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PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Pedagogical practices play a critical role in shaping learners' academic performance, engagement, and overall learning experiences, particularly in elementary education where foundational skills are developed. This study explores the pedagogical practices of teachers and the corresponding learning experiences of learners at Bantey Elementary School, Tadian, Mountain Province. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study captured the lived experiences of teachers handling multiple subject areas in elementary education. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Learner-Centered and Adaptive Pedagogical Practices, (2) Contextualized and Experiential Learning Approaches, (3) Interactive and Collaborative Learning Dynamics, (4) Relational Teaching and Emotional Engagement, and (5) Structural Constraints and Pedagogical Resilience. Results indicate that teachers employ flexible and context-sensitive strategies to enhance learner engagement and understanding despite limited resources. However, systemic challenges continue to influence the consistency and sustainability of these practices. The study contributes to the literature on pedagogy and learning by providing context-specific insights from a rural elementary setting and highlights the need for strengthened institutional support.

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INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy remains a central component of effective teaching and learning, particularly in elementary education where foundational knowledge, skills, and attitudes are developed. The quality of pedagogical practices directly influences learners' engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance. In recent years, educational reforms have emphasized learner-centered approaches that accommodate diverse learning needs, promote active participation, and foster meaningful learning experiences.

In elementary classrooms, learners exhibit a wide range of abilities, interests, and socio-cultural backgrounds. This diversity necessitates pedagogical approaches that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to individual learning needs. Teachers are therefore required to move beyond traditional, teacher-centered instruction and adopt strategies that encourage interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking. Such approaches align with contemporary educational frameworks that emphasize constructivist and experiential learning.

In rural contexts such as Bantey Elementary School in Tadian, Mountain Province, pedagogical practices are shaped by both opportunities and constraints. While teachers demonstrate creativity and adaptability in addressing learner needs, they often face challenges related to limited instructional materials, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to professional development. These conditions influence how teaching and learning are experienced in the classroom.

Despite the recognized importance of pedagogy, there remains a gap in qualitative research that captures the lived experiences of teachers and learners in rural elementary settings. Much of the existing literature focuses on quantitative measures of achievement, with limited attention to the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning.

This study aims to explore the pedagogical practices of teachers and the learning experiences of learners at Bantey Elementary School. Specifically, it seeks to examine how teachers implement instructional strategies, how learners experience these practices, and the challenges encountered in the process. By providing a qualitative lens on pedagogy and learning, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics and offers insights for improving educational practices in similar contexts.

Review of Related Literature

Pedagogical practices in elementary education are increasingly guided by learner-centered approaches that emphasize active participation, collaboration, and critical thinking (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). Constructivist theory posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and experience (Vygotsky, 1978), while experiential learning theory highlights the importance of learning through real-life experiences and reflection (Kolb, 1984).

Research indicates that contextualized teaching enhances learner engagement by connecting instruction to learners' lived experiences (Gay, 2018). Collaborative learning further supports knowledge construction and social development (Gillies, 2016). However, rural schools often face challenges such as limited resources and training opportunities, which affect pedagogical effectiveness (OECD, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers in implementing pedagogical practices and facilitating learning in elementary classrooms. The phenomenological approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of how teaching practices are perceived, enacted, and experienced within the specific context of Bantey Elementary School.

Participants were purposively selected teachers handling multiple subject areas in elementary education. Their experiences provided rich insights into classroom dynamics, instructional strategies, and learner engagement. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their perspectives and experiences in detail. Classroom observations were conducted to capture actual teaching practices and learner interactions, while document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials provided additional evidence of pedagogical approaches.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, audit trails, and thick description of the research context.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Learner-Centered and Adaptive Pedagogical Practices

Participants consistently described their pedagogy as fundamentally learner-centered, characterized by continuous adaptation to students' diverse abilities, learning paces, and needs. Rather than adhering to fixed instructional routines, teachers emphasized the importance of flexibility in lesson delivery, task design, and classroom interaction. Adaptive pedagogical practices include modifying instructional strategies, simplifying or enriching content, and providing differentiated support to ensure that all learners can meaningfully engage with the lesson. In the elementary context, where learners are at varying developmental stages, such adaptability becomes crucial in bridging learning gaps and sustaining participation. Teachers highlighted that effective instruction requires a deep understanding of individual learner profiles, allowing them to tailor teaching approaches that promote inclusivity and equitable learning opportunities.

Participant Responses

- *"Kailangan mong mag-adjust sa bawat bata."*
- *"Iba-iba ang approach depende sa kakayahan."*
- *"Learner-centered dapat ang teaching."*

These findings reflect the principles of learner-centered education, where instruction is designed around students' needs, interests, and capabilities. This aligns with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory, which emphasizes the role of scaffolding in supporting learners' development within their Zone of Proximal Development. Similarly, Florian (2019) argues that inclusive pedagogy requires extending teaching approaches to all learners rather than creating separate interventions. Adaptive teaching has been shown to enhance engagement, improve comprehension, and reduce learning disparities (Ainscow, 2020). Thus, learner-centered and adaptive pedagogy functions as a core mechanism for fostering inclusive and meaningful learning experiences in elementary classrooms.

Theme 2: Contextualized and Experiential Learning Approaches

Teachers highlighted the importance of contextualizing instruction and incorporating experiential learning approaches to enhance understanding and retention. By connecting lessons to learners' real-life experiences, local culture, and community context, teachers make abstract concepts more concrete and relatable. Contextualized instruction allows learners to draw from their own knowledge and experiences, facilitating deeper comprehension and meaningful learning. Experiential learning, on the other hand, involves engaging learners in hands-on activities, real-world applications, and reflective processes that promote active participation. In rural settings such as Bantey Elementary School, where resources may be limited, teachers rely on locally available materials and community-based examples to enrich the learning experience.

Participant Responses

- *"Ginagamit ko ang local examples."*
- *"Mas naiintindihan nila kapag relatable."*
- *"Experience-based learning ang ginagawa ko."*

These practices align with David Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that learning occurs through experience, reflection, and application. Contextualized teaching also reflects culturally responsive pedagogy, where instruction is grounded in learners' cultural and social realities (Gay, 2018). Research indicates that contextualized and experiential approaches significantly enhance learner engagement, motivation, and academic performance by making learning relevant and meaningful (UNESCO, 2020). These findings suggest that contextualization is not merely a strategy but a pedagogical necessity in fostering deeper understanding and sustained engagement in elementary education.

Theme 3: Interactive and Collaborative Learning Dynamics

Teachers emphasized the use of interactive and collaborative learning strategies to promote active participation and engagement among learners. These strategies include group work, peer discussions, cooperative tasks, and shared problem-solving activities. Collaborative learning environments encourage learners to interact, exchange ideas, and support one another in the learning process. Such interactions not only enhance academic understanding but also develop social skills, communication abilities, and teamwork. Teachers noted that when learners are actively involved in collaborative tasks, they become more motivated, confident, and engaged in the lesson.

Participant Responses

- *"Nagtutulungan ang mga bata."*
- *"Group activities ang ginagamit ko."*
- *"Mas active sila sa collaborative tasks."*

These findings are consistent with cooperative learning theory, which highlights the importance of positive interdependence and peer interaction in enhancing learning outcomes (Gillies, 2016). The approach also aligns with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning is socially constructed through interaction. Research shows that collaborative learning improves both cognitive and social outcomes, particularly in diverse classrooms where learners can benefit from peer support (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, interactive and collaborative learning serves as a powerful pedagogical approach that fosters both academic achievement and social development, reinforcing inclusive classroom practices.

Theme 4: Relational Teaching and Emotional Engagement

Teachers identified the establishment of strong interpersonal relationships as a fundamental aspect of effective pedagogy. Relational teaching involves creating a classroom environment characterized by trust, respect, empathy, and emotional support. Teachers described their classrooms as nurturing spaces where learners feel safe, valued, and encouraged to participate. Emotional engagement is particularly important in elementary education, where learners are still developing their social and emotional competencies. By building meaningful connections with students, teachers are able to better understand their needs, motivate them, and create a positive learning atmosphere that supports both academic and personal growth.

Participant Responses

- *"Parang pamilya ang classroom."*
- *"Importante ang connection sa bata."*
- *"Kailangan ng pasensya."*

These findings align with the Ethics of Care framework proposed by Nel Noddings (2005), which emphasizes the importance of caring relationships in education. Additionally, emotional engagement is a key component of effective teaching, as highlighted by Hargreaves (1998), who describes teaching as an emotionally intensive practice. Research by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) further indicates that positive teacher–student relationships significantly enhance learner motivation, engagement, and academic success. Thus, relational teaching is not merely supportive but central to the effectiveness of pedagogical practices, particularly in inclusive and learner-centered environments.

Theme 5: Structural Constraints and Pedagogical Resilience

Despite their commitment to effective teaching, participants reported significant structural challenges that impact their pedagogical practices. These include limited instructional materials, heavy workloads, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to professional development opportunities. Such constraints create barriers to implementing innovative and inclusive teaching strategies. However, teachers demonstrated strong pedagogical resilience by adapting to these challenges, improvising resources, and maintaining a commitment to learner success. This resilience reflects a sense of professional dedication and responsibility, where teachers strive to provide quality education despite systemic limitations.

Participant Responses

- *"Kulang sa materials."*
- *"Maraming workload."*
- *"Ginagawa ko ang best ko."*

These findings reflect broader systemic issues identified by OECD (2019), which highlights disparities in resource allocation and support for teachers in rural contexts. While teacher resilience plays a crucial role in sustaining pedagogical practices, reliance on individual effort alone is insufficient for long-term improvement. Ainscow (2020) emphasizes that inclusive and effective education requires systemic support, including adequate resources, training, and institutional frameworks. Therefore, while pedagogical resilience enables teachers to navigate challenges, sustainable improvement in teaching and learning requires structural and policy-level interventions that support and empower educators.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores that pedagogical practices in Bantey Elementary School are deeply rooted in adaptability, contextualization, and relational engagement, reflecting a responsive approach to addressing the diverse learning needs of elementary learners. Teachers emerge as central agents in shaping meaningful learning experiences through innovative, flexible, and learner-centered strategies that bridge gaps in understanding and promote active participation. Their ability to contextualize instruction and foster strong interpersonal relationships with learners contributes significantly to both cognitive and socio-emotional

development, reinforcing the importance of holistic pedagogy in elementary education.

However, despite these strengths, the findings reveal that the sustainability and consistency of such pedagogical practices are constrained by persistent structural challenges, including limited instructional resources, heavy workloads, and insufficient access to professional development opportunities. These systemic limitations not only affect the implementation of innovative teaching strategies but also place additional demands on teachers who must rely on personal initiative and resilience to maintain effective classroom practices.

Consequently, the study highlights the need for strengthened institutional support systems that prioritize resource allocation, capacity-building programs, and policy-driven interventions to support teachers in delivering inclusive and high-quality education. Enhancing access to instructional materials, continuous professional development, and supportive school leadership structures is essential in sustaining effective pedagogical practices. Ultimately, improving pedagogy and learning outcomes in rural elementary settings requires a coordinated effort that integrates teacher agency with systemic support, ensuring that educational reforms translate into meaningful and lasting classroom impact.

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