

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers and Learners in the Aral Reading Program: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers and learners in the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Program at Talabaan Elementary School. Anchored on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the research examined how instructional support, social interaction, and self-efficacy shape literacy development among struggling readers. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. The participants included nine teachers and ten learners from Grades 3 to 6 who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the program. Data were analyzed thematically using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedures. Findings revealed that teachers viewed literacy instruction as a moral responsibility that was both demanding and fulfilling, while learners initially experienced fear and low confidence but gradually developed improved self-esteem and engagement in reading activities. The ARAL Reading Program was implemented through adaptive, learner-centered strategies such as phonics instruction, guided reading, differentiated activities, and the use of multimodal instructional materials. Strong teacher-learner relationships characterized by patience, encouragement, and individualized support were found to be essential in enhancing learner participation and motivation. However, implementation challenges included heavy teacher workload, limited instructional resources, insufficient training opportunities, time constraints, and learner-related difficulties such as decoding struggles, low confidence, and socio-emotional barriers. Despite these challenges, the program was perceived to improve learners' reading competence, confidence, and long-term educational engagement. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and school stakeholders was identified as crucial for sustaining literacy development. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive and equitable literacy development, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing learning disparities among struggling readers, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through the emphasis on collaborative literacy support systems. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, social, and institutional sustainability by improving foundational literacy skills, enhancing teacher support systems, and fostering community engagement in literacy development.

Keywords: Adaptive Instruction, Aral Reading Program, Classroom Interaction, Literacy Intervention, Phenomenological Study, Reading Comprehension, Self-Efficacy, Teacher-Learner Experience

1. Introduction

Reading literacy is a fundamental component of educational success, lifelong learning, and sustainable development. Despite global and national efforts to improve literacy, many learners continue to experience difficulties in reading comprehension and critical reading skills. In the Philippines, results from international and national assessments have revealed persistent literacy gaps among elementary learners, prompting the implementation of intervention programs such as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. As a literacy intervention, the ARAL Reading Program provides structured and learner-centered support for struggling readers through guided reading, phonics instruction, remediation, and continuous assessment. While previous studies have largely focused on measuring literacy outcomes, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of teachers and learners involved in the implementation of the program. This study therefore explores the experiences, challenges, meanings, and insights associated with the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program at Talabaan Elementary School to contribute to literacy improvement and sustainable educational development.

1.1 Background of the ARAL Reading Program and Literacy Development

Literacy remains a fundamental foundation of educational achievement and human development. Reading proficiency enables learners to access knowledge, participate in learning activities, and develop critical thinking skills necessary for lifelong learning. UNESCO recognizes literacy as a driver of social inclusion, economic participation, and sustainable development because it empowers individuals to make informed decisions and actively participate in society. Globally, literacy remains a challenge despite ongoing educational reforms. International assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) continue to show that many learners experience difficulties in reading

comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical interpretation of texts. These findings underscore the need for effective literacy interventions that strengthen foundational reading skills at an early age. In the Philippines, literacy concerns have been highlighted by results from PISA, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), and the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which indicate that many elementary learners remain at instructional or frustration levels in reading. Contributing factors include limited access to reading materials, inadequate opportunities for guided reading practice, socio-economic barriers, and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These conditions have intensified the need for targeted literacy interventions. In response to the learning crisis, the Department of Education institutionalized the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program through Republic Act No. 12028 and related policy issuances. The ARAL Reading Program serves as a literacy intervention designed to address learners' reading difficulties through guided reading activities, phonics instruction, individualized support, remediation sessions, and continuous assessment. The program emphasizes instruction based on learners' actual literacy levels rather than grade placement and reflects the Department of Education's commitment to ensuring that no learner is left behind in acquiring foundational literacy skills.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Literature on Literacy Interventions and ARAL Reading Implementation

Literature consistently recognizes literacy as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development. The United Nations (2015) emphasized literacy under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), while UNESCO (2017) highlighted its role in promoting economic and social advancement. Reading is widely viewed as a meaning-making process requiring systematic instruction and continuous support, particularly for struggling readers (Snow, 2002). The Science of Reading likewise supports evidence-based instructional approaches that enhance literacy development. International studies further stress the importance of learner-centered interventions that address individual academic and socio-emotional needs (OECD, 2023). Research also highlights the importance of learner motivation and engagement. Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012) found that reading achievement improves when instruction aligns with learners' interests and experiences. Similarly, Brown and Garcia (2020) emphasized that sustainable literacy programs require collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Within the Philippine context, Republic Act No. 12028 and DepEd Memorandum No. 064 s. 2025 institutionalized the ARAL Program to provide targeted academic support. Scholars such as Rafanan and Raymundo, Mina, and Abad and Sison have emphasized the need for effective literacy interventions, teacher preparedness, individualized instruction, and proper utilization of assessment tools such as Phil-IRI. Alvarez and Pinto (2025) further argued that literacy contributes to poverty reduction, economic growth, and functional learning. Local and international studies consistently demonstrate that literacy interventions become more effective when they are contextualized, learner-centered, community-supported, and responsive to learners' needs (Bernardo, Reyes and Cuevas, 2023; Bautista and Tan, 2024; Brown and Garcia, 2020; OECD, 2023).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Reading Literacy and ARAL Implementation

Globally, literacy is recognized as a foundation for educational attainment, social participation, and sustainable development. UNESCO (2017) advocates literacy programs that are culturally responsive and inclusive, while international research emphasizes the importance of structured reading instruction, teacher support, and learner engagement (Snow, 2002; Taylor, et al., 2020). Nationally, the Philippines continues to face literacy challenges, as evidenced by low performance in PISA and concerns raised by national literacy assessments. The implementation of the ARAL Program seeks to address these challenges by providing structured interventions for learners experiencing difficulties in reading, mathematics, and science. National initiatives such as the Bawat Bata Makakabasa Program further support literacy development through daily reading practices, phonics instruction, and community engagement. Regionally, the Department of Education Region IX has implemented contextualized literacy initiatives designed to address the specific needs of learners in the Zamboanga Peninsula. Programs such as the Bawat Bata Makababasa Program and other regional literacy efforts highlight the importance of localized approaches, community participation, and learner-centered interventions. Reports from Region IX and Zamboanga City indicate improvements in reading readiness and literacy engagement, although challenges such as absenteeism, resource limitations, and teacher workload remain. At Talabaan Elementary School, the ARAL Reading Program serves as a primary intervention for learners identified as struggling readers. While the program provides structured literacy support, understanding how teachers and learners experience its implementation remains essential for strengthening literacy practices and sustaining program effectiveness.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Teachers' and Learners' Experiences in the ARAL Reading Program

This study is primarily anchored on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning (1978) and supported by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of Self-Efficacy (1986, 1997). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction, language, and collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals. Central concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding explain how learners acquire skills through guided support (Miller 2011). The ARAL Reading Program reflects these principles through guided reading, phonics instruction, teacher coaching, remediation, and individualized support, where teachers serve as knowledgeable others who facilitate literacy development. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish specific tasks (Bandura, 1997). In literacy development, self-efficacy influences learners' motivation,

persistence, participation, and confidence in reading activities. Teachers' confidence in implementing interventions and learners' confidence in reading are both critical to successful literacy outcomes. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how instructional support, social interaction, confidence-building, and positive learning relationships contribute to reading development within the ARAL Reading Program.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Exploring Lived Experiences in the ARAL Reading Program

Existing studies on literacy interventions have predominantly focused on reading proficiency, literacy outcomes, program effectiveness, and assessment results. While these studies provide evidence regarding program impacts, they offer limited understanding of the actual experiences of teachers and learners during implementation. There remains a lack of qualitative research exploring how participants experience the ARAL Reading Program, particularly regarding instructional practices, learner participation, implementation challenges, perceptions, and meanings associated with the intervention. Much remains unknown about how teachers navigate instructional demands, how learners experience reading remediation, and how participants perceive the program's contribution to literacy development and educational sustainability. Given this gap, a phenomenological approach is appropriate because it seeks to understand the essence of participants' lived experiences. By exploring teachers' and learners' perspectives, this study moves beyond performance indicators to uncover insights that may strengthen literacy interventions and support sustainable educational development.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with: SDG 4 – Quality Education. The ARAL Reading Program directly supports inclusive and equitable quality education by addressing literacy gaps and improving foundational reading skills among struggling learners. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth. Literacy development contributes to long-term employability, productivity, and economic participation by equipping learners with essential competencies for future educational and workforce opportunities. SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities. By providing targeted support to struggling readers, the ARAL Reading Program helps reduce educational disparities and promotes equitable learning opportunities. SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals. Literature emphasizes the importance of collaboration among schools, families, communities, and educational stakeholders in sustaining literacy interventions and improving learning outcomes.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by generating insights that can strengthen literacy interventions and support long-term reading development among elementary learners. Understanding the lived experiences of teachers and learners can inform improvements in instructional practices, learner support systems, and program implementation. The study also contributes to socio-economic sustainability because literacy is closely linked to academic achievement, future employment opportunities, and economic participation. Strengthening foundational literacy skills can support learners' long-term personal and social development. Additionally, the study supports community and institutional sustainability by providing evidence that may guide curriculum implementers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers in enhancing literacy programs. Through improved collaboration and informed decision-making, literacy interventions such as the ARAL Reading Program can become more responsive, effective, and sustainable within educational communities.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of teachers and learners involved in the ARAL Reading Program. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding participants' perspectives, meanings, and experiences within their natural settings rather than relying on numerical data (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology was selected because it seeks to describe the essence of experiences shared by individuals who have directly encountered a particular phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research aims to understand how individuals perceive and assign meaning to their experiences. The phenomenon explored in this study was the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program in terms of instructional strategies, learning activities, and support mechanisms. Data were gathered primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews and supported by classroom observations. The narratives were analyzed through thematic procedures involving the identification of significant statements, clustering of themes, and description of the essence of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Talabaan Elementary School, a public elementary school located approximately 25 kilometers from Zamboanga City proper. The school implements the ARAL Reading Program for learners from Grades 3 to 6 and actively participates in literacy intervention initiatives designed to improve reading proficiency among struggling readers. The school was selected because it provides a natural setting where teachers and learners directly experience the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program. Its active involvement in reading interventions makes it an appropriate site for exploring the lived experiences of both program implementers and beneficiaries. The locale offers a realistic context

for examining instructional practices, learner engagement, support mechanisms, and challenges encountered during program implementation. Consistent with qualitative research principles, the study was conducted in the participants' natural environment to obtain authentic and context-rich insights into the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program (Creswell, 2013). By focusing on this specific school setting, the study generated meaningful information regarding the experiences of teachers and learners, which may also provide insights relevant to other schools implementing similar literacy intervention programs.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of nine teachers and ten learners from Grades 3 to 6 who were directly involved in the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program at Talabaan Elementary School. They were purposively selected because of their firsthand experiences and active participation in the program, enabling them to provide meaningful and relevant insights into its implementation. The teacher-participants were responsible for administering the program, facilitating reading activities, applying instructional strategies, and supporting learners with reading difficulties. Their experiences provided valuable information regarding program implementation, instructional practices, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, collaboration with colleagues, resource availability, and support systems that contributed to the delivery of the intervention. Their perspectives reflected varying experiences, including commitment to learner development, adaptation to program demands, management of workload, utilization of available resources, and efforts to strengthen community involvement in literacy development. The learner-participants were beneficiaries of the ARAL Reading Program and represented varying levels of reading ability, particularly those identified as low and high emerging readers based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) and those classified at the frustration level based on Phil-IRI records. Their participation provided insights into their experiences with reading intervention activities, including the challenges they encountered, the strategies that supported their learning, and the improvements they experienced throughout the program. The learners' narratives reflected varying levels of confidence, motivation, curiosity, persistence, engagement in interactive reading activities, and gradual development of reading skills. The inclusion of both teachers and learners enabled the study to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the ARAL Reading Program by capturing perspectives from both the implementers and beneficiaries of the intervention. This provided a balanced view of how the program was delivered, experienced, and perceived within the school setting.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who possessed direct experience with the ARAL Reading Program. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who can provide rich and meaningful information about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Nine teachers and ten learners were selected based on their active participation in the implementation and reception of the ARAL Reading Program. The inclusion of both teachers and learners allowed the study to capture multiple perspectives and develop a comprehensive understanding of how the program is delivered and experienced within the school context.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary instruments used in the study were semi-structured interview guides and classroom observation protocols. Semi-structured interviews served as the main data collection tool because they allowed participants to freely share their perceptions, experiences, challenges, and insights while maintaining focus on the research objectives. Open-ended questions and probing techniques were employed to generate detailed narratives and capture participants' authentic voices (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to supplement interview data and provide contextual information regarding teaching practices, learner engagement, classroom interactions, and the implementation of reading sessions. Detailed field notes were recorded to document verbal and non-verbal behaviors observed during program implementation. The study was further guided by phenomenological principles (Moustakas, 1994), which emphasize understanding participants' lived experiences through rich descriptions. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedures developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin were utilized in organizing and interpreting participant narratives.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal approval was secured from the school principal of Talabaan Elementary School. Informed consent was obtained from teacher-participants, while parental consent and learner assent were secured for pupil-participants. Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study. Data collection began with face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted in a quiet and comfortable environment within the school. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was guided by open-ended questions with follow-up probes to obtain deeper insights into participants' experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To complement interview data, non-participant classroom observations were conducted during actual ARAL Reading Program sessions. These observations focused on instructional practices, learner engagement, classroom interactions, and implementation processes. Detailed field notes were maintained throughout the observations.

The researcher also maintained reflective journals to document observations, insights, and emerging patterns throughout the data collection process. Multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and reflective notes, were utilized to achieve data triangulation. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, indicating that no new themes or significant information emerged from subsequent interviews and observations.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedures developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and examined systematically to identify significant statements relevant to the participants' experiences. The analysis involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering related concepts into themes, and developing comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon. Through thematic analysis, common patterns, shared meanings, and unique experiences were identified and interpreted while remaining grounded in the participants' actual narratives. Researcher reflexivity was incorporated throughout the analysis process to minimize personal bias and ensure that interpretations accurately reflected participants' perspectives. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teachers and learners in implementing the ARAL Reading Program.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical principles to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Formal permission was obtained from the school principal, while informed consent, parental consent, and learner assent were secured before participation. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Creswell, 2013). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the exclusion of identifying information from research records and reports. Audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. Data were used solely for academic purposes and managed according to the confidentiality principles of Lincoln and Guba (1985). The principle of non-maleficence was observed by ensuring that participants experienced no physical, psychological, or emotional harm. Special care was taken when interviewing learner-participants by using age-appropriate questions and providing a safe and comfortable environment. Participation remained voluntary and free from coercion. The researcher maintained integrity, honesty, and objectivity throughout the study by accurately reporting findings and avoiding data manipulation. Reflexivity was practiced continuously to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' actual experiences and perspectives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences of Teachers and Learners in the ARAL Reading Program

3.1.1 Literacy as a Moral Calling and Confidence Restoration

Teachers consistently described their participation in the ARAL Reading Program as a meaningful responsibility despite physical exhaustion and additional workload. They viewed literacy instruction as an educational mission aimed at helping struggling readers overcome barriers to learning. Learners initially experienced fear, nervousness, embarrassment, and self-consciousness during reading activities but gradually developed confidence and willingness to participate as they experienced reading success. Teachers also expressed fulfillment when observing learners improve their reading abilities. These findings suggest that literacy intervention is experienced as both emotionally demanding and emotionally rewarding. Teachers perceive themselves not only as instructors but as facilitators of learners' educational success, while learners gradually reconstruct their confidence through repeated positive reading experiences. The program therefore serves not only as an academic intervention but also as a process of emotional growth, empowerment, and identity development.

3.1.2 Diverse Teacher Perspectives on Program Implementation

Participants demonstrated varying perspectives regarding program implementation. More experienced teachers associated the program with professional fulfillment and legacy building, while younger teachers expressed optimism and enthusiasm toward improving their instructional competence. Despite these differences, all participants remained committed to supporting literacy development among struggling readers. The findings indicate that teaching experience influences how educators interpret the challenges and rewards of literacy intervention. However, a shared commitment to learner success remained evident across all participants, highlighting the importance of educational responsibility and perseverance in program implementation.

3.2 Implementation Practices of the ARAL Reading Program

3.2.1 Adaptive and Learner-Centered Instructional Strategies

Teachers implemented the ARAL Reading Program using flexible and learner-centered strategies. These included phonics-based instruction, guided reading, differentiated activities, localized reading materials, repeated reading exercises, multimedia resources, flashcards, visual aids, storytelling, and interactive learning activities. Teachers adjusted pacing and instructional methods according to learners' individual needs and progress. Learners particularly appreciated visual

materials, games, and individualized support during reading sessions. The findings demonstrate that effective literacy intervention requires responsiveness to learner diversity. Teachers continuously adapted instruction based on learners' abilities, interests, and difficulties, creating more engaging and accessible learning experiences. The use of multimodal strategies and differentiated instruction reflects a commitment to meeting diverse literacy needs while promoting learner engagement.

3.2.2 Importance of Teacher Support and Learning Relationships

Learners highlighted the value of individualized attention, patience, encouragement, and one-on-one instruction. They reported feeling more comfortable participating in reading activities when supported by caring and understanding teachers. Observations further showed that positive reinforcement and supportive teacher-learner interactions were consistently present during reading sessions. These findings suggest that successful literacy intervention extends beyond instructional techniques. Emotionally supportive relationships foster psychological safety, reduce learner anxiety, and encourage active participation. Teacher empathy and encouragement therefore play a crucial role in sustaining learner motivation and confidence.

3.3 Challenges Encountered in Program Implementation

3.3.1 Workload Pressure and Resource Limitations

Teachers consistently reported challenges related to increased workload, extended instructional hours, insufficient teaching materials, limited resources, lack of training opportunities, and time constraints. Many participants noted that preparing instructional materials and conducting additional reading sessions contributed to physical fatigue and emotional stress. These findings indicate that while teachers remain committed to literacy intervention, implementation challenges may affect teacher well-being and program sustainability. The need to compensate for resource shortages and increased responsibilities highlights the importance of stronger institutional support for literacy programs.

3.3.2 Learner Difficulties and Environmental Barriers

Learners described difficulties with decoding unfamiliar words, maintaining concentration during reading activities, and overcoming fear of making mistakes in front of peers. Many experienced embarrassment, low self-confidence, and frustration when reading aloud. Some participants also reported limited access to books and literacy resources at home. The findings reveal that literacy challenges are not purely academic but are also emotional, social, and environmental in nature. Reading difficulties may influence learners' self-esteem and participation, while socio-economic limitations can restrict opportunities for practice beyond the classroom. These factors demonstrate the need for comprehensive support systems that address both academic and contextual barriers to literacy development.

3.4 Perceived Benefits of the ARAL Reading Program

3.4.1 Improvement in Reading Competence and Confidence

Teachers observed improvements in learners' phonemic awareness, word recognition, decoding skills, reading fluency, participation, and classroom engagement. Learners similarly reported greater confidence in reading and increased willingness to interact with books, signs, labels, and other reading materials. Many participants recognized gradual but meaningful progress in their literacy development. These findings suggest that the ARAL Reading Program contributes positively to foundational literacy development. Reading gains were experienced not only as academic improvements but also as personal achievements that enhanced learners' confidence, independence, and willingness to participate in learning activities.

3.4.2 Long-Term Educational Value of Literacy Development

Teachers perceived literacy intervention as essential to learners' long-term educational success. Participants emphasized that developing foundational reading skills increases learners' opportunities for academic achievement and reduces the risk of future educational difficulties. Learners likewise associated improved reading ability with greater independence and confidence in daily life. The findings indicate that literacy development extends beyond immediate classroom performance. Reading competence serves as a foundation for continued learning, educational participation, and personal empowerment, reinforcing the importance of sustained literacy intervention.

3.5 Collaboration and Support Systems

3.5.1 Importance of Family, School, and Community Support

Teachers emphasized the importance of parental involvement, professional collaboration, administrative assistance, and community partnerships. Participants highlighted communication with parents, sharing of instructional practices among colleagues, and collaboration with stakeholders as essential components of successful program implementation. These findings suggest that literacy development is a shared responsibility that extends beyond the classroom. Sustainable implementation of the ARAL Reading Program depends on coordinated support from families, educators, school leaders, and community partners who collectively contribute to learners' reading development.

3.6 Sustainability and Continuous Program Enhancement

3.6.1 Recommendations for Program Improvement

Teachers recommended ongoing professional development, mentoring opportunities, adequate instructional materials, reduced workload, stronger administrative support, and continuous program monitoring. Learners suggested incorporating more technology-based activities, providing shorter but more frequent reading sessions, allowing access to reading materials at home, and ensuring continuity of intervention beyond regular school periods. These findings indicate that both teachers and learners view the ARAL Reading Program as a valuable literacy intervention that requires sustained support and continuous improvement. Long-term success depends on consistent institutional commitment, sufficient resources, responsive instructional practices, and collaborative partnerships that prioritize both learner achievement and teacher well-being. Overall, the findings reveal that the ARAL Reading Program is experienced as an emotionally transformative literacy intervention that improves reading competence, confidence, and learner engagement. Although challenges related to workload, resources, and learner barriers remain evident, the program demonstrates strong potential for promoting literacy development when supported by adaptive instruction, collaborative partnerships, and sustained institutional commitment.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program was both emotionally challenging and meaningful for teachers and learners. Teachers demonstrated strong commitment to supporting struggling readers through adaptive, learner-centered, and flexible instructional practices, while learners gradually developed confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in reading activities. The program contributed positively to learners' reading competence, participation, self-esteem, and educational engagement. However, its implementation was affected by challenges such as workload pressure, limited instructional resources, time constraints, cognitive fatigue, emotional vulnerability, socio-economic barriers, and insufficient support systems. Overall, the sustainability and effectiveness of the ARAL Reading Program depend on continuous institutional support, adequate resources, collaborative partnerships, professional development opportunities, and responsive literacy interventions that address learners' academic, emotional, and developmental needs.

The study recommends strengthening the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program through the continued use of learner-centered, differentiated, and flexible instructional strategies, supported by adequate instructional materials, continuous teacher training, mentoring, and systematic monitoring. School administrators, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and educational authorities should collaborate to provide consistent literacy support, promote active learner participation, strengthen home-based reading practices, and enhance resource provision for literacy interventions. Future studies may further explore literacy programs in different educational settings and examine factors such as parental involvement, learner motivation, socio-economic conditions, and technology integration to support the continuous improvement and sustainability of literacy development initiatives.

The study was limited to the lived experiences of nine teachers and ten learners from Grades 3 to 6 who were directly involved in the implementation of the ARAL Reading Program at Talabaan Elementary School. The findings were based on participants' perceptions and experiences gathered through qualitative methods within a single school setting. As such, the results reflect the specific context of the study and may not fully represent the experiences of teachers and learners in other schools, grade levels, or educational environments implementing similar literacy intervention programs.

Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares no conflict of interest. This study received no external funding. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from teacher participants, while parental consent and learner assent were secured for pupil participants. Data were collected through non-invasive methods, including interviews and classroom observations, and all identifying information was withheld through the use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality; the authors also acknowledge the participants and Talabaan Elementary School for their cooperation and support in the conduct of the study.

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