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## Student Involvement in Learner-Centered Secondary Classrooms at Divisoria High School

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### Abstract

Student involvement is widely recognized as a critical determinant of learning quality, academic achievement, and persistence in secondary education. Learner-centered pedagogy has been advanced as a means of enhancing student involvement by shifting instructional focus from teacher transmission to active learner participation. This qualitative case study examined how learner-centered teaching practices shaped student involvement in secondary classrooms at Divisoria High School. Using classroom observations, focus group discussions with students, and semi-structured interviews with teachers, the study explored how instructional strategies influenced behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of student involvement. Thematic analysis revealed four interconnected themes: dialogic instruction as a catalyst for behavioral involvement, learner autonomy as a foundation for emotional engagement, collaborative learning as a mechanism for sustained participation, and instructional scaffolding as support for cognitive involvement. The findings demonstrate that learner-centered classrooms foster meaningful and sustained student involvement when interaction, autonomy, collaboration, and guidance are intentionally aligned. The study offers implications for classroom practice, instructional leadership, and future research on learner-centered secondary education.

**Keywords:** learner-centered pedagogy, student involvement, secondary education, classroom engagement, qualitative case study

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## INTRODUCTION

Student involvement remains a persistent challenge in secondary education, particularly in contexts where instructional practices continue to privilege teacher control, standardized pacing, and content coverage over meaningful participation. Adolescents in secondary schools often experience disengagement when learning tasks are perceived as irrelevant, overly prescriptive, or disconnected from their lived experiences. Low levels of involvement are associated with reduced motivation, surface learning, and increased risk of academic failure or school dropout.

Learner-centered pedagogy has gained prominence as a response to these challenges. By emphasizing active participation, learner voice, and shared responsibility for learning, learner-centered approaches seek to reconfigure classroom dynamics in ways that promote deeper involvement. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of information, learner-centered classrooms position them as contributors to knowledge construction through dialogue, collaboration, inquiry, and reflection.

In the Philippine secondary school context, curriculum reforms and policy frameworks advocate learner-centered and inclusive teaching practices. However, the translation of these policy ideals into everyday classroom practice remains uneven. While some teachers adopt interactive strategies, there is limited empirical documentation of how learner-centered pedagogy is enacted in secondary classrooms and how students themselves experience involvement in such environments. This study addresses this gap by examining student involvement in learner-centered secondary classrooms at Divisoria High School, focusing on how teaching practices shape behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of involvement.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### **Learner-Centered Pedagogy**

Learner-centered pedagogy is grounded in constructivist and sociocultural theories that conceptualize learning as an active, socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). Knowledge is constructed through interaction, dialogue, and engagement with meaningful tasks rather than transmitted unilaterally from teacher to learner. Weimer (2013) characterizes learner-centered teaching as an approach that redistributes responsibility for learning, encourages learner autonomy, and prioritizes understanding and reflection over rote compliance.

Empirical studies indicate that learner-centered strategies—such as dialogic teaching, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative problem-solving—are associated with higher levels of motivation, participation, and conceptual understanding in secondary education (Bransford et al., 2000). However, scholars also emphasize that learner-centered pedagogy requires intentional design and teacher facilitation to ensure coherence and inclusivity (Schweisfurth, 2013).

### **Student Involvement**

Student involvement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral participation, emotional engagement, and cognitive investment in learning tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral involvement includes observable actions such as effort, participation, and persistence. Emotional involvement refers to interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging,

while cognitive involvement reflects strategic thinking, self-regulation, and willingness to engage in challenging tasks.

Research demonstrates that instructional environments supporting autonomy, interaction, and relevance are more likely to foster sustained student involvement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 2012). Teacher practices that emphasize feedback, scaffolding, and supportive relationships further enhance involvement by creating emotionally safe and intellectually challenging classrooms (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

### **Learner-Centered Classrooms in Secondary Education**

In secondary classrooms, learner-centered pedagogy often takes the form of dialogic instruction, collaborative learning, inquiry-based tasks, and formative assessment. These practices align with adolescents' developmental need for autonomy, peer interaction, and meaningful challenge. Research suggests that such approaches can enhance engagement and learning outcomes when appropriately scaffolded (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). Nonetheless, implementation challenges including time constraints, uneven participation, and learner uncertainty highlight the need for structured guidance and instructional coherence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine student involvement in learner-centered secondary classrooms at Divisoria High School. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of instructional practices and student experiences within their natural classroom context.

The research was conducted at Divisoria High School, a public secondary school serving students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Participants included six secondary school teachers known for implementing learner-centered strategies and thirty students from Grades 8 to 10 selected through purposive sampling to represent varied participation levels, academic performance, and learning dispositions.

Data were collected over one academic term through multiple qualitative methods. Classroom observations documented teaching strategies, interaction patterns, and student participation across different subjects. Focus group discussions with students explored perceptions of classroom activities, opportunities for involvement, and learning experiences. Semi-structured interviews with teachers examined instructional intentions, pedagogical decision-making, and challenges in implementing learner-centered practices.

All data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Coding was iterative and involved constant comparison across data sources. Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Ethical approval was obtained, informed consent and student assent were secured, and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities.

## **FINDINGS**

Analysis of classroom observations, student focus group discussions, and teacher interviews yielded four major, interrelated themes that illustrate how learner-centered pedagogy shaped student involvement in secondary classrooms at Divisoria High School. Across themes, involvement emerged as a multidimensional and dynamic process influenced by instructional

interaction, learner agency, peer collaboration, and teacher support.

### **Theme 1: Dialogic Instruction as a Catalyst for Behavioral Involvement**

Classroom observations revealed that learner-centered lessons were consistently characterized by dialogic instructional practices, including open-ended questioning, guided whole-class discussions, think-pair-share activities, and opportunities for student-led explanations. Teachers deliberately posed questions that required students to explain reasoning, express opinions, and relate lesson content to personal or real-life experiences. Rather than dominating classroom talk, teachers facilitated dialogue by prompting follow-up questions, inviting multiple responses, and encouraging students to respond to one another. These practices transformed lessons from one-way transmission of information into interactive exchanges, resulting in visibly increased behavioral involvement, such as frequent hand-raising, spontaneous participation, sustained attention, and active listening.

Students articulated that being invited to speak and explain their ideas increased their willingness to participate. One student shared, "*Mas ganado ako kapag tinatanong kami at pinapakinggan ang sagot namin,*" highlighting how teacher acknowledgment validated their participation. Another student noted, "*Hindi ako inaantok kasi may tanong at usapan,*" suggesting that dialogue helped maintain focus and prevent disengagement. Teachers observed that students who were initially hesitant became more participative over time, with one teacher explaining that regular dialogue helped normalize speaking in class and reduced fear of making mistakes. These findings indicate that dialogic instruction strengthened behavioral involvement by positioning participation as a shared and expected classroom practice rather than a risk-taking activity, consistent with sociocultural views of learning as interactional and participatory.

### **Theme 2: Learner Autonomy as a Foundation of Emotional Involvement**

Learner autonomy emerged as a defining feature of learner-centered classrooms and played a crucial role in shaping students' emotional involvement. Teachers intentionally provided students with choices related to learning tasks, examples to explore, group roles, and formats for presenting outputs. These autonomy-supportive practices allowed students to exercise control over aspects of their learning, fostering a sense of trust, ownership, and personal relevance. Observations showed that students displayed greater enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to engage when they were able to make decisions about how to approach tasks. Students consistently reported positive emotional responses to having choices. One student remarked, "*Mas masaya kapag may choice kami kasi pakiramdam ko may tiwala sa amin,*" indicating that autonomy enhanced enjoyment and motivation. Another shared that having options reduced anxiety, as students could select tasks aligned with their strengths. However, some students expressed uncertainty when choices were too open-ended, noting that they felt unsure about expectations. Teachers acknowledged this tension and emphasized the importance of balancing freedom with guidance. As one teacher explained, autonomy was most effective when choices were clearly structured and aligned with learning goals. These findings suggest that learner autonomy fostered emotional involvement by enhancing enjoyment, confidence and a sense of belonging, particularly when supported by clear instructional boundaries.

### **Theme 3: Collaborative Learning Sustaining Participation**

Collaborative learning was a prominent instructional strategy across learner-centered classrooms and served as a key mechanism for sustaining student participation. Teachers frequently organized students into small groups for discussions, peer tutoring, cooperative problem-solving, and project-based activities. Observations indicated that students remained engaged for longer periods during collaborative tasks, especially those requiring explanation,

negotiation of ideas, and shared responsibility. Peer interaction appeared to support understanding and persistence, as students clarified concepts for one another and jointly constructed solutions.

Students expressed strong appreciation for collaborative learning. One student noted, "*Mas naiintindihan ko kapag nagpapaliwanagan kami,*" emphasizing the role of peer explanation in comprehension. Another shared that working with classmates increased confidence, as students felt supported rather than isolated. At the same time, challenges related to unequal participation were evident, with some students expressing frustration about group members who contributed less. Teachers addressed these issues by assigning specific roles, setting clear expectations, and actively monitoring group dynamics. These findings highlight that collaborative learning sustained student involvement by leveraging social interaction and peer support, but its effectiveness depended on intentional structuring and accountability mechanisms.

### **Theme 4: Instructional Scaffolding Supporting Cognitive Involvement**

Instructional scaffolding emerged as a critical factor in supporting students' cognitive involvement. Teachers employed a range of scaffolding strategies, including probing questions, step-by-step modeling, guided practice, and formative feedback. Rather than providing immediate answers, teachers encouraged students to reflect on their thinking, explain reasoning, and revise strategies. This approach created opportunities for deeper processing, persistence, and metacognitive regulation.

Students emphasized the importance of guidance in supporting understanding. One student stated, "*Mas natututo ako kapag tinatanong kung paano ko naisip,*" indicating that reflective questioning helped clarify thinking. Another shared that feedback enabled them to recognize and correct errors. Teachers highlighted the need to balance support and independence, explaining that scaffolding was intended to guide thinking without fostering dependency. These responses suggest that instructional scaffolding strengthened cognitive involvement by promoting reflection, self-monitoring, and strategic thinking, enabling students to engage meaningfully with complex learning tasks.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings demonstrate that learner-centered pedagogy effectively translates everyday teaching practices into multidimensional student involvement by intentionally engaging learners across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains. Dialogic instruction supported behavioral participation by normalizing interaction and positioning classroom talk as a shared responsibility rather than a teacher-dominated activity. When students were routinely invited to explain ideas, ask questions, and respond to peers, participation became an expected and valued aspect of classroom life. Learner autonomy further strengthened emotional engagement by promoting a sense of ownership, trust, and personal relevance in learning tasks, enabling students to experience enjoyment, confidence, and reduced anxiety. Collaborative learning sustained participation through social support, as peer interaction encouraged persistence, mutual explanation, and shared problem-solving. Instructional scaffolding, through questioning, modeling, and formative feedback, enhanced cognitive involvement by encouraging students to reflect on their thinking, monitor strategies, and persist through challenging tasks rather than disengage. Collectively, these patterns align closely with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) multidimensional engagement framework and extend it by demonstrating how student involvement is enacted in secondary classrooms through the deliberate alignment of learner-centered instructional practices.

At the same time, the findings highlight important tensions and constraints in the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. Time limitations, learner uncertainty when faced with open-ended tasks, and uneven participation during collaborative activities posed challenges to sustaining involvement for all students. These issues underscore the necessity of thoughtful instructional design in which flexibility is balanced with clear structure, explicit expectations, and ongoing teacher guidance. Learner-centered pedagogy was most effective when teachers carefully scaffolded autonomy, structured collaboration, and monitored participation, rather than assuming that student involvement would emerge automatically. These findings echo prior research emphasizing that while learner-centered approaches hold strong potential for enhancing engagement, their success depends on intentional planning, professional judgment, and supportive classroom conditions (Schweisfurth, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study demonstrates that learner-centered teaching practices at Divisoria High School play a crucial role in fostering meaningful and sustained student involvement by deliberately positioning learners as active participants, decision-makers, and reflective thinkers in the learning process. When instructional practices were intentionally designed to integrate dialogue, learner autonomy, collaborative engagement, and instructional scaffolding, students exhibited higher levels of behavioral participation, emotional investment, and cognitive engagement. Dialogue normalized participation and encouraged students to articulate ideas; autonomy enhanced motivation and confidence by affirming learners' agency; collaboration sustained involvement through peer support and shared responsibility; and scaffolding promoted deeper thinking by guiding reflection and metacognitive regulation. Together, these elements created learning environments in which students were not merely compliant participants but engaged contributors to classroom learning.

The findings offer important implications for classroom practice. Teachers are encouraged to design learner-centered lessons that systematically amplify student voice through dialogic questioning and discussion, structure collaborative learning to ensure equitable participation, and provide formative feedback that emphasizes reasoning, reflection, and strategy use rather than correctness alone. Such practices can help sustain student involvement across diverse learning contexts and learner profiles. At the level of school leadership, the study highlights the need to support professional development initiatives that deepen teachers' understanding of learner-centered pedagogy and its practical enactment in secondary classrooms. School leaders should also create enabling conditions such as protected time for collaborative planning, peer coaching, and reflective dialogue that allow teachers to design, implement, and refine learner-centered practices effectively.

Finally, the study points to directions for future research. Longitudinal investigations may examine how sustained exposure to learner-centered instruction influences students' academic achievement, motivation, and school retention over time. Comparative studies across different secondary school contexts may further illuminate how variations in institutional support, teacher preparation, and learner demographics shape the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogy, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of student involvement in diverse educational settings.

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