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Learning Engagement Patterns in Learner-Centered Instruction at Dipaluda Primary School

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Abstract

Learner engagement is a critical indicator of effective instruction, particularly in primary education where early learning experiences shape long-term academic motivation and attitudes toward schooling. Learner-centered instruction has been widely advocated as a pedagogical approach that promotes active participation, autonomy, and meaningful learning. This study examined learning engagement patterns within learner-centered instructional contexts at Dipaluda Primary School. Employing a qualitative institutional case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and focus group discussions with learners. Thematic analysis revealed distinct patterns of engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Findings indicate that learner-centered instruction fostered sustained participation, positive emotional involvement, and deeper cognitive engagement through participatory activities, differentiated tasks, and supportive classroom relationships. However, contextual factors such as class size, instructional resources, and time constraints influenced the consistency of engagement patterns. The study provides empirical insights into how learner-centered pedagogy shapes engagement in primary classrooms and highlights implications for instructional practice, school leadership, and future research.

Keywords:

learner-centered instruction, learning engagement, primary education, classroom practices, qualitative study

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INTRODUCTION

Learning engagement has emerged as a central concern in contemporary educational research due to its strong association with academic achievement, motivation, and holistic learner development. Engagement is particularly significant in primary education, where learners form foundational learning habits, self-concepts, and attitudes toward school. Engaged learners are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, persist in challenging tasks, and develop positive relationships with teachers and peers.

In response to concerns about passive learning and disengagement, learner-centered instruction has been widely promoted as an alternative to traditional teacher-centered approaches. Learner-centered pedagogy emphasizes active participation, collaboration, differentiation, and responsiveness to learners' interests and developmental needs. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients of knowledge, learner-centered instruction encourages them to take an active role in constructing understanding through interaction, exploration, and reflection.

Despite strong theoretical and policy support for learner-centered instruction, questions remain regarding how such practices translate into actual engagement patterns in primary classrooms. Engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components, and these dimensions may manifest differently depending on instructional context. While previous studies have documented positive outcomes associated with learner-centered approaches, fewer have examined how engagement patterns emerge and are sustained within real classroom settings, particularly in primary schools.

In the context of Dipaluda Primary School, learner-centered instruction has been encouraged as part of ongoing instructional improvement efforts. However, empirical evidence documenting how such instructional practices shape learners' engagement remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining learning engagement patterns in learner-centered instructional environments at Dipaluda Primary School. Specifically, it seeks to explore how instructional strategies, classroom interactions, and contextual factors influence learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner-Centered Instruction in Primary Education

Learner-centered instruction is grounded in constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning, which emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment and others. In primary education, learner-centered practices commonly include collaborative learning, hands-on activities, inquiry-based tasks, and opportunities for learner choice. These approaches aim to make learning meaningful, relevant, and developmentally appropriate.

Research indicates that learner-centered instruction enhances learners' motivation and participation by fostering autonomy and a sense of ownership over learning. Teachers adopting learner-centered approaches act as facilitators who guide learning while encouraging exploration, dialogue, and reflection. Such practices have been shown to support deeper understanding and positive learning dispositions in primary learners.

Learning Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct

Learning engagement is widely conceptualized as comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement refers to observable participation, effort, and persistence in learning activities. Emotional engagement involves learners' interest, enjoyment, and sense of belonging, while cognitive engagement reflects strategic thinking, self-regulation, and willingness to invest effort in complex tasks.

Studies consistently demonstrate that engagement is shaped by instructional practices and classroom climate. Learner-centered classrooms that emphasize interaction, relevance, and support are more likely to foster high levels of engagement across all dimensions. Conversely, highly teacher-centered environments often limit opportunities for active involvement and deeper thinking.

Engagement Patterns in Learner-Centered Classrooms

Engagement patterns refer to recurring ways in which learners participate, respond emotionally, and think during learning activities. In learner-centered settings, engagement patterns often include sustained participation, collaborative interaction, and reflective thinking. However, these patterns are influenced by contextual factors such as class size, resource availability, and teacher expertise. Understanding these patterns provides valuable insight into how learner-centered instruction functions in practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative institutional case study design to examine learning engagement patterns in learner-centered instructional contexts at Dupaluda Primary School, allowing for an in-depth exploration of classroom practices and learner experiences within their natural educational setting. The research was conducted in a public primary school implementing learner-centered approaches, with participants consisting of primary school teachers who regularly employed learner-centered strategies and selected learners from their respective classes; purposive sampling was used to ensure that all participants had direct and relevant experience with learner-centered instruction. Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to enhance credibility and triangulation, including classroom observations focusing on instructional strategies, learner participation, and classroom interactions; semi-structured interviews with teachers to explore pedagogical beliefs, instructional decisions, and perceived challenges; and focus group discussions with learners to examine their experiences, feelings, and perceptions of classroom activities. All qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which involved data familiarization, generation of initial codes, identification and refinement of themes, and interpretation of patterns across data sources. Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking, while ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining prior ethical approval, securing informed consent from teachers and parents as well as assent from learners, and maintaining confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

The qualitative analysis of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and learner focus group discussions revealed four dominant and interrelated patterns of learning engagement in learner-centered instructional contexts at Dupaluda Primary School. These patterns reflect how learner-centered pedagogy shaped learners' behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in classroom activities, while also highlighting contextual conditions that influenced the consistency of engagement.

Theme 1: Active Behavioral Engagement through Participatory Learning

Findings indicate that learner-centered instructional practices strongly promoted active behavioral engagement among primary learners. Teachers frequently employed participatory strategies such as group work, collaborative tasks, hands-on activities, role-playing, and guided discussions. During these activities, learners were observed listening attentively, volunteering responses, asking questions, and interacting with peers. Compared to more teacher-directed segments of lessons, participatory learning moments generated higher

levels of attentiveness and sustained involvement.

Teachers emphasized that active participation was intentional and central to their instructional approach. One teacher noted, "*Kapag pinapagawa at pinapaliwanag sa mga bata ang lesson, mas nagiging aktibo sila at hindi madaling mawala ang atensyon.*" Learners echoed this observation, with one stating, "*Mas masaya po ang lesson kapag may group work kasi nakakapag-usap kami at nakakatulong sa isa't isa.*" These responses suggest that participatory learning created opportunities for learners to engage physically, socially, and verbally with content.

This theme highlights the role of participatory instructional strategies in fostering behavioral engagement. Consistent with engagement theory, active involvement in learning tasks increases learners' effort, persistence, and on-task behavior (Fredricks et al., 2004). Constructivist perspectives further suggest that learning is enhanced when learners actively interact with ideas and peers rather than passively receive information (Vygotsky, 1978). The findings affirm that learner-centered instruction provides structures that sustain behavioral engagement in primary classrooms.

Theme 2: Positive Emotional Engagement Fostered by Supportive Learning Environments

A second dominant pattern was the presence of positive emotional engagement fostered by supportive classroom environments. Learner-centered classrooms at Dikaluda Primary School were characterized by encouragement, patience, mutual respect, and positive teacher-learner relationships. Teachers consistently used affirming language, provided constructive feedback, and demonstrated sensitivity to learners' needs. Such practices contributed to a classroom climate in which learners felt safe, valued, and confident to participate. Learners expressed enjoyment and emotional comfort in these environments. One learner shared, "*Hindi po ako natatakot sumagot kasi tinutulungan po kami ng teacher kapag mali.*" Another added, "*Mas gusto ko pumasok sa klase kasi masaya at hindi nakakahiya magkamali.*" Observations confirmed that learners were more willing to participate when mistakes were treated as part of the learning process rather than as failures.

This theme underscores the importance of emotional engagement as a foundation for sustained learning involvement. Supportive relationships enhance learners' sense of belonging and reduce anxiety, which in turn promotes participation and persistence (Wentzel, 2012). Research on learner-centered pedagogy emphasizes that emotional safety and positive classroom climate are essential for meaningful engagement, particularly among young learners (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The findings suggest that emotional engagement is not incidental but actively cultivated through relational teaching practices.

Theme 3: Cognitive Engagement through Reflection and Meaning-Making

The analysis further revealed patterns of deepening cognitive engagement when learner-centered tasks required explanation, reasoning, problem-solving, and reflection. Teachers frequently posed open-ended questions, encouraged learners to explain their answers, and guided them to reflect on what they had learned. These practices supported learners' ability to think critically, connect ideas, and regulate their own learning processes.

During observed lessons, learners demonstrated cognitive effort by revising answers, building on peers' ideas, and explaining reasoning in their own words. Teachers described this process as essential for meaningful learning. One teacher explained, "*Kapag pinapaliwanag ko kung bakit ganoon ang sagot, mas naiintindihan nila at natututo silang mag-isip.*" Learners also recognized the value of reflective tasks, with one noting, "*Mas naiintindihan ko po ang lesson kapag ipinaliliwanag namin at hindi lang sinasabi ang sagot.*"

This theme reflects the role of learner-centered instruction in fostering cognitive engagement through meaning-

making and self-regulation. Cognitive engagement involves sustained mental effort, strategic thinking, and willingness to grapple with complex ideas (Fredricks et al., 2004). The findings align with constructivist and inquiry-based learning theories, which emphasize reflection and explanation as key mechanisms for deep understanding (Dewey, 1938). The results suggest that learner-centered pedagogy promotes not only participation but also higher-order thinking in primary learners.

Theme 4: Contextual Factors Shaping Engagement Patterns

Despite the positive engagement patterns observed, teachers identified several contextual factors that shaped the depth and consistency of learner-centered engagement. These included large class sizes, limited instructional materials, time constraints, and competing administrative responsibilities. Teachers acknowledged that these challenges sometimes limited opportunities for individualized attention and extended inquiry activities.

One teacher shared, "*Gusto naming palaging learner-centered ang klase, pero mahirap kapag marami ang bata at kulang ang gamit.*" Observations showed that teachers often compensated for these constraints by improvising materials, adjusting activities, and prioritizing learner participation within available resources. This adaptability reflected teachers' commitment to learner-centered principles despite structural limitations.

This theme highlights the influence of institutional and contextual conditions on instructional practice. While learner-centered pedagogy supports engagement, its sustainability depends on systemic support, adequate resources, and manageable classroom conditions. These findings are consistent with research indicating that structural constraints can moderate the effectiveness of learner-centered instruction (Fullan, 2007). The results suggest that fostering engagement through learner-centered pedagogy requires both teacher agency and supportive educational environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that learner-centered instruction at Dupaluda Primary School fostered distinct yet interrelated patterns of learning engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Learners' active participation in classroom activities, their positive emotional investment in learning, and their sustained cognitive effort were not isolated outcomes but mutually reinforcing processes. Behavioral engagement, manifested through participation in discussions and collaborative tasks, created opportunities for emotional connection and interest, which in turn encouraged learners to invest greater cognitive effort in understanding and problem-solving. This interplay among engagement dimensions supports engagement theory, which conceptualizes learning engagement as a multidimensional construct in which behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components operate in a dynamic and interconnected manner.

Consistent with constructivist perspectives, learner-centered practices enabled learners to actively construct understanding through interaction, dialogue, and reflection rather than passive reception of information. By engaging learners in meaningful tasks that required explanation, collaboration, and sense-making, teachers facilitated deeper comprehension and reflective thinking. Supportive teacher–learner relationships further enhanced engagement by fostering emotionally safe classroom environments where learners felt valued, confident, and willing to take intellectual risks. However, the presence of contextual constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and time pressures underscores the need for sustained institutional support. Without adequate resources, professional development, and structural support, the consistent enactment of learner-centered pedagogy may be difficult to maintain, highlighting the importance of school-level and systemic interventions in sustaining effective learner-centered practices.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This qualitative institutional study demonstrates that learner-centered instruction plays a critical role in shaping positive learning engagement patterns in primary education. The findings show that when instruction intentionally promotes active participation, emotional safety, and appropriate cognitive challenge, young

learners are more likely to demonstrate sustained behavioral involvement, positive emotional connection to learning, and deeper cognitive engagement. Learner-centered pedagogy at Dipaluda Primary School enabled learners to actively construct understanding through interaction, reflection, and collaboration, while supportive classroom relationships fostered confidence and willingness to participate. These results affirm that meaningful engagement in primary classrooms is not incidental but is cultivated through deliberate instructional choices that recognize learners' developmental needs, voices, and capacities.

In terms of instructional practice, the study underscores the importance of adopting participatory, differentiated, and reflective teaching strategies in primary classrooms. Primary teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that allow learners to interact with content, peers, and real-life contexts while accommodating individual differences in ability, pace, and learning style. Strategies such as group work, hands-on activities, guided questioning, and formative feedback can enhance learner agency by encouraging learners to take ownership of their learning. When learners are given opportunities to explain ideas, reflect on understanding, and make meaningful choices, they are more likely to remain engaged and motivated throughout the learning process.

From a school leadership perspective, the findings highlight the essential role of institutional support in sustaining learner-centered instruction. School leaders are encouraged to prioritize continuous professional development focused on learner-centered pedagogy, classroom engagement strategies, and assessment for learning. Providing adequate instructional resources, opportunities for collaborative lesson planning, and supportive school policies can help teachers consistently implement active learning approaches despite contextual challenges. Leadership that values innovation and reflective practice creates conditions in which learner-centered pedagogy can flourish and positively impact classroom engagement.

Finally, this study points to important directions for future research. While the findings provide in-depth insights into engagement patterns within learner-centered primary classrooms, future studies may employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine how these engagement patterns develop over time and influence long-term academic achievement, motivation, and socio-emotional outcomes. Research across diverse school contexts would further strengthen understanding of how learner-centered instruction can be sustained and scaled to support holistic learner development in primary education.

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