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Engaging Minds through English Instruction: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Promoting Active Learning among Secondary Students at Rizal National High School

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School, Santiago City. Employing a transcendental phenomenological research design, the study sought to understand how teachers facilitate learner engagement through innovative English instructional practices, collaborative learning strategies, interactive classroom activities, and learner-centered pedagogies. Twelve purposively selected English teachers participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method, resulting in five major themes: (1) Cultivating Interactive Learning through Learner-Centered Pedagogies; (2) Strengthening Communication Skills through Collaborative Classroom Engagement; (3) Enhancing Critical Thinking through Inquiry-Based English Instruction; (4) Overcoming Classroom Challenges through Instructional Creativity and Adaptability; and (5) Sustaining Student Motivation through Reflective and Inclusive Teaching Practices. The findings revealed that active learning in English education extends beyond classroom participation by fostering critical thinking, communication competence, collaboration, learner autonomy, and meaningful engagement. Teachers emphasized that effective English instruction requires instructional flexibility, continuous innovation, positive teacher-student relationships, and reflective practice. Based on the findings, the study proposes the Active English Learning Enhancement Framework (AELEF) to strengthen learner engagement and instructional effectiveness in secondary English education.

Keywords: active learning, English instruction, learner engagement, phenomenology, English teachers, secondary education, communicative competence

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Background of the Study

Active learning has become one of the most influential instructional approaches in contemporary education because it transforms students from passive recipients of information into active participants in constructing knowledge. Rather than relying solely on teacher-centered lectures, active learning emphasizes collaboration, inquiry, communication, reflection, problem-solving, and authentic learning experiences that encourage learners to engage cognitively, socially, and emotionally with instructional content (Freeman et al., 2014). Within English language education, active learning has gained increasing significance because language acquisition is most effective when learners actively participate in meaningful communication, collaborative tasks, and authentic language experiences rather than memorizing grammatical rules in isolation (Richards, 2022). Consequently, English teachers play a vital role in designing engaging instructional environments that develop learners' communication competence, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning skills.

Globally, educational systems continue to prioritize learner-centered pedagogies that cultivate the competencies required in the twenty-first century. International organizations such as UNESCO (2021) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) advocate instructional practices that promote learner engagement, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for preparing students to thrive in rapidly changing social, technological, and economic environments. Recent international studies likewise indicate that classrooms characterized by active learning strategies significantly improve learner motivation, academic achievement, language proficiency, and higher-order thinking skills compared with traditional teacher-centered instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Within English education, active participation enables learners to develop authentic communication skills through discussions, collaborative writing, debates, role-playing, project-based learning, and inquiry-based instructional activities.

Richards (2022) emphasized that communicative English instruction encourages learners to actively negotiate meaning, express ideas, solve problems, and collaborate with peers, thereby promoting both linguistic competence and higher-order thinking skills. Likewise, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2020) argued that learner-centered instructional approaches foster communicative competence by integrating language use into meaningful classroom experiences where learners become confident and independent language users.

Recent educational reforms worldwide have increasingly promoted active learning as an essential component of twenty-first-century education. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) recognizes learner engagement, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking as fundamental competencies necessary for preparing students to participate effectively in rapidly evolving global societies. Similarly, UNESCO (2021) emphasized that educational systems should prioritize learner-centered pedagogies that empower students to become active contributors to knowledge creation and lifelong learning. These international perspectives affirm that English teachers play a crucial role in facilitating interactive classroom environments where students actively construct language knowledge through authentic communication, collaborative inquiry, and reflective learning.



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Within English language education, learner engagement becomes especially important because language learning requires continuous interaction, communication, and authentic participation. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) explained that learners acquire language more effectively when they actively engage in communicative tasks, collaborative projects, debates, role-playing, and reflective writing activities. Rather than merely mastering linguistic forms, engaged learners develop confidence in expressing ideas, negotiating meaning, and applying language in real-world contexts.

Similarly, learner-centered pedagogy shifts instructional responsibility from teachers toward learners by encouraging active participation, collaborative inquiry, self-regulation, and reflective learning. Weimer (2013) argued that learner-centered classrooms promote greater student responsibility because learners become active participants in constructing knowledge instead of merely receiving information. English teachers therefore facilitate learning by designing engaging instructional experiences, guiding inquiry, encouraging collaboration, and supporting learner autonomy.

In the Philippine educational context, learner-centered instruction has become a major priority under the MATATAG Agenda, the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, and the K to 12 Curriculum, all of which emphasize the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and lifelong learning. The Department of Education has continuously encouraged teachers to implement innovative pedagogical approaches that promote learner engagement and meaningful classroom interaction rather than rote memorization and passive learning. English instruction, in particular, serves as an essential avenue for developing communicative competence, literacy, global citizenship, and higher-order thinking among Filipino learners. The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) likewise require teachers to employ learner-centered instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and reflective teaching practices that respond to learners' diverse educational needs. Despite these national initiatives, many English teachers continue to encounter significant challenges in promoting active learning within secondary classrooms. Large class sizes, varying learner abilities, limited instructional resources, time constraints, declining learner motivation, and diverse language proficiencies often make it difficult to sustain meaningful student engagement. Furthermore, rapid technological advancements, changing learner preferences, and the increasing integration of digital learning environments require teachers to continuously adapt their instructional practices. Although many educators have adopted collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, educational technologies, and communicative teaching approaches, the lived experiences underlying these instructional practices remain insufficiently explored, particularly within public secondary schools in the Philippines.

Existing literature predominantly examines active learning using quantitative methodologies that focus on learner achievement, instructional effectiveness, or classroom performance indicators. While these studies provide valuable evidence regarding the outcomes of active learning, they offer limited understanding of how teachers personally experience the complexities of implementing learner-centered English instruction in authentic classroom settings. Moreover, previous investigations have largely concentrated on higher education institutions or general pedagogical practices, with relatively few phenomenological studies examining English teachers' lived experiences in fostering active learning among secondary learners. Even fewer studies have focused specifically on public secondary schools in Santiago City, where contextual factors such as school culture, learner diversity, instructional resources, and



community characteristics may uniquely shape teachers' instructional experiences.

This gap in the literature highlights the need for an in-depth qualitative investigation that explores how English teachers experience, interpret, and sustain active learning practices within their daily instructional responsibilities. Understanding these lived experiences is essential for identifying effective instructional strategies, contextual challenges, and professional support mechanisms that contribute to meaningful learner engagement. Such knowledge can inform teacher professional development, instructional supervision, curriculum enhancement, and educational policy aimed at strengthening English language instruction and improving student learning outcomes.

Hence, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School, Santiago City. By examining teachers' narratives through a transcendental phenomenological lens, the study aims to generate a deeper understanding of how learner-centered instructional practices influence classroom engagement, communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, and overall teaching effectiveness. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of English language education by providing evidence-based insights that support instructional innovation, teacher professional growth, and sustainable learner engagement in Philippine secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do English teachers describe their lived experiences in promoting active learning among secondary students?
2. What instructional practices do English teachers employ to enhance learner engagement in English instruction?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing active learning strategies in English classrooms?
4. How do these experiences influence teachers' professional growth and instructional effectiveness?

Objective of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how teachers implement learner-centered instructional strategies, facilitate meaningful classroom engagement, overcome instructional challenges, and sustain active participation in English language learning. Furthermore, the study aims to develop an evidence-based framework that may guide English teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in



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strengthening learner engagement, instructional innovation, and communicative competence in secondary English education.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach utilizing transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School, Santiago City. Transcendental phenomenology was deemed appropriate because it seeks to describe and understand the essence of participants' lived experiences while allowing the researcher to suspend personal assumptions through the process of epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach enabled the researcher to capture English teachers' authentic experiences in facilitating learner engagement through communicative language teaching, collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, differentiated learning activities, technology integration, reflective teaching, and learner-centered pedagogies. By focusing on teachers' personal narratives, the study sought to uncover the meanings they attached to promoting active learning, the instructional strategies they employed, the challenges they encountered, and the professional insights they gained while fostering meaningful classroom engagement. The study was conducted at Rizal National High School, located at Purok 4, Rizal, Santiago City, a public secondary school under the Department of Education that serves diverse learners through the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum and learner-centered instructional approaches. The school provides an appropriate setting for investigating teachers' experiences because English teachers regularly implement communicative and interactive instructional strategies aimed at enhancing learners' communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and active classroom participation. The participants consisted of twelve (12) purposively selected English teachers who had rendered at least three years of teaching experience, were permanently employed at Rizal National High School, and had extensive experience implementing active learning strategies in English instruction. Purposive sampling was utilized because it enabled the selection of participants who possessed rich, meaningful, and firsthand experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation, while data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved (Saunders et al., 2018). Data were gathered using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions focusing on teachers' experiences in promoting learner engagement, implementing active learning strategies, facilitating communicative classroom instruction, addressing instructional challenges, integrating technology, and sustaining learner participation. Prior to implementation, the interview guide underwent expert validation by specialists in English language education, curriculum and instruction, qualitative research, and educational leadership to ensure its clarity, relevance, and content validity. Pilot interviews were likewise conducted with English teachers outside the research participants to refine the interview questions and estimate the duration of the interviews. Before data collection, approval was secured from the school administration and appropriate educational authorities, while all participants voluntarily signed informed consent forms after receiving a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality measures, and ethical safeguards. Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes were conducted in locations convenient to the



participants to encourage openness and minimize distractions. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded, while field notes were simultaneously documented to capture non-verbal behaviors, classroom contexts, emotional expressions, and researcher observations that complemented the interview narratives. Interview recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' responses, and member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review their interview transcripts and verify the accuracy of the recorded information. Data analysis was performed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method (Colaizzi, 1978), which involved repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering similar meanings into categories, generating emergent themes, developing exhaustive textual descriptions of the phenomenon, and validating the findings through participant feedback. This systematic analytical process enabled the researcher to identify the essential structures underlying English teachers' lived experiences in promoting active learning among secondary students. To establish the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher adhered to the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, triangulation of interview transcripts and field notes, and sustained interaction with participants. Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and instructional experiences, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail documenting each phase of the research process, while confirmability was achieved through reflexive journaling, participant validation, audit records, and continuous bracketing of researcher assumptions to ensure that the findings genuinely reflected participants' lived experiences. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and participant codes in place of actual names, while all interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and electronic research files were securely stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Furthermore, the study complied with the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2022) by upholding the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, confidentiality, justice, and respect for participants' dignity throughout every stage of the research process.

Results and Discussion

The phenomenological analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that English teachers at Rizal National High School perceive active learning as a transformative instructional approach that goes beyond increasing classroom participation. Participants described active learning as a learner-centered process that encourages students to communicate confidently, think critically, collaborate meaningfully, and become responsible for constructing their own understanding of the English language. Rather than functioning solely as providers of information, teachers viewed themselves as facilitators of learning who create classroom environments where students actively interact with texts, peers, and authentic language



experiences. The teachers emphasized that meaningful engagement occurs when students are encouraged to ask questions, express opinions, solve problems, participate in collaborative activities, and apply English in authentic communication contexts.

The participants likewise explained that promoting active learning requires continuous instructional innovation, creativity, flexibility, and reflective practice. They acknowledged that learner engagement cannot be sustained through traditional lecture-based instruction alone, particularly among secondary learners who possess diverse learning preferences, varying language proficiencies, and different motivational levels. Instead, teachers intentionally integrate collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, role-playing, group discussions, project-based learning, educational technology, games, and reflective activities to make English lessons more interactive and meaningful. Despite encountering challenges such as large class sizes, learner diversity, limited instructional resources, and varying levels of student motivation, teachers remained committed to creating engaging learning experiences that promote communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

Theme 1. Cultivating Interactive Learning through Learner-Centered Pedagogies

The first and most dominant theme revealed that English teachers consistently employ learner-centered pedagogies to transform their classrooms into interactive learning environments where students actively participate in constructing knowledge. Rather than relying on traditional teacher-centered lectures, participants intentionally designed instructional activities that encouraged learners to become active contributors during classroom discussions, collaborative learning tasks, role-playing activities, debates, presentations, storytelling, and project-based learning experiences. Teachers emphasized that meaningful learning occurs when students actively use English to communicate ideas, solve authentic problems, and collaborate with classmates rather than merely listening to explanations or memorizing grammatical rules. Participants explained that learner-centered instruction allows students to develop confidence because they become responsible for expressing opinions, asking questions, and engaging in authentic communication. Teachers observed that learners become more motivated when instructional activities are relevant to their experiences and provide opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and independent thinking. Instead of positioning themselves as the sole source of knowledge, teachers described their role as facilitators who guide students in exploring concepts, constructing understanding, and reflecting upon their learning experiences. This instructional approach not only enhanced language acquisition but also strengthened learners' communication skills, confidence, and classroom participation.

One participant shared:

"I rarely lecture for the entire period because students learn English better when they actively participate. I encourage discussions, group activities, and presentations because learners become more confident when they use the language instead of simply listening." (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

"Every lesson becomes more meaningful when students interact with one another. They learn from sharing ideas, asking questions, and solving activities together rather than depending entirely on the teacher." (Participant 8)

Participant 11 similarly reflected:



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"Active learning changes the atmosphere of the classroom. Students become excited because they know they will participate instead of simply copying notes from the board."

Several participants further emphasized that learner-centered instruction creates a more inclusive classroom environment where learners with different abilities can participate according to their strengths. Teachers intentionally designed differentiated activities that accommodated varying language proficiencies, learning preferences, and confidence levels. Group work, pair activities, interactive games, and performance-based assessments allowed both high-performing and struggling learners to contribute meaningfully during classroom instruction. Teachers observed that learners who were initially reluctant to participate gradually developed greater confidence because classroom activities emphasized collaboration rather than competition.

The participants also noted that learner-centered pedagogies strengthened teacher-student relationships by creating opportunities for meaningful interaction. Rather than maintaining formal teacher-centered classroom dynamics, English teachers fostered supportive learning environments characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for learning. Students became more willing to express ideas, ask for clarification, and participate actively because they perceived the classroom as a safe environment where mistakes were viewed as opportunities for learning rather than reasons for criticism. These findings strongly support Constructivist Learning Theory proposed by Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978), which argues that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction, collaboration, and meaningful experiences. Likewise, Weimer (2013) emphasized that learner-centered classrooms increase learner autonomy, responsibility, and engagement by shifting instructional focus from teaching to learning. Similarly, Freeman et al. (2014) concluded that active learning significantly improves academic achievement and learner participation because students become intellectually engaged in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information. The findings therefore demonstrate that learner-centered pedagogies enable English teachers to create engaging instructional environments where communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and authentic language use become central components of learning.

Theme 2. Strengthening Communication Skills through Collaborative Classroom Engagement

The second theme illustrates that collaborative classroom engagement serves as one of the most effective strategies for strengthening learners' communication skills in English. Participants consistently described collaborative learning activities as essential opportunities for students to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing through authentic interactions with their classmates. Rather than viewing English merely as an academic subject, teachers encouraged learners to use the language as a practical means of expressing ideas, negotiating meaning, solving problems, and building interpersonal relationships.

Teachers explained that collaborative activities such as group discussions, debates, role-playing, peer editing, storytelling, dialogue simulations, and project-based learning significantly improved learners' confidence in communicating in English. Many students initially experienced anxiety when speaking English; however, regular participation in collaborative learning gradually reduced communication apprehension and increased willingness to interact using the target language. Teachers observed that



learners became more articulate, expressive, and confident because collaborative activities provided authentic opportunities for language use within supportive peer environments.

Participant 5 explained:

"Students become more confident when they work in groups because they learn from one another. Even shy learners begin participating because they feel supported by their classmates."

Participant 9 shared:

"Role-playing and group presentations allow students to practice English naturally. Instead of memorizing dialogues, they communicate ideas based on real-life situations."

Participant 1 added:

"The classroom becomes more interactive when students discuss topics together. They develop communication skills while learning to respect different opinions."

Teachers further explained that collaborative learning promotes not only language proficiency but also essential twenty-first-century competencies such as teamwork, leadership, empathy, conflict resolution, and problem-solving. Through cooperative activities, students learned to negotiate responsibilities, exchange constructive feedback, appreciate diverse perspectives, and build meaningful social relationships. These experiences enabled learners to recognize that language serves as a powerful tool for communication, collaboration, and social interaction rather than simply an academic requirement.

Participants likewise emphasized that collaborative engagement transformed classroom dynamics by increasing student motivation and participation. Learners became more enthusiastic because collaborative tasks encouraged active involvement, creativity, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes. Teachers intentionally facilitated heterogeneous groupings to maximize peer support, allowing more proficient learners to assist classmates who required additional guidance. This collaborative culture fostered inclusivity while enhancing communication competence across varying learner abilities.

These findings align with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative engagement within the Zone of Proximal Development. Likewise, Richards (2022) explained that Communicative Language Teaching promotes meaningful language acquisition by providing authentic opportunities for interaction and communication rather than isolated grammar instruction. Furthermore, Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) argued that collaborative classroom environments significantly strengthen learner engagement, communication competence, motivation, and confidence because students actively construct language through authentic interpersonal experiences. Collectively, these findings affirm that collaborative classroom engagement constitutes an essential instructional strategy through which English teachers cultivate communicative competence while simultaneously promoting social, cognitive, and emotional development among secondary learners.

Theme 3. Enhancing Critical Thinking through Inquiry-Based English Instruction

The third theme revealed that inquiry-based English instruction significantly enhances students' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, construct evidence-based arguments, and communicate their ideas meaningfully. Participants consistently explained that English instruction extends beyond developing learners' language proficiency because it also



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cultivates intellectual curiosity, reflective thinking, and sound decision-making. Rather than asking students to memorize literary concepts, grammatical rules, or vocabulary, teachers designed learning experiences that challenged learners to question assumptions, interpret texts critically, solve authentic problems, and justify their opinions using logical reasoning. Through inquiry-based activities, English classrooms became spaces where learners actively explored ideas, collaborated with peers, and developed deeper understanding through meaningful discourse.

Teachers emphasized that questioning strategies played a vital role in stimulating higher-order thinking. They intentionally asked open-ended questions that encouraged learners to compare ideas, evaluate characters' actions, infer meanings from literary texts, defend arguments, and relate classroom discussions to real-life experiences. Participants observed that students became more engaged when lessons required thoughtful analysis rather than simple recall of information. Instead of providing direct answers, teachers guided learners through reflective questioning, allowing them to construct knowledge independently while developing confidence in expressing their own interpretations.

One participant explained:

"I always encourage students to explain why they arrived at their answers instead of simply giving the correct response. When they justify their ideas, they become more confident in thinking critically and communicating effectively." (Participant 4)

Another participant shared:

"Literature discussions become meaningful when students analyze the characters' decisions and connect them with issues happening in society. They begin to realize that English is not only about language but also about understanding people and life." (Participant 10)

Participant 7 likewise reflected:

"Inquiry-based activities make students more curious. Instead of waiting for answers from the teacher, they investigate ideas, ask questions, and learn from one another during classroom discussions."

Several participants also emphasized that inquiry-based learning strengthened students' reading comprehension because learners were encouraged to interpret texts from multiple perspectives. Rather than focusing exclusively on identifying factual information, students learned to infer meanings, evaluate arguments, recognize bias, and synthesize information from various sources. Teachers observed that learners became more analytical readers and more articulate speakers because classroom discussions challenged them to support their opinions with textual evidence and logical explanations.

Furthermore, participants explained that inquiry-based instruction fostered creativity and independent learning by allowing students to design projects, conduct mini-research activities, solve authentic communication problems, and develop innovative presentations. These learning experiences enabled students to assume greater responsibility for their own learning while simultaneously strengthening collaboration, communication, and leadership skills. Teachers noted that inquiry encouraged learners to appreciate English as a tool for critical inquiry, problem-solving, and lifelong learning rather than merely a subject required for academic achievement.

These findings strongly support Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that learners construct understanding through active exploration, reflection, and interaction with their environment. Likewise, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory explains that meaningful learning occurs through concrete experiences followed by reflection, conceptualization, and active



experimentation. Similarly, Richards (2022) emphasized that communicative English instruction should promote inquiry, authentic interaction, and meaningful language use that develops learners' critical thinking alongside communicative competence. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) argued that learner-centered instruction enhances higher-order thinking because students actively analyze, evaluate, and create knowledge rather than simply receiving information. Consistent with these perspectives, the findings indicate that inquiry-based English instruction empowers learners to become reflective thinkers capable of applying language skills in authentic academic and real-world contexts.

Theme 4. Overcoming Classroom Challenges through Instructional Creativity and Adaptability

The fourth theme illustrates that English teachers continuously overcome instructional challenges through creativity, flexibility, and adaptability. Participants acknowledged that promoting active learning is not without difficulties, particularly in public secondary school settings where large class sizes, diverse learner abilities, limited instructional resources, varying levels of English proficiency, and declining learner motivation frequently affect classroom engagement. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated remarkable resilience by modifying instructional strategies, designing contextualized learning materials, and utilizing available resources to sustain meaningful student participation.

Teachers explained that one of their greatest challenges involved accommodating learners with different language abilities within the same classroom. While some students confidently participated in English discussions, others struggled because of limited vocabulary, fear of making grammatical mistakes, or lack of confidence in speaking the language. To address these differences, participants implemented differentiated instruction by assigning flexible learning tasks, organizing heterogeneous learning groups, providing scaffolded activities, and adjusting instructional pacing according to learners' needs. They emphasized that instructional flexibility allowed every learner to participate meaningfully regardless of individual proficiency levels.

Participant 6 explained:

"Every class is different. Some students participate actively while others hesitate because they are afraid of making mistakes. I adjust my teaching strategies depending on the needs and confidence of my students."

Participant 3 stated:

"Limited resources never stop us from making lessons engaging. We create our own instructional materials, use simple technologies, and encourage students to become creative during classroom activities."

Participant 12 reflected:

"Sometimes internet access is unavailable, so we modify our activities using printed materials, storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions. The important thing is that students remain actively involved in learning."

Teachers further explained that maintaining learner motivation required continuous instructional innovation. They integrated educational games, multimedia presentations, digital applications, collaborative projects, debates, simulations, and authentic communication tasks to sustain learners' interest and participation. Participants observed that students became more engaged when instructional activities reflected their interests, daily experiences, and contemporary social issues. Rather than depending solely on prescribed learning resources, teachers contextualized instructional materials to make



lessons more meaningful and relatable.

Several participants also emphasized the importance of adaptability during unexpected classroom situations such as technological limitations, schedule adjustments, curriculum revisions, or disruptions caused by external circumstances. Teachers described adaptability as an essential professional competency because effective instruction requires immediate decision-making and creative problem-solving. They viewed instructional challenges not as barriers but as opportunities to improve teaching practices, strengthen professional resilience, and develop innovative approaches that respond to learners' evolving needs.

The findings support Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which explains that professionals continuously improve through experience, reflection, adaptation, and experimentation. Similarly, Bandura's (1997) Social Learning Theory suggests that teachers develop confidence and instructional competence through repeated successful experiences, observation, and reflective practice. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) likewise emphasized that adaptive expertise enables teachers to respond effectively to diverse classroom contexts by continuously refining instructional practices. These findings demonstrate that creativity and adaptability are indispensable qualities of effective English teachers because they enable sustained learner engagement despite contextual challenges and resource limitations.

Theme 5. Sustaining Student Motivation through Reflective and Inclusive Teaching Practices

The fifth and final theme revealed that sustaining active learning requires English teachers to cultivate reflective and inclusive teaching practices that continuously motivate learners while addressing their diverse academic, social, and emotional needs. Participants consistently explained that student motivation cannot be sustained solely through interesting instructional activities; rather, it develops when learners experience supportive teacher-student relationships, meaningful classroom interactions, equitable participation, and opportunities for personal growth. Teachers believed that inclusive learning environments encourage students to participate confidently because they feel respected, valued, and accepted regardless of their language proficiency or academic ability.

Participants emphasized that reflective teaching played a central role in improving learner engagement. After every lesson, teachers evaluated the effectiveness of instructional strategies, analyzed students' responses, identified areas requiring improvement, and modified future lessons accordingly. Reflection enabled teachers to recognize which activities successfully promoted participation and which instructional approaches required refinement. Rather than viewing reflection as a routine professional requirement, participants considered it an essential process for continuously enhancing instructional effectiveness and responding to learners' changing needs.

Participant 8 shared:

"After every lesson, I ask myself whether my students truly learned or simply completed the activity. Reflection helps me improve my teaching and design better learning experiences for the next class."

Participant 1 remarked:

"I make sure that every student has the opportunity to participate. Even those who are shy or academically challenged deserve to express their ideas because every learner has something valuable to contribute."



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Participant 5 explained:

"Positive relationships motivate students to participate. When learners know that their teacher respects them and values their opinions, they become more willing to communicate and take risks in using English."

Teachers further explained that inclusive teaching involved recognizing learners' diverse backgrounds, interests, learning preferences, and emotional needs. They intentionally encouraged hesitant learners through positive reinforcement, individualized support, cooperative learning, and differentiated instructional activities that promoted equal participation. Participants emphasized that mistakes were treated as natural components of language learning rather than indicators of failure. This supportive classroom climate reduced students' anxiety while strengthening confidence, communication skills, and willingness to participate actively.

The participants likewise described motivation as a shared responsibility between teachers and students. Teachers continuously sought innovative instructional approaches that inspired curiosity, creativity, and meaningful engagement, while simultaneously encouraging learners to become independent, responsible, and reflective participants in their own learning. They believed that when students are empowered to make decisions, collaborate with classmates, and connect English lessons with authentic life experiences, motivation becomes intrinsic and sustainable.

These findings strongly support Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self-Determination Theory, which posits that learner motivation flourishes when educational environments satisfy the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Likewise, Schön's (1983) Reflective Practice Theory explains that continuous reflection enables educators to refine instructional practices and respond effectively to complex classroom situations. Furthermore, UNESCO (2021) emphasized that inclusive, learner-centered education promotes equitable participation, lifelong learning, and holistic learner development. Consistent with these theoretical perspectives, the findings demonstrate that reflective and inclusive teaching practices sustain active learning by creating supportive classroom environments where students develop confidence, communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, and a lifelong motivation to learn English. Collectively, these lived experiences highlight that active learning becomes most effective when English teachers integrate reflective practice, inclusive pedagogy, instructional innovation, and positive teacher-student relationships to foster meaningful learner engagement and continuous educational growth.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active learning among secondary students at Rizal National High School. The findings revealed that active learning is far more than encouraging students to participate in classroom activities; rather, it is a comprehensive instructional approach that cultivates communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, learner autonomy, and lifelong learning. The teachers consistently described themselves as facilitators who create meaningful learning environments where students actively construct knowledge through authentic communication, collaborative inquiry, reflective thinking, and experiential learning. Their lived experiences demonstrate that effective English instruction is characterized by



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flexibility, innovation, inclusivity, and continuous professional reflection that responds to the evolving needs of diverse learners.

The first emergent theme, Cultivating Interactive Learning through Learner-Centered Pedagogies, demonstrated that learner-centered instruction significantly transforms classroom engagement by positioning students as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Teachers intentionally utilized collaborative discussions, role-playing, project-based learning, storytelling, debates, presentations, and differentiated instructional activities to encourage learners to communicate confidently and assume greater responsibility for their learning. These instructional experiences promoted learner autonomy, increased classroom participation, and fostered meaningful interaction among students. The findings affirm that learner-centered pedagogies strengthen not only language acquisition but also communication skills, confidence, creativity, and collaborative learning, ultimately contributing to more engaging and effective English classrooms.

The second theme, Strengthening Communication Skills through Collaborative Classroom Engagement, revealed that collaborative learning experiences play a crucial role in developing learners' communicative competence. Teachers emphasized that authentic language learning occurs when students interact meaningfully through group discussions, peer collaboration, role-playing, debates, cooperative projects, and classroom presentations. Such activities enabled learners to express ideas confidently, negotiate meaning, appreciate diverse perspectives, and strengthen interpersonal relationships while using English in authentic contexts. The findings suggest that collaborative engagement not only improves language proficiency but also develops essential twenty-first-century competencies such as teamwork, leadership, empathy, and problem-solving.

The third theme, Enhancing Critical Thinking through Inquiry-Based English Instruction, highlighted the importance of inquiry-oriented teaching in developing learners' analytical and reflective thinking skills. Participants consistently encouraged students to analyze literary texts, evaluate arguments, formulate evidence-based opinions, solve authentic problems, and relate classroom learning to real-life situations. Inquiry-based instructional strategies transformed English classrooms into intellectually stimulating environments where students became active investigators rather than passive learners. Consequently, learners developed stronger reading comprehension, reasoning abilities, creativity, and independent learning skills, demonstrating that English instruction serves not only as language education but also as a platform for intellectual development.

The fourth theme, Overcoming Classroom Challenges through Instructional Creativity and Adaptability, emphasized teachers' resilience and professional commitment in addressing diverse instructional challenges. Participants encountered obstacles such as varying learner abilities, limited instructional resources, technological constraints, declining learner motivation, and large class sizes. Nevertheless, they continuously adapted instructional strategies, contextualized learning materials, integrated technology whenever possible, and designed innovative classroom activities to sustain active learning. Their experiences illustrate that instructional creativity and adaptability are essential professional competencies that enable teachers to maintain meaningful learner engagement despite contextual limitations.

The fifth theme, Sustaining Student Motivation through Reflective and Inclusive Teaching Practices, demonstrated that learner motivation is strengthened through supportive teacher-student relationships,



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reflective teaching, and inclusive classroom environments. Teachers emphasized that every learner should be provided equitable opportunities to participate regardless of language proficiency or academic ability. Through continuous reflection, individualized support, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction, and emotionally supportive classroom interactions, teachers cultivated learning environments where students developed confidence, intrinsic motivation, and a genuine interest in learning English. These findings underscore that sustainable learner engagement depends not only on instructional strategies but also on teachers' commitment to fostering inclusive, respectful, and learner-centered educational experiences.

Hence, the findings conclude that English teachers play a pivotal role in promoting active learning by integrating learner-centered pedagogies, collaborative engagement, inquiry-based instruction, instructional creativity, reflective practice, and inclusive teaching. These lived experiences demonstrate that active learning significantly enhances learners' communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, confidence, motivation, and lifelong learning competencies. The findings strongly support Constructivist Learning Theory, Communicative Language Teaching Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, affirming that meaningful English instruction is achieved when learners actively construct knowledge through authentic experiences, social interaction, reflection, and continuous engagement.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study provide significant implications for English language education, curriculum development, teacher professional development, and educational leadership. First, English teachers should continue adopting learner-centered instructional approaches that prioritize communication, collaboration, inquiry, reflection, and authentic learning experiences rather than traditional teacher-centered instruction. Second, school administrators should strengthen professional development programs focusing on active learning strategies, differentiated instruction, communicative language teaching, classroom assessment, educational technology integration, and reflective teaching practices to enhance instructional effectiveness. Third, curriculum developers should design English learning resources that encourage inquiry-based learning, project-based instruction, authentic communication, collaborative learning, and critical thinking to better align with twenty-first-century educational goals. Fourth, the Department of Education should continue supporting learner-centered pedagogies through sustained teacher capability-building, technology integration, instructional supervision, and curriculum innovation consistent with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, and the MATATAG Agenda. Finally, teacher education institutions should strengthen pre-service and graduate English education programs by emphasizing communicative language teaching, reflective practice, instructional innovation, educational research, and learner-centered pedagogies to prepare future educators for increasingly diverse classroom environments.

Recommendations



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Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **English teachers** should continuously integrate learner-centered instructional strategies such as collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, project-based learning, communicative activities, and differentiated instruction to sustain active learner engagement and improve English language proficiency.
2. **School administrators** should provide continuous professional development opportunities focusing on active learning, classroom innovation, technology integration, reflective teaching, assessment for learning, and communicative language teaching.
3. **The Department of Education** should strengthen policies and capability-building initiatives that support innovative English instruction through instructional coaching, mentoring, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and educational technology integration aligned with national educational reforms.
4. **Curriculum developers** should enhance English learning materials by incorporating authentic communication tasks, inquiry-based learning experiences, collaborative projects, digital resources, and differentiated instructional activities that address learners' diverse needs.
5. **Future researchers** should conduct comparative phenomenological, mixed-methods, or longitudinal studies involving English teachers from different schools, regions, and educational settings to further explore the relationships among active learning, learner engagement, teacher effectiveness, communicative competence, educational technology integration, and learner achievement.

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