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EXPLORING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING SKILLS AMONG LEARNERS IN SIFFU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract

This qualitative inquiry explores how pedagogical practices influence the development of learning skills among learners in Siffu Elementary School. Anchored in constructivist learning theory and 21st-century skills frameworks, the study examines how instructional strategies shape learners' cognitive, social, and metacognitive competencies. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving purposively selected teachers and learners. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings revealed four major themes: (1) Adaptive and Differentiated Pedagogical Practices, (2) Experiential and Skill-Oriented Learning Engagements, (3) Development of Collaborative and Critical Thinking Skills, and (4) Structural Constraints Affecting Skill Development. Results indicate that learner-centered and contextually grounded pedagogies enhance the development of essential learning skills, particularly collaboration, problem-solving, and self-regulation. However, systemic challenges such as limited resources and time constraints hinder the consistent implementation of such practices. The study underscores the need for sustained professional development and institutional support to strengthen skill-based learning in elementary education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of learning skills among elementary learners has become a central focus in contemporary education, particularly in response to rapidly evolving societal, economic, and technological demands. In the 21st century, learners are expected not only to acquire foundational knowledge but also to develop higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and self-regulation, which are essential for lifelong learning and adaptability (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These learning skills enable learners to analyze information, solve complex problems, work effectively with others, and manage their own learning processes. In the context of elementary education, these competencies are especially critical, as they form the foundation for future academic success and personal development. At this stage, learners begin to develop habits of inquiry, interaction, and reflection, which shape their capacity to engage meaningfully with content and participate actively in the learning process (Zimmerman, 2002).

Pedagogical practices play a pivotal role in cultivating these essential learning skills. Learner-centered approaches, grounded in constructivist theory, emphasize active participation, experiential engagement, and social interaction as fundamental components of effective instruction. According to Lev Vygotsky, learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration, where learners construct knowledge within meaningful contexts and with the support of more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective underscores the importance of dialogue, scaffolding, and cooperative learning in fostering cognitive development. Similarly, experiential learning theory, as advanced by David Kolb, highlights that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, involving cycles of action, reflection, and application (Kolb, 1984). These theoretical perspectives suggest that pedagogical practices that engage learners actively and contextually are more effective in developing not only knowledge but also transferable skills.

In the Philippine educational context, national policies and frameworks increasingly emphasize inclusive, learner-centered, and skill-based education aligned with global competencies such as those outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Department of Education's curriculum reforms. Initiatives such as the MATATAG Curriculum and inclusive education policies advocate for the development of holistic learners equipped with 21st-century skills (Department of Education, 2023). However, despite these policy directions, there remains a critical need to examine how such pedagogical principles are translated into actual classroom practices, particularly in public elementary schools where resource constraints and diverse learner needs are prevalent. Existing literature often prioritizes quantitative assessments of academic performance, thereby overlooking the qualitative and experiential dimensions of how learners develop and internalize these skills within real classroom contexts (OECD, 2019).

This study addresses this gap by exploring the pedagogical practices employed in Siffu Elementary School and their influence on the development of learners' learning skills. By adopting a qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and interactions of both teachers and learners, providing a deeper understanding of how teaching strategies facilitate or hinder the acquisition of essential competencies. Through this approach, the research aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on skill-based education by highlighting the contextual realities of classroom practice and offering insights that may inform more responsive and effective pedagogical interventions.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What pedagogical practices are employed by teachers in Siffu Elementary School?
2. How do these practices influence the development of learners' learning skills?
3. What learning skills do learners develop through classroom engagement?
4. What challenges affect the development of learning skills in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory. Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and collaboration, while experiential learning highlights the role of experience, reflection, and application in skill development. These frameworks provide a lens for understanding how pedagogical practices facilitate the acquisition of cognitive, social, and metacognitive skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of pedagogical practices and the development of learning skills within Siffu Elementary School. Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the case study approach allowed the researchers to examine teaching-learning processes within their natural context, capturing the complexities and nuances of classroom interactions. Siffu Elementary School, a public elementary institution, reflects the typical conditions of Philippine classrooms, characterized by diverse learner backgrounds, varying levels of academic readiness, and limited instructional resources. These contextual realities made the school an appropriate setting for investigating how pedagogical practices are enacted and how they influence the development of learners' cognitive, social, and metacognitive skills.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that those involved had direct and relevant experiences related to the focus of the study. The participants included six teachers from the upper elementary levels and twelve learners representing diverse learning abilities and engagement levels. Data were gathered using multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth and triangulation, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. Interviews provided insights into participants' perspectives and lived experiences, while observations captured actual classroom practices and interactions. Document analysis further enabled the researchers to examine the alignment between planned instruction and its implementation. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving systematic processes of familiarization, coding, categorization, and theme development. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to the principles of credibility, dependability, and confirmability through triangulation of data sources, member checking to validate interpretations, and the maintenance of audit trails to ensure transparency and rigor in the research process.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Adaptive and Differentiated Pedagogical Practices

Teachers demonstrated a high level of instructional flexibility by employing differentiated pedagogical strategies that responded to the diverse abilities, learning paces, and needs of learners. Instruction was not delivered in a uniform manner; rather, teachers modified content complexity, varied instructional materials, and adjusted pacing based on learners' levels of understanding. For instance, learners who required additional support were provided with scaffolded tasks, guided instruction, and simplified explanations, while those who demonstrated advanced comprehension were given enrichment activities that required analysis and independent thinking. This adaptability was also evident in the use of multimodal teaching approaches, including visual aids, oral explanations, and hands-on tasks, which catered to different learning preferences.

Responses:

"Iba-iba ang paraan ng pagtuturo ko depende sa kakayahan ng bata."

(I adjust my teaching based on the learner's ability.)

"Kapag nahihirapan sila, binabago ko ang activity para mas maintindihan nila."

(When they find it difficult, I change the activity so they can understand better.)

"May mga bata na mabilis matuto kaya binibigyan ko sila ng dagdag na gawain."

(Some learners learn quickly, so I give them additional tasks.)

The findings affirm that differentiated instruction is a critical component of inclusive pedagogy, as it ensures equitable access to learning opportunities for all students regardless of ability level. By tailoring instruction to meet individual learner needs, teachers facilitate meaningful engagement and promote skill development across cognitive and metacognitive domains. This aligns with constructivist principles, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of providing appropriate support within the learner's zone of proximal development. Furthermore, differentiated instruction enhances learner motivation and participation, as students are more likely to engage in tasks that are appropriately challenging (Tomlinson, 2014). The results suggest that adaptive pedagogy not only supports academic achievement but also fosters confidence and autonomy among learners, although its effectiveness depends on sustained teacher capacity and institutional support.

Theme 2: Experiential and Skill-Oriented Learning Engagements

Learning activities in the classroom were largely experiential, emphasizing active participation,

hands-on engagement, and real-life application of concepts. Teachers integrated practical tasks, demonstrations, and problem-solving exercises that required learners to apply knowledge rather than merely recall information. These activities often mirrored real-world situations, enabling learners to connect classroom learning with their daily experiences. Such approaches encouraged learners to explore, experiment, and reflect, thereby deepening their understanding and facilitating the development of essential learning skills.

Responses:

"Mas natututo ako kapag ginagawa namin ang activity."

(I learn more when we do activities.)

"Kapag may halimbawa sa totoong buhay, mas naiintindihan ko ang lesson."

(When there are real-life examples, I understand the lesson better.)

"Mas masaya ang klase kapag may hands-on na gawain."

(The class is more enjoyable when there are hands-on activities.)

The findings highlight the effectiveness of experiential learning in promoting skill acquisition and meaningful understanding. By engaging learners in active tasks, teachers enable them to move beyond passive learning toward deeper cognitive engagement. This supports the experiential learning model of David Kolb, which posits that learning occurs through a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Kolb, 1984). Experiential activities also foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as learners are required to analyze situations and make decisions. Moreover, the integration of real-life contexts enhances the relevance of learning, increasing learners' motivation and engagement. These findings suggest that skill-oriented pedagogies are essential in developing not only academic competencies but also practical and transferable skills necessary for lifelong learning.

Theme 3: Development of Collaborative and Critical Thinking Skills

Learners developed essential learning skills particularly communication, collaboration, and critical thinking through structured group work, peer discussions, and cooperative learning tasks. These activities required learners to articulate ideas, listen to others, evaluate different perspectives, and collectively solve problems. The collaborative nature of these tasks created opportunities for learners to engage in higher-order thinking processes, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Additionally, group interactions allowed learners to learn from one another, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support within the classroom.

Responses:

"Natututo akong makinig at magbigay ng idea sa grupo."

(I learn to listen and share ideas in the group.)

"Kapag nag-uusap kami, mas marami akong naiintindihan."

(When we discuss, I understand more.)

"Mas natututo ako kapag nagtutulungan kami sa pagsagot."

(I learn better when we help each other in answering.)

The findings indicate that collaborative learning environments are instrumental in developing higher-order thinking and social skills among learners. Through interaction and dialogue, learners engage in the co-construction of knowledge, which enhances both cognitive and interpersonal competencies. This aligns with the constructivist perspective of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Furthermore, collaborative learning supports the development of 21st-century skills, including communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). The results suggest that when learners are actively involved in cooperative tasks, they become more reflective, analytical, and engaged. Thus, integrating collaborative strategies in classroom instruction is essential in preparing learners for complex problem-solving and real-world interactions.

Theme 4: Structural Constraints Affecting Skill Development

Despite the implementation of learner-centered and skill-oriented pedagogies, several structural constraints hindered the consistent development of learning skills. These included limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient teaching materials. Teachers often faced pressure to complete curriculum requirements within a restricted timeframe, which reduced opportunities for interactive and experiential activities. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms made it difficult to effectively manage group work and provide individualized attention. The lack of adequate instructional resources further limited the variety and quality of learning experiences that could be offered to learners.

Responses:

"Kulang ang oras para sa activities."

(Time is not enough for activities.)

"Minsan hindi na namin nagagawa ang group work dahil marami kami sa klase."

(Sometimes we cannot do group work because there are too many of us in the class.)

"Kulang ang materials kaya hindi lahat nakakasabay sa activity."

(Materials are lacking, so not everyone can participate in the activity.)

The findings reveal that systemic and structural challenges significantly constrain the implementation of effective skill-based pedagogies. While teachers demonstrate awareness and commitment to learner-centered approaches, external factors limit their capacity to sustain such practices. This reflects a broader issue within educational systems, where policy aspirations for inclusive and skill-oriented education are not always matched by adequate resources and support. Research indicates that resource availability and class size are critical determinants of instructional effectiveness and learner engagement (OECD, 2019). The results suggest that addressing these constraints requires systemic interventions, including improved resource allocation, curriculum flexibility, and institutional support. Without such measures, the potential of pedagogical innovations to enhance learning skills remains constrained.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that pedagogical practices in Siffu Elementary School play a pivotal role in shaping the development of learners' learning skills. Adaptive and differentiated instructional strategies enable teachers to address diverse learner needs, fostering inclusive and meaningful learning experiences. Experiential and skill-oriented activities further enhance learners' ability to apply knowledge in practical contexts, promoting deeper understanding and the development of critical competencies. Additionally, collaborative learning environments contribute significantly to the development of communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, which are essential for 21st-century learning.

However, the study also highlights the persistent influence of structural constraints on the effectiveness and sustainability of these pedagogical practices. Limited instructional time, large class sizes, and inadequate resources create barriers that hinder the consistent implementation of learner-centered and skill-based approaches.

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