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## LIVED EXPERIENCES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ON LEARNING PRACTICES, PEDAGOGY, AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN DAPPAT INTEGRATED SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE LENS

<sup>1</sup>**Erla Mae B. Malunay**

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines  
Dappat Integrated School

<sup>2</sup>**Ulysses B. Daquioag**

Department of Education

### Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the lived experiences of junior high school students regarding learning practices, pedagogy, and educational activities in Dappat Integrated School. Anchored in constructivist learning theory and student engagement frameworks, the study examines how instructional approaches and classroom dynamics shape learners' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving purposively selected junior high school students and teachers. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, five major themes emerged: (1) Interactive and Learner-Centered Pedagogical Engagements, (2) Experiential and Contextualized Learning Practices, (3) Collaborative Learning and Peer Support Systems, (4) Emotional and Motivational Dimensions of Learning, and (5) Structural Constraints in Instructional Implementation. Findings reveal that students' engagement and skill development are enhanced through participatory, relevant, and socially supportive learning environments. However, systemic challenges such as limited resources and time constraints hinder the consistent delivery of such practices. The study underscores the importance of strengthening pedagogical responsiveness and institutional support to sustain meaningful and inclusive learning experiences.

\*Corresponding author: [erlmae.malunay@deped.gov.ph](mailto:erlmae.malunay@deped.gov.ph) / [ulysses.daquioag@deped.gov.ph](mailto:ulysses.daquioag@deped.gov.ph)

## **INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary education, understanding learners' lived experiences has become increasingly essential in evaluating the effectiveness of pedagogical practices and the overall quality of learning environments. The shift toward learner-centered education reflects a paradigm change from merely transmitting knowledge to fostering meaningful learning experiences that consider how students actively engage with, interpret, and internalize instructional content. This perspective recognizes learners as active agents in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients. In the junior high school level, this focus becomes even more critical, as learners undergo significant cognitive, social, and emotional transitions that influence their learning behaviors, attitudes, and academic performance. During this developmental stage, students begin to demonstrate higher-order thinking, increased autonomy, and more complex social interactions, making it an opportune period to examine how pedagogical practices shape not only academic outcomes but also learners' identities, motivations, and engagement in the learning process.

Learning practices and educational activities play a central role in shaping students' engagement and the development of essential skills. Effective pedagogy requires the intentional integration of interactive, experiential, and collaborative approaches that encourage learners to actively participate in constructing knowledge. Classrooms that promote dialogue, inquiry, and hands-on engagement provide opportunities for learners to connect new information with prior knowledge, thereby enhancing understanding and retention. This aligns with the social constructivist perspective of Lev Vygotsky, which posits that learning is inherently social and occurs through interaction, dialogue, and shared experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, experiential learning theory, as proposed by David Kolb, emphasizes that learners develop deeper and more meaningful understanding when they engage in concrete experiences followed by reflection and application (Kolb, 1984). These theoretical frameworks highlight that learning is most effective when it is active, contextualized, and socially mediated, enabling learners to develop not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.

In the Philippine educational context, ongoing reforms underscore the importance of inclusive, learner-centered, and skills-based education aligned with 21st-century competencies. Initiatives such as curriculum enhancements and policy frameworks aim to equip learners with the necessary skills to thrive in a rapidly changing global environment. However, despite these policy directions, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these pedagogical principles are translated into actual classroom practices and, more importantly, how they are experienced by learners. Much of the existing research tends to focus on instructional strategies from the perspective of teachers or on quantitative measures of academic performance, often overlooking the subjective and experiential dimensions of learning. As a result, there is limited insight into how students perceive the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches, how they engage with learning activities, and how these experiences influence their motivation and skill development, particularly in public secondary school settings where contextual challenges are prevalent.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of junior high school students in Dappat Integrated School in relation to learning practices, pedagogy, and educational activities. By adopting a qualitative approach, the research seeks to capture the voices, perspectives, and everyday realities of learners, providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how teaching and learning processes unfold in the classroom. Specifically, the study aims to examine how pedagogical practices influence student engagement, motivation, and the development of essential learning skills. Through this inquiry, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on learner-centered education by highlighting the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies with learners' needs, experiences, and contextual realities, ultimately informing more responsive and effective educational practices.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do junior high school students describe their lived experiences of learning practices in Dappat Integrated School?
2. What pedagogical approaches are experienced by students in their classrooms?
3. How do educational activities influence students' engagement and learning?
4. What challenges affect students' learning experiences?

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory. Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through social interaction and contextual experiences, while experiential learning highlights the role of active engagement and reflection in meaningful learning. These frameworks provide a foundation for analyzing how pedagogical practices shape learners' lived experiences.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the lived experiences of junior high school students in Dappat Integrated School, with particular attention to how learning practices, pedagogy, and educational activities shape their engagement and development. Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the case study approach allowed the researchers to capture the complexity of classroom realities within their natural setting, providing a holistic understanding of how students perceive and experience teaching and learning processes. Dappat Integrated School, as a public secondary school in the Philippine context, reflects typical educational conditions characterized by diverse learner backgrounds, varying academic abilities, and limited instructional resources. These contextual factors made the site particularly relevant for examining how pedagogical practices are enacted and experienced in real classroom environments.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that those included had direct and meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. The study involved eight junior high school students representing different levels of academic performance and engagement, as well as four teachers who were actively involved in classroom instruction. 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 learning materials. Interviews provided rich, firsthand accounts of students' and teachers' perspectives, while observations allowed the researchers to document actual classroom interactions and instructional practices. Document analysis further enabled the examination of the alignment between intended and implemented pedagogy. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving systematic processes of familiarization, coding, categorization, and theme development to identify patterns and meanings within the data. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the researchers adhered to the criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability through the use of triangulation, member checking to validate participants' responses and interpretations, and audit trails to ensure transparency and consistency throughout the research process.

## RESULTS

### Theme 1: Interactive and Learner-Centered Pedagogical Engagements

Students consistently described their classroom experiences as more engaging, meaningful, and intellectually stimulating when teachers employed interactive and learner-centered pedagogical approaches. These approaches moved beyond traditional lecture-based instruction and instead emphasized active participation through strategies such as guided questioning, open discussions, think-pair-share activities, and collaborative problem-solving tasks. Teachers frequently posed higher-order questions that required learners to analyze, explain, and justify their answers, rather than simply recall information. This created a dialogic classroom environment where students were not only recipients of knowledge but also contributors to the learning process. As a result, learners were given opportunities to articulate their thoughts, challenge ideas, and build on the contributions of their peers, thereby deepening their understanding of the lesson content.

Moreover, participatory activities such as group discussions, interactive tasks, and class recitations fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility for learning among students. Learners reported feeling more motivated and confident when they were actively involved in classroom interactions, as these experiences allowed them to express their perspectives and engage in meaningful exchanges with both teachers and classmates. The shift from passive listening to active involvement also promoted critical thinking, as students were encouraged to evaluate information, make connections, and apply concepts in different contexts. This transformation in classroom dynamics reflects a move toward a more inclusive and learner-centered environment, where students are empowered to take an active role in constructing knowledge. Overall, the integration of interactive pedagogical practices not only enhances engagement but also supports the development of essential cognitive and communication skills necessary for effective learning.

### Responses:

"Mas naiintindihan ko ang lesson kapag tinatanong kami ng teacher at nakakasagot kami."

(I understand the lesson better when the teacher asks us and we can respond.)  
"Mas gusto ko yung klase na may discussion kasi nakakapag-share kami ng ideas."  
(I prefer classes with discussions because we can share ideas.)  
"Kapag interactive ang teacher, hindi ako nabobore sa klase."  
(When the teacher is interactive, I don't get bored in class.)

The findings suggest that learner-centered pedagogy plays a critical role in enhancing student engagement by shifting the focus of instruction from passive reception to active participation and meaningful cognitive involvement. When learners are given opportunities to interact, question, and contribute to the learning process, they become more invested in constructing their own understanding of the content. This active engagement allows students to move beyond surface-level learning toward deeper comprehension, as they are required to analyze information, connect ideas, and reflect on their own thinking. Such processes strengthen not only content mastery but also the development of higher-order cognitive skills, including reasoning, evaluation, and problem-solving.

This interpretation is strongly aligned with constructivist principles, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978). Interactive teaching strategies such as discussions, questioning, and collaborative tasks serve as platforms for learners to negotiate meaning, share perspectives, and refine their understanding through peer and teacher support. Furthermore, these approaches foster a classroom environment that encourages inquiry and critical thinking, as students are challenged to justify their ideas and engage with diverse viewpoints. Consequently, learner-centered pedagogy not only enhances engagement but also cultivates independent, reflective, and critically thinking learners who are better equipped to apply their knowledge in varied contexts.

## **Theme 2: Experiential and Contextualized Learning Practices**

Students consistently reported that their learning became more effective, engaging, and memorable when lessons were connected to real-life situations and involved hands-on or experiential activities. Rather than relying solely on abstract explanations, teachers incorporated practical examples, demonstrations, and tasks that reflected learners' everyday experiences such as community scenarios, household situations, or familiar social contexts. These approaches allowed students to visualize and relate to the lesson content more easily, reducing confusion and increasing comprehension. Hands-on activities, such as experiments, role-playing, and performance-based tasks, further enabled learners to interact directly with the material, transforming learning into an active and participatory process rather than a passive one.

Moreover, contextualized instruction enhanced the relevance and meaning of learning by bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world application. Students expressed that they were more motivated to participate when they could see the usefulness of what they were learning in their daily lives. This connection fostered deeper understanding, as learners were able to anchor new knowledge to their prior experiences and apply concepts in familiar contexts. As a result, learning became not only easier to grasp but also more purposeful, reinforcing retention and encouraging learners to transfer their knowledge beyond the classroom. Overall, experiential and contextualized approaches contributed significantly to meaningful learning by making education more relatable, practical, and engaging for students.

### **Responses:**

"Mas madaling maintindihan kapag may halimbawa sa totoong buhay."  
(It is easier to understand when there are real-life examples.)  
"Kapag may activity, mas natatandaan ko yung lesson."  
(When there are activities, I remember the lesson better.)  
"Mas interesting kapag may experiments o ginagawa."  
(It is more interesting when there are experiments or activities.)

The findings indicate that experiential learning significantly strengthens both retention and depth of understanding by immersing learners in direct interaction with content rather than limiting them to passive reception (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1938). When students engage in hands-on activities, simulations, or real-life applications, they are able to process information more actively, linking new knowledge with prior experiences (Bransford et al., 2000). This active engagement supports memory retention because learners are not only hearing or seeing information but also doing, reflecting, and applying it, which enhances cognitive processing and long-term retention (Prince, 2004). As a result, concepts become more concrete, meaningful, and easier to recall, particularly when learners encounter similar situations outside the classroom.

This interpretation aligns with the experiential learning theory of David Kolb, which posits that effective

learning occurs through a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Through this cycle, learners continuously refine their understanding by connecting experience with reflection and application. The findings suggest that when teachers incorporate experiential strategies, they not only enhance comprehension but also promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Consequently, experiential learning fosters deeper, more transferable knowledge, enabling learners to apply what they have learned in varied academic and real-life contexts (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

### **Theme 3: Collaborative Learning and Peer Support Systems**

Collaborative learning emerged as a central and highly influential aspect of students' classroom experiences, wherein group work and peer interaction served as key mechanisms for enhancing understanding and developing essential learning skills. Through structured group activities, discussions, and cooperative tasks, students were able to engage in meaningful exchanges of ideas, clarify misconceptions, and collectively construct knowledge. Rather than working in isolation, learners actively interacted with their peers asking questions, explaining concepts, and negotiating meaning which allowed them to process information more deeply. These interactions created a dynamic learning environment where students were not only recipients of knowledge but also contributors to the learning process, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective achievement.

Moreover, collaborative learning provided a supportive platform for learners to build confidence and develop critical social and cognitive skills. Students frequently relied on one another for academic assistance, especially when encountering challenging concepts, as peer explanations were often perceived as more relatable and easier to understand. This peer support system enabled learners to feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, asking questions, and participating in discussions without fear of judgment. In addition, group work encouraged the development of communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, as learners were required to listen actively, respect diverse perspectives, and work together toward common goals. Overall, collaborative learning not only enhanced comprehension but also cultivated interpersonal skills and a positive learning community, making it a vital component of effective and engaging pedagogy.

#### **Responses:**

"Mas natututo ako kapag nagtutulungan kami sa group work."

(I learn more when we work together in group activities.)

"Kapag may hindi ako maintindihan, tinutulungan ako ng classmates ko."

(When I don't understand something, my classmates help me.)

"Mas madali kapag may kausap ka sa pag-aaral."

(It is easier when you have someone to study with.)

Collaborative learning significantly promotes both cognitive and social development by creating opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful interaction, dialogue, and shared problem-solving. Through group work and peer discussions, learners are able to articulate their ideas, question assumptions, and build upon the perspectives of others, leading to deeper cognitive processing and understanding. This aligns with the principles of social constructivist theory, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and mediated learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). In such environments, learners operate within their zone of proximal development, where peer support and collaboration enable them to accomplish tasks that they may not achieve independently. As a result, collaborative learning not only strengthens conceptual understanding but also develops higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

In addition to cognitive benefits, collaborative learning plays a crucial role in fostering social development and interpersonal competencies. Engaging in cooperative tasks requires learners to communicate effectively, listen actively, negotiate roles, and respect diverse viewpoints. These interactions cultivate essential 21st-century skills, including communication, teamwork, and adaptability, which are critical for success in both academic and real-world contexts (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Furthermore, collaborative environments promote a sense of belonging and mutual support, as learners feel encouraged to participate and contribute without fear of judgment. This supportive atmosphere enhances motivation and confidence, ultimately leading to more sustained engagement in learning activities. Thus, collaborative learning not only facilitates academic achievement but also nurtures the social and emotional dimensions of learner development.

### **Theme 4: Emotional and Motivational Dimensions of Learning**

Students' emotional experiences and levels of motivation emerged as powerful factors shaping their overall engagement in classroom learning. Learners were more inclined to participate actively when they felt emotionally secure, valued, and supported within the classroom environment. Positive emotions such as enjoyment, interest, and a sense of belonging enhanced their willingness to engage in discussions, complete tasks, and express their ideas. Conversely, feelings of anxiety, fear of making mistakes, or lack of connection with the teacher and peers tended to inhibit participation and reduce engagement. This highlights that learning is not purely a cognitive process but is deeply intertwined with learners' emotional states, which can either facilitate or hinder their involvement in academic activities.

Moreover, strong and positive relationships with teachers and peers played a crucial role in fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom climate. When teachers demonstrated approachability, encouragement, and respect, students felt more comfortable asking questions, sharing opinions, and taking academic risks. Similarly, peer relationships contributed to a sense of community, where learners supported one another and collaborated without fear of judgment. This environment nurtured confidence and intrinsic motivation, enabling students to engage more meaningfully with the learning process. As a result, students were more likely to persist in challenging tasks, participate in activities, and develop a positive attitude toward learning. Overall, the findings emphasize that emotional support and relational dynamics are essential components of effective pedagogy, as they create conditions where learners can thrive both academically and socially.

**Responses:**

"Mas ganado ako mag-aral kapag mabait ang teacher."

(I am more motivated when the teacher is kind.)

"Kapag comfortable ako, mas nakakapag-participate ako."

(When I feel comfortable, I participate more.)

"Mas gusto ko ang klase kapag hindi ako natatakot magkamali."

(I like the class more when I am not afraid to make mistakes.)

Emotional engagement emerges as a critical component of the learning process, as it directly influences students' willingness to participate, persist, and invest effort in academic tasks. When learners experience positive emotions such as interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging, they are more likely to engage actively in classroom activities, contribute to discussions, and take intellectual risks. In contrast, negative emotions such as anxiety, fear of failure, or disconnection can hinder participation and reduce motivation. This highlights that engagement is not solely cognitive or behavioral but also deeply affective, shaping how learners approach and respond to learning experiences. As emphasized by Jennifer A. Fredricks and colleagues, emotional engagement plays a vital role in sustaining attention, enhancing persistence, and promoting positive academic outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Furthermore, a positive classroom climate serves as a foundational condition for fostering both motivation and confidence among learners. When teachers cultivate an environment characterized by respect, encouragement, and psychological safety, students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, asking questions, and participating without fear of judgment. Such environments promote intrinsic motivation, where learners engage in tasks out of genuine interest and personal satisfaction rather than external pressure. Additionally, supportive peer relationships contribute to a sense of community, reinforcing learners' confidence and willingness to collaborate. These findings suggest that emotional engagement, supported by a nurturing classroom climate, is essential in creating meaningful and sustained learning experiences, ultimately contributing to both academic success and holistic learner development.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study reveals that the lived experiences of junior high school students in Dappat Integrated School are shaped by interactive, experiential, and collaborative pedagogical practices. These approaches enhance engagement, motivation, and the development of essential learning skills. However, structural challenges hinder the consistent implementation of these practices.

The findings highlight the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies with learners' needs and providing systemic support to sustain effective teaching practices. Creating inclusive, engaging, and resource-supported learning environments is essential in improving students' learning experiences and outcomes.

To enhance the quality of teaching and learning, it is essential to strengthen learner-centered and interactive teaching strategies that actively engage students in the learning process and promote critical

thinking. Schools should ensure the provision of adequate instructional resources, including materials and technological tools, to support diverse and innovative pedagogical approaches. Additionally, promoting collaborative and experiential learning activities can further develop learners' cognitive, social, and practical skills by encouraging active participation and real-world application of knowledge. Addressing structural constraints such as limited time, large class sizes, and insufficient resources through policy reforms and institutional support is also crucial to sustain effective instructional practices. Finally, conducting further research using mixed-methods approaches is recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learning processes and outcomes, thereby informing evidence-based educational improvements.

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