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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining Classroom Participation in Learner-Centered Instruction at Andabuen Elementary School – Main

Darhyl L. Gamayon

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines

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Abstract

Classroom participation is a critical indicator of meaningful learning, particularly in learner-centered instructional environments that emphasize active engagement, autonomy, and interaction. This study examined patterns of classroom participation in learner-centered instruction at Andabuen Elementary School – Main. Employing a qualitative institutional case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and focus group discussions with learners. The analysis focused on how learner-centered practices influenced behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation in elementary classrooms. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) participatory instructional strategies promoting active involvement, (2) differentiated and contextualized tasks supporting inclusive participation, (3) supportive classroom relationships fostering confidence and voice, and (4) contextual constraints shaping participation practices. Findings indicate that learner-centered instruction significantly enhanced learners' willingness to participate, express ideas, and engage meaningfully with learning tasks, although structural challenges affected the consistency of participation. The study highlights the importance of sustained institutional support and professional development in strengthening learner-centered pedagogy and classroom participation in elementary education.

*Corresponding author: Darhyl L. Gamayon

INTRODUCTION

Classroom participation has long been recognized as a key component of effective teaching and learning, as it reflects learners' engagement, motivation, and active involvement in instructional activities. Participation is particularly important in elementary education, where learners are developing foundational academic skills, social competence, and attitudes toward schooling. When learners actively participate—by asking questions, sharing ideas, collaborating with peers, and engaging in tasks—they are more likely to develop deeper understanding and sustained interest in learning.

Learner-centered instruction has been widely promoted as a pedagogical approach that fosters active classroom participation by positioning learners as central agents in the learning process. Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, which often emphasizes lecture, rote learning, and uniform activities, learner-centered pedagogy prioritizes interaction, differentiation, collaboration, and reflection. In learner-centered classrooms, teachers act as facilitators who design meaningful learning experiences and encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning.

Despite strong theoretical foundations and policy support, the implementation of learner-centered instruction in elementary classrooms remains uneven. Many teachers face challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and curriculum demands that constrain opportunities for active participation. Moreover, while existing research has documented the benefits of learner-centered pedagogy for achievement and engagement, fewer studies have closely examined how classroom participation unfolds in learner-centered instructional contexts, particularly from the perspectives of both teachers and learners.

Andabuen Elementary School – Main provides a relevant context for examining classroom participation in learner-centered instruction. As a public elementary school implementing learner-centered approaches, it offers an opportunity to explore how instructional practices shape learners' participation in everyday classroom interactions. This study addresses a gap in the literature by examining classroom participation in learner-centered instruction at Andabuen Elementary School- Main, with particular attention to instructional strategies, classroom relationships, and contextual factors influencing participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner-centered instruction in elementary education is grounded in constructivist and sociocultural theories that emphasize the active construction of knowledge through interaction, experience, and social engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). In elementary classrooms, learner-centered practices commonly include group work, hands-on activities, inquiry-based tasks, and opportunities for learner choice, all of which aim to make learning meaningful, engaging, and responsive to learners' developmental needs. Research indicates that learner-centered instruction enhances classroom participation by creating interactive learning environments in which learners are encouraged to express ideas, collaborate with peers, and engage actively with content, while teachers assume the role of facilitators who guide exploration and reflection rather than transmit information (Dewey, 1938; Gay, 2018). Classroom participation within this framework is widely understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, where behavioral participation involves observable actions such as contributing to discussions and completing tasks, emotional participation reflects learners' interest, confidence, and sense of belonging, and cognitive participation refers to sustained effort, reasoning, and engagement in higher-order thinking (Fredricks et al., 2004). Studies further suggest that instructional strategies and classroom climate play a critical role in shaping participation across these dimensions, with learner-centered environments being particularly effective in promoting sustained and inclusive participation by valuing learner voice, autonomy, and active involvement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 2012). However, the effectiveness of learner-centered instruction in fostering participation is also shaped by contextual factors such as class size, resource availability, teacher preparation, and school leadership, as sustained participation requires not only effective pedagogy but also supportive institutional conditions that enable teachers to implement interactive and differentiated instruction consistently (Fullan, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative institutional case study design to examine classroom participation in learner-centered instruction at Andabuen Elementary School – Main, an approach suited to capturing the complexity of instructional practices and participant experiences within their natural classroom contexts. The research was conducted in a public elementary school implementing learner-centered approaches, with participants consisting of elementary teachers who regularly employed learner-centered strategies and selected learners from their respective classes; purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct and sustained experience with learner-centered instruction. Data were gathered through multiple qualitative methods to enhance credibility and triangulation, including classroom observations that documented instructional strategies, patterns of learner participation, and classroom interactions; semi-structured interviews with teachers that explored pedagogical beliefs, instructional decisions, and challenges in promoting participation; and focus group discussions with learners that examined their experiences, feelings, and perceptions of classroom participation. All data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework, involving familiarization with the data, systematic coding, theme development and refinement, and interpretation of participation patterns across data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness was ensured through 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 learner assent, and maintaining confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

The qualitative analysis of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and learner focus group discussions revealed four major themes that illustrate how classroom participation was shaped within learner-centered instructional contexts at Andabuen Elementary School – Main. These themes reflect the ways instructional strategies, classroom relationships, and contextual conditions influenced learners’ willingness and ability to participate actively in classroom activities.

Theme 1: Participatory Instructional Strategies Promoted Active Involvement

Findings indicate that participatory instructional strategies played a central role in promoting active classroom participation among learners. Teachers consistently employed group discussions, collaborative tasks, hands-on activities, and guided questioning to encourage learners to take part in the learning process. Classroom observations showed that learners were more attentive, responsive, and eager to share ideas when lessons emphasized interaction rather than passive listening. During participatory activities, learners asked questions, volunteered answers, and collaborated with peers, demonstrating higher levels of engagement compared to teacher-dominated lesson segments. Teachers intentionally used these strategies to sustain attention and involvement, as one teacher explained, *"Kapag may group work at tanungan, mas nagiging aktibo ang mga bata at mas gusto nilang sumali."* Learners also expressed preference for interactive lessons, with one stating, *"Mas masaya po ang klase kapag may activity kasi nakakapag-usap kami at hindi lang nakikinig."*

This theme suggests that participatory instructional strategies effectively foster behavioral participation by increasing learners’ opportunities to interact with content and peers. Consistent with engagement theory, active involvement in learning tasks enhances effort, persistence, and on-task behavior (Fredricks et al., 2004). From a constructivist perspective, learning is optimized when learners actively construct knowledge through interaction rather than passive reception, supporting the effectiveness of participatory approaches in learner-centered classrooms.

Theme 2: Differentiated and Contextualized Tasks Supported Inclusive Participation

Another key theme was the use of differentiated and contextualized tasks to support inclusive participation

among learners with varying abilities and learning needs. Teachers adapted instructional activities by adjusting task difficulty, providing alternative activities, and allowing flexible pacing to accommodate individual differences. Lessons were also linked to learners' real-life experiences, such as family routines or community contexts, making content more meaningful and accessible.

Teachers emphasized that flexibility was necessary to ensure that all learners could participate, as one teacher shared, "*Hindi pare-pareho ang kakayahan ng bata kaya ina-adjust ko ang gawain para lahat ay makasali.*" Learners likewise noted that contextualized examples helped them understand lessons better, with one stating, "*Mas naiintindihan ko po ang lesson kapag may example na ginagawa namin sa bahay.*"

This theme highlights the role of differentiation and contextualization in promoting inclusive participation. When instruction is aligned with learners' readiness levels and lived experiences, learners are more likely to engage and contribute meaningfully. Research on learner-centered pedagogy emphasizes that differentiated instruction supports participation by reducing frustration and increasing relevance, thereby enhancing both emotional and cognitive engagement (Tomlinson, 2014; Gay, 2018).

Theme 3: Supportive Classroom Relationships Fostered Confidence and Voice

The findings further revealed that supportive classroom relationships significantly influenced learners' confidence and willingness to participate. Learner-centered classrooms were characterized by encouragement, patience, and respectful teacher–learner interactions, creating emotionally safe environments where learners felt comfortable expressing ideas. Teachers consistently provided positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, framing mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than failure. Learners expressed that this supportive atmosphere reduced fear and anxiety, with one learner stating, "*Hindi po ako natatakot sumagot kasi tinutulungan po kami kapag mali.*" Teachers recognized the importance of emotional support, as one explained, "*Kapag pinupuri at ginagabayan ang bata, mas nagiging confident silang magsalita.*"

This theme underscores the importance of emotional safety in fostering classroom participation. Supportive relationships enhance learners' sense of belonging and confidence, which are essential for sustained participation and engagement. Prior studies have shown that positive teacher–learner relationships are strongly associated with increased learner participation and motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 2012), reinforcing the significance of relational practices in learner-centered instruction.

Theme 4: Contextual Constraints Shaped Participation Practices

Despite the positive effects of learner-centered strategies, teachers identified several contextual constraints that shaped participation practices. These included large class sizes, limited instructional materials, time constraints, and competing administrative responsibilities. Teachers acknowledged that such challenges sometimes limited opportunities for individualized support and extended interactive activities. One teacher noted, "*Mahirap minsan maging learner-centered kapag marami ang bata at kulang ang materials.*" Observations showed that teachers often responded to these constraints by improvising materials, modifying activities, and prioritizing participation within available time, demonstrating adaptability and commitment to learner-centered principles.

This theme highlights the influence of structural and institutional factors on the enactment of learner-centered instruction. While teachers demonstrated strong commitment to promoting participation, the sustainability of learner-centered practices depends on adequate resources, manageable class sizes, and institutional support. This finding aligns with research suggesting that effective pedagogical innovation requires supportive school structures and leadership to be sustained over time (Fullan, 2007).

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that learner-centered instruction at Andabuen Elementary School – Main fostered strong and interconnected patterns of classroom participation. Active instructional strategies encouraged behavioral participation, which supported emotional confidence and deeper cognitive engagement. These

results align with engagement theory emphasizing the multidimensional nature of participation.

Consistent with constructivist perspectives, learner-centered practices enabled learners to construct understanding through interaction and reflection. Supportive classroom relationships further enhanced participation by creating emotionally safe environments. However, contextual constraints highlight the need for institutional support to sustain learner-centered pedagogy.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study provides qualitative evidence that learner-centered instruction plays a crucial role in promoting classroom participation in elementary education. The findings demonstrate that when instruction emphasizes interaction, differentiation, and supportive teacher–learner relationships, classrooms become spaces where learners are more willing to participate, express ideas, and engage meaningfully in learning activities. At Andabuen Elementary School – Main, teachers’ deliberate use of participatory strategies, flexible tasks, and affirming feedback fostered environments that encouraged learners to take an active role in discussions, collaborative work, and problem-solving. These practices not only increased observable participation but also strengthened learners’ confidence, sense of belonging, and willingness to sustain engagement, underscoring the value of learner-centered pedagogy in shaping inclusive and participatory classroom cultures.

In terms of instructional practice, the findings suggest that elementary teachers should intentionally adopt participatory and differentiated teaching strategies that amplify learner voice and engagement. Strategies such as group discussions, hands-on activities, contextualized tasks, and formative feedback can accommodate diverse learning needs while encouraging learners to contribute ideas and take ownership of their learning. By recognizing learners’ varying abilities, interests, and experiences, teachers can create learning opportunities that promote equitable participation and sustained involvement.

From a leadership perspective, the study highlights the importance of institutional support in sustaining learner-centered instruction. School leaders are encouraged to prioritize continuous professional development focused on learner-centered pedagogy, classroom participation strategies, and inclusive teaching practices. Providing adequate instructional resources, time for collaborative planning, and supportive policies can help teachers consistently implement active learning approaches and overcome contextual challenges that limit participation. Finally, this study points to important directions for future research. While the findings offer in-depth insights into classroom participation within learner-centered environments, future studies may employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine the long-term effects of learner-centered instruction on participation patterns, academic achievement, and learner motivation. Further research across varied educational contexts would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how learner-centered pedagogy can be sustained and scaled to enhance participation and learning outcomes in elementary education.

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