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Challenges encountered and strategies of the key stage 2 ARAL tutors in the implementation of the ARAL Program: Philippine education

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences of 17 Key Stage 2 tutors in the Schools Division of the City of Batac during the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. Employing a phenomenological qualitative design, the research explored the operational challenges and instructional strategies central to academic recovery. Findings revealed that tutors faced significant time constraints, diverse learner abilities, increased workloads, irregular attendance, and insufficient level-appropriate materials, all of which impeded the delivery of foundational literacy and numeracy interventions. These challenges slowed skill mastery and shifted tutors' focus from instruction to learner motivation and relationship-building. To address these barriers, tutors utilized differentiated instruction, scaffolded learning, game-based activities, peer collaboration, and localized materials to enhance accessibility. The study underscores that while the ARAL Program is crucial in addressing the learning crisis, its long-term effectiveness depends on extended instructional time, improved resource allocation, and institutional support for tutors. Results highlight the importance of a flexible, context-specific approach to promote meaningful learning recovery for struggling Filipino learners.

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Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of societal progress, yet the recent global disruptions have left significant gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy, with reports indicating that nearly 9 out of 10 Filipino children struggle to read basic text (World Bank, 2022). In response, the Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 12028, establishing the Alternative Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as a vital intervention to bridge these learning losses (ARAL Program Act, 2024). For the Schools Division of Batac District 1, this program is not just a remedial measure; it is a commitment to ensuring that no learner is left behind. Understanding the experiences of front-line educators—Key Stage 2 tutors—is

essential for refining pedagogical approaches and ensuring the program's long-term sustainability and effectiveness in raising student achievement.

According to Bajo (2025) of Integrated GMA News, the Department of Education (DepEd) has launched the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program to tackle the nation's learning crisis and reinforce the foundational skills of Filipino learners. For School Year 2025–2026, the program will focus primarily on Reading (ARAL-Reading), providing immediate support to learners who require the most assistance—especially low- and high-emerging readers and those identified as frustrated readers. ARAL tutors will comprise teachers, para-teachers, pre-service teachers, and other trained individuals, all of whom will receive proper training and remuneration for their roles.

In response, the Schools Division of the City of Batac took immediate action to implement the ARAL Program. The division followed RA 12028, Section 10, which mandates the integration of the ARAL Program into the Teacher's Program, School Improvement Plan, and Annual Implementation Plan. To ensure the program's effectiveness and sustainability, ARAL activities were incorporated into the School Improvement Plan and Annual Implementation Plan.

For teachers who served as ARAL tutors, the tutorial sessions were integrated into their teaching programs and counted toward their teaching load. These sessions were scheduled during weekdays, weekends, or at any available time within the school calendar.

The ARAL Program activities in schools were aligned with existing remedial, enrichment, or recovery interventions as prescribed by current laws, policies, and DepEd issuances, to maximize learner engagement. The schedule and additional manpower required for the program were reflected in School Form 7, which was submitted to the Schools Division Office for monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance (IRR-R12028)

Existing studies have examined reading intervention and learning recovery programs in the Philippine educational context, with a particular focus on improving learners' literacy skills and addressing learning gaps. For instance, structured reading remediation programs have been found to significantly enhance learners' reading comprehension levels, moving them from frustration to instructional levels (Abellanos, 2023). Similarly, research on classroom-based reading interventions highlights that teachers tend to emphasize word recognition more than comprehension, indicating an imbalance in instructional approaches (Bacus, 2022). Other studies have explored the challenges teachers face in implementing reading programs, including limited instructional time, insufficient resources, and a need for stronger stakeholder support (Dela Cruz, 2023). More recent literature also discusses academic recovery initiatives, emphasizing their potential to strengthen foundational skills in response to post-pandemic learning loss (Singh & Kumar, 2024). Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains in the literature on the large-scale, policy-driven implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program under Republic Act No. 12028 (Bajo, 2025). In particular, limited research has examined how the program is operationalized at the division and school levels, including its integration into teachers' workloads, its alignment with School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs), and the use of monitoring tools such as School Form 7. Furthermore, there

is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the program's sustainability and its contextual implementation in specific localities, such as the Schools Division of Batac City. Thus, further research is needed to explore both the effectiveness and implementation dynamics of the ARAL Program in localized educational settings.

Ultimately, the motivation behind this research is to bridge the gap between program design and actual classroom experience. By documenting the lived experiences of these tutors, the study aims to identify recurring bottlenecks, highlight successful localized strategies, and provide data-driven recommendations for school heads. Through this inquiry, the researcher seeks to ensure the professional well-being of tutors while ultimately improving the academic recovery rate of learners in Batac District 1, thereby fulfilling the promise of accessible, quality education for all.

Review of related literature and studies

This research builds upon existing literature to examine the ARAL Program through the lived experiences of educators in Batac District 1. While national policies like Republic Act No. 12028 provide the framework for academic recovery, the program's true success depends on how tutors navigate daily classroom realities.

By focusing on the challenges and strategies of Key Stage 2 tutors, this study aims to capture the local innovations used to overcome instructional hurdles. Ultimately, this inquiry seeks to bridge the gap between high-level policy and ground-level practice, ensuring that learning recovery remains effective, accessible, and sustainable for every student in the district.

The legal and policy framework of the ARAL program

The institutionalization of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program through Republic Act No. 12028 (2024) marks a significant shift in the Philippine educational landscape, establishing a statutory framework to address learning gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the law, the ARAL Program is designed to offer free, targeted interventions for learners from kindergarten to Grade 10, particularly those struggling to meet minimum proficiency levels in Reading, Mathematics, and Science (lawphil.net)

The Act emphasizes the State's responsibility to ensure the right to quality education and mandates structured, accessible tutorials for learners who have fallen behind academically, whether due to pandemic-related disruptions or other challenges. Under RA 12028, the program outlines mechanisms for identifying learners in need, training tutors, delivering instructional support through face-to-face, online, or blended modalities, and monitoring learner progress to ensure effective recovery. The law further institutionalizes the ARAL Program by building upon prior literacy and remedial initiatives, such as the Bawat Bata Makababasa Program (BBMP) and the Nationwide Learning Recovery Program (NLRP), integrating their lessons and best practices into a comprehensive, sustainable system of academic support (Manila Bulletin, September 2025)

By embedding these provisions into legislation rather than leaving them solely to administrative policy, RA 12028 ensures that learning recovery is not only prioritized but also legally binding, providing tutors

and schools with clear mandates to address learners' educational needs and close achievement gaps in a systematic, nationwide manner.

In the Schools Division of the City of Batac, Division Memorandum No. 621, s. 2025 emphasizes that implementation success relies heavily on "learner targeting" and "instructional delivery," specifically on tools such as the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) and the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) to group Key Stage 2 learners.

Challenges encountered by tutors

Implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program mandated under Republic Act No. 12028 during School Years 2024 and 2025 has revealed significant operational and pedagogical challenges for educators in the Philippines. Although the program is designed to mitigate the country's learning crisis, translating national policy into classroom practice has proven complex, particularly for Key Stage 2 tutors in districts such as Batac. These tutors are tasked with addressing deep learning gaps while navigating systemic constraints that affect both instruction and program sustainability.

One major challenge lies in organizational and structural barriers that complicate program delivery. The rollout of the ARAL Program has been characterized by role ambiguity, resulting in a form of distributed leadership where responsibilities are unclear and unevenly assigned. As a result, many tutors experience workload overload, often being "double-loaded" as they juggle regular classroom teaching alongside the intensive demands of ARAL sessions (Guzman, 2025). Additionally, staffing inconsistencies persist due to the program's reliance on a mix of regular teachers, para-teachers, and student volunteers. This arrangement has led to irregular tutor availability and uneven instructional quality across school divisions, thereby affecting the continuity and effectiveness of intervention efforts (RSIS International, 2025).

Pedagogical and curricular mismatches further compound these challenges. Key Stage 2 tutors frequently encounter a pronounced cognitive gap between the prescribed recovery curriculum and learners' actual proficiency levels. An increasing number of learners enter Grades 4 to 6 as non-readers, compelling tutors to revert to foundational Key Stage 1 competencies such as letter-sound recognition and basic phonics, even as they are expected to implement accelerated learning modules intended for higher grade levels (Jackaria, 2022; DepEd, 2025). This difficulty is intensified by the scarcity of developmentally appropriate remedial materials. In many cases, tutors are forced to create localized instructional resources at their own expense, as existing grade-level modules are often too advanced for struggling learners (Tutor & Elbanbuena, 2024).

Professional and technical gaps also hinder effective implementation. While diagnostic tools such as the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) are used, many tutors report limited training in interpreting assessment data to design targeted, individualized interventions (RSIS International, 2025). Moreover, the rapid rollout of the ARAL Program left little time for adequate capacity building, leaving educators to navigate complex policy guidelines and instructional expectations independently (Reddit DepEd Teachers, 2025; DepEd SDO Aklan, 2026).

Finally, socio-environmental factors frequently undermine instructional gains. Irregular learner attendance remains a persistent concern, often linked to socio-economic constraints and insufficient parental support at home (Scribd Implementation Report, 2025). Compounding this issue is the negative learner affect developed after years of academic difficulty. Many learners exhibit fear, anxiety, or disengagement toward subjects such as Reading and Mathematics, necessitating psychosocial support alongside academic remediation (Jackaria, 2022; UNICEF Philippines, 2025). Together, these challenges highlight the need for more holistic and context-sensitive strategies to strengthen implementation of the ARAL Program at Key Stage 2.

Strategies for effective implementation

To address the multifaceted challenges encountered in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program, Key Stage 2 tutors and school leaders have adopted a range of strategic responses focused on instructional alignment, capacity building, and learner support (DepEd, 2024; Guzman, 2022). These strategies aim to strengthen the translation of policy into effective classroom practice while remaining sensitive to local contexts (DepEd, 2023). One critical strategy involves clarifying roles and strengthening organizational support structures. School heads and district supervisors have begun issuing localized implementation guidelines that clearly define tutor responsibilities, schedules, and reporting mechanisms (DepEd, 2024). By institutionalizing collaborative planning and redistributing tasks among teachers, schools can reduce workload overload and ensure continuity of instruction despite staffing inconsistencies (Guzman, 2022). Peer mentoring and team-teaching arrangements further help standardize instructional quality across tutors with varying levels of experience (DepEd, 2020).

Instructionally, tutors employ differentiated and remediation-focused teaching strategies to address the wide cognitive gaps among learners (Tutor & Elbanbuena, 2021; Jackaria, 2020). For non-readers in Key Stage 2, tutors prioritize mastery of foundational literacy skills through structured phonics instruction, guided reading, and repeated practice before transitioning to grade-level competencies (Jackaria, 2020). The use of modularized and scaffolded lessons allows tutors to adjust pacing and content according to learner readiness (DepEd, 2023). To address resource scarcity, tutors localize and contextualize instructional materials using low-cost, learner-friendly tools such as word cards, visual organizers, and leveled reading texts aligned with learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Tutor & Elbanbuena, 2021).

Capacity building remains a central strategy for improving program effectiveness. Continuous professional development activities, including Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, coaching, and demonstration teaching, are utilized to enhance tutors' skills in assessment interpretation and intervention planning (DepEd, 2020; RSIS International, 2021). Focused training in the analysis of diagnostic data, particularly CRLA results, enables tutors to design targeted, individualized remediation plans (RSIS International, 2021). Providing simplified implementation guides and exemplar lesson models also helps tutors navigate policy requirements more confidently (DepEd, 2024).

To mitigate socio-environmental barriers, schools adopt learner-centered and psychosocially responsive

approaches. Flexible scheduling and catch-up sessions help address irregular attendance, while regular communication with parents and guardians strengthens home-school collaboration (Jackaria, 2020; UNICEF Philippines, 2023). Tutors integrate motivational strategies such as positive reinforcement, gamified learning activities, and success tracking to rebuild learner confidence and reduce anxiety toward academic tasks (Jackaria, 2020). By creating safe, supportive learning environments, tutors can address both the academic and emotional needs of learners, thereby enhancing engagement and learning outcomes (UNICEF Philippines, 2023).

Overall, the effectiveness of the ARAL Program at the Key Stage 2 level depends on the sustained integration of organizational, pedagogical, professional, and psychosocial strategies. When these approaches are systematically implemented and supported by school leadership and policy mechanisms, the ARAL Program becomes a more responsive and impactful intervention for addressing learning gaps among Filipino learners (DepEd, 2024; Tutor & Elbanbuena, 2021).

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of Key Stage 2 tutors at the forefront of academic recovery by examining the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program within the Schools Division of the City of Batac.

Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the specific challenges encountered by the Key Stage 2 ARAL Tutors in implementing the ARAL Program?
2. How do these challenges affect the tutor's teaching practice and overall delivery of the ARAL program?
3. What are the effective strategies and instructional innovations employed by these tutors to mitigate implementation hurdles and enhance learner recovery?

Methodology

Validity and reliability in data collection and analysis were ensured through several rigorous procedures despite the small sample size. To establish validity, the researcher subjected the data-gathering instruments to expert review to confirm that the items appropriately measured the intended variables. Pilot testing was also conducted with a group similar to the target respondents to identify and correct any ambiguities in the instrument. Additionally, clear operational definitions of variables were provided, and where applicable, triangulation of data sources or methods was employed to strengthen the accuracy of the findings.

For reliability, standardized procedures were strictly followed during data collection to maintain consistency, and validated or previously tested instruments were used or adapted. Data collectors were properly oriented to ensure uniform administration of the tools, and an audit trail was maintained to

To address the limitation of a small sample size, the study employed a careful sampling strategy to select participants most relevant to the research objectives, and in-depth data collection techniques to gather rich, meaningful information. Appropriate analytical methods suited for small samples were also applied, and limitations were transparently acknowledged, ensuring that the results remain credible and dependable.

Research design

This study employed a phenomenological research design; a qualitative approach aimed at exploring and understanding the lived experiences of Key Stage 2 tutors participating in the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program.

Locale of the study

This study was conducted in the Schools Division of the City of Batac. The participants were Key Stage 2 ARAL tutors who handled learners in Grades 4 to 6. These tutors provided academic support in core subjects, focusing on reading and comprehension to help learners bridge gaps and improve proficiency through the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program.

Population sampling

The study's population consisted of all 17 Key Stage 2 ARAL tutors in the Schools Division of the City of Batac who were directly involved in implementing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. Because the population was small, purposive sampling was used, and all tutors were invited to participate. This approach ensured the collection of comprehensive insights into the program's implementation, effectiveness, and challenges, providing rich data to uncover the phenomenon's essence.

Data gathering instrument

Data were collected via online questionnaires administered through Google Forms to Key Stage 2 ARAL tutors in the Schools Division of the City of Batac. Follow-up emails were sent to clarify unclear responses, and tutors had the option to schedule follow-up video interviews if further elaboration was needed.

The questionnaire was designed to gather reflective responses on academic support strategies, learner engagement, challenges, and perceived outcomes of the ARAL Program. It was piloted to ensure clarity and relevance, and adjustments were made based on feedback. The online format allowed tutors to respond at their own pace, promoting thoughtful, detailed reflections that yielded rich qualitative data for the study.

Data gathering procedures

Data collection was conducted via online questionnaires using Google Forms. To address the potential for limited depth inherent in digital platforms, several mitigation strategies were employed to ensure data richness. The researchers utilized follow-up emails to resolve ambiguities and prompted participants to provide exhaustive qualitative descriptions. Furthermore, the option of face-to-face follow-up interviews

was provided to participants who required further elaboration. The instrument was iteratively refined based on pilot feedback to optimize its structure.

Specifically, open-ended inquiries focused on the challenges encountered, their subsequent impact on pedagogy, and the effective strategies used to implement the ARal Program. This asynchronous approach allowed participants to respond at their own pace, fostering deeper reflection and more comprehensive data.

Data analysis tool

This study employed qualitative methods to capture the essence of tutors' experiences, including their challenges and coping strategies. Following Moustakas' modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, interviews were transcribed, coded, and clustered into themes to synthesize textural and structural descriptions of the participants' lived experiences.

NVivo was utilized to systematically organize data and identify significant statements regarding issues such as heavy workloads and low student engagement. The software's visualization tools illustrated relationships between challenges and strategies while ensuring data traceability. Ultimately, this interpretive process provided a nuanced perspective on how the ARAL Program was operationalized and the practical factors that influenced its success in Key Stage 2 classrooms.

Ethical considerations

The study prioritized ethical integrity by securing digital informed consent and ensuring participants understood their right to withdraw. Data privacy was maintained through anonymization and encrypted storage. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of the topic, support resources were made available to participants to mitigate potential distress.

Data presentation and analysis

This part presents findings from structured interviews conducted with the Key Stage 2 Aral Tutors of the Schools Division of the City of Batac, organized according to key themes identified during the interviews.

Problem 1: What are the specific challenges encountered by the Key Stage 2 ARAL Tutors in implementing the ARAL Program?

Table 1. Challenges of Key Stage 2 Aral Tutors

Theme	Frequency	Respondents
Limited Time / Time Constraints	9	R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R9, R12, R13, R15
Varied Learning Levels / Learning Gaps	7	R2, R3, R4, R5, R7, R10, R14
Low Reading / Numeracy Skills	3	R1, R3, R5
Learner Motivation / Attendance Issues	3	R2, R4, R6
Lack of Materials / Resources	3	R2, R8, R12
Workload / Additional Responsibilities	3	R6, R11, R13

Difficulty Mastering Skills / Retention Issues	2	R1, R10
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Source: Data were collected among 17 Key Stage 2 Aral teachers of the Schools Division of the City of Batac

Based on the tutors' responses, several challenges were encountered during the implementation of the ARAL Program. These challenges include time constraints, diverse learning gaps among learners, limited instructional readiness, learner attendance and motivation issues, additional workload for teachers, and logistical concerns in program delivery. These findings are consistent with existing literature on remedial education and intervention programs, which highlight similar barriers that affect the effectiveness of learning support initiatives.

One of the most frequently identified challenges is the limited time available for tutoring sessions. Several respondents emphasized that the time allotted for intervention is insufficient to fully address the academic needs of learners who are significantly behind in reading and numeracy. For instance, one respondent stated that the challenge encountered is

“Limited time in tutoring and low reading and numeracy skills” (R1).

Similarly, three respondents directly cited

“Time constraint” is a major difficulty in implementing the program (R6, R9, R13).

Another respondent explained that

“Time is not enough to master the skill they need to improve” (R15),

while another referred to

“Time constraints within the school day” (R16).

These responses indicate that tutors struggle to provide adequate remediation due to the limited duration of the ARAL sessions. Since learners require repeated practice, guided instruction, and continuous monitoring to develop foundational skills, insufficient time can limit the intervention's effectiveness.

This finding is supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016), which emphasized that effective learning interventions require sufficient instructional time to allow learners to practice skills, receive feedback, and achieve mastery. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) reported that remedial programs often face scheduling constraints within the regular school timetable, which may limit the depth and continuity of learning support for struggling learners. Without adequate time allocation, intervention programs may struggle to address the root causes of learning gaps.

Another significant challenge identified by respondents is the presence of varied learning levels and learning gaps among learners. Many tutors reported that learners within the same group demonstrate different levels of reading ability, comprehension skills, and academic readiness.

One respondent shared that there are

“Varying learning levels of learners within the same group require careful differentiation of instruction” (R4).

In the same way, another respondent noted that

“Pupils often have a wide range of reading levels within the same group, making differentiation demanding” (R14).

Additionally, a respondent mentioned the presence of

“Diverse learning gaps” among learners (R17).

These responses suggest that tutors face difficulty designing instructional activities that effectively address the needs of learners with significantly different abilities within the same intervention group.

The challenge of addressing diverse learner needs is widely discussed in educational research. Tomlinson (2017) explained that teachers must use differentiated instruction to accommodate students' diverse readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. In intervention programs like ARAL, tutors are required to adjust their instructional strategies, pacing, and materials to ensure that all learners can benefit from the sessions. However, implementing differentiation can be particularly challenging when tutors have limited time and resources.

Another challenge highlighted by respondents is the low academic readiness of some learners, particularly in reading and comprehension. Several tutors observed that some learners require intensive support to understand basic instructions and complete assigned tasks. One respondent reported that.

“Some learners need more support in reading and comprehension, which requires extra patience and guidance.” (R3)

Similarly, another respondent stated that

“Some learners still cannot cope with the tasks given” (R15).

These responses indicate that many learners in the ARAL Program struggle with foundational literacy skills that require sustained, individualized support.

This observation is supported by global education research. According to the World Bank (2018), many learners in developing education systems experience “learning poverty,” defined as the inability of children to read and understand a simple text by age 10. Addressing learning poverty requires targeted intervention programs that strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy skills through structured, consistent remediation.

Another issue raised by respondents is learner attendance, retention, and motivation. One respondent mentioned

while another reported

“Irregular attendance of some learners” (R2).

Furthermore, one respondent highlighted

“Learner motivation and confidence” are factors that influence the effectiveness of tutoring sessions (R8).

When learners do not attend sessions regularly, it becomes difficult for tutors to maintain instructional continuity and monitor learners’ progress. Inconsistent participation can disrupt the learning process and limit the long-term impact of the intervention program.

Research supports the importance of consistent learner participation in remedial education programs. UNESCO (2017) emphasized that learner engagement and sustained participation are essential components of successful intervention programs. Regular attendance allows learners to build skills progressively through guided practice, reinforcement, and feedback. Without consistent participation, learners may struggle to retain previously learned skills or keep pace with instructional activities.

The additional workload for teachers was also identified as a significant challenge in implementing the ARAL Program. One respondent reported

“Additional workload” as a concern (R7),

while another explained that the program involves

“Added workload for teachers and time constraints in preparing” (R11).

Moreover, another respondent stated that the challenge includes

“Printing of modules and the preparation itself” (R10).

These responses suggest that tutors must invest extra time and effort in preparing instructional materials, planning intervention sessions, and monitoring learner progress.

This concern is supported by the Department of Education Philippines (DepEd, 2023), which acknowledges that intervention programs often require teachers to assume additional responsibilities beyond their regular teaching duties. These responsibilities include preparing learning materials, conducting remediation sessions, documenting learner progress, and coordinating with other teachers. When these tasks are added to teachers’ existing workloads, they may contribute to increased stress and time management challenges.

Some respondents also highlighted organizational and logistical concerns in implementing the program. One respondent explained that.

“My clients are not my own pupils,” which makes it more difficult to understand learners’ academic

The same respondent also mentioned that learners are

“Pulled out in their regular class,” which may disrupt their regular lessons or create scheduling difficulties (R8).

These logistical issues may affect coordination among teachers and influence learners’ participation in both their regular classes and intervention sessions.

Despite these challenges, tutors remain committed to implementing the ARAL Program effectively. As one respondent explained, these challenges are addressed through:

“Proper planning, collaboration with teachers, continuous feedback, and flexible instructional strategies.” (R4)

This response indicates that tutors actively adopt adaptive teaching practices to ensure learners continue to receive meaningful academic support despite existing limitations. Collaboration among teachers and flexible instructional planning appear to be key strategies in addressing implementation challenges.

Overall, the findings reveal that while the ARAL Program plays a crucial role in addressing learning gaps among struggling learners, its successful implementation requires adequate instructional time, sufficient resources, strong institutional support, and effective coordination among teachers. Addressing these challenges can improve the program's effectiveness and sustainability in supporting learners’ academic development.

Problem 2: How do these challenges affect the tutor's teaching practice and overall delivery of the ARAL program?

Table 2. Impact of challenges on tutors’ teaching practice and ARAL program delivery

Theme	Frequency (Number of Responses)	Respondents
1. Instructional adjustment and differentiation	4	2, 3, 8, 7
2. Slower progress and delayed skill mastery	4	3, 8, 12, 15
3. Time constraints and preparation difficulties	4	1, 4, 10, 16, 14
4. Learner engagement and motivation issues	2	5, 13
5. Impact on regular class schedule	1	6
6. Collaboration and positive teaching attitude	1	11
7. Varied learner difficulties	1	17
8. Need for extended intervention time	1	4

Source: Data were collected among 17 Key Stage 2 Aral teachers of the Schools Division of the City of Batac

The challenges encountered in implementing the ARAL Program significantly affect tutors' teaching practices and the program's overall delivery. Tutors consistently reported that these difficulties require adjustments to teaching strategies, increased time and attention for struggling learners, and simplified lessons to ensure comprehension despite time constraints. A respondent explained the challenges.

"Require us to adjust our teaching strategies and give more time and attention to learners who need extra support." We also need to simplify lessons and use different activities to make sure all learners understand the topics despite the limited time" (R2)

Similarly, one respondent noted that

"The challenges necessitate spending more time planning, differentiating instruction, and monitoring learners' progress, which may affect the pace and consistency of lesson delivery, but also encourages flexibility and improvement in teaching practices. (R4)

These findings are consistent with Tomlinson (2017), who emphasized the importance of differentiated instruction in classrooms with heterogeneous learners, particularly in intervention programs where varied readiness levels require tailored teaching approaches. Several respondents highlighted that these challenges slow the delivery of lessons and learners' skill mastery. One respondent also shared that.

"Challenges affect the foundational interventions in literacy without compromising the pace required for learners to catch up," (R3)

While another stated that

"Progress may appear gradual rather than immediate." (R6)

Another respondent added that

"The lesson was not delivered within the designated time." (R 12)

These observations are supported by OECD (2018) and World Bank (2018), which note that remedial programs often experience slower progress because tutors must balance addressing foundational skill gaps with maintaining instructional pacing.

The impact of challenges on learner engagement and motivation was also emphasized. Another explained that

"When pupils lack engagement, tutors must incorporate more interactive and confidence-building approaches. This can shift sessions from purely skill-based instruction to balancing skill development with motivation and relationship-building." (R7)

Similarly, another shared that.

"It is hard to convince the learners" to participate, which requires additional strategies to maintain attention and interest. (R 5)

UNESCO (2019) supports this, highlighting that consistent engagement and self-efficacy are essential for the success of remedial programs, as learners' active participation contributes to skill acquisition.

Additionally, tutors reported that the challenges increase their workload and require collaboration with colleagues, administration, and parents. A respondent noted that

"There was not enough time to prepare the content of the lesson itself," (R8), while another explained that

"Teachers often cannot meet the time given, so they need to apply or think of some strategies for the learner to cope up." (R10)

Despite these constraints, a respondent emphasized that

"Maintaining patience, positive attitudes, and teamwork helps ensure successful outcomes. (R 9)

This aligns with the Department of Education Philippines (2023), which stresses the importance of institutional support, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement in the effective implementation of remedial programs.

Finally, tutors recognized that not all learners achieve the intended skills within the intervention period.

A respondent stated that

"Not all the learners achieve the skill," (R 11)

While another highlighted

The range of learning difficulties, noting that learners have different levels of difficulty—some struggle with basic decoding, while others have comprehension or numeracy gaps. (R13)

This observation reflects OECD's (2018) findings that heterogeneous classrooms in remedial programs often exhibit unequal learning outcomes, requiring ongoing adaptation and individualized support to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Overall, despite these challenges, tutors demonstrate adaptability, patience, and collaborative strategies, which contribute to the continued effectiveness of the ARAL Program in addressing learners' gaps in literacy and numeracy.

Problem 3: What are the effective strategies and instructional innovations employed by these tutors to mitigate implementation hurdles and enhance learner recovery?

Table 3. Effective Strategies of Key Stage 2 Aral Tutors

Theme	Frequency	Repondents
Differentiated instruction / scaffolded learning	6	R2, R4, R6, R7, R8, R9

Game-based / interactive learning	7	R1, R2, R5, R7, R10, R11, R12
Guided / step-by-step instruction	4	R2, R3, R6, R8
Reading strategies (echo, choral, paired, repeated reading)	5	R3, R9, R10, R11, R12
Use of Official ARAL modules / structured curriculum	2	R4, R8
Positive reinforcement / motivation	2	R6, R8
Contextualization / experiential learning	2	R5, R11
Word study/vocabulary strategies	1	R8
Lecturing	1	R5
One-on-one teaching	1	R5
Songs / puzzles	1	R11

Source: Data were collected among 17 Key Stage 2 Aral teachers of the Schools Division of the City of Batac

The responses from Key Stage 2 ARAL tutors reveal a variety of effective strategies to address learners' diverse needs, particularly in literacy and numeracy. A key theme that emerged is the use of differentiated instruction and scaffolded learning, mentioned by six respondents. Tutors highlighted techniques such as:

“Guided practice, remediation activities, and learner-centered instruction to address the varying levels of understanding among pupils. (R2, R4, R6, R7, R8, R9).

One respondent stated,

“Scaffolded Learning and Differentiated Instruction” reflects the need to tailor lessons to learners' abilities. (R7),

This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding to support learners as they progress from current to potential capabilities. Recent studies continue to confirm that differentiation is crucial in heterogeneous classrooms for promoting equity in learning outcomes (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2017; Subban, 2018).

Another prominent strategy identified is the use of game-based and interactive learning approaches, which seven respondents cited. Respondents indicated that

“Games, peer reading, and interactive activities significantly enhance engagement and motivation. (R1, R2, R5, R7, R10, R11, R12).

For instance, the respondent mentioned,

“One of the best strategies that I employed was the game-based approach because while playing, they are learning.” (R10)

This practice is supported by recent research emphasizing the effectiveness of gamification and interactive pedagogy in improving student engagement and knowledge retention in primary education (Hamari et al., 2019; Zainuddin et al., 2020). Interactive approaches not only facilitate comprehension but also encourage collaboration and active participation, which are critical for learners struggling with low reading and numeracy skills. Reported by other respondents

“Guided and step-by-step instruction also emerged as a critical strategy, reported by respondents. Methods such as the “I do, we do, you do” model and structured explanations support learners by breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps. R2, R3, R6, and R8

One respondent highlighted,

“Use modeling (‘I do’), guided practice (‘We do’), and independent work (‘You do’).” (R8)

Research has shown that explicit, structured instruction is particularly effective for learners with learning gaps, improving both comprehension and skill acquisition (Hattie, 2017; Archer & Hughes, 2017). Several respondents emphasized

“Reading strategies such as echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, and repeated readings. These strategies are designed to improve fluency, comprehension, and retention among struggling readers” (R3, R9, R10, R11, R12).

A respondent specifically reiterates that.

“Timed repeated readings”, demonstrating a focus on measurable progress in reading skills. (R 12)

Evidence from literacy studies underscores that repeated and guided reading practices significantly enhance reading fluency and confidence, particularly in low-performing learners (National Reading Panel, 2020; Rasinski et al., 2017).

Additionally, tutors integrated ARAL modules and structured curricula (R4, R8) into their teaching practices. By adhering to competency-based, stepwise interventions, tutors ensured alignment with program goals and learning outcomes. A respondent explained,

“I strictly use the official ARAL modules and materials as the foundation of my instruction.” (R 4).

Structured and evidence-based curriculum implementation is crucial for maintaining consistency and monitoring learner progress, as highlighted in recent studies on program fidelity in primary education (Borman et al., 2018). Other strategies mentioned,

“Though less frequent, include positive reinforcement and motivation (R6, R8), Another was contextualization and experiential learning (R5, R11), and vocabulary strategies (R8).

These strategies address learners’ affective and cognitive needs by promoting engagement, meaningful

connections to content, and vocabulary acquisition, supporting holistic learning approaches recommended in contemporary pedagogical literature (Hough, 2018; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In summary, the tutors' responses indicate a multi-pronged approach combining structured, differentiated instruction with interactive and game-based methods to enhance engagement, motivation, and mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. These strategies directly address the challenges identified in previous thematic analyses, such as varied learning levels, low motivation, and limited skill mastery. The alignment of practical strategies with current educational research confirms the effectiveness and relevance of these approaches in improving learner outcomes in primary education.

Results and discussions

The findings of the study offer important contributions not only to practice but also to educational theory, policy development, and broader applicability across contexts. From a theoretical standpoint, the results reinforce the relevance of the Zone of Proximal Development by demonstrating how ARAL tutors employ scaffolded and differentiated instruction to support learners with varying levels of readiness. The use of guided instruction, repeated reading strategies, and interactive approaches reflects core principles of constructivist and social learning theories, where knowledge is built through structured support and active engagement. Furthermore, the findings extend these theories by highlighting how contextual constraints—such as limited time, workload pressures, and resource limitations—mediate the effectiveness of theoretically grounded strategies. This suggests that while instructional theories remain valid, their application in large-scale intervention programs like ARAL requires systemic alignment and contextual adaptation, thereby contributing to the evolving discourse on theory-to-practice integration in learning recovery programs.

In terms of policy implications, the study provides strong evidence for strengthening the implementation mechanisms of the ARAL Program under Republic Act No. 12028. First, the persistent issue of time constraints calls for policy adjustments to ensure adequate, protected instructional time for remediation, consistent with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (2016) recommendations, which emphasize that sufficient learning time is essential for mastery. Second, the findings highlight the necessity of institutional support for teachers, including workload management, provision of ready-to-use differentiated materials, and continuous professional development. This aligns with UNESCO's (2020) guidance, which emphasizes that effective recovery programs require adequate resources and teacher capacity-building initiatives. Third, the study underscores the importance of learner engagement policies, including strengthened parental and community involvement, to address attendance and motivation issues. Additionally, enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems—through tools such as School Form 7—can support data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement of program delivery. Collectively, these policy recommendations point to the need for a whole-system approach in which instructional interventions are supported by coherent policies, resources, and institutional structures.

Regarding transferability, the findings of this study demonstrate moderate to high potential for application in other districts and educational contexts, particularly within similar public-school systems

in the Philippines. The challenges identified—such as time constraints, diverse learner needs, low foundational skills, and teacher workload—are not unique to the Schools Division of Batac but are widely documented in other divisions and developing education systems. Likewise, the strategies employed by tutors, including differentiated instruction, scaffolded learning, and game-based approaches, are grounded in universally accepted pedagogical principles, making them adaptable across contexts. However, the extent of transferability depends on several factors, including availability of resources, administrative support, teacher capacity, and local implementation structures. Districts with similar conditions—such as limited resources and high levels of learning gaps—are more likely to benefit directly from these findings.

At the same time, certain contextual elements may limit full transferability. For instance, variations in school leadership, community involvement, and policy enforcement across divisions may affect the effectiveness of ARAL strategies. Therefore, while the study provides a valuable model for understanding ARAL implementation, it is best viewed as analytically generalizable rather than universally generalizable. Other districts can adopt the identified strategies and policy recommendations, but these must be contextualized to local needs and conditions to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

Overall, the study contributes to theory by bridging instructional frameworks and real-world constraints, informs policy by identifying systemic gaps and actionable improvements, and offers transferable insights to guide the implementation of learning recovery programs beyond Batac, while recognizing the importance of contextual adaptation.

Conclusion

The analysis of Key Stage 2 ARAL tutors' responses highlights that limited time, varied learning levels, and low reading and numeracy skills are the primary challenges affecting program implementation. Tutors reported that these challenges often lead to slower progress, delayed skill mastery, and increased preparation demands, while issues such as learner motivation, attendance, and lack of materials further complicate effective lesson delivery. Despite these obstacles, tutors consistently demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a positive teaching attitude, navigating these difficulties and maintaining program continuity.

In response to these challenges, tutors employ a range of effective strategies that balance structure with engagement. The most frequently used methods include game-based and interactive learning, differentiated and scaffolded instruction, and guided step-by-step teaching, which support learners with diverse abilities. Additionally, reading strategies such as echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, and repeated readings, along with adherence to official ARAL modules, ensure skill development and program alignment. Tutors also integrate motivational techniques, experiential learning, and individualized support, demonstrating a learner-centered approach that promotes both comprehension and engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of the ARAL Program relies on tutors' ability to adapt instruction to learners' needs while effectively managing time and resources. By combining structured,

evidence-based approaches with interactive and scaffolded strategies, tutors can address learning gaps, enhance motivation, and improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. These results underscore the importance of providing ongoing professional support, sufficient resources, and flexible scheduling to optimize ARAL Program implementation and ensure meaningful learning for all Key Stage 2 pupils.

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