

Difficulties Encountered by Teachers in the Implementation of the Aral Reading Program of Elementary Schools in Villaverde

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study explores the struggles of eight elementary school teachers in Villaverde who implement the ARAL-Reading Program. Using Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the research reveals that while teachers embrace their roles as reading guides, they face heavy workloads, exhaustion, student absenteeism, limited time, material shortages, and mixed reading levels that make differentiation difficult. Although the program aims to improve literacy under national law, it relies too heavily on unpaid overtime and personal funds. The study recommends that the government and school leaders reduce paperwork, provide adequate supplies, and hire dedicated tutors to support teachers.

Keywords: ARAL-Reading, Tutor-leader, reading difficulty, reading, intervention

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Reading is fundamentally a technical process centered on decoding symbols and understanding meaning, heavily involving cognitive functions like comprehension, interpretation, and analysis. In an operational sense, it represents a student's ability to seamlessly apply these critical literacy skills to real-life tasks, such as understanding complex texts and successfully completing academic coursework. As emphasized by Dayag (2022), learning to read begins in early childhood and must continuously improve over time, acting as a foundational pillar that develops an individual's personality, intellectual capacity, and language proficiency. Ultimately, reading is a skill requiring continuous refinement to ensure learners can effectively meet the rigorous academic demands of higher education and achieve long-term success across diverse academic fields.

Despite its critical importance, serious literacy deficits have emerged on both global and local levels. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in its 2018 and 2022 cycles ranked the Philippines among the lowest in reading performance globally. PISA data revealed that only 24% of Filipino students reached the minimum reading proficiency of Level 2, compared to an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 74%. While Level 2 merely requires students to identify main ideas and locate basic text information, almost no Filipino students reached Level 5, which demands critical thinking and deep structural understanding. This massive discrepancy highlights that a vast majority of learners are completely unprepared for real-life reading demands.

Locally, this troubling trend is mirrored within regional data. According to the DepEd SDO 1 Pangasinan Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results for the school year 2025–2026, a staggering 23.96% of learners are performing three levels below their designated grade level, and 29.86% are performing two levels below. Only a minority of 46.17% are reading at their actual grade level. These metrics underscore a widespread struggle in elementary reading, proving an urgent necessity to aggressively strengthen core student competencies in decoding, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension.

In direct response to this ongoing literacy crisis, the Department of Education introduced the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program in Reading (ARAL-Reading). Guided nationally by Republic Act No. 12028

and DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025, the program is systematically implemented across Key Stages 1 to 3. Its core purpose is to support struggling learners who fall below mandated reading levels and scaffold them until they satisfy grade-level expectations. Under this framework, elementary school teachers serve as critical "tutor-leaders" and primary facilitators of reading instruction, positioning them as the central pillars determining the program's ultimate success or failure.

However, the localized execution of ARAL-Reading has been met with immediate friction. Preliminary literature and structural observations indicate that teachers face serious operational hurdles, including limited specialized training, a lack of collaborative planning structures, an influx of traditional top-down leadership styles, unclear professional responsibilities, severe resource deficits, and a heavily burdened workload. While an abundance of contemporary educational literature centers entirely on the reading difficulties of the learners themselves, a distinct research gap remains regarding the personal and professional experiences of the educators tasked with keeping these interventions afloat. There is highly limited empirical research exploring the actual, lived challenges faced by frontline teachers within the newly minted ARAL-Reading Program framework. Therefore, this qualitative study explicitly seeks to address this gap by exploring the specific difficulties encountered by elementary school teachers implementing the ARAL-Reading Program within the distinct locale of Villaverde.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

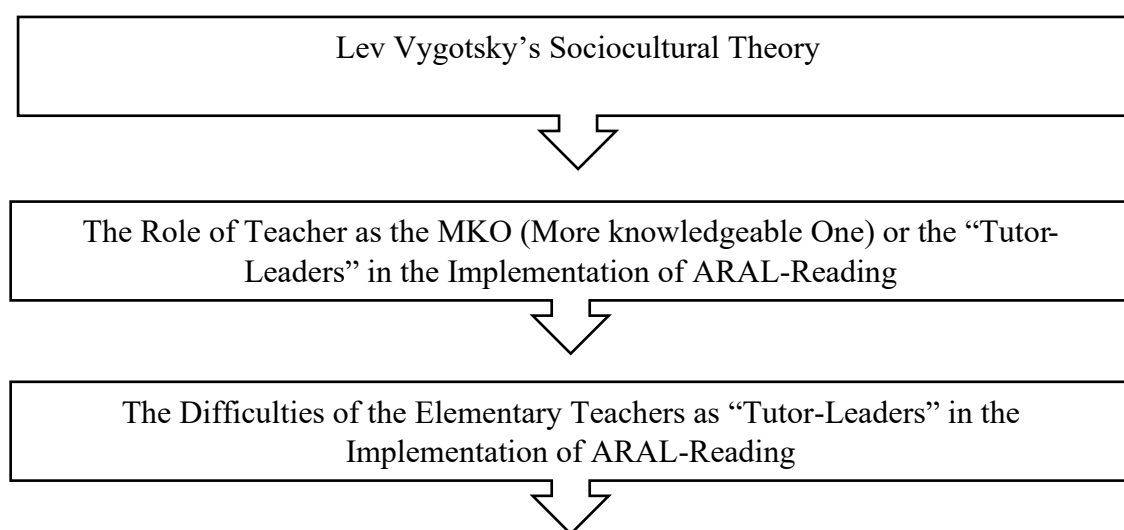


Figure 1. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory Applied to Elementary Teachers Challenges in the ARAL-Reading Program

This study is explicitly anchored on the Sociocultural Theory of Learning developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky. While traditional educational inquiries utilize this theory to evaluate and measure student learning outcomes, this study uniquely inverts the analytical focus. It applies Vygotsky's framework to examine the operational, structural, and environmental realities of the educators who are tasked with executing the intervention. The study does not evaluate the student's cognitive processing of reading acquisition; instead, it uses the theory to diagnose how systemic friction restricts the teacher's professional capacity to act as an effective facilitator of learning.

Vygotsky's theory posits that human actions and development are deeply mediated by the environment, cultural artifacts, and social interactions. In an instructional setting, learning occurs when an individual interacts with a "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO), such as a teacher, tutor, or expert peer, who possesses a higher level of mastery over a specific domain. Under the structural design of the Department of Education's Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program in Reading (ARAL-Reading), elementary school teachers are explicitly designated to serve as "tutor-leaders" and primary facilitators of reading instruction. Thus, by policy design, the teacher is positioned as the critical MKO.

A fundamental concept within this framework is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the psychological distance between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish under guided support. In terms of literacy development, struggling readers improve their core skills when teachers systematically bridge this gap using targeted assistance and appropriate remediation strategies. To navigate the ZPD successfully, the MKO must implement Scaffolding, the provision of temporary, fine-tuned instructional support mechanisms that are gradually dismantled as the learner develops autonomous proficiency.

The primary point of theoretical connection to this study lies in the reality that effective teacher-led scaffolding cannot occur in isolation; it requires robust institutional tools, clear roles, emotional energy, and unhurried time. Vygotsky emphasizes that the quality of human action is completely dependent on the tools and environments available to the actor.

Statement of the Problem

The main objective of this study is to explore the specific difficulties encountered by elementary school teachers in the implementation of the ARAL-Reading Program in Villaverde.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What difficulties do teachers encounter in implementing the ARAL-Reading Program?
2. How do teachers describe their experiences as tutor-leaders in the program?
3. What challenges do teachers face in terms of training, resources, and time?
4. What strategies do teachers use to address the challenges they encounter?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this qualitative inquiry offers valuable insights into the operational realities of educational recovery initiatives, proving highly beneficial to the following stakeholders:

Department of Education (DepEd) Officials and Policy Makers: This study provides direct empirical data regarding the ground-level execution of Republic Act No. 12028 and DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025. It highlights systemic vulnerabilities in training and policy execution, allowing administrators to optimize national programmatic frameworks.

School Heads and District Supervisors: By illuminating the barriers teachers face regarding top-down leadership styles and missing collaboration structures, this study can guide local administrators toward establishing more democratic, supportive, and collaborative school environments.

Elementary School Teachers / Tutor-Leaders: This research serves as a platform to give voice to their pedagogical challenges, while archiving and sharing the grassroots coping mechanisms and strategies devised by peers to navigate heavy workloads and resource constraints.

Future Researchers: This study contributes to addressing a prominent gap in contemporary literature by shifting academic focus from student reading failure to the structural struggles faced by teachers. It establishes a contextual baseline for future researchers conducting parallel investigations across other regions of the country.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is bounded strictly within a qualitative scope, focusing exclusively on exploring the lived experiences, operational difficulties, and coping strategies of elementary school teachers tasked with executing the ARAL-Reading Program.

Geographically, the study is confined to public elementary schools operating within the municipality of Villaverde. Due to the intensive nature of qualitative case studies, the participant pool is limited to exactly eight (8) elementary school teacher-respondents who are actively serving as tutor-leaders within the program. The study lasted 5 months, from January to May.

The study does not attempt to measure quantitative correlations, calculate statistical reading performance metrics of the students, or evaluate external key stages outside of the local elementary bracket. Given these parameters, the findings are context-specific to the local conditions of Villaverde and may not be universally generalizable to urban or differently resourced school divisions.

Definition of Terms

Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program in Reading (ARAL-Reading): A national intervention initiative introduced by the Department of Education designed to support students performing below established reading expectations, with the goal of bringing them up to grade-level proficiency.

Difficulties: Professional anxieties experienced by educators, specifically relating to inadequate training, materials shortages, time compression, heavy workloads, and a lack of administrative support.

Scaffolding: The temporary instructional support structures, guided reading activities, and targeted strategies deployed by a teacher to transition a student from a state of reading difficulty to independent literacy.

Tutor-Leader / Teacher-Facilitator: An active elementary school teacher assigned the dual responsibility of managing classroom instruction while organizing, leading, and executing targeted remedial reading sessions within the ARAL program framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a systematic review of literature, educational policies, and contemporary studies relevant to the operational difficulties encountered by teachers in implementing remedial reading initiatives. The thematic structure progresses from the baseline definitions of reading and literacy crises to the concrete structural challenges educators experience as frontline implementers.

The Concept of Reading and Literacy Development

Reading is widely recognized as a foundational cognitive and linguistic process essential for academic achievement and lifelong learning. Dayag (2022) highlights that learning to read begins in early childhood and continuously improves over time, heavily shaping an individual's intellectual capacity, language proficiency, and persona. Operationally, reading is not merely the passive recognition of printed symbols but a technical process of decoding text and extracting meaning, requiring the dynamic application of comprehension, interpretation, and analysis. When a student transitions into higher academic levels, their reading skills directly dictate their capacity to independently navigate complex texts and complete rigorous coursework.

The Widespread Reality of Reading Difficulties

When a learner fails to develop adequate decoding and word-recognition skills during early childhood, they experience persistent reading difficulties. These deficits often manifest as poor vocabulary acquisition, an inability to use contextual clues, and a breakdown in reading comprehension. Within contemporary educational settings, reading difficulties are rarely isolated to a small subset of learners; rather, they present a systemic crisis that halts progress across all subject areas. Students who struggle with foundational reading components cannot transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," which places extreme pressure on elementary educators to provide ongoing remedial support.

Reading Programs and the Evolving Role of Teachers

To address persistent literacy gaps, educational systems frequently design and launch specialized remedial reading programs. Historically, the success of these institutional interventions has been evaluated based on student reading metrics. However, contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes that the ultimate trajectory of any literacy program depends on the instructional capacity and role clarity of classroom teachers (Soria, 2024). Within a remedial framework, a teacher's responsibilities expand far beyond universal curriculum delivery. Teachers are expected to act as dynamic facilitators of learning who carefully structure individualized reading paths. Through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the reading program transforms the teacher into a "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO) who must constantly monitor and respond to diverse learner profiles. This expanding pedagogical role demands that teachers possess advanced skills in diagnostic assessment, phonetic instruction, and behavioral management.

The PISA Assessments

Despite continuous local implementation of reading programs, global benchmarks indicate that severe literacy gaps remain a persistent challenge within the Philippine basic education system. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) serves as a primary macro metric highlighting these structural vulnerabilities. In its 2018 and 2022 evaluation cycles, PISA data ranked the Philippines among the lowest performing nations in reading proficiency globally (OECD, 2024).

The PISA 2022 assessments revealed that Filipino learners obtained an average reading score of 347, standing substantially below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 476. The data revealed that only 24% of Filipino students reached the minimum reading proficiency of Level 2. The fact that a vast majority of Filipino students failed to reach baseline proficiency levels proves that traditional classroom instruction alone is insufficient to address entrenched learning deficits, demanding more aggressive and structural national intervention efforts.

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI)

The macro-level deficits documented by PISA are clearly reflected on a local scale through regional diagnostic data. In public elementary schools, student reading levels are monitored using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), an authentic reading assessment tool used across the country to determine students' independent, instructional, and frustration levels.

Recent diagnostic assessments, such as the SDO 1 Pangasinan Phil-IRI results for the 2025–2026 school year, reveal that a staggering percentage of elementary learners perform significantly below their expected grade level. Specifically, nearly 23.96% of students score three levels below their designated bracket, and approximately 29.86% perform two levels below, leaving only a minority of 46.17% reading at an independent grade level. These alarming local metrics provide the direct empirical justification for the immediate roll-out of targeted academic recovery campaigns.

Prominent Philippine Reading Programs

Before the institutional mandates of the ARAL-Reading Program, the Department of Education launched several key literacy programs over the past decades to address reading deficiencies. These interventions established the historical landscape within which classroom teachers operate:

- Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP): Introduced nationally by DepEd to ensure that every public school student becomes an independent reader by the end of Grade 3. ECARP served as an umbrella framework that integrated professional development for teachers alongside early-grade diagnostic tracking tools (DepEd, 2019).
- Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiative): Formalized under DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019, this initiative intensified the national campaign for reading proficiency. It directed schools to strengthen their

existing reading intervention protocols, specifically targeting "fraction-level" readers and non-readers through structured school-based remediation blocks (Ocampo, 2024).

- Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) & Catch-up Fridays: Mandated under DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024, this program designated Fridays entirely to learning recovery activities, utilizing the DEAR model to foster an autonomous reading culture and clear the backlog of learning loss exacerbated by pandemic-related class interruptions (DepEd, 2024).
- Localized and Regional Extensions: To supplement national mandates, various regional and institutional programs emerged. In the Bicol region, the 5Bs Program (Bawat Bicolanong Bata Bihasang Bumasa) targeted tens of thousands of non-readers (Ocampo, 2024). At the school level, targeted modules like Project RECITeS (Reading Exercises Through Comprehensive and Innovative Teaching Strategies) and L.O.V.E. Reading Program were implemented by teachers to utilize teacher-assisted modules and improve oral reading fluency among struggling students (Philippine E-Journals, 2024).

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL-Reading)

In direct response to post-pandemic learning loss and the distressing trends observed in PISA and Phil-IRI data, the Philippine government enacted Republic Act No. 12028, establishing the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. Formally operationalized through DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025 and targeted issuances like DM No. 064, s. 2025, the ARAL-Reading Program serves as the current national umbrella initiative for literacy recovery.

The program focuses specifically on building foundational literacy and comprehension skills for struggling learners in Key Stages 1 to 3. Structurally, the ARAL framework prioritizes well-systematized tutorial sessions, learner-centered intervention plans, and face-to-face or online tutorial blocks. It officially replaces previous fragmented initiatives like the National Reading Program (NRP) to create a standardized approach to literacy intervention across all public schools.

The Experiences and Challenges of Teachers in Reading Programs

As the primary implementers and designated "tutor-leaders" of the ARAL-Reading Program and historical reading interventions, elementary school teachers find themselves navigating a complex landscape of instructional delivery and systemic friction. Recent qualitative and mixed-methods research exploring the early implementation phases of the ARAL program across various regions reveals a profound tension between program ideals and ground-level realities:

Studies consistently show that the integration of remedial programs alongside regular teaching loads causes severe workload inflation for educators. Magtalas and Eduvala (2024) note that teachers report a substantial professional burden stemming from the need to balance regular classroom hours, extensive clerical logging, and post-session tracking for remedial students. Qualitative inquiries into teacher experiences show that this severe time restriction often forces teachers to extend their hours without compensation, leading to operational burnout (UIJRT, 2025).

While program guidelines mandate the provision of specialized learning materials, empirical data reveals persistent shortages on the ground. Tutor-leaders frequently experience a lack of designated reading spaces, manipulative materials, evidence-based modules, and physical textbooks. Consequently, teachers must frequently spend limited personal hours manually creating or duplicating contextualized worksheets using their own private funds (UIJRT, 2025; IJMRD, 2026).

Recent literature highlights that while teachers receive school-based briefings, many report a systemic gap in advanced, foundational beginning reading training (Taguba, 2020). This training deficit severely limits their capacity to handle highly diverse, mixed-ability remedial groups or maintain attention spans during intensive decoding sessions, turning structured scaffolding into a process of trial and error.

De Los Santos et al. (2025) note that traditional top-down leadership styles within schools frequently limit the autonomy of ARAL tutors. When administrative environments fail to provide clear monitoring guidelines, democratic collaboration, or structured planning networks, teachers face institutional isolation, managing intense program friction without shared peer support.

Synthesis

The reviewed literature establishes a direct connection between global literacy deficits, local diagnostic realities, and the institutional interventions designed to address them. Reading is universally recognized as a foundational technical skill, yet international metrics like PISA and local diagnostics like Phil-IRI prove that the Philippines faces an ongoing literacy crisis. In response, historical interventions like ECARP and the 3Bs Initiative laid the groundwork for the current passage of Republic Act No. 12028, which established the ARAL-Reading Program as a standardized framework for academic recovery.

However, contemporary empirical studies demonstrate that the success of such an intervention is entirely dependent on the frontline educators serving as tutor-leaders. While policy directives assume a seamless delivery of instructional scaffolding, ground-level research reveals that teachers face intense systemic challenges, including heavy workloads, resource shortages, specialized training gaps, and top-down institutional structures.

This study addresses a clear gap in the existing literature: while previous research focuses extensively on student reading deficiencies, there is limited qualitative documentation concerning the specific operational barriers encountered by elementary teachers. By exploring the lived experiences of tutor-leaders in the distinct locale of Villaverde, this inquiry utilizes Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to evaluate how environmental and institutional difficulties restrict the teacher's capacity to build the vital instructional scaffolds that struggling readers depend on.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design to address its core objectives. Qualitative descriptive research is uniquely suited for studies requiring a straightforward, comprehensive summary of phenomena, experiences, or perceptions in the everyday language of the participants, without heavily relying on abstracted theoretical frameworks or numerical metrics. By utilizing this approach, the researcher can focus intensely on capturing the real, lived experiences, contextual settings, and nuanced narratives of elementary school teachers as they go about the localized implementation of the ARAL-Reading Program within their respective school environments.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The participant pool for this investigation consists of exactly eight (8) public elementary school teachers currently employed in Villaverde. To select these individuals, the researcher employed a purposive sampling procedure. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique where participants are selected based entirely on specific criteria aligned with the core focus of the study.

Data Gathering Instrument

The primary data gathering instrument for this study is a researcher-developed, semi-structured interview guide composed of twelve targeted qualitative questions. This approach permits structural consistency across respondents while providing the researcher with the flexibility to use open-ended follow-up questions to uncover deeper contextual details.

Due to logistical arrangements, institutional safety preferences, and scheduling efficiencies, the semi-structured interview guide is transcribed, formatted, and administered digitally via Google Forms. This electronic format

enables the eight selected tutor-leaders to review the prompts carefully and submit extensive, unhurried text responses detailing their professional insights.

The qualitative interview instrument is systematically structured into five thematic sections as outlined below:

Qualitative Interview Guide

I. Being a "Tutor-Leader"

1. What do you think about your role as a "tutor-leader" or teacher-facilitator in this program?
2. Could you describe how a typical reading session works?

Difficulties and Challenges

3. What are the biggest problems you face when using the ARAL-Reading Program in your classroom?
4. How do these problems make it harder for you to help your students?

Training, Tools, and Time

5. Did the training you received help you feel ready to teach this program?
6. Do you have the right books and materials to teach reading effectively?
7. How has this program changed your daily schedule and workload?

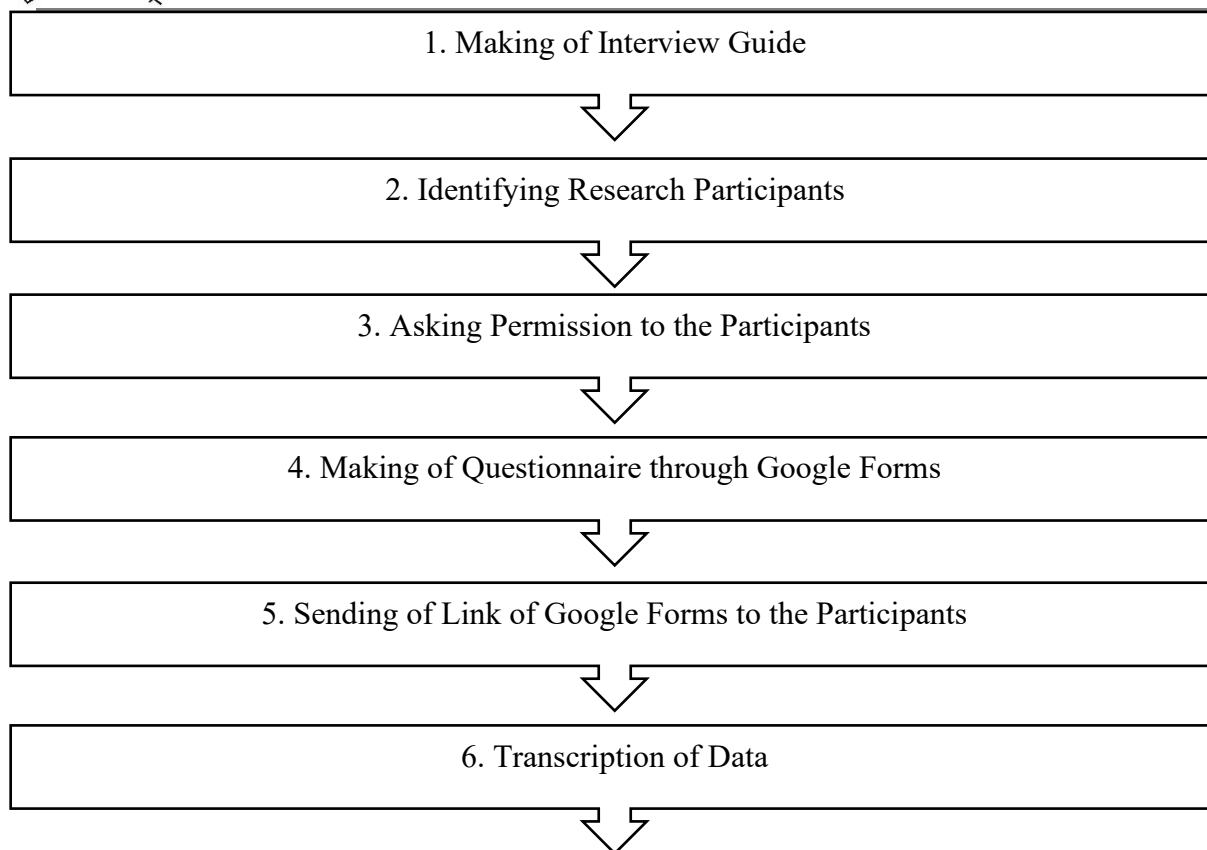
Support and Guidance

8. When students need help to move from what they know to what they are learning, what problems do you face in giving them that support?
9. Does your school leadership provide enough support and collaboration for this program?

Solutions

10. What have you done on your own to solve the problems you face?
11. Based on your experience, what changes would you suggest to make this program better for teachers and students?
12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with the program?

Data Gathering Procedure



The data gathering process was executed systematically through six distinct chronological phases to preserve ethical standards and ensure data integrity:

Figure 2. The Data Gathering Procedure.

1. Making of Interview Guide: The researcher designs a comprehensive, semi-structured 12-question interview tool explicitly mapped to Vygotsky's concepts of scaffolding, ZPD, and the research objectives.
2. Identifying Research Participants: Using purposive sampling guidelines, the researcher screens and identifies exactly eight (8) qualified elementary school tutor-leaders within public schools in Villaverde.
3. Asking Permission to the Participants: Formal contact is established with the identified educators. The researcher distributes an introductory letter alongside an informed consent form detailing the study's scope, ensuring complete anonymity, and emphasizing their right to voluntary withdrawal.
4. Making of Questionnaire through Google Forms: The finalized qualitative interview guide is carefully structured inside Google Forms, using expansive paragraph-response blocks to encourage comprehensive, unfiltered written testimonies.
5. Sending of Link of Google Forms to the Participants: The secure web link generated by Google Forms is transmitted directly to the eight consenting participants via official email channels or professional messaging platforms, allowing them to respond asynchronously.
6. Transcription of Data: Upon submission, the researcher gathers the textual data from the secure database, compiles the open-ended responses, and transcribes them into organized text documents for processing.

Research Locale

This study is situated entirely within the public elementary schools of the Municipality of Villaverde, located in the province of Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. Villaverde is a distinct municipality whose public-school sector operates under the oversight of the Department of Education. This specific setting provides an ideal environment for the case study, as its localized elementary institutions are actively navigating the implementation mandates of the ARAL-Reading Program amid regional resource realities.

Data Analysis

The qualitative text compiled from the Google Forms was examined using Thematic Analysis. This analytical technique centers on discovering, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns or "themes" embedded within qualitative data.

The eight respondents completed and submitted the Google Forms questionnaire across four dates in May 2026: R1 through R4 submitted their responses on May 5, R5 and R6 on May 6, R7 on May 17, and R8 on May 18.

Coding Stages

The qualitative descriptive analysis of the data gathered through Google Forms follows a systematic five-stage coding process. This approach helps organize unstructured text responses into clear, meaningful patterns while keeping the authentic voices of the tutor-leaders intact.

1. Data Cleaning: Organize and read through the Google Forms responses to get familiar with the data.
2. Initial Coding: Highlight key words and assign simple labels to meaningful phrases in the text.
3. Grouping Themes: Sort the labels into broader categories or common themes.
4. Refining Themes: Check the themes against the original answers to make sure they are accurate and clear.
5. Writing the Report: Describe the findings clearly using the final themes and direct quotes from the responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data gathered from the eight public elementary school teacher-respondents in Villaverde.

This section presents the demographic profile and professional background of the eight (8) public elementary school teacher-respondents from Villaverde who participated in this qualitative study.

Table 1. The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondent Number	Elementary School	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching	Grade Level/s Handled
R1	Villaverde Central School Sped center	43	Female	18 years	2
R2	Nagbitin Elementary school	55	Female	29	4, 5, 6
R3	LABBUNAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	46	Female	19	Kinder
R4	Labbunan Elementary School	44	Female	14	2
R5	NAGBITIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	33	Female	6	Kinder
R6	Sawmill Elementary School	25	Female	10 months	3
R7	Nagbitin Elementary School	46	Female	20	5
R8	Ernesto Lapan Pale Elementary School	44	Female	21	4

The table presents the demographic profile of the eight teacher-respondents. All respondents are teaching in different Elementary Schools in Villaverde, Nueva Vizcaya. The respondents are all female, with ages ranging from 25 to 55 years old. Their teaching experience varies from 10 months to 29 years, indicating a combination of beginning and experienced teachers. They are assigned to different grade levels, including Kindergarten, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6, providing perspectives from various levels of elementary education.

This section presents the results which are divided into six main themes based on the teachers' real-life experiences in using the ARAL-Reading Program. Each theme includes an explanation, evidence from the teachers' answers, and a comparison with other studies.

Table 2. Summary of Theme

Theme Name	Description of the Theme	Teachers Experiencing this Theme
Theme 1: The Role of the Teacher as a Helper and Facilitator	Teachers accept their role as key reading helpers and facilitators.	R1: To help pupils read R2: To facilitate learners with difficulty in reading R3: Being an ARAL - tutor requires commitment, extra effort and creativity in making activities that are engaging for students to build their confidence and motivates them to learn. R4: Serve as facilitator of learning R5: As an "ARAL-tutor", my role is to guide and support every learner in learning and exploring their skills and weaknesses in reading. Also, to provide additional information, help learners solve and answer questions, and facilitate discussions. R6: As an ARAL tutor, I guide and support learners by creating a safe and engaging environment. I help them understand lessons, build confidence, and actively participate, ensuring that no one is left behind. R7: Implementer
Theme 2: Additional Task and Workload	The program adds extra teaching hours and paperwork, causing physical and mental exhaustion.	R1: It made us feel so exhausted. heavy workloads of teacher R3: Another common challenge is the limited time for ARAL because of the different work responsibilities-reports, paper works and preparing of materials for the regular class. It is an additional task for me. It is a heavier workload, more demanding and requires more time and effort. R4: This program add 60 minutes of daily structured reading time and increases my work load by requiring extra hours for preparing leveled materials R5: I have to manage everything such time, resources and improve one's ability. R6: As an ARAL tutor, the program has added to my workload because I need to conduct sessions and monitor each learner's progress. It also requires extra time and effort in supporting students with different reading levels. R7: Additional workload R8: It doesn't change my teaching schedule but it's a additional task for me as a teacher
Theme 3: Students Engagement	3.1: Students have inconsistent attendance.	R1: Inconsistent learner attendance. It made us rush every lesson because the attendance of the pupils are poor R4: Absenteeism of learners R8: Absenteeism of pupils
	3.2: Limited Time	R3: Another common challenge is the limited time for ARAL because of the different work responsibilities-reports, paper works and preparing of materials for the regular class. R5: Time constraints

		R6: Limited time also affects how much guidance each student receives.
Theme 4: Not Enough Materials	Schools lack physical books, forcing teachers to spend their own money to copy worksheets.	R1: Provide all the materials needed so the teachers who will handle the Aral Program will not spend his/her own money just to provide quality learning. R2: Lack of reading materials. Provide more readily materials . R3: Lack of materials is also one problem for the Aral-Rading Program. Materials are limited. R4: Limited resources R5: lack of instructional materials
Theme 5: Wide Gaps in Student Reading Levels	Teaching students with completely different reading levels in the same group is highly difficult.	R3: One of the many challenges in Using the ARAL-Program is the diverse learning levels of students. In a group of learners some may still struggle in phonics, while others can read simple words which gives the teacher a hard time to give equal attention to the learners. R5: ability of every learners R6: As an ARAL tutor, common problems include learners having different reading levels, making it hard to teach and support everyone at the same time. In addition, keeping all learners focused and engaged during reading sessions can be challenging, especially for those who need more support.
Theme 6: Teacher-Created Solutions	Teachers group students by ability, use personal games, and ask parents to help at home.	R1: It made me do my own strategy to help the pupils read better R3: To address the chalenges in implementing the program, I've tried my best to maximize my time to help the children read and as much as possible I group them acoording to their level of learning. R4: Involving parents to support the program R6: I try to adjust my teaching strategies based on students' reading levels, give extra attention to those who need help, and manage my time well during sessions. I also look for simple ways to keep learners engaged and motivated. R7: Make strategic plan to meet the desired learning outcomes to be achieved by learners who undergone aral program R8: I did my own teaching strategies

The Role of the Teacher as a Helper and Facilitator

This theme shows how teachers view their main jobs in the ARAL-Reading Program. Under Vygotsky's theory, the teacher is the "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO) who helps students move from what they know to what they need to learn. The teachers see themselves not just as regular classroom teachers, but as dedicated helpers and guides who build a safe space, grow student confidence, and help children learn to read well.

The teachers shared their thoughts on their roles:

R1 stated: "To help pupils read" and noted that the program "helps struggling readers achieve grade level proficiency".

R2 described their core function as being "to facilitate learners with difficulty in reading".

R3 explained: "Being an ARAL-tutor requires commitment, extra effort and creativity in making activities that are engaging for students to build their confidence and motivates them to learn".

R4 said their goal is to "Serve as facilitator of learning".

R5 stated: "As an 'ARAL-tutor', my role is to guide and support every learner in learning and exploring their skills and weaknesses in reading. Also, to provide additional information, help learners solve and answer questions, and

facilitate discussions".

R6 noted: "As an ARAL tutor, I guide and support learners by creating a safe and engaging environment. I help them understand lessons, build confidence, and actively participate, ensuring that no one is left behind".

R7 called their role simply an "Implementer".

These results match Vygotsky's idea that teachers are key guides for student learning. Soria (2024) also pointed out that a reading program's success depends heavily on teachers accepting their roles clearly. Furthermore, making students feel safe and confident is vital for helping them recover from past learning losses.

Additional Task and Workload

This theme highlights the heavy pressure and extra work brought by the ARAL-Reading Program. While teachers want to help, adding reading sessions on top of regular classes, paperwork, and material preparation causes great physical and mental tiredness.

The teachers described how the program increased their workload:

R1 shared that doing the program alongside regular duties "made us feel so exhausted" because of the "heavy workloads of teacher".

R3 noted: "Another common challenge is the limited time for ARAL because of the different work responsibilities- reports, paper works and preparing of materials for the regular class... It is an additional task for me. It is a heavier workload, more demanding and requires more time and effort".

R4 stated: "This program add 60 minutes of daily structured reading time and increases my work load by requiring extra hours for preparing leveled materials".

R5 shared: "I have to manage everything such time, resources and improve one's ability".

R6 explained: "As an ARAL tutor, the program has added to my workload because I need to conduct sessions and monitor each learner's progress. It also requires extra time and effort in supporting students with different reading levels".

R7 and R8 agreed, with R7 mentioning an "Additional workload" and R8 stating it is an extra task done through "Overtime with no pay".

These findings match the study by Magtalas and Eduvala (2024), which showed that teachers get burnt out from balancing regular teaching, reports, and tracking struggling readers. When teachers are overworked, they have less energy to teach well. This shows a big problem: national laws create good programs, but teachers end up doing unpaid overtime and extra work to make them run.

Student Engagement and Time Constraints

This theme covers problems related to student attendance and limited time. Teachers reported that students missing classes disrupts the learning flow, while heavy school duties leave very little time for actual teaching.

Students Attendance

The challenges with attendance and time are shown below:

R1 noted "Inconsistent learner attendance" which "made us rush every lesson because the attendance of the pupils are poor".

R4 and R8 both pointed out the "Absenteeism of learners" and "Absenteeism of pupils" as big problems.

Limited time

R3 explained that there is "limited time for ARAL because of the different work responsibilities- reports, paper works and preparing of materials for the regular class".

R5 experienced basic "Time constraints".

R6 added that "Limited time also affects how much guidance each student receives".

Vygotsky's theory says that learning happens best through regular, steady interaction between the student and the teacher. When students are often absent, that learning connection breaks down, forcing teachers to repeat basic lessons. This supports recent findings (UIJRT, 2025) that student motivation and regular attendance are crucial for reading programs to succeed.

Not Enough Materials

This theme focuses on the lack of proper books, reading kits, and learning materials for the ARAL-Reading Program. Instead of receiving enough supplies from the government, teachers often have to use their own money to print and make worksheets.

The shortage of materials is proven by these statements:

R1 suggested: "Provide all the materials needed so the teachers who will handle the Aral Program will not spend his/her own money just to provide quality learning".

R2 reported a "Lack or reading materials" and asked to "Provide more readily materials".

R3 stated that "Lack of materials is also one problem for the Aral-Rading Program" and that "Materials are limited".

R4 and R5 noted "Limited resources" and a "lack of instructional materials".

According to Vygotsky, teachers need proper tools and materials to help students learn effectively. When books and materials are missing, teaching becomes much harder. This matches other studies (IJMRD, 2026; UIJRT, 2025) showing that material shortages are a common problem, forcing teachers to spend their own cash to cover the gaps.

Wide Gaps in Student Reading Levels

This theme looks at the difficulty of teaching groups of students who have very different reading skills. In one ARAL group, some children struggle with basic letter sounds, while others can already read simple words. This makes it very hard for teachers to give equal and proper attention to everyone.

The challenge of mixed reading levels is described here:

R3 explained: "One of the many challenges in Using the ARAL-Program is the diverse learning levels of students. In a group of learners some may still struggle in phonics, while others can read simple words which gives the teacher a hard time to give equal attention to the learners".

R5 noted that the different "ability of every learners" makes pacing difficult. R6 shared: "As an ARAL tutor, common problems include learners having different reading levels, making it hard to teach and support everyone at the same time. In addition, keeping all learners focused and engaged during reading sessions can be challenging, especially for those who need more support".

Vygotsky's theory explains that help must match a student's exact skill level. When students in the same group have completely different reading abilities, it is almost impossible to help each child properly. Taguba (2020) and De Los Santos et al. (2025) also found that teachers lack special training for mixed-ability reading classes, making the work feel like a difficult balancing act.

Teacher-Created Solutions

This final theme shows how teachers use their own resourcefulness and smart ideas to solve problems. Because of missing materials, different reading levels, and lack of time, teachers create their own strategies, such as grouping students by ability, making fun learning activities, and asking parents to help at home.

The solutions created by teachers include:

R1 noted: "It made me do my own strategy to help the pupils read better".

R3 shared: "To address the chalenges in implementing the program, I've tried my best to maximize my time to help the children read and as much as possible I group them acoording to their level of learning".

R4 mentioned: "Involving parents to support the program".

R6 stated: "I try to adjust my teaching strategies based on students' reading levels, give extra attention to those who need help, and manage my time well during sessions. I also look for simple ways to keep learners engaged and motivated".

R7 and R8 focused on planning ahead, with R7 making a "strategic plan" and R8 stating, "I did my own teaching strategies".

These actions show that teachers are very resilient and creative. When the school system fails to provide enough support, teachers find their own ways to keep learning alive, which matches other local studies (E-Saliksik, 2025). However, schools should not rely completely on teacher hacks; the government must step in to provide real structural support.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter gives a short summary of the study, the final conclusions, and simple recommendations to improve the ARAL-Reading Program in Villaverde.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Teacher Roles: Teachers fully accept their roles as helpful guides and "More Knowledgeable Others" who want to build student confidence and reading skills. **Heavy Workload:** The program adds too much work, causing physical and mental exhaustion because teachers must balance regular classes, paperwork, and reading sessions.

Student Attendance and Time: Students missing classes (absenteeism) and a lack of enough time make it hard to keep lessons moving smoothly.

Lack of Materials: There are not enough books and supplies, forcing teachers to spend their own money on printing worksheets.

Different Reading Levels: Teaching groups where students have mixed reading abilities makes it hard to give the right kind of help to everyone.

Teacher Solutions: To fix these issues, teachers group students by skill level, manage their time well, and ask parents for help at home.

CONCLUSIONS

Elementary teachers in Villaverde are deeply dedicated to helping children read, but their work is severely limited by heavy workloads and missing support. While the ARAL-Reading Program has a good purpose under national law (Republic Act No. 12028), it is hard to run in real life because it depends too much on unpaid overtime and teachers' personal money. Problems like student absences, material shortages, and mixed reading groups block the success of the reading program. Teachers show great creativity in solving problems on their own, but the school system must provide proper support instead of leaving teachers to fix everything by themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Department of Education (DepEd): Reduce unnecessary paperwork and reports for teachers. The government should also release funds quickly and hire dedicated reading tutors so regular classroom teachers are not overloaded.

For School Principals and Supervisors: Protect teachers' time, ensure that basic school supplies and reading materials are provided using school budgets, and stop making teachers spend their own money.

For Teachers: Continue sharing best practices with co-workers and work closely with parents to lessen student absenteeism and keep children reading at home.

For Future Researchers: Conduct more studies with a larger group of schools or use a mix of numbers and interviews to learn more about how to improve reading programs.

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