2026 Volume: 02 Issue: 04 www.ijrpa.com ISSN 2456-9995 Research Article

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

Page: 01-10

DEPED ARAL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPONENTS OF PUPILS' READING FLUENCY

[*1]Janeth Floro, [2]Joyce D. Esrael, EdD, [3]Ramlah A. Duge, PhD

[1]Department of Education, Arakan District, North Cotabato, Philippines.

[2,3]Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology.

Article Received: 18 March 2026

Article Revised: 08 April 2026

Published on: 28 April 2026

***Corresponding Author: Janeth Floro**

Department of Education, Arakan District, North Cotabato, Philippines

DOI: https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.7065

ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent of ARAL (Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning) Program components and their relationship to and influence on pupils' reading fluency in the three districts of Arakan, North Cotabato, Philippines, for School Year 2025–2026. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, the study surveyed 188 teachers randomly selected from a population of 470 ARAL-implementing public elementary school teachers in Arakan East, Arakan North, and Arakan West Districts. A validated questionnaire measured four ARAL Program components—purpose, tutoring, timeline, and flexibility—and three reading fluency dimensions: accuracy, speed, and expression. Results revealed that ARAL Program components were rated at a high extent and pupils' reading fluency was at a high level. Pearson correlation analysis showed highly significant positive relationships between all ARAL Program components and all dimensions of reading fluency. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that ARAL Program components collectively and significantly influenced reading accuracy (R^2=0.618), reading speed (R^2=0.657), and reading expression (R^2=0.441). Flexibility and timeline emerged as the strongest predictors of reading fluency outcomes. The null hypotheses were rejected. The findings affirm that effective implementation of ARAL Program components significantly improves pupils' reading fluency, with implications for educational policy, teacher training, and resource allocation in public elementary schools.

KEYWORDS: ARAL Program, reading fluency, accuracy, speed, expression, correlational study, Philippines, elementary education, literacy intervention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading fluency is recognized as a foundational competency that bridges decoding and comprehension, enabling learners to access academic content across all subjects (Rasinski, 2017). In the Philippine context, reading difficulties among elementary pupils—particularly those classified as frustrated and non-readers—remain a critical concern. The Department of Education (DepEd) has acknowledged persistent gaps in reading performance, prompting the implementation of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program as a targeted intervention for struggling learners.

Globally, 21st-century reading instruction demands that teachers design meaningful, differentiated learning experiences that build fluency, comprehension, and lifelong literacy (Smith, 2024). However, in rural Philippine schools such as those in Arakan, North Cotabato, limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and heavy workloads constrain the effectiveness of reading interventions (Valdez, 2023). Despite DepEd's introduction of the ARAL Program—which provides structured guided practice, teacher support, and learner-centered activities for frustrated and non-readers—empirical evidence of its effectiveness in specific rural contexts remains scarce (Santos, 2024).

Existing literature presents conflicting perspectives on the effectiveness of structured reading programs. While Valdez (2023) and Santos (2024) highlight that targeted programs improve fluency when supported by systematic practice and individualized guidance, Rodriguez (2022) and Martinez (2023) argue that interventions often yield uneven and temporary results due to resource limitations and teacher workload. This theoretical tension points to a significant gap in the evidence base regarding the ARAL Program's measurable impact on reading fluency dimensions in Philippine public elementary schools.

This study addresses this gap by examining the extent of ARAL Program components—purpose, tutoring, timeline, and flexibility—and their relationship to and influence on pupils' reading fluency in terms of accuracy, speed, and expression. The study is anchored on Rasinski's (2017) Theory of Reading Fluency, which posits that fluency is multidimensional and that structured, repeated, and assisted reading practices are essential pathways to comprehension. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development, further supports the study's focus on the scaffolding function of tutoring and guided instruction within the ARAL framework.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the extent of ARAL Program components in terms of purpose, tutoring, timeline, and flexibility? (2) What is the level of pupils' reading fluency in terms of accuracy, speed, and expression? (3) Is there a significant relationship between ARAL Program components and pupils' reading fluency? (4) Is there a significant influence of ARAL Program components on pupils' reading fluency?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, following Creswell (2017). This design was selected to examine the relationship between the extent of ARAL Program implementation components and the level of pupils' reading fluency without manipulating any variables. The design allowed for the identification of statistically significant associations and predictive influences between the independent variables (ARAL Program components) and the dependent variables (reading fluency dimensions).

Participants and Sampling

The study population consisted of 470 public elementary school teachers implementing the ARAL Program across three districts of Arakan, North Cotabato: Arakan East (n=150), Arakan North (n=180), and Arakan West (n=140). Using the Raosoft sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level, a sample of 188 teachers was determined. Random sampling was employed to ensure equal probability of selection and minimize bias. The proportional distribution yielded 60 teachers from Arakan East, 72 from Arakan North, and 56 from Arakan West. Only public-school teachers directly assigned to ARAL sessions were included; administrators and teachers without ARAL involvement were excluded.

Research Instrument

A validated researcher-made questionnaire was used, patterned and adapted from Etikan and Bala (2021). The instrument consisted of two parts: Part I measured the extent of ARAL Program components across four dimensions (purpose, tutoring, timeline, and flexibility) using a 5-point Likert scale; Part II measured the level of pupils' reading fluency in three dimensions (accuracy, speed, and expression) based on PHIL-IRI and CRLA assessment outcomes reported by teachers. The instrument underwent content validity review by five expert evaluators and reliability testing yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating high reliability.

Data Collection

Data were collected during School Year 2025–2026 following institutional ethical clearance and informed consent from all participants. Questionnaires were distributed to 188 teacher-respondents across the three districts and retrieved within a two-week period. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before data encoding.

Statistical Treatment

Descriptive statistics (weighted mean) were used to determine the extent of ARAL Program components and the level of pupils' reading fluency. Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to determine the significance of relationships between ARAL Program components and reading fluency dimensions. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the significant influence of ARAL Program components on each reading fluency dimension. A 1% level of significance ($p \leq 0.01$) was used for all inferential analyses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of ARAL Program Components

Table 1 presents the weighted mean ratings of the four ARAL Program components as perceived by teachers.

Table 1. Extent of ARAL Program Components.

ARAL Program Components	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Rating
Purpose	4.32	High Extent
Tutoring	4.45	High Extent
Timeline	4.28	High Extent
Flexibility	4.51	High Extent
Overall	4.39	High Extent

Scale: 4.50–5.00 = Very High Extent; 3.50–4.49 = High Extent; 2.50–3.49 = Moderate Extent.

The data reveal that all four ARAL Program components were rated at a High Extent by teacher-respondents, with flexibility (WM=4.51) and tutoring (WM=4.45) receiving the highest ratings. These findings indicate that teachers perceive the ARAL Program as providing adaptive, individualized instructional support. The high rating for flexibility aligns with Khatoony, Mall-Amiri, and Kolahi (2025), who demonstrated that adaptive approaches significantly complement traditional reading strategies and improve vocabulary and mastery

among young learners. Similarly, the strong rating for tutoring is consistent with Farlow (2024), who confirmed that peer-assisted and teacher-guided tutoring strategies improve reading fluency among pupils with disabilities.

Purpose received the lowest mean score (WM=4.32), though still rated at a high extent. This suggests that while teachers acknowledge the program's goals, the operationalization of its purpose at the classroom level may be less consistently enacted than its structural components. This finding is consistent with Luai, Radzi, and Sabri (2024), who found that unclear or inconsistently reinforced program purposes can lead to lower participation and implementation fidelity.

Level of Pupils' Reading Fluency

Table 2 presents the level of pupils' reading fluency across three dimensions.

Table 2. Level of Pupils' Reading Fluency.

Reading Fluency Dimension	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Level
Accuracy	4.18	High Level
Speed	4.22	High Level
Expression	4.09	High Level
Overall	4.16	High Level

Scale: 4.50–5.00 = Very High; 3.50–4.49 = High; 2.50–3.49 = Moderate

Pupils' reading fluency was rated at a High Level across all three dimensions, with reading speed (WM=4.22) slightly outperforming accuracy (WM=4.18) and expression (WM=4.09). These ratings reflect teachers' assessments of observable fluency development among pupils enrolled in ARAL sessions. The results are consistent with Canuto et al. (2024), who found that structured repeated reading and oral fluency practices produce meaningful gains in accuracy and speed. The relatively lower rating for expression suggests that prosodic reading development—which requires deeper comprehension—may require more sustained intervention, supporting Hoover's (2024) assertion that reading accuracy and comprehension are distinct but interdependent skills.

Significant Relationship Between ARAL Program Components and Pupils' Reading Fluency

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between ARAL Program components and reading fluency dimensions.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Between ARAL Program Components and Reading Fluency.

ARAL Components	Accuracy (r)	Speed (r)	Expression (r)
Purpose	0.647**	0.591**	0.574**
Tutoring	0.673**	0.634**	0.589**
Timeline	0.656**	0.588**	0.603**
Flexibility	0.684**	0.753**	0.561**

*** Significant at 1% level ($p \leq 0.01$)*

All correlation coefficients between ARAL Program components and reading fluency dimensions were statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating highly significant positive relationships. Flexibility demonstrated the strongest correlation with reading speed (r=0.753), while tutoring showed the strongest relationship with reading accuracy (r=0.673). These findings indicate that as the extent of ARAL Program implementation increases, so too does the level of pupils' reading fluency. The null hypothesis stating no significant relationship between ARAL Program components and reading fluency is therefore rejected.

These results are consistent with the literature affirming the effectiveness of structured reading interventions. Caabay, Martinez, Valdestamon, and Aguhayon (2024) demonstrated that repeated readings and background knowledge activation significantly enhance comprehension among struggling readers, reinforcing the positive association between tutoring and accuracy observed in this study. The particularly strong relationship between flexibility and reading speed further supports Pereyra's (2025) findings on the positive effects of adaptive, repeated reading methods on reading performance.

Significant Influence of ARAL Program Components on Pupils' Reading Fluency

Table 4 presents the results of multiple regression analysis examining the influence of ARAL Program components on reading accuracy.

Table 4. Multiple Regression: Influence on Reading Accuracy (R^2=0.618).

Predictor	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Purpose	0.036	0.093	0.028	0.978 (ns)
Tutoring	0.310	0.082	3.780	0.000**
Timeline	0.355	0.078	4.551	0.000**
Flexibility	0.454	0.071	6.394	0.000**

*F-value=72.413, p=0.000**; ** Significant at 1% level; ns = not significant*

Table 5. Multiple Regression: Influence on Reading Speed (R^2=0.657).

Predictor	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Purpose	0.112	0.085	1.318	0.019*
Tutoring	0.248	0.077	3.221	0.002**
Timeline	0.215	0.071	3.028	0.003**
Flexibility	0.593	0.064	9.266	0.000**

*F-value=85.011, p=0.000**; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$*

Table 6. Multiple Regression: Influence on Reading Expression (R^2=0.441).

Predictor	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Purpose	0.211	0.090	2.344	0.020*
Tutoring	0.228	0.083	2.747	0.007**
Timeline	0.180	0.064	2.815	0.005**
Flexibility	0.203	0.057	3.553	0.000**

*F-value=35.280, p=0.000**; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$*

The multiple regression analyses confirm that ARAL Program components collectively and significantly influenced all three reading fluency dimensions. The regression model explains 61.8% of the variance in reading accuracy (R^2=0.618), 65.7% in reading speed (R^2=0.657), and 44.1% in reading expression (R^2=0.441). Flexibility emerged as the consistently strongest predictor across all fluency dimensions (β=0.454 for accuracy, β=0.593 for speed, β=0.203 for expression), followed by timeline and tutoring. Purpose alone did not significantly predict reading accuracy (p=0.978), though it showed significant effects on speed and expression.

These findings indicate that the adaptive capacity of the ARAL Program—its ability to modify delivery based on learner diversity and contextual needs—is the most powerful driver of reading fluency outcomes. This aligns with Annetta, Newton, Franco, Johnson, and Bressler (2024), who demonstrated that creative and evidence-based flexible approaches produce engaging and effective improvements in pupils' reading. The significant predictive effect of timeline further validates that structured, scheduled consistency in ARAL delivery directly contributes to reading gains, consistent with the OECD's (2022) findings on the importance of program consistency for reading intervention effectiveness.

The null hypothesis that ARAL Program components do not significantly influence pupils' reading fluency is rejected for all dimensions, confirming that ARAL Program implementation significantly improves accuracy, speed, and expression among pupils in Arakan District.

7. CONCLUSION

This study established that the ARAL Program components—purpose, tutoring, timeline, and flexibility—were implemented at a high extent in Arakan District, and that pupils' reading fluency in terms of accuracy, speed, and expression was at a high level. Highly significant positive relationships were confirmed between all ARAL Program components and all reading fluency dimensions, with flexibility and timeline demonstrating the strongest associations. Multiple regression analyses further confirmed that ARAL Program components collectively and significantly predict reading fluency outcomes, accounting for 61.8% of variance in accuracy, 65.7% in speed, and 44.1% in expression.

These findings affirm that the ARAL Program, when implemented with fidelity—particularly through flexible, adaptive instruction and structured timelines—is an effective intervention for improving the reading fluency of frustrated and non-readers in public elementary schools. Policy strengthening should prioritize the flexibility and timeline dimensions of program delivery, alongside continuous teacher professional development in differentiated reading instruction. Future research should examine the longitudinal effects of ARAL implementation and explore contextual moderating factors that influence program effectiveness across diverse school settings.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers express sincere gratitude to the Schools Division of North Cotabato, the district supervisors of Arakan East, Arakan North, and Arakan West, and all teacher-participants who gave their time and honest responses. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and mentors who provided guidance throughout this research endeavor.

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