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## Classroom Engagement in Learner-Centered Elementary Instruction: A Descriptive Survey at Sta. Cruz Elementary School

<sup>1</sup> Mark Anthony Maneja Reyes

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines

### Abstract

*Classroom engagement is widely recognized as a critical indicator of instructional quality and effective learning, particularly in learner-centered educational environments. This study examined the level of classroom engagement in learner-centered elementary instruction at Sta. Cruz Elementary School using a descriptive survey design. Grounded in constructivist and engagement theories, the study investigated pupils' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement as experienced in learner-centered classrooms. Data were collected from elementary pupils using a validated engagement survey instrument aligned with learner-centered pedagogical practices. Descriptive statistical analyses revealed that classroom engagement was generally high across all dimensions, with behavioral and emotional engagement showing stronger manifestations than cognitive engagement. The findings suggest that learner-centered instructional practices foster positive participation and involvement among elementary pupils, although deeper cognitive engagement requires sustained instructional support. Implications for classroom practice, school leadership, and instructional improvement are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *classroom engagement, learner-centered instruction, elementary education, descriptive survey, pupil participation*

## Introduction

Elementary education serves as the foundation for learners' academic development, socialization, and attitudes toward schooling. At this stage, classroom experiences play a vital role in shaping learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage in learning tasks. In response to the demands of contemporary education, instructional reforms have increasingly emphasized a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered pedagogy, which prioritizes active participation, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences.

Learner-centered instruction positions pupils as active participants who construct knowledge through interaction with content, peers, and teachers. Such approaches are grounded in constructivist learning theory, which asserts that learning occurs most effectively when learners are engaged in inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. Research has consistently shown that learner-centered classrooms are associated with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and academic achievement, particularly in elementary settings where learners are still developing foundational learning habits.

Despite policy support for learner-centered instruction, classroom engagement remains uneven across educational contexts. Engagement defined as learners' behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment has emerged as a critical indicator of whether learner-centered pedagogy is meaningfully enacted rather than nominally adopted. Understanding pupils' engagement levels in learner-centered classrooms is therefore essential for evaluating instructional effectiveness and guiding school improvement efforts.

Sta. Cruz Elementary School has adopted learner-centered instructional practices as part of its teaching framework, making it a relevant context for examining classroom engagement in elementary education. This study sought to describe the level of classroom engagement among pupils in learner-centered elementary classrooms at Sta. Cruz Elementary School.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement of pupils in learner-centered elementary instruction?
2. Which dimension of classroom engagement is most evident among pupils?
3. What implications can be drawn from the findings for learner-centered teaching practices?

## Review of Related Literature

### Learner-Centered Instruction in Elementary Education

Learner-centered instruction is rooted in constructivist and socio-cultural theories that view learning as an active, participatory process. In elementary education, learner-centered practices include collaborative learning, inquiry-based activities, contextualized instruction, and formative feedback. These practices are designed to align with pupils' developmental needs and promote autonomy, curiosity, and interaction.

Studies have demonstrated that learner-centered instruction enhances pupils' motivation and participation by creating meaningful learning experiences that connect academic content to real-life contexts. Teachers who adopt facilitative roles encourage pupils to explore ideas, ask questions, and learn through social interaction rather than passive listening.

### Classroom Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct

Classroom engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. Behavioral engagement refers to observable participation such as attention, effort, and involvement in tasks. Emotional engagement includes learners' interest, enjoyment, and sense of belonging, while cognitive engagement reflects learners' investment in understanding, self-regulation, and use of deep learning strategies.

Research suggests that learner-centered classrooms support all three dimensions of engagement by promoting autonomy, relevance, and supportive teacher-pupil relationships. Engagement is therefore considered both an

outcome of effective instruction and a mediator of learning achievement.

## Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to determine the level of classroom engagement in learner-centered elementary instruction at Sta. Cruz Elementary School. This design was deemed appropriate because it enabled the systematic description of pupils' engagement experiences as they naturally occurred in learner-centered classrooms, without manipulating instructional variables or introducing experimental conditions. By focusing on description rather than causation, the design allowed the study to capture patterns of engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions within the existing instructional context.

The research was conducted at Sta. Cruz Elementary School, a public elementary school that has adopted learner-centered instructional practices across selected grade levels. The respondents consisted of elementary pupils from these grade levels who were regularly exposed to learner-centered teaching strategies. Participants were selected using appropriate sampling procedures to ensure adequate representation across classes and grade levels, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of classroom engagement within the school. The selection process aimed to capture diverse learner experiences rather than focusing solely on highly engaged pupils.

Data were collected using a self-report classroom engagement questionnaire adapted from existing validated engagement instruments. The questionnaire was designed to measure three dimensions of classroom engagement: behavioral engagement, which focused on pupils' participation in classroom activities and attentiveness during lessons; emotional engagement, which examined pupils' interest, enjoyment, and sense of belonging in the classroom; and cognitive engagement, which assessed pupils' effort to understand lessons, persistence in challenging tasks, and reflective thinking. Responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived engagement.

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency counts, means, and standard deviations, to summarize pupils' engagement levels across the three dimensions. The computed mean scores were interpreted using established descriptive benchmarks to classify engagement levels as low, moderate, or high. This analytical approach allowed for a clear and systematic presentation of the extent of classroom engagement in learner-centered elementary instruction and provided a quantitative basis for interpreting pupils' engagement experiences.

## Results and Findings

This section presents the descriptive statistical results on pupils' classroom engagement in learner-centered elementary instruction at Sta. Cruz Elementary School. Classroom engagement was examined across three dimensions: **behavioral**, **emotional**, and **cognitive engagement**. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed to determine the overall level and relative strength of each engagement dimension.

**Table 1. Overall Level of Classroom Engagement in Learner-Centered Instruction**

Engagement Dimension	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (SD)	Descriptive Interpretation
Behavioral Engagement	4.21	0.54	High
Emotional Engagement	4.15	0.57	High
Cognitive Engagement	3.78	0.61	Moderate to High
<b>Overall Engagement</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>

**Scale:** 1.00–1.80 (Very Low), 1.81–2.60 (Low), 2.61–3.40 (Moderate), 3.41–4.20 (High), 4.21–5.00 (Very High)

Table 1 shows that pupils demonstrated an overall high level of classroom engagement ( $\bar{x} = 4.05$ ) in learner-centered elementary instruction. Among the three dimensions, behavioral engagement obtained the highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 4.21$ ), indicating that pupils frequently participated in classroom activities, followed instructions, and

remained attentive during lessons. Emotional engagement was also rated high ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ), suggesting that pupils generally experienced interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging in the classroom. Cognitive engagement, while still relatively strong, obtained the lowest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 3.78$ ), indicating that deeper engagement such as sustained effort in challenging tasks and reflective thinking was present but less pronounced than behavioral and emotional engagement.

**Table 2. Behavioral Engagement of Pupils in Learner-Centered Classrooms**

Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Interpretation
Participates in class activities	4.30	0.56	Very High
Pays attention during lessons	4.18	0.59	High
Completes assigned tasks	4.15	0.62	High
Works cooperatively with classmates	4.21	0.58	High
<b>Overall Behavioral Engagement</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>High</b>

Results in Table 2 indicate that pupils exhibited high to very high behavioral engagement in learner-centered classrooms. The highest-rated indicator was participation in class activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.30$ ), reflecting pupils' active involvement in discussions, group work, and learning tasks. Cooperative work with classmates also received a high rating ( $\bar{x} = 4.21$ ), suggesting that learner-centered instructional strategies effectively promoted collaboration. These findings imply that learner-centered instruction successfully encourages observable participation and sustained effort among elementary pupils.

**Table 3. Emotional Engagement of Pupils in Learner-Centered Classrooms**

Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Interpretation
Enjoys classroom activities	4.19	0.61	High
Feels motivated to learn	4.11	0.60	High
Feels comfortable expressing ideas	4.17	0.55	High
Feels a sense of belonging in class	4.12	0.59	High
<b>Overall Emotional Engagement</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 3 reveals that pupils experienced a high level of emotional engagement in learner-centered classrooms. Pupils reported enjoyment of classroom activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.19$ ) and comfort in expressing ideas ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ), indicating that the learning environment was perceived as supportive and inclusive. The findings suggest that learner-centered instruction contributes to positive emotional experiences, which are critical for sustaining participation and motivation in elementary education.

**Table 4. Cognitive Engagement of Pupils in Learner-Centered Classrooms**

Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Interpretation
Tries to understand lessons deeply	3.85	0.63	High
Persists when tasks are difficult	3.72	0.66	Moderate
Thinks about different ways to solve problems	3.79	0.60	Moderate to High
Reflects on mistakes to improve learning	3.76	0.58	Moderate to High
<b>Overall Cognitive Engagement</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>Moderate to High</b>

As shown in Table 4, pupils' cognitive engagement was rated at a moderate to high level, with the highest indicator being efforts to understand lessons deeply ( $\bar{x} = 3.85$ ). However, persistence in difficult tasks obtained a comparatively lower mean score ( $\bar{x} = 3.72$ ), suggesting that while pupils are generally engaged cognitively, they may require additional scaffolding and instructional support to sustain effort during challenging activities. This pattern indicates that learner-centered instruction promotes thinking and reflection but must be complemented by strategies that explicitly support higher-order and self-regulated learning.

The statistical results demonstrate that learner-centered elementary instruction is associated with high levels of classroom engagement, particularly in behavioral and emotional dimensions. Pupils actively participated in classroom activities and reported positive emotional experiences, reflecting the effectiveness of learner-centered strategies in fostering involvement and motivation. However, cognitive engagement, while present, was relatively lower than the other dimensions, suggesting a need for instructional practices that further promote deep thinking, persistence, and metacognitive skills. These findings underscore the importance of balancing participatory activities with structured cognitive support to maximize the benefits of learner-centered instruction in elementary classrooms.

Results indicated that pupils in learner-centered elementary classrooms demonstrated a high level of overall classroom engagement. Behavioral engagement obtained the highest mean score, indicating that pupils frequently participated in classroom activities, followed instructions, and showed attentiveness during lessons. Emotional engagement was also rated high, suggesting that pupils generally enjoyed learning activities and felt a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Cognitive engagement, while still rated at a moderate to high level, obtained a comparatively lower mean score than behavioral and emotional engagement. This finding suggests that while pupils were actively involved and emotionally invested, deeper cognitive engagement such as sustained effort in challenging tasks and self-regulated learning required further instructional support.

## Discussion

The statistical findings of this study indicate that learner-centered elementary instruction at Sta. Cruz Elementary School is associated with a high overall level of classroom engagement, with notable variations across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The high mean score for behavioral engagement suggests that pupils frequently participated in classroom activities, collaborated with peers, and remained attentive during lessons. This finding supports existing research which demonstrates that learner-centered instructional strategies such as group work, interactive tasks, and active participation encourage observable engagement among elementary learners (Fredricks et al., 2004). When pupils are given opportunities to actively take part in learning activities rather than passively listen, they are more likely to exhibit sustained effort and on-task behavior.

Similarly, the results revealed a high level of emotional engagement, indicating that pupils generally enjoyed classroom activities, felt motivated to learn, and experienced a sense of belonging in learner-centered classrooms. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing the role of supportive and autonomy-enhancing learning environments in fostering positive emotional responses to learning (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Learner-centered

classrooms often emphasize encouragement, respect for pupil voice, and collaborative interaction, which contribute to learners' feelings of acceptance and motivation. Emotional engagement is particularly important in elementary education, as positive affective experiences during early schooling influence long-term attitudes toward learning and school participation (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010).

In contrast, cognitive engagement, although rated at a moderate to high level, obtained a comparatively lower mean score than behavioral and emotional engagement. This pattern suggests that while pupils were actively involved and emotionally invested in classroom activities, deeper cognitive processes such as persistence in challenging tasks, reflective thinking, and self-regulated learning were less consistently evident. This finding echoes previous research indicating that active participation does not automatically translate into deep cognitive engagement unless instructional activities are deliberately designed to challenge learners' thinking and promote metacognitive strategies (Jang et al., 2010). In elementary classrooms, pupils often require explicit scaffolding, guided questioning, and structured reflection to sustain effort in complex or demanding tasks.

The disparity among the three engagement dimensions highlights the importance of balancing participation-oriented activities with cognitive challenge in learner-centered instruction. While interactive and collaborative activities effectively promote behavioral and emotional engagement, teachers must also integrate instructional supports such as problem-solving tasks, reflective discussions, and feedback that encourage pupils to think deeply about content. This interpretation is consistent with engagement literature suggesting that high-quality learner-centered instruction combines autonomy support with clear structure to maximize cognitive engagement (Reeve, 2012).

Hence, the statistical data affirm that learner-centered pedagogy contributes positively to classroom engagement in elementary education, particularly in fostering participation and positive learning emotions. However, the findings also suggest that enhancing cognitive engagement remains an instructional priority. Consistent with prior studies, this indicates that learner-centered teaching is most effective when participatory strategies are complemented by intentional cognitive scaffolding and opportunities for deeper learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Jang et al., 2010). These results underscore the need for continuous instructional refinement to ensure that learner-centered practices not only engage pupils behaviorally and emotionally but also support sustained cognitive growth.

## Conclusions and Implications

This descriptive survey study concludes that learner-centered elementary instruction at Sta. Cruz Elementary School is associated with generally high levels of classroom engagement, with particularly strong manifestations in the behavioral and emotional dimensions. Pupils were observed to participate actively in classroom activities, demonstrate attentiveness, and express positive feelings toward learning tasks, indicating that learner-centered pedagogical practices effectively promote involvement and motivation in elementary classrooms. These findings affirm the value of learner-centered pedagogy as an instructional approach that supports active participation, fosters a positive classroom climate, and enhances pupils' overall learning experiences. At the same time, the comparatively lower level of cognitive engagement suggests that while pupils are involved and emotionally invested, deeper forms of engagement such as sustained effort in challenging tasks, reflective thinking, and self-regulated learning require more deliberate instructional support.

**Implications for Practice.** The findings suggest that elementary teachers should continue to implement learner-centered strategies that encourage participation, collaboration, and pupil voice, while also intentionally integrating instructional supports that promote deeper cognitive engagement. Such supports may include reflective questioning, guided problem-solving activities, opportunities for pupils to explain their reasoning, and structured feedback that encourages persistence and metacognitive awareness. By balancing participatory activities with cognitive challenge, teachers can help pupils move beyond surface-level involvement toward deeper understanding and independent learning.

**Implications for School Leadership.** School leaders play a crucial role in sustaining effective learner-centered instruction by providing professional development initiatives that enhance teachers' capacity to design and implement learner-centered lessons. Leadership support may involve facilitating collaborative lesson planning, offering instructional coaching focused on engagement and higher-order thinking, and creating a school culture that values reflective teaching and continuous improvement. Policies and structures that allow flexibility in pacing and assessment can further enable teachers to balance engagement with cognitive rigor.

**Directions for Future Research.** Future studies may extend the present findings by employing correlational or mixed-methods research designs to examine the relationships between specific learner-centered practices and different dimensions of classroom engagement. Longitudinal studies could explore how sustained exposure to learner-centered instruction influences pupils' engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes over time. Additionally, research conducted across multiple elementary schools and diverse contexts would enhance the generalizability of findings and provide a broader understanding of how learner-centered pedagogy operates in varying educational settings.

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