

The Effects of Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL) Results in English on the Reading Proficiency Level of Elementary Pupils in Cataingan West

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Abstract

This study determined the effects of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program on the reading proficiency of elementary pupils in Cataingan West, with emphasis on word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency. The study was anchored on the premise of learning recovery interventions implemented by the Department of Education to address reading gaps and improve foundational literacy skills among struggling learners. A quantitative research design employing a pre-test and post-test approach was utilized. The respondents of the study were selected elementary pupils from schools within Cataingan West District who participated in the ARAL Program. Standardized reading assessment tools were used to gather data on pupils' reading proficiency before and after the intervention. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, particularly the paired t-test, to determine significant differences in pupils' reading performance. Findings revealed that pupils demonstrated improved reading proficiency after the implementation of the ARAL Program, showing gains in word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. The results further indicated a significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention reading scores, suggesting that the ARAL Program was effective in enhancing foundational literacy skills among elementary learners. The study highlights that structured remediation activities, guided reading instruction, and continuous literacy support contribute to improved reading outcomes. It is concluded that the ARAL Program is an effective learning recovery intervention in improving elementary pupils' English reading proficiency. Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools continue strengthening the implementation of ARAL through sustained instructional support, targeted reading remediation, and provision of appropriate learning materials to further enhance learner outcomes. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes quality education by ensuring inclusive and equitable learning opportunities and improving foundational literacy skills. In terms of sustainability impact, the findings support institutional and educational sustainability by strengthening school-based reading interventions and improving instructional practices. It also contributes to long-term learner development by enhancing literacy competence, which is essential for lifelong learning and academic success.

Keywords: Academic Recovery Program, Elementary Pupils, Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Reading Intervention, Reading Proficiency, Word Recognition

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills in education, serving as the foundation for all other learning areas. In the Philippine basic education system, reading proficiency is considered a critical indicator of learners' academic success. However, many elementary pupils continue to struggle in word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency, affecting overall performance. In response, the Department of Education implemented the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program to address learning gaps and improve foundational skills, particularly in reading and numeracy. The program is supported by Republic Act No. 12028, which institutionalizes learning recovery initiatives. According to Alcober (2025), DepEd continues strengthening literacy programs to address the national learning crisis. Globally, the World Bank (2021) highlights "learning poverty," where learners cannot read and understand simple texts by age 10, while National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022) reports persistent below-standard reading proficiency levels in many education systems.

Related literature consistently emphasizes that structured reading interventions significantly improve literacy outcomes. Studies show that guided reading, repeated reading, and comprehension strategies enhance word recognition, fluency, and understanding (Caabay et al., 2024; Marciano, 2023; Centeno, 2024; Mercado, 2024). Intervention-based approaches such as Project RISE, Project READY PLUS, and STRIDE demonstrate measurable gains in reading performance. International studies also highlight the importance of explicit instruction, sustained practice, and learner engagement in improving reading skills (Filderman et al., 2022; Starling-Alves et al., 2023). Overall, literature confirms that structured interventions

are effective in addressing reading difficulties. At the global level, reading difficulties are linked to learning poverty and reduced literacy attainment (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), World Bank, 2021). Nationally, DepEd initiatives such as ARAL respond to widespread literacy gaps through targeted interventions and remediation strategies (Alcober, 2025). Locally, Philippine studies highlight the effectiveness of reading programs such as READ AL, DEAR, and guided oral reading approaches in improving comprehension, fluency, and word recognition (Utto et al., 2024; Boholst, 2024; Flores, n.d.). These studies confirm that structured school-based interventions are essential in improving literacy outcomes among elementary learners.

This study is anchored on the principle that reading proficiency develops through the interaction of decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. The Simple View of Reading emphasizes the importance of word recognition and language comprehension as core components of reading development. Intervention-based learning theories also support the use of structured instruction, guided practice, and feedback in improving literacy outcomes. These frameworks collectively suggest that targeted interventions such as ARAL can enhance reading performance by addressing foundational skill gaps and providing systematic instructional support. Although numerous studies confirm the effectiveness of reading interventions, gaps remain in evaluating large-scale learning recovery programs such as ARAL within specific local contexts. Many existing studies focus on individual strategies or short-term interventions, with limited evaluation of integrated government-implemented programs across multiple reading domains. There is also a need for localized evidence in Cataingan West regarding the actual impact of ARAL on word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. This study addresses this gap by determining whether significant improvements occur after program implementation.

This study is primarily aligned with SDG 4 – Quality Education, as it promotes inclusive and equitable quality learning opportunities through reading intervention and literacy improvement. It also indirectly supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities by addressing learning disparities among struggling readers. Additionally, it aligns with SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals through collaboration between schools, teachers, and DepEd in implementing ARAL interventions. The study contributes to educational sustainability by strengthening literacy foundations that support lifelong learning and academic success. It enhances institutional sustainability by improving the effectiveness of school-based intervention programs and instructional practices. Social sustainability is supported through improved learner confidence, participation, and academic inclusion. Furthermore, it contributes to policy sustainability by providing evidence-based insights for improving national learning recovery initiatives. Overall, the study reinforces the role of structured literacy interventions in building resilient and equitable education systems.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive pre-test and post-test design. This design was used to measure and compare the reading proficiency levels of elementary pupils before and after the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. The approach allowed the researcher to determine whether there was a significant difference in reading performance in terms of word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency. The design is aligned with intervention-based evaluation studies where changes in learner performance are assessed using structured baseline and post-intervention measurements.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the municipality of Cataingan, Masbate, Philippines, specifically within selected public elementary schools under the Cataingan West District. The area is composed of coastal and agricultural communities where public elementary schools serve learners with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The selected schools include Curvada Elementary School, Libtong Elementary School, Osmeña Elementary School, Emilio S. Boro Sr. Central School, Divisoria Elementary School, Villapogado Elementary School, Pitogo Elementary School, and Bagumbayan Elementary School. These schools were chosen due to their active participation in the implementation of the ARAL Program and their accessibility to the researcher.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were selected elementary pupils from the identified schools in Cataingan West District who participated in the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. The respondents were considered appropriate since they were directly involved in reading intervention activities and served as the primary beneficiaries of the program. Their reading performance data before and after the intervention served as the basis for evaluation.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used a purposive sampling technique to identify respondents who met the inclusion criteria. Only pupils who were officially part of the ARAL Program implementation and had complete pre-test and post-test reading assessment records were included.

This sampling method ensured that the respondents were directly exposed to the intervention, allowing for accurate measurement of changes in reading proficiency.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in the study was a structured questionnaire designed to measure pupils' reading proficiency before and after the ARAL Program implementation.

The instrument consisted of two parts:

Part I: Pre-implementation assessment

Part II: Post-implementation assessment

Both parts measured three indicators:

Word recognition

Reading comprehension

Fluency

Each item was rated using a four-point Likert scale:

4 – Very Proficient

3 – Proficient

2 – Less Proficient

1 – Not Proficient

The questionnaire was validated by experts including a language teacher, reading specialist, and education research adviser to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with literacy indicators. It also underwent pilot testing for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency before final administration.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process began with the distribution and administration of the validated questionnaire to selected respondents. The pre-implementation assessment was conducted first to determine baseline reading proficiency levels. After the implementation of the ARAL Program, the same instrument was administered as a post-implementation assessment to measure any changes in pupils' reading performance. All data were collected systematically to ensure consistency, accuracy, and comparability between pre-test and post-test results.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as mean and frequency distribution were used to describe the reading proficiency levels of pupils in terms of word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency before and after the ARAL Program implementation. To determine whether there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results, appropriate inferential statistical tests (commonly t-test for dependent samples) were applied. The analysis aimed to establish whether the ARAL Program had a statistically significant effect on pupils' reading proficiency.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Reading Proficiency Level Before the Implementation of the ARAL Program

3.1.1 Word Recognition

Before the implementation of the ARAL Program, pupils demonstrated generally low word recognition skills, with an overall composite mean of 2.20, interpreted as less proficient. Pupils showed relative strength in identifying letters and their corresponding sounds, while difficulties were evident in reading sight words, decoding unfamiliar words, recognizing vocabulary, pronouncing words correctly, and reading confidently and automatically. These findings indicate that pupils possessed basic letter-sound knowledge but lacked proficiency in more advanced decoding and recognition skills necessary for fluent reading. The results support the findings of Marcel and Patterson (2022), who found that learners' ability to recognize and produce words influences overall reading performance and language development. The study further emphasized that weak decoding and vocabulary skills often contribute to poor reading comprehension and slower reading performance.

3.1.2 Reading Comprehension

The results revealed that pupils were generally less proficient in reading comprehension before the intervention, with a composite mean of 1.92. Many pupils experienced difficulty understanding simple sentences, recalling details, identifying story elements, making inferences, summarizing texts, and distinguishing important information. The weakest area

involved identifying the main idea of a short passage. The findings suggest that pupils struggled to process and interpret written texts effectively, limiting their ability to answer questions, organize ideas, and derive meaning from reading materials. This result is consistent with the findings of Starling-Alves et al. (2023), who reported that interrupted learning experiences negatively affected learners' reading comprehension and fluency and emphasized the importance of recovery programs in addressing literacy gaps.

3.1.3 Fluency

Prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program, pupils exhibited low levels of reading fluency, obtaining an overall mean of 1.92, interpreted as less proficient. Pupils experienced difficulties in reading at an appropriate pace, maintaining smooth and continuous reading, using correct phrasing and intonation, and demonstrating confidence during oral reading activities. The results indicate that pupils had not yet developed the automaticity necessary for efficient reading. Frequent pauses, hesitation, and inconsistent pacing may have hindered both comprehension and reading confidence. These findings support Washburn (2022), who found a strong relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension and emphasized that learners with stronger fluency skills are better able to understand texts because they process information more efficiently.

3.2 Reading Proficiency Level After the Implementation of the ARAL Program

3.2.1 Word Recognition

Following the implementation of the ARAL Program, pupils demonstrated substantial improvement in word recognition, achieving a composite mean of 3.05, interpreted as proficient. Pupils showed stronger performance in identifying letters and sounds, reading sight words, decoding unfamiliar words, recognizing vocabulary, pronouncing words correctly, and reading with greater confidence and accuracy. The improvement indicates that the ARAL Program effectively strengthened foundational literacy skills and enhanced pupils' ability to recognize and decode words. The findings support Stanovich (2024), who emphasized that efficient word recognition is among the strongest predictors of successful reading comprehension and highlighted the importance of early intervention in strengthening foundational literacy skills among struggling readers.

3.2.2 Reading Comprehension

After the intervention, pupils attained a composite mean of 2.88, interpreted as proficient. Improvements were observed in answering literal questions, recalling details, identifying story elements, understanding sentence meanings, making inferences, identifying main ideas, summarizing texts, and distinguishing important information. These findings suggest that the structured reading activities and targeted interventions provided through the ARAL Program enhanced pupils' ability to understand, analyze, and respond to reading materials. The results are consistent with Tsegaw (2023), who found that learners who participated in literacy interventions demonstrated significant improvement in reading comprehension and academic performance due to consistent reading support and structured activities.

3.2.3 Fluency

The results showed that pupils achieved a composite mean of 2.92, interpreted as proficient, after the implementation of the ARAL Program. Pupils displayed greater confidence when reading aloud, reduced hesitation, improved pacing, smoother reading delivery, and more appropriate use of expression and intonation. The improvement indicates that the intervention contributed positively to pupils' oral reading performance and confidence. Enhanced fluency likely supported better comprehension and greater participation in classroom activities. These findings align with Cockerill et al. (2023), who reported that targeted fluency and comprehension instruction improved learners' reading outcomes and increased their participation through structured literacy activities and consistent instructional support.

3.3 Significant Difference Between Pretest and Posttest Reading Proficiency

The paired t-test results revealed a computed t-value of -45.20256245, whose absolute value exceeded the critical t-value of 2.04523 at the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant difference between pupils' reading proficiency levels before and after the implementation of the ARAL Program. The findings confirm that the ARAL Program significantly improved pupils' reading proficiency in terms of word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency. The substantial increase in posttest scores demonstrates the effectiveness of structured literacy interventions and learning recovery programs in addressing reading difficulties among elementary learners. The results further suggest that consistent remediation, guided reading activities, and targeted instructional support can effectively strengthen foundational reading skills and improve overall literacy performance.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that before the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL), elementary pupils demonstrated low reading proficiency in English, particularly in word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency. Their difficulties included decoding words, recognizing vocabulary, understanding texts,

identifying main ideas, making inferences, and reading with confidence and proper expression. After the implementation of the ARAL Program, pupils showed significant improvement in identifying letters and sounds, decoding words, understanding texts, recalling details, identifying main ideas, and reading with greater confidence, smoothness, and expression. The significant difference between the pretest and posttest results indicates that the ARAL Program effectively enhanced pupils' foundational reading skills and overall English reading performance.

It is recommended that schools and teachers continuously implement and strengthen the ARAL Program and other structured reading intervention activities to sustain and further improve pupils' word recognition, reading comprehension, and fluency. English teachers should provide targeted and differentiated reading activities that focus on decoding unfamiliar words, identifying main ideas, making inferences, and improving oral reading fluency for learners who still experience reading difficulties. School administrators and education stakeholders should also provide adequate instructional materials, reading resources, and teacher training programs related to literacy instruction and reading interventions, while further studies in other areas within the same province with a larger sample are encouraged.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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