



International Review of Pedagogical Innovation and Learning Sciences

Volume I, Issue 1, 2026 | <https://www.azalpub.com/index.php/IRPILS>

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT AND LIVED LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF GRADE 3 LEARNERS IN SAN ANTONIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Article Info

Received: 3/18/2026

Accepted: 05/30.2026

Published: 06/18/2026

Keywords

classroom engagement, lived experiences, qualitative research, elementary education, learner-centered pedagogy

¹**Janice Pascua Reyes**

Northeastern College
San Antonio Elementary School

²**Ulysses B. Daquioag**

Department of Education

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the nature of classroom engagement and the lived learning experiences of Grade 3 learners in San Antonio Elementary School. Anchored in constructivist learning theory and student engagement frameworks, the research investigates how instructional practices, classroom environments, and social interactions shape learners' participation and meaning-making processes. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving purposively selected learners and teachers. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings revealed four major themes: (1) Interactive Engagement through Collaborative Learning, (2) Experiential and Contextualized Meaning-Making, (3) Emotional and Social Dimensions of Engagement, and (4) Constraints in Sustaining Active Participation. Results indicate that learners are more engaged when instruction is interactive, socially grounded, and relevant to their lived experiences. However, structural challenges such as time constraints and resource limitations hinder consistent engagement. The study underscores the importance of learner-centered pedagogies and supportive classroom environments in enhancing engagement and meaningful learning.

*Corresponding author: janice.reyes011@deped.gov.ph/ulysses.daquioag@deped.gov.ph

INTRODUCTION

Classroom engagement is widely recognized as a critical determinant of learners' academic success and overall development, particularly in the foundational years of elementary education. Engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, reflecting how learners participate in activities, connect with learning tasks, and invest effort in understanding concepts. In Grade 3, a transitional stage in the Philippine basic education system, learners begin to demonstrate increased independence and higher-order thinking, making engagement a vital component of effective instruction.

The concept of lived learning experiences further enriches the understanding of engagement by emphasizing how learners perceive, interpret, and internalize classroom interactions. Drawing from constructivist perspectives, learning is viewed as an active process shaped by social interaction, prior knowledge, and contextual realities (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, student engagement theories highlight the importance of interactive, collaborative, and meaningful learning environments in fostering sustained participation and deeper understanding (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Despite policy emphasis on learner-centered education in the Philippines, there remains a need for in-depth qualitative investigations into how engagement is experienced by young learners within actual classroom contexts. Many studies focus on quantitative measures of engagement, leaving a gap in understanding the subjective and lived dimensions of learning among elementary students.

This study addresses this gap by exploring classroom engagement and lived learning experiences of Grade 3 learners in San Antonio Elementary School. It seeks to provide nuanced insights into how learners interact with instructional practices and how these experiences shape their engagement and learning processes.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do Grade 3 learners experience classroom engagement in San Antonio Elementary School?
2. What are the lived learning experiences of learners during classroom instruction?
3. What factors influence learners' engagement in classroom activities?
4. What challenges affect the sustainability of learner engagement?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that learners construct knowledge through interaction and experience, and the Student Engagement Theory (Fredricks et al., 2004), which conceptualizes engagement as a multidimensional construct involving behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. These frameworks provide a lens for understanding how learners actively participate in and make sense of their classroom experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to examine classroom engagement and lived learning experiences within a real-life educational setting. The research was conducted at San Antonio Elementary School, a public school characterized by diverse learner backgrounds and typical classroom conditions in the Philippine context. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included one Grade 3 teacher and ten Grade 3 learners representing varied levels of engagement and academic performance.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. These methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both observed practices and participants' perspectives. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme development. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation, member checking, and audit trails to establish credibility, dependability, and

confirmability.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Interactive Engagement through Collaborative Learning

Learners demonstrated high levels of engagement when participating in group activities, peer discussions, and cooperative learning tasks. These instructional strategies created opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and shared problem-solving, allowing learners to actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive information. During classroom observations, learners were seen exchanging ideas, clarifying concepts with peers, and jointly completing tasks, indicating that collaboration served as a central mechanism for engagement. The structure of group activities also enabled learners with varying abilities to contribute in different ways, thereby promoting inclusivity and participation across diverse learner profiles.

Responses:

“Mas gusto ko kapag may group activity kasi nakakapag-usap kami.”

(I prefer group activities because we can talk and share ideas.)

“Mas naiintindihan ko kapag may kasama akong tumutulong.”

(I understand better when someone helps me.)

The findings affirm that collaborative learning fosters engagement by facilitating social interaction and the co-construction of knowledge, a core principle of constructivist learning theory. Through peer interaction, learners are able to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and build upon one another's ideas, resulting in deeper cognitive processing. This aligns with the theoretical perspective of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Furthermore, collaborative learning enhances not only academic understanding but also social skills such as communication, cooperation, and empathy. The results suggest that when learners are positioned as active participants within a social learning environment, their engagement becomes more sustained and meaningful. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on careful facilitation by teachers to ensure equitable participation and purposeful interaction.

Theme 2: Experiential and Contextualized Meaning-Making

Learners exhibited stronger engagement and comprehension when instructional content was linked to real-life experiences and familiar contexts. Teachers' use of contextualized examples drawn from learners' homes, communities, and daily routines enabled students to relate abstract concepts to tangible realities. This approach made lessons more meaningful and accessible, particularly for young learners who rely heavily on concrete experiences in understanding new ideas. Observations revealed that learners were more responsive, attentive, and participative when lessons reflected situations they could easily recognize and relate to.

Responses:

“Kapag may halimbawa sa bahay o sa paligid, mas madali ko maintindihan.”

(When examples are related to home or surroundings, I understand better.)

This finding highlights the importance of contextualized learning in enhancing both engagement and comprehension. By connecting academic content to learners' lived experiences, teachers reduce the abstraction of concepts and facilitate meaningful learning. This supports experiential learning perspectives, particularly the work of David Kolb, which posits that learning is most effective when grounded in concrete experiences followed by reflection and application. Contextualization also validates learners' backgrounds and experiences, making learning more inclusive and culturally responsive. The results suggest that when learners perceive relevance in what they are learning, they are more motivated to participate and invest effort. Thus, contextualized pedagogy is not merely a strategy for comprehension but a critical factor in sustaining learner engagement.

Theme 3: Emotional and Social Dimensions of Engagement

Learners' emotional states and interpersonal relationships significantly influenced their level of classroom engagement. A supportive and positive classroom climate, characterized by

trust, respect, and encouragement, enabled learners to participate more actively in discussions and activities. Learners who felt comfortable with their teacher and peers were more willing to express ideas, ask questions, and take academic risks. Conversely, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, or lack of connection with the teacher could limit participation.

Responses:

“Mas sumasagot ako kapag comfortable ako sa teacher.”

(I participate more when I feel comfortable with the teacher.)

The findings underscore the critical role of emotional and social factors in shaping learner engagement. Engagement is not solely cognitive but also deeply affective, as learners’ feelings toward the classroom environment influence their willingness to participate. This aligns with student engagement theories, particularly the framework of Jennifer A. Fredricks, which highlights emotional engagement as a key dimension of learning. Positive teacher-student relationships foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety, which are essential for active participation. The results indicate that teachers who create nurturing and inclusive environments can significantly enhance learners’ confidence and motivation. Therefore, emotional support and relational pedagogy are integral to effective teaching, especially in early elementary settings.

Theme 4: Constraints in Sustaining Active Participation

Despite the presence of engaging instructional practices, several structural and contextual factors limited the consistent implementation of active and learner-centered strategies. These included time constraints, large class sizes, and insufficient instructional materials. Teachers often had to prioritize curriculum coverage, which reduced opportunities for interactive and experiential activities. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms made it challenging to manage group work effectively, while limited resources constrained the variety of teaching strategies that could be employed.

Responses:

“Minsan hindi na kami nakakapag-activity kasi kulang sa oras.”

(Sometimes we cannot do activities because time is limited.)

The findings reveal that structural constraints significantly hinder the sustainability of engaging pedagogical practices. While teachers recognize the value of interactive and learner-centered approaches, systemic limitations often restrict their consistent application. This reflects a gap between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities, particularly in public school contexts. The results suggest that engagement is not solely dependent on teacher effort but is also shaped by institutional conditions. Addressing these challenges requires systemic interventions, including flexible curriculum implementation, adequate resource provision, and manageable class sizes. Without such support, the full potential of learner-centered pedagogy cannot be realized, resulting in uneven engagement among learners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study reveals that classroom engagement among Grade 3 learners in San Antonio Elementary School is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by instructional practices, learner experiences, and contextual realities. Interactive and collaborative learning strategies emerged as powerful drivers of engagement, enabling learners to actively participate, share ideas, and construct knowledge collectively. Similarly, experiential and contextualized approaches enhanced comprehension and relevance by linking lessons to learners’ lived experiences, thereby fostering meaningful learning. The emotional and social dimensions of the classroom further played a crucial role, as positive relationships and supportive environments encouraged learners to engage confidently and consistently.

However, the study also highlights persistent challenges in sustaining high levels of engagement due to structural constraints such as limited time, large class sizes, and inadequate resources. These factors create a tension between the aspiration for learner-centered pedagogy and the realities of classroom implementation. As a result, while engagement is evident in many instructional moments, it is not always consistently maintained across all learning situations.

Hence, the findings emphasize that effective classroom engagement requires not only

innovative teaching practices but also systemic support that enables teachers to implement these practices sustainably. Promoting interactive, contextualized, and emotionally supportive learning environments, alongside addressing structural limitations, is essential in enhancing the quality of learning experiences for elementary learners.

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