INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH
2026, Vol. 7, No. 11, 4884 – 4892
http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.07.11.11

Research Article

Challenges and Coping Strategies of ARAL Reading Tutors in Elementary Schools in the Division of Zambales, Philippines

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Article history:
Submission 31 October 2026
Revised 15 November 2026
Accepted 23 November 2026

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ABSTRACT

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Reading Program depends heavily on tutors who deliver remediation under real classroom constraints, yet localized evidence on their implementation experience remains limited. This study determined the challenges encountered and coping strategies employed by 200 ARAL Reading Tutors in elementary schools in the Division of Zambales, Philippines, selected through proportional sampling. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational survey design, a validated four-point Likert questionnaire measured challenges and coping strategies across five dimensions: workload, learning resources, awareness in program implementation, supervision, and learner behavior. Results show that tutors generally agree that challenges exist across all dimensions, with learner behavior and workload rated most pressing and supervision least pressing. Tutors consistently applied coping strategies most notably in adapting learning resources and maintaining program awareness, and least consistently in managing workload and learner behavior. Strengthening continuous, practice-embedded capacity-building, structured workload management, and resource provision is recommended to reduce implementation strain among ARAL Reading Tutors in the Division of Zambales.

Keywords: *Foundational Literacy; Instructional Support; Professional Adaptability; Program Implementation; Workload Management, Challenges, Coping Strategies, ARAL Reading Tutors*

Introduction

Reading proficiency in the early grades underpins learners' success across the curriculum, and children who fail to acquire basic reading skills early tend to experience compounding academic difficulties. International evidence from the United States and Denmark shows that trained tutors, regular monitoring,

How to cite:
Mawili, C. G., & Cabal, E. M. (2026). Challenges and Coping Strategies of ARAL Reading Tutors in Elementary Schools in the Division of Zambales, Philippines. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. *7*(11), 4884 – 4892. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.07.10.01

and faithful implementation determine whether early-literacy interventions translate into measurable reading gains, while deviations from program guidelines weaken outcomes (Cortes, Kortecamp, Loeb, and Robinson, 2024; Seerup, Dietrichson, Jensen, and Bingley, 2025). In the Philippines, the 2019 National Early Grade Reading Assessment revealed weak oral reading fluency among many Grade 3 learners, prompting the enactment of Republic Act No. 12028, the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act, which institutionalized tutorial and learning-support interventions from kindergarten to Grade 10 (Republic of the Philippines, 2024). The Department of Education subsequently issued DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2025 and DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025 to operationalize ARAL-Reading for Key Stages 1 to 3, prescribing tutor training, materials provision, learner grouping, parent orientation, and continuous monitoring as core implementation requirements (Department of Education, 2025a, 2025b).

Yet the success of any policy-driven intervention ultimately rests on how it is enacted at the school level. In elementary schools of the Division of Zambales, ARAL-Reading tutors carry out this mandate under real constraints' workload, limited materials, uneven awareness of guidelines, inconsistent supervision, and learner behavior concerns that may shape both their day-to-day practice, and the quality of remediation learners receive. Prior Philippine studies on ARAL implementation describe similar operational strain, including added workload and resource insufficiency (Batistisa & Siat, 2025), gaps in teacher preparedness and specialized reading practices (Ubanan & Libradilla, 2026), and moderate capacity-building, tutorial delivery, and stakeholder engagement under inconsistent learner participation and funding (Taray & Mepieza, 2026). These studies, however, have concentrated largely on learner outcomes or overall program fidelity, leaving tutors living experience of implementation challenges and the coping strategies they employ comparatively unexamined at the local level.

This gap is conceptually significant: implementation demands that are not matched by adequate resources can constrain tutors' capacity to sustain quality instruction, while tutors' coping behaviors peer collaboration, lesson adaptation, caregiver engagement, and self-monitoring represent purposeful, self-regulatory responses that may offset these demands (Lemire, Rousseau, and Dionne, 2023; Spacciapoli et al., 2022). Understanding both sides of this equation is a precondition for any meaningful program-improvement effort, particularly because tutor characteristics such as training exposure and grade assignment may shape how challenges and coping strategies are experienced across the tutor population.

This study determined the challenges encountered and the coping strategies employed by ARAL Reading Tutors in elementary schools of the Division of Zambales. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: (1) How do the respondents assess the challenges encountered in implementing the ARAL Reading Program in terms of workload, learning resources, awareness in the implementation of the program, supervision, and learner behavior? (2) What are the respondents' coping strategies to address these challenges in terms of the same five dimensions?

Guided by these questions, this study aimed to: (1) determine the level of challenges encountered by the respondents in implementing the ARAL Reading Program in terms of workload, learning resources, awareness in the implementation of the program, supervision, and learner behavior; (2) determine the coping strategies employed by the respondents to address these challenges across the same five dimensions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a quantitative descriptive survey research design, appropriate for measuring the tutors' challenges, and coping

strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miksza et al., 2023). The descriptive component captured the existing conditions of ARAL-Reading implementation as reported by the respondents.

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the different districts in the Schools Division of Zambales, Philippines. 200 ARAL Reading Tutors were drawn through proportionally stratified random sampling. Respondents are currently and actively serving as ARAL Reading Tutors with actual tutoring experience under the program and voluntarily completed the questionnaire in full; teachers not officially designated as ARAL Reading Tutors, those not identified as respondents, those involved in the pilot testing of the instrument, and those who submitted incomplete responses were excluded.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher made questionnaire with three-part structured anchored on the Statement of the Problem, ARAL policy issuances, and related literature. It measured perceived challenges along five dimensions (workload, learning resources, awareness in program implementation, supervision, and learner behavior) and also measured coping strategies along the same five dimensions. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree it is Challenging/Always to Strongly Disagree it is Challenging/Never). The instrument underwent face and content validation by a panel of research, language, and education experts, with item retention guided by the Item- and Scale-Level Content Validity Index, followed by pilot testing among non-participant tutors. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Challenges subscales ranged from .735 to .876, and those for the Coping Strategies subscales ranged from .853 to .925, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

Data Collection

Following approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Zambales and the respective school heads, the researcher personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires in June 2026. Respondents were briefed on the study's purpose, given sufficient time to respond, and assured of confidentiality of their responses.

Data Analysis

Weighted mean was used to determine the level of perceived challenges and coping strategies, interpreted using the following four-point scale: 3.26–4.00 (Strongly Agree it is Challenging/Always), 2.51–3.25 (Agree it is Challenging/Often), 1.76–2.50 (Disagree it is Challenging/Seldom), and 1.00–1.75 (Strongly Disagree it is Challenging/Never).

Results and Discussion

Challenges Encountered in Implementing the ARAL Reading Program

Table 1. Perceived Challenges Encountered by ARAL Reading Tutors

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Workload	3.06	Agree it is a Challenge
Learning Resources	2.89	Agree it is a Challenge
Awareness in the Implementation of the Program	2.92	Agree it is a Challenge
Supervision	2.87	Agree it is a Challenge
Learner Behavior	3.10	Agree it is a Challenge
Grand Mean	**2.97**	**Agree it is a Challenge**

ARAL tutors generally agreed that implementation challenges existed across all five dimensions, with a grand mean of 2.97. Learner behavior was perceived as the most pressing

concern (WM = 3.10), even though respondents affirmed that learners generally show motivation to complete ARAL tasks; the difficulty centered more on punctuality and session readiness than on motivation itself. Workload followed (WM = 3.06), with tutors reporting difficulty managing time for all required tasks and fatigue from combining ARAL duties with regular teaching loads. Awareness in program implementation (WM = 2.92) and learning resources (WM = 2.89) were moderately challenging, driven respectively by uncertainty over specific reporting requirements and a shortage of manipulatives and visual aids for targeted reading skills. Supervision was the least pressing challenge (WM = 2.87), although tutors still noted occasional feelings of isolation in addressing implementation issues.

These results aligned with the study of Tan et al. (2024), who found that learner engagement and behavioral readiness significantly shape outcomes in literacy programs; with Reyes et al. (2024), who reported that competing responsibilities affect the consistency of remedial-program delivery; with Abdullah et al. (2023), who linked clarity of program guidelines to effective implementation; and with Widodo et al. (2024), who associated resource availability and supervisory support with more structured reading instruction. The convergence of these findings suggests that ARAL-Reading challenges are multidimensional and interrelated, such that improving learner engagement, redistributing workload, clarifying procedures, and strengthening resource provision and supervision would jointly, rather than individually, improve implementation quality consistent with the materials-provision, tutor-orientation, and continuous-monitoring requirements embedded in DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025 (Department of Education, 2025b).

Coping Strategies Employed by ARAL Reading Tutors

Table 2. Perceived Coping Strategies Employed by ARAL Reading Tutors

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Workload	3.23	Often
Learning Resources	3.38	Always
Awareness in the Implementation of the Program	3.33	Always
Supervision	3.30	Always
Learner Behavior	3.21	Often
Grand Mean	**3.29**	**Always**

Tutors reported consistently applying coping strategies overall (grand mean = 3.29, interpreted as Always). They coped most consistently through resourcefulness with learning materials (WM = 3.38), such as supplementing texts with visuals and aligning activities with MATATAG reading competencies, and through active efforts to stay informed about ARAL guidelines (WM = 3.33) and to maintain supervisory compliance through session logs and alignment with coach/observer rubrics (WM = 3.30). Coping strategies for workload (WM = 3.23) and learner behavior (WM = 3.21) were comparatively less consistently applied, interpreted only as "Often": tutors prioritized high-impact reading activities to manage time but were less inclined to seek administrative assistance for workload relief, and while they readily used group-based recognition to build cooperation, techniques such as structured positive reinforcement and self-regulation coaching were used less often.

This pattern echoes Alonzo et al. (2024), who found that teachers who actively build coping mechanisms sustain stronger implementation effectiveness; Mohd Yusof et al. (2023), who linked resourceful adaptation of materials to instructional effectiveness; Santos et al. (2024), who associated active engagement with program guidelines with stronger implementation fidelity; and Pramudita et al. (2023), who tied supervisory-compliance

behaviors to professional adaptation. The comparatively lower reliance on workload- and behavior-focused coping may reflect the collective, structural nature of these two concerns, which appear less amenable to individual-level adaptation and may instead benefit from facilitated, system-level supports such as coaching and performance feedback (Meyer et al., 2024; Scheibel et al., 2023) and from fidelity-tracking routines embedded in everyday practice (Lemire et al., 2023; Spacciapoli et al., 2022).

Differences Between Perceived Challenges Encountered and Coping Strategies Employed

Table 1. Differences Between Perceived Challenges Encountered and Coping Strategies Employed by ARAL Reading Tutors, by Dimension

Dimension	Challenges WM	Coping WM	Difference (Coping – Challenges)	Gap Rank	Observed Pattern
Workload	3.06	3.23	+0.17	4	Narrow gap; coping barely exceeds challenge
Learning Resources	2.89	3.38	+0.49	1	Widest gap; strongest coping surplus
Awareness in the Implementation of the Program	2.92	3.33	+0.41	3	Wide gap; coping well above challenge
Supervision	2.87	3.30	+0.43	2	Wide gap; coping well above challenge
Learner Behavior	3.10	3.21	+0.11	5	Narrowest gap; least coping surplus
Grand Mean	**2.97**	**3.29**	**+0.32**	**—**	**Inverse correspondence**

Table 3 presents the difference between the weighted means for coping strategies employed and challenges encountered in each dimension (coping minus challenges), computed from the summary results of the study. Overall, tutors' coping (grand mean = 3.29, Always) exceeded the challenges they reported (grand mean = 2.97, Agree it is a Challenge) by 0.32, and coping was higher than challenge in all five dimensions, but the size of the difference was uneven. The widest differences were in learning resources (+0.49; coping WM = 3.38 vs. challenge WM = 2.89), supervision (+0.43; 3.30 vs. 2.87), and awareness in program implementation (+0.41; 3.33 vs. 2.92), where tutors' adaptive use of materials, self-monitoring and rubric-aligned routines, and regular review of DepEd ARAL guidelines appear to more than offset comparatively lower challenges (Al Otaiba et al., 2022; Mohd Yusof et al., 2023; Scheibel et al., 2023; Spacciapoli et al., 2022; Pramudita et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2024). In contrast, the differences were narrowest in workload (+0.17; 3.23 vs. 3.06) and learner behavior (+0.11; 3.21 vs. 3.10), the two dimensions tutors rated as most challenging, indicating that coping in these areas barely exceeded the demands tutors face. This inverse correspondence — the largest coping surplus where challenges are lowest and the smallest where challenges are highest — suggests that tutors' adaptive capacity has not yet fully caught up with their most pressing implementation demands, and that structured teacher capacity-building and adaptive instructional support are needed (Creagh et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2024; Alonzo et al., 2024; Silagan et al., 2025). This comparison is descriptive, drawn from the

weighted means obtained for each construct; it does not represent a separate inferential correlation test, as the relationships formally tested for significance in this study were the tests of difference reported.

Conclusion

ARAL Reading Tutors in the elementary schools of the Division of Zambales experience challenges across all five dimensions examined, led by learner behavior and workload, while supervision is comparatively the least burdensome. They responded with generally consistent coping practices, most strongly in resourcefulness with learning materials and active engagement with program guidelines, and least consistently in workload and learner-behavior management.

Recommendations

Aral tutors and school heads may consider establishing strong cooperation with parents to address learner behavior, with local government units to enhance availability of learning resources. The school heads may consider strategies to enhance awareness of tutors relative to ARAL Program.

Beyond these measures, the two dimensions where tutors' coping has lagged furthest behind the challenges they report — workload and learner behavior — warrant more systemic, administrative-level support rather than reliance on tutors' individual effort alone. For workload, school heads and division officials may review and reduce non-ARAL ancillary tasks assigned to tutors, institute protected instructional and preparation time (administrative time carve-outs), deploy teacher aides or co-tutors to share session-related duties (task-sharing), and formally integrate ARAL hours into tutors' regular teaching loads, alongside more consistent tutor compensation mechanisms, since workload-relief measures of this kind have been recommended to prevent burnout and sustain tutor engagement (Momo, 2024; Romelo & Sotto, 2026; Tolentino, 2026). For learner behavior, structured positive behavior support (PBS) training may help tutors move beyond group-based recognition toward more systematic behavioral intervention protocols such as individualized positive reinforcement, consistent encouragement, and goal-setting routines shown to sustain learners' motivation and engagement in ARAL sessions (Lago, 2026), complemented by coaching on self-monitoring and self-regulation strategies (Scheibel et al., 2023) and by tailoring tutor capacity-building to learners' needs (Silagan et al., 2025).

Acknowledgement

Throughout the researcher’s journey, there have been many who have supported and sacrificed such that researcher could finish this research study. They are as follows:

Dr. Esmen M. Cabal, her research adviser, for her continuous guidance and invaluable expertise. Her constructive feedback and encouragement significantly shaped the quality of this research;

All ARAL tutors/ teachers of Palauig, Iba and Botolan Districts, for their time and willingness to serve as respondents for this study;

Giron family, for their unfailing support, unconditional love, and continuous motivation throughout this academic journey. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them;

Jeffrey C. Mawili, the researcher’s husband, for his endless patience, moral and financial support, and unwavering love. The researcher appreciates him always;

Above all, the highest praise and glory belong to Almighty God for providing the wisdom, strength, and grace needed to complete this undertaking.

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