

Effects of Aral Program in Enhancing the Reading Performance of Struggling Learners of Bataraza Central School in Palawan

Amina A. Buahe

Bataraza Central School, Bataraza, Palawan

Abstract

This study seeks to determine the effects of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in enhancing the reading performance of struggling learners at Bataraza Central School. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils before the ARAL intervention in terms of the following:
 - a. word recognition,
 - b. fluency, and
 - c. reading comprehension?
2. What is the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils after the ARAL intervention in terms of the following:
 - a. word recognition,
 - b. fluency, and
 - c. reading comprehension?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the reading performance of Grade IV learners before and after the intervention?

This study is anchored on the premise that reading comprehension is influenced by several interrelated foundational reading skills, particularly word recognition, vocabulary, and reading fluency, and that these skills can be strengthened through a structured reading intervention program such as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program. The respondents of this study are the fifteen struggling Grade IV learners of Bataraza Central School who were enrolled during the school year covered by the research. These learners were identified based on their reading performance results from diagnostic reading assessments, such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which initially classified 42 pupils at the frustration level. These pupils were then further assessed using the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), a tool designed for Grades 1–3 to evaluate foundational literacy skills. Based on the results of the CRLA, the pupils who did not meet the required literacy level were selected to receive intervention under the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL). From this screening process, the fifteen learners who demonstrated the most significant difficulties in foundational reading skills were identified and included as the respondents of the study. The research instruments used in the study included the reading assessment tools provided by the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and the assessment tools used in the Academic Recovery

and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL). These assessment tools were developed by the Department of Education and are used to measure learners' reading performance in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension. In addition, a teacher self-made observation checklist was used to document the reading behaviors and challenges observed among the learners during the implementation of the ARAL sessions.

After the implementation of the ARAL intervention program, a notable improvement in reading performance was observed across all areas. The pupils showed enhanced word recognition skills with reduced reading errors, improved fluency with faster and more efficient reading, and better comprehension skills with increased understanding of texts. Most learners shifted from the frustration level to the independent level, indicating substantial progress in their literacy development.

Furthermore, the study revealed a significant improvement between the pretest and posttest results, confirming that the aral program has a positive effect on the reading performance of the learners. This suggests that structured and targeted reading interventions are effective in addressing reading difficulties and improving foundational literacy skills among elementary pupils. Overall, the findings in the present study affirm that the aral program is an effective intervention in enhancing the reading abilities of struggling readers. However, owing to limitation in number of participants subjected to the intervention, further study involving large samples from diverse groups of learners from various schools (not just one) may yield more generalizable findings on the efficacy of aral program on learners' reading performance.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, ARAL Program, Phil-IRI, struggling learners

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a central skill in early education that underpins students' ability to learn across subjects and engage meaningfully with texts. In the elementary years, children must not only decode letters and words but also develop comprehension strategies such as predicting, summarizing, questioning, and making connections. When comprehension instruction in the early grades is limited, students may struggle with understanding, retention, and critical thinking. In the Philippines, concerns over reading performance have been persistent. Assessment tools such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) consistently reveal that a significant proportion of pupils remain at the "frustration level," indicating that they cannot comprehend grade-level texts (Bautista et al., 2022; Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism [PCIJ], 2019).

Empirical studies have shown that many Filipino elementary pupils perform poorly in reading comprehension compared with other components of reading. Dinoro et al. (2023) found that while pupils in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte demonstrated mastery of alphabetic skills, comprehension remained the least mastered component based on Phil-IRI assessments. Similarly, Mejala (2024) reported that early grade reading instruction often prioritizes word recognition and phonics over comprehension strategies, leaving pupils less prepared for higher-order understanding. Several studies have demonstrated that explicit comprehension instruction can improve reading outcomes. For example, Camino et al. (2025) found that a multisensory approach significantly enhanced reading comprehension in Filipino among Grade 3 learners. Likewise, Lagdaan and Sevilla (2025) highlighted that targeted comprehension strategies

improved junior high school students' literacy skills. These findings underscore the potential of well-designed interventions when comprehension is intentionally taught.

Despite these positive findings, evidence indicates that early reading instruction in many Philippine schools still focuses primarily on decoding, phonics, and fluency. In a case study of a public elementary school, teachers' reading objectives and strategies were found to emphasize word reading skills with little attention to comprehension (Normal Lights Journal, 2022). Other challenges include large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and insufficient time for comprehension-focused activities (Bautista et al., 2022). Nationally, Phil-IRI results continue to show that a large proportion of pupils are at frustration levels in reading, with fewer than one-fourth reaching independent reading levels (PCIJ, 2019). These findings highlight a systemic weakness in developing comprehension—a skill essential to achieving literacy. The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program of the Department of Education (DepEd) was established under Republic Act No. 12028, signed into law in 2024 to address learning losses and gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program's Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) were finalized in December 2024, just 34 days after the law took effect, highlighting the urgency of implementing interventions to accelerate learning recovery (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024a). The ARAL Program primarily targets learners from Kindergarten to Grade 10 who demonstrate deficiencies in foundational skills in Reading, Mathematics, and Science (Philippine Information Agency [PIA], 2024).

While previous research has documented Filipino pupils' reading performance and tested interventions aimed at improving comprehension, several gaps remain. Few studies have examined school-specific contexts, such as Bataraza Central School in Palawan, to explore how early comprehension instruction is implemented and perceived. There is also a lack of longitudinal perspectives tracing how limited early comprehension instruction affects reading performance in later grades. Moreover, most studies provide limited analysis of specific comprehension strategies taught in the early grades and how frequently they are applied in classroom settings. Addressing these gaps is crucial for designing evidence-based interventions that strengthen early literacy instruction and foster lasting reading comprehension skills. This study aims to investigate the impact of limited early comprehension instruction on the reading challenges of Bataraza Central School pupils. By exploring the adequacy of early comprehension instruction and its relationship to pupils' reading performance, the study seeks to inform teachers, administrators, and policymakers in developing targeted strategies that bridge the gap between early literacy practices and the goal of producing proficient, independent readers.

This study seeks to determine the effects of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in enhancing the reading performance of struggling learners at Bataraza Central School. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils before the ARAL intervention in terms of the following:
 - a. word recognition,
 - b. fluency, and
 - c. reading comprehension?

2. What is the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils after the ARAL intervention in terms of the following:
 - a. word recognition,
 - b. fluency, and
 - c. reading comprehension?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the reading performance of Grade IV learners before and after the intervention?

By addressing these questions, the study intends to provide insights into the relationship between early comprehension instruction and pupils' reading development. The findings will serve as a basis for enhancing instructional practices and implementing targeted interventions to improve reading outcomes at Bataraza Central School.

The ARAL Program is positioned as the intervention variable in this framework. Drawing from the literature, ARAL provides structured, learner-centered, and remedial reading instruction through guided reading, explicit teaching, and contextualized learning activities. Diagnostic tools such as Phil-IRI and CRLA are used to identify learners' reading levels and specific difficulties, allowing instruction to be tailored to their needs. Through consistent exposure to reading activities that target word recognition, vocabulary, and fluency, the program is expected to address common reading challenges experienced by struggling learners. The framework further assumes that improvements in word recognition, vocabulary, and fluency lead to enhanced reading comprehension, which is the dependent variable of the study. Reading comprehension is viewed as the learner's ability to understand, interpret, and apply information from texts, encompassing literal, inferential, and evaluative understanding. As supported by the literature, when foundational reading skills are strengthened through effective intervention, learners' overall reading performance improves.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method research design utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine the effect of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program on the reading performance of Grade IV learners at Bataraza Central School in Palawan Philippines. The quantitative component used a pretest–posttest approach to measure the pupils' reading performance before and after the ARAL intervention in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension. This enabled the researcher to determine whether there was an improvement in the learners' reading skills after participating in the program.

On the other hand, the qualitative component focused on identifying the challenges encountered during the implementation of the ARAL Program and the success stories experienced by the struggling learners throughout the intervention. Through observation, one-on-one interviews with learners, and focus group discussions, the researcher gathered relevant insights regarding the learners' experiences, difficulties, improvements, and achievements while participating in the program. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the ARAL Program in enhancing the reading performance of struggling learners.

The respondents of this study are the fifteen struggling Grade IV learners of Bataraza Central School who were enrolled during the school year covered by the research. These learners were identified based on their reading performance results from diagnostic reading assessments, such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which initially classified 42 pupils at the frustration level. These pupils were then further assessed using the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), a tool designed for Grades 1–3 to evaluate foundational literacy skills. Based on the results of the CRLA, the pupils who did not meet the required literacy level were selected to receive intervention under the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (ARAL). From this screening process, the fifteen learners who demonstrated the most significant difficulties in foundational reading skills were identified and included as the respondents of the study.

2.1 Research Instrument

The researcher employed structured research instruments in gathering the data for the study. The instruments used in this study were all adopted from the standardized assessment tools of the Department of Education (DepEd), specifically the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which is designed to assess learners' reading abilities and reading levels.

To address Problem 1, which determines the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils before the ARAL intervention in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension, the researcher utilized the Phil-IRI oral and silent reading assessment tools prescribed by the Department of Education. The Phil-IRI assessment served as the pre-test instrument to determine the baseline reading performance of the Grade IV learners prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program. The assessment measured the learners' word recognition through the number of miscues committed during oral reading, fluency through the number of minutes consumed in reading the passage, and comprehension through the number of correct responses to comprehension questions.

To address Problem 2, which determines the level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils after the ARAL intervention in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension, the same Phil-IRI assessment tools were used as the post-test instrument after the implementation of the ARAL Program. The post-assessment was conducted to determine the changes in the learners' reading performance following the intervention. The use of the same standardized DepEd Phil-IRI assessment tools before and after the intervention ensured consistency and reliability in measuring the learners' reading abilities.

To address Problem 3, which aims to determine if there is a significant relationship between the reading performance of Grade IV learners before and after the intervention, the results obtained from the pre-test and post-test Phil-IRI assessments were compared and analyzed statistically. The collected data from the learners' scores in word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension provided the basis in determining whether significant changes occurred after the implementation of the ARAL Program.

Since the instruments used in the study were standardized assessment tools from the Department of Education through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), the instruments were already established and recognized as valid and reliable measures of learners' reading performance. These

instruments were appropriate for identifying the learners' reading levels and determining the effect of the ARAL Program on the reading performance of struggling Grade IV learners in Bataraza Central School.

2.2 Data Gathering Procedures

The baseline reading performance of the learners was obtained from the results of the pretest already conducted by the school using the Phil-IRI assessment. These results have served as the initial data to determine the learners' reading level prior to the intervention. After identifying the struggling readers, the ARAL program was implemented in Bataraza Central School for a total of 60 instructional hours, following the guidelines and structured reading activities prescribed by the Department of Education. During the implementation period, the teacher-made observation checklist was used to document the learners' reading progress and challenges observed during the ARAL sessions.

Upon completion of the 60-hour ARAL intervention, the posttest reading assessment provided under the ARAL program was administered to measure improvements in the pupils' reading performance in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension.

All data collected are treated with strict confidentiality. Digital files are password-protected, and hard copies have been stored in a secured, locked cabinet. The researcher declares no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

This study has strictly adhered to ethical standards in educational research, particularly in studies involving minor participants. Prior to data collection, all respondents were clearly informed of the purpose, scope, and nature of the study to ensure transparency and informed participation. All data collected will be used solely for academic and research purposes, with strict observance of confidentiality and ethical principles.

Considering that the respondents were Grade IV pupils aged 9 to 13 years old, parental consent and pupil assent have been acquired. The consent and assent processes were not self-administered. Instead, the researcher had personally facilitated the process to ensure that both the pupils and their parents or guardians would clearly understand the study. Parental consent forms were explained through face-to-face discussions conducted at the school prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program. Likewise, the assent process was administered using a verbal assent script appropriate to the pupils' age and level of comprehension, ensuring that participation would be voluntary and informed.

The study involved respondents from Bataraza Central School, an elementary school in Southern Palawan. Special care was taken to ensure that the ethical procedures would be accessible, culturally appropriate, and clearly understood by all participants. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and free from coercion, undue influence, or pressure. The researcher explicitly declared that refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study at any stage would not result in penalties and would not affect the pupils' grades, academic standing, or relationship with teachers and school personnel.

While the school administration assisted in identifying eligible participants, invitations to participate will be extended directly by the researcher through a formal invitation letter accompanied by a face-to-face explanation of the study, including the consent process. Respondents were informed using Filipino language of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences.

Given the vulnerability of minor participants, the study has ensured that potential risks would be minimal. The only foreseeable risk involved was the minor inconvenience due to the time required to participate in the reading assessments and survey instruments related to the ARAL Program. To minimize this risk, respondents were allowed to take breaks as needed, and data collection was scheduled to avoid disruption of regular instructional time. All possible risks and mitigation strategies were clearly explained to the respondents and their parents or guardians prior to participation.

No monetary compensation was provided to the participants. However, pupils were given small tokens, such as a pencil or gel pen, as a gesture of appreciation for their time and cooperation. The estimated time required for participation ranged from 15 to 20 minutes, and efforts were made to ensure that the research activities were conducted efficiently and respectfully.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process. Respondents' identities are protected through the use of numerical codes instead of names. All data collected are now stored securely in password-protected digital files and locked physical storage. Access to the data will be limited to the researcher and authorized personnel, including the Palawan State University Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC), if necessary. The data will be retained for three years after the completion of the study and will be securely disposed of thereafter.

Overall, the study shall uphold the rights, welfare, and dignity of all respondents. The findings aim to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the ARAL Program in enhancing the reading comprehension of struggling Grade IV learners in Southern Elementary Schools in Palawan. These findings may serve as a basis for strengthening reading intervention programs and improving instructional practices in elementary education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Level of reading performance of Bataraza Central School pupils before the ARAL intervention in terms of word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension

Table 1.a Individual Level of Reading Performance in Terms of Word Recognition (Before the ARAL Program)

(Legend: 80-100% - Independent; 59-79% - Instructional; and 58% & below – Frustration Based on the Phil-Iri Guidelines)

In reading assessment, particularly in the Phil-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory), the term miscues refer to the errors or mistakes committed by learners while reading orally. Miscues are used to measure the learner’s ability in word recognition, which pertains to how accurately a learner can identify, pronounce, and read words from a given passage. These errors may include mispronunciation of words, substitution of one word for another, omission or skipping of words, insertion of unnecessary words,

Pupil Number	Word Recognition (Number of Miscues)	Percentage (%)	Reading Level
Pupil Number 1	9	29.03	Frustration
Pupil Number 2	8	25.81	Frustration
Pupil Number 3	10	32.26	Frustration
Pupil Number 4	12	38.71	Frustration
Pupil Number 5	8	25.81	Frustration
Pupil Number 6	7	22.58	Frustration
Pupil Number 7	8	25.81	Frustration
Pupil Number 8	5	16.13	Frustration
Pupil Number 9	7	22.58	Frustration
Pupil Number 10	5	16.13	Frustration
Pupil Number 11	6	19.35	Frustration
Pupil Number 12	6	19.35	Frustration
Pupil Number 13	5	16.13	Frustration
Pupil Number 14	6	19.35	Frustration
Pupil Number 15	5	16.13	Frustration

repetition, reversal of words, or inability to read a word correctly within a given time.

In connection to word recognition, the number of miscues reflects the learner’s difficulty in accurately recognizing and decoding words while reading. A high number of miscues indicates that the learner struggles to identify words correctly, which affects reading fluency and comprehension. For instance, if a learner frequently mispronounces or skips words while reading, it suggests limited vocabulary knowledge, poor phonics skills, or insufficient familiarity with the words in the passage. On the other hand, fewer miscues indicate better word recognition skills because the learner can read words more accurately and smoothly.

Table 1.a presents the individual level of reading performance of the pupils in terms of word recognition before the implementation of the ARAL Program. The findings revealed that all fifteen pupils were classified under the frustration level based on the standards of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory. The percentage scores ranged from 16.13% to 38.71%, all of which fall below the 58% threshold for the frustration level. Among the pupils, Pupil Number 4 obtained the highest percentage of miscues at 38.71%, followed by Pupil Number 3 with 32.26%, while several pupils recorded the lowest percentage of 16.13%. These results indicate that the pupils experienced considerable difficulty in recognizing and decoding words accurately during reading activities. Familiarity with words in a passage plays a crucial role in reading performance, as it allows learners to recognize vocabulary quickly, read with accuracy, and construct meaning more efficiently. On the other hand, a high number of miscues indicates weak word recognition skills, as the learner struggles to decode and pronounce words correctly, resulting in slow and inaccurate reading. Thus, fewer miscues reflect stronger word recognition because the learner is able to read words smoothly and with greater accuracy.

The findings suggest that the pupils had weak foundational reading skills, particularly in decoding, pronunciation, and word identification. Word recognition is an essential component of reading proficiency because learners who struggle to recognize words accurately often experience difficulty in understanding the text as a whole. According to Liugan and Lacostales (2026), learners with poor reading performance commonly encounter challenges in decoding unfamiliar words and recognizing sight vocabulary, which greatly affects their overall reading ability. Similarly, Mercado and Ching (2025) emphasized that elementary learners with weak word recognition skills tend to read slowly, commit frequent miscues, and struggle to process textual meaning effectively.

Moreover, the consistently low scores across all pupils imply that the problem may not only be individual but also instructional in nature. Casinto (2025) noted that reading difficulties among Filipino learners are often associated with inadequate mastery of foundational literacy skills and limited exposure to effective reading interventions. In the same way, Idulog (2023) explained that insufficient practice in phonics and decoding contributes to poor reading achievement among elementary learners in the Philippines. Since all pupils remained under the frustration level, the results underscore the urgent need for intensive and structured reading interventions such as the ARAL Program to strengthen pupils' word recognition skills and improve their overall reading performance.

**Table 1.b Individual Level of Reading Performance in Terms of Fluency
(Before the ARAL Program)**

Pupil Number	Fluency (Number of Mins = Target mins = 1-2mins)	Reading Level
Pupil Number 1	6 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 2	5 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 3	5 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 4	10 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 5	6 mins	Frustration

Pupil Number 6	7 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 7	6 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 8	4 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 9	4 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 10	3 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 11	6 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 12	7 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 13	3 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 14	4 mins	Frustration
Pupil Number 15	5 mins	Frustration

In reading assessment, the number of minutes refers to the amount of time a learner spends reading a given passage orally. This serves as an indicator of reading fluency, which is the ability to read accurately, smoothly, quickly, and with proper expression. Reading fluency is an important component of reading performance because fluent readers can recognize words automatically without spending too much time decoding each word. As a result, they are able to focus more on understanding the meaning of the text.

In connection to fluency, learners who consume more time in reading a passage are usually experiencing difficulty in word recognition, pronunciation, and decoding. Slow reading often indicates hesitations, pauses, repetitions, and frequent miscues while reading. These difficulties interrupt the smooth flow of reading and affect the learner's comprehension of the text. On the other hand, learners who read the passage within a shorter amount of time with fewer errors are considered more fluent readers because they can process and recognize words more automatically and confidently.

Based on the reading assessment, the number of minutes consumed by the learners in reading the passage reflects their level of fluency before the implementation of the ARAL Program. Learners who required longer reading time demonstrated limited fluency skills and difficulty in oral reading performance. Their slow pacing, hesitations, and repeated miscues contributed to their frustration reading level under the Phil-IRI Guidelines. This implies that the learners needed intervention and continuous reading practice to improve their speed, accuracy, and confidence in reading. Through the ARAL Program, activities such as guided oral reading, repeated reading exercises, phonics drills, and mentoring sessions were conducted to help enhance the learners' fluency and overall reading performance.

Table 1.b presents the individual level of reading performance of the pupils in terms of fluency before the implementation of the ARAL Program. The findings revealed that all fifteen pupils were classified under the frustration level based on the standards of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory. The recorded reading times ranged from 3 to 10 minutes, which exceeded the target reading time of 1–2 minutes. Among the pupils, Pupil Number 4 recorded the longest reading time of 10 minutes, while Pupil Numbers 10 and 13 obtained the shortest reading time of 3 minutes. Despite variations in reading duration, all pupils failed to meet the expected fluency standard, indicating slow and laborious reading performance.

The findings suggest that the pupils have experienced significant difficulty in reading smoothly, accurately, and at an appropriate pace. Reading fluency is an essential component of reading proficiency because it allows learners to read with automaticity and focus on comprehension rather than decoding

individual words. According to Mercado and Ching (2025), learners with poor fluency often struggle with word recognition and spend excessive time decoding words, which negatively affects their understanding of the text. Similarly, Liugan and Lacostales (2026) explained that struggling readers commonly exhibit slow reading rates and frequent hesitations, resulting in weak overall reading performance.

Moreover, the consistently prolonged reading times of the pupils imply inadequate mastery of foundational reading skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding, and word recognition. Casinto (2025) emphasized that limited fluency among Filipino learners is often associated with insufficient reading practice and lack of structured literacy interventions. In the same way, Idulog (2023) noted that learners who read slowly tend to experience difficulty processing meaning because much of their attention is focused on recognizing words rather than understanding the passage. Since all pupils remained under the frustration level, the results highlight the urgent need for intensive and targeted reading interventions such as the ARAL Program to improve pupils’ fluency skills and overall reading achievement.

Mean Performance of Learners Compared to the Target Minutes

Table 1.b.2 Mean Performance of Learners Compared to the Target Minutes

Variable	Mean Minutes	Target Minutes	Interpretation
Learners’ Performance	5.40 minutes	2.00 minutes	Above Target

Table 1.b.2 presents the mean performance of the learners compared to the target reading minutes before the implementation of the ARAL Program. The findings revealed that the learners obtained a mean reading time of 5.40 minutes, which exceeded the target reading time of 2.00 minutes. This result was interpreted as “Above Target,” indicating that the learners required significantly more time than expected to complete the reading task. The result implies that the pupils demonstrated low reading fluency and experienced difficulty reading smoothly and efficiently.

The prolonged mean reading time suggests that the learners struggled with automatic word recognition and decoding skills, causing delays in their reading performance. Reading fluency is a critical component of literacy development because learners who read fluently can process words quickly and focus more on understanding the text. According to Liugan and Lacostales (2026), struggling readers often exhibit slow reading rates and excessive pauses due to weak foundational reading skills. Similarly, Mercado and Ching (2025) emphasized that learners with poor fluency require more time to decode words, which negatively affects both reading speed and comprehension.

Moreover, the result indicates that the learners had not yet achieved the expected level of fluency appropriate for their grade level. Casinto (2025) explained that insufficient reading practice, lack of exposure to reading materials, and inadequate intervention programs contribute to poor fluency development among Filipino learners. In the same way, Idulog (2023) noted that slow reading performance limits learners’ ability to comprehend texts effectively because much of their attention is directed toward decoding rather than understanding meaning. Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of implementing structured and intensive reading interventions, such as the ARAL Program, to improve learners’ fluency skills and help them achieve the desired reading standard.

Individual Level of Reading Performance in Terms of Comprehension (Before the ARAL Program)

Table 1.c Individual Level of Reading Performance in Terms of Comprehension (Before the ARAL Program)

Pupil Number	COMPREHENSION (Number of Correct Responses)	Percentage (%)	Reading Level
Pupil Number 1	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 2	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 3	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 4	0	0.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 5	2	40.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 6	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 7	2	40.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 8	2	40.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 9	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 10	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 11	0	0.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 12	0	0.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 13	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 14	1	20.00	Frustration
Pupil Number 15	1	20.00	Frustration

Table 1.c presents the individual level of reading performance of the pupils in terms of comprehension before the implementation of the ARAL Program. The reading passage entitled “Pam’s Cat” consisted of five comprehension questions, which served as the basis for determining the learners’ comprehension performance. The number of correct responses obtained by each pupil was converted into percentage scores following the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) guidelines.

The data revealed that all fifteen pupils fell under the frustration level based on the Phil-IRI classification. Specifically, most pupils obtained only one correct response, equivalent to 20%, while a few pupils answered two items correctly or 40%. Notably, three pupils recorded zero correct responses, corresponding to 0%. Since all percentage scores were 58% and below, none of the pupils reached the instructional (59–79%) or independent (80–100%) levels. This indicates that prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program, the pupils demonstrated very low comprehension skills and experienced significant difficulty in understanding the reading passage, thereby requiring intensive reading intervention and support.

The results in Table 1.c revealed a very low level of reading comprehension among the pupils prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program. Based on the standards of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory, all pupils were classified under the frustration level, with scores ranging from 0% to 40%. This indicates that the pupils were unable to comprehend the text independently and experienced significant

difficulty even with assistance. Most pupils obtained only one correct response (20%), some achieved two correct responses (40%), while a few recorded zero scores, reflecting very limited comprehension skills.

In reading assessment, the number of correct responses refers to the learner's correct answers to comprehension questions given after reading a passage. This measures the learner's reading comprehension, which is the ability to understand, interpret, and get meaning from the text that was read. Reading comprehension is an essential component of reading performance because it determines whether the learner can process information, identify important details, and understand the overall message of the passage.

In connection to comprehension, the number of correct responses reflects how well the learner understood the text. Learners who obtained a high number of correct answers demonstrate better comprehension skills because they can recall information, identify main ideas, understand vocabulary in context, and answer questions accurately. On the other hand, learners with fewer correct responses may have difficulty understanding the passage due to poor word recognition, limited vocabulary, weak fluency, or lack of focus while reading. Difficulty in decoding words and slow reading fluency can also affect comprehension because the learner spends more effort recognizing words rather than understanding the meaning of the text.

Based on the assessment results, the number of correct responses obtained by the learners indicates their level of comprehension before the implementation of the ARAL Program. Learners who answered fewer questions correctly were classified under the frustration reading level according to the Phil-IRI Guidelines, suggesting that they had difficulty understanding and interpreting the reading material independently. These results emphasized the need for intervention through the ARAL Program to improve not only the learners' word recognition and fluency but also their comprehension skills. Through guided reading, comprehension drills, vocabulary activities, questioning techniques, and mentoring sessions, the program aimed to help learners better understand the passages they read and improve their overall reading performance.

This finding is supported by recent studies, learners with low comprehension performance often struggle with identifying main ideas, vocabulary, and inferential thinking, which are essential for understanding texts (Liugan & Lacostales, 2026). Similarly, elementary pupils in the Philippines commonly experience reading difficulties due to weak comprehension skills and limited use of effective reading strategies (Mercado & Ching, 2025). Furthermore, reading challenges in Philippine basic education have been found to persist due to gaps in foundational skills and instructional support (Casinto, 2025). A synthesis of related studies also revealed that low reading performance among Filipino learners is associated with insufficient mastery of basic reading elements, low motivation, and lack of appropriate interventions (Idulog, 2023).

The fact that all pupils were under the frustration level suggests that the issue is systemic rather than individual, indicating a need for structured and targeted reading interventions. Research further shows that learners at the frustration level require intensive and guided instruction to develop comprehension skills effectively. Intervention-based studies also highlight that structured reading programs significantly improve comprehension among struggling readers, emphasizing the importance of implementing programs such as ARAL.

3.1 THE ARAL program intervention

**Figure 1. Schedule of ARAL Program
Key Stage 2/ Grade 4 Learners
SY: 2025-2026**

Date/Day	Number of Minutes/Hours
March 2, 2026 (Monday)	45 min.
March 3, 2026 (Tuesday)	45 min.
March 4, 2026 (Wednesday)	45 min.
March 5, 2026 (Thursday)	45 min.
March 6, 2026 (Friday)	6 hrs.
March 9, 2026 (Monday)	45 min.
March 10, 2026 (Tuesday)	45 min.
March 11, 2026 (Wednesday)	45 min.
March 12, 2026 (Thursday)	45 min.
March 13, 2026 (Friday)	6 hrs.
March 16, 2026 (Monday)	45 min.
March 17, 2026 (Tuesday)	45 min.
March 18, 2026 (Wednesday)	45 min.
March 23, 2026 (Monday)	6 hrs.
March 24, 2026 (Tuesday)	6 hrs.
March 25, 2026 (Wednesday)	6 hrs.
March 27, 2026 (Thursday)	6 hrs.
March 28, 2026 (Friday)	6 hrs.
April 1, 2026 (Wednesday)	5 hrs
April 6, 2026 (Monday)	5 hrs.
TOTAL NO.OF HOURS	60 HRS.

Figure 1 presents the matrix of the ARAL Program intervention. The intervention implemented in this study was carefully planned and systematically conducted to ensure that the struggling readers received sufficient academic support, reading guidance, mentoring, and remediation. The intervention focused primarily on improving the learners’ reading comprehension, word recognition, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in reading through continuous mentoring and coaching sessions under the Aral Program.

Based on the intervention schedule, the Aral Program was conducted from March 2, 2026 to April 6, 2026 with a total of 60 hours of intervention sessions. The mentoring sessions were conducted regularly during weekdays. Some sessions lasted for 45 minutes, particularly during regular class days, while intensive remediation sessions during Fridays and special intervention days lasted from 5 to 6 hours. The consistent schedule allowed the learners to repeatedly practice reading skills and gradually improve their performance through continuous exposure to guided reading activities.

The researcher handled fifteen (15) struggling Grade IV learners identified through reading assessment and teacher recommendations. These learners demonstrated difficulties in reading comprehension, decoding words, pronunciation, oral reading fluency, and confidence during classroom reading activities. To effectively address these concerns, the learners were grouped according to their reading abilities and learning needs. The researcher created small-group and paired-reading arrangements to ensure close monitoring and individualized instruction. The grouping consisted of approximately three to five learners per group depending on their reading level and behavior during sessions. Pairing was also used wherein a relatively higher-performing learner was partnered with a struggling learner to encourage peer tutoring, cooperation, and confidence-building.

The mentoring and coaching process was conducted four times weekly for regular sessions and intensified during whole-day intervention schedules. Each session followed a structured flow. The intervention usually started with motivation activities such as word drills, phonics exercises, vocabulary unlocking, and sight-word recognition. This was followed by guided oral reading where learners read short stories, passages, or instructional materials aloud while the researcher corrected pronunciation, diction, intonation, and pacing. After oral reading, comprehension questions were given to measure understanding of the text. Learners were also asked to retell stories, identify important details, sequence events, and explain the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context clues.

During mentoring sessions, the researcher devoted approximately 10 to 15 minutes of focused coaching per learner within group rotations. In paired or small-group activities, learners spent around 30 to 45 minutes practicing reading together under supervision. During intensive whole-day interventions, learners participated in multiple reading exercises, remedial drills, silent reading, comprehension tasks, and oral reading activities. Individual follow-up coaching was also provided to learners who demonstrated persistent reading difficulties.

Several instructional materials were utilized throughout the intervention. The researcher prepared and used reading passages, flashcards, picture cards, storybooks, comprehension worksheets, vocabulary exercises, phonics materials, and short assessment quizzes. On average, three to five reading materials or activities were used in every session depending on the objectives and learners' needs. Visual aids and contextualized reading materials were incorporated to sustain learners' attention and make reading activities more engaging and meaningful. The researcher also ensured that the materials were appropriate to the learners' reading level to avoid frustration and encourage gradual improvement.

Weekly monitoring and assessment were also conducted to track the progress of the learners. Based on the Aral scores, learners underwent multiple sessions and weekly evaluations from Week 1 to Week 8. Each week consisted of four sessions with corresponding 10-item assessments to determine improvement

in reading-related competencies. The learners' scores showed fluctuating but generally improving performances across the intervention period, indicating that repeated mentoring and guided practice positively influenced their reading abilities. Additional assessments composed of 15-item and 20-item tests were also administered at the end of the intervention to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program.

Throughout the implementation of the intervention, several challenges were encountered by the researcher. One of the primary challenges was learners' absenteeism and inconsistent attendance, which affected continuity of instruction and retention of previously learned skills. Some learners also displayed low self-confidence and hesitation during oral reading activities due to fear of making mistakes in front of peers. Behavioral distractions and short attention spans were likewise observed, especially during longer intervention sessions. Additionally, differences in learners' reading levels made it challenging to maintain uniform pacing during group activities. Some learners progressed faster

Furthermore, the researcher provided additional intervention time and individualized coaching to learners who consistently obtained lower scores during the Aral Program assessments. After every weekly assessment and reading activity, the researcher carefully monitored the performance of each learner to identify those who needed further remediation and support. Learners who demonstrated difficulty in comprehension, decoding, pronunciation, fluency, and answering comprehension questions were given extra tutorial sessions beyond the regular intervention schedule.

The additional mentoring sessions were conducted either before regular classes, during vacant periods, or after the scheduled Aral Program sessions. The researcher allotted approximately 15 to 30 minutes of extra coaching per learner depending on the severity of the reading difficulty and the learner's level of participation during the regular sessions. During these individualized remediation activities, the researcher repeated reading exercises, conducted one-on-one oral reading practices, reviewed difficult words, and provided simplified reading passages appropriate to the learner's reading level.

Special attention was given to learners who obtained the lowest scores in the weekly assessments because they required more intensive intervention and constant encouragement. The researcher ensured that these learners received repeated drills in phonics, vocabulary development, word recognition, and reading comprehension. Additional instructional materials such as flashcards, short stories, picture-based reading materials, and guided comprehension activities were also prepared specifically for these learners to strengthen their foundational reading skills.

Moreover, the researcher employed differentiated instruction strategies during the extra coaching sessions. Learners were guided step-by-step while reading aloud, and immediate corrections and feedback were provided to improve pronunciation, pacing, and understanding of the text. Positive reinforcement, encouragement, and praise were consistently used to build learners' confidence and reduce anxiety during reading activities. Through continuous monitoring and individualized mentoring, the researcher was able to address the specific needs of struggling learners more effectively.

This additional allotment of time significantly contributed to the improvement of learners who initially performed poorly in the assessments. It also demonstrated the researcher's commitment to ensuring that

no learner would be left behind during the implementation of the Aral Program. The individualized intervention approach helped struggling learners gradually improve their reading performance, participation, and confidence throughout the duration of the study.

Overall, the intervention under the Aral Program was implemented through systematic mentoring, coaching, small-group instruction, paired reading, and continuous assessment. The consistent intervention schedule, appropriate instructional materials, individualized guidance, and repeated reading exercises contributed significantly to the enhancement of the reading performance of struggling Grade IV learners in Bataraza Central School. The intervention not only improved learners’ reading comprehension and fluency but also strengthened their confidence, participation, and interest in reading activities.

**Table 2.a.1 Overall Word Recognition Performance
(After the ARAL Program)**

Frequency (Pupils)	Percentage	Miscue Range	Interpretation
4	26.67%	0 miscues	Excellent (No error)
10	66.67%	1–2 miscues	Within target (Good performance)
1	6.67%	3 miscues	At maximum target
15	100%		

Table 2.a.1 presents the overall word recognition performance of the learners after the implementation of the ARAL Program. The results revealed that 4 pupils (26.67%) committed zero miscues, which is interpreted as Excellent or no error, indicating full accuracy in word recognition. Meanwhile, 10 pupils (66.67%) recorded 1–2 miscues, interpreted as within target or good performance, showing that most learners demonstrated minimal errors and were able to recognize words with high accuracy. Only 1 pupil (6.67%) obtained 3 miscues, interpreted as at the maximum target level, yet still within an acceptable range of performance. Overall, all 15 pupils (100%) achieved performance within or above the expected word recognition standard.

These findings indicate a substantial improvement in word recognition skills after the implementation of the ARAL Program. The low number of miscues suggests that learners have developed stronger decoding skills, improved sight vocabulary, and greater reading accuracy. Word recognition is a critical component of reading proficiency because it directly affects fluency and comprehension. According to Liugan and Lacostales (2026), improved word recognition reflects the development of foundational literacy skills that enable learners to read with greater ease and accuracy. Similarly, Mercado and Ching (2025) emphasized that structured reading interventions significantly reduce reading errors and enhance learners’ decoding abilities, particularly among struggling readers.

Furthermore, results demonstrate that most learners are now performing within the expected level, with a notable proportion achieving error-free reading. Casinto (2025) explained that targeted reading

interventions that focus on phonics, repeated reading, and guided practice are effective in improving word recognition skills among Filipino learners. In the same way, Idulog (2023) highlighted that consistent exposure to structured reading activities promotes reading automaticity and reduces miscues over time. Overall, the findings suggest that the ARAL Program was effective in improving the learners’ word recognition performance and supporting their transition toward more accurate and independent reading.

**Table 2.b.2 Mean Performance of Learners Compared to the Target Minutes
(After ARAL Program)**

Variable	Total Score	Mean	Target Range	Interpretation
Fluency (Minutes Read)	21	1.40 minutes	1–2 minutes	Within Target

Table 2.b.2 presents the mean performance of the learners in terms of fluency after the implementation of the ARAL Program. The findings revealed that the learners obtained a total score of 21 with a mean reading time of 1.40 minutes, which falls within the target range of 1–2 minutes. The result was interpreted as “Within Target,” indicating that the learners were able to achieve the expected fluency standard after the intervention. This demonstrates that the pupils significantly improved their reading speed and were able to read more efficiently compared to their performance before the implementation of the ARAL Program.

Findings suggest that the learners have developed better reading automaticity, pacing, and decoding skills, which are important indicators of reading fluency. Reading fluency enables learners to recognize words quickly and accurately, allowing them to focus more on understanding the text. According to Liugan and Lacostales (2026), improved fluency is associated with increased reading efficiency and stronger foundational literacy skills. Similarly, Mercado and Ching (2025) emphasized that guided and repeated reading activities help struggling learners improve their reading speed, pronunciation, and confidence in oral reading tasks.

Furthermore, the decrease in the learners’ mean reading time from above the target range during the pre-assessment to within the target range after the intervention indicates the effectiveness of the ARAL Program in enhancing reading fluency. Casinto (2025) explained that structured literacy interventions and consistent reading exposure contribute significantly to the development of fluency among Filipino learners. In the same way, Idulog (2023) noted that learners who engage in regular reading practice become more automatic and efficient readers over time. Therefore, the findings highlight that the ARAL Program successfully improved the learners’ fluency skills and enabled them to meet the expected reading standard.

Table 2.c.1 Overall Level of Reading Performance

(After the ARAL Program)

Indicator	Total Score	Mean	Interpretation	Reading Level
Comprehension Level	49	3.27	High Comprehension	Independent
Fluency Level	15	1.00	Within Target	Independent
Word Recognition Level	21	1.40 minutes	Within Target	Independent

Table 2.c.1 presents the overall level of reading performance of the learners after the implementation of the ARAL Program in terms of comprehension, fluency, and word recognition. The findings revealed that the learners obtained a total score of 49 with a mean of 3.27 in comprehension, interpreted as “High Comprehension,” and classified under the independent reading level. In terms of fluency, the learners obtained a total score of 15 with a mean of 1.00, interpreted as “Within Target,” indicating that the pupils were able to read within the expected fluency standard. Likewise, in word recognition, the learners recorded a total score of 21 with a mean reading time of 1.40 minutes, also interpreted as “Within Target” and classified under the independent level. Overall, the results demonstrate that the learners achieved independent reading performance across all reading components after participating in the ARAL Program.

Further, the findings indicate a substantial improvement in the learners’ overall reading abilities after the intervention. The high comprehension mean suggests that the learners were able to understand, interpret, and answer questions from the reading passages effectively. Similarly, the fluency and word recognition results imply that the learners developed stronger decoding skills, reading automaticity, and accuracy, which enabled them to read more efficiently and confidently. According to Liugan and Lacostales (2026), improvements in fluency and word recognition contribute significantly to better comprehension because learners can focus more on meaning construction rather than decoding words. Likewise, Mercado and Ching (2025) emphasized that structured reading interventions improve learners’ reading accuracy, pacing, and comprehension through guided practice and repeated exposure to reading materials.

Furthermore, the transition of the learners from the frustration level during the pre-assessment to the independent level after the intervention reflects the effectiveness of the ARAL Program in enhancing reading performance. Casinto (2025) explained that targeted literacy programs and continuous reading support significantly improve the reading achievement of Filipino learners. In the same way, Idulog (2023) noted that learners who are provided with consistent and meaningful reading activities develop stronger literacy skills and greater confidence in reading tasks. Overall, the findings strongly suggest that the ARAL Program was effective in improving the learners’ comprehension, fluency, and word recognition skills, enabling them to achieve independent reading performance.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-Test Results Comparing Pretest and Posttest Phil-IRI Outcomes

Phil IRI Result	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Comprehension	-1.933	-4.882	<0.001	Significant
Fluency	-2.267	-14.789	<0.001	Significant
Word Recognition	4.000	9.165	<0.001	Significant

As shown in Table 3, results of the paired samples t-test indicate statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest Phil-IRI outcomes across all measured variables. Specifically, the number of correct responses shows a significant change ($t = -4.882, p < 0.001$), suggesting an improvement in reading comprehension from pretest to posttest, as reflected by the negative mean difference (posttest scores higher than pretest scores).

Similarly, the number of minutes read significantly decreased ($t = -14.789, p < 0.001$), indicating that participants were able to complete the reading task in less time during the posttest. This suggests improved reading fluency and efficiency. On the other hand, the number of miscues significantly increased in terms of mean difference ($t = 9.165, p < 0.001$). Given the positive mean difference, this implies that miscues were higher during the pretest than in the posttest, indicating a reduction in reading errors after the intervention. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the intervention had a statistically significant positive effect on learners' reading performance, as evidenced by increased correct responses, reduced reading time, and fewer miscues during the posttest.

Table 3 indicates that there is a significant improvement in the learners' reading performance after the implementation of the ARAL Program in terms of comprehension, fluency, and word recognition. The findings suggest that learners demonstrated better understanding of texts, improved reading speed, and fewer reading errors during the post-intervention assessment compared to their initial performance.

The improvement in comprehension shows that learners became more capable of understanding and interpreting reading materials effectively. This supports the findings of Abadiano and Aranda (2024), who emphasized that structured reading interventions enhance learners' comprehension by systematically developing their ability to construct meaning from texts. In the same line, Santos and Villanueva (2023) explained that targeted literacy programs significantly improve learners' reading comprehension by addressing gaps in foundational reading skills.

In terms of fluency, the results imply that learners were able to read more smoothly and efficiently after the intervention. This is supported by Bautista et al. (2023), who found that repeated reading and guided reading activities significantly improve reading fluency by developing automaticity and reducing hesitation during oral reading. Similarly, Mendoza and Reyes (2022) highlighted that consistent reading practice helps learners improve reading speed and accuracy.

For word recognition, the findings suggest that learners showed improved decoding skills and made fewer reading errors after the program. Dela Cruz (2025) noted that phonics-based instruction and structured literacy interventions significantly enhance learners' word recognition skills by improving decoding accuracy. Likewise, Mendoza and Reyes (2022) emphasized that continuous exposure to reading materials

strengthens learners' ability to recognize words automatically and accurately. Overall, the results indicate that the ARAL Program was effective in enhancing the learners' reading abilities across all domains. Casinto (2025) explained that structured reading interventions in Philippine basic education play a vital role in improving learners' literacy skills by addressing difficulties in comprehension, fluency, and word recognition. Therefore, the findings confirm that well-implemented reading programs significantly contribute to the development of independent and proficient readers.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the Grade IV pupils of Bataraza Central School initially demonstrated low reading performance in terms of word recognition, fluency, and comprehension, all of which were categorized under the frustration level prior to the implementation of the ARAL Program. This indicates that the learners experienced significant difficulties in decoding words, reading with fluency, and understanding reading materials.

After the implementation of the ARAL intervention program, a notable improvement in reading performance was observed across all areas. The pupils showed enhanced word recognition skills with reduced reading errors, improved fluency with faster and more efficient reading, and better comprehension skills with increased understanding of texts. Most learners shifted from the frustration level to the independent level, indicating substantial progress in their literacy development.

Furthermore, the study revealed a significant improvement between the pretest and posttest results, confirming that the ARAL Program has a positive effect on the reading performance of the learners. This suggests that structured and targeted reading interventions are effective in addressing reading difficulties and improving foundational literacy skills among elementary pupils. Overall, the findings in the present study affirm that the ARAL Program is an effective intervention in enhancing the reading abilities of struggling readers. However, owing to limitation in number of participants subjected to the intervention, further study involving large samples from diverse groups of learners from various schools (not just one) may yield more generalizable findings on the efficacy of ARAL Program on learners' reading performance. This should briefly state the major findings of the study.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

I declare that no competing interests exists.”.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

I, the lone author have designed the study, wrote the protocol, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the first whole draft of the manuscript including its revision

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