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Early Grade Teaching and Foundational Learning Development: Classroom Practices in Literacy, Mathematics and MAKABANSA Education

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Abstract

Foundational learning serves as the cornerstone of learners' long-term academic success, particularly during the early grades where literacy, numeracy, and socio-civic understanding are initially developed. This qualitative case study explored the classroom practices of early grade teachers in literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa education and examined how these pedagogical practices contribute to foundational learning development. The study involved eight early grade teachers from public elementary schools. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the data. Findings revealed three major themes: (1) contextualized and learner-centered instructional practices, (2) interactive and scaffolded foundational learning strategies, and (3) values-oriented and culturally grounded Makabansa integration. Teachers employed differentiated instruction, storytelling, manipulative-based learning, collaborative activities, localized examples, and experiential learning approaches to strengthen learners' literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies. However, challenges such as limited instructional resources, diverse learner needs, reading difficulties, and time constraints affected instructional implementation. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptive pedagogical practices that supported learner engagement and foundational skill acquisition. The study highlights the importance of responsive early grade teaching practices and recommends strengthened instructional support, teacher professional development, and contextualized curriculum implementation to improve foundational learning outcomes in early childhood education.

Keywords: *foundational learning, early grade teaching, literacy education, mathematics instruction, Makabansa education, classroom practices, qualitative case study*

Introduction

Foundational learning in the early grades plays a critical role in shaping learners' academic achievement, cognitive development, and lifelong educational engagement. Early childhood and primary education provide learners with essential competencies in literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, communication, and values formation, which collectively serve as the basis for future learning success. International educational organizations such as the UNESCO and UNICEF emphasize that foundational learning deficits in early education significantly affect learners' long-term educational trajectories, particularly in developing countries where literacy and numeracy gaps remain prevalent.

In the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education continues to strengthen foundational learning through curriculum reforms, early language and literacy programs, numeracy interventions, and the implementation of Makabansa education under the revised curriculum framework. Makabansa education emphasizes the integration of values education, cultural identity, civic responsibility, and social awareness among young learners. As early grade teachers serve as primary facilitators of foundational learning development, their classroom practices significantly influence learners' academic engagement, skill acquisition, and socio-emotional growth.

Despite various educational reforms, many learners continue to experience difficulties in reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, and active classroom participation during the early grades. Existing literature highlights that effective foundational learning requires learner-centered, contextualized, and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that address diverse learner needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, classroom instruction in literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa education must be responsive to learners' cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts to ensure meaningful learning experiences.

Although previous studies have explored literacy instruction, numeracy interventions, and values education separately, limited research comprehensively examines how early grade teachers simultaneously implement classroom practices across literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa education to support foundational learning development. This study therefore explored the pedagogical practices employed by early grade teachers and examined their contributions to foundational learning outcomes among young learners.

Review of Related Literature

Foundational Learning and Early Grade Education

Foundational learning refers to the acquisition of basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies necessary for lifelong learning and academic success. According to World Bank (2022), foundational learning deficits hinder learners' future educational attainment and economic participation. Early grade education serves as a crucial developmental stage where learners build essential cognitive and social competencies.

Research emphasizes that learner-centered instruction, active participation, and scaffolded learning significantly improve foundational skill development among early learners (Bruner, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). Effective early grade teaching requires instructional responsiveness, differentiated learning strategies, and culturally contextualized pedagogy.

Literacy Instruction in Early Grades

Literacy development remains a central component of foundational learning. Early literacy instruction includes phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, comprehension, and written expression. According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), social interaction and guided learning experiences enhance language acquisition and cognitive development.

Studies reveal that storytelling, shared reading, peer-assisted learning, and contextualized reading

materials improve learner engagement and reading comprehension (Snow et al., 2021). Similarly, interactive literacy instruction promotes learner confidence and communication skills.

Mathematics Instruction and Numeracy Development

Early mathematics instruction develops learners' problem-solving abilities, logical reasoning, and quantitative understanding. Manipulative-based learning, visual representations, and experiential activities support numeracy acquisition among young learners (Clements & Sarama, 2020).

Constructivist learning approaches encourage learners to actively participate in mathematical exploration through hands-on activities and collaborative problem-solving. Teachers who utilize differentiated numeracy strategies create more inclusive and meaningful mathematical learning experiences.

Makabansa Education and Values Formation

Makabansa education promotes patriotism, cultural identity, moral development, and civic responsibility among Filipino learners. Integrating Makabansa concepts into classroom instruction helps learners understand social values, community participation, and national identity.

Research suggests that values-oriented education strengthens learners' socio-emotional development and promotes positive classroom behavior (Gay, 2018). Teachers who contextualize Makabansa instruction through local culture, storytelling, and experiential activities foster stronger learner engagement and cultural appreciation.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction, collaboration, and guided instructional support. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development explains that learners develop higher-order thinking skills when teachers provide appropriate scaffolding and instructional mediation.

The study was also grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experiential and meaningful learning activities. These theories support the importance of interactive, learner-centered, and contextualized classroom practices in foundational learning development.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the classroom practices of early grade teachers in literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa education.

Participants of the Study

Eight early grade teachers handling Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners from public elementary schools participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their teaching experience and involvement in foundational learning instruction.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment tools.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The process involved familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, defining themes, and report writing.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility was ensured through member checking and triangulation of data sources. Dependability

was established through audit trails, while confirmability was strengthened through reflective documentation. Thick descriptions supported transferability.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Contextualized and Learner-Centered Instructional Practices

Participants emphasized the use of localized examples, storytelling, collaborative learning, and differentiated instruction to improve learner engagement and understanding.

One participant shared:

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

Teachers integrated contextualized examples and culturally relevant learning materials to make lessons more meaningful and relatable. These findings support Gay (2018), who emphasized that culturally responsive teaching enhances learner participation and comprehension.

Differentiated instruction also emerged as an important practice in addressing diverse learner needs. Teachers modified activities, simplified instructions, and provided individualized support for struggling learners.

Theme 2: Interactive and Scaffolded Foundational Learning Strategies

Teachers utilized interactive activities such as phonics drills, shared reading, manipulatives, games, and peer collaboration to strengthen literacy and numeracy skills.

One teacher explained:

“Sa Math, gumagamit kami ng counters, sticks, at actual objects para mas maintindihan nila ang numbers at operations.”

Hands-on and scaffolded instructional approaches enhanced learner participation and conceptual understanding. These findings align with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory emphasizing guided learning and scaffolding in cognitive development.

Teachers also highlighted reading remediation practices, repetitive drills, and peer-assisted learning as effective interventions for struggling readers.

Theme 3: Values-Oriented and Culturally Grounded Makabansa Integration

Participants integrated Makabansa concepts through storytelling, role-playing, community discussions, and values-focused classroom activities.

One participant stated:

“Hindi lang academics ang focus namin. Tinuturuan din namin sila ng respeto, pagmamahal sa bayan, at tamang pakikitungo sa kapwa.”

Teachers emphasized that Makabansa education contributes to learners’ socio-emotional development, cultural awareness, and civic responsibility. These findings corroborate studies emphasizing the importance of values education in holistic child development.

Challenges Encountered by Teachers

Participants identified several instructional challenges, including limited learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, learner diversity, reading difficulties, and limited parental support.

Teachers also noted time constraints in balancing literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa instruction within daily classroom schedules.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated adaptability and instructional commitment through creative and learner-responsive teaching strategies.

Conclusion

Early grade teachers play a vital role in strengthening foundational learning development through contextualized, learner-centered, and interactive instructional practices. Literacy, mathematics, and Makabansa education are effectively integrated through scaffolded teaching approaches, experiential activities, and culturally grounded instruction.

Although teachers encounter instructional challenges related to resources, learner diversity, and time constraints, they continue to implement adaptive pedagogical strategies that support foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development among learners.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher support systems, professional development programs, and contextualized curriculum implementation to improve foundational learning outcomes in early grade education.

Implications of the Study

The study highlights the need for educational institutions and policymakers to strengthen instructional support for early grade teachers through continuous professional development, adequate learning resources, and localized teaching materials.

Schools may enhance foundational learning programs by promoting learner-centered pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and collaborative family-community partnerships. Furthermore, integrating culturally responsive and values-oriented teaching practices can strengthen learners' academic competencies and socio-emotional development.

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