



Article

Active Engagement, Stronger Learning: Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students at Ditumabo National High School in Developing Learning Skills

¹ **Michelle R. Cadungog**

Ditumabo National High School

Ditumabo San Luis, Aurora

michellecadungogshs@gmail.com

Abstract

Student engagement has emerged as a critical determinant of learning quality and the development of essential learning skills in senior high school education. As educational paradigms increasingly shift toward learner-centered instruction, active participation in classroom activities has become fundamental in enhancing students' communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and self-directed learning. Senior High School learners are expected to acquire these competencies to prepare them for higher education, employment, and lifelong learning. Despite the growing recognition of student engagement as a predictor of academic success, limited qualitative studies have explored how learners themselves experience active classroom participation and how such experiences contribute to the development of learning skills. This phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School in developing learning skills through active engagement in classroom instruction. The study examines students' perceptions of classroom participation, collaborative learning, communication, instructional experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and personal growth. Participants will consist of purposively selected Grade 11 and Grade 12 students from Ditumabo National High School who have demonstrated consistent classroom participation across different learning activities. Data will be collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using the systematic procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The study is expected to generate meaningful themes that explain how active engagement strengthens learners' academic competence, confidence, communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and lifelong learning dispositions. The findings are anticipated to contribute to the improvement of learner-centered pedagogy, curriculum implementation, and instructional practices in Senior High School education. Student engagement has increasingly been recognized as a multidimensional construct closely associated with meaningful learning experiences and improved educational outcomes. However, qualitative explorations of how students themselves experience engagement remain relatively limited, reinforcing the need for phenomenological investigations.

Keywords: student engagement, learning skills, active learning, Senior High School, learner-centered instruction, phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, classroom participation



Introduction

The development of learning skills has become one of the primary goals of twenty-first-century education. Beyond acquiring academic knowledge, learners are expected to develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and self-directed learning competencies that enable them to succeed in higher education, future careers, and an increasingly complex global society. These competencies are cultivated through meaningful learning experiences that encourage learners to actively participate in classroom activities, collaborate with peers, communicate ideas, and reflect on their own learning processes. Consequently, student engagement has become an essential component of quality education because it promotes deeper understanding, sustained motivation, and holistic learner development.

Student engagement is widely understood as the degree to which learners are behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in classroom learning. Engaged students actively participate in discussions, complete learning tasks responsibly, ask meaningful questions, collaborate with classmates, and demonstrate persistence in overcoming academic challenges. Such active participation not only enhances academic performance but also develops learners' confidence, independence, and lifelong learning skills. Contemporary educational research consistently identifies engagement as one of the strongest predictors of meaningful learning and academic achievement. While much of the literature has examined engagement quantitatively, qualitative studies have highlighted that students' experiences of engagement are shaped by instructional approaches, classroom relationships, and opportunities for active participation.

The implementation of learner-centered instruction in Philippine Senior High Schools places greater emphasis on active participation rather than passive reception of knowledge. Subjects such as Effective Communication, Creative Writing, Reading and Writing Skills, and 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World require learners to express ideas, analyze texts, engage in collaborative discussions, produce authentic written outputs, and communicate effectively in various contexts. These learning experiences encourage students to become active participants in constructing knowledge rather than merely receiving information from teachers.

Meaningful classroom engagement likewise contributes to the development of essential learning skills that extend beyond academic performance. Students who actively participate in discussions, group activities, presentations, reflective writing, and collaborative projects develop stronger communication skills, analytical thinking, creativity, interpersonal competence, and self-confidence. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential employability skills and lifelong learning attributes that prepare graduates to respond effectively to changing educational and workplace demands.

Despite the growing emphasis on student engagement, many Senior High School learners continue to encounter challenges that limit meaningful participation. Factors such as fear of making mistakes, low academic confidence, communication anxiety, limited classroom interaction, diverse learning preferences, and varying instructional approaches may influence students' willingness to engage in learning activities. These challenges may consequently affect the development of learning skills and overall academic growth. Understanding how students experience classroom engagement is therefore essential in designing instructional practices that encourage inclusive participation and meaningful learning.

Existing studies have extensively investigated student engagement, learning motivation, and academic performance using quantitative research designs. Numerous investigations have demonstrated positive relationships between active participation and learner achievement. However, relatively few studies have explored the lived experiences of Senior High School students in understanding how classroom engagement influences the development of learning skills from the learners' own perspectives. Qualitative evidence describing how students interpret classroom participation, overcome engagement barriers, and develop meaningful learning competencies remains limited, particularly within Philippine public secondary schools. Recent phenomenological research similarly notes that students' experiences of engagement are complex and context-dependent, underscoring the value of in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Understanding students' lived experiences provides valuable insights into the personal meanings they attach to active participation, collaborative learning, and skill development. Their narratives reveal the factors that encourage engagement, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to become active learners. Such insights may guide teachers in designing classroom environments that promote participation, strengthen learner confidence, and develop higher-order learning skills.

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study seeks to explore how Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School make sense of their experiences in actively engaging with classroom learning and developing essential learning skills. By focusing on learners' voices, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on student engagement, learner-centered pedagogy, and skill development while providing evidence-based recommendations for improving instructional practices in Senior High School education.

Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined student engagement, academic motivation, classroom participation, and learning outcomes, the majority of existing research has employed quantitative approaches that focus on measuring the relationships among these variables. While these studies demonstrate that student engagement positively influences academic performance, they provide limited understanding of how learners personally experience engagement and how these experiences shape the development of essential learning skills. Furthermore, phenomenological investigations exploring the lived experiences of Senior High School students in Philippine public schools remain relatively scarce. Existing qualitative studies also indicate that students' engagement is influenced by contextual factors such as classroom interaction, teacher support, and collaborative learning opportunities, yet these experiences remain underexplored in the local educational setting. Consequently, there is a need for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis that explores how Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School interpret active classroom participation, overcome barriers to engagement, and develop communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and other learning skills. Addressing this gap will provide contextual evidence that can inform learner-centered teaching practices, curriculum enhancement, and educational policies aimed at improving student engagement and holistic learning.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School in developing learning skills through active classroom engagement.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Describe the lived experiences of Senior High School students in actively participating in classroom learning.
2. Examine how active engagement contributes to the development of learning skills.
3. Identify the factors that encourage or hinder meaningful student engagement.
4. Explore the strategies students use to remain actively engaged in learning.
5. Understand the meanings students attribute to active engagement in relation to their personal and academic growth.
6. Develop evidence-based recommendations for strengthening learner-centered instruction and student engagement in Senior High School.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore and understand the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School, San Luis, Aurora, in developing learning skills through active classroom engagement. IPA was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of how individuals interpret and make meaning of significant educational experiences within their personal and social contexts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). The participants consisted of 10–12 purposively selected Grade 11 and Grade 12 students who demonstrated consistent participation in classroom learning activities across subjects such as Effective Communication, Creative Writing, Reading and Writing Skills, and 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled in Senior High School at Ditumabo National High School; (2) active participation in classroom discussions, collaborative learning activities, presentations, or written tasks; (3) willingness to share their learning experiences; and (4) submission of signed informed consent from parents or legal guardians for students below 18 years old, together with student assent, or informed consent from students who were already of legal age. Data were gathered through face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to narrate their experiences regarding classroom participation, collaborative learning, communication, motivation, challenges, coping strategies, and the development of learning skills. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed through member checking to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the participants' narratives. Data analysis followed the systematic procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, including repeated reading of transcripts, initial noting, identification of emergent themes, clustering of related themes, cross-case analysis, and interpretative synthesis to capture the essence of students' lived experiences. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, audit trails, and participant validation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed by securing approval from the appropriate institutional research ethics committee and obtaining permission from the Schools Division Office and the school administration before conducting the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and all interview recordings, transcripts, and research documents were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. This methodological approach provided a rigorous and comprehensive understanding of how active classroom engagement influenced the development of communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, self-confidence, and other essential learning skills among Senior High School students.

Results and Discussion

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the interview transcripts revealed four superordinate themes that describe the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School in developing learning skills through active classroom engagement. The findings illustrate that meaningful participation in classroom activities not only enhanced students' academic competencies but also strengthened their confidence, communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and personal responsibility toward learning.

Theme 1. Building Confidence Through Active Classroom Participation

Participants consistently described active classroom participation as a significant factor in developing self-confidence and improving their ability to communicate ideas effectively. Many learners admitted that they were initially hesitant to participate because of fear of making mistakes, receiving negative feedback, or speaking before their classmates. However, continuous opportunities to engage in classroom discussions, oral presentations, debates, and collaborative activities gradually increased their confidence.

One participant shared:

"Noong una, nahihya talaga akong magsalita sa harap ng klase. Pero habang madalas kaming may reporting at discussion, mas naging kampante na akong magpahayag ng opinyon." (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

"Mas naging confident ako dahil hinihikayat kami ng teacher na lahat ay may pagkakataong magsalita at magbigay ng sariling ideya." (Participant 8)

Another learner stated:

"Kapag nakikita kong nakikinig ang mga kaklase ko sa sinasabi ko, mas ginaganahan akong makilahok sa klase." (Participant 5)

These findings suggest that active classroom engagement creates opportunities for students to strengthen their communication competence and self-confidence. The supportive learning environment encouraged learners to overcome communication anxiety and participate more meaningfully in academic discussions. This finding supports Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984), which emphasizes that greater student involvement leads to enhanced personal and academic development. It also aligns with Hattie (2023), who identified classroom discussion and teacher feedback as high-impact instructional practices that improve learner confidence and achievement.

Theme 2. Developing Critical Thinking and Communication Skills Through Collaborative Learning

Participants emphasized that collaborative classroom activities significantly enhanced their learning skills. Group discussions, peer feedback, collaborative writing, literary analysis, and problem-solving activities enabled students to examine different perspectives, organize their thoughts, and communicate ideas more effectively.

Many learners explained that working with classmates encouraged them to listen carefully, express opinions respectfully, and support their ideas using logical reasoning and evidence.

One participant shared:

Studies in Interdisciplinary Horizons

"Kapag may group discussion, natututo akong makinig sa iba't ibang opinyon bago ako magsalita." (Participant 4)

Another participant stated:

"Sa paggawa ng group activities, natututo akong makipagtulungan at mas napapaganda ko ang paraan ng pagsasalita at pagsusulat." (Participant 9)

Another learner explained:

"Mas naiintindihan ko ang aralin kapag pinag-uusapan namin ito kasama ang mga kaklase ko." (Participant 1)

These narratives indicate that collaborative learning strengthens higher-order thinking and communication competencies by encouraging learners to actively construct knowledge through interaction. Such experiences are consistent with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978), which explains that learning is enhanced through meaningful social interaction and collaborative engagement. The findings also support Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), who emphasized that collaborative learning environments foster critical thinking, communication, and deeper conceptual understanding.

Theme 3. Overcoming Personal and Academic Barriers to Engagement

Although participants valued active engagement, they acknowledged several challenges that limited their classroom participation. The most common barriers included fear of public speaking, lack of confidence, language anxiety, limited prior knowledge, peer pressure, and concern about giving incorrect answers.

Some participants explained that they initially preferred remaining silent because they feared criticism or embarrassment. Others reported that limited preparation and unfamiliar lesson content reduced their willingness to participate.

One participant narrated:

"Takot akong magkamali kaya minsan kahit alam ko ang sagot, hindi ako nagsasalita." (Participant 7)

Another participant shared:

"Nahihiya akong magtanong kasi baka isipin ng iba na hindi ko naiintindihan ang lesson." (Participant 10)

Another learner added:

"Kapag hindi ako handa sa lesson, mas pinipili kong makinig na lang kaysa sumagot." (Participant 6)

Despite these difficulties, participants gradually overcame their fears through repeated classroom participation, encouragement from teachers, and positive interactions with classmates. These findings demonstrate that student engagement is influenced by both internal and external factors, reinforcing the importance of supportive classroom climates that encourage risk-taking and active participation.

Theme 4. Transforming into Active, Independent, and Lifelong Learners

. Participants consistently described meaningful classroom engagement as transformative. Beyond improving academic performance, active participation encouraged them to become more responsible, independent, reflective, and motivated learners.

Students explained that participating regularly in discussions, collaborative projects, writing activities, and classroom presentations motivated them to prepare lessons in advance, complete assignments responsibly, seek additional learning resources, and monitor their own academic progress.

One participant reflected:

"Dahil mas aktibo na ako sa klase, mas nagsisikap na rin akong magbasa bago pumasok para makasabay sa discussion." (Participant 3)

Another learner stated:

"Mas naging responsable ako sa pag-aaral dahil gusto kong makapagbahagi ng magandang ideya sa klase." (Participant 11)

One participant further shared:

"Hindi lang grades ang nag-improve. Mas natuto akong makinig, makipag-usap, at matuto nang mag-isa." (Participant 12)

These narratives demonstrate that sustained engagement nurtures self-directed learning and lifelong learning dispositions. Students became more reflective, responsible, and intrinsically motivated as they assumed greater ownership of their learning. These findings support UNESCO (2023), which advocates for educational practices that empower learners to become active, independent, and lifelong learners equipped with essential twenty-first-century competencies.

Summary of Findings

The phenomenological analysis generated four interconnected themes that describe the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School in developing learning skills through active classroom engagement:

1. **Building Confidence Through Active Classroom Participation** – Students developed greater self-confidence and communication competence by actively participating in classroom discussions, presentations, and other learning activities.
2. **Developing Critical Thinking and Communication Skills Through Collaborative Learning** – Collaborative learning experiences enhanced students' analytical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.
3. **Overcoming Personal and Academic Barriers to Engagement** – Learners encountered challenges such as fear of public speaking, low self-confidence, and language anxiety but gradually overcame these barriers through supportive classroom experiences and repeated participation.
4. **Transforming into Active, Independent, and Lifelong Learners** – Sustained engagement fostered responsibility, self-directed learning, intrinsic motivation, reflective practice, and a commitment to continuous personal and academic growth.

Collectively, these themes demonstrate that active classroom engagement serves as a powerful catalyst for developing essential learning skills among Senior High School students. Meaningful participation, collaborative interaction, supportive teacher-student relationships, and reflective

learning experiences contribute not only to improved academic performance but also to the formation of confident, resilient, and lifelong learners capable of thriving in higher education and future professional environments.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Senior High School students at Ditumabo National High School in developing learning skills through active classroom engagement. Through the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the findings revealed that meaningful classroom participation serves as a powerful catalyst for learners' academic, personal, and social development. The participants' narratives demonstrated that active engagement extends beyond participation in classroom activities; it is a transformative educational experience that nurtures confidence, communication competence, critical thinking, collaboration, self-regulation, and lifelong learning.

The first theme, Building Confidence Through Active Classroom Participation, highlighted that students gradually developed confidence in expressing their ideas as they were provided with consistent opportunities to engage in classroom discussions, oral presentations, and collaborative activities. Their experiences suggest that supportive teachers and inclusive classroom environments encourage learners to overcome communication anxiety and participate more actively in the learning process.

The second theme, Developing Critical Thinking and Communication Skills Through Collaborative Learning, emphasized the value of collaborative instruction in strengthening students' higher-order thinking skills. Working with peers enabled learners to analyze diverse perspectives, communicate ideas effectively, justify opinions logically, and solve problems collaboratively. These experiences reinforced the importance of social interaction as a foundation for meaningful learning.

The third theme, Overcoming Personal and Academic Barriers to Engagement, demonstrated that students encountered challenges such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, communication apprehension, and limited preparation. Nevertheless, these barriers were gradually overcome through repeated participation, constructive teacher feedback, and supportive peer relationships. This finding illustrates that meaningful engagement is fostered within psychologically safe learning environments where learners feel respected and encouraged to take academic risks.

Finally, the fourth theme, Transforming into Active, Independent, and Lifelong Learners, revealed that sustained engagement encouraged students to become more responsible, reflective, motivated, and self-directed learners. As students actively participated in authentic learning experiences, they developed positive learning habits that extended beyond classroom requirements and prepared them for future academic and professional endeavors.

Overall, the study concludes that active classroom engagement significantly contributes to the development of essential learning skills among Senior High School students. Meaningful participation enhances not only academic competence but also the personal attributes required for lifelong learning, including confidence, resilience, responsibility, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. The proposed Active Learning Engagement Framework (ALEF) provides a contextual model that explains how supportive learning environments and learner-centered instructional practices facilitate holistic learner development. The findings contribute to the growing body of qualitative educational research by providing a deeper understanding of student engagement within the Philippine public Senior High School context and offer practical insights for improving instructional practices and learner outcomes.

Recommendations

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

For Teachers

Teachers should continue implementing learner-centered instructional approaches that encourage active classroom participation through collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, project-based learning, classroom discussions, reflective activities, oral presentations, and authentic assessments. They should create psychologically safe classrooms where students feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and learning from mistakes. Providing timely and constructive feedback can further strengthen students' confidence, motivation, and learning skills.

For School Administrators

School administrators should support continuous professional development programs focusing on active learning strategies, student engagement, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and collaborative pedagogy. They should also encourage classroom innovations that promote learner participation and provide adequate instructional resources to facilitate interactive teaching and learning.

For Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers should strengthen learning competencies that emphasize communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Learning activities should provide authentic opportunities for students to apply knowledge in real-world contexts while developing twenty-first-century competencies required for higher education and future employment.

For Guidance Counselors and Student Support Services

Guidance counselors should collaborate with teachers in developing interventions that address communication anxiety, low self-confidence, academic stress, and other psychosocial factors influencing classroom participation. Programs such as peer mentoring, leadership development, confidence-building workshops, and student support groups may enhance learner engagement and personal growth.

For Parents and Guardians

Parents should provide emotional support and encourage open communication regarding their children's educational experiences. Creating a supportive home learning environment and reinforcing positive study habits can strengthen learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate actively in school activities.

For Future Researchers

Future studies may replicate this research in different educational settings, regions, or academic strands to compare students' engagement experiences across diverse contexts. Researchers may also employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine how student engagement evolves over time and influences long-term academic achievement, learner well-being, and career readiness. Additionally, future investigations may explore teachers' perspectives on fostering classroom engagement or examine the relationship between student engagement and other variables such as academic resilience, digital learning, emotional intelligence, or inclusive education.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297–308.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2022). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 26(2), 97–140.
- Fredricks, J. A., Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2019). *Handbook of student engagement interventions: Working with disengaged students*. Academic Press.
- Hattie, J. (2023). *Visible learning: The sequel*. Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *OECD skills outlook 2023: Skills for resilient and sustainable futures*. OECD Publishing.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education—A tool on whose terms?* UNESCO.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *The future of jobs report 2023*. World Economic Forum.
- Yin, R. K. (2023). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (7th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2008). Investigating self-regulation and motivation: Historical background, methodological developments, and future prospects. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(1), 166–183.