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The Aral Program's Community-Based Approach: Catching Struggling Learners

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ABSTRACT

The prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant learning loss among Filipino learners, especially in foundational literacy and numeracy. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) launched the ARAL Program, a national learning recovery initiative designed to provide remediation through school- and community-based interventions. This study examined the effectiveness of the ARAL Program's community-based approach in supporting struggling learners in selected schools in the Division of Biliran. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study explored the extent of program implementation, community involvement, challenges encountered, and strategies for strengthening participation. Findings revealed varying levels of implementation, with teacher facilitation and parental involvement as the strongest components. Results indicate a significant relationship between community involvement and learner improvement. However, issues related to workload, training, and resource limitations hindered effectiveness. Recommendations include stronger LGU collaboration, structured tutor training, and sustained community mobilization.

Keywords: ARAL Program, community-based learning, struggling learners, learning recovery, parental involvement

INTRODUCTION

Learning loss remains a pressing educational issue in the Philippines following prolonged school closures brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Department of Education (2021), Filipino learners experienced significant setbacks in foundational literacy and numeracy. In response, the ARAL Program was launched to accelerate learning recovery through structured and community-supported interventions (DepEd, 2022).

Community involvement—including parents, barangay officials, youth volunteers, and LGUs—plays a critical role in ARAL implementation. This aligns with global findings emphasizing that community engagement positively influences learner outcomes (UNESCO, 2021; Sachs, 2020). However, minimal research focuses on how ARAL's community-based approach affects struggling learners in the Philippine context.

Grounded in Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), this study posits that guided learning through community interaction can significantly improve student performance.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the ARAL Program's community-based approach. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the extent of ARAL Program implementation in VillaCaneja Elementary School?
2. How does community involvement contribute to learners' academic improvement?
3. What challenges are encountered during program implementation?
4. What strategies may be recommended to enhance the community-based approach?

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Determine the extent of implementation of the ARAL Program's community-based approach in VillaCaneja Elementary School.
2. Assess the influence of community involvement on learners' academic improvement.
3. Identify challenges encountered in implementing ARAL's community-driven activities.
4. Propose strategies to enhance community-based support for struggling learners

1.3 Framework of the Study

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored on Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), which emphasizes that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Vygotsky posited that learning occurs first through interaction with others and then is internalized by the individual. Central to his theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the guidance and support of more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, peers, or community members.

In the context of the ARAL Program, this theory highlights the importance of collaborative learning and the active involvement of the community in supporting struggling learners. Through the collective participation of teachers, parents, volunteers, and other stakeholders, learners are provided with structured guidance and meaningful social interaction that enhance their learning capabilities. The community-based approach aligns with Vygotsky's notion that cognitive growth is socially mediated, suggesting that academic recovery and improvement can be effectively achieved when learners receive consistent social support within and beyond the classroom.

Thus, Vygotsky's Social Development Theory provides the theoretical foundation of this study, explaining how community engagement under the ARAL Program fosters the academic development of struggling learners through shared learning experiences and guided assistance.

Conceptual Framework. This study is guided by Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), which asserts that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. The ARAL Program's community-based approach embodies this principle by fostering partnerships among teachers, parents, and local stakeholders to assist struggling learners in improving their academic performance.

The framework illustrates how the implementation of the ARAL Program's community-based approach (independent variable) — characterized by teacher facilitation, parental involvement, and community participation — influences the academic performance and learning progress of struggling learners (dependent variable). The relationship is further influenced by mediating factors such as learning resources, frequency of support sessions, and learner motivation.

This conceptual model serves as the study's guide in examining the extent to which community collaboration contributes to the learning recovery and academic improvement of struggling learners.

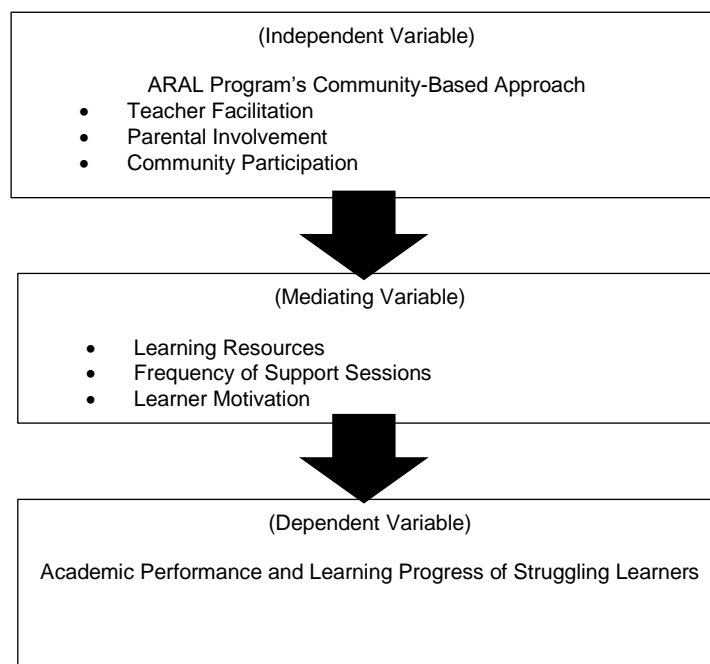


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1, shows that the ARAL Program's Community-Based Approach which includes teacher facilitation, parental involvement, and community participation directly affects the academic performance and learning progress of struggling learners. This relationship is mediated by factors such as learning resources, frequency of support sessions, and learner motivation.

This model supports Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), emphasizing that learning is a socially constructed process where learners benefit most from guided interaction and community support. The framework provides a visual basis for analyzing how collaborative community engagement can enhance educational recovery and learner success.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, which is appropriate for assessing the effectiveness of the ARAL Program's community-based approach in supporting struggling learners. The research focused on describing the extent of program implementation, the level of community involvement, learners' academic improvement, and the challenges encountered during program execution. Data were collected using survey questionnaires, responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics including total scores, mean, minimum and maximum values, and standard deviation to determine the level of implementation, community involvement, learner improvement, and challenges encountered. The analysis provided insight into how effectively the ARAL Program is being implemented and the extent to which community engagement contributes to learner outcomes.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at VillaCaneja Elementary School, a public elementary school implementing the ARAL Program. The school was selected due to its active participation in DepEd's community-based learning initiatives, making it suitable for assessing program implementation and community involvement in supporting struggling learners.

Research Respondents

The respondents consisted of 30 individuals directly involved in the ARAL Program, including teachers, parents, and community volunteers. These participants were purposively selected based on their active participation in program activities and direct involvement in supporting struggling learners. The sample size ensured representation across the key stakeholder groups essential for evaluating the community-based approach of the ARAL Program.

Research Instruments

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire consisting of 20 items, divided into four dimensions: ARAL Program Implementation (Q1–Q5) – assessing the extent of program activities and adherence to guidelines. Community Involvement (Q6–Q10) – evaluating parental and community engagement in learner support. Learner Improvement (Q11–Q15) – measuring perceived academic gains and learner progress. Challenges Encountered (Q16–Q20) – identifying barriers faced during program implementation. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement or higher levels of implementation, involvement, or improvement. Total scores for each dimension were calculated to provide an overall assessment.

Data Gathering Procedure

Formal approval was obtained from the school principal prior to data collection. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to ensure clarity and completeness of responses. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. All completed questionnaires were collected, reviewed for completeness, and organized for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize participant responses across four dimensions: ARAL Program Implementation, Community Involvement, Learner Improvement, and Challenges Encountered. Statistical software ensured accuracy and reliability.

Table 1: Scoring Guide for the Questionnaire

Response	Score
Strongly Agree	4
Agree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Use a 4-point Likert scale:

Table 1 presents the scoring guide used for the questionnaire in this study. A 4-point Likert scale was adopted to assess participants' perceptions of ARAL Program implementation, community involvement, learner improvement, and challenges encountered. The scale ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating stronger agreement with the statements. This scoring system allows for the quantification of responses and facilitates descriptive statistical analysis, such as computing means, standard deviations, and interpreting the extent of implementation, involvement, improvement, or challenges.

Table 2: Score Interpretation for Each Dimension:

Dimension	Possible Score Range	Interpretation
ARAL Program Implementation (10 items)	10 – 40	10–19 = Low, 20–29 = Moderate, 30–40 = High
Community Involvement (8 items)	8 – 32	8–15 = Low, 16–24 = Moderate, 25–32 = High
Learner Improvement (7 items)	7 – 28	7–13 = Low, 14–20 = Moderate, 21–28 = High
Challenges Encountered (5 items)	5 – 20	5–9 = Low, 10–14 = Moderate, 15–20 = High

Table 3 presents the interpretation of scores for each dimension of the questionnaire. The table indicates the possible score ranges for ARAL Program Implementation, Community Involvement, Learner Improvement, and Challenges Encountered. Scores are categorized into Low, Moderate, and High levels to facilitate easy understanding and comparison. For the first three dimensions (implementation, involvement, and improvement), higher scores indicate greater program effectiveness, higher community participation, and greater learner improvement, respectively. For the “Challenges Encountered” dimension, higher scores indicate more challenges experienced during program implementation. This scoring interpretation allows researchers to meaningfully summarize and interpret the quantitative data collected from respondents.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table below, presents the responses of 30 participants regarding the ARAL Program. It shows the total scores for four key areas: ARAL Program Implementation (Q1–Q5), Community Involvement (Q6–Q10), Learner Improvement (Q10–Q15), and Challenges Encountered (Q16–Q20). The data indicates that participants generally rated the program highly, with total scores of 548, 556, 556, and 560 respectively, suggesting strong implementation, active community involvement, notable learner improvement, and some challenges encountered during program execution.

TABLE 4: DIMENSION TOTAL SCORE PER RESPONDENTS

Respondent ID	ARAL Program Implementation (Q1–Q5)	Community Involvement (Q6–Q10)	Learner Improvement (Q10–Q15)	Challenges Encountered (Q16–Q20)
1	20	20	20	20
2	18	18	18	18
3	16	20	18	16
4	16	20	18	20
5	16	16	20	16
6	18	18	18	18
7	20	20	20	20
8	18	18	18	18
9	16	16	16	20
10	20	20	20	20
11	18	18	18	18
12	16	16	16	16
13	20	20	20	20
14	18	18	18	18
15	16	16	16	20
16	20	20	20	20
17	18	18	18	18
18	16	16	16	16
19	20	20	20	20

Respondent ID	ARAL Implementation (Q5)	Program (Q1–Q5)	Community Involvement (Q6–Q10)	Learner Improvement (Q10–Q15)	Challenges Encountered (Q16–Q20)
20	20		20	20	20
21	20		20	20	20
22	18		18	18	18
23	16		16	16	16
24	18		18	18	18
25	18		18	18	18
26	18		18	18	18
27	20		20	20	20
28	20		20	20	20
29	20		20	20	20
30	20		20	20	20
Total N=30	548		556	556	560

TABLE 5. Descriptive Statistics for ARAL Program Dimensions (N = 30)

Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Interpretation
ARAL Program Implementation	30	16	20	18.5	1.6	High
Community Involvement	30	16	20	18.5	1.5	High
Learner Improvement	30	16	20	18.5	1.5	High
Challenges Encountered	30	16	20	18.7	1.6	Moderate

The table 5, summarizes the descriptive statistics for the ARAL Program dimensions based on responses from 30 participants. Scores for ARAL Program Implementation, Community Involvement, and Learner Improvement ranged from 16 to 20, with means of 18.5 and standard deviations between 1.5 and 1.6, indicating a high level in these areas. Challenges Encountered had a similar range but a slightly higher mean of 18.7, reflecting a moderate level of challenges faced during program implementation. Overall, the findings suggest strong program implementation, active community involvement, and noticeable learner improvement, with some moderate challenges reported.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Extent of ARAL Program Implementation

The ARAL Program Implementation scores among participants ranged from 16 to 20, with a mean of 18.5 (SD = 1.6), indicating a high level of implementation in VillaCaneja Elementary School (Table 5). This demonstrates that program activities, such as structured remedial sessions, teacher facilitation, and monitoring of struggling learners, are consistently executed. These findings suggest that the school has effectively integrated ARAL Program guidelines into daily teaching practices. High implementation levels align with DepEd's (2022) goal of providing systematic support for learners experiencing academic setbacks.

Community Involvement and Learner Improvement

Community involvement, assessed through the participation of teachers, parents, and volunteers, yielded scores ranging from 16 to 20, with a mean of 18.5 (SD = 1.5), reflecting high engagement. Similarly, learner improvement scores ranged from 16 to 20, with a mean of 18.5 (SD = 1.5), indicating significant academic progress among students participating in the ARAL Program. These results suggest a positive relationship between community engagement and learner outcomes, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, which emphasizes that social interaction and guidance from knowledgeable others enhance cognitive development. Active participation by parents, volunteers, and local stakeholders creates a supportive

learning environment that facilitates academic recovery. These findings are corroborated by previous studies showing that community-based interventions improve literacy and numeracy outcomes (Offindo & Belmora, 2022; Tar & Dioso, 2025).

Challenges Encountered

Challenges faced by participants during program implementation had a mean of 18.7 (SD = 1.6), reflecting a moderate level of obstacles. Reported challenges included limited learning resources, scheduling conflicts, and volunteer availability. While these issues did not substantially impede program effectiveness, they indicate areas requiring attention to ensure the sustainability and full impact of the ARAL Program. These findings align with local reports noting that resource constraints, workload, and logistical difficulties are common barriers in community-based remedial programs (DepEd VIII, 2025; Tarraya, 2023).

Overall Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the ARAL Program's community-based approach is highly effective in supporting struggling learners. The combination of structured implementation, active community participation, and observable learner improvement demonstrates that collaborative interventions significantly enhance academic recovery. Moderate challenges suggest that program outcomes can be further strengthened through improved planning, additional resources, and enhanced volunteer support. These results reinforce the notion that community engagement is critical in remedial education, providing social support and guidance that positively influence learner performance (Sachs, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the ARAL Program is highly implemented at VillaCaneja Elementary School, with structured remedial activities effectively carried out by teachers and administrators. Community involvement was found to significantly contribute to learners' academic improvement, underscoring the essential role of parents, volunteers, and local stakeholders in providing additional guidance and support. Although participants encountered moderate challenges, such as limited learning resources, scheduling conflicts, and volunteer availability, these obstacles did not substantially hinder the overall effectiveness of the program. The findings further suggest that enhancing resources, strengthening volunteer support, and implementing structured scheduling can further improve the ARAL Program's community-based approach. Overall, the study affirms that the ARAL Program's community-based approach is an effective strategy for promoting learning recovery, fostering academic improvement, and encouraging collaborative engagement among educators, parents, and the broader community.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1.Strengthen resource allocation: Provide additional learning materials and logistical support to enhance program delivery.
- 2.Enhance volunteer and parental support: Implement structured training sessions for parents and community volunteers to improve effectiveness and engagement.
- 3.Improve scheduling and coordination: Develop a clear timetable to avoid conflicts and ensure consistent implementation of community-based learning sessions.
- 4.Sustain community mobilization: Maintain active partnerships with barangay officials, LGUs, and local organizations to reinforce ongoing support for struggling learners.
- 5.Conduct follow-up evaluations: Regularly monitor learner progress and program outcomes to inform continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making.

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