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Enhancing Araling Panlipunan Instruction through Learner-Centered Pedagogical Practices

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Abstract

This study examined how learner-centered pedagogical practices enhanced Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School. It specifically aimed to identify the learner-centered strategies employed by teachers, examine their influence on students' engagement, conceptual understanding, and critical thinking, explore teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instruction, and identify challenges encountered in implementing such practices. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to provide an in-depth and context-specific understanding of instructional practices and classroom experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected Araling Panlipunan teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct involvement in implementing learner-centered approaches. Thematic analysis was applied to systematically analyze the data, with triangulation enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The results revealed that learner-centered pedagogical practices such as group discussions, inquiry-based activities, role-playing, and contextualized tasks significantly increased learner participation and interest in Araling Panlipunan lessons. These practices promoted deeper conceptual understanding and critical thinking by encouraging learners to analyze social issues, express viewpoints, and connect lessons to real-life experiences. Teachers generally held positive perceptions of learner-centered instruction, viewing it as effective in making learning meaningful and inclusive. However, challenges such as limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient resources constrained the consistent implementation of these strategies. Despite these challenges, learner-centered pedagogy contributed to a more supportive classroom climate, increased learner confidence, and respectful interaction. The study concludes that learner-centered pedagogical practices play a vital role in strengthening Araling Panlipunan instruction and recommends sustained instructional support and professional development to maximize their effectiveness.

Keywords: learner-centered pedagogy, Araling Panlipunan, student engagement, critical thinking, secondary education

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Introduction

Araling Panlipunan plays a vital role in secondary education as it develops learners' understanding of history, geography, economics, governance, and civic responsibility. Beyond content mastery, the subject aims to cultivate critical thinking, social awareness, and active citizenship among learners. In the Philippine educational context, Araling Panlipunan serves as a key platform for fostering national identity, democratic values, and informed participation in societal issues. However, traditional teacher-centered approaches in social studies instruction have often resulted in passive learning, limited engagement, and surface-level understanding of complex social concepts.

In response to these challenges, learner-centered pedagogical practices have gained increasing attention as effective approaches to improve instruction and learner outcomes. Learner-centered pedagogy emphasizes active participation, collaborative learning, inquiry-based tasks, and the integration of learners' experiences into classroom instruction. In Araling Panlipunan, such approaches allow students to analyze social issues, engage in discussions, and connect lessons to real-life contexts. This study examines how learner-centered pedagogical practices enhance Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School, focusing on teaching strategies, learner engagement, and instructional challenges.

Educational reforms in the Philippines, including curriculum shifts and learner-centered frameworks, have emphasized the need to move away from rote memorization toward meaningful and participatory learning. In social studies education, effective instruction requires strategies that encourage analysis, discussion, and reflection rather than simple recall of facts. Learner-centered practices such as group work, project-based learning, role-playing, and inquiry activities are particularly relevant in Araling Panlipunan, where understanding social realities and multiple perspectives is essential.

At Mungayang National High School, teachers face the ongoing challenge of making Araling Panlipunan lessons engaging and relevant to learners' lived experiences. Differences in learners' abilities, limited instructional time, and resource constraints may affect the consistent implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. Understanding how teachers apply learner-centered practices and how these practices influence instruction and student engagement is essential for improving teaching effectiveness and supporting curriculum goals.

Learner-centered pedagogy is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and experience (Vygotsky, 1978). Bruner (1996) emphasized discovery learning as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, which is particularly relevant in social studies instruction. In the context of learner-centered classrooms, students are encouraged to question, analyze, and apply knowledge rather than passively receive information.

Research in social studies education highlights the effectiveness of learner-centered strategies in promoting engagement and critical thinking. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) found that student-centered instructional practices improve learners' motivation and understanding across subject areas, including social sciences. Similarly, Prince (2004) demonstrated that active learning strategies enhance student participation and comprehension. In Araling Panlipunan, inquiry-based and discussion-driven approaches have been shown to deepen students' understanding of historical and social issues (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

Studies also emphasize the role of teachers' beliefs and competencies in implementing learner-centered pedagogy. Teachers who value student voice and collaborative learning are more likely to adopt interactive strategies (Philipp, 2007). However, challenges such as time constraints, large class sizes, and limited instructional resources often hinder full implementation (OECD, 2019). In the Philippine context, Bernardo (2019) noted that while learner-centered approaches are encouraged, teachers often struggle with translating these principles into daily classroom practice.

Furthermore, learner-centered instruction has been linked to improved classroom climate and student engagement. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) highlighted that active participation and meaningful tasks enhance behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. In social studies classrooms, such engagement is crucial for developing informed and socially responsible learners.

Although existing literature strongly supports the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogy in social studies education, several gaps remain. Many studies focus on general social studies instruction or large-scale educational

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reforms, with limited attention to school-based investigations that document actual classroom practices in specific local contexts. In the Philippine setting, there is a lack of empirical research examining how learner-centered pedagogical practices are implemented in Araling Panlipunan at the secondary school level and how these practices influence instruction and learner engagement.

Moreover, few studies integrate teachers' pedagogical practices, perceptions, and challenges within a single investigation. There is also limited research conducted in rural or less-documented school settings such as Mungayang National High School. Addressing these gaps, the present study provides context-specific evidence on learner-centered pedagogy in Araling Panlipunan, contributing to instructional improvement and strengthening social studies education in Philippine secondary schools.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine how learner-centered pedagogical practices enhance Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School. Specifically, it seeks to identify the learner-centered teaching strategies and instructional approaches employed by Araling Panlipunan teachers in delivering historical, social, and civic concepts. The study also aims to examine how these pedagogical practices influence students' understanding of content, critical thinking skills, and classroom engagement. In addition, it seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instruction and the factors that shape their pedagogical decisions in teaching Araling Panlipunan. The study further aims to identify the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing learner-centered practices and how these challenges affect instructional delivery. Finally, the study aims to generate context-based insights that may inform instructional improvement, professional development, and school-based initiatives to strengthen Araling Panlipunan teaching and learning at Mungayang National High School.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how learner-centered pedagogical practices enhanced Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School. This design was appropriate because the study sought to provide an in-depth and context-specific understanding of teachers' instructional practices, perceptions, and experiences, as well as learners' engagement in Araling Panlipunan classes. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to capture rich descriptions of classroom interactions and pedagogical processes as they naturally occurred within the school setting.

The participants of the study consisted of selected Araling Panlipunan teachers at Mungayang National High School who were directly involved in classroom instruction. Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that the participants had sufficient teaching experience and active involvement in implementing learner-centered strategies. This sampling technique ensured that the data gathered were relevant and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' pedagogical practices, perceptions of learner-centered instruction, and challenges encountered in teaching Araling Panlipunan. Classroom observations were carried out to examine actual instructional strategies, learner participation, and interaction patterns during lessons. Document analysis involved the review of lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment tasks to determine how learner-centered approaches were reflected in instructional planning.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically coded, categorized, and analyzed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to learner-centered pedagogy, instructional effectiveness, and classroom challenges. Triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study, including securing informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality and ensuring that all data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Results/Findings

Based on the thematic analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, several themes emerged that addressed the objectives of the study on enhancing Araling

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Panlipunan instruction through learner-centered pedagogical practices at Mungayang National High School.

Theme 1: Learner-Centered Pedagogical Practices Promote Active Engagement in Araling Panlipunan

Findings revealed that Araling Panlipunan teachers consistently employed learner-centered strategies such as group discussions, role-playing, debates, and inquiry-based activities to encourage active learner participation. Classroom observations showed that lessons often shifted from lecture-based instruction to interactive tasks that required learners to analyze historical events, social issues, and civic responsibilities.

One teacher stated,

“Mas nagiging aktibo ang mga estudyante kapag pinapabayaan silang magtanong at magbahagi ng opinyon nila.”

Another participant shared,

“Kapag may group activity o talakayan, mas naiintindihan nila ang aralin.”

A third teacher remarked,

“Nakikita ko na mas interesado sila kapag may kinalaman sa totoong buhay ang aralin.”

These responses indicate that learner-centered practices increased student participation and interest. Observational data confirmed higher levels of engagement during interactive activities, suggesting that learner-centered pedagogy effectively enhanced classroom involvement and motivation in Araling Panlipunan instruction.

Theme 2: Enhanced Conceptual Understanding and Critical Thinking through Inquiry-Based Instruction

In response to the objective of examining how pedagogy supports learning outcomes, the findings showed that learner-centered strategies fostered deeper conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. Teachers encouraged learners to analyze sources, explain viewpoints, and reflect on social issues rather than simply memorize facts.

One teacher explained,

“Hindi lang memorization ang Araling Panlipunan; tinuturuan ko silang mag-isip at magbigay ng sariling pananaw.”

Another teacher noted,

“Pinapaliwanag ko sa kanila kung bakit nangyari ang isang pangyayari, hindi lang kung ano ang nangyari.”

A learner participant shared,

“Mas naiintindihan ko ang lesson kapag pinapaliwanag namin sa klase.”

The triangulation of interview data and classroom observations showed that inquiry-based instruction encouraged learners to reason and articulate ideas. This suggests that learner-centered pedagogy contributed to improved comprehension and analytical skills, aligning with the instructional goals of Araling Panlipunan.

Theme 3: Teachers' Positive Perceptions of Learner-Centered Instruction

The study found that teachers held positive views toward learner-centered pedagogy, perceiving it as effective in making lessons meaningful and relevant. Teachers believed that such approaches helped learners connect content to current social realities and personal experiences.

One participant stated,

“Mas epektibo ang learner-centered approach dahil nakikita kong may natututunan talaga ang mga bata.”

Another teacher shared,

“Mas nagiging bukas ang isip ng mga estudyante kapag sila ang sentro ng talakayan.”

A third teacher added,

“Mas buhay ang klase kapag ang mga estudyante ang gumagalaw at nagsasalita.”

These perceptions influenced teachers' instructional decisions, as reflected in lesson plans and observed practices.

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The findings suggest that teachers' beliefs supported the consistent use of learner-centered strategies, reinforcing their pedagogical effectiveness.

Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing Learner-Centered Pedagogical Practices

Despite the benefits, teachers identified challenges that affected the consistent implementation of learner-centered instruction. These included limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient teaching materials.

One teacher stated,
"Minsan kulang ang oras para sa discussion at group work."

Another teacher explained,
"Mahirap i-manage ang klase kapag marami ang estudyante."

A third teacher noted,
"Hindi palaging sapat ang resources para sa activities."

These challenges were evident during classroom observations, where time constraints limited the depth of discussion. The findings suggest that while learner-centered pedagogy is effective, contextual constraints influence its sustainability and depth of implementation.

Theme 5: Improved Classroom Climate and Learner Confidence

The study found that learner-centered pedagogical practices contributed to a more positive classroom climate. Learners appeared more confident in expressing ideas and respectful of differing opinions.

One teacher remarked,
"Mas naging open ang mga estudyante sa pagsasalita."

Another teacher shared,
"Mas natuto silang makinig at rumespeto sa opinyon ng iba."

A learner participant stated,
"Mas hindi ako natatakot magsalita sa klase."

These findings indicate that learner-centered instruction not only enhanced academic outcomes but also supported socio-emotional development. Observations confirmed improved interaction patterns, suggesting that such pedagogy fostered inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Hence, the results demonstrate that learner-centered pedagogical practices at Mungayang National High School positively enhanced Araling Panlipunan instruction by increasing learner engagement, improving conceptual understanding, fostering critical thinking, and creating a supportive classroom climate. While challenges existed, the findings affirm the value of learner-centered pedagogy in strengthening social studies instruction and highlight the need for continued instructional support and resource provision.

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that learner-centered pedagogical practices play a significant role in enhancing Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School. The use of interactive strategies such as group discussions, inquiry-based activities, role-playing, and contextualized tasks encouraged learners to actively participate in lessons. These practices shifted classroom dynamics from passive reception of information to active knowledge construction, allowing learners to engage more deeply with historical, social, and civic concepts. This supports the view that learner-centered instruction is particularly effective in social studies, where understanding multiple perspectives and real-life connections is essential.

The study also revealed that learner-centered pedagogy enhanced students' conceptual understanding and critical

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thinking skills. Teachers' emphasis on explanation, reflection, and analysis enabled learners to move beyond memorization toward meaningful interpretation of social issues and historical events. Classroom observations confirmed that learners were more confident in articulating ideas and reasoning during discussions. This finding highlights the value of inquiry-based and discussion-driven approaches in achieving the broader goals of Araling Panlipunan, such as developing informed, reflective, and socially aware citizens.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified challenges that affected the consistent implementation of learner-centered practices. Limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient learning resources constrained teachers' ability to fully maximize interactive strategies. Nevertheless, the overall classroom climate improved, as learners demonstrated greater confidence, respect for diverse viewpoints, and willingness to participate. These results suggest that while contextual constraints exist, learner-centered pedagogy remains a powerful approach for improving both academic and socio-emotional outcomes in Araling Panlipunan instruction.

Conclusions

This study concludes that learner-centered pedagogical practices significantly enhance Araling Panlipunan instruction at Mungayang National High School. The findings show that such practices promote active learner engagement, deepen conceptual understanding, and foster critical thinking and reflective learning. Teachers' positive perceptions of learner-centered instruction influenced their consistent use of interactive and contextualized strategies, which contributed to a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Although challenges related to time, class size, and resources limited full implementation, the overall impact of learner-centered pedagogy on instruction and learner participation was positive. The study affirms that shifting instructional focus toward learners' active involvement strengthens the effectiveness of Araling Panlipunan teaching and supports its educational goals.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study imply that learner-centered pedagogical practices should be strengthened and sustained in Araling Panlipunan instruction. Teachers may benefit from continuous professional development focused on practical strategies for managing learner-centered activities within time and resource constraints. School administrators may consider providing instructional support, adequate learning materials, and collaborative planning opportunities to help teachers implement learner-centered approaches more effectively. The positive impact on learner confidence and classroom climate also suggests that learner-centered pedagogy contributes to holistic development, reinforcing its relevance beyond academic learning. Finally, the study implies that future research may explore the long-term effects of learner-centered instruction on learners' civic awareness and academic performance, as well as examine its application across different subject areas and school contexts.

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Conflicts of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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