

School Leadership Practices and Perceived Effectiveness of English Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program: A Cluster-Wide Analysis in South Cluster of Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between school leadership practices and the perceived effectiveness of the English Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program in the South Cluster of Schools, Schools Division of Santiago City. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed among 92 elementary teachers and ARAL program implementers selected through proportionate random sampling from nine public elementary and integrated schools. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire covering instructional, transformational, distributed/shared, and learning-centered leadership and four program-effectiveness dimensions. Mean and Pearson product-moment correlation were used for data analysis. School leadership practices were strongly

implemented (grand mean = 3.87), with learning-centered leadership receiving the highest summary rating. The English ARAL Program was perceived as very effective (grand mean = 3.80), with reading interventions ranked highest and community/parent involvement ranked lowest. A moderate positive and statistically significant relationship was found between school leadership practices and perceived program effectiveness ($r = 0.409$, $p < .001$). The findings indicate that stronger leadership practices are associated with more effective literacy-recovery implementation, while also showing the need to strengthen stakeholder engagement, resource support, and sustained monitoring.

Keywords: *school leadership, English ARAL Program, literacy intervention, instructional leadership, learning-centered leadership, program effectiveness*

INTRODUCTION

School leadership is central to the quality of teaching and learning because school heads shape instructional priorities, teacher support systems, resource use, professional collaboration, and the climate in which educational programs are implemented. In Philippine basic education, school leaders are expected to perform administrative functions while also serving as instructional leaders who connect policy, curriculum, teacher development, and learner achievement. Innovative, relational, and adaptive leadership can help schools respond to changing educational demands and sustain continuous improvement (Hernandez et al., 2023). Supportive leadership also strengthens teachers' commitment and their willingness to participate in school initiatives that extend beyond routine classroom responsibilities (Camus, 2024).

These leadership responsibilities have become particularly important in addressing persistent English literacy gaps. Reading proficiency supports learning across subject areas, yet national indicators distinguish high

basic literacy from lower functional literacy, showing that many learners can decode text without consistently understanding and applying what they read (Department of Education, 2025). The disruptions associated with the pandemic intensified existing learning gaps and increased the need for structured recovery initiatives that provide targeted, accessible, and developmentally appropriate support.

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program was established as a national response to these learning needs. It provides tutorial support, remediation, enrichment, and learning resources for learners who have not yet achieved expected competencies, with particular attention to reading, mathematics, and science. The program emphasizes targeted instruction based on actual learning needs and seeks to strengthen foundational competencies through sustained school-level implementation (EDCOM II, 2026). Teachers' experiences, however, show that the effectiveness of ARAL depends on implementation capacity, instructional resources, coordination, monitoring, and leadership support (Batistis & Siat, 2025).

In the South Cluster of Schools in the Schools Division of Santiago City, nine public elementary and integrated schools implement English ARAL activities within varied organizational and resource contexts. Although schools conduct reading interventions, remediation sessions, classroom literacy activities, and stakeholder-supported programs, limited cluster-wide evidence has examined how leadership practices relate to the perceived effectiveness of these initiatives. This gap is important because the same policy may produce different implementation experiences when leaders vary in instructional supervision, professional support, shared decision-making, resource mobilization, and stakeholder engagement.

The study was anchored on Instructional Leadership Theory, which views the school leader as a key influence on instructional goals, curriculum coordination, supervision, teacher capacity, and the learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Contemporary work further emphasizes that leadership effects are shaped by context and commonly operate through teaching quality, organizational conditions, and professional collaboration rather than through direct control of learner outcomes (Hallinger, 2018). Evidence from literacy-focused research likewise suggests that leadership establishes essential conditions for program implementation even when reading outcomes are also influenced by instructional and family factors (Bonita, 2025).

Accordingly, this study determined the school leadership practices implemented in the South Cluster in terms of instructional, transformational, distributed/shared, and learning-centered leadership; assessed the perceived effectiveness of the English ARAL Program in terms of reading interventions, remediation and enrichment, classroom-based literacy practices, and community/parent involvement; and tested the relationship between leadership practices and perceived program effectiveness. The findings were intended to provide an empirical basis for strengthening leadership practice, literacy-program implementation, professional development, resource allocation, and cluster-wide collaboration.

Literature Review

English ARAL Program and Foundational Literacy Recovery

The ARAL Program institutionalizes structured academic support for learners experiencing learning gaps. Its literacy component focuses on targeted reading instruction, tutorial services, remediation, and accessible learning materials that respond to learners' current proficiency levels. National reports emphasize that the program is intended to accelerate foundational learning recovery and reduce the number of learners who remain below functional literacy expectations (EDCOM II, 2026; Cariaso, 2025). In school settings, this requires a coherent process of identifying needs, matching interventions to learner profiles, monitoring progress, and adjusting instruction.

Research on reading intervention indicates that learners with reading difficulties benefit from explicit, systematic, and appropriately intensive instruction that develops decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Vaughn et al., 2022). Contemporary reading research also cautions against reducing literacy instruction to a single component; effective programs integrate word recognition, language comprehension,

knowledge-building, motivation, and opportunities to apply reading in meaningful contexts (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). These principles align with ARAL's emphasis on targeted support and differentiated recovery pathways.

Implementation evidence from Philippine schools suggests that reading-recovery initiatives can improve learner performance when interventions are regular, needs-based, adequately resourced, and supported by teachers and school leaders (Bete, 2025). At the same time, teachers report challenges related to workload, scheduling, materials, learner attendance, and implementation consistency (Batistis & Siat, 2025). Thus, program design alone does not guarantee effectiveness; sustained organizational and instructional support is necessary.

Instructional and Learning-Centered Leadership

Instructional leadership prioritizes the core work of teaching and learning. It involves communicating instructional goals, coordinating curriculum, observing teaching, giving feedback, providing resources, monitoring learner progress, and facilitating professional development (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This leadership approach is directly relevant to literacy recovery because school heads must ensure that interventions are aligned with assessed needs, implemented consistently, and reviewed using evidence.

Studies in Philippine educational settings show that instructional leadership is associated with teacher confidence, instructional competence, and program implementation. Battad (2024) found that school heads' instructional leadership was significantly related to elementary teachers' self-efficacy, while Manguiat (2025) reported a moderate positive relationship between teacher-led instructional leadership and student learning outcomes. In specialized program contexts, Ciocon (2022) likewise found that stronger instructional leadership accompanied higher implementation of special education programs, highlighting the importance of leadership behavior in translating program requirements into practice.

Learning-centered leadership extends instructional leadership by organizing school decisions around learner needs and outcomes. It integrates data use, professional learning, reflective practice, collaboration, resource alignment, and continuous program evaluation. Hallinger (2018) emphasizes that effective leadership must be interpreted within its organizational context, while Noceto (2022) shows that contemporary instructional leadership also includes supporting technology integration, distributed responsibility, and strategic planning. These features are relevant to English ARAL implementation, which depends on differentiated instruction, monitoring, and coordinated support.

Transformational and Distributed/Shared Leadership

Transformational leadership contributes to school improvement by communicating a shared vision, motivating teachers, encouraging innovation, modeling integrity, and providing individualized professional support. Blancia (2021) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and teacher efficacy, suggesting that teachers feel more capable when leaders inspire improvement and provide meaningful support. Dacpano (2022) similarly reported a positive relationship between transformational leadership and school performance, particularly in school-improvement initiatives and stakeholder involvement.

The influence of transformational leadership is not always direct or uniform. Esogon et al. (2024) found that school heads were highly rated in transformational leadership and teachers demonstrated strong performance, yet the direct relationship between these variables was not significant. Such findings suggest that leadership may operate through motivation, school climate, collaboration, and instructional conditions, while performance also depends on teaching strategies, resources, and contextual factors. This reinforces the value of examining perceived program effectiveness rather than assuming a simple causal pathway.

Distributed or shared leadership broadens responsibility for school improvement by involving teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making, implementation, mentoring, and accountability. Reviews describe distributed leadership as a relational and context-sensitive practice that can strengthen professional collaboration and organizational capacity (Harris et al., 2022). Philippine evidence indicates that delegation, open communication, trust-building, and leadership-team development support collaborative decision-making (Rance et al., 2025). Teachers also tend to value flexible combinations of leadership approaches rather than a single fixed style (Caputolan, 2025), making shared leadership relevant to cluster-wide ARAL implementation.

Reading Interventions, Remediation, and Classroom Literacy Practices

Effective reading interventions require accurate assessment, explicit instruction, appropriate grouping, progress monitoring, and responsive adjustment. Programs should support learners who are below expected levels while also providing enrichment for those ready for more advanced tasks. Differentiated instruction enables teachers to vary content, process, support, and learning products based on readiness and need (Tomlinson, 2017). Intensive interventions are more feasible when teachers understand their purpose, have access to usable materials, and receive organizational support (Donegan et al., 2025).

Classroom-based literacy practices sustain intervention gains by embedding reading and writing throughout daily instruction. Formative assessment helps teachers identify misconceptions, monitor progress, and modify instruction before learning gaps become more difficult to address (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Effective literacy classrooms also combine direct instruction with authentic reading and writing tasks, critical thinking, discussion, technology-supported resources, and opportunities for independent learning. Such practices connect ARAL activities with regular classroom learning rather than treating recovery as an isolated program.

Leadership supports these practices by protecting instructional time, facilitating teacher collaboration, providing professional development, ensuring access to materials, and monitoring implementation. The effectiveness of literacy programs therefore reflects both the quality of the intervention and the organizational conditions in which teachers use it. This helps explain why leadership practices and perceived program effectiveness may be related even though individual learner outcomes are also shaped by motivation, prior knowledge, attendance, and home support.

Community and Parent Involvement in Literacy

Families and communities extend literacy learning beyond the classroom. Meta-analytic evidence associates parental involvement with academic achievement, especially when parents communicate expectations, support learning routines, and engage in developmentally appropriate literacy activities (Castro et al., 2015; Jeynes, 2019). Home reading, storytelling, progress monitoring, and positive reinforcement can strengthen motivation, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading habits.

In the Philippine context, parental participation in reading programs and home literacy support has been linked to learners' reading achievement and program continuity (Hernandez & Decena, 2024). However, schools must provide clear guidance so that parents understand program goals and can support learning without replacing teachers' instructional roles. Inclusive communication, parent workshops, accessible materials, school literacy events, and partnerships with libraries or community volunteers can create a broader support network for struggling readers.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

The reviewed literature indicates that English literacy recovery is shaped by the interaction of instructional design and organizational leadership. Instructional and learning-centered leadership align goals, teaching practices, professional learning, and monitoring with learner needs. Transformational leadership builds motivation and commitment, while distributed leadership expands participation and shared accountability. Together, these practices can create conditions that support reading interventions, remediation, classroom literacy integration, and stakeholder participation.

The present study therefore treated school leadership practices as the independent variable and the perceived effectiveness of English ARAL implementation as the dependent variable. The framework assumes an association rather than a direct causal effect: stronger leadership practices are expected to accompany better organized, supported, monitored, and sustained literacy programming, while other instructional, learner, family, and resource factors may also contribute to program effectiveness.

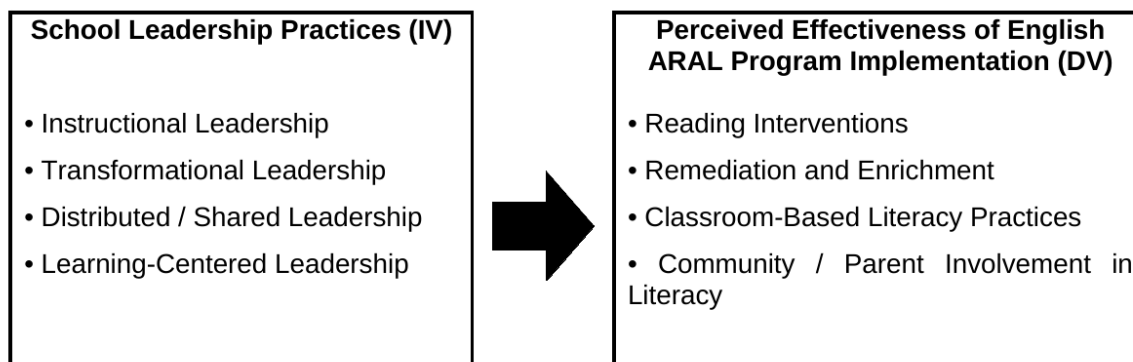


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to determine the extent of school leadership practices and the perceived effectiveness of the English ARAL Program as they occurred in the participating schools. The correlational component was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two principal variables. No variable was manipulated, and the study did not claim causality.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the South Cluster of Schools under the Schools Division Office of Santiago City. The cluster comprised Baluarte Elementary School, Calaoacan Elementary School, Rosario Elementary School, Balintocatoc Integrated School, Bannawag Integrated School, Luna Elementary School, San Jose Integrated School, Sta. Rosa Elementary School, and Santiago South Central School. These schools implemented English literacy and ARAL-related activities within varied school contexts, making the cluster appropriate for a comparative, cluster-wide assessment.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were elementary teachers, particularly English teachers and ARAL program implementers directly involved in the delivery of the English ARAL Program. From a population of 121 teachers, 92 respondents were selected through proportionate random sampling. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Proportional allocation ensured representation from all nine schools.

Table 1. *Distribution of Teacher-Respondents by School*

School	Population (N)	Sample (n)
Baluarte Elementary School	20	15
Calaoacan Elementary School	10	8
Rosario Elementary School	17	13
Balintocatoc Integrated School	13	10
Bannawag Integrated School	8	6
Luna Elementary School	6	5
San Jose Integrated School	14	11
Sta. Rosa Elementary School	6	5
Santiago South Central School	27	19
Total	121	92

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire adapted from instruments associated with Avolio and Bass (2015) and Donegan et al. (2025). The first section measured instructional, transformational, distributed/shared, and learning-centered leadership. The second section measured the perceived effectiveness of reading interventions, remediation and enrichment, classroom-based literacy practices, and community/parent involvement. Responses were recorded using a four-point Likert scale. For leadership practices, 3.25-4.00 represented the strongest level of practice; for program effectiveness, the same range represented very effective implementation.

Three education experts reviewed the adapted instrument for content alignment, clarity, and relevance. A pilot test involving 15 teachers outside the study locale was conducted, and Cronbach's alpha values for the instrument dimensions exceeded the acceptable threshold of .70, indicating adequate internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Office and the heads of the participating schools. The researcher oriented the teacher-respondents regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the procedures for completing the questionnaire. Instruments were distributed directly, with an online survey used as an alternative for respondents who were unavailable for face-to-face administration. Completed responses were collected, checked, tabulated, and encoded for analysis.

Data Analysis

Mean scores were computed to describe school leadership practices and the perceived effectiveness of the English ARAL Program. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the overall leadership-practice scores and overall perceived program-effectiveness scores. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

Ethical Consideration

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to decline or withdraw without penalty. No personally identifying information was reported, and results were presented only in aggregate form. Data were coded, securely stored, and used solely for research purposes. The study observed the ethical requirements and administrative guidelines of the Department of Education and the Schools Division Office of Santiago City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

School Leadership Practices

The respondents assessed school leadership practices at a consistently strong level across all four dimensions. As shown in Table 2, the grand mean was 3.87. Learning-centered leadership received the highest summary mean of 3.88, followed by transformational leadership at 3.87. Instructional and distributed/shared leadership both obtained means of 3.86. The close distribution of scores indicates a balanced leadership profile in which teaching quality, motivation, participation, and learner-centered decision-making were all strongly evident.

Table 2. *Summary of School Leadership Practices*

Leadership Dimension	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Learning-Centered Leadership	3.88	Strongly Agree	1
Transformational Leadership	3.87	Strongly Agree	2
Instructional Leadership	3.86	Strongly Agree	3
Distributed/Shared Leadership	3.86	Strongly Agree	3
Grand Mean	3.87	Strongly Agree	

The detailed indicators show that leaders were especially strong in providing professional-development opportunities ($M = 3.90$), giving constructive feedback and encouraging varied teaching strategies (both $M = 3.89$), challenging teachers to improve professionally ($M = 3.92$), supporting teamwork for instructional outcomes ($M = 3.91$), and creating shared accountability for student success ($M = 3.89$). These practices reflect active leadership that develops teacher capability rather than limiting leadership to administrative compliance.

Some indicators, although still strongly rated, point to practical areas that can be strengthened. The provision of adequate instructional resources received a lower mean within instructional leadership ($M = 3.77$), while resource support for addressing learning gaps received $M = 3.83$. Teachers' participation in decision-making and empowerment to lead initiatives each received $M = 3.83$. The results suggest that the cluster has a strong leadership foundation, but resource availability and wider teacher participation may not be equally experienced across all schools.

These findings are consistent with studies linking instructional leadership with teacher self-efficacy and program implementation (Battad, 2024; Ciocon, 2022). They also support evidence that transformational leadership can build teacher motivation, professional confidence, and school-improvement commitment (Blancia, 2021; Dacpano, 2022). The balanced profile further reflects the value of adaptive and shared leadership practices that promote collaboration and collective responsibility (Harris et al., 2022; Rance et al., 2025).

Perceived Effectiveness of the English ARAL Program

The English ARAL Program was perceived as very effective, with a grand mean of 3.80. Reading interventions ranked first with a summary mean of 3.84, followed by remediation and enrichment at 3.83, classroom-based literacy practices at 3.79, and community/parent involvement at 3.74. All dimensions remained within the very effective range, indicating that the program was implemented positively across the participating schools while showing differences in the relative strength of its components.

Table 3. *Summary of the Perceived Effectiveness of the English ARAL Program*

Program Dimension	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Reading Interventions	3.84	Very Effective	1
Remediation and Enrichment	3.83	Very Effective	2
Classroom-Based Literacy Practices	3.79	Very Effective	3
Community/Parent Involvement	3.74	Very Effective	4
Grand Mean	3.80	Very Effective	

Within the detailed program indicators, reading instruction that addressed comprehension and decoding received a high rating ($M = 3.85$), and regular monitoring and progress-tracking tools were also strongly assessed. Enrichment activities that challenged advanced learners received $M = 3.90$, while teacher collaboration in remediation and enrichment received $M = 3.86$. Classroom practices involving technology and the development of independent learning and critical thinking each received $M = 3.88$. These results show that teachers perceived ARAL as extending beyond basic remediation to include monitoring, differentiated support, enrichment, and literacy integration.

The comparatively lower ratings concerned resources and stakeholder participation. Adequacy of materials for reading interventions received $M = 3.71$, and sufficient resources for remediation and enrichment received $M = 3.78$. Parent participation in school literacy events received the lowest detailed mean of 3.64, while parent workshops or guidance received $M = 3.67$. Although these ratings were still interpreted positively, they show that the program's school-based instructional components were stronger than its home-community support mechanisms.

The strong assessment of reading interventions supports evidence that targeted, systematic, and monitored instruction is necessary for learners experiencing literacy difficulties (Vaughn et al., 2022; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The positive ratings for remediation, enrichment, and classroom literacy also reflect the importance of differentiation and formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017). The lower relative rating for

community/parent involvement is consistent with research showing that home-school partnerships can improve literacy outcomes but require clear structures, guidance, and sustained communication (Castro et al., 2015; Hernandez & Decena, 2024).

Relationship Between Leadership Practices and Program Effectiveness

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between school leadership practices and the perceived effectiveness of the English ARAL Program, $r = 0.409$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The positive coefficient indicates that higher leadership-practice ratings tended to occur with higher perceived program-effectiveness ratings.

Table 4. *Relationship Between School Leadership Practices and Perceived English ARAL Program Effectiveness*

Variables	N	r	p	Interpretation	Decision
School Leadership Practices and Perceived English ARAL Program Effectiveness	92	0.409	< .001	Moderate Positive	Significant

The result suggests that leadership contributes to program effectiveness by establishing instructional priorities, supporting teacher learning, facilitating collaboration, aligning resources, monitoring implementation, and sustaining accountability. It does not indicate that leadership alone determines program outcomes. The correlation explains association rather than causation, and literacy-program effectiveness may also be influenced by learner characteristics, teacher expertise, attendance, family support, available materials, and local school conditions.

The finding is consistent with Instructional Leadership Theory, which proposes that leaders influence learning through the organizational and instructional conditions they create (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). It also corresponds with evidence that leadership effects are often indirect and mediated through school climate, professional capacity, and instructional improvement (Hallinger, 2018). The moderate magnitude of the relationship supports the study's conclusion that leadership is an important contributor to English ARAL implementation while leaving room for other significant influences.

CONCLUSION

School leadership practices in the South Cluster of Schools were strongly implemented across instructional, transformational, distributed/shared, and learning-centered dimensions. Learning-centered leadership received the highest overall summary rating, indicating that school decisions, professional learning, monitoring, and improvement practices were generally oriented toward learner needs. The English ARAL Program was perceived as very effective across reading interventions, remediation and enrichment, classroom-based literacy practices, and community/parent involvement. Its strongest components were school-based reading support and targeted academic activities, while stakeholder participation and some resource-related indicators remained comparatively less developed.

The moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between leadership practices and perceived program effectiveness demonstrates that stronger leadership is associated with more effective English ARAL implementation. The study contributes cluster-level evidence that literacy-recovery programs benefit from clear instructional direction, teacher development, shared accountability, monitoring, collaboration, and resource support. At the same time, the moderate correlation confirms that leadership should be strengthened alongside instructional quality, learner participation, family engagement, and contextual support rather than treated as the sole determinant of program success.

Recommendation

School administrators and cluster leaders should sustain learning-centered and instructional leadership by maintaining regular supervision, constructive feedback, data-informed planning, and professional development focused on reading intervention, remediation, differentiation, and progress monitoring. Resource gaps identified in the detailed indicators should be addressed through cluster-level sharing of materials, coordinated procurement, learning-resource development, and systematic review of school needs. Distributed leadership may be strengthened by giving teachers meaningful roles in planning, monitoring, mentoring, and evaluating English ARAL activities.

Teachers should continue integrating literacy practices across subjects, using assessment evidence to group learners and adjust support, and balancing remediation with enrichment. Schools should intensify parent and community engagement through clear progress communication, practical home-reading guidance, parent workshops, literacy events, and partnerships with libraries, local organizations, and volunteers. These strategies should be accessible to families with varied schedules and resources.

Future studies may include learner-level reading data, implementation fidelity measures, qualitative accounts from school heads, parents, and learners, and additional variables such as attendance, teacher workload, instructional resources, motivation, socioeconomic conditions, and digital access. Longitudinal and comparative designs may clarify how leadership and implementation practices influence literacy outcomes over time and across school contexts.

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