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From Questioning to Engagement: Inquiry-Based Social Science Teaching and Learners' Academic Engagement at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian

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ABSTRACT

Inquiry-based teaching has emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach for fostering meaningful learning and academic engagement, particularly in Social Science education where interpretation, dialogue, and critical thinking are essential. This study examined how inquiry-based Social Science teaching influenced learners' academic engagement at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with Social Science teachers, and focus group discussions with learners. Thematic analysis revealed that inquiry-based instruction enhanced learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement by centering lessons on questioning, collaborative exploration, contextualized discussion, and reflective sense-making. Learners demonstrated increased participation, sustained interest, and deeper analytical thinking when teachers structured instruction around inquiry questions and supported learning through scaffolding and a respectful classroom climate. The study highlights the pedagogical value of inquiry-based teaching and underscores the role of instructional leadership in sustaining engaged learning environments in Social Science classrooms.

Keywords: *inquiry-based teaching, social science education, academic engagement, learner-centered pedagogy, qualitative case study*

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic engagement is widely recognized as a key determinant of learning quality and educational success across disciplines. In Social Science education, engagement plays a particularly critical role because learners are expected not only to acquire factual knowledge but also to interpret social realities, examine historical events, analyze multiple perspectives, and develop informed civic understanding. Engagement in this context extends beyond participation to include emotional involvement and sustained cognitive effort, enabling learners to think critically about social issues and their implications.

Despite its importance, engagement remains a persistent challenge in many Social Science classrooms. Instruction is often characterized by teacher-centered lectures, textbook-driven content, and factual recitation, which may promote surface-level learning but limit opportunities for questioning, dialogue, and critical analysis. Such practices frequently position learners as passive recipients of information rather than active constructors of meaning, resulting in reduced motivation and limited cognitive engagement.

Inquiry-based teaching has been advanced as an alternative approach that aligns closely with the nature of Social Science as an interpretive and inquiry-driven discipline. Inquiry-based Social Science teaching emphasizes questioning, investigation, discussion, and reflection, encouraging learners to explore issues, examine evidence, and construct understanding collaboratively. Through inquiry, learners are invited to ask "why" and "how" questions, consider multiple viewpoints, and connect classroom content to contemporary social realities.

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While inquiry-based teaching is widely endorsed in theory and policy, its enactment in everyday classroom practice varies significantly. There remains a need for empirical, school-based studies that document how inquiry-based Social Science teaching is implemented and how it influences learners' engagement in authentic classroom settings. This study addresses this gap by examining inquiry-based Social Science teaching and learners' academic engagement at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian, focusing on how questioning practices translate into meaningful learner involvement.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Academic Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct

Academic engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. Behavioral engagement refers to learners' participation in classroom activities, discussions, and tasks. Emotional engagement involves learners' interest, enjoyment, and sense of belonging, while cognitive engagement reflects the degree to which learners invest effort in understanding, analyzing, and reflecting on learning content.

In Social Science education, engagement must be understood as deeply contextual and interactional. Learners may appear behaviorally compliant listening attentively or completing written tasks—without being emotionally or cognitively engaged. Authentic engagement in Social Science requires learners to question assumptions, evaluate evidence, and articulate reasoned positions, processes that demand emotional commitment and cognitive effort. Instructional approaches that support dialogue, inquiry, and reflection are therefore critical for sustaining engagement in this discipline.

2.2 Inquiry-Based Teaching in Social Science Education

Inquiry-based teaching is rooted in constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning, which emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, dialogue, and reflection. In Social Science education, inquiry-based teaching involves posing meaningful questions, examining sources, discussing interpretations, and drawing conclusions based on evidence. This approach mirrors the practices of historians, geographers, economists, and social scientists, making learning more authentic and intellectually demanding.

Inquiry-based Social Science instruction shifts the focus of teaching from content transmission to knowledge construction. Teachers act as facilitators who guide learners through inquiry processes by posing questions, modeling analytical thinking, and supporting discussion. Research suggests that inquiry-based teaching promotes deeper understanding, motivation, and engagement by allowing learners to explore social issues rather than memorize information.

2.3 Questioning, Dialogue, and Classroom Climate

Questioning lies at the heart of inquiry-based teaching. Well-designed questions stimulate curiosity, prompt discussion, and guide learners toward deeper understanding. Open-ended and interpretive questions encourage learners to think critically, articulate reasoning, and engage with multiple perspectives. However, effective inquiry requires more than questioning alone; it also depends on a classroom climate that values dialogue, respect, and intellectual risk-taking.

A supportive classroom climate encourages learners to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and learn from mistakes. In Social Science classrooms, where discussions often involve sensitive or contested issues, emotional safety and mutual respect are essential for sustaining engagement. Teacher responsiveness, encouragement, and respect for diverse viewpoints play a critical role in creating conditions for meaningful inquiry.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to examine inquiry-based Social Science teaching and learners' academic engagement at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian. The case study approach was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of instructional practices and learner experiences within a real-life classroom context.

The research site was purposively selected due to its implementation of inquiry-oriented approaches in Social Science instruction. Participants included Social Science teachers and learners from selected grade levels. Teachers were chosen based on their active use of inquiry-based strategies, while learners were selected to represent diverse levels of participation and academic performance.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and focus group discussions with learners. Observations focused on questioning strategies, learner participation, classroom discourse, and instructional scaffolding. Teacher interviews explored pedagogical intentions, perceptions of learner engagement, and challenges encountered in inquiry-based teaching. Learner focus group discussions elicited experiences, interests, and perceptions of engagement during inquiry-based Social Science lessons.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Observation notes and transcripts were read repeatedly, coded inductively, and organized into themes representing patterns in instructional practice and engagement outcomes. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms.

IV. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Four major themes emerged from the analysis, illustrating how inquiry-based Social Science teaching influenced learners' academic engagement.

Theme 1: Increased Behavioral Engagement through Question-Driven Instruction

Inquiry-based Social Science lessons were consistently organized around carefully constructed guiding questions that served as the starting point for learning activities. Rather than beginning lessons with direct explanation or prolonged lecturing, teachers posed open-ended and interpretive questions that required learners to read texts, examine sources, discuss ideas, and articulate responses. These questions encouraged learners to engage immediately with the lesson content and take responsibility for constructing understanding. As a result, learner talk time increased significantly, classroom interactions became more dialogic, and participation was distributed more evenly across learners, including those who were typically quiet during traditional recitation-based lessons.

Participant Responses

Teachers observed noticeable changes in learners' participation patterns during inquiry-based lessons. One teacher explained, *"Kapag tanong ang simula ng aralin, mas marami ang gustong magsalita at makibahagi dahil may iniisip silang sagot."* Learners similarly reported that questioning transformed the classroom experience, with one learner sharing that lessons felt more interactive and engaging because they were invited to respond and exchange ideas rather than simply listen.

These findings indicate that inquiry-based instruction enhanced behavioral engagement by positioning learners as active contributors to classroom discourse. Question-driven instruction reduced passivity by requiring learners to participate cognitively and verbally from the outset of the lesson. By shifting the instructional focus from teacher explanation to learner response, inquiry-based teaching created multiple entry points for participation and increased learners' sense of involvement in the learning process.

Theme 2: Strengthened Emotional Engagement through Meaningful and Relevant Inquiry

Inquiry-based teaching deliberately connected Social Science topics to learners' lived experiences, community realities, and current social issues. Teachers encouraged learners to express opinions, share personal experiences, and relate lesson content to events and situations familiar to them. This approach framed Social Science learning as relevant and meaningful rather than distant or purely academic, allowing learners to see the value of the subject in understanding their own social environment.

Participant Responses

Learners consistently expressed heightened interest and enjoyment during inquiry-based discussions. One learner stated, *"Mas interesado ako kapag tungkol sa totoong nangyayari sa lipunan kasi parang may kinalaman sa amin."* Teachers also noted increased enthusiasm, observing that learners were more attentive, eager to participate, and emotionally invested when lessons involved discussion of real-life social issues.

These findings suggest that relevance and meaning played a critical role in enhancing learners' emotional engagement. When learners perceived Social Science lessons as connected to real-life experiences and social realities, they

developed stronger interest and emotional involvement in learning activities. This emotional connection motivated learners to participate more actively and sustain attention during inquiry-based lessons, reinforcing the importance of contextual relevance in engagement.

Theme 3: Deepened Cognitive Engagement through Analysis and Reflection

Inquiry-based lessons required learners to engage in higher-order cognitive processes such as analyzing sources, comparing perspectives, evaluating evidence, and justifying interpretations. Teachers supported cognitive engagement by posing probing questions, encouraging learners to explain reasoning, and facilitating reflective discussions that extended beyond factual recall. Reflection activities prompted learners to reconsider initial ideas, connect evidence to conclusions, and refine understanding through dialogue.

Participant Responses

Teachers reported noticeable improvement in the depth of learners' responses over time. One teacher remarked, *"Mas malalim na ang sagot nila kapag sanay na sa inquiry dahil natututo silang magpaliwanag at magbigay ng dahilan."* Learners also shared that discussions helped them think more carefully and understand issues from different perspectives.

These findings indicate that inquiry-based teaching fostered cognitive engagement by requiring learners to think critically and engage in evidence-based reasoning. The emphasis on analysis and reflection supported learners in moving beyond surface-level responses toward deeper conceptual understanding. Cognitive engagement was strengthened as learners were challenged to articulate ideas, defend positions, and evaluate information critically within a supportive instructional framework.

Theme 4: Sustained Engagement through a Supportive Classroom Climate

Teachers intentionally cultivated a classroom climate characterized by respect, openness, and encouragement. Diverse opinions were acknowledged and valued, and mistakes were treated as opportunities for learning rather than failure. This environment reduced fear of judgment and encouraged learners to participate actively in inquiry discussions, even when expressing tentative or developing ideas.

Participant Responses

Learners consistently reported feeling safe and confident in sharing ideas during inquiry-based lessons. One learner stated, *"Hindi ako natatakot magsalita kasi iginagalang ang opinyon namin kahit magkaiba."* Teachers observed that this supportive climate encouraged learners to persist in discussions and remain engaged even when topics were complex or challenging.

The supportive classroom climate played a crucial role in sustaining engagement across inquiry activities. Emotional safety and mutual respect enabled learners to take intellectual risks, participate confidently, and persist in inquiry tasks. These findings highlight that inquiry-based teaching is most effective when supported by positive teacher–learner relationships and a classroom environment that values dialogue, respect, and collaborative learning.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that inquiry-based Social Science teaching at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian significantly enhanced learners' academic engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement increased as question-driven instruction encouraged learners to participate actively in discussions, respond to prompts, and collaborate with peers rather than remain passive listeners. Emotional engagement was strengthened when inquiry activities connected lesson content to learners' lived experiences and contemporary social issues, fostering interest, relevance, and a sense of personal connection to the subject matter. Cognitive engagement deepened as learners were required to analyze sources, compare perspectives, justify interpretations, and reflect on evidence, thereby engaging in higher-order thinking processes central to Social Science learning.

These results reinforce the view that learner engagement is not solely an individual learner attribute but is co-constructed through intentional instructional design, classroom interaction, and supportive teacher–learner relationships. Inquiry-based teaching provided structured opportunities for learners to interact with content, peers, and

teachers in meaningful ways, creating conditions that supported sustained engagement. The alignment of questioning, dialogue, and reflection enabled learners to move beyond surface-level participation toward more thoughtful and deliberate engagement with social issues. This finding supports theoretical perspectives that emphasize engagement as a dynamic and context-sensitive process shaped by pedagogical practices and learning environments.

Inquiry-based teaching also shifted the classroom dynamic from traditional information delivery to collaborative sense-making. Instead of positioning the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, inquiry-oriented instruction encouraged learners to co-construct understanding through dialogue, interpretation, and evidence-based reasoning. Teachers' strategic use of questioning and scaffolding played a critical role in this process, as these practices provided cognitive support while allowing learners to exercise agency in constructing meaning. By maintaining a balance between learner autonomy and instructional structure, teachers enabled learners to engage deeply with complex Social Science content without experiencing confusion or disengagement.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the central role of classroom climate in sustaining engagement, particularly in discussion-based subjects such as Social Science. A classroom environment characterized by respect, openness, and emotional safety encouraged learners to express ideas, challenge assumptions, and participate consistently in inquiry activities. When learners perceived that their opinions were valued and that mistakes were treated as learning opportunities, they were more willing to take intellectual risks and persist in challenging discussions. This underscores the importance of relational and affective dimensions of teaching in supporting inquiry-based pedagogy and sustaining meaningful learner engagement.

VI. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study suggest that Social Science teachers should intentionally design instruction around carefully crafted inquiry questions that promote discussion, analysis, and reflective thinking. Rather than relying heavily on prolonged lectures or textbook-centered delivery, teachers are encouraged to use inquiry questions as the primary drivers of learning. Such questions can serve as entry points for exploration, prompting learners to examine social issues, analyze evidence, and articulate interpretations collaboratively. By facilitating dialogue and encouraging learners to share perspectives, teachers can create learning environments where understanding is constructed through interaction and critical reflection, thereby strengthening learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

At the level of instructional leadership, the study highlights the importance of sustained professional development focused on inquiry-based teaching competencies. Professional learning initiatives should emphasize inquiry facilitation skills, including the design of higher-order questions, strategies for managing classroom discussions, and techniques for scaffolding learner thinking without diminishing autonomy. Providing structured time for collaborative lesson planning and reflective dialogue among teachers can further support the effective implementation of inquiry-based instruction. Such collaboration allows teachers to share questioning strategies, refine discussion prompts, and align inquiry activities with learners' needs and curriculum standards, contributing to more consistent and effective inquiry practices across classrooms.

For curriculum developers, the findings underscore the value of embedding inquiry-based activities and discussion prompts within Social Science curricula in ways that reflect learners' social contexts and lived experiences. Integrating inquiry tasks that address local issues, historical narratives, and contemporary social concerns can make learning more relevant and engaging for learners. By aligning curricular materials with inquiry-oriented pedagogy, curriculum developers can support teachers in facilitating meaningful discussions and critical analysis, ensuring that inquiry-based learning is not treated as an optional strategy but as a core component of engaged and responsive Social Science education.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As a qualitative case study, the findings are context-specific. Future studies may involve multiple schools, mixed-methods designs, or longitudinal approaches to examine how inquiry-based Social Science teaching influences engagement and civic learning over time.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that inquiry-based Social Science teaching significantly enhances learners' academic engagement at San Miguel Integrated School–Mian. The findings demonstrate that when instruction is deliberately centered on questioning, dialogue, and reflective inquiry, learners become more active participants in the learning process, exhibit stronger interest in lesson content, and engage more deeply in critical and analytical thinking. Inquiry-based teaching shifted classroom practices away from passive content transmission toward interactive sense-making, enabling learners to construct understanding through discussion, interpretation, and evidence-based reasoning. The study further illustrates that learner engagement was not driven solely by increased activity, but by the quality of instructional experiences made possible through inquiry-oriented pedagogy. Purposeful questioning encouraged learners to articulate ideas and examine multiple perspectives, while dialogic interaction fostered emotional

involvement and a sense of belonging. Reflective activities supported cognitive engagement by prompting learners to analyze social issues, justify interpretations, and connect classroom learning to real-world contexts. Together, these practices created learning environments that supported sustained behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Sustaining the benefits of inquiry-based Social Science teaching requires consistent instructional support and targeted professional development. Teachers need opportunities to strengthen inquiry facilitation skills, refine questioning techniques, and develop strategies for managing discussion-rich classrooms. When supported by instructional leadership and aligned curricular structures, inquiry-based practices can be embedded more systematically in Social Science instruction. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research demonstrating that inquiry-based pedagogy offers a viable and effective pathway toward more engaging, meaningful, and learner-centered Social Science education.

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