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Original Article

Application of Social Constructivism in the Classroom: A Case Study of a Private Elementary School in Davao City

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Abstract. This case study investigated how teachers in Grades 4-6 at a private elementary school in Davao City apply social constructivism in Araling Panlipunan and Values Education classes, addressing the need to understand how this approach supports student learning in basic education. Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher collected data through interviews with five teachers and classroom observations. The data were analyzed to identify significant themes in instructional practices and student engagement. Findings show that teachers consistently promote collaborative and inclusive learning environments through interactive discussions, group tasks, and real-life applications of lessons. Reflective assessment practices and opportunities for students to construct their own understanding were also evident. Classroom observations further revealed improved instructional strategies, effective classroom management, and high levels of student participation, particularly during collaborative and hands-on activities. Three core components emerged as essential to the application of social constructivism: fostering collaboration and real-life learning, supporting active and reflective student engagement, and strengthening holistic learning through improved teaching practices. Results indicate that social constructivism positively influences student engagement and learning outcomes. The study suggests that targeted professional development can help teachers deepen their understanding of constructivist strategies and address implementation challenges, thereby enhancing the integration of social constructivism into classroom practice.

Keywords: *Collaborative learning; Instructional practices; Qualitative case study; Student engagement; Social constructivism.*

Engagement and active participation are essential for meaningful learning, especially among elementary students who learn best through interaction with their peers and teachers. Constructivism accounts for this process by positing that learners construct understanding through inquiry and discovery rather than passive listening (Akpan et al., 2020). Building on this view, social constructivism emphasizes the role of collaboration, dialogue, and shared problem-solving in constructing knowledge. Vygotsky's work highlights how social interaction, culture, and language guide cognitive development, particularly when learners receive support from more knowledgeable individuals within their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky et al., 1978; Moll, 1990).

Social constructivism has been widely applied in elementary classrooms worldwide. Schools in the United States, for example, have used constructivist strategies such as problem-solving, role-playing, and model-building to help

students understand mathematical concepts more deeply, in line with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards. Teachers also use classroom discussions to build on students' natural exchanges and strengthen their reasoning skills (Powell & Kalina, 2009). These approaches foster collaborative learning environments where students construct knowledge together rather than in isolation (Hein, 1991).

Studies indicate that today's learners prefer interactive, technology-supported environments in which they can actively explore ideas rather than memorize content. Traditional methods that rely heavily on lectures often lead to disengagement and limit critical thinking. This shift in learner needs has encouraged schools to explore instructional strategies rooted in constructivist and social constructivist principles, such as case studies, guided discovery, simulations, brainstorming, and group work (Akpan et al., 2020; Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

In the Philippine context, research comparing constructivist and traditional teaching approaches has yielded mixed results. A study at Saint Michael College of Caraga found no significant difference in academic performance between the two methods in Social Studies. Still, it emphasized the need for teachers to explore both to determine which works best in particular subjects (Teach Pinas, 2023). Private elementary schools, meanwhile, often adopt flexible and innovative teaching strategies, such as differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, project-based activities, and technology-supported lessons, thereby enabling students to build knowledge through hands-on and social experiences (Tomlinson, 2001).

Although many studies have examined constructivist practices, there is limited qualitative research on how elementary teachers, particularly in private schools, apply social constructivism in their daily classroom routines. Few studies describe teachers' real experiences with collaborative learning strategies, the challenges they face, and how these strategies shape student engagement and understanding. To address this gap, this case study investigates how Grades 4-6 Araling Panlipunan and Values Education teachers at a private elementary school in Davao City apply social constructivist methods in their classrooms. The study explores their instructional practices, experiences, and challenges through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Its findings offer insights that may guide teachers, administrators, and curriculum planners in strengthening collaborative, learner-centered approaches in elementary education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore how social constructivism is applied in private elementary school classrooms. The case study approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth understanding of real-life teaching practices within a bounded context (Creswell, 2008). This design enabled the examination of classroom interactions, teacher strategies, and student behaviors as they naturally occurred. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations, which together provided rich, meaningful insights into how the participating teachers implemented social constructivist principles.

Research Participants

The study was conducted in a private elementary school in Davao City. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on teachers known to use social constructivist instructional strategies. This sampling method ensured that participants had the requisite experiences to address the research objectives. A small number of teachers and their classrooms were involved to allow a detailed, focused examination of their practices. Participation was voluntary, and all individuals were fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures before agreeing to take part.

Research Instruments

Two main instruments were used in the study: Semi-Structured Interview Guides and Observation Checklists. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that explored how teachers applied social constructivist approaches in their classrooms, allowing flexibility to ask follow-up questions as needed. The observation checklist focused on key indicators of social constructivism, such as student collaboration, teacher facilitation, and learner-centered tasks. Experienced educators reviewed both instruments to ensure clarity and relevance to the study's objectives.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic process. After securing written permission from school administrators and

obtaining informed consent from participants, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each teacher. Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Classroom observations were then conducted over several sessions, with the researcher acting solely as a non-participant observer to avoid influencing classroom activities. Notes, recorded behaviors, and classroom interactions were documented in detail. All interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after each session, and observation notes were organized chronologically to maintain accuracy and completeness.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, interview transcripts and observation notes were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the content. The researcher then assigned codes to statements and actions that were meaningful within social constructivism. Similar codes were grouped into broader themes, such as peer collaboration, teacher facilitation, and student engagement. These themes were refined and compared across both interviews and observations to ensure consistency and accuracy. The ongoing comparison of data strengthened the credibility of the findings and allowed the researcher to identify patterns that reflected how social constructivism was practiced in the school.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed all required ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was secured from all teacher participants. Confidentiality was ensured by removing personal identifiers from transcripts and reports and by storing digital files in password-protected folders. All printed notes and documents were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. These steps ensured that the rights, privacy, and dignity of all participants were fully protected.

Results and Discussion

Interview Findings

The codes were organized into three overarching themes: Collaborative and Inclusive Learning Environment, Interactive Learning and Reflective Assessment, and Holistic Learning. Interview responses related to these themes were examined for their relevance to the study's aims, alignment with educators' perspectives, and consistency across data sources. The key findings derived from this analysis are presented below.

Collaborative and Inclusive Learning Environment

The findings reveal that collaborative learning has become a central strategy in creating inclusive classroom environments. Collaborative approaches—characterized by teamwork, dialogue, and joint problem-solving—support learners with diverse abilities and backgrounds. Such approaches not only deepen understanding but also foster essential social skills, including communication, empathy, and cooperation.

Teacher A highlighted challenges and opportunities in fostering collaboration: *"I encouraged my pupils to engage in class. This will help them better understand as they work together. I also saw that group work and collaboration are their weakness. Smart kids do not want to associate with kids who are not very good in class… Other intelligent pupils prefer to work independently rather than in a group. I encouraged peer collaboration to share what they learn with others."*

Teacher B, meanwhile, emphasized behavioral considerations in implementing social constructivist practices: *"I give hands-on activities to my pupils. Applying social constructivism is very challenging, especially with kids who have behavioral problems. It was challenging at the beginning of the school year, as I had first to understand their behavior and learn how to manage them. Once I learned that, I applied social constructivist principles to improve their behavior."*

Across interviews, teachers described both positive and challenging experiences when applying social constructivism in the classroom. Early in the school year, encouraging active participation was difficult, particularly for shy or struggling learners. Some students lacked confidence to speak or share, whereas high-performing students often preferred working independently to group activities. Despite this, teachers consistently encouraged peer collaboration, helping students gradually build confidence and develop more cooperative habits. As students became accustomed to working together, teachers reported noticeable improvements in engagement and learning outcomes.

Time constraints also posed challenges. The limited duration of class periods sometimes hindered the completion

of group-based tasks. One teacher noted the need to help pupils find quicker yet effective ways of responding when time was limited, while another extended activities to the following day to ensure task completion. These strategies illustrate pragmatic adjustments made to maintain the integrity of collaborative learning within structural limitations. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated effective use of social constructivist principles. They observed increased student interest in collaborative work and deeper learning as students connected concepts to real-life applications—an outcome particularly beneficial for struggling learners.

The data further indicate that the social constructivist classrooms in the selected private elementary school in Davao City successfully fostered a collaborative and inclusive environment. Teachers intentionally promoted interaction among students of varying ability levels, encouraging both reluctant and high-achieving learners to participate meaningfully in group tasks. They also provided students with opportunities to build independence and creativity through hands-on, inquiry-based activities. Although behavioral and social issues emerged, the teachers used constructivist principles to understand students' needs and adapt instruction accordingly.

An inclusive classroom climate is one in which all learners feel academically supported and experience a sense of belonging regardless of identity, learning style, or background. Such environments thrive when teachers and students work together to cultivate respect, thoughtfulness, and high expectations. As Kaplan and Miller (2007) argue, students are more likely to achieve academic success in classrooms that employ collaborative approaches attentive to learners' lived experiences. Overall, the analysis shows that teachers effectively established inclusive, collaborative learning environments in which social constructivist principles were actively practiced and continuously refined.

Interactive Learning and Reflective Assessment

Teachers implement social constructivism in their lesson planning by designing activities that align with lesson objectives and students' levels of understanding. Teacher A explained: *"I always think of the most effective activity in the lessons that encourages the kids to move and work. I give different scenarios and action plans and let the pupils answer."* Ensuring that students can demonstrate what they have learned in every lesson is central to this approach. Teachers emphasized the importance of fostering critical thinking through guided questioning during discussions. To support this, lesson plans often include peer and group activities as well as dedicated reflection time, allowing students to consolidate and articulate their understanding.

Teachers reported using strategies that encourage peer interaction and knowledge sharing, adapting their methods in response to classroom experiences and challenges. Positive discipline played a key role in promoting participation. Teachers motivated students through rewards and appreciation, maintained a warm and supportive environment, incorporated engaging activities, and provided opportunities for all students—both struggling and high-achieving—to collaborate and share knowledge.

This approach supports a balanced use of teacher-guided instruction and student-centered activities. Teacher A noted: *"The teacher introduces the topic and then asks the students what they learned. You must include an activity and a short lecture to achieve your goals."* Similarly, Teacher D added: *"I group the students, give them activities, and let them explore the topic. I incorporate the lesson into the group activity and assessment."*

Assessment is a critical element of integrating social constructivism into classroom practice, as it allows teachers to gauge student learning and engagement. Teacher A described: *"I can assess how they learn, answer the questions, and analyze them, especially when giving real-life scenarios. I give essays and assignments that require them to apply what they have learned. Competent learners enhance their learning, and others gain confidence and strive to share what they know. They ask questions eagerly, even if they have difficulty using Filipino, and they engage in the lesson."* These strategies demonstrate that teachers adapt assessments to their students' needs, creating opportunities for engagement and deeper learning. Students demonstrate greater motivation and understanding when lessons are interactive and meaningful.

Analysis of the interview data indicates that interactive learning and reflective assessment are effective for teaching Araling Panlipunan and Values Education in this private elementary school. Peer and group activities enhance retention, foster teamwork, and create space for students to share knowledge. Reflective assessment allows students to articulate their learning as they interact with classmates, reinforcing both cognitive and social skills. Positive teacher modeling further promotes a welcoming and engaging classroom climate.

Teachers also incorporated student-led discussions, interactive tools, and visual aids to stimulate creativity and maintain interest. Engagement-based, creative, and reflective assessments further strengthened learning outcomes. Social constructivism provides the framework for these strategies, guiding teachers' instructional decisions and defining their role in facilitating learning. As Akpan et al. (2020) note, effective teaching methods under this philosophy include learner-centered, collaborative, and guided approaches, all of which were evident in the observed practices.

Holistic Learning

Pumpo (2023) defined holistic education as a learning approach that attends to all dimensions of a learner, including academic skills and emotional, social, and personal development. Among the selected Grade 4-6 Araling Panlipunan and Values Education teachers, this approach was evident. Their practices demonstrated that social constructivism supports holistic learning by enabling students to construct meaning through interaction, reflection, and real-world application. The teachers provided multiple examples of how they achieved holistic learning through constructivist strategies.

Teacher A explained how constructivism nurtures analytical and reflective thinking: "*In using social constructivism, the students can think and analyze more, and do their best to brainstorm and share ideas. They make their best effort to guess, and retention is higher because ideas originate with them. When I give them tasks like doing action plans, they learn to make more plans.*" Teacher C highlighted how student engagement improves when lessons are interactive and meaningful: "*The students appreciate the lessons more. They are not bored because they are involved. Teachers must go beyond the influence of social media and be more creative to capture students' attention.*"

Teacher D emphasized how constructivist activities provide opportunities for socialization and independence: "*Social constructivism helped this generation, especially since they are more into gadgets and lack socialization. Through constructivism, they can learn independently through group and peer activities, since some students are shy to report.*" Teacher E similarly recognized the benefits for understanding and enjoyment: "*Social constructivism has a significant impact and is a big help in the classroom. Aside from kids enjoying the lesson, they also learn a lot and understand it easily.*"

Across the interviews, teachers reported notable improvement in students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. Students demonstrated the ability to answer more complex, analytical questions, such as correcting statements rather than simply choosing true or false. Despite language barriers in Araling Panlipunan, teachers observed higher test scores and stronger assessment results. Meanwhile, in Values Education, students showed growth in sharing insights and reflections, working independently and in groups, and understanding how to approach various tasks.

Although some teachers still preferred traditional methods, they acknowledged that students responded more positively to social constructivist strategies. Acting as facilitators enabled them to create more interactive classes in which students asked questions, shared ideas, and explored topics collaboratively. According to the teachers, this approach stimulated curiosity, increased attention, and prevented boredom—issues they often encountered with traditional, lecture-heavy instruction.

Despite its advantages, teachers also identified limitations and areas for improvement in the implementation of social constructivism. Teacher D: "*Time is a limitation. To improve, we must apply constructivism more often so they can practice. Using a timer helps us complete the tasks.*"

Teacher E: "*Students are very competitive. We must encourage them to work in groups. I sometimes do one-on-one activities with very competitive students.*" These reflections show that while constructivism is effective, it requires careful planning, time management, confidence-building, and strategies to balance competition and collaboration.

The analysis shows that holistic learning is fostered effectively in social constructivist classrooms. Teachers observed improvements in students' cognitive skills, communication, independence, collaboration, and overall engagement. Students appeared more curious, confident, and socially aware, demonstrating not only academic improvement but also broader personal development. Teachers believed that social constructivism is applicable in Araling Panlipunan, Values Education, and across other subject areas, as it enhances motivation and supports the development of essential lifelong skills.

Akpan et al. (2020) further affirm these findings by emphasizing that, under social constructivism, students no longer passively receive information but construct knowledge through questioning, assignments, projects, and guided discovery. They learn to work collaboratively in teacher-organized groups and become co-creators of knowledge as they build on prior experiences to form new understanding. Prawat (1992) also noted that social constructivism holds that effective teaching and learning are significantly influenced by interpersonal interaction and dialogue, with a particular emphasis on students' comprehension of the material.

Observation Findings

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies are teaching methods that help students learn better. These strategies make learning enjoyable and practical, encouraging students to participate actively in their education. The goal is to help students become independent and strategic learners (Persaud, 2024). Classroom observations showed that teachers use effective teaching methods. They include asking questions, demonstrating concepts, providing hands-on experiences, and encouraging group activities that engage students. The teachers applied social constructivism in their lessons. They offered differentiated activities and assessed students through group work, in which students shared what they had learned and explained their answers to challenging questions. This approach showed that students understood the material well. The teachers also provided motivational activities that captured students' interest. The students' responses indicated that these activities were fun. At the end of the lessons, the teachers assigned hands-on activities with practical, real-life applications. This helped students reflect on the importance of the lessons discussed in class. During the classes, students learned independently and actively. They responded well to the social constructivist teaching style.

Classroom Management

In elementary classrooms, effective classroom management is essential for teaching and learning. It involves organizing resources, students, processes, and routines to ensure safety and efficiency. Classroom observations showed that teachers created a positive and orderly environment most of the time. They achieved this by setting clear expectations and treating students with respect. The teachers explained their classroom routines, including prayer, praise and worship, attendance, and outlining rules. In a social constructivist classroom, effective management enabled teachers to create a space in which students could openly share and collaborate. Observations revealed that teachers employed various management techniques to maintain student engagement.

The classroom rules established at the beginning of class encouraged students to respond positively, helping teachers manage group activities effectively. Positive discipline, consistent encouragement, and teacher appreciation motivated shy and struggling students to participate. A key aspect of their management was using a timer during group activities, which pushed students to complete tasks on time and manage time limits. Teachers consistently monitored students during group work and individual tasks. In class discussions, they made a point to ensure everyone was heard, particularly those who found it difficult to share. In a social constructivist setting, teachers' strong classroom management skills resulted in successful classes with high student engagement and strong learning outcomes.

Student Engagement

In education, student engagement refers to the attention, curiosity, interest, and passion students show while learning. It also reflects their motivation to learn and succeed. During the classroom observation, the teachers actively engaged their students through interactive activities, fostering a culture of critical thinking and participation. Most students actively participated in lessons. Observations showed that students engaged well in every activity provided by the teachers. They demonstrated greater engagement during group work, enabling collaboration. Students also participated actively in discussions, especially when teachers asked about real-life experiences. Additionally, when teachers used games for assessments, most students enjoyed and engaged in those activities. However, there was insufficient engagement when the teacher explained the lesson alone.

Collaborative Learning

Most teachers use group activities in their classes. This facilitates students' interaction and learning together. Students share their ideas and support each other. Collaborative learning means students work together in small groups, allowing everyone to participate. In these groups, students can work on different tasks that contribute to

a common goal or collaborate on a shared task. During the observation, it was clear that most lessons focused on collaborative learning. The group activities, peer reflection, and teacher discussions demonstrated that students learned through collaboration.

Real-life applications

Teachers use real-life scenarios in their lessons. They ask questions that help students think critically and consider different viewpoints. This approach encourages students to think deeply before responding. By relating lessons to real-life situations, students can better understand the material. For example, one teacher set up a Sari-Sari store as a visual aid and asked students to connect their lessons to it. Another teacher had students bring real objects to use during a group activity. A different teacher used a magic box with a mirror to help students reflect on their importance. Teachers creatively engage their students by using real-life examples and incorporating technology to encourage active participation in lessons.

Triangulation of Findings

Findings from the interview and classroom observation complement each other as shown in Table 1. Social constructivism was considered adequate in the chosen private elementary school context. Although the teachers faced challenges, particularly at the beginning of the school year, they successfully refined their instructional strategies and classroom management by applying principles of social constructivism. As shown through triangulation of interviews and classroom observations, social constructivism at the chosen private elementary school enabled teachers to encourage students to engage in collaborative learning and real-world applications. As defined by Campos Gómez & Aquino Turcios (2022), constructivism holds that people actively construct knowledge and that reality is determined by their experiences as learners. The first category summarized the elementary teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing social constructivism in the classroom.

With respect to the theme "Interactive Learning and Reflective Assessment," classroom observations indicate that teachers incorporate social constructivist principles into their teaching practices. Nickerson (2024) defined social constructionism as a sociological theory of knowledge that examines how individuals construct their knowledge and understanding of the world. The students could build their knowledge through the different activities provided by the teachers. Through reflective assessment, they could also relate what they learned to their real-life experiences of understanding the world.

Table 1. *Triangulation Table: Application of Social Constructivism in the Classroom*

Category	Findings from the Interview	Findings from the Observation
Engagement in collaborative learning and real-life application.	The teachers said they encourage collaboration in their classrooms by using creative, interactive techniques in their activities. They also encourage their students to be independent and innovative instead of relying on the teachers. They also foster inclusivity in participation and relate their lessons to real-life events. They also monitor and encourage students to engage with the lessons.	Approximately 80% of the teachers utilize group activities to promote student interaction. Additionally, the same percentage of teachers integrate real-life scenarios into their lessons, prompting students to think critically and consider various viewpoints before responding.
Student engagement through interactive learning and reflective assessment.	The teachers incorporate peer and group activities in their lessons. They asked their students to present their outputs. They also let them engage in collaborative activities by modeling positive behavior and giving student-led discussions. They provide interactive tools and visual aids and observe students' participation and outputs. They also offer engagement-based evaluations and creative, reflective assessments.	The teachers employed various instructional methods, such as questioning, modelling, hands-on activities, and group activities, which contributed to 80% of their effectiveness. These interactive activities fostered critical thinking, reflective assessment, and participation, with 80% of students actively engaged in lessons.
Holistic learning and improved instructional strategies and classroom management.	Social constructivism positively influences student learning and results in holistic education. According to the teachers, the students improved their critical thinking skills and increased their retention. Students also enjoyed their lessons and gained a deeper understanding. They also observed a positive impact on students' social skills and cognitive growth. It also enhanced their communication skills. Because of the positive effects of social constructivism, the teachers were able to manage their classrooms and improve their instructional strategies.	The teachers established a positive and orderly classroom environment 80% of the time by setting clear expectations and respecting students. They effectively utilized various instructional methods, including questioning, modeling, hands-on activities, and group work, to engage and challenge students, contributing to 80% of their effectiveness. The improved instructional strategies led to holistic learning and positively affected students' communication and social skills.

Moreover, results showed that social constructivism positively impacts student learning, providing holistic education and improved instructional strategies and classroom management for teachers. The third category summarizes the teachers' perceptions of the impact of social constructivism on student learning and engagement. The result also aligns with Western Governors University's (2020) findings: educators can use various forms of constructivism to implement this learning theory and achieve positive outcomes.

In addition, Powell & Kalina (2009) said that teachers encourage and facilitate discourse by leveraging the organic exchange of conversation within the classroom. The teachers at the chosen private school reiterated that, throughout their classes, they encourage students to share their knowledge and ideas by answering questions posed by the teachers during discussions and through collaborative group activities. The teachers in the chosen private school considered themselves no longer the primary source of knowledge but facilitators of learning. Akpan V. et al. (2020) stated that social constructivism is a form of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning, guided by a facilitator or other students.

Conclusion

This study shows that applying social constructivism in a private elementary school creates a collaborative, inclusive, and engaging learning environment. Teachers used interactive learning, reflective assessment, and differentiated instruction to support holistic student development. Students actively participated in group activities and demonstrated the ability to connect classroom lessons with real-life situations. These findings emphasize that social constructivism can strengthen meaningful learning when supported by effective classroom management and well-planned instructional strategies. At the same time, the study reveals that teachers still face challenges, especially in motivating all learners, managing time for group work, and supporting diverse communication skills. To address these concerns, schools should provide training that helps teachers apply social constructivist strategies with greater confidence and plan collaborative tasks effectively. Administrators may also introduce programs that build students' communication skills and self-confidence across grade levels. Future research may explore how social constructivism operates at lower grade levels, such as preschool through Grade 3, and examine its long-term effects on students' learning, collaboration, and classroom engagement. Such studies can further strengthen the understanding of how social constructivism can be used to promote inclusive and meaningful learning in elementary education.

Contributions of Authors

In accordance with international or university standards, written consent from respondents has been obtained and retained by the author(s).

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Conflict of Interests

All authors declared that they have no conflicts of interest regarding this study.

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