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Learner Participation in the Teaching-Learning of Araling Panlipunan: A Qualitative Study at Calabuanan National High School

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Abstract

Learner participation is a central principle in contemporary education, particularly in Social Studies or Araling Panlipunan, where critical thinking, civic engagement, and social awareness are core learning outcomes. This qualitative study examined the nature, forms, and perceived value of learner participation in the teaching-learning process of Araling Panlipunan at Calabuanan National High School. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, the study explored the experiences and perspectives of teachers and students regarding classroom participation, instructional strategies, and learning engagement. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed three major themes: (1) participatory teaching strategies as catalysts for engagement, (2) learner participation as a pathway to deeper understanding and critical thinking, and (3) challenges and enabling conditions influencing participation in Araling Panlipunan classes. The results indicate that learner participation enhances motivation, interaction, and contextual understanding of social concepts, while teacher facilitation and classroom climate play critical roles in sustaining engagement. The study concludes that meaningful learner participation strengthens the teaching-learning process in Araling Panlipunan and contributes to the development of informed, reflective, and socially aware learners. Implications for pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational practice are discussed.

Keywords: learner participation, Araling Panlipunan, social studies education, qualitative study, secondary education



1. Introduction

Learner participation has long been recognized as a vital component of effective teaching and learning, particularly in subjects that emphasize critical thinking, social awareness, and civic responsibility. In Social Studies education, active learner engagement allows students to move beyond passive reception of information and toward meaningful interaction with social issues, historical narratives, and contemporary realities. In the Philippine context, *Araling Panlipunan* serves as a foundational subject that aims to develop learners' understanding of society, culture, governance, and national identity.

Recent educational reforms emphasize learner-centered pedagogy, participatory learning, and contextualized instruction as essential to improving learning outcomes. In *Araling Panlipunan*, these approaches are particularly relevant, as the subject requires discussion, reflection, analysis, and the examination of multiple perspectives. Learner participation through questioning, group work, debates, and collaborative activities supports deeper understanding and fosters democratic values within the classroom.

Despite the recognized importance of learner participation, classroom practices often remain teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for meaningful student involvement. Factors such as large class sizes, time constraints, and curriculum demands may hinder participatory teaching approaches. Moreover, there is limited empirical research that documents how learner participation is experienced and enacted in *Araling Panlipunan* classrooms, particularly in public secondary schools.

This study was conducted to examine learner participation in the teaching–learning process of *Araling Panlipunan* at Calabuanan National High School. By exploring the perspectives of teachers and learners, the study seeks to provide insights into how participatory practices influence learning and how such practices may be strengthened in Social Studies instruction.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine learner participation in the teaching–learning process of *Araling Panlipunan* at Calabuanan National High School. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe the forms of learner participation observed in *Araling Panlipunan* classes;
2. Examine how learner participation influences students' engagement and understanding of lesson content;
3. Identify factors that facilitate or hinder learner participation in the classroom; and
4. Generate insights that may inform improved teaching practices in *Araling Panlipunan*.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to capture in-depth accounts of learner participation as experienced by teachers and students in *Araling Panlipunan* classes. This approach

was appropriate for exploring classroom practices, perceptions, and meanings within their natural educational context.

3.2 Participants and Setting

Participants included Araling Panlipunan teachers and junior high school students from Calabuanan National High School. Teachers were selected based on their active involvement in teaching the subject, while students were chosen from classes where participatory strategies were regularly employed. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with students. The interview and FGD guides focused on classroom participation, teaching strategies, learner engagement, and perceived learning outcomes. All sessions were conducted in a language comfortable to the participants, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded, categorized, and synthesized into emerging themes.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

4. Results

Analysis of the data yielded three major themes describing learner participation in Araling Panlipunan classes.

Theme 1: Participatory Teaching Strategies as Catalysts for Learner Engagement

Participants emphasized that participatory teaching strategies such as group discussions, questioning, role-playing, and debates significantly increased learner engagement in Araling Panlipunan classes. These strategies created opportunities for learners to actively interact with lesson content rather than remain passive recipients of information. Through structured discussions and role-playing activities, students were able to explore social issues and historical events from different perspectives, which heightened their interest and sustained their attention throughout the lesson. Questioning and debate, in particular, encouraged learners to think critically, articulate their viewpoints, and listen to the ideas of others, making classroom interactions more purposeful and intellectually stimulating.

Teachers further noted that when lessons were intentionally designed to encourage interaction, students became more attentive, confident, and willing to share their ideas. Learners who were usually quiet or hesitant were more likely to participate when they felt that their contributions were valued and that the classroom environment was supportive. Interactive strategies helped break the monotony of lecture-based instruction and fostered a sense of shared responsibility for learning. As a result, participatory teaching approaches not only increased learner engagement but also contributed to a more inclusive and dynamic classroom atmosphere that supported meaningful learning and active involvement.

Responses:

P2-“Mas nagiging active ang mga estudyante kapag may discussion at group activities.”

P5-“Kapag nagtatanong ang guro, mas nag-iisip ang mga bata.”

P10- “Mas naiintindihan namin ang lesson kapag may palitan ng ideas.”

These responses indicate that participatory strategies stimulate active engagement by creating meaningful opportunities for learners to express their opinions, share insights, and interact both with lesson content and with their peers. When students are encouraged to participate through discussions, group work, questioning, and collaborative activities, they become more invested in the learning process. Such interaction allows learners to articulate their thoughts, listen to alternative viewpoints, and refine their understanding through dialogue, thereby deepening their engagement with the subject matter.

Moreover, participatory strategies transform the classroom into a dynamic learning space where knowledge is constructed collaboratively rather than transmitted unilaterally by the teacher. Through shared inquiry and collective problem-solving, learners co-construct meaning, negotiate interpretations, and develop a sense of shared responsibility for learning. This collaborative environment not only enhances comprehension but also fosters communication skills, social interaction, and mutual respect among learners. As a result, participatory approaches support a more interactive, inclusive, and meaningful teaching–learning process.

Theme 2: Learner Participation as a Pathway to Deeper Understanding

Learner participation was perceived to significantly enhance comprehension and critical thinking in Araling Panlipunan by allowing students to engage more actively with lesson content. Participants explained that when learners are given opportunities to share ideas, ask questions, and participate in discussions, they are better able to process complex social concepts and historical narratives. Through dialogue and interaction, students move beyond simply receiving information and instead examine causes, consequences, and multiple perspectives related to social issues and historical events. This active engagement supports deeper understanding and encourages learners to think critically about the content being studied.

Furthermore, students reported that discussing social issues and historical events during class activities helped them relate lessons to their own lived experiences and contemporary societal realities. By connecting classroom discussions to current events, community issues, and personal experiences, learners found the subject more relevant and meaningful. This contextualization of learning strengthened their ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations, fostering greater interest and sustained engagement in Araling Panlipunan. As a result, learner participation not only improved comprehension but also contributed to the development of critical awareness and informed perspectives essential to Social Studies education.

Responses:

P7- “Mas madaling maintindihan ang topic kapag pinag-uusapan namin.”

P14- "Natututo kaming mag-isip at magbigay ng opinyon."

P9- "Mas tumatatak ang lesson kapag kami mismo ang nagsasalita."

These findings suggest that learner participation promotes deeper cognitive processing by providing opportunities for students to actively analyze, reflect on, and contextualize information presented during instruction. When learners are encouraged to participate in discussions, ask questions, and express their own interpretations, they engage in higher-order thinking processes such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. This active engagement enables learners to connect new concepts to prior knowledge and real-life experiences, particularly in subjects like Araling Panlipunan where understanding social issues, historical events, and civic concepts requires critical examination and multiple perspectives.

Moreover, active involvement in the teaching-learning process supports meaningful learning rather than surface-level memorization of facts and concepts. Through participatory activities such as group discussions, debates, and collaborative tasks, learners are able to construct knowledge collaboratively and internalize ideas more effectively. This process allows learning to become more durable and transferable, as students are not merely recalling information for assessments but are developing a deeper understanding that can be applied to new situations. Consequently, learner participation enhances cognitive engagement and fosters lasting comprehension, critical thinking, and informed judgment.

Theme 3: Factors Influencing Learner Participation

Participants identified several interrelated factors that influence learner participation in the teaching-learning process, including teacher encouragement, classroom climate, learners' confidence levels, and instructional time constraints. Teacher encouragement emerged as a critical factor, as participants emphasized that learners are more willing to participate when teachers actively invite responses, acknowledge students' ideas, and provide positive reinforcement. Supportive teacher behaviors such as affirming contributions, allowing wait time, and responding constructively to errors help reduce learners' fear of making mistakes and increase their confidence to engage in discussions. Existing literature supports this finding, indicating that teacher support and responsiveness significantly enhance students' classroom engagement and willingness to participate (Wentzel, 2010).

Classroom climate was also identified as a key determinant of learner participation. Participants noted that a respectful, inclusive, and non-threatening classroom environment encourages learners to share ideas and ask questions freely. Research suggests that positive classroom climates foster a sense of psychological safety, which is essential for active participation and meaningful interaction, particularly in discussion-based subjects such as Social Studies (Fraser, 2012). When learners perceive the classroom as a safe space for expression, they are more likely to engage in dialogue and collaborative learning activities.

Learners' confidence levels further influence their participation, as students with higher self-confidence are more inclined to voice opinions and contribute to class discussions. Conversely, learners who are shy or uncertain about their knowledge may hesitate to participate, especially in large or highly structured classrooms. Studies have shown that student self-efficacy and perceived competence are closely linked to classroom engagement and participation (Bandura, 1997; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Time constraints were likewise identified as a limiting factor, as tight lesson schedules and curriculum demands often lead teachers to rely on lecture-based instruction at the expense of participatory activities. This finding aligns with research indicating that insufficient instructional time can restrict opportunities for discussion and interaction, thereby reducing learner participation (Prince, 2004). Overall, these findings underscore the importance of creating supportive learning environments that prioritize teacher encouragement, positive classroom climate, and adequate instructional time to foster meaningful learner participation.

Responses:

P12- "Mas sumasagot kami kapag supportive ang teacher."

P4- "May mga estudyante na nahihya kaya hindi agad nakikilahok."

P8- "Minsan kulang sa oras kaya lecture na lang."

These responses highlight that learner participation is shaped by a dynamic interaction between instructional and contextual factors within the classroom. Instructional practices such as the use of questioning, collaborative activities, and open-ended discussions influence how comfortable and willing learners are to participate. When teachers intentionally design lessons that invite dialogue and value students' ideas, learners are more likely to engage actively in the teaching-learning process.

At the same time, contextual elements particularly teacher attitudes and the overall classroom atmosphere play a crucial role in either encouraging or limiting student involvement. Supportive, respectful, and non-threatening classroom environments foster learners' confidence and willingness to express their thoughts, while negative or overly rigid atmospheres may inhibit participation. Teachers who demonstrate openness, patience, and encouragement help create a safe space where learners feel valued and heard, thereby promoting sustained participation and meaningful interaction during Araling Panlipunan lessons.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the importance of learner participation in enhancing engagement and understanding in Araling Panlipunan. Participatory strategies align with learner-centered pedagogies that emphasize interaction, dialogue, and critical inquiry. By involving students actively in discussions and collaborative activities, teachers foster deeper learning and civic awareness.

The results also underscore the role of teachers as facilitators of participation. Supportive classroom climates and purposeful instructional design are essential in sustaining meaningful learner engagement. However, challenges such as limited time and learner confidence suggest the need for continuous pedagogical refinement.

6. Conclusions

This study concludes that learner participation plays a significant role in enriching the teaching-learning process of Araling Panlipunan at Calabuanan National High School. Participatory teaching strategies enhance engagement, deepen understanding, and promote critical thinking among learners. While challenges exist, intentional instructional practices and supportive classroom environments can strengthen learner participation.

7. Implications

Educational Implications:

Teachers may adopt and refine participatory strategies to promote active learning and critical engagement in Araling Panlipunan.

Curricular Implications:

Curriculum developers may integrate learner-centered and discussion-based approaches to support participatory learning outcomes.

Practical Implications:

School administrators may support professional development initiatives focused on participatory pedagogy and classroom facilitation skills.

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