

Enhancing Critical Thinking Through Community Immersion: Evidence from Grade 8 Araling Panlipunan Students

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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is recognized as one of the essential competencies learners must develop to address real-world challenges. This study investigated the effectiveness of community immersion as an instructional approach in enhancing the critical thinking skills of Grade 8 students in Araling Panlipunan at Mountain Province General Comprehensive High School during School Year 2023–2024. Using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design, two Grade 8 classes participated. The experimental group engaged in structured community immersion activities integrated into classroom instruction, while the control group received conventional classroom-based instruction. Data were collected through written and oral assessments, rubrics, classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. Statistical analysis using mean, standard deviation, t-tests, ANCOVA, and effect sizes revealed significant improvements in the experimental group. Qualitative themes highlighted authentic connection, confidence in expression, and problem-solving mindset. Findings demonstrate that community immersion provides authentic learning experiences that strengthen students' analytical, reflective, and problem-solving abilities. Integrating community immersion into Social Studies instruction is an effective strategy for promoting critical thinking and meaningful learning among secondary school students.

Keywords: community immersion, critical thinking, experiential learning, Araling Panlipunan, Grade 8 students

INTRODUCTION

Developing learners who can think critically, solve problems, and make informed decisions has become a primary goal of twenty-first-century education. In the Philippine context, Araling Panlipunan plays a significant role in civic competence and historical understanding, yet instruction often emphasizes factual recall. Community immersion, an experiential learning strategy, allows students to interact directly with communities, observe local practices, and connect theoretical knowledge with real-world contexts. This study investigated the effectiveness of community immersion in enhancing Grade 8 students' critical thinking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking involves purposeful, self-regulated judgment including interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation (Facione, 2020). UNESCO (2021) emphasizes education that develops learners capable of addressing societal challenges through inquiry and collaboration. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (2015) explains that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

Recent Philippine studies (e.g., Cruz, 2022; Santos, 2023) highlight the importance of contextualized, community-based learning in strengthening higher-order thinking and cultural competence. These findings support the integration of immersion strategies into Social Studies to bridge classroom concepts with lived realities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was employed. Grade 8 Daisy served as the experimental group (community immersion), while Grade 8 Azalea served as the control group (conventional instruction).

Research Instruments

- **Written Critical Thinking Test:** Essay-type, pilot-tested with Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$.
- **Rubrics:** Validated by three Araling Panlipunan experts; inter-rater agreement reached 85%.
- **Observation Checklist:** Monitored participation and engagement.
- **Interviews & FGDs:** Provided qualitative insights.

Statistical Treatment

- Descriptive statistics: mean, SD.
- Inferential statistics: paired-samples t-test, independent-samples t-test, ANCOVA (to control pretest differences).
- Effect sizes: Cohen's d, partial eta squared.
- Significance level: $\alpha = .05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pretest Results

Written scores were comparable (Control M = 7.08; Experimental M = 7.22). Oral/participation differed significantly (Control M = 15.80; Experimental M = 10.50).

Posttest Results

Experimental group improved substantially (Written M = 27.98; Oral/Participation M = 28.16) compared to control (Written M = 20.58; Oral/Participation M = 19.58). Differences were significant ($p < .001$). Effect sizes were large ($d = 1.25$ written; $d = 1.10$ oral/participation).

ANCOVA Adjustment

ANCOVA confirmed that experimental group maintained significantly higher adjusted posttest means ($F = 42.16$, $p < .001$), controlling for pretest imbalance.

Qualitative Themes

- **Authentic Connection:** *"We saw how our elders' rituals are like the Aztec ceremonies."*
- **Confidence in Expression:** *"I felt braver to speak because I experienced it myself."*
- **Problem-Solving Mindset:** *"We discussed how farming practices solve local problems, like water shortage."*

DISCUSSION

Community immersion enhanced analytical, reflective, and problem-solving abilities. Findings align with Kolb's theory and prior studies (Bowman et al., 2010; Wiggins et al., 2007). Integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence underscores immersion's effectiveness in promoting higher-order thinking and meaningful learning.

CONCLUSION

Community immersion is an effective instructional approach for enhancing critical thinking in Araling Panlipunan. It provided authentic opportunities for students to connect classroom learning with real-life experiences, strengthening analysis, evaluation, communication, and problem-solving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Teacher integration** into Araling Panlipunan competencies.
2. **Administrative support** through logistics, policy, and training.
3. **Curriculum development** to embed community-based learning.
4. **School-community partnerships** for authentic engagement.
5. **Future research** with larger samples, multiple schools, and extended interventions.

Appendices

DepEd Performance Descriptors

Rubrics

Descriptor	Range	Meaning
Beginning	0–10	Minimal analysis, recall only
Approaching Proficiency	11–20	Some analysis, limited evidence
Proficient	21–30	Clear analysis, evidence-based
Advanced	31+	Sophisticated reasoning, synthesis

Analytic rubric for written assessment and oral participation rubric attached.

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