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A Grounded Theory of Adaptive Literacy Development Through Mediated and Self-Regulated Learning Processes in the ARAL Program

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ABSTRACT

Remedial reading remains a critical challenge in Philippine basic education, exacerbated by post-pandemic learning losses. Despite the institutionalization of the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program, Junior High School learners continue to struggle with comprehension and fluency, necessitating more responsive, holistic approaches. This study employed a grounded theory design to examine the interaction between instructional practices, learner barriers, and adaptive strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. The findings demonstrate that learners' progress in reading acquisition depends on many interrelated factors, including instructional, cognitive, affective, and social factors. The guided instruction and collaborative approach make the learners more engaged despite the negative attitude towards reading. However, there are still some difficulties, like cognitive overload and poor retention of the material. The study proposes the Theory of Adaptive Literacy Development through Mediated and Self-Regulated Learning Processes in the Aral Program, asserting the movement from scaffolded reliance to strategic independence. This demonstrates the importance of including instructional scaffolding, emotional influences, and self-regulation into the process of enhancing reading skills. These results offer a theoretical foundation for more adaptive remedial literacy interventions in the Philippine context.

Keywords: *Remedial Reading, ARAL Program, Grounded Theory, Instructional Scaffolding, Self-Regulated Learning, Reading Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading proficiency is fundamental to learners' academic participation, knowledge acquisition, and educational opportunities. However, persistent literacy deficiencies, intensified by instructional disruptions and educational inequalities, remain a significant concern. The World Bank (2024) emphasizes the need to address foundational learning gaps through targeted interventions and sustained instructional support. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 12028, or the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act of 2024, institutionalized a national framework providing additional academic assistance to learners struggling with essential competencies, particularly reading, mathematics, and science (Republic of the Philippines, 2024). Despite the availability of structured remedial programs, additional instructional opportunities do not automatically ensure literacy development. Struggling readers often experience difficulties in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading strategy application. These challenges may be compounded by inadequate instructional support, limited practice, low confidence, and unfavorable learning environments. Recent studies demonstrate the effectiveness of structured and multicomponent reading interventions in improving adolescent learners' reading comprehension and academic performance (Sohn et al., 2023; Opatz & Kocherhans, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of addressing the interconnected dimensions of reading development through comprehensive instructional approaches. Literacy development also involves affective, motivational, and self-regulatory processes. Reading difficulties may result in anxiety, embarrassment, and frustration, affecting learners' confidence and willingness to participate. Murnan et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of understanding the motivational experiences of struggling adolescent readers, while van der Sande et al. (2023) established that reading motivation interventions can improve learners' motivational outcomes. Moreover, Xue and Xiao (2024) found that self-regulated learning interventions positively influence reading performance, particularly through metacognitive monitoring and strategic learning. These findings suggest that effective reading interventions must integrate instructional guidance, emotional support, motivation, and the gradual development of learner independence. Although existing research has examined reading intervention effectiveness and literacy outcomes, limited attention has been given to how learners personally experience remedial reading, negotiate difficulties, access support, and develop adaptive learning strategies. In particular, the interaction of instructional mediation, peer collaboration, affective experiences, cognitive challenges, environmental conditions, and self-regulatory behaviors warrants further qualitative investigation. Understanding these processes is essential to developing interventions responsive to learners' actual experiences and learning needs. In response to this gap, the present study explored the remedial reading experiences of Junior High School learners participating in the ARAL Program at Toledo National Vocational School (TNVS), Toledo City, Cebu, during School Year 2025–2026. Using Straussian grounded theory, the study examined learners' instructional experiences, reading difficulties, emotional responses, coping strategies, and sources of support through open, axial, and selective coding. Ultimately, the study developed the substantive theory of Adaptive Literacy Development through Mediated and Self-Regulated Learning Processes in the ARAL Program. The theory explains literacy development as a dynamic and recursive process shaped by instructional guidance, social interaction, affective conditions, cognitive and contextual challenges, strategic learning, and external support. It illustrates how struggling readers gradually develop confidence, adaptive reading strategies, and learner autonomy through the interaction of mediated instruction and self-regulated learning.

Research Problem

Reading difficulties among Filipino learners remain a persistent educational concern, particularly among students whose foundational literacy development has been affected by prolonged educational disruptions and accumulated learning deficiencies. The enactment of Republic Act No. 12028 established the ARAL Program as a national mechanism for providing targeted academic interventions to learners who require additional assistance in developing essential competencies (Republic of the Philippines, 2024). Nevertheless, the implementation of remedial interventions raises important questions concerning how learners experience instructional support, respond to reading difficulties, and develop strategies that enable them to participate more independently in literacy activities. Although recent studies have established the potential benefits of targeted reading interventions for adolescents with reading difficulties (Opatz & Kocherhans, 2024; Sohn et al., 2023), the processes through which learners adapt to remedial instruction require further examination. Reading development is influenced not only by instructional exposure but also by learners' cognitive capacities, emotional responses, motivational conditions, social relationships, and opportunities for continued practice. Consequently, examining reading intervention solely in terms of instructional activities or academic outcomes may provide an incomplete understanding of the mechanisms underlying learners' adaptation. At Toledo National Vocational School, learners in Grades 7–10 identified as struggling readers through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory participated in the ARAL Remedial Reading Program. Their participation provided an opportunity to investigate how learners experienced structured reading instruction, interacted with teachers and classmates, encountered cognitive and environmental difficulties, and employed strategies to address their reading challenges. However, a contextually grounded explanation was needed to establish how these experiences were interconnected and how they contributed to learners' developing literacy capabilities. Accordingly, this study addressed the need to generate a substantive grounded theory explaining the adaptive literacy development of Junior High School learners participating in the ARAL Program. It examined the experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and support mechanisms reflected in learners' narratives and investigated how these factors interacted throughout their remedial reading experiences.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was grounded in an interpretive qualitative perspective and employed the Straussian grounded theory approach to explore how learners constructed meaning from their experiences in the ARAL Remedial Reading Program. It assumed that literacy development is a dynamic and varied process shaped by learners' prior experiences, instructional support, emotional responses, social interactions, and learning environments (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Pretorius, 2024). Ontologically, the study recognized that learners may interpret their reading experiences differently. Epistemologically, it viewed knowledge as emerging through the interaction between the researcher and participants during interviews and focus group discussions. Axiologically, it acknowledged the researcher's potential influence on data collection and interpretation; therefore, reflexivity, transparency, and sensitivity were considered essential throughout the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Pretorius, 2024). Methodologically, the study assumed that adaptive literacy development could be understood by examining the conditions, actions, interactions, strategies, and outcomes reflected in learners' accounts. These assumptions guided the analysis while allowing categories and theoretical relationships to emerge through systematic coding and comparison of the data rather than imposing predetermined explanations (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Pretorius, 2024).

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to explore the remedial reading experiences of Junior High School learners participating in the ARAL Program at Toledo National Vocational School during School Year 2025–2026 and to generate a substantive grounded theory explaining their adaptive literacy development. Specifically, it examined learners' experiences, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed, the process through which they adapted over time, and the relationships among these experiences and processes.

Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

The study was anchored by instructional scaffolding, social learning, self-regulated learning, and cognitive learning perspectives as sensitizing concepts for understanding how Junior High School learners adapted to the ARAL Remedial Reading Program. Constructivism explains learning as an active process in which learners develop and modify their understanding through experiences and the integration of prior knowledge (Piaget, 1970). The perspective of instructional scaffolding highlights the importance of structured guidance, modeling, and support in helping learners develop competencies that they may eventually perform independently (Bruner, 1966). Social and behavioral perspectives further emphasize the influence of interactions, encouragement, and learning experiences on learners' participation, confidence, and responses to academic challenges (Bandura, 1997). Self-regulated learning provides a conceptual lens for understanding how learners plan, monitor, and regulate their reading behaviors through strategies such as rereading, seeking assistance, and using context clues. Recent research highlights the positive contribution of self-regulatory and metacognitive strategies, particularly planning, monitoring, and evaluating, to reading performance (Xue & Xiao, 2024; Dignath et al., 2023). Cognitive learning perspectives further explain how difficulties in decoding, comprehension, and the management of cognitive demands may hinder literacy development (Peng et al., 2024). These perspectives served as sensitizing concepts rather than predetermined theoretical frameworks to be tested. Consistent with the Straussian grounded theory approach, the study allowed the participants' experiences and the systematic analysis of qualitative data to guide the emergence of the substantive theory through open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through this process, the study identified interconnected instructional, social, affective, cognitive, contextual, strategic, and external support factors that shaped adaptive literacy development among learners participating in the ARAL Program. The study primarily supports **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4: Quality Education)** by contributing to inclusive and equitable quality education through the improvement of literacy skills and the provision of learning support for struggling readers. Its focus on adaptive literacy development highlights the importance of accessible, responsive, and sustained remedial instruction in addressing learners' reading difficulties and supporting their continued educational participation. The study also relates to **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)** through its recognition of the affective and motivational dimensions of literacy learning, particularly learners' confidence, motivation, emotional responses, and resilience when facing reading difficulties. Furthermore, it contributes to **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** by emphasizing the need to provide appropriate instructional assistance and learning opportunities to students experiencing difficulties in literacy acquisition. In the Philippine context, these contributions are consistent with the objectives of Republic Act No. 12028, or the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act, which institutionalizes academic intervention and learning recovery for learners who need additional educational support. Overall, the study advances inclusive and sustainable literacy development by presenting a grounded theoretical explanation of how instructional mediation, collaborative learning, affective-motivational

processes, strategic learning, and external support interact in facilitating learners' movement toward improved reading competence, independence, and resilience.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative Straussian grounded theory design. This approach was selected because the inquiry focused on a process—how learners experienced remedial reading, encountered challenges, adopted coping strategies, and developed greater independence. The analysis followed the procedures associated with Strauss and Corbin: open coding to identify concepts, axial coding to establish relationships among categories, and selective coding to integrate categories around a core phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Constant comparison, analytical memo writing, and theoretical sampling were employed iteratively to refine emerging categories, examine relationships among concepts, and support the development of a substantive grounded theory (Abela et al., 2022; Themelis, 2022).

Research Locale or Study Setting

The study was conducted at Toledo National Vocational School (TNVS), a public secondary educational institution in Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines, offering Junior High School and Senior High School programs, including the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track. The institution serves learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and has experienced educational interruptions associated with natural disasters, school suspensions, changes in learning modalities, and challenges during modular instruction. The school was selected because its disaster-related experiences provided a relevant setting for examining how learners regained confidence following prolonged interruptions to their education. The participants' varied academic and personal circumstances enabled the investigation of different recovery experiences and support conditions. Interviews were conducted in quiet, private, and participant-appropriate locations within the school to facilitate comfortable and confidential discussions.

Participants or Data Sources

The study involved 40 Junior High School learners enrolled in the ARAL Remedial Reading Program at Toledo National Vocational School (TNVS), Toledo City, Cebu, during School Year 2025–2026. The participants were selected from a population of 169 Grade 7–10 learners identified as struggling readers based on the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Their inclusion was based on their reading difficulties and active participation in the program, making them appropriate sources of information about remedial reading experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. Data were gathered through in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) using a semi-structured interview guide validated by education experts from Cebu Technological University–Argao Campus. These methods elicited detailed accounts of learners' reading difficulties, coping strategies, instructional experiences, and perceived progress. The data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding, supported by constant comparison and analytical memo writing to identify patterns, develop categories, and establish relationships among emerging concepts. The study observed ethical safeguards, including voluntary participation, informed parental or guardian consent when required, learner assent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without academic consequences. Data collection and analysis followed an iterative process guided by theoretical saturation. Saturation was considered achieved when additional data no longer contributed substantial new properties, dimensions, or relationships to the emerging categories. In grounded theory, this process involves continuous data collection, coding, comparison, and refinement of categories

until their conceptual properties and relationships are sufficiently developed (Wutich et al., 2024).

Research Instruments or Materials

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide that was reviewed and validated by education experts at Cebu Technological University–Argao Campus. The guide elicited learners' accounts of their remedial reading experiences, challenges, coping strategies, sources of support, and perceived changes over time. Focus group discussion questions complemented the individual interviews by eliciting shared experiences and perspectives. Three experts validated the instrument based on content relevance, age appropriateness, language clarity, and cultural suitability (Edgar et al., 2024; Eli et al., 2022). Their recommendations guided revisions to improve clarity and contextual relevance. The guide remained flexible to accommodate emerging categories during data collection (Kalender et al., 2023). Clarification, example-based, and comparative probing techniques were used to obtain detailed responses (Bhalla et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted in English and Cebuano according to participants' preferences to ensure authentic expression and cultural sensitivity (Kalender et al., 2023).

Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering followed an iterative grounded theory process in which data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently. This approach enabled emerging findings to guide follow-up questions and further exploration of developing categories (Wutich et al., 2024). After obtaining approval from the school principal, the researcher coordinated with school personnel to identify eligible participants. Before the interviews, the researcher refined the semi-structured interview guide based on the validators' recommendations and secured the necessary permissions and ethical clearances. The selected learners were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature. Parental or guardian consent was obtained for participants below 18 years of age, together with learner assent, while informed consent was secured from participants aged 18 and above. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were then conducted using the validated interview guide. Follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and explore emerging concepts. Data collection and analysis continued until the categories were sufficiently developed and additional data no longer contributed meaningful insights to their properties and relationships (Wutich et al., 2024). The interview protocol was developed from relevant literature and refined through expert validation to ensure that the questions were relevant, clear, and appropriate to the research context. Interviews were conducted in English or Cebuano, depending on the participants' preference. Cebuano responses were transcribed and translated into English while retaining their intended meanings. Transcripts, field notes, and analytical memos were maintained to support systematic analysis and document the development of categories and methodological decisions (Sosa-Díaz & Valverde-Berrocoso, 2022; Cena et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Straussian grounded theory approach, with data collection and analysis conducted concurrently and iteratively. Open coding was used to identify significant experiences and perceptions in learners' accounts and organize them into initial concepts and categories. Axial coding examined relationships among conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences, while selective coding integrated the major categories into a substantive theory of adaptive literacy development. Constant comparison and analytical memo writing supported the refinement of codes, categories, and theoretical relationships throughout the process (Bingham, 2023). The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported by comparing participants' accounts across individual interviews and focus group discussions. Transferability was facilitated through detailed descriptions of the participants and research setting. Dependability was strengthened by documenting the research procedures, coding processes, and analytical decisions through an audit trail. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in participants' actual accounts and maintaining reflexive documentation of the researcher's assumptions and decisions (Ahmed, 2024; Bingham, 2023). Collectively, these procedures strengthened the transparency and rigor of the analysis and ensured that the emerging theory remained grounded in learners' experiences

Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, fairness, cultural sensitivity, and protection of participants' well-being (Gomersall & Floyd, 2022; Uicheng & Chobphon, 2024). Parental consent and learner assent were secured for minors, while adult participants provided their own informed consent (Ederio et al., 2023; Rai & Mantaring, 2024). Participants were informed of the study's objectives and their right to decline questions or withdraw at any time without academic repercussions. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms, anonymized records, and password-protected files accessible only to the researcher (Desmet et al., 2023; Eli et al., 2022). Interviews were conducted in private and comfortable settings, allowing participants to take breaks or discontinue whenever necessary. Fair participant selection, respectful communication, and the appropriate use of Cebuano promoted cultural and linguistic sensitivity (Kalender et al., 2023). Furthermore, researcher reflexivity was practiced throughout the study to safeguard participants' dignity, autonomy, privacy, and welfare (Uicheng & Chobphon, 2024).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Instructional Mediation and Collaborative Learning as Enabling Conditions

The findings revealed that structured instructional support served as a fundamental condition for learners' participation in the ARAL Remedial Reading Program. Participants described reading sessions that involved phonics exercises, warm-up activities, vocabulary development, guided reading, oral reading, and comprehension questions. These activities provided learners with opportunities to develop foundational reading skills through organized instruction and teacher guidance. One participant explained, *"My teacher helps me explain hard words before reading"* (Participant 5). Another described the sequence of instructional activities: *"We have warm-up activities, reading, then comprehension activities"* (Participant 3). These accounts illustrate how teacher assistance and structured learning activities helped learners approach reading tasks systematically, particularly when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary and comprehension difficulties. Instructional mediation provided learners with guidance to engage in tasks that they might otherwise have found difficult to accomplish independently. Through explanation, modelling, guided practice, and feedback, teachers established a supportive instructional environment in which learners could gradually develop their reading abilities. This finding is consistent with evidence that structured reading interventions can improve reading comprehension among adolescents experiencing reading difficulties (Sohn et al., 2023). The findings therefore emphasize the importance of systematic and responsive teacher guidance in addressing learners' varying literacy needs.

3.2 Collaborative Learning as a Social Mechanism

Beyond direct teacher assistance, the findings identified collaborative learning as an important social mechanism that supported learners' engagement in remedial reading activities. Participants described opportunities to discuss reading materials, share answers, and interact with teachers and classmates during instructional sessions. Participant 8 stated, *"We start with phonics, we read the story, and then discuss answers,"* while Participant 10 shared, *"We talk about the texts with our teacher and peers."* These responses suggest that reading instruction provided opportunities for learners to participate in shared activities and develop understanding through interaction with others. Collaborative engagement complemented teacher-led instruction by allowing learners to exchange ideas, clarify meanings, and participate in discussions about reading materials. Such interactions may also have helped learners become more comfortable expressing their thoughts and responding to reading tasks. Recent research on peer tutoring has demonstrated the potential of structured peer interaction to support reading comprehension through shared learning and reciprocal participation (Flores et al., 2024). Similarly, research on paired reading highlights the importance of purposeful peer engagement in supporting students' reading experiences (Roberts et al., 2023). Thus, the findings indicate that literacy development involved not only individual practice but also social participation and shared learning experiences.

3.3 Affective–Motivational Processes as Mediating Conditions

The participants' accounts revealed that emotional and motivational experiences influenced their willingness to participate in remedial reading activities. Some learners experienced nervousness, embarrassment, and hesitation, particularly when asked to read aloud or when they made pronunciation errors in front of their classmates. Participant 6 expressed*, "I felt nervous reading aloud,"* while Participant 7 stated, *"I was embarrassed making mistakes."* These responses indicate that reading difficulties involved not only challenges in acquiring literacy skills but also emotional experiences that could influence classroom participation. Fear of making mistakes and being judged by others may have contributed to learners' reluctance to participate in oral reading activities. Recent research involving students with reading difficulties found that reading anxiety was associated with poorer reading fluency and comprehension outcomes, although the relationship varied according to the severity of reading difficulties (Fishstrom et al., 2024). Research examining adolescents' perspectives also identified reading-related emotions, school experiences, and social factors as important considerations in reading engagement (2023 study on adolescents' perspectives on barriers to reading for pleasure). These findings support the interpretation that affective experiences are closely connected to learners' engagement in reading. Consequently, supportive classroom interactions and non-threatening opportunities for practice are important in helping learners develop confidence and willingness to participate.

3.4 Cognitive Learning Challenges as Developmental Constraints

The findings further revealed that learners encountered cognitive challenges that affected their ability to perform reading tasks. This included difficulty decoding unfamiliar words, understanding lengthy passages, retaining information, and maintaining concentration while reading. Such challenges influenced the extent to which learners could independently process and comprehend written texts. Participant 1 reported, *"I struggle to decode words, especially long words,"* while Participant 3 stated, *"I find it hard to comprehend what I am reading."* These

responses demonstrate that learners' difficulties extended beyond word recognition to include the construction of meaning from written materials. The accounts also suggest that cognitive challenges and affective experiences were interconnected. Repeated difficulty in decoding words and understanding passages could contribute to frustration and discouragement, while anxiety and embarrassment could further limit learners' participation in reading activities. Recent research has emphasized the importance of targeted reading comprehension strategies for learners experiencing reading difficulties. A meta-analysis by Peng et al. (2024), involving 52 studies, found that strategy instruction addressing skills such as identifying main ideas, understanding text structures, retelling, and self-monitoring can support reading comprehension when appropriately combined with background knowledge instruction. Similarly, Sohn et al. (2023) established the effectiveness of reading interventions for adolescents with reading difficulties. These findings reinforce the need for remedial instruction that addresses both foundational reading skills and comprehension-related challenges.

3.5 Contextual Constraints as Environmental Moderators

The findings indicated that environmental and instructional conditions influenced learners' opportunities to participate effectively in remedial reading activities. Participants identified classroom noise and limited instructional time as contextual constraints that affected their concentration and completion of reading tasks. Participant 9 explained, *"It is difficult to concentrate in a noisy classroom,"* while Participant 2 stated, *"We do not have sufficient time for all the activities."* These accounts demonstrate that learners' reading experiences were shaped not only by their individual capabilities and instructional approaches but also by the conditions in which remedial instruction occurred. Environmental distractions and time limitations may restrict opportunities for sustained practice and meaningful engagement. Even when instructional activities are appropriately designed, their implementation may be affected by available instructional time and the conduciveness of the learning environment. Research on adolescents' reading experiences has similarly identified time limitations, school-related experiences, and social conditions as factors that may influence reading engagement (2023 study on adolescents' perspectives on barriers to reading for pleasure). Contextual conditions therefore function as environmental moderators that may either facilitate or constrain learners' participation. This highlights the importance of appropriate classroom organization, sufficient instructional time, and a supportive learning environment when implementing remedial reading interventions.

3.6 Strategic Learning as an Adaptive Response Mechanism

Another significant finding concerned the development of strategic learning behaviours among participants. Learners described using different approaches to address reading difficulties, including rereading passages, using context clues, decoding unfamiliar words, adjusting their reading pace, and seeking assistance from teachers. Participant 1 explained, *"I often reread the text to make sure that I understand everything."* Participant 3 stated, *"When I encounter unknown words, I use context clues to figure them out,"* while Participant 5 shared, *"When something is unclear to me, I ask the teacher for clarification."* These responses indicate that learners were beginning to employ strategies to manage difficulties encountered during reading. Rereading, contextual analysis, and help-seeking demonstrate attempts to monitor understanding and respond to unfamiliar or challenging material. Rather than relying exclusively on direct teacher assistance, learners gradually developed ways of addressing reading difficulties through their

own actions. This pattern is supported by Xue and Xiao (2024), whose meta-analysis of 22 studies involving 2,735 learners found that self-regulated learning interventions had a moderate positive effect on reading performance, particularly when learners were taught to monitor, plan, and evaluate their learning. Peng et al. (2024) likewise identified self-monitoring as an important component of reading comprehension strategy instruction. The findings suggest that strategic learning served as an adaptive response mechanism through which learners managed reading challenges and gradually assumed greater responsibility for their learning.

3.7 Extended Support as a Reinforcement System

The findings also highlighted the importance of support beyond formal remedial reading sessions. Participants identified family assistance and home-based reading practice as additional opportunities to reinforce the skills developed during school-based instruction. Participant 10 shared, *"My parents teach me how to read at home,"* while Participant 4 explained, *"I practice reading at home with my family members."* These accounts indicate that family members provided additional assistance and opportunities for learners to practice reading outside the classroom. Such support may strengthen the continuity of learning by allowing learners to revisit reading activities, receive guidance, and apply strategies in a familiar environment. The findings therefore suggest that literacy development does not occur exclusively during scheduled remedial sessions; rather, it may be reinforced through continued engagement and assistance from individuals within the learner's home environment. This interpretation is consistent with Petersen-Brown et al. (2024), whose review and meta-analysis examined the contribution of caregiver-implemented literacy interventions to children's literacy achievement. The findings also highlight the importance of coordinated support among teachers, peers, and family members. In this regard, extended support functions as a reinforcement system that complements formal instruction and provides learners with additional opportunities to sustain their engagement with reading.

3.8 Learner Transformation as a Developmental Outcome

The final theme concerned the changes learners described in their reading experiences, particularly in comprehension, confidence, participation, and independent use of reading strategies. Participants' accounts suggested that engagement in remedial reading activities was associated with perceived improvements in their ability to understand texts and respond to reading tasks. Participant 4 stated, *"I started to understand stories better,"* while Participant 6 shared, *"I became more confident reading in class."* Participant 7 further explained, *"I can now use strategies independently."* These responses indicate perceived changes that extended beyond the performance of individual reading activities. They reflect developments in learners' understanding, confidence, and capacity to apply strategies when encountering reading difficulties. The findings suggest that learner transformation involved a gradual movement from dependence on instructional assistance towards greater confidence and strategic independence. Evidence from recent reading intervention research supports the value of structured instruction and self-regulated learning strategies in strengthening reading comprehension and learner engagement (Sohn et al., 2023; Xue & Xiao, 2024). However, because the present study relied on participants' narratives, these changes should be interpreted as learners' perceived developmental experiences rather than objectively measured improvements in reading proficiency. This development should also not be understood as uniform or strictly linear. Learners may continue to experience difficulties even as they become more capable of

identifying challenges, applying appropriate strategies, and seeking assistance when necessary. Thus, learner transformation represents a developmental outcome arising from the interaction of instructional mediation, collaborative engagement, affective and cognitive experiences, contextual conditions, strategic responses, and extended support.

3.9 Integration of the Eight Themes and Development of the Core Category

Selective coding integrated the eight themes into the core category, Adaptive Literacy Development through Mediated and Self-Regulated Learning Processes in the ARAL Program. This core category explains how learners' experiences of remedial reading instruction were shaped by the continuing interaction of instructional, social, affective, cognitive, contextual, and strategic factors. The eight themes form an interconnected explanatory structure. Instructional Mediation as an Enabling Structure provides the guidance and organization necessary for learners to engage in reading activities, while Collaborative Learning as a Social Mechanism creates opportunities for shared understanding and interaction. Affective–Motivational Processes as Mediating Conditions and Cognitive Learning Challenges as Developmental Constraints explain the emotional and learning-related difficulties that may influence participation. Contextual Constraints as Environmental Moderators further demonstrate how classroom conditions and instructional time can affect opportunities for learning. In responding to these conditions, learners employ Strategic Learning as an Adaptive Response Mechanism, drawing on strategies such as rereading, using context clues, and seeking clarification. Extended Support as a Reinforcement System provides additional opportunities to practice and strengthen reading skills beyond formal instructional sessions. Through the interaction of these processes, learners may experience Learner Transformation as a Developmental Outcome, reflected in improved understanding, increased confidence, and greater independence in applying reading strategies. The central theoretical proposition is that struggling readers develop adaptive literacy not simply through the removal of reading difficulties, but through learning to respond to those difficulties with the assistance of structured instruction, social participation, strategic regulation, and sustained reinforcement. The movement from mediated reliance towards strategic independence represents the developmental direction reflected in the participants' accounts. The resulting theory conceptualizes adaptive literacy development as a recursive and context-dependent process rather than a fixed sequence of stages. Learners may move between periods of reliance on teacher guidance, independent strategy use, renewed difficulty, and further support as they encounter different reading demands. The theory is therefore substantive and context-bound, explaining the experiences of learners participating in the ARAL Program in the study setting rather than claiming to provide a universal explanation of literacy development.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that adaptive literacy development among learners in the ARAL Program is a dynamic, recursive, and multidimensional process. Learners' progress was shaped by the interaction of instructional, cognitive, affective, social, and contextual factors. Teacher guidance in phonics, guided reading, vocabulary, and comprehension provided an enabling foundation, while collaborative activities supported participation and shared meaning-making. At the same time, reading anxiety, embarrassment, decoding and comprehension difficulties, weak retention, limited attention, and environmental distractions continued to influence learning. Learners responded to these challenges through rereading, decoding, context-clue use, pacing, repeated practice, and help-seeking. Teacher, peer, and family support reinforced these efforts.

Over time, participants described greater confidence, motivation, comprehension, and willingness to read more independently. These interrelated processes informed the substantive theory of Adaptive Literacy Development through Mediated and Self-Regulated Learning Processes in the ARAL Program.

Teachers and reading instructors should sustain structured, scaffolded instruction that integrates phonics, guided reading, vocabulary development, and comprehension activities. They should explicitly teach strategic behaviors such as rereading, decoding, using context clues, and monitoring comprehension. Classrooms should also provide supportive opportunities for collaborative learning and participation without embarrassment. School administrators should allocate adequate time, materials, and personnel for remedial reading and reduce avoidable environmental distractions. Schools should strengthen home–school partnerships by encouraging manageable reading practice with family support. Policymakers may consider the theory's emphasis on cognitive, affective, social, and contextual dimensions when designing responsive literacy interventions. Future researchers may examine the theory in other schools and learner populations and use quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to further investigate its applicability and refine its propositions.

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