ISSN (online): 3028-1687

Azal Arts and Humanities

Volume 3, Issue 2, 2026 |
https://azalpub.com/index.php/AAH

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nurturing Foundational Learning Skills through Learner-Centered Pedagogy: A Qualitative Exploration of Grade 2 Teaching Practices in Rural Elementary Schools

[1] Gina W. Salipan
Master Teacher 2
Balaoa Elementary School

Article Info

Received: 3/5/2026
Accepted: 4/30/2026
Published: 5/30/2026

Abstract

Foundational learning skills, including literacy, numeracy, communication, critical thinking, and socio-emotional competencies, are essential for learners' academic success and lifelong development. In rural educational settings, teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating these skills through pedagogical approaches responsive to learners' needs and contextual realities. This study explored the learner-centered pedagogical practices employed by Grade 2 teachers at Balaoa Elementary School in nurturing foundational learning skills among young learners. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and reflective conversations with teachers, school administrators, parents, and learners. Thematic analysis revealed six major themes: differentiated instruction as a response to learner diversity, experiential and contextualized learning, nurturing literacy through interactive engagement, strengthening numeracy through concrete and collaborative activities, fostering learner confidence and socio-emotional growth, and building learning partnerships with families and the community. Findings indicate that learner-centered pedagogy enhances learner participation, motivation, comprehension, and foundational skill development by creating meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Teachers demonstrated flexibility and creativity in adapting instruction to diverse learner needs despite challenges associated with rural schooling. The study concludes that learner-centered pedagogical practices significantly contribute to the development of foundational learning skills and support holistic learner growth. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen foundational education and improve learning outcomes in rural elementary schools.

Keywords: learner-centered pedagogy, foundational learning skills, literacy, numeracy, rural education, Grade 2 learners, qualitative case study

Introduction

The early years of education serve as a critical period for developing foundational learning skills that support future academic achievement and lifelong learning. Foundational learning encompasses literacy, numeracy, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and socio-emotional competencies that enable learners to participate effectively in school and society. Research consistently demonstrates that learners who acquire strong foundational skills during the primary grades are more likely to achieve academic success and develop positive learning dispositions (UNESCO, 2023).

Within elementary education, learner-centered pedagogy has emerged as an effective approach for promoting meaningful learning experiences. Learner-centered teaching shifts the focus from teacher-directed instruction to active learner engagement, allowing children to construct knowledge through exploration, collaboration, and reflection. Such pedagogical practices recognize learners as active participants rather than passive recipients of information.

In rural schools, the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy assumes particular significance due to the diverse learning needs, cultural contexts, and resource limitations often encountered by educators. Teachers must continuously adapt instructional approaches to ensure that foundational learning skills are effectively developed despite contextual challenges.

Balaoa Elementary School, a rural educational institution, provides a unique context for examining how learner-centered pedagogical practices support foundational learning development among Grade 2 learners. Understanding teachers' experiences and instructional approaches can provide valuable insights into effective practices for improving educational outcomes in similar contexts.

This study explored the learner-centered teaching practices employed by Grade 2 teachers in nurturing foundational learning skills among young learners at Balaoa Elementary School.

Review of Related Literature

Foundational Learning Skills in Early Elementary Education

Foundational learning skills constitute the building blocks of future academic success. According to the World Bank (2022), foundational learning includes basic literacy, numeracy, communication, and cognitive skills necessary for lifelong learning. Early mastery of these competencies significantly influences learners' future educational trajectories.

Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Learner-centered pedagogy emphasizes active participation, inquiry, collaboration, and individualized learning experiences. Weimer (2013) argues that learner-centered teaching promotes deeper understanding, autonomy, and learner engagement. Such approaches encourage learners to take ownership of their learning while enabling teachers to act as facilitators and guides.

Literacy Development

Literacy development extends beyond reading and writing to include language comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, communication, and critical interpretation of texts. Interactive reading activities, storytelling, and contextualized literacy experiences have been found to enhance literacy outcomes among young learners (Snow et al., 2019).

Numeracy Development

Numeracy involves understanding mathematical concepts, reasoning, problem-solving, and the practical application of mathematics in daily life. Research indicates that hands-on learning activities and contextualized mathematical experiences significantly improve numeracy achievement among elementary learners (Clements & Sarama, 2020).

Rural Education and Pedagogical Innovation

Rural schools often face challenges related to resources, accessibility, and learner diversity. However, innovative pedagogical practices enable teachers to create meaningful learning opportunities despite contextual constraints (Hargreaves et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory proposed by Piaget (1972) and further developed by Vygotsky (1978). Constructivism posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences, interactions, and reflection.

The study is also informed by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding in learning. These theoretical perspectives support learner-centered pedagogical approaches that encourage active participation and meaningful engagement.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore learner-centered pedagogical practices in nurturing foundational learning skills among Grade 2 learners at Balaoa Elementary School. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth examination of teachers' experiences, instructional strategies, and perceptions regarding learner development.

Participants included Grade 2 teachers, school administrators, selected parents, and learners who were purposively selected based on their involvement in teaching and learning processes. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and reflective discussions.

Interview questions focused on teaching practices, learner engagement, instructional challenges, foundational skill development, and stakeholder involvement. Classroom observations provided insights into actual instructional practices and learner interactions.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Differentiated Instruction Responds to Diverse Learning Needs

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the study was the consistent use of differentiated instruction to address the diverse learning needs of Grade 2 learners. Participants emphasized that learners enter the classroom with varying levels of readiness, abilities, interests, learning styles, and prior experiences. Consequently, teachers recognized the necessity of adapting instructional approaches to ensure that all learners have equitable opportunities to succeed.

One teacher explained:

"Hindi pare-pareho ang bilis ng pagkatuto ng mga bata kaya kailangan naming mag-adjust sa kanilang pangangailangan."

Another participant stated:

"May mga batang mabilis matuto habang ang iba ay nangangailangan ng mas maraming gabay."

A third teacher added:

"Kapag nakita naming nahihirapan ang isang bata, binibigyan namin siya ng mas simpleng gawain o karagdagang tulong para makasabay."

Classroom observations revealed that teachers utilized varied instructional strategies, including flexible grouping, individualized tasks, scaffolded activities, peer tutoring, and differentiated assessments. Advanced learners were

provided with enrichment activities, while struggling learners received additional support through guided instruction and remediation.

The findings suggest that differentiated instruction serves as a critical mechanism for promoting inclusive and equitable learning environments. By acknowledging learner diversity and adapting instruction accordingly, teachers are able to maximize participation and learning outcomes. This approach is particularly important in rural schools where classrooms often consist of learners with diverse academic backgrounds and learning needs.

These findings support Tomlinson (2017), who argues that differentiated instruction enhances learner engagement, achievement, and motivation by responding to individual differences. Similarly, Subban (2016) found that differentiated teaching improves academic performance and learner confidence by ensuring that instruction matches learners' readiness levels and learning preferences. The findings further affirm Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, which emphasizes the importance of providing support tailored to learners' developmental needs.

Theme 2: Experiential and Contextualized Learning Makes Learning Meaningful

The study revealed that teachers consistently employed experiential and contextualized learning approaches to make lessons more meaningful and relevant. Participants emphasized that learners demonstrated greater understanding and retention when lessons were connected to their daily experiences, local culture, and community environment.

One teacher shared:

"Mas naiintindihan nila ang aralin kapag may kaugnayan ito sa kanilang buhay."

Another remarked:

"Ginagamit namin ang mga halimbawa mula sa komunidad upang maging makabuluhan ang pagkatuto."

A participant further explained:

"Kapag ang halimbawa ay tungkol sa kanilang pamilya, bukid, hayop, o mga ginagawa nila araw-araw, mas mabilis nilang nauunawaan ang konsepto."

Classroom observations revealed the integration of storytelling, role-playing, community-based examples, local materials, educational games, and real-life problem-solving activities. Teachers frequently used familiar contexts such as farming, household routines, local markets, and community events to explain academic concepts.

These practices enabled learners to connect classroom learning with their lived experiences, making learning more authentic and engaging. Learners became more active participants because they could relate lessons to situations they regularly encountered.

The findings align with Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively engage with experiences connected to their lives. Likewise, Kolb (2015) argues that experiential learning promotes deeper understanding because learners construct knowledge through reflection and interaction with their environment. Research by Gay (2018) further supports contextualized instruction, noting that culturally relevant teaching enhances learner engagement, comprehension, and academic success.

Theme 3: Interactive Literacy Activities Strengthen Reading and Communication Skills

Interactive literacy activities emerged as another significant pedagogical practice supporting foundational learning development. Teachers reported utilizing storytelling, guided reading, reading circles, dramatization, collaborative reading tasks, role-playing, and classroom discussions to strengthen literacy and communication skills.

One participant stated:

"Mahilig silang makinig at magkuwento kaya ginagamit namin ito sa pagbabasa."

Another explained:

“Kapag interactive ang activity, mas nagiging interesado silang matuto.”

A teacher added:

“Kapag binibigyan sila ng pagkakataong magbasa nang malakas at magbahagi ng kanilang opinyon, mas lumalakas ang kanilang kumpiyansa.”

Classroom observations showed that learners actively participated in reading activities when lessons incorporated songs, stories, games, and peer interaction. Teachers encouraged learners to express their ideas, ask questions, and discuss texts collaboratively.

Participants observed improvements not only in reading comprehension but also in vocabulary development, oral communication, listening skills, and self-confidence. Learners who were previously reluctant to participate became more willing to engage in classroom discussions and reading activities.

These findings suggest that literacy development is enhanced when learners actively interact with texts and participate in meaningful communication experiences. Literacy learning becomes more effective when reading is viewed as a social and interactive process rather than a purely individual activity.

The findings support Snow et al. (2019), who emphasize that interactive literacy experiences promote language acquisition, reading fluency, and comprehension. Similarly, Guthrie and Wigfield (2020) found that learner engagement significantly influences reading achievement. Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory likewise highlights the importance of social interaction in language development and literacy learning.

Theme 4: Concrete and Collaborative Activities Enhance Numeracy Development

Participants consistently emphasized the effectiveness of concrete and collaborative approaches in teaching mathematical concepts. Teachers reported that young learners develop stronger numeracy skills when they can manipulate objects, participate in games, and solve problems collaboratively.

One teacher noted:

“Mas natututo sila kapag nakikita at nahahawakan nila ang ginagamit sa pagtuturo.”

Another participant remarked:

“Ang group activities ay nakakatulong upang matuto sila mula sa isa’t isa.”

A teacher further shared:

“Kapag gumagamit kami ng counters, sticks, bottle caps, at iba pang konkretong materyales, mas madaling naiintindihan ng mga bata ang matematika.”

Observations revealed frequent use of manipulatives, counting materials, visual representations, educational games, and group problem-solving activities. Learners worked together to solve mathematical tasks, explain solutions, and compare strategies.

Participants noted that collaborative learning allowed learners to learn from peers while reducing anxiety associated with mathematics. Concrete learning experiences helped learners visualize abstract concepts and develop stronger conceptual understanding.

These findings support Clements and Sarama (2020), who argue that hands-on mathematical experiences enhance conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities. Likewise, Van de Walle et al. (2019) emphasize that manipulatives and collaborative learning create opportunities for meaningful mathematical thinking. Research by Boaler (2016) further indicates that collaborative mathematical experiences foster deeper understanding and positive attitudes toward mathematics.

Theme 5: Learner-Centered Pedagogy Fosters Confidence and Socio-Emotional Growth

Beyond academic achievement, participants highlighted the significant influence of learner-centered pedagogy on learners' socio-emotional development. Teachers observed improvements in learners' self-confidence, motivation, independence, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships.

One teacher explained:

"Mas nagiging kumpiyansa sila kapag nabibigyan sila ng pagkakataong magsalita at magbahagi ng kanilang ideya."

Another participant stated:

"Kapag pinakikinggan ang kanilang opinyon, mas nagiging aktibo sila sa klase."

A parent shared:

"Mas naging interesado ang anak ko sa pag-aaral at mas gusto niyang pumasok sa paaralan."

Teachers explained that learner-centered classrooms encourage children to express themselves freely, participate actively, and make meaningful contributions during lessons. Such opportunities enable learners to develop a positive self-image and stronger sense of belonging.

Participants also observed improvements in cooperation, empathy, and respect for others. Learners became more willing to collaborate, assist classmates, and engage positively in group activities.

These findings suggest that learner-centered pedagogy supports holistic learner development by addressing both cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of learning. The nurturing classroom environment created by learner-centered approaches promotes emotional safety, confidence, and motivation.

The findings support Noddings (2018), who emphasizes the importance of caring educational environments in fostering learner well-being. Likewise, Durlak et al. (2020) found that socio-emotional learning contributes significantly to academic achievement, positive behavior, and emotional resilience. These findings reinforce the notion that effective teaching extends beyond academic instruction and encompasses the holistic development of learners.

Theme 6: Family and Community Partnerships Strengthen Foundational Learning

The final theme highlights the critical role of family and community partnerships in supporting foundational learning. Participants consistently emphasized that learning becomes more effective when schools, families, and communities work collaboratively to support children's educational development.

One parent remarked:

"Mas natutulungan namin ang mga bata kapag alam namin kung ano ang kanilang pinag-aaralan."

A teacher noted:

"Malaking tulong ang suporta ng mga magulang sa pagkatuto ng mga bata."

Another participant explained:

"Kapag nagtutulungan ang paaralan at pamilya, mas mabilis ang pag-unlad ng mga bata."

Teachers reported maintaining communication with parents through meetings, home visits, progress updates, and collaborative activities. Parents were encouraged to support reading, monitor assignments, and participate in school programs.

Participants observed that learners whose families actively supported their education demonstrated stronger motivation, better attendance, and improved academic performance. Community members also contributed by

providing learning resources, participating in school activities, and supporting educational initiatives.

These findings suggest that foundational learning is a shared responsibility extending beyond the classroom. Strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities create supportive learning ecosystems that enhance learner success.

The findings support Epstein's (2019) theory of school-family-community partnerships, which emphasizes the positive impact of stakeholder collaboration on learner achievement. Similarly, Henderson and Mapp (2017) found that parental involvement significantly improves academic performance, attendance, and learner motivation. UNESCO (2022) likewise recognizes family and community engagement as essential components of quality and inclusive education.

The findings collectively demonstrate that learner-centered pedagogy serves as a powerful framework for nurturing foundational learning skills among Grade 2 learners in rural elementary schools. Through differentiated instruction, contextualized learning, interactive literacy experiences, collaborative numeracy activities, socio-emotional support, and strong family partnerships, teachers create learning environments that address both academic and developmental needs. These interconnected practices contribute to the holistic development of learners and provide a strong foundation for future educational success.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that learner-centered pedagogy plays a significant role in nurturing foundational learning skills among Grade 2 learners in rural elementary schools. Through differentiated instruction, experiential learning, interactive literacy activities, collaborative numeracy experiences, socio-emotional support, and family engagement, teachers create meaningful learning environments that promote holistic learner development.

The findings reveal that learner-centered practices enhance learner participation, motivation, confidence, and academic achievement while addressing the diverse needs of young learners. Despite challenges associated with rural education, teachers demonstrate creativity, adaptability, and commitment in implementing effective pedagogical approaches.

Implications of the Study

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening learner-centered pedagogical competencies among elementary teachers. Professional development programs should focus on differentiated instruction, contextualized learning, literacy and numeracy enhancement, and socio-emotional learning strategies.

School leaders may use the findings to support instructional innovations that foster foundational learning development. Policymakers may also consider strengthening support systems and resources that enable learner-centered instruction in rural schools.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen teacher training on learner-centered pedagogical approaches.
2. Develop contextualized instructional materials for rural schools.
3. Enhance literacy and numeracy intervention programs.
4. Promote collaborative learning strategies across grade levels.
5. Strengthen family and community engagement initiatives.
6. Conduct further studies on learner-centered pedagogy and foundational learning outcomes.

References

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–

101.

Clements, D. H., & Sarama, J. (2020). *Learning and teaching early mathematics*. Routledge.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.

Epstein, J. L. (2019). *School, family, and community partnerships*. Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D., Wangia, S., Bacon, C., & D'Angelo, M. (2021). *Leading from the middle*. Routledge.

Noddings, N. (2018). *The challenge to care in schools*. Teachers College Press.

Piaget, J. (1972). *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (2019). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. National Academies Press.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms*. ASCD.

UNESCO. (2023). *Foundational learning and educational recovery*. UNESCO Publishing.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

World Bank. (2022). *The state of global learning poverty*. World Bank.