areas collectively presented ARAL-Reading implementation as a complex instructional undertaking shaped by diverse learner needs, pedagogical adaptations, organizational conditions, collaborative relationships, and professional learning. The interpretive framework suggested that teachers' experiences could be understood through their continuous efforts to connect literacy assessment with appropriate intervention while managing the practical demands of their teaching environments.

A possible unifying meaning was that rebuilding reading foundations required teachers to move beyond routine instruction and exercise responsive professional judgment. Literacy recovery involved not merely providing additional reading sessions but understanding individual learning difficulties, adapting instructional methods, maintaining learner engagement, and mobilizing available support.

From the perspective of phenomenological inquiry, the essential experience of ARAL-Reading implementation needed to be established through the synthesis of verified participants' textural and structural descriptions. The final interpretation should demonstrate how teachers understood their experiences and how school, learner, and professional circumstances shaped those meanings.

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5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The conceptual analysis of ARAL-Reading highlighted the significance of understanding literacy recovery from the perspective of teachers responsible for translating national education policy into instructional practice.

The research literature established that effective reading intervention required attention to specific foundational skills rather than undifferentiated remedial activities. The National Reading Panel (2000) emphasized systematic instruction in decoding-related competencies and guided reading practices, while the Education Endowment Foundation (2021) underscored the importance of fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and targeted instruction.

These principles were consistent with the policy orientation of ARAL-Reading, which emphasized responsive interventions based on learners' reading proficiency. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of literacy interventions depended on more than identifying appropriate reading strategies. Teachers also needed to interpret assessment results, organize intervention sessions, communicate with learners, and adjust instruction according to individual progress.

The theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky (1978), Shulman (1986), and Kolb (1984) provided complementary explanations of these responsibilities through guided learning, pedagogical knowledge, and reflective professional practice. The distinctive contribution of the proposed study concerned the intermediate elementary grades and the local educational context of Hingyon, Ifugao. Its empirical contribution would depend on whether participants' accounts revealed experiences not sufficiently explained by existing reading intervention research.

Particular attention should be directed toward the linguistic accessibility of reading materials, differences in learners' foundational skills, and the institutional conditions influencing teachers' implementation decisions.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The study identified several issues relevant to the improvement of school-based literacy intervention. First, reading instruction needed to respond to the specific competencies learners had not yet mastered. Assessment-informed intervention could help teachers select activities appropriate to decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension needs. Second, teachers required instructional resources and professional development opportunities that supported differentiated reading intervention. These included suitable reading texts, progress-monitoring materials, and strategies for working with learners exhibiting diverse literacy difficulties.

Third, school-based instructional leadership and professional collaboration could provide opportunities for sharing intervention practices and addressing implementation challenges. Fourth, literacy instruction in geographically and linguistically distinctive communities required attention to learners' language backgrounds and local experiences, without assuming that all learners from the same community possessed identical language competencies. Finally, teachers' experiences could provide important evidence for refining school-level implementation arrangements and identifying where additional support was necessary.

7. CONCLUSION

The study addressed an important dimension of Philippine basic education by focusing on teachers' lived experiences and instructional adaptations in implementing the ARAL-Reading Program among Grades 4–6 learners. The theoretical and literature-based analysis emphasized that reading recovery involved multiple interrelated competencies and required teachers to exercise informed instructional judgment.

Five analytical areas provided a framework for examining diverse literacy difficulties, differentiated instruction, implementation challenges, collaborative support, and professional development. These areas

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indicated the potential importance of viewing reading recovery as an instructional and organizational process rather than a series of isolated remedial activities.
A definitive empirical conclusion concerning ARAL-Reading implementation in Hingyon, Ifugao, required the verified participant narratives and completed phenomenological synthesis. Once grounded in actual data, the study could contribute context-sensitive evidence to guide instructional planning, reading intervention support, teacher professional development, and school-based literacy improvement.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were informed by the literature and policy context and should be refined according to the actual study findings.

1. **Strengthen diagnostic and progress-based instruction.** Reading intervention activities should be aligned with learners' assessed decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension needs.
2. **Enhance teacher professional development.** Training should address explicit reading instruction, differentiated interventions, progress monitoring, and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices.
3. **Improve the availability of instructional resources.** Schools should review the adequacy of reading texts, intervention materials, and assessment tools suitable for Grades 4–6 learners.
4. **Support professional collaboration.** School reading coordinators, teachers, and instructional leaders should have opportunities to discuss implementation concerns and share evidence-informed instructional strategies.
5. **Strengthen family engagement.** Schools should develop feasible approaches to encouraging reading practice beyond intervention sessions while recognizing differences in home circumstances.
6. **Extend research on ARAL-Reading.** Future investigations should include classroom observations, longitudinal monitoring, or analysis of reading assessment outcomes to complement teachers' lived experiences.

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