

Tracing the Path: Exploring Learners' Experiences in Acquiring Foundational Geometry Knowledge as A Pathway to Proofs

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Abstract

This qualitative research was conducted in Zarraga National High School among senior high school learners School Year 2024-2025. It aimed to determine the learners' prior mathematical experiences, backgrounds, emotional and cognitive challenges, and experiences with instructional strategies in acquiring foundational geometry knowledge as a pathway to proofs. Data were gathered through interviews and analyzed using the thematic analysis. This study found that learners' experiences with arithmetic and algebra were significant as arithmetic skills offer transferable knowledge for numeric calculations but do not transfer to the concepts required for geometry, and algebra offers crucial information and a start to geometric reasoning but is impeded by obstacles in the transition to the more conceptual shift demanded in geometry. Techniques such as the use of visuals, manipulatives, and concrete-abstract connections, models that promote meaning-making and increase learners' self-confidence in geometry proof-writing procedures that support learners in constructing meaning step by step for proof-writing. The study pointed the need to introduce logical reasoning and proof-writing at the early stages of more mathematics learning coupled with the learning need to match individual learner needs. Furthermore, learning strategies to improve confidence in logical thinking were suggested when working with learners to eliminate learners' affective and cognitive barriers to geometry acquisition.

Keywords: Tracing the Path, Acquiring Foundational Geometry Knowledge, Pathway to Proofs

1. INTRODUCTION

Geometry is an important part of math education. It links simple arithmetic to higher-order proficiency in creating and understanding proofs. Intermediate geometry skills Some, though, run into trouble with the shift from basic geometric concepts found in construction problems to the abstract reasoning required to tackle proof-based challenges. As the medium through which learners struggle with these learning gaps, the experience also serves as a diagnostic for where learners are weak in their fundamental understanding, critical thinking capabilities and emotional robustness. This is of special interest to make teaching methods more efficient, which should only be possible if we understand what learners go through when learning geometry.

The learners' past experiences with math have greatly influenced how they engage with geometry and proofs. All experiences that learners have had, including those of earlier mathematics, their learning

environments, and the earlier lessons, play a role in how they engage in geometric thinking and proof-making (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2019). By understanding these past experiences, obstacles as well as opportunities can be identified.

Furthermore, they found that the shift from concrete geometry to abstract proofs was cognitively and emotionally challenging for learners. This can make it difficult to engage in abstract reasoning, organize thoughts coherently, and manage proof statements. For these learners, despair (which may lead to discussing F) and other obstacles stress them emotionally affecting management, which can provide or decrease self-belief energy to learn. We suggest that the affective dimension should be a priority in learning, geometry education is no exception (Boero 2019).

Besides, teaching practices enormously support learners in mastering higher-level mathematics. Some of the forms that are quite effective are group work over problems and visuals as tools for facilitating conversations. Instructional that are based on these approaches might develop learners' abilities to build up their conceptual knowledge and hence the ability to construct proofs. Yet, it is vital to know the way learners interpret these techniques in order to improve teaching practices. The work attempts to determine learners' feelings about this type of teaching to build up its pedagogical base (Sinclair et al., 2020).

This research is particularly interesting because it uncovers the learners' learning process as they are involved in proof-based reasoning. This is an instrumental mathematical skill, which means that it also encompasses higher-order cognitive skills such as logical thinking, problem-solving, and organized reasoning (Stylianides & Stylianides, 2019). Thus, grabbing a good grip on learners' experiences, as well as the problems and thoughts they have during this time, is the best way to get the needed improvement in geometry education and to be able to support the learners more than before.

This qualitative research seeks to trace the path of learners' experiences in acquiring foundational geometry knowledge and transitioning to mastering proofs. It focuses on three key questions:

1. What are the learners' prior mathematical experiences and backgrounds that shape their approach to learning geometry and mastering proofs?
2. What are the perceived emotional and cognitive challenges that learners face when transitioning from learning basic geometry to engaging with formal proofs?
3. How do learners describe their experiences with instructional strategies used to teach foundational geometry and their effectiveness in preparing them for proof-based tasks?

In line with this study, intends to highlight complexities in learning pathways of geometry education, particularly in how learners' experiences, challenges, and instructional practices interplay. Findings might contribute to a better understanding of paths through which support should be provided for the Learners to navigate this critical transition into being effective in handling proofs and developing their strength in mathematical reasoning.

2. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative research design in the form of semi-structured interviews. By using semi-structured interviews, it is possible to question the participants to a great extent about their ideas relating to their previous mathematical background knowledge, emotions, and cognition, and even the teaching techniques used in learning geometry are explored. Besides, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to come up with further questions coming from the responses which provoke a deeper insight of the issues.

Semi-structured interviews constitute a vital component of everyday sociological research so that they can

manage the coexistence of structure and flexibility and provide valuable data about related phenomena. The semi-structured interview technique is the most often-applied qualitative method aimed at studying the subjective experience, viewpoints, and attitudes of respondents (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). According to Patton (2015), the semi-structured style is the most suitable in the study of topics in those cases where the general outline is known beforehand, however, the depth of understanding is required. The researcher is not obliged to the initial questions; he might include new ones based on the participant's answer drawn from the query in hand.

Before the conduct of the research, the researcher conducted a pre-survey with the learners to come up with the research problem about geometric proofs. Based on the pre-survey, the researcher discovered that the learners do not encounter proofs in geometry, and with this, the researcher came up with this study.

The respondents of this study were selected through the pre-survey and the researcher explained to the respondents the purpose of the study including the details of the interview such as the ethical considerations and the number of questions they should answer.

The researcher followed the procedure of a semi-structured interview and thematic analysis which involves several steps. First, the researcher formulated an interview questionnaire and validated it by the Math and English Coordinators of the schools. The survey questionnaires are divided into three parts: Part 1: Prior Mathematical Experiences and Backgrounds: Questions 1-4 (related to previous mathematical experiences, prior knowledge, and exposure to proofs). Part 2: Emotional and Cognitive Challenges: Questions 5-8 (focused on challenges faced in learning geometry, particularly in constructing proofs and dealing with the abstract nature of mathematical reasoning). Part 3: Instructional Strategies and Effectiveness: Questions 9-12 (focused on instructional methods, strategies, and how the learner prefers to learn geometry).

Then, the researcher obtained consent from the participants identified for the schedule of the interview and explained to them the purpose of the study. Next, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in a face-to-face. During the interview, the participants shared and elaborated on their prior mathematical experiences, backgrounds, emotional and cognitive challenges, and experiences with instructional strategies. After the interviews were accomplished and completed, the researcher transcribed the interviews and conducted a thematic analysis. This involved identifying patterns or themes within the data and exploring how these themes relate to the research question. Finally, the researcher wrote the results of the study, including the key themes identified in the data and how these themes relate to the research question.

3. Results and Discussion

The acquisition of foundational geometry knowledge and the transition to mastering proofs is a complex journey for many learners. This study examines how learners' prior mathematical experiences influence their approach to geometry and proof-writing, explores the emotional and cognitive challenges encountered during the transition, and assesses the effectiveness of instructional strategies in preparing learners for the demands of formal proof-based tasks.

Prior Mathematical Experiences and Backgrounds

Influence of Previous Mathematical Experiences on Geometry Learning

Participants' prior mathematical experiences played a significant role in shaping their approach to learning geometry. Many learners reported that their experiences with arithmetic and algebra gave them the foundational skills necessary for understanding geometric concepts. However, a few learners faced

difficulties because their previous math experiences were limited or focused mainly on procedural learning rather than abstract reasoning. Learner 3 shared "Algebra helped me with equations, but geometry was a whole new way of thinking that I wasn't prepared for." *Learner 8 remarked, "Ang Math pirme mabudlay para sa akon, gani pagsugod subject nga geometry umpisa naman ini sang akon nga struggle (Math has always been tough for me, so I started geometry feeling like it was going to be another struggle)."*

This result blends the current research and thereby confirms the notion that the prior mathematical experience has a grand impact on the learners' quality of acquiring new concepts (Kilpatrick et al., 2020). Algebraic thinking, as many learners experienced before geometry, was the necessary basis for mastering all the required skills in calculations and understanding geometric relationships. But logical reasoning and the ability to present proof are very much abstract in geometry and they also need the development of cognitive capacities (Boaler, 2019). Over and above arithmetic and algebra were taught beforehand and were successful in some areas of geometry, but the switch to a more abstract modus necessitated a change in approach.

Thus, initial experience in algebra and arithmetic creates a conducive atmosphere for learners to enter geometric concepts, more so in calculations. Nonetheless, the development of abstract approaches to algebraic proof concepts is very important for learners to realize the underlying nature of geometry. Courses must be designed so that those structures are introduced at the starting point in logical reasoning and proofs so that learners can rent their way through subsequent geometric studies more easily.

Exposure to Mathematical Proofs and Its Impact

The training on the proof writing and logic thinking in the early stage of education results in the comprehension and implementation of the geometric ideas. Nonetheless, some arguments can be found that understanding of the basic concepts of geometry is simplified due to the teaching of these before formal geometry. This is especially true according to "Smith (2020) as well as Johnson & Lee (2018)". Apart from that, these last strategies of teaching the learners also help them in the improvement of their critical thinking skills which they will further need to master the more complex subjects during their education.

Most of the learners had very little exposure to reaching out for proofs before under Geometry which created an initial problem and weaknesses during their learning of this dimension of the subject. Learners who had encountered proofs in earlier grade levels, such as algebra, reported a smoother transition. *Learner 5 described feelings of doubt, "Wala pa gid ako gaagi makasulat sing proof before, at first, daw nadula ako bangod indi ako makahibalo kon paano organize ang akon thoughts"* (I had never written a proof before, and at first, I felt lost because I didn't know how to organize my thoughts). *Leaner 2 said, "Nakaagi na ako encountered sang paghimo sang proof daw sa algebra wla lang ko kabalo kung ini kinahanglan man sa geometry, pero nabudlayan ako sa mga steps guihapon"*. (Having done some proofs in algebra assisted me in understanding what needed to be geometry, but I still had difficulties with the steps).

This finding adds to the current understanding of the benefits of beginning with the study of proofs for them to be important tools for learners to pursue an even more complex area of geometry (Mason et al, 2021). They have an interesting perspective on this point, the absence of experiences is the reason for the problems in the process acquisition of fully structured geometric cognition, this is due to the complexity of the change from actions to ideas (Schoenfeld, 2020). Performing proofs and logical reasoning at these stages in mathematics would help in dismissing such barriers.

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Emotional and Cognitive Challenges

Initial Challenges in Learning Geometry

Cognitive overload refers to the challenges that confront learners when they are presented with new information or the unfamiliar concepts in their working memory's capacity is exceeded. This problem is predominant in the academic environment where learners see many complex or simple concepts, e.g. geometry or advanced mathematics.

The concept of cognitive overload was identified as a significant challenge for learners. Most learners are exposed to much information that can lead them to frustration and misconceptions. Indeed, *learner 2 stated* “*Ang pagsaulo sang tanan nga mga postulate kag mga Theorem ka overwhelming. Indi ko mahibalan kon san-o ko sila apply o gamiton*” (Memorizing all the postulates and theorems was overwhelming. I couldn't figure out when to apply them). While others, *learner 4 explained*, “*Nabudlayan ako sa pagconnect sang akon natun-an sa algebra sa geometry. Daw feeling ko indi gid sila parehas nga subject.*” (I found it hard to connect what I learned in algebra to geometry. It felt like a completely different subject). In addition, introducing too many different topics can leave learners feeling overwhelmed and unable to process or retain information effectively (Van Dooren et al., 2019). The learners are overloaded when, for example, they learn and apply new concepts to contexts different from the previous ones and reason with other ideas at the same time. This woe can then morph into other things like anger, lower learning, and even dishonesty.

Moreover, scaffolding is a crucial learning strategy that enables learners to handle and fuse intricate topics by taking them apart to the least common multiple, which are more digestible and making connections to previous knowledge (Dede and Sochacki, 2021). To be more specific, in geometry, this method provides learners with the opportunity to move from the fundamentals of geometry to progressively more complex matters, which they will be able to address with much more confidence and clarity than before. Studies in the field show that scaffolding is in a way the most efficient tool that you can use to understand problems and get rid of the cognitive barrier, particularly in such areas as geometry that require abstract thinking. Thus, teachers must employ scaffolding as they break down complex topics into parts that are easier to manage and use the connections between geometry and other math subjects in the process.

Transitioning to Formal Proofs

The shift from informal to formal proofs in math plays a big role in how learners grow. This change doesn't just mean learning new ideas. It also means thinking more and solving problems better. Stylianides et al. (2020) say that moving to formal proofs is tough for learners. The transition to formal proofs is a daunting process for learners as they are required to have not only the technical skills for constructing formal proofs but the comprehension of the logical structures that give the right mathematical reasoning as well.

The shift from learning basic geometric concepts to constructing formal proofs poses significant cognitive challenges. Learners need to develop skills in logical structuring, abstract reasoning, and metacognition, which are often underdeveloped. *According to learner 4*, “*Wala ako sing nakaencounter kung paaano paghimo sang proofs, gani wala ako sing confidence sa paghimo sang mga proofs kung ako lang.*” (I didn't have encountered constructing proofs, so I didn't feel confident in constructing proofs on my own).

Learner 5 added, "Mabudlay ang mga proofs kay wala ako idea kon diin ako mastart. Mabudlay makita kon paano iconnect o para sa diin ini iconnect ang tanan." (Proofs were hard because I didn't know where to start. It was hard to see how everything connected).

The study by Stylianides et al. (2020) underscores the idea that the process of acquiring this skill increases the learner's capacity to think systematically and rigorously. Not only must the learners understand the 'what' (the theorem or postulate), but also the 'why' (the logical justification behind it). This means that practice and feedback will be a lot of help to them to become aware of the structure of solid arguments. An example of this is the proof construction where learners move from particular instances to the general lasting connections of geometric facts and logical evidence throughout the whole process.

Hence, to teach transition to proofs entails special considerations of teaching methods that supports conceptual reasoning as well as meta-cognition. Scaffolding, collaborative learning and early introduction to the informal reasoning mode could easily overcome these difficulties. That is why, it is important that teachers explain the proofs properly, give examples, use collective discussions, and give several comments to make learners more confident.

Abstract Nature of Mathematical Proofs

The process of geometric reasoning due the highly logical nature of geometrical proofs poses a big challenge to the learners. To overcome this problem, the emphasis should be made on explanation of the purpose and organization of proofs within the system of effective instruction to connect them with more practical geometric concepts. According to literature research, it looks like learners benefit from context and practical examples when it comes to the mathematical function of geometry (Taylor & Green, 2019; Brown, 2021). This contributes to closing the gap between concept definition and utilization in geometry. The abstract nature of mathematical proofs in geometry was identified as a significant challenge. Most Learners often struggle with the conceptual leap from basic geometric concepts to formal proofs. *Learner 7 shared, "Ang pagka-abstract sang mga proofs I feel sa akon nga daw iba nga language, kag indi ko sila pirme maconnect sa kon ano ang akon na learned sa past grade level especially sa algebra."* (The abstractness of proofs made me feel like a different language, and I couldn't always connect them to what I knew from algebra). Others, like *Learner 3 stated, "It was hard to understand Ngaa ang proofs were necessary nga I just wanted to solve problems."* (It was hard to understand why proofs were necessary when I just wanted to solve problems).

Several studies indicate that the abstract nature of proofs presents the learner with a difficulty, especially in geometry, where not only rules must be identified and applied, but logical structures need to be constructed: (Rittle-Johnson & Schneider, 2019). This is made even worse by learners' psychological pushback against their necessary cognitive processes since they may not relate to it or see any reason why they have to learn it (Hattie & Anderman, 2022). The mastery of proofs impels the learner to learn how to reason logically and do mathematics in that higher plane of abstraction.

As a consequence, the general and discrete approach to proofs in geometry poses a strong learning difficulty. To address this challenge, one has to engage more effort on the kind of instructions that give importance and organization of proofs regarding more concrete aspects within geometry.

Cognitive Skills and Confidence in Geometry

Perception and rationality are mandatory prerequisites in geometry and proof writing. However, there seems to be a dearth of classroom practices and instructional strategies that would enable learners develop confident in these areas. The analysis shows that learning strategies like the use of practice scaffolding and partnership can greatly boost learners' confidence and effectiveness in logical thinking and proofs

creation (Williams & Garcia, 2020; Lee, 2022).

These strategies help create a more meaningful and effective learning environment. Learners identified logical reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking as crucial cognitive skills for understanding geometry and writing proofs. However, most learners reported low confidence in their ability to use these skills effectively. *Learner 4 shared, "Feeling ko sa problem solving daw ok pa ako, pero kung sa proofs daw indi ko kabalo kung diin maumpisa".* (I feel like my problem-solving skills are good, but when it comes to proofs, I'm not sure where to start). While, *learner 5 stated, I know need nga ma think logically in geometry, pero wla ko nabatyagan nga confident ako subong nga I am on the right track".* (I know I need to think logically for geometry, but I don't always feel confident that I'm doing it the right way).

The importance of cognitive skills like logical reasoning and problem-solving is Logarithmic skills such as logical understanding and problem-solving skills are among the most acclaimed and visualized wisdom aspects in mathematics learning research (Schoenfeld, 2020). Nevertheless, learners frequently do not have sufficient self-simplification to apply these skills in proofs, situations that entail some kind of logical structure coupled with creative thinking (Zhang & Stephens, 2023). This might be since proof construction is abstract and much of the content and tasks might be unfamiliar; this confirms the need for remedial interventions pointing to confidence in the learner's reasoning profiles of mathematics.

Therefore, it also means that other skills such as logical deduction and problem-solving will always help any learner to excel in geometry and writing proofs. However, the results of the study pointed that out learners have low self-confidence in these skills, and therefore this implies that classroom practices require more reinforcement and support for building self-confidence.

Instructional Strategies and Effectiveness

Teaching Methods for Geometry

An appreciation of the learning styles of learners maximizes the returns of geometric education, thereby improving learner's knowledge and skill base. Studies have pointed out that the use of multiple approaches to teaching including use of graphic and visual tools and practical examples can enhance the teaching of geometry immensely (Harrison & Carter, 2021; Patel & Kim, 2019). This is why catering to the learner's learning needs to enhance learning makes for effective learning and understanding. Accordingly, it is only logical to state that a sound method for teaching geometry entails not only merely relying on what could be seen and touched, but also on what learners and teachers tell them through words.

Learners provided mixed feedback on the effectiveness of their teachers' teaching methods. Some found that visual aids and diagrams helped understand geometric concepts, while others felt that more hands-on practice and clear explanations of proofs were necessary. *Learner 4 shared, "Na namian man ako nga ang amon teachers ka teach sang mga diagrams, pero para sa akon mas nami pagid kung gina teach sa amon how to prove things".* (I like how the teacher uses diagrams, but I think I would benefit from more examples of how to prove things). Others, like *Learner 2 explained, "Mas prefer ko nga sa pagteach sa amon through learning by doing, kag ang visual aids I think daw indi makabulig sa amon to understand proofs much".* (I prefer learning through doing problems, and I don't think the visual aids helped me understand proofs much).

Teaching techniques of geometrical learning include the use of visual instructions, discussions and then practical challenges; (Foster, 2022). In view of Learners' diverse needs, the paper concludes that use of multiple techniques in teaching mathematics will be more effective than the transmission method that was used (NCTM, 2020). Some learners find it easier to reason geometrically while others need more

demonstrations as well as practice for the logical reasoning tasks.

Therefore, drawings/ motions, manipulatives, and exposure to syllabic explanations should be incorporated into teaching geometry. This paper aims to provide insight into how the differences in learners affect teaching strategies by identifying their learning styles.

Strategies for Proof-Writing

Dividing proofs into smaller sections, as well as using graphics to help learners connect with teaching statements are strong approaches to teaching that have far-reaching positive effects on learners' comprehension of the relevant proofs as well as their ability to write proof with confidence. The use of these methods when teaching geometry is crucial in ensuring learners have a good grasp of the content taught. Studies are confirming that when it comes to complex tasks, such as geometric proof, the more detailed instructions, and diagrams given to learners, the more likely they are to not only respond but succeed at those tasks Johnson & Brown (2020); Williams and Lee (2022). These strategies also help in making learning more systematic and easier.

Most learners identified several strategies that helped them with geometry, particularly in proof-writing. Examples included breaking down proofs step by step and using visual diagrams to illustrate abstract concepts. *Learner 1 stated, "I encountered nga kung himayhimayon gid ang mga steps sa poofs mas madali namon maintindihan."* (I find that when I break the proofs into smaller steps, it's easier to understand.) *While, learner 8 shared, "Ang pagvisualize o pagnaitindihan ang problem makabulig gid sa amon mayad mag structure sang proofs."* (Visualizing the problem helps me structure my proof better.)

Studies propose views that are congruent with POS, and state that organizing the thought processes in a more orderly manner, for example, when delivering proofs in the form of steps is helpful in building the reasoning disposition of learners (Boaler, 2019). Drawing has also been used to enrich learners' ability to relate between the concepts that are being taught and a diagram or picture and therefore aids with proof-writing (Foster, 2022).

Hence, the identification of the employing of logical steps and graphical representation strategies helps to increase learner knowledge and self-confidence in proof-writing. These methods should be used in addition to enrollment in geometry courses to foster mastery of the content

4. Conclusion

This research draws on prior mathematics experiences, mental abilities, and approaches that learners bring to the class in understanding geometry, especially geometric proofs. The experience learners had in numbers and algebra was well suited for the calculation aspects of geometry. However, new semiotic practice and focusing on geometric proofs means new cognitive and especially emotional demands: thinking in terms of procedures is replaced rather dramatically by the need to deal with the abstractions of proofs. However, efforts including giving learners an early exposure to proofs, using learning by doing, and structured environment to solve geometrical problems help enhance the learners' understanding and confidence in geometry.

Needless to say, learning of precise logical thinking and writing of proofs makes the transition to geometry far smoother, by cultivating the appropriate mental aptitudes. Moreover, the identified instruction methods provide for the multiple access to geometric knowledge through the use of visual aids, repeated practice with materials, and using modeling techniques that facilitates learners' reception of geometric information, their practice with materials and objects, and verbal guidance that enhances their acquisition of knowledge. These results support other works in the field that underscore the necessity of kindling and guiding

mathematical thinking and employing learners to structured procedures in problem-solving.

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