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## Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Pedagogies in Early Elementary Education: Instructional Practices and Learner Engagement Among Grades 1 and 2 Teachers in Rural Mountain Province Schools

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### Abstract

*Foundational literacy and numeracy serve as critical building blocks in early childhood education, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities where access to educational resources remains limited. This study explored the pedagogical practices and learner engagement strategies employed by Grades 1 and 2 teachers in selected rural schools in Mountain Province, Philippines. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research investigated how teachers facilitate literacy and numeracy instruction, the challenges they encounter, and the contextual strategies they employ to sustain learner participation. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving ten Grades 1 and 2 teachers from rural public elementary schools. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework revealed four major themes: contextualized and mother tongue-based instruction, demonstration and activity-centered pedagogies, differentiated and scaffolded learning support, and relational and motivational learner engagement practices. Findings further indicated that multigrade teaching conditions, inadequate instructional materials, and limited technological access remain persistent barriers in rural education settings. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated strong pedagogical adaptability and culturally responsive instructional approaches. The study highlights the importance of strengthening teacher support systems, localized curriculum implementation, and policy interventions that promote equitable foundational learning opportunities in remote communities. The findings contribute to the growing discourse on inclusive and context-responsive early elementary education in rural Philippine schools.*

**Keywords:** *foundational literacy, foundational numeracy, learner engagement, rural education, pedagogical practices, Mountain Province, early elementary education*

## **Introduction**

Foundational literacy and numeracy are widely recognized as essential competencies that influence learners' academic success, lifelong learning, and social participation. Early elementary education plays a crucial role in developing children's reading, writing, counting, and problem-solving abilities, particularly during Grades 1 and 2 where foundational skills are systematically introduced and strengthened. In many developing educational contexts, however, learners continue to experience difficulties in acquiring these competencies due to inequitable access to quality instruction, instructional resources, and supportive learning environments.

In the Philippine educational system, the Department of Education has emphasized the importance of strengthening foundational learning outcomes through programs focusing on early literacy, numeracy intervention, and contextualized instruction. Nevertheless, rural schools in geographically isolated areas such as Mountain Province continue to encounter persistent instructional challenges including multigrade teaching arrangements, limited learning materials, insufficient technological infrastructure, and socioeconomic constraints among learners. These conditions significantly affect classroom instruction and learner engagement, especially among young children who require sustained scaffolding and interactive learning experiences.

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of contextualized and culturally responsive pedagogies in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes among early learners. Constructivist perspectives suggest that children learn more effectively when instruction is connected to their lived experiences, language, and cultural contexts. Similarly, experiential and activity-based pedagogies have been found to improve participation, comprehension, and motivation among young learners. However, limited studies have specifically examined how Grades 1 and 2 teachers in rural Mountain Province schools navigate instructional realities while fostering foundational literacy and numeracy engagement. This study sought to examine the instructional practices and learner engagement strategies employed by Grades 1 and 2 teachers in rural elementary schools in Mountain Province. Specifically, it explored the pedagogical approaches used in literacy and numeracy instruction, the learner engagement practices observed in classroom settings, and the contextual challenges encountered by teachers in facilitating foundational learning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study was anchored on Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction, guided participation, and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development. In foundational literacy and numeracy instruction, teachers play a critical role in guiding learners through structured support and collaborative learning experiences until independent mastery is achieved. The study also drew from Bruner's Constructivist Learning Theory, which highlights discovery learning, active participation, and learner-centered instruction. Bruner posited that children learn effectively through hands-on exploration and meaningful engagement with instructional materials and experiences. These theoretical perspectives collectively explain how interactive pedagogical strategies enhance foundational learning among young learners.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to investigate the pedagogical experiences and instructional practices of Grades 1 and 2 teachers in rural Mountain Province schools. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of classroom realities, contextual instructional strategies, and learner engagement processes.

### **Research Participants**

The participants consisted of ten Grades 1 and 2 teachers from selected rural public elementary schools in Mountain Province. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their teaching experience in early elementary education and direct involvement in literacy and numeracy instruction.

### **Data Collection**

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans, instructional materials, and learner activity sheets. Interviews focused on instructional

strategies, classroom experiences, learner engagement practices, and teaching challenges.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis involved familiarization with data, coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, defining themes, and report writing. Credibility was ensured through member checking and triangulation of interview, observation, and document analysis data.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Theme 1: Contextualized and Mother Tongue-Based Literacy and Numeracy Instruction**

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of contextualizing literacy and numeracy lessons using local language, familiar experiences, and culturally relevant examples. Teachers explained that learners demonstrated better comprehension when lessons were connected to their daily activities, indigenous practices, and local environment.

One participant stated:

“Mas naiintindihan ng mga bata kapag ginagamit namin ang sariling wika at mga halimbawa na nakikita nila araw-araw sa komunidad.”

Teachers utilized localized stories, indigenous songs, counting materials from nature, and contextualized problem-solving examples to facilitate learning. These findings support the principles of culturally responsive teaching, which emphasize that learners engage more meaningfully when instruction reflects their cultural identities and experiences. Similar findings were reported by Gay (2018), who emphasized that culturally grounded pedagogies strengthen learner participation and academic understanding.

#### **Theme 2: Demonstration and Activity-Centered Pedagogical Practices**

Participants described extensive use of demonstrations, manipulatives, games, storytelling, and interactive classroom activities to facilitate foundational literacy and numeracy development. Teachers emphasized that young learners require visual and experiential learning opportunities to sustain attention and comprehension.

One teacher explained:

“Kapag puro lecture lang, mabilis mawalan ng focus ang mga bata. Kailangan talaga may activities at demonstrations.”

Classroom observations revealed the use of flashcards, counting objects, picture matching activities, phonics drills, and collaborative learning games. Teachers also incorporated songs, movement activities, and storytelling sessions to enhance engagement. These findings align with Bruner's constructivist perspective emphasizing active participation and experiential learning among young children.

Studies by Kolb (1984) and Piasta et al. (2020) similarly found that activity-based instruction significantly improves foundational literacy and numeracy acquisition among early learners.

#### **Theme 3: Differentiated and Scaffolded Learning Support**

Teachers highlighted the necessity of differentiated instruction due to varied learner abilities, reading readiness levels, and numeracy competencies. Participants explained that learners in rural schools exhibit diverse learning paces, requiring individualized support and scaffolded instruction.

A participant shared:

“May mga batang mabilis matuto pero mayroon ding nangangailangan ng paulit-ulit na gabay lalo na sa pagbabasa at basic operations.”

Teachers employed peer tutoring, guided reading, small-group instruction, remediation sessions, and repetitive practice exercises to support struggling learners. Classroom observations revealed frequent teacher scaffolding, prompting, and guided questioning strategies.

These findings support Vygotsky's theory emphasizing scaffolded learning within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) also emphasized that inclusive pedagogical approaches require flexible instructional practices responsive to diverse learner needs.

#### **Theme 4: Relational and Motivational Learner Engagement Practices**

Participants emphasized that emotional support, encouragement, and positive teacher-learner relationships significantly influence learner participation and motivation. Teachers described how affirmations, praise, and nurturing classroom environments contribute to learners' confidence and willingness to participate.

One participant explained:

"Kapag nararamdaman ng bata na supportive ang teacher, mas ganado silang sumali at matuto."

Teachers utilized reward systems, recognition activities, interactive questioning, and collaborative tasks to sustain engagement. Observations showed that learners participated more actively when teachers provided encouragement and individualized attention.

These findings align with engagement theories emphasizing the importance of emotional and relational dimensions in early childhood learning environments. Research by Fredricks et al. (2019) similarly identified emotional support as a critical factor influencing learner engagement and academic persistence.

#### **Challenges Encountered in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Instruction**

Despite positive pedagogical practices, participants identified several contextual barriers affecting instruction. Major challenges included lack of instructional materials, multigrade teaching conditions, large learner diversity, absenteeism, and limited parental support.

Teachers also cited difficulties in addressing reading delays and numeracy gaps among learners entering early grades with limited preschool preparation. Inadequate access to digital learning resources and unstable internet connectivity further constrained instructional innovation.

These findings corroborate OECD (2019) reports highlighting systemic inequalities and resource disparities affecting rural education systems globally.

#### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that Grades 1 and 2 teachers in rural Mountain Province schools employ diverse, culturally responsive, and learner-centered pedagogical practices to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy development. Contextualized instruction, demonstration-based learning, scaffolded support, and relational engagement practices emerged as critical strategies for sustaining learner participation and comprehension.

Despite significant contextual challenges including limited resources and multigrade teaching conditions, teachers demonstrated strong instructional adaptability and commitment to inclusive foundational learning. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional support systems, providing localized instructional resources, and enhancing professional development opportunities for rural elementary teachers.

#### **Implications of the Study**

The study highlights the need for policy interventions focusing on equitable foundational learning opportunities in geographically isolated schools. Educational institutions and policymakers may strengthen contextualized curriculum implementation, provide additional literacy and numeracy intervention materials, and improve teacher capacity-building programs emphasizing inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies.

The findings also suggest the importance of strengthening community and parental engagement programs to support early literacy and numeracy development among young learners. Future studies may further explore learner outcomes associated with localized pedagogical practices across other rural educational settings.

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