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Contextualized Teaching Practices and Learner Engagement in Rural Elementary Schools: Evidence from Andabuen Elementary School Main, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Contextualized teaching has emerged as an important pedagogical approach in addressing the diverse learning needs of learners, particularly in rural educational settings where community realities, local culture, and environmental contexts significantly influence the teaching-learning process. This study explored the contextualized teaching practices employed by teachers and examined their influence on learner engagement among elementary learners at Andabuen Elementary School Main, Philippines. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving teachers, learners, and school administrators. Findings revealed that teachers integrated contextualization through localized examples, community-based learning activities, indigenous knowledge incorporation, contextualized instructional materials, and experiential learning strategies. These practices enhanced learner participation, motivation, classroom interaction, and academic engagement. The study further found that contextualized instruction strengthened learners' understanding of lessons by connecting academic concepts with their daily experiences and community environment. Despite challenges related to limited instructional resources and contextual material development, teachers demonstrated innovation and adaptability in designing meaningful learning experiences. The findings underscore the significance of contextualized teaching in promoting learner engagement and improving educational relevance in rural elementary schools.

Keywords: contextualized teaching, learner engagement, rural education, elementary education, localized instruction, community-based learning, Philippines

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Introduction

The increasing diversity of learners' experiences, backgrounds, and educational needs has prompted educational systems worldwide to adopt teaching approaches that make learning more meaningful, relevant, and responsive to local realities. Traditional instructional approaches that rely heavily on decontextualized content often fail to connect classroom learning with learners' lived experiences, resulting in reduced engagement, limited participation, and difficulties in knowledge application. As a result, contextualized teaching has gained increasing recognition as an effective pedagogical strategy that bridges academic content with learners' social, cultural, environmental, and community contexts.

Contextualized teaching refers to the process of linking educational content to real-life situations, local experiences, cultural practices, and community realities to enhance learner understanding and engagement. Rather than presenting knowledge as abstract and disconnected concepts, contextualized instruction allows learners to relate lessons to familiar situations, thereby making learning more meaningful and relevant. Research has consistently shown that contextualized learning promotes deeper understanding, critical thinking, learner motivation, and academic achievement by enabling students to construct knowledge based on authentic experiences and prior understandings.

In elementary education, contextualized teaching is particularly important because young learners tend to learn more effectively when concepts are connected to their immediate surroundings and daily experiences. Through contextualization, teachers can create learning environments that encourage active participation, experiential learning, inquiry, and meaningful engagement. Contextualized instruction also supports culturally responsive pedagogy by recognizing learners' cultural identities, community knowledge, and local realities as valuable resources in the teaching-learning process.

In the Philippines, contextualized teaching has become a central component of educational reforms under the K to 12 Curriculum. The Department of Education advocates contextualization and localization as instructional approaches that enable teachers to adapt curriculum content to the needs, experiences, and realities of learners. DepEd policies emphasize that learning becomes more effective when educational materials and instructional practices reflect local culture, language, environment, and community life. These reforms are particularly relevant in rural schools where learners' experiences are closely tied to agriculture, environmental conditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and local community practices.

Rural schools face unique educational challenges associated with geographical isolation, limited instructional resources, inadequate access to technology, and socioeconomic constraints. However, these contexts also provide rich opportunities for contextualized learning because learners possess extensive experiential knowledge derived from their interactions with their families, communities, and local environments. Teachers in rural schools often utilize local resources, community experiences, and indigenous knowledge to enrich classroom instruction and make learning more meaningful.

Andabuen Elementary School Main, a rural public elementary school in the Philippines, provides a valuable setting for examining contextualized teaching practices and learner engagement. Rural elementary schools serve as important educational institutions that connect formal learning with community realities and local development needs. Understanding how teachers implement contextualized instruction within such settings can provide meaningful insights into effective pedagogical practices that support learner engagement and educational relevance. The school operates within a rural community context where



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learners' daily experiences are influenced by agricultural activities, local environmental conditions, family livelihood practices, and community traditions. Such contextual realities provide opportunities for teachers to integrate local experiences into classroom instruction and strengthen learner participation. Despite growing support for contextualized instruction, limited studies have examined how contextualized teaching practices influence learner engagement in rural elementary schools. Existing literature has often focused on curriculum policies, instructional frameworks, or urban educational settings, leaving a gap in understanding how rural teachers implement contextualization and how learners experience such instructional approaches. Furthermore, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the specific strategies employed by teachers, the challenges they encounter, and the factors that facilitate successful contextualized instruction in rural educational environments.

Given these considerations, this study explored the contextualized teaching practices employed by teachers and examined their influence on learner engagement at Andabuen Elementary School Main, Philippines. Specifically, it investigated how teachers integrate local contexts into instruction, how learners respond to contextualized teaching approaches, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the enabling factors that support meaningful and engaging learning experiences. By generating context-specific insights, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on contextualized education and provides practical implications for strengthening learner-centered instruction in rural elementary schools.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What contextualized teaching practices are employed by teachers at Andabuen Elementary School Main?
2. How do contextualized teaching practices influence learner engagement?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing contextualized instruction?
4. What enabling factors support the successful implementation of contextualized teaching practices?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory developed by Jean Piaget and Social Constructivist Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky. Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment. Social constructivism further highlights the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping learning processes. The study is also informed by Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which emphasizes connecting instruction to learners' cultural identities, community experiences, and local realities to promote meaningful learning and engagement.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of contextualized teaching practices and learner engagement within a rural elementary school setting. The research was



conducted at Andabuen Elementary School Main, a public elementary school serving learners from a rural community in the Philippines. Participants included elementary teachers, learners, and school administrators who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in teaching and learning processes. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Classroom observations focused on instructional strategies, learner participation, and classroom interactions, while interviews and discussions explored participants' experiences and perceptions regarding contextualized instruction. The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework to identify recurring themes and patterns emerging from the participants' narratives and observed practices.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Localization of Learning Content Enhances Meaningful Understanding

The most dominant theme that emerged from the study was the strategic localization of learning content. Teachers consistently reported integrating examples, situations, and materials drawn from learners' immediate environment, including agricultural practices, local livelihoods, community traditions, and environmental conditions. Participants emphasized that learners demonstrated greater comprehension when lessons were connected to familiar experiences and realities.

One teacher explained:

"Kapag ang halimbawa ay tungkol sa pagsasaka, pagtatanim, o mga gawain sa barangay, mas mabilis nilang naiintindihan ang aralin dahil bahagi iyon ng kanilang pang-araw-araw na buhay."

Another participant shared:

"Mas nagiging buhay ang lesson kapag ang pinag-uusapan ay nakikita nila sa kanilang paligid at nararanasan nila mismo."

Similarly, a learner stated:

"Mas naiintindihan ko po ang Math kapag tungkol sa pagbibilang ng ani o paninda sa tindahan."

Classroom observations revealed that teachers frequently utilized local examples involving farming, fishing, family businesses, and community events to explain abstract concepts across subject areas.

These findings indicate that contextualized instruction strengthens conceptual understanding by connecting academic content to learners' prior knowledge and lived experiences. The process allows learners to construct meaning more effectively because new information is anchored to familiar contexts.

The findings support the Constructivist Learning Theory of Jean Piaget, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge based on existing experiences. Similarly, research by Gilbert (2006) found that contextualized learning enhances knowledge retention and conceptual understanding by situating learning within authentic real-life contexts.

Theme 2: Contextualized Instruction Increases Learner Motivation and Interest

Another major theme that emerged was increased learner motivation resulting from contextualized teaching practices. Teachers observed that learners displayed greater enthusiasm, attentiveness, and curiosity when lessons reflected situations relevant to their daily lives.

One teacher remarked:

"Kapag nakaka-relate sila sa lesson, mas interesado silang makinig at makilahok sa talakayan."



Another participant noted:

“Hindi sila agad nababagot dahil nakikita nila ang kahalagahan ng pinag-aaralan sa totoong buhay.”

Learners similarly expressed:

“Mas gusto ko po ang klase kapag tungkol sa mga bagay na ginagawa namin sa bahay o sa komunidad.”

“Mas masaya po ang lesson kapag alam namin ang pinag-uusapan.”

These responses suggest that contextualized instruction increases intrinsic motivation because learners perceive lessons as meaningful and relevant. When learners understand the practical value of classroom content, they become more engaged in learning activities.

This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, which emphasizes relevance and meaningfulness as critical factors influencing learner motivation. Previous studies have also demonstrated that contextualized instruction increases student engagement and academic motivation by strengthening connections between school learning and real-world experiences.

Theme 3: Active Participation Through Experiential and Community-Based Learning

Participants consistently highlighted experiential and community-based learning activities as important features of contextualized instruction. Teachers frequently organized hands-on activities, field observations, community projects, and practical applications that allowed learners to interact directly with their environment.

A participant explained:

“Pinapupunta namin sila sa school garden at minsan ay nagpapagawa kami ng community observation para makita nila ang konsepto sa totoong sitwasyon.”

Another teacher stated:

“Mas natututo sila kapag may actual na gawain kaysa puro lecture lamang.”

A learner shared:

“Mas natatandaan ko po ang lesson kapag kami mismo ang gumagawa ng activity.”

Observations revealed learners actively participating in gardening projects, environmental clean-up activities, community mapping exercises, and local history documentation tasks.

The findings suggest that experiential learning facilitates deeper engagement because learners become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

This result supports the Experiential Learning Theory of David A. Kolb, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through direct experiences followed by reflection and application. Studies by Kolb and Kolb (2017) further highlight that experiential learning strengthens learner engagement and practical understanding.

Theme 4: Strengthening Cultural Identity Through Indigenous and Local Knowledge Integration

The integration of indigenous knowledge, local traditions, and community culture emerged as another significant theme. Teachers deliberately incorporated local stories, cultural practices, indigenous knowledge systems, and community experiences into classroom discussions.

One teacher explained:

“Kasama sa aming pagtuturo ang mga lokal na kwento, tradisyon, at paniniwala upang mas maintindihan



ng mga bata ang kanilang kultura.”

Another participant stated:

“Mahalaga na makita nila na may halaga ang kanilang kultura at kaalaman sa komunidad.”

A learner remarked:

“Masaya po kapag pinag-uusapan namin ang mga tradisyon namin dito sa lugar.”

These findings indicate that contextualized teaching contributes to cultural affirmation and identity development by validating learners’ cultural backgrounds and local knowledge.

The findings support culturally responsive teaching frameworks advanced by Gloria Ladson-Billings, which emphasize the importance of recognizing learners’ cultural experiences as valuable resources in education. Research has consistently shown that culturally relevant instruction enhances learner participation, self-esteem, and academic success.

Theme 5: Enhanced Classroom Interaction and Collaborative Learning

The study revealed that contextualized teaching promoted more dynamic classroom interactions and collaborative learning experiences. Teachers reported that learners became more willing to share ideas, ask questions, and engage in discussions when lessons were connected to familiar experiences.

One teacher observed:

“Mas marami silang gustong sabihin kapag ang pinag-uusapan ay tungkol sa kanilang karanasan.”

Another participant shared:

“Nagiging mas aktibo sila sa group activities dahil may maiaambag silang personal na karanasan.”

A learner explained:

“Mas gusto ko po ang group work kasi nakakapagbahagi kami ng mga alam namin.”

These responses suggest that contextualized instruction creates opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaborative knowledge construction.

The findings support the Social Constructivist Theory of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative engagement. Similar studies have shown that contextualized learning environments foster communication skills, peer interaction, and cooperative learning behaviors.

Theme 6: Development of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Participants reported that contextualized teaching encouraged learners to think critically and apply knowledge to real-life situations. Teachers frequently utilized local issues and community problems as instructional materials to stimulate analysis and problem-solving.

One teacher remarked:

“Kapag pinag-aaralan nila ang mga problema sa komunidad, natututo silang mag-isip ng mga posibleng solusyon.”

Another participant stated:

“Mas nagiging analytical sila dahil nakikita nila ang aplikasyon ng kanilang natututuhan.”

A learner shared:

“Natututo po kaming maghanap ng paraan para makatulong sa mga problema sa aming barangay.”



These findings indicate that contextualized learning encourages learners to connect academic concepts with practical decision-making and real-world problem-solving.

This observation aligns with studies on authentic learning which emphasize that real-world contexts promote higher-order thinking skills, critical analysis, and problem-solving competencies among learners.

Theme 7: Resourcefulness and Teacher Innovation in Contextualized Instruction

Despite resource limitations, teachers demonstrated remarkable creativity in designing contextualized learning experiences. Participants described developing localized instructional materials, utilizing community resources, and adapting lessons to available learning environments.

One teacher shared:

“Kahit kulang ang materials, gumagamit kami ng mga bagay na makikita sa komunidad para maituro ang konsepto.”

Another participant explained:

“Minsan kami mismo ang gumagawa ng instructional materials dahil walang available na resources.”

The findings reveal that teacher innovation serves as a critical factor in sustaining contextualized teaching practices within rural educational settings.

Research on rural education consistently highlights teacher adaptability and resourcefulness as essential competencies for effective teaching in resource-constrained environments.

Theme 8: Challenges in Sustaining Contextualized Teaching Practices

While contextualized instruction yielded positive outcomes, participants identified several implementation challenges. These included limited instructional resources, insufficient contextualized learning materials, time constraints in lesson preparation, and inadequate professional development opportunities.

One teacher disclosed:

“Mahirap gumawa ng localized materials dahil nangangailangan ito ng dagdag na oras at paghahanda.”

Another participant stated:

“Kailangan pa namin ng mas maraming training tungkol sa contextualization at localization.”

Teachers also expressed concerns regarding balancing curriculum requirements with the demands of contextualized lesson development.

The findings indicate that successful contextualized instruction requires institutional support, resource provision, and continuous teacher capacity-building initiatives.

Consistent with UNESCO reports on rural education, limited instructional resources and insufficient professional development remain among the most common barriers affecting effective contextualized teaching implementation in rural schools.

Discussion

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that contextualized teaching practices significantly enhance learner engagement by making learning relevant, meaningful, and responsive to learners' realities. Through localized content, experiential activities, cultural integration, collaborative learning, and authentic problem-solving opportunities, teachers at Andabuen Elementary School Main successfully connected



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curriculum content to learners' lived experiences. These practices strengthened learner motivation, participation, comprehension, critical thinking, and cultural identity while fostering more meaningful educational experiences. Although challenges related to resources and instructional preparation persist, teacher innovation and commitment remain essential in sustaining effective contextualized instruction within rural educational settings.

Conclusion

This study explored the contextualized teaching practices employed at Andabuen Elementary School Main and examined their influence on learner engagement within a rural elementary school setting. The findings revealed that contextualized instruction serves as a powerful pedagogical approach that enhances the relevance, meaningfulness, and effectiveness of learning by connecting academic content with learners' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and community realities. Teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to making learning authentic and accessible by integrating localized examples, community-based experiences, indigenous knowledge systems, environmental contexts, and culturally relevant materials into classroom instruction.

The study found that contextualized teaching significantly contributes to increased learner engagement through multiple dimensions. Learners exhibited higher levels of motivation, participation, attentiveness, and interest when lessons reflected familiar situations and real-life experiences. By linking classroom content to local agricultural practices, family livelihoods, community events, and environmental conditions, teachers enabled learners to construct deeper understanding and develop stronger connections between school learning and everyday life. Contextualized instruction also facilitated experiential learning opportunities that encouraged active participation, inquiry, collaboration, and practical application of knowledge.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that contextualized teaching promotes the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, cultural awareness, and social interaction. The integration of indigenous knowledge and local culture strengthened learners' appreciation of their identity and heritage while validating community knowledge as an important component of the educational process. Collaborative learning activities and community-based projects provided opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful dialogue, share experiences, and construct knowledge collectively. These experiences fostered not only academic engagement but also social and emotional development.

The study likewise highlighted the crucial role of teacher innovation and adaptability in implementing contextualized instruction. Despite challenges associated with limited instructional resources, insufficient localized materials, time constraints, and limited professional development opportunities, teachers demonstrated creativity in utilizing community resources and designing contextualized learning experiences. Their efforts illustrate the capacity of rural educators to transform contextual limitations into opportunities for meaningful teaching and learning.

The findings suggest that contextualized teaching extends beyond curriculum adaptation and functions as a transformative educational practice that bridges the gap between formal schooling and community realities. By making learning responsive to learners' experiences and cultural contexts, contextualized instruction contributes to educational equity, inclusivity, and relevance. It empowers learners to see the value of education within their own lives while fostering deeper engagement in the learning process.



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Ultimately, the study concludes that contextualized teaching practices at Andabuen Elementary School Main play a significant role in enhancing learner engagement and promoting meaningful educational experiences. The successful implementation of contextualized instruction demonstrates the importance of learner-centered, culturally responsive, and community-oriented pedagogies in rural education. Strengthening support for contextualized teaching through teacher training, instructional resource development, and institutional commitment can further enhance educational quality and learner outcomes in rural elementary schools. As educational systems continue to pursue inclusive and relevant learning environments, contextualized teaching remains a vital strategy for ensuring that education responds effectively to the realities, aspirations, and needs of rural learners.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer significant implications for educational practice, policy development, curriculum implementation, teacher preparation, and future research, particularly within rural elementary school contexts. The results affirm that contextualized teaching is not merely an instructional strategy but a transformative pedagogical approach that enhances learner engagement, strengthens educational relevance, and supports meaningful learning experiences. As such, the study underscores the need for educational stakeholders to institutionalize and strengthen contextualized teaching practices across various levels of the educational system.

For classroom teachers, the findings highlight the importance of continuously designing learning experiences that are grounded in learners' realities, community contexts, and cultural backgrounds. Teachers are encouraged to move beyond textbook-centered instruction and utilize local resources, community experiences, indigenous knowledge systems, and authentic situations as integral components of lesson delivery. By doing so, they can foster greater learner participation, improve conceptual understanding, and make learning more responsive to students' needs and interests. The study also suggests that teachers should be provided with opportunities to share best practices and collaborate with colleagues in developing localized instructional materials and contextualized learning activities.

For school administrators, the findings emphasize the need to create supportive learning environments that encourage innovation and contextualized instruction. School leaders play a crucial role in fostering a culture that values localized teaching practices by providing instructional support, facilitating professional development opportunities, and allocating resources for the development of contextualized learning materials. Administrators may also strengthen partnerships with local communities, parents, and stakeholders to enrich educational experiences and ensure that learning activities remain relevant to community realities. Encouraging collaborative planning among teachers can further strengthen the implementation of contextualized teaching practices across grade levels and learning areas.

For curriculum developers and educational policymakers, the study provides evidence supporting the continued promotion of contextualization and localization within the K to 12 Curriculum and the MATATAG Curriculum framework. The findings suggest that curriculum implementation becomes more effective when teachers are given flexibility to adapt learning competencies and instructional materials to local contexts. Consequently, curriculum guidelines should continue to emphasize contextualized learning while providing teachers with practical frameworks, exemplars, and instructional resources that support localization efforts. Policymakers may likewise consider strengthening policies that encourage



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community-based learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into classroom instruction.

The study also has implications for teacher education institutions responsible for preparing future educators. Teacher preparation programs should strengthen coursework and field experiences related to contextualized teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, community-based education, and localized curriculum development. Pre-service teachers should be equipped with the competencies necessary to design meaningful learning experiences that reflect the cultural, social, environmental, and economic realities of the communities they serve. Exposure to rural educational contexts during teacher training may further enhance future educators' understanding of contextualized instructional practices and their impact on learner engagement.

For local communities and stakeholders, the findings reinforce the importance of active participation in the educational process. Community members possess valuable knowledge, experiences, and cultural resources that can enrich classroom instruction and support contextualized learning initiatives. Strengthening school-community partnerships can create authentic learning opportunities for learners while fostering greater community ownership and support for educational programs. Such collaboration can also contribute to preserving local culture, traditions, and indigenous knowledge through meaningful integration into school curricula.

From a learner-development perspective, the study demonstrates that contextualized teaching contributes not only to academic engagement but also to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, cultural identity, communication abilities, and social participation. This suggests that contextualized instruction may serve as an effective approach for promoting holistic learner development and preparing students to become active, informed, and culturally grounded members of society. By recognizing and valuing learners' experiences and backgrounds, schools can foster inclusive educational environments that support learner success and well-being.

The findings further imply the need for sustained professional development programs focusing on contextualization, localization, culturally responsive teaching, and instructional innovation. Many teachers reported challenges associated with developing localized materials and implementing contextualized instruction due to limited training and resource constraints. Addressing these concerns through continuous capacity-building initiatives can enhance teacher confidence, competence, and effectiveness in applying contextualized teaching approaches.

Finally, the study provides important directions for future research. While the present investigation focused on a single rural elementary school, future studies may explore contextualized teaching practices across multiple schools, districts, or regions to examine similarities and differences in implementation. Quantitative and mixed-methods studies may also investigate the relationship between contextualized instruction and specific learner outcomes such as academic achievement, critical thinking skills, motivation, and school retention. Additional research may further explore the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, technology-supported contextualization, and community-based educational innovations within diverse educational settings.

Overall, the implications of this study emphasize that contextualized teaching represents a powerful mechanism for enhancing learner engagement, promoting educational relevance, and improving the quality



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of education in rural schools. Strengthening support for contextualized instruction through collaborative efforts among teachers, administrators, policymakers, teacher education institutions, and community stakeholders can contribute significantly to the development of more responsive, inclusive, and meaningful educational experiences for all learners.

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