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Learning Beyond Instruction: Understanding How School Experiences Influence Learners' Skills and Attitudes toward Learning

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Abstract

School experiences extend beyond formal instruction and play a significant role in shaping learners' academic skills, social competencies, personal development, and attitudes toward learning. Through interactions with teachers, peers, school personnel, and participation in school activities, learners acquire essential competencies that contribute to educational success and lifelong learning. This study explored how school experiences influence learners' skills and attitudes toward learning at San Miguel Integrated School, Ramon District, Philippines. Using a qualitative case study design, the study involved fifteen (15) learners, six (6) teachers, one (1) school administrator, one (1) Administrative Assistant II, and ten (10) parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, school observations, and document analysis. Findings revealed that positive school experiences foster communication skills, critical thinking, social competence, self-confidence, responsibility, and positive learning attitudes. Supportive relationships, extracurricular participation, learner engagement, and a positive school climate emerged as significant contributors to learner development. The study highlights the importance of viewing schools as holistic learning environments that nurture both academic and non-academic competencies. Findings provide valuable insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen learner development through meaningful school experiences.

Keywords: *school experiences, learner development, learning attitudes, educational engagement, school climate, qualitative research, Philippines*

1. Introduction

Education is often viewed primarily as a process of instruction and academic knowledge acquisition. However, contemporary educational research recognizes that learning extends beyond classroom teaching and encompasses the broader experiences learners encounter within school environments. School experiences including interactions with teachers, peers, school personnel, extracurricular activities, school culture, and participation in various learning opportunities play a crucial role in shaping learners' development.

Schools function as social institutions where learners acquire not only academic competencies but also communication skills, interpersonal abilities, problem-solving skills, values, and attitudes toward learning. Positive educational experiences contribute to motivation, engagement, resilience, and academic success, while negative experiences may hinder learner development and participation. Consequently, understanding how learners experience schooling is essential for creating environments that promote holistic growth.

The concept of learning beyond instruction highlights the importance of educational experiences that occur outside formal classroom lessons. Learners often develop important competencies through participation in school programs, collaborative activities, leadership opportunities, social interactions, and engagement with the broader school community. These experiences contribute significantly to the development of skills and attitudes that support lifelong learning.

San Miguel Integrated School, located in Ramon District, serves learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds. As an integrated school, it provides multiple opportunities for learners to engage in academic, social, and extracurricular experiences that influence their development. Teachers and school personnel have observed that learners' attitudes toward learning and educational success are shaped not only by instructional practices but also by their overall school experiences.

This study explored how school experiences influence learners' skills and attitudes toward learning. By examining the perspectives of learners, teachers, parents, and school personnel, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the broader educational factors that shape learner development.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to explore how school experiences influence learners' skills and attitudes toward learning at San Miguel Integrated School.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Explore learners' experiences within the school environment.
2. Examine how school experiences contribute to skills development.
3. Investigate the influence of school experiences on learners' attitudes toward learning.
4. Identify school factors that support positive learner development.
5. Determine how school stakeholders contribute to meaningful educational experiences.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Experiential Learning Theory, Social Constructivist Theory, and School Climate Theory. Experiential Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through experiences, reflection, and active engagement. Learners acquire knowledge and skills through participation in meaningful activities and interactions.

Social Constructivist Theory emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction and collaboration. Learners construct understanding through engagement with teachers, peers, and their environment.

School Climate Theory highlights the influence of relationships, safety, support, and school culture on learner outcomes. Positive school climates contribute significantly to academic achievement, motivation, and well-being.

Together, these theories explain how educational experiences beyond instruction contribute to learner development and positive attitudes toward learning.

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative case study design to explore learners' experiences and perceptions regarding the influence of school experiences on their skills and attitudes toward learning. A qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gain in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences and interpretations of their educational environment.

The study was conducted at San Miguel Integrated School, Ramon District, Philippines. Participants included fifteen (15) learners, six (6) teachers, one (1) school administrator, one (1) Administrative Assistant II, and ten (10) parents selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their involvement in various aspects of school life and their ability to provide rich descriptions of educational experiences.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, school observations, and document analysis. Interview questions focused on school experiences, skill development, learner engagement, relationships, attitudes toward learning, and perceptions of school support systems.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Coding procedures were employed to identify recurring themes and patterns across participant responses. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing. Ethical principles including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the research process.

5. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Positive School Experiences Enhance Communication and Interpersonal Skills

A major theme that emerged from the study was the significant influence of school experiences on the development of learners' communication and interpersonal skills. Participants consistently described daily interactions with teachers, classmates, and school personnel as opportunities that strengthened their ability to communicate effectively and build positive relationships. Learners reported that classroom discussions, school programs, group activities, and informal interactions enabled them to express ideas confidently and interact appropriately with others.

One learner shared:

"Mas natututo akong magsalita at makipag-usap sa ibang tao dahil sa mga activities at discussions sa school."

Another participant remarked:

"Kapag may group work at school programs, natututo akong makipagtulungan at makinig sa iba."

Teachers observed that learners who actively participated in school activities demonstrated improved communication abilities and stronger social confidence.

One teacher explained:

"Napapansin naming mas nagiging bukas at mahusay makipag-ugnayan ang mga batang aktibong kasali sa mga gawain ng paaralan."

The Administrative Assistant II also highlighted the importance of school interactions in developing social competencies.

"Maging sa simpleng pakikisalamuha sa opisina o pakikilahok sa school events, natututo ang mga bata ng tamang pakikipagkapwa."

School observations revealed that learners developed communication skills through formal and informal interactions across various school contexts. These experiences contributed to confidence, empathy, and interpersonal competence.

The findings support Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning and development occur through social interaction. Mercer and Littleton (2007) argued that communication-rich environments promote language development and cognitive growth. Similarly, Wentzel (2017) found that positive peer relationships contribute significantly to learners' social competence and academic engagement. Pianta et al. (2012) further emphasized that supportive interactions within schools foster both interpersonal development and educational success.

Theme 2: School Participation Strengthens Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Abilities

Another significant theme highlighted the contribution of school experiences to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Participants explained that involvement in classroom discussions, school projects, leadership activities, and co-curricular programs encouraged them to analyze situations, make decisions, and solve problems independently.

One learner shared:

"Kapag may projects at activities, natututo akong mag-isip kung paano ko matatapos ang gawain."

Another participant stated:

"Mas natututo akong maghanap ng solusyon kapag may mga challenges sa school."

Teachers observed that participation in various school activities encouraged learners to become more reflective and analytical.

One teacher explained:

"Kapag binibigyan sila ng pagkakataong magdesisyon at magplano, mas nahahasa ang kanilang critical thinking skills."

School observations revealed that learners actively engaged in planning activities, solving classroom challenges, and participating in decision-making processes. These experiences strengthened their ability to evaluate options and make informed judgments.

The findings align with Brookfield (2017), who argued that authentic learning experiences promote critical reflection and problem-solving. Facione (2020) identified analysis, evaluation, and reasoning as essential critical

thinking skills developed through active engagement. Hattie (2023) similarly found that experiential and participatory learning experiences significantly contribute to cognitive development. Kolb (2015) further emphasized that meaningful experiences provide opportunities for reflection and application, leading to deeper learning.

Theme 3: Extracurricular and School-Based Activities Foster Leadership and Responsibility

The study revealed that extracurricular activities and school-based programs play a crucial role in developing leadership skills and personal responsibility among learners. Participants frequently cited involvement in clubs, school events, contests, community activities, and leadership roles as experiences that enhanced their confidence and accountability.

One learner shared:

"Kapag kasama ako sa school programs, natututo akong maging responsable sa aking mga gawain."

Another participant remarked:

"Mas nagkaroon ako ng lakas ng loob na mamuno dahil sa mga activities sa school."

Teachers noted that extracurricular participation provides learners with opportunities to develop leadership competencies and decision-making skills.

One teacher stated:

"Sa mga school activities natututo silang mamuno, makipagtulungan, at maging responsable sa kanilang tungkulin."

The Administrative Assistant II observed that learners who actively participated in school organizations often displayed stronger discipline and commitment.

Observations confirmed that involvement in extracurricular activities encouraged initiative, accountability, and leadership. Learners demonstrated increased responsibility when entrusted with specific roles and tasks.

The findings support the work of Eccles and Barber (1999), who found that extracurricular participation contributes to leadership development and academic success. Mahoney et al. (2021) similarly reported that participation in school organizations enhances responsibility, self-discipline, and social competence. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) further emphasized that extracurricular engagement promotes positive youth development and school connectedness.

Theme 4: Supportive Relationships Foster Self-Confidence and Learner Motivation

Another important theme centered on the role of supportive relationships in fostering self-confidence and motivation. Learners consistently described teachers, peers, parents, and school personnel as important sources of encouragement and support.

One learner stated:

"Mas ginaganahan akong mag-aral kapag may naniniwala sa akin at sumusuporta sa akin."

Another participant shared:

"Kapag pinupuri ako ng teacher, mas gusto kong pagbutihin ang aking pag-aaral."

Teachers emphasized that encouragement and positive feedback strengthen learners' confidence.

One teacher explained:

"Ang simpleng pagkilala sa kanilang pagsisikap ay malaking bagay upang mapataas ang kanilang kumpiyansa."

The Administrative Assistant II noted that learners often seek affirmation from school personnel and respond positively when recognized for their efforts.

Observations showed that learners who experienced supportive relationships demonstrated greater persistence, participation, and willingness to take academic risks.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which suggests that positive experiences and encouragement strengthen confidence and motivation. Dweck (2017) emphasized that supportive feedback promotes resilience and a growth mindset. Ryan and Deci (2020) further argued that feelings of competence and relatedness significantly influence learner motivation and engagement.

Theme 5: Positive School Climate Cultivates Favorable Attitudes toward Learning

A major theme emerging from the study was the influence of school climate on learners' attitudes toward learning. Participants consistently described a positive school environment as one characterized by safety, respect, encouragement, and belongingness.

One learner explained:

"Mas gusto kong pumasok sa school kapag masaya at maganda ang pakikitungo sa amin."

Another participant remarked:

"Kapag komportable ako sa school, mas interesado akong matuto."

Teachers observed that learners who felt connected to the school community displayed stronger enthusiasm for learning.

One teacher shared:

"Kapag positibo ang school environment, mas nagiging motivated ang mga bata sa kanilang pag-aaral."

School observations revealed that positive relationships, supportive policies, and inclusive practices contributed to a welcoming educational atmosphere. Learners appeared more engaged and enthusiastic in environments where they felt valued and respected.

These findings support School Climate Theory, which highlights the role of positive educational environments in promoting learner success. Thapa et al. (2013) found that positive school climates are associated with improved academic achievement and learner well-being. Wang and Degol (2016) similarly reported that supportive school climates enhance motivation, engagement, and educational attitudes. Cohen et al. (2009) further emphasized that school climate influences social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

Theme 6: Holistic School Experiences Promote Lifelong Learning Dispositions

The final theme highlighted the role of holistic school experiences in fostering lifelong learning dispositions. Participants emphasized that learning occurs not only during formal instruction but also through participation in school events, social interactions, community activities, and personal experiences within the school environment. One learner shared:

“Marami akong natututunan hindi lang sa classroom kundi pati sa mga activities ng school.”

Another participant remarked:

“Ang school ang nagtuturo sa akin kung paano maging mabuting tao at magpatuloy sa pag-aaral.”

Teachers described schools as environments that shape values, attitudes, and aspirations.

One teacher explained:

“Ang bawat karanasan sa paaralan ay may ambag sa paghubog ng pagkatao at kinabukasan ng mga bata.”

The Administrative Assistant II similarly observed that school experiences help learners develop discipline, perseverance, and responsibility beyond academic learning.

Observations revealed that learners developed habits of cooperation, self-regulation, persistence, and continuous improvement through their daily school experiences.

The findings support Kolb's (2015) Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that learning emerges through experience, reflection, and application. Dewey (1938) similarly emphasized that meaningful experiences shape future learning and development. OECD (2019) highlighted that modern education should cultivate lifelong learning competencies that extend beyond academic content.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that school experiences significantly influence learners' skills and attitudes toward learning at San Miguel Integrated School. Learning extends beyond formal instruction and is shaped by interactions, participation, relationships, extracurricular activities, and the broader school environment. Through these experiences, learners develop communication skills, critical thinking abilities, leadership competencies, self-confidence, responsibility, and positive attitudes toward education.

The findings further reveal that supportive relationships and positive school climates play crucial roles in fostering learner engagement and motivation. School experiences serve as powerful mechanisms for holistic development, enabling learners to acquire competencies that contribute to both academic achievement and personal growth.

Ultimately, schools should be viewed as comprehensive learning environments where every interaction, activity, and experience contributes to the development of competent, motivated, and lifelong learners.

7. Implications of the Study

1. Schools should strengthen programs that promote learner participation in both academic and extracurricular activities.
2. Teachers and school personnel should continue creating supportive environments that foster confidence, motivation, and engagement.
3. School leaders should prioritize positive school climate initiatives that enhance learner well-being and belongingness.
4. Educational programs should recognize the value of experiential learning opportunities beyond classroom instruction.
5. Parents and community stakeholders should be actively involved in supporting learners' educational experiences.
6. Policies should promote holistic learner development by integrating academic, social, emotional, and leadership experiences.

8. Recommendations

1. Expand opportunities for learner participation in leadership programs, clubs, and community-based activities.
2. Conduct professional development programs focusing on positive school climate and learner support.
3. Strengthen collaboration among teachers, parents, and school personnel to promote learner development.
4. Develop school-based initiatives that encourage critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills.
5. Implement recognition programs that celebrate learner growth, participation, and achievement.
6. Conduct future studies involving multiple schools and educational contexts to further examine the influence of school experiences on learner outcomes.

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