

Beyond the Classroom: Investigating the Influence of Active Community Engagement by Generation Z University Students on Academic Performance in Readings in Philippine History

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of active community engagement among Generation Z university students on academic performance in Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study. An embedded mixed-methods design was employed, with the quantitative component serving as the primary strand and qualitative interviews providing contextual explanation. The quantitative phase involved 319 first-year Generation Z students selected from a population of 346 across nine sections at a local university in Valenzuela, while the qualitative phase involved nine student class presidents with prior or current community-engagement experience. A researcher-developed questionnaire, validated by three experts and pilot-tested with 30 non-participants, obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .916. Community engagement was described across community-based learning, political participation, faith-based engagement,

cultural engagement, community-based sports, community-based drug-prevention programs, and eco-volunteerism. Political participation received the highest overall mean ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.10$), while faith-based engagement received the lowest ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.25$). Students' final grades were generally high ($M = 92.85$, $SD = 4.81$). The thesis's statistical model showed a very weak relationship between community engagement and academic performance ($r = .038$, $R^2 = .001$), with the reported model remaining non-significant ($F = .456$, $p = .500$). Qualitative findings nevertheless identified intrinsic motivation, family influence, emotional fulfillment, civic awareness and social responsibility, skill development, and academic connection as important influences on engagement. Students also described benefits involving time management, communication, leadership, critical thinking, motivation, and real-world application. The findings indicate that community engagement may contribute to students' holistic and civic development even when its direct statistical relationship with course grades is negligible. The study supports curriculum-integrated service-learning and structured school-community engagement opportunities.

Keywords: *community engagement, Generation Z, academic performance, Readings in Philippine History, service-learning, mixed methods*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z students participate in community life through volunteering, advocacy, cultural activities, environmental initiatives, political discussion, sports, faith-based activities, and other civic spaces. These forms of engagement are increasingly relevant to higher education because they connect academic learning with social

responsibility, leadership, and participation beyond the classroom. Service-oriented and community-based experiences have long been associated with gains in civic responsibility and student development, although their direct association with academic performance varies across contexts (Astin & Sax, 1998; Celio et al., 2011).

The relationship between engagement and academic performance is especially important in general education subjects that address history, citizenship, culture, and society. Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study provides a context in which students encounter themes that can be reinforced through participation in real communities. Service-learning literature suggests that structured reflection and curricular integration can strengthen academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes by helping students connect theory with lived experience (Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012).

At the same time, active participation can compete with academic responsibilities. Students may value civic action while facing time constraints, financial limitations, limited access to programs, or uncertainty about how engagement relates to classroom learning. The uploaded thesis identified a localized evidence gap in the Philippine higher-education context: although community involvement among young people is visible, little institution-specific evidence was available on whether different forms of engagement were associated with academic performance in Readings in Philippine History.

The study was therefore guided by Social Capital Theory, which views relationships, networks, trust, and shared norms as resources that may support individual and collective outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). In this perspective, students' community networks can provide opportunities for learning, belonging, mentorship, and participation even when such benefits are not fully captured by course grades.

Accordingly, the study described the level of Generation Z students' community engagement across seven dimensions, identified factors that contributed to their engagement, examined the perceived effects of engagement on academic experiences, described their course performance, tested whether community engagement significantly influenced academic performance, and proposed school-based responses that could integrate civic participation with learning.

Literature Review

Community Engagement and Service-Learning

Community engagement in higher education ranges from volunteering and civic participation to curriculum-linked service-learning. The distinction is important because service-learning intentionally connects community activity with academic objectives and reflection. Research has shown that undergraduate service participation can strengthen academic development, life skills, and civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998). Meta-analytic evidence likewise indicates positive effects of service-learning on attitudes toward school and learning, social skills, civic engagement, and academic outcomes (Celio et al., 2011).

The strength of these outcomes depends on how community experiences are organized. Conway et al. (2009) found positive academic, personal, social, and citizenship effects across service-learning studies, with structured reflection associated with larger gains. Yorio and Ye (2012) similarly reported positive effects on understanding social issues, personal insight, and cognitive development. These findings support the thesis's proposal that engagement should be curriculum-integrated rather than treated as an unrelated extracurricular activity.

In the Philippine context, community learning also intersects with local traditions of collective action and volunteering. Millora (2024) showed how community-based volunteers learn through shared practice while also navigating formalized organizational processes. Such findings reinforce the value of recognizing community participation as a site of learning while remaining attentive to the institutional conditions that shape participation.

Generation Z Civic and Political Participation

Generation Z's civic engagement increasingly occurs across both offline and digital spaces. Political participation may include voting, rallies, campaigns, political discussion, advocacy, and information-seeking

through social media. Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) demonstrated that online participation includes distinct but related modes that can interact with offline political behavior. Ahmad et al. (2019) likewise found strong links between online political activity, political awareness, and real-life participation among university students.

This digital orientation helps explain why students in the thesis reported stronger political awareness than direct action. Staying informed through news and social media received stronger ratings than campaigning, protests, or other highly active forms of participation. The pattern suggests that participation is not binary; students may be civically aware and politically attentive while engaging selectively in visible or time-intensive activities.

Higher education can provide structured opportunities that help translate awareness into informed participation. High-impact educational practices emphasize learning experiences that require sustained involvement, reflection, and connection with real-world problems (Kuh, 2008). Within social studies and history education, well-designed community engagement can therefore function as an experiential complement to formal instruction.

Social Capital, Cultural Participation, and Student Development

Social Capital Theory provides a useful explanation for the non-grade outcomes of community engagement. Bourdieu (1986) emphasized resources embedded in durable networks, while Coleman (1988) explained how social relationships can facilitate action and human-capital development. Portes (1998) later synthesized the origins, functions, and limitations of social capital, while Putnam (2000) emphasized the civic value of networks, trust, and participation. Together, these perspectives show how network-based resources can operate through information, support, expectations, and shared norms.

The thesis applied this framework to Generation Z students' participation in cultural, faith-based, sports, drug-prevention, environmental, and community-learning activities. These activities can create networks and shared experiences that contribute to belonging, identity, leadership, and civic responsibility. Community-based cultural education, for example, has been linked with increased awareness and participation in heritage conservation (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023).

Community participation can also create spaces in which students practice initiative and social responsibility independent of measurable grade gains. This distinction is important because social capital may influence motivation, confidence, communication, and opportunities for learning without producing a strong direct linear relationship with a single academic metric. The thesis's qualitative findings are consistent with this broader developmental interpretation.

Academic Performance and the Engagement-Achievement Relationship

Academic performance is often influenced by multiple personal, instructional, family, and institutional factors. Consequently, community engagement may contribute to academic outcomes directly in some settings and indirectly in others. The service-learning literature shows average positive effects, but the magnitude depends on program design, curricular connection, reflection, participant characteristics, and context (Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009).

The thesis's focus on one course and one university therefore provides a context-specific test rather than a universal estimate of the effects of engagement. A weak statistical relationship with course grades would not necessarily contradict evidence that engagement develops social or cognitive skills, because the dependent variable captures only one dimension of student development. This is particularly relevant when students already have generally high and relatively clustered grades.

The study's conceptual model integrated these ideas through an Input-Process-Output framework. Community-engagement dimensions and academic performance were treated as inputs, the embedded mixed-methods analysis represented the process, and proposed workshops and curriculum-integrated service-learning initiatives represented the outputs.

Conceptual Framework

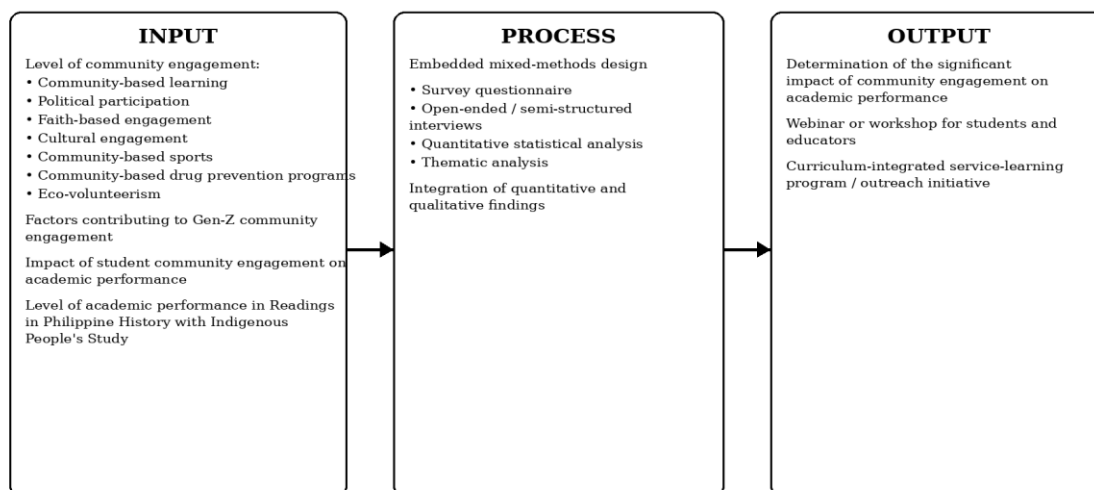


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of the Study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an embedded mixed-methods design. The quantitative strand served as the primary component and measured community engagement and academic performance, while the qualitative strand provided supplemental explanations of students' motivations and perceived outcomes. Quantitative and qualitative evidence was integrated during interpretation to provide both measurable patterns and contextual understanding, consistent with embedded mixed-methods logic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at a local university in Valenzuela City, Philippines, during Academic Year 2024-2025. The participants were enrolled in the general-education course Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study. The specific setting was selected because the course provided a common academic context for examining how community participation intersected with historical, cultural, and civic learning.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The quantitative population consisted of 346 first-year Generation Z students across nine sections. Using purposive sampling and the study's inclusion criteria, 319 students were included in the quantitative phase. Section samples ranged from 25 to 46 students. The inclusion criteria required participants to belong to Generation Z, be enrolled as first-year students during the specified academic year, and be taking Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study.

For the qualitative phase, nine students who served as class presidents were selected for semi-structured interviews. The thesis states that these participants were officially enrolled in the course and had previous or current experience in community engagement, making them suitable key informants for exploring motivations and perceived academic and developmental effects.

Table 1. Distribution of Quantitative Respondents

Section	Population	Sample
A	40	37
B	38	35
C	43	39
D	51	46
E	39	36
F	37	34
G	32	30
H	40	37
I	26	25
Total	346	319

Research Instrument

The quantitative instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire measuring seven dimensions of community engagement: community-based learning, political participation, faith-based engagement, cultural engagement, community-based sports, community-based drug-prevention programs, and eco-volunteerism. Responses were recorded using a five-point frequency scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Academic performance was measured using students officially recorded final grades in Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study.

The questionnaire underwent content validation by three experts in education and social science. A pilot test with 30 Generation Z students who were not part of the final sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .916, which the thesis interpreted as excellent internal consistency. The qualitative interview guide was also reviewed by the same validators for clarity, neutrality, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the objectives.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study first underwent research-ethics review and institutional permission procedures. After approval, the researcher coordinated with the university and relevant offices, explained the study to eligible participants, obtained informed consent, and administered the quantitative survey. Final course grades were obtained through the authorized academic process described in the thesis. After the quantitative results were organized, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the nine key informants to deepen the interpretation of engagement-related experiences.

Data Analysis

Weighted means and standard deviations were used to describe the seven dimensions of community engagement. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize final grades. The thesis reported normality testing using the Shapiro-Wilk test and then applied a model presented as an ANOVA/regression output to test the influence of community engagement on academic performance. The reported model included B, beta, t, r, R-squared, F, and p values, with statistical significance evaluated at the .05 level.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The uploaded thesis identifies recurring themes concerning motivations for engagement and students' perceptions of how community participation influenced their academic and personal development.

Ethical Consideration

The study emphasized informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' views, especially because some interview questions addressed political participation and social issues. Participant codes were used instead of names, access to data was restricted, and the thesis described safeguards intended to minimize emotional, social, and reputational risk.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Community Engagement

Generation Z students reported varying levels of participation across the seven community-engagement dimensions. Political participation obtained the highest overall mean ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.10$; Often), followed by community-based learning ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.04$; Often), cultural engagement ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.20$; Often), and community-based sports ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.27$; Often). Community-based drug-prevention programs ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.39$), eco-volunteerism ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.11$), and faith-based engagement ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.25$) were interpreted as Sometimes.

Table 2. *Summary of Community-Engagement Dimensions*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Political participation	3.77	1.10	Often
Community-based learning	3.51	1.04	Often
Cultural engagement	3.50	1.20	Often
Community-based sports	3.48	1.27	Often
Community-based drug-prevention programs	3.37	1.39	Sometimes
Eco-volunteerism	3.27	1.11	Sometimes
Faith-based engagement	3.05	1.25	Sometimes

The pattern shows a recurring gap between favorable beliefs and direct participation. Students strongly recognized the value of community learning, political awareness, sports, drug prevention, and environmental action, yet activities requiring regular attendance, volunteering, workshops, or organized participation often received lower ratings. This distinction is consistent with research showing that civic engagement can take different forms and that awareness or online participation does not necessarily translate into sustained offline action (Ahmad et al., 2019; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013).

Academic Performance in Readings in Philippine History

Academic performance was generally high. Across the 319 students, the mean final grade was 92.85, with a minimum of 51 and a maximum of 99. The thesis reported a standard deviation of 4.81, indicating that most grades clustered relatively closely around the high mean despite a small number of extreme scores.

Table 3. *Academic Performance of the Quantitative Respondents*

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
319	51	99	92.85	4.81

The high average is important when interpreting the relationship between engagement and grades. When most students are already performing at a high level, a single course grade may provide limited variability for detecting small differences associated with community participation. Moreover, service-learning research indicates that engagement may influence civic, social, and personal outcomes in addition to academic achievement (Celio et al., 2011; Yorio & Ye, 2012).

Influence of Community Engagement on Academic Performance

The statistical model reported in the thesis did not show a significant direct influence of community engagement on academic performance. The coefficient for community engagement was $B = .298$ with $SE = .442$, standardized beta = .038, $t = .675$, and $p = .500$. The model also reported $r = .038$, $R^2 = .001$, and $F = .456$. Thus, the relationship was very weak and the model explained only 0.1% of the variance in final grades.

Table 4. *Reported Model for Community Engagement and Academic Performance*

B	SE	β	t	p	r	R ²
.298	.442	.038	.675	.500	.038	.001

Note. The thesis labels this table ANOVA but presents regression-style coefficients and model statistics; the values are reproduced as reported. $F = .456$; $\alpha = .05$.

The null hypothesis was therefore retained. Community engagement, as measured in this study, was not a meaningful direct predictor of final course grades. This result does not imply that engagement lacked educational value. Rather, it suggests that grades may be more directly shaped by other factors and that the benefits of engagement may appear in domains such as civic awareness, communication, leadership, identity, or application of knowledge. Such a multidimensional interpretation is consistent with service-learning research, which reports broader social and cognitive outcomes beyond grades alone (Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012).

Qualitative Factors Contributing to Community Engagement

The qualitative component involved nine student leaders with community-engagement experience. The thesis organized the factors contributing to their engagement into six themes: Intrinsic Motivation, Family Influence, Emotional Fulfillment, Civic Awareness and Social Responsibility, Skill Development, and Academic Connection. These themes indicate that participation was sustained by a combination of personal purpose, social modeling, positive emotion, responsibility to others, opportunities for growth, and perceived connections between community experience and academic learning.

Table 5. *Qualitative Themes on Factors Contributing to Community Engagement*

Theme	Interpretive Focus
Intrinsic Motivation	Desire to help, contribute, and make a positive difference.
Family Influence	Encouragement and role-modeling from parents and significant others.
Emotional Fulfillment	Sense of purpose, satisfaction, and positive emotion from helping.
Civic Awareness and Social Responsibility	Recognition of community needs and personal responsibility.
Skill Development	Opportunities to build practical, interpersonal, and organizational skills.
Academic Connection	Perceived links between community experiences and school learning.

These themes are consistent with Social Capital Theory because engagement was not described solely as individual activity; it was embedded in networks, relationships, examples from family and community, and shared civic experiences. The findings also support the thesis's view that community participation can generate resources such as belonging, confidence, support, and practical learning even when the statistical association with grades remains negligible (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998).

Perceived Effects of Community Engagement on Students

The thesis's qualitative results further organized perceived effects of engagement into six themes: Enhanced Time Management and Discipline; Increased Confidence and Communication Skills; Development of Leadership and Initiative; Broadened Perspective and Critical Thinking; Motivation and Emotional Fulfillment; and Learning Through Real-World Application. These themes explain why students could report meaningful educational benefits despite the non-significant quantitative relationship with final grades.

Table 6. *Qualitative Themes on the Perceived Effects of Community Engagement*

Theme	Developmental Meaning
Enhanced Time Management and Discipline	Balancing academic responsibilities with participation required organization and self-management.
Increased Confidence and Communication Skills	Community interaction provided opportunities to speak, coordinate, and collaborate.
Development of Leadership and Initiative	Participation encouraged students to take responsibility and act on community needs.
Broadened Perspective and Critical Thinking	Real social contexts exposed students to diverse experiences and viewpoints.
Motivation and Emotional Fulfillment	Helping others reinforced purpose, satisfaction, and continued involvement.
Learning Through Real-World Application	Community experiences helped students connect classroom concepts with lived social realities.

This qualitative pattern is compatible with broader service-learning evidence. Meta-analyses have found gains in personal insight, social understanding, cognitive development, and civic outcomes even when academic effects vary in size (Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). The qualitative findings therefore complement rather than contradict the quantitative result: community engagement may be educationally meaningful without functioning as a strong direct predictor of course grades.

Proposed Educational Response

The thesis's preliminary materials identify a comprehensive whole-school approach to student and teacher engagement and name two proposed programs: SERVE-ED (Service-Learning for Empowerment and Development) and IMPACT-Hub (Integrated Mentorship and Participation for Action, Citizenship, and Transformation). Consistent with the conceptual framework, these proposals position workshops, mentoring, and curriculum-integrated service-learning as mechanisms for connecting civic participation with academic and social development. This direction is consistent with high-impact-practice literature emphasizing purposeful, structured, and reflective experiential learning (Kuh, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Generation Z students in the study demonstrated moderate but uneven community engagement. They most frequently reported political participation, community-based learning, cultural engagement, and community-based sports, while faith-based engagement, eco-volunteerism, and drug-prevention participation were less frequent. Their academic performance in Readings in Philippine History with Indigenous People's Study was generally high and relatively consistent.

Community engagement did not significantly predict academic performance in the reported statistical model, and the observed relationship was negligible. However, the qualitative findings showed that engagement was associated with intrinsic motivation, family influence, emotional fulfillment, civic awareness, skill development, and academic connection, while students also perceived gains in discipline, communication, leadership, critical thinking, motivation, and real-world learning. The study therefore concludes that the value of community engagement is better understood as multidimensional and developmental rather than as a direct determinant of course grades alone.

Recommendation

Higher education institutions should create structured, accessible, and curriculum-connected opportunities for community engagement, particularly through service-learning activities linked to general-education courses

such as Readings in Philippine History. Reflection, academic integration, and explicit learning outcomes should accompany community activities so that civic experiences are meaningfully connected to course content.

Student-support units, faculty members, and community partners may use the thesis's proposed whole-school direction, including SERVE-ED and IMPACT-Hub, as organizing concepts for workshops, mentorship, citizenship activities, and community-based learning. Programs should address barriers identified in the thesis, including limited time, inconsistent access to activities, financial constraints, and the gap between positive attitudes and actual participation.

Future research should use complete multi-institutional samples, additional academic and developmental outcomes, and longitudinal designs to examine whether particular forms or intensities of engagement influence performance over time. Researchers should also distinguish extracurricular volunteering from curriculum-integrated service-learning and explore whether family, school, peer, or institutional support moderates the relationship between community engagement and academic outcomes.

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