

Lived Experiences of Filipino Teachers: A Comparative Study of the Philippines and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences, challenges, and comparative insights of Filipino teachers working in two different contexts, the Philippines and Thailand. In this pure qualitative research utilizing comparative phenomenological design, data were gathered from teachers across both settings to understand how they experience teaching the learner-centered approach which are enacted within diverse cultural, linguistic, and institutional environments. Findings revealed that teachers in both contexts experienced a clear role shift from content deliverers to facilitators of learning, resulting in more interactive, participatory, and flexible classroom environments. However, teachers encountered significant challenges, including classroom management and noise during active learning, heavy time and preparation demands, limited instructional resources, language barriers, and diverse levels of student readiness.

Comparative perspective analysis showed that while both countries share strong policy support for learner-centered pedagogy implementation varies, as actual experienced by the participants. Thai schools were described as more resource-rich, enabling smoother facilitation of interactive lessons, whereas Philippine teachers often faced limited materials and larger class sizes, requiring adaptive, low-cost strategies. Cultural and linguistic factors also shaped classroom participation, particularly in Thailand where English proficiency posed barriers. The study recommended an enhanced cross-country adaptable action plan as support program to strengthening learner-centered pedagogy.

Keywords: Comparative Phenomenology, Filipino Teachers, Lived Experiences, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of national development and global competitiveness. In an increasingly globalized educational landscape, cross-border teacher mobility has reshaped instructional practices and professional expectations. Teachers play a central role in educational quality, particularly as systems respond to diverse learner needs and global standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Filipino teachers have become a significant presence in international education systems in Southeast Asia; however, differences in curricula, institutional policies, and classroom cultures influence their professional practices and lived experiences.

Learner-centered education has been widely adopted as a pedagogical reform aimed at promoting meaningful, inclusive, and engaging learning environments. Despite strong policy support, research shows persistent challenges in implementation. SEAMEO (2023) and UNESCO (2023) note that migrant and foreign teachers often experience limited professional development opportunities, cultural adjustment difficulties, and gaps in institutional support. Understanding teachers' lived experiences is therefore essential, as educational reform depends not only on policy but on how teachers interpret and enact learner-centered approaches in practice (Merrill & Tisdell, 2016).

In the Philippines, learner-centered pedagogy is embedded in the K–12 curriculum and supported by Republic Act No. 10533. However, large class sizes, limited resources, and time constraints continue to hinder effective implementation (Del Valle, 2023; Bernardo & Dacumos, 2020). Similarly, in Thailand, despite longstanding policy support through the National Education Act of 1999, cultural norms, exam-oriented practices, and

language barriers pose challenges for both local and foreign teachers (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Jacela, 2025).

This study explores the lived experiences, challenges, and insights of Filipino teachers working in two different contexts, the Philippines and Thailand. In this pure qualitative research utilizing comparative phenomenological design, data were gathered from teachers across both settings to understand how they experience teaching which are enacted within diverse cultural, linguistic, and institutional environments.

METHODOLOGY

Using a descriptive qualitative and phenomenology approach, this study explored and described the lived experiences, challenges, and comparative insights of Filipino teachers working in two different contexts, the Philippines and Thailand. In this pure qualitative research utilizing comparative phenomenological design, data were gathered from teachers across both settings to understand how they experience teaching the learner-centered approach which are enacted within diverse cultural, linguistic, and institutional environments.

A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because the study sought to provide a rich, straightforward description of teachers' experiences rather than interpret their lived meanings or conduct an in-depth analysis of a single bounded system. According to (Creswell, 2013) and (Merriam, 2009), descriptive qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to present a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms without imposing theoretical interpretation. This design allowed the researcher to capture practical insights based on their experiences, making it suitable for comparative studies focused on improving classroom practices rather than exploring philosophical essence or organizational structures.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method focused on understanding the essence of human experiences from the first-person perspective, and this fits the study since their actual experiences are shared and disclose voluntarily. This design has core principles such as: emphasizing the lived experience of individuals, exploring how people perceive, interpret, and make sense of events, situations, or phenomena in their everyday lives. It is rooted in philosophy, particularly the works of Edmund Husserl, which is a descriptive phenomenology.

Methodological Steps on phenomenological study were considered in this current study: Identifying the Phenomenon, where the researcher selected a phenomenon that is significant and deeply tied to human experience; Bracketing: where the researcher set aside her preconceptions, biases, and prior knowledge to approach the phenomenon with openness, aiming to describe it as purely as possible; Data Collection: should be rich and detailed data were gathered primarily through in-depth interviews; Data Analysis which is descriptive in nature, focusing on what was experienced while exploring the meaning and context of experiences; and lastly, Returning to the Essence: where the researcher identified the invariant structures of the experience, capturing its core meaning as described by participants.

Population and Sample

Table 1 presents the study's participants.

Table 1 The Participants of the Study

Participants	Age	Grade Level Being Handled	Subject Being Taught	Years in Teaching
Philippines				
P1-PH	38	4-6	Math, Science, English	10
P2-PH	37	6	Filipino, Math	9
P3-PH	55	5	Science and Math	20
P4-PH	42	6	Science	18
P5-PH	40	4-6	Science	12
P6-PH	33	6	TLE, MAPEH, Science	9
Thailand				
P1-TH	31	6	Science	2-TH, 8-PH

P2-TH	27	4-6	Science	2-TH, 1-PH
P3-TH	27	6	English, Science and Health	1-TH, 3-PH
P4-TH	42	4-6	English, Science	11-TH, 8-PH
P5-TH	31	6	English, Math	5-TH, 1-PH
P6-TH	33	6	English and Science	5-TH, 5-PH
Total No of Participants	12			

Legend: P-TH= Participants from Thailand

P-PH= Participants from the Philippines

Participants were purposively selected from Filipino teachers in Grade 4, 5, and 6 elementary public schools in the Philippines, specifically in the province of Bataan, and from primary-grade –Filipino teachers in Thailand. Participants were chosen from a pool of educators who meet the following criteria: 1) they are full-time teachers in public elementary schools in Thailand or the Philippines, 2) they have at least one year of teaching experience; 3) they teach Grades 4 to 6 and handle Mathematics and Science subjects; and 4) they are willing to adopt learner-centered approaches in their classrooms as supported by their school administration.

This study included twelve (12) respondents, six (6) Filipino teachers from Bataan and six (6) Filipino teachers currently teaching in Thailand. According to Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009), qualitative research values depth over breadth, making small, focused samples appropriate for capturing rich descriptions of experiences. For descriptive qualitative studies, a sample size of 5 to 25 respondents is generally sufficient to reach data saturation, where no new themes emerge. Therefore, a sample of 12 participants is considered adequate to provide diverse perspectives while allowing for detailed analysis as they unveil their significant experiences, their challenges, and individual perspectives related to learner-centered pedagogy.

RESULTS

The themes are organized into four (4) major sections provided by the data, with both the major and subthemes emerging from the explored narratives of the participants: Part I presents the emerging themes on teachers' lived experiences, focusing on learner-centered pedagogy. Part II discusses the identified challenges participants encounter and experience. Part III shows the comparative perceptions on learner-centered pedagogy between the Philippine and Thai contexts. Finally, Part IV presents the proposed program to strengthen the learner-centered pedagogy among Filipino teachers across local and international contexts. Each major theme is further supported by subthemes derived from the participants' responses.

In the presentation, PH stands for Filipino teachers teaching in the Philippines, while TH refers to those teaching in Thailand.

Part I- Filipino Teachers' Experiences on Learner-Centered Pedagogy in the Philippines and Thailand

This section presents the actual experiences of Filipino teachers while they teach in both the Philippines and Thailand. Their explored experiences on learner-centered pedagogy presented two (2) major themes: First is the Role shift to facilitation, with sub themes-interactive and participatory classrooms, guiding and supporting student learning, and meaningful and flexible learning; second theme is Engagement and Positivity, with subthemes- increased student confidence and engagement, and rewarding despite challenges.

Drawing from the experiences of Filipino teachers working in Thailand and those teaching in the Philippines, the findings reveal how learner-centered pedagogy is shaped not only by instructional choices but also by the conditions, constraints, and cultural contexts in which teachers work. Their narratives highlight the practical adjustments, strategies, and challenges they encounter as they shift away from traditional teacher-directed instruction toward approaches that emphasize student participation, collaboration, autonomy, and meaningful engagement. By examining these lived experiences, this theme provides a nuanced understanding of how learner-centered approaches unfold in authentic classroom environments across two educational contexts.

1. Role Shift to Facilitation

This theme captures teachers' experiences as they move from being content deliverers to facilitators of learning, resulting in more interactive and participatory classrooms and meaningful, flexible learning opportunities. The theme emerged from repeated references to group work, inquiry tasks, teacher guidance rather than lecturing, and responsiveness to student interests across interviews in both the Philippines and Thailand.

Interactive and Participatory Classrooms

Filipino teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines described how learner-centered strategies resulted in more interactive and participatory classrooms, where students became increasingly engaged and confident.

As one Filipino Teacher in Thailand shared,

"The approach creates a more engaging and meaningful learning environment where learners are motivated, participative, and confident when given opportunities to explore ideas and collaborate" (P5 TH).

Another teacher emphasized that:

"Students become more active, confident, and engaged...when they feel heard and involved" (P6 TH)."

Similar observations were echoed in the Philippines, where teachers noted that:

"Classes became more exciting, with learners showing higher engagement and being encouraged to learn in ways that suited them, with appropriate guidance (P5 PH).

"Students were more confident and "willing to try even if they're not 100% sure" (P4 PH).

Collectively, these accounts suggest that learner-centered environments support increased participation, greater willingness to contribute, and improved learner confidence, especially when students are given voice, choice, and collaborative opportunities. Studies highlight that active learning helps students collaborate, take risks, and take ownership of ideas—key elements of 21st-century skills (Scoular, 2020). UNESCO also reports that participatory classrooms promote deeper learning and encourage students to express themselves more freely, especially when given opportunities for voice and choice (UNESCO Bangkok, 2014; UNESCO, 2023).

Guiding and Supporting Student Learning

Teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines consistently emphasized that learner-centered pedagogy transforms their role from being the primary source of information to becoming guides who support students' active exploration and construction of knowledge.

As one Filipino Teacher in Thailand explained,

"learner-centered teaching encourages students to explore, ask questions, collaborate, and actively construct knowledge, positioning the teacher as a facilitator rather than the sole authority (P5-TH).

Another echoed that:

"the teacher acts as a guide who supports and facilitates learning rather than simply giving information" (P6-TH).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Filipino teachers in the Philippines, who described:

"students are active participants who explore, collaborate, and apply knowledge to real-life situations while the teacher takes on a facilitative role" (P1-PH).

“Learner-centered settings, the teacher becomes a guide, facilitator, or even a coach who supports students in the learning process (P5-PH).”

This shift was further highlighted by a teacher who observed that:

“In learner-centered approach, students are more involved—they ask questions, share ideas, and explore concepts. Ako, my role shifts from being the one who lectures to being a facilitator or guide” (P6-PH).

Taken together, these accounts illustrate a shared recognition across both countries that learner-centered pedagogy encourages student agency and positions teachers as supportive facilitators who structure and guide learning rather than dominate instruction. Studies emphasize that this shift—from teacher-directed to student-driven learning—supports autonomy and improves learning outcomes (Scoular, 2020; UNESCO Bangkok, 2014). Research on modern pedagogy further highlights that teachers who function as guides help students take ownership of their learning, engage more meaningfully with tasks, and connect concepts to real-world contexts (UNESCO, 2023).

Meaningful and Flexible Learning

Teachers from both the Philippines and Thailand highlighted that learner-centered pedagogy leads to more meaningful learning when lessons are responsive to students’ needs, interests, and real-life applications.

One Filipino teacher in the Philippines noted that:

“lessons become more meaningful when focus on learners’ personal contexts and lived experiences” (P1-PH).

Filipino teachers in Thailand expressed similar experiences, explaining that:

“students become more active, confident, and engaged when they feel heard and involved, and that the approach while requiring greater planning and flexibility—allows teachers to better understand students and adjust instruction accordingly, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable for everyone” (P6-TH).

“Learner- centered result in a more engaging and meaningful learning environment overall (T5-TH).

These accounts show that meaningfulness and flexibility emerge when teachers adapt lessons to student needs and provide opportunities for exploration, collaboration, and authentic application, thereby fostering deeper engagement and relevance in classroom learning. Studies on curriculum alignment in the Philippines highlight that connecting lessons to learners’ backgrounds and real-world issues strengthens relevance and motivation (Barrot, 2021) . International research on experiential and authentic learning also emphasizes that students learn more meaningfully when tasks relate to real-life applications and allow for exploration and collaboration (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Likewise, Thai education reforms highlight the importance of meaningful learning by encouraging student-centered activities tied to daily experience, community relevance, and holistic development (MOE Thailand, 2008).

Engagement and Positivity

This subtheme captures teachers’ observations that learner-centered pedagogy is associated with higher student participation, confidence, and ownership, and that teachers themselves experience the work as professionally rewarding, despite increased preparation and management demands. It addresses the research objective on how learner-centered strategies influence student engagement and teacher perceptions of classroom climate.

Increased Student Confidence and Engagement

Teachers from both the Philippines and Thailand observed notable increases in student confidence, participation, and engagement when using learner-centered approaches.

A Filipino teacher in the Philippines shared that:

“learners became more confident, participative, and cooperative, demonstrating stronger problem-solving and critical-thinking skills during activities (P8-PH).

Thai teachers expressed similar experiences, noting that:

“students became more engaged and interested when lessons encouraged active involvement (P3-TH).

“learner-centered approach resulted in improved student engagement, stronger collaboration skills, and increased confidence in expressing ideas and students also displayed greater independence, responsibility, and enjoyment in learning (P5-TH).

These suggest that learner-centered environments appear to foster not only higher levels of engagement but also increased self-efficacy and cognitive participation, as students take on more active roles in their learning. These experiences are supported by recent studies showing that active and participatory learning environments strengthen student confidence, communication skills, and self-efficacy. Research on student-centered learning across Asia found that when students are given opportunities to contribute, collaborate, and make decisions, their confidence and academic engagement significantly improve (Kirkpatrick, 2010). A large review of inquiry-based and cooperative learning likewise concluded that active involvement enhances motivation, deepens cognitive engagement, and builds stronger problem-solving abilities (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). More recent classroom-based studies highlight that learner autonomy and meaningful participation contribute to increased self-efficacy and willingness to participate—especially in culturally diverse or multilingual settings (Derrah et al., 2024).

Rewarding Despite Challenges

Teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines described their overall experience with learner-centered pedagogy as positive and rewarding, even though it requires substantial planning, flexibility, and effort.

A Filipino teacher in Thailand expressed that:

“implementing learner-centered strategies has been positive and rewarding, however it demands careful preparation but creates a more engaging and meaningful learning environment for students (P5-TH).

“More active, confident, and engaged when they feel heard and involved (P6-TH).

Filipino teachers in the Philippines shared similar sentiments, with one noting that:

“although the approach is challenging and rewarding due to the need for additional preparation and differentiation, it is fulfilling because students become more engaged, active, and responsible for their own learning, and lessons become more meaningful when grounded in students’ needs and real-life contexts (P1-PH).

“The approach is demanding, it has been very rewarding, transforming their role from simply delivering content to facilitating students’ growth (P4-PH).

These reflections align with broader research showing that learner-centered pedagogy enhances teacher satisfaction and professional growth. Recent studies on teacher professionalism in participatory classrooms note that facilitating active learning strengthens teachers’ sense of purpose, efficacy, and connection with students (Bautista et al., 2023). Research on teacher experience within student-centered reforms also shows that while the approach demands more preparation, it contributes to greater instructional confidence and fulfillment as teachers witness deeper student engagement and autonomy (Barrot, 2021). In the Thai context, studies on intercultural and student-centered practice also highlight that teachers feel rewarded when students take ownership of learning, participate more actively, and show growth in independence (Derrah et al., 2024).

Part II- Identified Teachers' Challenges

This theme explores the difficulties teachers face when applying learner-centered pedagogies in real classroom settings. Although learner-centered approaches aim to promote active participation, collaboration, and meaningful learning, teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines reported several obstacles that complicate implementation. The first emergent theme is on Practical Implementation Barriers, where classroom management and noise, time and preparation demands, and resource limitations are the subthemes. The second major theme is the Learner-Specific Hurdles, which includes language barriers, student readiness, and diversity.

Specifically, these include managing active classrooms, addressing diverse learning needs, navigating time-consuming lesson preparation, and adjusting to limited resources or large class sizes. Such challenges highlight the gap between pedagogical ideals and day-to-day realities, emphasizing that successful learner-centered teaching requires not only strong instructional skills but also adequate support, preparation, and adaptable classroom conditions.

Practical Implementation Barriers

This theme captures the structural and contextual obstacles that Filipino teachers encounter when applying learner-centered pedagogies in both Thailand and the Philippines. Although learner-centered approaches promote active engagement, collaboration, and student autonomy, their effective implementation depends heavily on classroom conditions, available resources, and institutional expectations. For many teachers, shifting from traditional, teacher-directed instruction to more interactive and inquiry-based methods introduced challenges related to managing student behavior, preparing differentiated tasks, aligning lessons with time-pressured curricula, and compensating for limited instructional materials or technological tools. These barriers do not reflect resistance to learner-centered teaching; rather, they highlight the practical realities teachers navigate daily as they attempt to balance pedagogical ideals with the constraints of their actual working environments.

Classroom Management and Noise

Participants across both contexts reported that active, collaborative work intensifies classroom management demands-

"The common challenges as I always observed is that the classroom managements because when it is a group works or any active learning the noise cannot be avoided if the teacher dont know to discipline the students it will cause some burdens to the teacher." (P2-TH)

"Ofcourse, the classroom management. When they misbehaved, it's hard to conduct learning activities ." (P4-TH).

This imposes explicit routines, rules, and relationship-centered norms to keep small groups productive; this is consistent with research showing that effective classroom management produces substantial gains in achievement and reductions in disruptive behavior, particularly when teachers start the year by teaching procedures and structuring transitions for cooperative learning (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Evertson, Emmer, & Poole, 2022). (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Marzano, 2003) (Evertson, Emmer, & Poole, 2022).

Time and Preparation Demands

Teachers in both the Philippines and Thailand emphasized that differentiated and inquiry-rich lessons require heavy planning time and that "packed" curricula make it hard to sustain deep inquiry.

Filipino teaches in the Philippines echoed,

"In implementing learner-centered methods, one challenge is time management—it's more difficult to prepare differentiated activities and projects." (P1-TH);

“The curriculum is very packed, and sometimes it’s difficult to sustain deep inquiry because we also have to meet certain standards and deadlines. (P4-PH)

“One challenge is time, because the curriculum is packed”. (P6- PH)

Teachers from both the Philippines and Thailand emphasized that learner-centered pedagogy requires substantial planning, preparation, and curricular flexibility, making it challenging to sustain in classrooms with packed schedules and numerous requirements. This challenge reflects wider research showing that learner-centered and inquiry-driven approaches place heavy demands on teacher planning, especially when lessons must be tailored to diverse needs and aligned with curriculum standards. Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008) explain that effective inquiry and project-based learning require thoughtful task design, scaffolding, and assessment planning—processes that naturally extend teachers’ workload. Similarly, Barrot (2021) found that Filipino teachers struggle with implementing 21st-century, student-centered practices because the K–12 curriculum’s pacing and content load often limit time for deeper, inquiry-rich learning.

Resource Limitations

Philippine-based teachers noted that limited materials and technology constrain the quality of learner-centered tasks.

“Limited resources also make it difficult, the materials and technology are lacking”. (P1-PH)

“Challenges include limited resources”. (P2-PH)

“Limited resources sometimes affect the quality of learning experiences”. (P6-PH)

This is consistent with global monitoring indicating persistent inequities in infrastructure and access that blunt the benefits of technology-supported student-centered learning; from a design perspective, the TPACK framework further explains that effective tech integration requires not only teacher knowledge but also the availability of appropriate tools, so resource gaps can directly hinder implementation fidelity (UNESCO, 2023; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). (UNESCO, 2023) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) Similarly, research on educational innovation in the Philippines finds that schools with limited technology and instructional materials struggle to fully adopt student-centered practices, often defaulting to more traditional, textbook-driven approaches (Barrot, 2021).

Learner-Specific Hurdles

This theme describes the challenges that arise from the diverse needs, backgrounds, and readiness levels of learners. Teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines noted that students vary widely in their language abilities, learning styles, prior knowledge, motivation, and confidence—factors that can make learner-centered activities difficult to implement smoothly. Some students struggle with independent tasks, others are hesitant to participate, and many require additional scaffolding to fully engage in inquiry-based or collaborative work. These learner-specific differences often demand more guidance, differentiation, and targeted support from teachers. Overall, the theme highlights that while learner-centered pedagogy empowers students, it also requires careful responsiveness to individual learning needs to ensure that all students can participate meaningfully.

Language Barriers

Thailand-based Filipino teachers shared that language barriers significantly hinder the smooth implementation of learner-centered pedagogy.

“Having to repeat instructions multiple times is truly time consuming which is due to language barrier”. (P3-TH)

“Language barrier and students’ disinterest in English language is one of the major problem”. (P4-TH)

These experiences align with research showing that limited English proficiency is one of the biggest challenges faced by teachers in non-English-speaking countries, particularly under English-Medium Instruction (EMI) policies. Dearden (2014) found that teachers in Asian EMI contexts frequently struggle with slowed pacing, repeated explanations, and reduced student interaction because learners lack the language skills needed for active participation. Similarly, Ulla, Bucol, and Dechatiwongse (2022) reported that in Thai classrooms, language limitations often prevent students from fully engaging in learner-centered tasks, leading teachers to spend more time clarifying instructions rather than facilitating higher-order activities. Furthermore, Derrah et al. (2024) highlighted that foreign teachers in Thailand must constantly adjust their instructional strategies to overcome communication barriers, which can affect students' willingness to participate.

Student Readiness and Diversity

Teachers from both Thailand and the Philippines noted that varying levels of student readiness, learning needs, and participation styles pose challenges when implementing learner-centered pedagogy.

As shared by teachers in Thailand,

"Some challenges I have encountered include limited instructional time, large class sizes, varied student abilities. In some cases, students are not immediately accustomed to taking an active role in learning, which requires gradual adjustment and consistent guidance from the teacher". (P5-TH)

Others highlighted the difficulty of meeting the needs of students with diverse abilities, including those with special educational needs, while still ensuring equal participation.

"One challenge I have encountered in using learner-centered methods is meeting the different needs of all students, especially when I have two learners with special needs in the same class. I make an effort to treat everyone equally, but it can be challenging to balance support, time, and activities so that all students can participate meaningfully". (P6-TH)

Filipino teachers in the Philippines voiced similar concerns, explaining that:

"not all students participate actively. Some are shy or hesitant, especially at the beginning. So I try to slowly build their confidence". (P5-PH)

These experiences reflect established research showing that learner-centered pedagogy demands careful scaffolding to accommodate varying levels of readiness. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning occurs most effectively within the Zone of Proximal Development, where teachers provide scaffolds that help learners gradually move toward independence (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) explain that without appropriate scaffolding, students may struggle to engage meaningfully in tasks that require higher-order thinking or unfamiliar learning roles. Studies on inclusive and differentiated instruction further show that diverse classrooms—especially those with mixed abilities—require flexible teaching strategies, additional support, and intentional opportunities for participation (Florian, 2014).

Part III- Comparative Perceptions Between the Philippine and Thai Contexts

This theme presents a cross-contextual examination of how learner-centered education is understood and enacted by Filipino teachers in two settings: those teaching in Thailand and those teaching in the Philippines. While both countries officially promote learner-centered pedagogies in their respective national curriculum frameworks—such as the Philippine K–12 curriculum, which embeds constructivist and 21st-century skills approaches, and Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008, which emphasizes holistic development and student-centered learning—teachers' experiences reveal important similarities and distinctions shaped by resources, cultural norms, language factors, and classroom realities. Exploring these comparative insights helps illuminate how national policies translate differently at ground level, revealing the contextual conditions that support or constrain learner-centered practice in each country.

Policy and Practice Alignment

This highlights how both the Philippines and Thailand formally promote learner-centered pedagogy in their national education policies, yet teachers experience varying levels of alignment between these policy expectations and actual classroom practice. Both countries' curriculum frameworks emphasize active, participatory, and student-focused learning, but teachers noted that the extent to which these approaches are implemented depends on school conditions, available resources, and classroom realities. While the policies provide a strong foundation for learner-centered teaching, teachers in both contexts often navigate gaps between what the curriculum envisions and what is feasible day-to-day. This alignment—along with its inconsistencies—shapes how effectively learner-centered approaches are carried out across diverse educational settings.

Shared Promotion of Learner-Centered Shifts

The responses from teachers in both Thailand and the Philippines reflect a clear and consistent perception that both countries are actively shifting toward learner-centered education. Participants emphasized common priorities such as active student participation, collaboration, real-life application of knowledge, and holistic development.

“As my experience so far one of the similarities, I’ve seen is that promoting learner-centered approach that students participate actively in the class”. (P2-TH)

“Philippines and Thailand both promoting learner- centered approaches”. (P4-TH)

“Both Thailand and the Philippines promote learner-centered education in their curricula and emphasize student participation and holistic development”. (P5-TH)

Philippine-based Teachers also stressed that:

“For me, both Thailand and the Philippines promote learner-centered pedagogy, encouraging active participation, collaboration, and real-life application of lessons. The similarity lies in their shift from traditional teacher-centered methods toward approaches that develop 21st-century skills”. (P2-PH)

“If we compare countries, I think both share a strong respect for education. Pareho namang may effort to modernize the curriculum and align with global standards. The direction is similar, though the implementation may differ”. (P4-PH)

“Both countries value education and are slowly shifting to learner-centered approaches”. (P6--PH)

Research supports this observed shift. Learner-centered pedagogy has been widely promoted across Southeast Asia as part of competency-based education frameworks that reposition learners as active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients (UNESCO, 2017). In the Philippines, the K–12 curriculum explicitly adopts constructivist and inquiry-based approaches, encouraging student engagement and meaningful learning experiences (DepEd, 2016). Similarly, Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum emphasizes experiential learning, student autonomy, and holistic development as central components of quality teaching (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2008).

Studies also show that both countries have undertaken reforms to modernize curricula and align with global standards, though implementation challenges persist. For example, Trakulphadetkrai (2018) notes that Thailand continues to grapple with traditional instructional practices despite policy support for innovative methods. In the Philippines, teacher readiness, resource gaps, and contextual constraints influence the degree to which learner-centered strategies are fully realized in classrooms (Bernardo & Dacumos, 2020).

Contextual Variations

This theme highlights how differences in social, cultural, institutional, and classroom contexts shape the way learner-centered approaches are implemented in both countries.

While the Philippines and Thailand share similar policy goals, actual classroom practices vary depending on factors such as available resources, teacher training, school environment, and local educational culture.

Resource Availability Differences

This emphasized the contrast in material and institutional support experienced by teachers in Thailand and the Philippines. Participants consistently described Thai schools as *resource-rich environments*, where instructional materials, learning facilities, and classroom supplies are readily provided.

“..more resources here in Thailand than the Philippines” (P1-TH)

“In the Philippines, there is a lack of resources, so teachers need to find ways to execute activities effectively. In Thailand, resources are more abundant, and everything is provided. As a teacher, you only need to maintain the liveliness of the class, keep students happy, and ensure that they learn many things before they go home.” (P2-TH)

“Cultural context and available resources also influence how learner-centered approaches are implemented in each country. Here in Thailand, the resources are more provided”. (P5-PH)

This abundance enables teachers to focus more fully on facilitating engaging, learner-centered activities without the added burden of sourcing or improvising materials. In contrast, teachers in the Philippines highlighted *persistent resource constraints*, requiring them to be creative and adaptive to meet students’ needs. Such disparities align with regional studies showing that resource availability is a key determinant of how effectively learner-centered approaches can be implemented (UNESCO Bangkok, 2014).

More recent reports also emphasize that schools with stable funding, access to technology, and supportive infrastructure are better positioned to sustain active, participatory learning environments, while resource-limited contexts often rely on low-cost or improvised strategies to approximate similar outcomes. Thus, the resource-rich Thai school settings described by participants can lower the barrier to sustained learner-centered work, while resource variability in Philippine schools can force adaptive, low-cost strategies to approximate similar experiences (UNESCO Bangkok, 2014; UNESCO, 2023).

Pedagogical Variations

Participants contrasted classroom enactments: they observed more experiential/routine activities and a relaxed, harmony-oriented climate in Thailand, whereas Philippine classes more often balance learner-centered tasks with structured, content-driven instruction, strong discussion, and use of English.

“Classrooms in Thailand tend to integrate more experiential learning and routine classroom activities, while classrooms in the Philippines often balance learner-centered strategies with more structured and content-driven instruction due to curriculum demands and large class size”. (P5-TH)

“In the Philippines, teaching is often more structured and teacher-led, with strong focus on discussion and English communication. In Thailand, classrooms are usually more relaxed, with emphasis on harmony, behavior, and gradual learning”. (P6-TH)

These findings align with research showing that instructional practices in Southeast Asia are shaped by cultural learning traditions and systemic constraints. Studies note that Thai classrooms often prioritize social harmony and non-competitive participation (Fry & Bi, 2013), leading to more relaxed and routine-based learning environments. Meanwhile, Philippine classrooms are documented to integrate discussion-heavy, teacher-guided instruction due to accountability pressures, multilingual learning demands, and the goal of meeting rigorous curriculum standards (Bernardo, 2017; Tupas, 2015). Thus, while both countries value learner-centered education, teachers enact it differently based on contextual expectations and educational cultures.

Cultural and Language Influences

This reflects how cultural norms and language proficiency shape students' engagement and the implementation of learner-centered approaches in both Thailand and the Philippines. Participants noted that Thai learners often appear less responsive or more disconnected during lessons, attributing this partly to the language barrier, as many Thai students have limited confidence or proficiency in English.

"Thai students generally have a tendency to be more disconnected in the class than Ph students. I think because of the language barrier". (P3-TH)

"Cultural context.....also influence how learner-centered approaches are implemented in each country" (P5-TH)

This aligns with regional research showing that English-medium instruction can create participation gaps in contexts where students rely heavily on their first language for comprehension (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Baker, 2015). Additionally, cultural values emphasizing politeness, non-confrontation, and maintaining classroom harmony may lead Thai students to participate more passively or cautiously, especially in interactive tasks. In contrast, Philippine classrooms generally demonstrate higher levels of verbal engagement due to stronger exposure to English and cultural norms that encourage discussion and expressive interaction (Tupas, 2015; Bernardo, 2017). As participants suggested, these cultural and linguistic differences influence how learner-centered strategies are enacted—what works smoothly in a Philippine classroom may require adaptation in Thailand, where teachers must repeat instructions, scaffold language, or adjust questioning techniques. Thus, cultural and language dynamics play a central role in shaping classroom participation patterns and the practical implementation of learner-centered pedagogy.

Similarity in Student Diversity and Management Needs

This emphasized that both Philippine and Thai classrooms exhibit high levels of student diversity, requiring teachers to employ strong and adaptable classroom management skills.

"One similarity that I noticed was that both group of students can be so diverse which will test your skills in classroom management". (P3-PH)

As participants noted, learners in both contexts differ widely in their abilities, behaviors, learning styles, and motivation levels, creating complex instructional environments. This observation is consistent with research showing that Southeast Asian classrooms often contain heterogeneous groups, influenced by varied linguistic backgrounds, socio-economic factors, and individual learning needs (UNESCO, 2017). Effective management, therefore becomes essential in supporting equitable participation and sustaining learner-centered strategies. Studies also emphasize that diverse classrooms place additional demands on teachers, who must differentiate instruction, manage behavior, and create inclusive learning spaces (Tomlinson, 2014; Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). Thus, despite contextual differences between the two countries, teachers in both settings face similar challenges in navigating learner diversity and maintaining productive classroom climates.

While experiencing such challenges and analyzing the comparative perspectives, participants also provided suggestions on how to improve learner-centered pedagogy for both countries. This theme confirms teachers' practical recommendations for strengthening the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy in both the Philippine and Thai contexts. While earlier themes highlighted the barriers and contextual challenges that shape classroom practice, this section focuses on forward-looking solutions grounded in teachers' lived experiences.

Their suggestions emphasize four key areas: improving teacher training, providing adequate resources, addressing structural constraints such as class size, and fostering professional collaboration with recognition for innovative work. These insights align with broader education literature, which stresses that successful learner-centered form requires not only competent teachers but also supportive systems, sufficient resources, and professional communities that sustain reflective practice and pedagogical innovation. Collectively, the

participants' recommendations offer actionable pathways for enhancing the quality and feasibility of learner-centered approaches across diverse school environments.

Enhanced Teacher Training and Professional Development

Across both Filipino teachers in Thailand and the Philippines, there was a clear consensus that strengthening teacher training and professional development is essential for improving the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. Participants emphasized the need for continuous, practical, and immediately usable training.

"To improve the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogy in my country, I would suggest providing continuous teacher training". (P5-TH)

"I suggest providing more training and continuous support for teachers, so they feel confident using different strategies". (P6-TH)

Teachers from the Philippines call for mentoring and hands-on strategies.

"To improve the effectiveness of the learner-centered model in the Philippines, I suggest strengthening teacher training and mentoring, para mas handa ang mga guro sa paggamit ng strategies like inquiry-based and project-based learning". (P1-PH)

"To improve effectiveness, I suggest stronger teacher training". (P2-PH)

"If I were to suggest something, I think we need more targeted professional development—the proven practical and classroom-tested strategies,, not just theory. Teachers need trainings that we can immediately apply in real classroom situations". (P4-PH)

"I believe more trainings for teachers would really help, especially practical ones". (P5-PH)

These insights align with research underscoring that effective learner-centered instruction requires teachers to have sustained professional learning, opportunities to refine inquiry-based and collaborative methods, and structured support systems such as LACs (Learning Action Cells) (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016). International literature likewise confirms that ongoing teacher development improves instructional quality, strengthens pedagogical skills, and supports curriculum reform efforts aimed at building 21st-century competencies (Scoular, 2020; Rivera, 2017). Taken together, the data suggest that teachers in both contexts recognize training not as a one-time event but as a continuous process critical for sustaining learner-centered reforms.

Provision of Resources and Materials

Participants also emphasized the necessity of adequate teaching resources and materials to effectively implement learner-centered approaches. Teachers in Thailand noted that government-provided resources greatly support classroom needs, while Filipino teachers highlighted that limited materials—especially technology—often hinder lesson execution.

"I would suggest that maybe the government supports the teacher in all ways for example the resources that needs inside the classroom so the teacher will use it to provide the needs of the students". (P2-TH)

"Schools should also reduce class sizes when possible and provide enough learning materials". (P6-TH)

"Schools should also provide adequate resources and technology support, because limited materials often hinder implementation". (P1-PH)

"Schools should also provide enough materials and support to effectively implement learner-centered strategies". (P6-PH)

This is consistent with comparative ASEAN analyses showing that disparities in school resources directly influence instructional quality and teachers' ability to facilitate active, collaborative tasks (UNESCO Bangkok, 2014). Furthermore, global monitoring reports emphasize that technology access, learning materials, and infrastructure are core enablers of modern, student-centered pedagogy (UNESCO GEM, 2023). The alignment between participant insights and international policy evidence signals that resource provision is not merely supportive but foundational—without appropriate materials, learner-centered instruction becomes difficult to sustain, especially in public school systems with large class sizes and limited budgets.

Reduction of Class Sizes and Structural Supports

Teachers across both contexts recommended reducing class sizes, strengthening school support systems, and providing structural conditions that allow learner-centered pedagogy to flourish. Participants noted that smaller classes, leadership support, collaboration, and time flexibility help ensure consistent application of learner-centered strategies.

“Strengthening school support systems and encouraging collaboration among teachers can also help ensure successful and consistent application of learner-centered approaches”. (P5-TH)

“Schools should also reduce class sizes when possible and provide enough learning materials. Most importantly, there should be strong support from school leaders and parents to help create an environment where learner-centered teaching can truly succeed”. (P6-TH)

“more resources and technology support, active collaboration among teachers, and recognition of innovative practices.” (P2-PH)

These insights echo regional findings that student-teacher ratios significantly affect learning outcomes and classroom management, with countries having lower ratios generally outperforming those with large classes (Galang et al., 2021; OECD, 2019). Philippine public school data likewise highlight overcrowded classes as a major barrier to interactive learning, reinforcing the participant view that structural adjustments—not only pedagogical changes—are necessary for sustaining learner-centered reforms (Teachers Click, 2025). Overall, the data emphasize that teacher capacity alone is insufficient; systemic supports are equally crucial.

Promotion of Collaboration and Recognition

Participants also highlighted the importance of teacher collaboration, peer support, and recognition of innovative practices in strengthening learner-centered teaching. Filipino teachers in the Philippines particularly emphasized the value of LAC sessions, peer sharing, and incentives for action research—mechanisms that help teachers refine strategies and sustain motivation.

“Collaboration among teachers through LAC sessions and peer sharing can make practices more consistent. Finally, recognition and incentives for action research and innovative teaching will motivate teachers to sustain learner-centered approaches and connect lessons more meaningfully to students' lives”. (P1-PH)

“active collaboration among teachers, and recognition of innovative practices.” (P2-PH)

This aligns with DepEd's policy framework that positions professional learning communities as essential for reflective practice and instructional improvement (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016). Studies show that collaborative teacher cultures lead to better pedagogical decisions, shared problem-solving, and more effective learner-centered practices (UNESCO, 2014; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Research also indicates that recognition and incentives boost teacher motivation and willingness to adopt innovative approaches (Bandur, 2012; Avalos, 2011). Thus, collaboration and recognition function not only as support mechanisms but as key drivers of sustained pedagogical innovation.

IV- Proposed Program to Strengthen the Learner-Centered Teaching Practices among Filipino Teachers Across Local and International Contexts

Based on the findings, the LCP-SEAL (Learner-Centered Pedagogy–Support, Enhancement, and Adaptive Leadership) Program was developed—a one-year, cross-country adaptable professional development plan focusing on teacher training, resource support, classroom management, inclusive practices, and professional collaboration.

Table 1. Quarterly Implementation Plan (Dual-Context Approach)

Quarter	Focus Area	Key Activities (Applicable in Both Countries)	Contextual Adaptation	Link to Findings	Expected Output
Q1 (Months 1–3)	Strengthening Learner-Centered Pedagogical Foundations	- Virtual orientation on learner-centered pedagogy - Training on facilitative teaching and interactive strategies - Demonstration teaching focused on interactive and participatory classrooms - Workshops on flexible instruction and student-guided learning	Philippines: aligned with K–12 curriculum Thailand: aligned with host school expectations	Part I – Teachers’ Experiences - <i>Role Shift to Facilitation</i> – activities emphasize teachers as facilitators rather than lecturers - <i>Interactive and Participatory Classrooms</i> – collaborative and inquiry-based activities encourage active learner participation - <i>Guiding and Supporting Student Learning</i> – focus on scaffolding and learner autonomy - <i>Meaningful and Flexible Learning</i> – flexible teaching strategies support learner-centered environments Part III – Comparative Perceptions - <i>Shared Promotion of Learner-Centered Shifts</i> – both contexts strengthen the transition toward learner-centered pedagogy - <i>Pedagogical Variations</i> – adaptations recognize differences in instructional practices between countries	Teachers adopt facilitative and student-centered approaches
Q2 (Months 4–6)	Addressing Practical Implementation Barriers	- Workshops on classroom management in learner-centered settings - Training on managing classroom noise while maintaining active participation - Time-management	Philippines: large class management strategies Thailand: language-sensitive classroom routines	Part II – Identified Teachers’ Challenges - <i>Classroom Management and Noise</i> – training directly addresses maintaining order in active classrooms - <i>Time and Preparation Demands</i> – lesson-planning workshops help reduce preparation burden - <i>Resource Limitations</i> –	Improved classroom management, efficient instructional preparation, and increased use of accessible teaching materials

		and lesson-planning seminars to reduce teacher workload -Development of localized, low-cost, and reusable instructional materials -Sharing of resource-maximization practices among teachers		development of low-cost materials addresses lack of instructional resources Part III – Comparative Perceptions -Resource Availability <i>Differences</i> – acknowledges unequal access to materials across contexts -Similarity in Student Diversity and Management Needs – both countries face similar classroom management concerns	
Q3 (Months 7–9)	Inclusive, Diverse, and Language-Responsive Teaching	-Training on differentiated instruction and inclusive classroom practices -Workshops on addressing varying student readiness and learning styles -Language-responsive teaching strategies and communication support -Peer mentoring and sharing sessions between Philippine and Thai teachers -Student engagement activities that build confidence and participation	Philippines: multilingual classroom support Thailand: English/Thai bridging strategies	Part I – Teachers’ Experiences -Increased Student Confidence and Engagement – engagement-focused strategies encourage active participation and confidence-building -Rewarding Despite Challenges – collaborative sharing reinforces teacher motivation and resilience Part II – Identified Teachers’ Challenges -Language Barriers – language-responsive instruction directly targets communication difficulties -Student Readiness and Diversity – differentiated instruction addresses varied learner needs Part III – Comparative Perceptions -Cultural and Language Influences – contextual adaptations recognize cultural and linguistic differences between countries	Increased learner participation and inclusive practices
Q4 (Months 10–12)	Collaborative Reflection, Structural Support, and Policy Enhancement	-Cross-country virtual reflection forums and teacher learning communities -Classroom observations and reflective practice	Joint reflection and collaborative	Part III – Comparative Perceptions -Enhanced Teacher Training and Professional Development – sustained professional learning opportunities are prioritized	Evidence-based policy recommendations, strengthened professional

		sessions -Consolidation of evidence-based policy recommendations -Advocacy discussions on class size reduction and structural support -Recognition programs highlighting innovative learner-centered practices -Development of sustainability plans for continuous professional development	exchange of best practices and policy insights	<i>-Provision of Resources and Materials</i> – policy recommendations advocate stronger material support <i>-Reduction of Class Sizes and Structural Supports</i> – addresses structural barriers affecting implementation <i>-Promotion of Collaboration and Recognition</i> – encourages teacher motivation and professional sharing <i>-Policy and Practice Alignment</i> – reflective activities strengthen consistency between educational policy and classroom realities	collaboration, improved institutional support, and sustainable learner-centered classroom implementation
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Estimated Budget (Shared Program)

Item	Estimated Cost (PHP)
Virtual Trainings and Webinars	250,000
Instructional Materials Development	200,000
Collaboration Platforms and Meetings	100,000
Monitoring and Evaluation	100,000

Total Estimated Budget: ₱650,000

Key Features of This Cross-Country Plan

The proposed cross-country program is designed to strengthen learner-centered pedagogy among Filipino primary grade teachers in both the Philippines and Thailand by responding directly to the lived experiences and challenges identified in this study. It ensures equitable benefit by providing shared professional learning opportunities for Filipino teachers across both settings, while recognizing contextual differences in classroom conditions, culture, and institutional support. The program is intentionally flexible and context-sensitive, allowing common activities such as reflective dialogue, collaborative planning, and strategy sharing to be adapted to local realities rather than imposed uniformly. It also emphasizes collaborative learning through cross-country peer exchange, enabling teachers to learn from one another's experiences, build supportive professional networks, and strengthen their confidence in implementing learner-centered approaches. Most importantly, the program is directly anchored on the study's findings, supporting facilitative and engaging teaching practices, addressing classroom management and resource constraints, and responding to language and learner diversity through culturally responsive strategies, making it a practical and sustainable framework for improving learner-centered teaching across local and international contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings affirm that learner-centered pedagogy is meaningfully practiced by Filipino teachers in both contexts but is deeply shaped by institutional resources, classroom realities, and cultural norms. The observed role shift aligns with learner-centered and constructivist theories emphasizing facilitation, student agency, and social learning. Challenges identified reflect persistent structural issues reported in regional and international literature.

Comparative insights reveal that effective enactment of learner-centered pedagogy depends not only on teacher competence but also on systemic and contextual support. The proposed LCP-SEAL Program responds directly to these lived experiences, offering a practical, context-sensitive framework to strengthen learner-centered teaching across local and international educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that learner-centered pedagogy is meaningfully experienced by Filipino primary grade teachers in both the Philippines and Thailand, though these experiences are shaped by distinct classroom realities and contextual conditions. Filipino teachers in both settings described a clear shift from traditional, teacher-directed instruction to facilitative roles that emphasize interactive, participatory, and flexible learning. Through their lived experiences, teachers highlighted how collaboration, and autonomy led to more meaningful classroom engagement and improved learner confidence.

Across both contexts, teachers encountered common challenges related to classroom management, time constraints, and learner diversity, reinforcing that learner-centered pedagogy requires sustained effort and support regardless of teaching location. Comparative findings further reveal that while both countries promote learner-centered education at the policy level, its actual practice is shaped by resource availability, cultural expectations, and institutional support. These contextual factors influence how learner-centered approaches are interpreted and enacted in daily classroom practice.

The proposed LCP-SEAL Program responds directly to these lived experiences by providing a structured, flexible, and collaborative professional development framework designed to strengthen and sustain learner-centered teaching practices among Filipino teachers across both local and international contexts.

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