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Issues Affecting Students' Classroom Engagement in Junior High School: Basis for a Proposed Intervention

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Abstract

This study investigated the issues affecting students' classroom engagement at Junior High School Sta. Isabel Annex, Buguey, Cagayan, Philippines. The purpose of the study was to investigate students' experience on classroom management, identify themes in students' narrative, determine issues hindering their participation, and suggest an intervention plan. Thematic analysis was used in a qualitative descriptive research design. The researcher-crafted Student Narrative Guide was administered to sixty (60) purposively selected junior high school students (fifteen per grade level from Grades 7-10). Based on the findings, students are more engaged in learning activities that are interactive, student-centered, experiential and include performing activities, working in groups and life application of lessons. Nonetheless, there were some weaknesses observed such as passive lessons, lesson irrelevance, low confidence, and naughty friends that prevented students from participating in lessons. Moreover, thematic analysis showed that classroom engagement is influenced by instructional practices, personal factors, and peer dynamics. In light of the findings, an intervention plan called Project ENGAGE which focused on the physical classroom teaching strategies, contextualized learning experiences and classroom management to enhance students' engagement in class. The conclusion of the study is that all the instructional, personal and environmental factors should be managed and modified in junior high school students to make their participation and learning more active.

Keywords: classroom engagement, student experiences, thematic analysis, qualitative descriptive research, intervention plan

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INTRODUCTION

The active involvement of students in classroom activities has been recognized worldwide as an important predictor of educational success as it influences not just academic growth but also learners' overall development and engagement in school (Fredricks et al., 2004). When students are engaged, they are more likely to be actively involved, paying attention and learning (Skinner & Belmont 1993). Higher engagement levels lead to better academic performance, lower drop-out rates and greater well-being (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Despite these advantages, many similar schools are still plagued by problems of disengaged students.

In modern-day classrooms, the engagement of a student is determined by more than just attendance and compliance (Appleton et al., 2008). It is about behaviour, emotional and cognitive engagement with the learning experience. Behavioral engagement consists of student participation in activities, emotional engagement means students feel a sense of belonging, and cognitive engagement means students invest more deeply in a learning task (Reeve, 2012). However, due to distractions, a lack of interest, and poor classroom conditions, many students struggle to maintain these forms of engagement (National Research Council, 2004; UNESCO, 2017). Based on Emmer and Sabornie (2015), classroom management significantly influences students' behavior and participation. Effective management enhances the discipline, organization, and participation in the classroom while ineffective management can lead to disruption, inattention and lack of participation (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Marzano, 2003). According to Pianta and Hamre, as well as Simonsen et al., classroom conditions and teacher strategies, rules and interactions enable or limit student willingness. Conversely, ineffective practices may result in minimal participation and student disruption (Hattie, 2009).

According to Eccles & Roeser (2011), junior high school students experience a critical stage in the educational system as they undergo developmental and social transition. At this stage, students become more aware of what is happening in class, teacher expectations, and how lessons are taught (Wentzel, 2009). The educational system of the Philippines promotes learner-centered instruction and active participation at the national level as enunciated in various policies and programs. (Department of Education, 2016; Republic of the Philippines, 1987). Policies focusing on the criticality of student engagement issue (department of education, 2012). Junior High School Sta. At Isabel Annex, the teachers have noticed that several problems affect students' engagement in the classroom. Students are often inattentive, disengaged or distracted during a lesson (Creswell, 2015; Slavin, 2018). Woolfolk (2019) saw that participation tracked along with that as low participation, lack of motivation, and a low level of involvement in classroom activities. Teachers also report difficulties managing behaviors in class with some students being disruptive and interrupting the flow of lesson (Schunk, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002).

A lot of studies on student engagement have been made. However, few have focused on students' lived experiences and narratives on classroom management and engagement issues, especially in the localized Philippine context. Therefore, researchers investigated issues affecting students' participation inside the classroom at Junior High School. Through an investigation into the experiences of students in classroom management, we examine the themes that emerge from their narratives, and issues affecting participation, and provide an intervention plan.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on several theories. The Student Engagement Theory highlights the impact of classroom interactions on active learners, which involves the three types of engagement: behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Classroom Management Theory further elaborates that the rules, organization, and strategies teachers execute have a great impact on student behavior and participation (Doyle, 1986; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Vygotsky (1978) Social Development Theory suggests social environment interaction is the basis for learning. Significantly, the Zone of Proximal Development offers appropriate support for learning. The importance of planning the curriculum in a way that encourages active learning and meaning making is stressed in Brunner's (1966) Constructivist Theory, while Bandura's (1977, 1986) Social Learning Theory explains that students learn ways of acting and responding through observations and interaction. The Psychosocial Development Theory by Erikson (1963) presents a developmental viewpoint; adolescents seek competence, ability to belong, and

identity within the classroom. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Theory of Ecological Systems allows learners' classrooms to be considered as part of their microsystem. When viewed in combination, the frameworks may reveal climate, instructional practices and developmental variables influencing engagement.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of junior high school students in relation to classroom management, instructional practices, and peer interaction?
2. What major themes emerge from the students' narratives regarding classroom engagement?
3. What issues affecting students' classroom engagement are identified from their narratives?
4. What intervention plan may be proposed to address the identified classroom engagement issues?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore the issues affecting students' classroom engagement at Junior High School Sta. Isabel Annex. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe students' classroom engagement experiences, identify emerging themes from their narratives, and determine issues affecting their participation as basis for a proposed intervention plan. Data were gathered through a researcher-made Student Narrative Guide and analyzed through coding, categorization, and thematic analysis.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Licerio Antiporda Sr. National High School Sta. Isabel Annex, located in Sta. Isabel, Buguey, Cagayan, Philippines. The school is one of the public secondary schools in the area that implements the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum and caters to students coming from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were the junior high school students enrolled at Junior High School Sta. Isabel Annex in the School Year 2024–2025, Grade 7 to 10 students. Uses purposive sampling and voluntary participation. The respondents were selected because they were junior high school students who experienced directly the presence of classroom engagement and could tell meaningful stories about participation, motivation, influence of the peer group and management of the classroom. The researcher noted saturation when the final student narratives produced no new codes or themes. There were repeated mentions of interactive teaching, passive lectures, real-life relevance, learner confidence, and peer behaviour.

Before data collection, consent and assent were obtained from the guardians and participant respectively. The participants were also informed that they could opt out from the study anytime they wish to, without any penalty or affect on their academic standing.

Table 1 *Profile of the Participants*

Grade Level	No. of Participants	Male	Female
Grade 7	15	7	8
Grade 8	15	8	7
Grade 9	15	6	9
Grade 10	15	9	6
Total	60	30	30

Research Instrument

The research employed a researcher-made Student Narrative Guide with three parts corresponding to the objective of the research. The respondent were introduced to the part I. The purpose of the study was introduced to them. Moreover, their confidentiality was assured and they were informed about voluntary participation. In Part II, the profile of the students' information which included their grade level, age, sex and section. In Part III, a set of open-ended questions explored how students experienced engagement in the classroom. The questions addressed students' participation in classroom activities, experiences of engagement and disengagement, influence of peers and teachers, challenges faced, and suggestions to enhance engagement. The instrument was qualitative in nature; questions were reviewed for clarity, appropriateness, and relevance prior to administration.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the School Head of Sta. Isabel Annex to conduct the study. Upon approval, the Student Narrative Guide was administered to selected junior high school students during their scheduled class period, where they provided reflective responses based on their classroom engagement experiences. The purpose of the study was explained, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured. After completion, responses were collected, organized, and analyzed through coding and thematic analysis to identify emerging themes and issues, which served as the basis for the proposed intervention.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the Student Narrative Guide were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher first read and reread the students' responses to become familiar with the data. Significant statements related to classroom engagement were identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were grouped into categories, which were further organized into emerging themes reflecting the students' experiences, issues, and perceptions regarding classroom engagement. The results served as the basis for developing the proposed intervention plan, Project ENGAGE.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the sequence of the research questions: students' experiences in classroom engagement, the emerging themes from their narratives, the issues affecting classroom engagement, and the proposed intervention plan.

Students' Experiences in Classroom Management and Engagement

The researcher identified significant statements from the students' written narratives. These statements were coded based on recurring meanings such as participation, group work, real-life connection, boredom, fear of mistakes, and peer distraction. Similar codes were clustered into organizing themes and then grouped into broader global themes. Table 2 presents the integrated thematic matrix.

Table 2

Integrated Thematic Matrix of Junior High School Students' Classroom Engagement Experiences

Area of Experience	Sample Significant Statement	Initial Code	Organizing Theme	Major/Global Theme
Instructional Practices	"A typical class where I feel actively engaged is one where I am not just listening but also participating."	Active participation	Active participation and student involvement	Interactive and Student-Centered Learning Environment

Instructional Practices	"The teacher uses interactive methods such as group discussion, hands-on activities, and real-life examples."	Interactive strategy	Use of interactive activities	Interactive and Student-Centered Learning Environment
Instructional Practices	"It makes the lesson interesting and relevant."	Real-life connection	Real-life connection of lessons	Meaningful and Relevant Learning Experiences
Instructional Practices	"The teacher talked for a long time without interaction."	Long lecture	Lecture-based teaching with limited interaction	Disengaging and Passive Classroom Experiences
Instructional Practices	"The topic was presented in a very abstract way with no real-world examples."	Lack of relevance	Abstract and irrelevant lessons	Disengaging and Passive Classroom Experiences
Classroom Management	"She also encourages us to ask questions and share different opinions."	Teacher encouragement	Teacher questioning and encouragement	Teacher Support and Classroom Facilitation
Student-Related	"I sometimes feel shy or unsure if my answer is right."	Fear of mistakes	Low confidence and fear of mistakes	Learner Confidence and Emotional Barriers
Peer Interaction	"My classmates inspire me to communicate and boost my participation during class."	Positive peer support	Supportive peer interaction	Peer Influence on Classroom Engagement
Peer Interaction	"Classmates chat loudly or make jokes during lessons, pulling my attention away."	Peer distraction	Negative peer behavior and distraction	Peer Influence on Classroom Engagement

Major Themes Emerging from Students' Narratives

Through thematic analysis, six major themes emerged from students' narratives: (1) Interactive and Student-Centered Learning Environment, (2) Teacher Support and Classroom Facilitation, (3) Meaningful and Relevant Learning Experiences, (4) Disengaging and Passive Classroom Experiences, (5) Learner Confidence and Emotional Barriers to Participation, and (6) Peer Influence on Classroom Engagement.

Theme 1: Interactive and Student-Centered Learning Environment

Students' stories showed that interactive activities lead to higher student engagement in the classroom as well as learning. A student says, "A typical class where I feel actively engaged is one where I am not just listening but also participating." Another said that "the teacher uses interactive methods such as group discussion, hands-on activities, and real-life examples." These show that students get a larger interest when they are actively involved. According to Bond et al. (2021) as well as Fredricks and Reschly (2022), and Martin et al. (2023), interactive and student-centered instructional practices enhance students' motivation, participation, and academic engagement.

Theme 2: Teacher Support and Classroom Facilitation

Support from teachers and class management appeared as a significant theme. Students stressed that the way teachers question them, encourage them, and are open to their ideas encourages them to participate. A student mentioned that the teacher, "encourages us to ask questions and share different opinions." Supportive teachers build classroom environments where asking questions and making attempts is acceptable. This finding agrees with the observations of Quin (2021), Kahu and Nelson (2022), Martin and Collie (2023) that positive teacher-

student relationships, effective questioning and open communication increase students' motivation and participation.

Theme 3: Meaningful and Relevant Learning Experiences

According to students, they are more engaged when lessons are meaningful and connected to their lives. A student says, "It makes the lesson interesting and relevant." When a lesson is taught in connection with real-life situations, students understand the value of the lesson, and they get motivated to listen, think, and respond. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2021), Ryan and Deci (2022), and Saeed and Zyngier (2023), students' motivation better increases, encouraging them to engage actively, when learning experiences are meaningful and contextualized.

Theme 4: Disengaging and Passive Classroom Experiences

The narratives of students, on the contrary, demonstrated that engagement decreases when lessons are passive, lecture-based and lacking interaction. One student said, "The teacher talked for a long time without interaction", while another stated, "There was no interaction; it caused boredom." Lack of engagement is therefore not only a student-related issue. But this is also dependent on the way lessons are delivered. This statement is supported by the findings of Garcia and Weiss (2021), Skinner et al. (2021), and Fredricks et al. (2023), which indicate that too many lectures in the classroom make students bored and disengaged.

Theme 5: Learner Confidence and Emotional Barriers to Participation

Confident learners face lesser barriers and it also matters. A few students said that they do not participate because they are too shy/nervous or they are afraid to answer wrong. Some students are not assertive enough with their responses. As one student said, "I sometimes feel shy or unsure if my answer is right." So emotional barriers can stop students from taking part in classroom discussion even if they know the answer to a lesson. This is in line with Pekrun et al. (2021), Mercer and Dörnyei (2022), Wang et al. (2023) who reported that anxiety, fear of error, low self-confidence, and fear of peer judgment negatively affect classroom participation.

Theme 6: Peer Influence on Classroom Engagement

Peer influence became a prominent topic. Classmates can either promote or prevent participation. According to one student, "My classmates inspire me to communicate and boost my participation during class," Another student said, "Classmates chat loudly or make jokes during lessons, pulling my attention away." Positive peer interaction promotes confidence and active involvement while negative peer behaviour distracts students and weakens concentration. This is underscored by Wentzel and Ramani (2021), Liu et al. (2022), and Wang and Eccles (2023), who found that supportive peer relationships enhanced motivation while damaging peers' behaviors affected their engagement negatively.

Synthesis of the Major Themes

All in all, students' classroom engagement is a function of instructional, emotional, and social factors. When classroom activities are interactive, student-centered, relevant, and supported by teachers and classmates, students get more involved. But student engagement reduces when instructions are passive, interaction is limited, lessons are not connected to real-life experiences, students are not confident, or classmates disrupt. The findings indicate a more holistic approach is needed to improve classroom engagement and provide a solid foundation for Project ENGAGE.

Issues Affecting Students' Classroom Engagement

The narratives revealed different factors that hindered students' classroom engagement. A major concern is the continuing presence of passive, teacher-centered teaching practices that restrict active engagement of learners. Thus, classroom experiences are lecture-based with limited opportunities for interaction. Another

important matter is the irrelevance of lesson content to students' lives, with a few students reporting losing interest when lessons were presented in an abstract manner. Factors relating to the students like lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, difficulty understanding the lessons, etc., also prevent engagement. Peer influence was finally mentioned in negative behaviours that hinder the learning environment. The instructional issues raised teachers are believed to be influenced by a combination of instructional practice, student factor and peer behaviour which all account for classroom engagement. Reeve and Shin (2022), Saeed and Zyngier (2023) and Eccles and Roeser (2021), and Allen et al. (2022) supported this notion.

Table 3

Summary of Issues Affecting Students' Classroom Engagement

Issues Affecting Classroom Engagement	Students' Narratives	Implications on Engagement	Possible Intervention
Passive Teacher-Centered Instruction and Limited Classroom Interaction	"The teacher talked for a long time without interaction." / "There was little explanation or interaction after that."	Students become passive, lose focus, and participate less; limited opportunities to express ideas and clarify understanding.	Use interactive, student-centered strategies (guided questioning, discussions, think-pair-share, collaborative learning, hands-on activities).
Lack of Relevance of Lessons	"The topic was presented in a very abstract way with no real-world examples."	Students lose interest and motivation when lessons are not meaningful or relatable.	Integrate real-life examples and contextualized learning activities.
Low Learner Confidence and Emotional Barriers	"I sometimes feel shy or unsure if my answer is right."	Fear, anxiety, and low confidence reduce students' willingness to participate.	Create supportive and encouraging classroom environments.
Disruptive Peer Behavior	"Some of my peers were talking loudly and joking around."	Classroom distractions weaken students' concentration and engagement.	Strengthen classroom management and promote positive peer behavior.
Unsupportive Classroom Environment	Students feel hesitant to participate due to lack of encouragement.	Learners become less comfortable and less active in classroom participation.	Foster inclusivity, respect, and positive teacher-student relationships.

Proposed Intervention Plan: Project ENGAGE

Based on the findings, Project ENGAGE was developed as a structured framework for enhancing classroom engagement. The intervention responds to the multidimensional nature of engagement through six components: Establishing interactive learning environments, Nurturing meaningful and relevant learning experiences, Guiding active participation, Addressing learners' confidence and support needs, Governing classroom behavior and peer interactions, and Enriching instruction through varied strategies. Through this approach, Project ENGAGE aims to create a supportive, inclusive, and stimulating classroom environment where students are encouraged to actively participate, express ideas with confidence, and engage meaningfully in the learning process. Table 4 presents the intervention plan matrix.

Table 4

Project ENGAGE Intervention Plan Matrix

ENGAGE Component	Area of Concern	Objectives	Strategies/Activities	Time Frame	Persons Involved	Success Indicators
E – Establish Interactive Learning Environment	Passive teaching methods	Transform teacher-centered instruction into	Structured demonstration teaching using think-pair-share, guided questioning,	1st–2nd Qtr	Teachers, School Head	At least 80% of students actively participate in

		interactive learning experiences	collaborative group tasks, and hands-on activities; "no student left passive" rule			discussions, questioning, and collaborative activities
N – Nurture Relevance and Meaningful Learning	Lack of real-life relevance	Contextualize lessons and increase student interest through meaningful connections	Integrate real-life applications, localized examples, case-based tasks, and project-based learning	Whole SY	Teachers	At least 85% of students demonstrate sustained attention and active involvement
G – Guide Active Participation	Limited student involvement	Ensure all students are actively engaged in classroom processes	Assigned roles in group work, recitation mapping, participation tracking, inclusive questioning techniques	Continuous	Teachers, Students	At least 80% participate regularly in group work, recitation, and classroom interaction
A – Address Learner Confidence and Support Needs	Low student confidence and fear of participation	Build students' confidence and reduce fear of making mistakes	Small-group sharing, peer mentoring, scaffolded questioning, positive reinforcement, safe classroom spaces; normalize mistakes	Continuous	Teachers, Students	At least 75% demonstrate improved confidence in speaking and sharing ideas
G – Govern Classroom Behavior and Peer Dynamics	Disruptive peer behavior	Promote a disciplined and supportive classroom environment	Establish clear classroom rules, positive behavior reinforcement systems, peer accountability structures, consistent classroom management	Continuous	Teachers, Students	Classroom disruptions and off-task behaviors reduced by at least 70%
E – Enrich Instruction through Varied Strategies	Limited variety of engagement strategies	Diversify instructional approaches to sustain engagement	Multimedia tools, gamified learning, differentiated instruction, interactive technologies, creative tasks	Whole SY	Teachers	At least 85% demonstrate improved engagement and sustained attention

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

According to the result of the research, it can be concluded that the junior high school students at the Sta. Isabel Annex's experience in classroom management, instructional practices, and classroom environment shaped their differing levels of engagement in the classroom. Students are more inclined to learn in contexts that are interactive, participatory and student-centered; thus it is evident that engagement is highly dependent on the way learning activities are designed and delivered.

Analysis showed that students passive, lecture-based teaching practices, and lessons that did not connect to the students' real life, and students lacking confidence, and disturbed behaviour of other students hinder students engagement in the classroom. Students' participation in interactive teaching-learning may be limited, while their motivation and attention during an activity are also reduced. Both instructional and environmental conditions need to be improved for better engagement.

The identification of key themes and issues indicates that classroom involvement is a function of teaching, personal and social variables. The proposed intervention plan (that is Project ENGAGE) has been found appropriate and responsive to the needs as revealed by the study. It essentially creates opportunities for interactive/methodical strategy, contextualized learning, and the confidence of students, along with optimum

classroom management.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Teachers should strengthen the use of interactive and student-centered teaching strategies, such as group discussions, hands-on activities, and collaborative learning, to address passive and lecture-based instruction.
2. Teachers should consistently integrate real-life examples and contextualized learning activities to make lessons more meaningful and relevant to learners' experiences.
3. Teachers should create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment by encouraging students to share ideas, ask questions, and participate without fear, in order to address students' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes.
4. Teachers should implement structured classroom management practices, including clear rules and consistent routines, to minimize disruptive peer behavior and maintain a focused learning environment.
5. School heads should support teachers in improving classroom engagement practices by providing guidance and encouraging consistent use of student-centered instructional strategies.
6. Students are encouraged to actively participate in classroom activities and develop confidence in expressing their ideas.
7. The proposed intervention plan, Project ENGAGE, should be implemented in the classroom, as it directly addresses the issues identified in the study.
8. Future researchers may explore other factors affecting students' classroom engagement, such as different learning environments or grade levels, to further validate and expand the findings of this study.

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