

Students' Awareness of Heraldic Code in Selected Private and Public Schools: A Comparative Study

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Date Submitted:

August 16, 2026

Date Accepted:

September 11, 2026

Date Published:

October 14, 2026

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.2336286

ABSTRACT

This study assessed and compared junior high school students' awareness of the Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 8491) in selected public and private schools in the City Schools Division of Tayabas City. A quantitative descriptive-survey and descriptive-comparative design involved 566 Grades 7–10 students, including 362 public-school and 204 private-school respondents selected through stratified random sampling. A researcher-developed, expert-validated and pilot-tested questionnaire measured awareness of national-flag protocols, the national anthem and the national motto. Frequency, percentage and weighted arithmetic mean summarized responses; Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney U tests examined group differences at the .05 level. The results indicated very high reported awareness of the flag-raising ceremony (3.78), national anthem (3.69) and national motto (3.68), but comparatively lower awareness of flag design (3.20) and specifications (3.23).

Significant differences emerged in selected indicators by age, sex and school type, although these differences were not uniform across all domains. The findings informed the proposed Tayabense Youth Patriots Program, emphasizing technical understanding of flag regulations, reflective civic learning and meaningful observance of national symbols. The study concludes that strong ceremonial and values-related awareness coexist with specific gaps in knowledge of the Heraldic Code, suggesting a need for targeted school-based reinforcement.

Keywords: *Heraldic Code, Republic Act No. 8491, national symbols, civic education, student awareness, public–private school comparison*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine flag, national anthem and national motto are prominent symbols of sovereignty and shared citizenship. Republic Act No. 8491, or the Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines, establishes rules for their display, observance and protection (Republic Act No. 8491, 1998). Educational institutions are central to transmitting these norms because learners encounter national symbols through recurring flag ceremonies, curricular instruction and commemorative activities. Department of Education Order No. 50, s. 2015 further directs appropriate observance of flag raising, flag lowering and the national anthem in schools (Department of Education, 2015).

Ceremonial participation, however, does not necessarily demonstrate accurate knowledge of technical requirements or reflective appreciation of civic values. Educational scholarship distinguishes routine compliance from forms of citizenship learning grounded in knowledge, judgment and participation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Banks, 2020). Research on student nationalism in the Philippines also identifies variation in attitudes and symbolic understanding across learner backgrounds (Manugas, 2022). In the related field of cultural heritage, Pastera (2024) describes how familiarity with cultural practices can coexist with incomplete conceptual understanding. These concerns underscore the importance of examining what students understand about heraldic protocols rather than assuming that observance alone guarantees literacy.

In the City Schools Division of Tayabas City, the original thesis reported preliminary school observations of differences in learners' attention during flag ceremonies, providing a local rationale for a systematic comparison. Public and private schools operate under the same national code but may differ in institutional routines and forms of civic

instruction. Rather than presuming a particular school sector is more knowledgeable, the present study compares reported awareness across these settings while considering age and sex. The comparison is descriptive, and group differences cannot establish that school type or any learner characteristic causes awareness.

The study specifically assessed Grades 7–10 students' reported awareness of national flag design, hoisting and display, flag-raising ceremonies, the pledge, specifications and flag retreat; the national anthem; and the national motto's Makadiyos, Makatao, Makakalikasan and Makabansa dimensions. It also examined differences according to age, sex and school type, and used the results to formulate the Tayabense Youth Patriots Program (TYPP). This localized evidence may guide civic instruction, school-ceremony reinforcement and curriculum support without extending the findings beyond the schools studied.

Literature Review

The Heraldic Code, National Symbols, and Civic Literacy

Republic Act No. 8491 prescribes the design and observance of Philippine national symbols, creating a common reference for flag display, anthem rendition, the pledge and the national motto (Republic Act No. 8491, 1998). The accompanying school-policy context gives these requirements a recurring place in students' experience. Department of Education (2015) provides procedural guidance for official ceremonies, including the sequence of public-school flag observances. Legal knowledge and actual observance are related but conceptually distinct, making their conflation a potential weakness in survey interpretation.

Civic literacy also involves how students understand the social meanings of shared symbols. Banks (2020) connects citizenship education to identity, democratic values and knowledge construction, whereas Westheimer and Kahne (2004) distinguish personally responsible, participatory and justice-oriented conceptions of citizenship. The international civic-assessment framework likewise treats civic knowledge, attitudes, engagement and contextual influences as distinguishable measurement domains (Schulz et al., 2023). Taken together, these perspectives suggest examining rule-based awareness alongside the values attributed to national symbols, without equating agreement with a statement to objectively observed compliance.

Studies close to the Philippine context make the distinction especially relevant. Manugas (2022) reported differences in student nationalism linked to personal circumstances; Pastera (2024) documented the varied ways Filipino students articulate cultural heritage. These studies do not measure Republic Act No. 8491 in the same population, but they support a rationale for assessing symbolic and civic knowledge directly. The present research addresses that localized gap among selected Tayabas City schools.

School Experience, Demographic Differences, and Civic Participation

The school environment influences how learners encounter civic traditions. Hüning (2022) identifies relationships between schools' collective orientation and students' civic engagement; Hoskins and Janmaat (2019) situate civic participation within wider educational and social inequalities. Such scholarship cautions against reducing awareness differences to age, sex or school classification alone. Curricular exposure, collective practices and social context may all contribute to observed patterns, although the present study did not test those mechanisms.

Educational arrangements that combine structured knowledge and engagement are relevant to civic outcomes. Cohen et al. (2021) argue for sustained attention to civic education and civic capacity in public schools, while Liu et al. (2021) discuss evaluating active-citizenship programs for young people facing educational disadvantage. International guidance similarly encourages learning objectives addressing cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral dimensions (UNESCO, 2015). This supports a framework in which students learn what the national symbols mean, why rules exist and how to participate respectfully.

For a descriptive-comparative study, demographic analyses should be interpreted as differences in observed scores rather than evidence of universal behavioral traits. The present thesis compares awareness by six age groups, sex and school type; its inferential tests concern particular questionnaire domains. The theoretical literature therefore provides a basis for cautious analysis of which domains differ, rather than a broad claim that an entire demographic group possesses stronger patriotism.

Experiential Instruction and School-Based Enhancement Programs

Civic education is often strengthened when students have opportunities to discuss public responsibilities and practice them purposefully. Kolb (2015) frames experiential learning as a cycle connecting experience, reflection and application. Applied to the Heraldic Code, an activity should move beyond repeating a pledge to examining its meaning and the legal and historical reasons for respectful observance. UNESCO (2015) similarly advocates translating civic learning objectives into adaptable, age-appropriate experiences.

In the Philippines, Piñgul (2015) evaluated a supplemental civic education initiative and reported higher civic attitude and efficacy outcomes among participants than nonparticipants, while emphasizing the need to evaluate such programs systematically. This demonstrates the potential value of structured extracurricular citizenship activities, although the present research did not measure the effects of its own proposed program. UNESCO (2020) further emphasizes action-oriented learning in education for sustainable development, relevant to environmental responsibility within the national motto.

The synthesis of the reviewed literature supports two complementary priorities: accurate procedural understanding of national symbols and reflective internalization of the values they represent. These principles informed the study's proposed Tayabense Youth Patriots Program, intended as an intervention for the observed gaps, not as a proven effective program. The study conceptualized demographics and heraldic awareness as inputs, survey administration and statistical examination as the process, and TYPP development as the intended output.

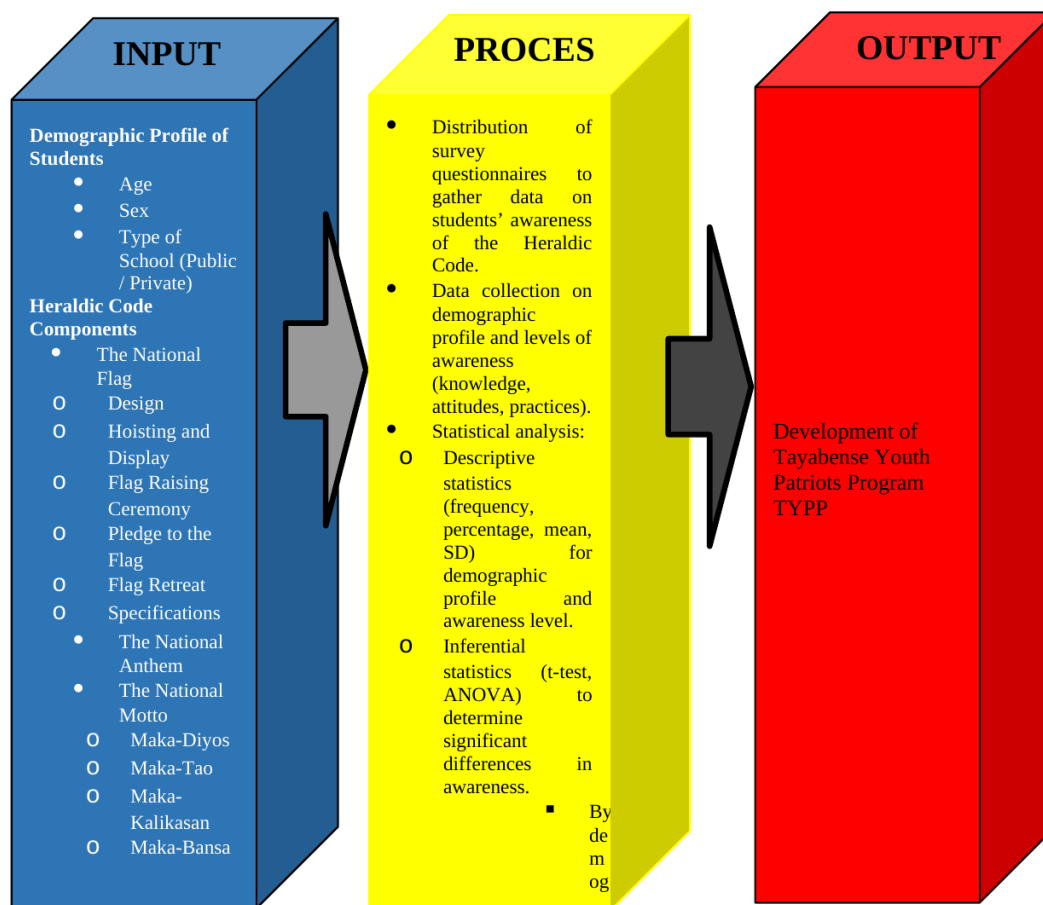


Figure 1. *Conceptual paradigm of the study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-survey and descriptive-comparative design. The survey described learner characteristics and levels of awareness; comparative analyses examined differences in awareness when respondents were grouped by age, sex and school type. No variables were manipulated and no intervention outcomes were experimentally evaluated.

Research Locale

The research was conducted in selected public and private junior high schools in the City Schools Division of Tayabas City, Quezon Province, Philippines. The thesis identifies the study period as August 2025 to June 2026. The selected schools represented two institutional types within the same division.

Participants and Sampling Technique

A total of 566 Grades 7–10 learners participated: 362 from three selected public schools and 204 from three selected private schools. The thesis describes stratified random sampling and an allocation of 121, 121 and 120 respondents across public schools and 68 respondents in each private school. Eligibility required current enrollment in the target grade levels and willingness to participate. Although a different sample total appears in the thesis's scope paragraph, the respondent distribution and demographic results consistently document 566 learners. The study described its sample-size determination using Cochran's sampling formula (Cochran, 1977).

Table 1. Distribution of student respondents by school sector.

School sector	School A	School B	School C	Total
Public	121	121	120	362
Private	68	68	68	204
Combined	189	189	188	566

Research Instrument

The researcher designed a two-part questionnaire based on Republic Act No. 8491 and related literature. Part I collected age, sex and school type. Part II measured awareness of six national-flag dimensions, the national anthem and four dimensions of the national motto using a four-point response scale. The thesis defined 1.00–1.75 as Not Aware, 1.76–2.50 as Slightly Aware, 2.51–3.25 as Aware and 3.26–4.00 as Very Aware. Three education practitioners reviewed the instrument: a master teacher, an Araling Panlipunan head teacher and a principal. The revised instrument was pilot-tested with 30 nonrespondents from public and 30 from private schools in the Division of Quezon. The thesis reports an overall Cronbach's alpha of .898 for both groups; it also presents varying reliability values across subscales.

Data Gathering Procedure

After obtaining permission from the Tayabas City Schools Division Office and the selected school heads, the researcher coordinated with class advisers to identify eligible students. The study purpose was explained, participation was solicited and questionnaires were administered in print or digital form where feasible. Responses were collected, checked for completeness, tallied and encoded for analysis. The researcher-maintained confidentiality and restricted use of the data to the research purposes described in the thesis.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages described demographic characteristics, and weighted arithmetic means summarized awareness ratings. Normality and variance-homogeneity checks informed the use of nonparametric comparisons. The thesis reports Kruskal–Wallis H tests for age groups and Mann–Whitney U tests for comparisons by sex and school type, with a significance threshold of .05. Reported p values were transcribed from the original test tables; values displayed as .000 in the thesis are expressed here as $p < .001$. No new statistical tests or estimates were generated.

Ethical Consideration

The thesis documented institutional permission, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization or pseudonymization, minimization of harm and responsible reporting. Because the participants were junior high school students, procedures for parent or guardian permission and student assent should be confirmed by the corresponding author before submission; the manuscript does not claim a specific institutional ethics-board approval number that was not supplied in the thesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The sample included 566 learners: 292 males (51.6%) and 274 females (48.4%). The public sector accounted for 362 respondents (64.0%), while private schools contributed 204 (36.0%). The largest age groups were 15 years (165; 29.2%) and 13 years (135; 23.9%), followed by 16 years (97; 17.1%), 14 years (92; 16.3%), 12 years (73; 12.9%) and 17 years (4; 0.7%). This composition furnished the age, sex and school-type groups for the descriptive-comparative analysis, but should not be taken as representative of all Tayabas City learners beyond the sampling frame.

Awareness of National Flag, National Anthem, and National Motto

Table 2 consolidates the study's summary awareness measures. Respondents reported particularly strong awareness of the conduct of flag raising (3.78) and the national anthem (3.69), with correspondingly high awareness of the four values of the national motto (sub-total 3.68). In contrast, the flag-design score (3.20) and flag-specification score (3.23) fell within the Aware rather than Very Aware range. These contrasts indicate that routine and values-oriented knowledge was generally stronger than the technical content addressed by the questionnaire.

Table 2. *Students' reported awareness of the Heraldic Code (weighted arithmetic means).*

Awareness domain	Public	Private	Reported overall
National flag — design	3.19	3.21	3.20
National flag — hoisting and display	3.27	3.29	3.28
National flag — flag-raising ceremony	3.76	3.79	3.78
National flag — pledge to the flag	3.46	3.50	3.48
National flag — specifications	3.22	3.23	3.23
National flag — flag retreat	3.48	3.62	3.55
National flag — sub-total	3.40	3.44	3.42
National anthem	3.67	3.71	3.69
National motto — Makadiyos	3.66	3.68	3.67
National motto — Makatao	3.61	3.70	3.66
National motto — Makakalikasan	3.64	3.73	3.69
National motto — Makabansa	3.67	3.68	3.68
National motto — sub-total	3.65	3.70	3.68
Reported overall WAM (thesis)	3.86	3.91	3.89

Within the flag-related indicators, knowledge of ceremonies was more developed than knowledge of the flag's design and technical specifications. This difference is compatible with the distinction between participation in familiar rituals and conceptual or legal understanding. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and Banks (2020) emphasize the need for civic learning that exceeds rule-following, while the official policy framework gives schools regular opportunities to teach those rules explicitly (Department of Education, 2015). Thus, the results suggest strengthening instruction on colors, symbolism, measurements and display conditions while retaining respectful ceremonial practice.

The National Anthem and each of the four National Motto domains received Very Aware ratings: Makadiyos (3.67), Makatao (3.66), Makakalikasan (3.69) and Makabansa (3.68). These ratings describe reported awareness, not direct behavioral observation or tested legal proficiency. The pattern nevertheless indicates that learners recognize the ethical and social dimensions associated with the nation's symbols. UNESCO (2015, 2020) emphasizes the value of linking civic and environmental knowledge to reflection and action; this connection is pertinent to translating motto-related awareness into sustained school and community learning.

Comparison by Age, Sex, and School Type

The detailed age-group comparisons were significant for the conduct of the flag-raising ceremony ($p = .027$), pledge to the flag ($p = .036$), national anthem ($p = .012$), Makadiyos ($p < .001$), Makatao ($p = .001$), Makabansa ($p = .003$), national motto sub-total ($p < .001$) and the reported overall measure ($p < .001$). The age-group test for Makakalikasan was not significant ($p = .204$), and several technical flag categories were likewise nonsignificant. Thus, differences by age were selective rather than common to every awareness measure.

Sex-group comparisons likewise identified significant differences in the flag-raising ceremony ($p = .030$), national anthem ($p = .004$), Makadiyos ($p < .001$), Makatao ($p = .001$), Makakalikasan ($p = .014$), Makabansa ($p = .007$) and the reported overall measure ($p = .001$). Flag design ($p = .704$) and flag specifications ($p = .877$), among other flag indicators, showed no significant differences. The findings indicate differences in selected reported awareness domains but do not justify essentialist explanations of male or female civic aptitude. School culture and student experience may play roles not measured by this design (Hüning, 2022; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019).

When grouped by school type, significant results were reported for flag-raising ceremony ($p = .039$), flag retreat ($p < .001$), Makatao ($p = .009$), Makakalikasan ($p = .013$), national-motto sub-total ($p = .046$) and overall awareness ($p = .038$). In contrast, design ($p = .452$), hoisting and display ($p = .617$), pledge ($p = .130$), specifications ($p = .516$) and national anthem ($p = .064$) did not show significant differences. While private-school means were slightly higher in most summarized domains, both sectors generally occupied the same qualitative awareness band. Given the observational comparison, the findings cannot attribute those differences to school ownership.

Table 3. *Selected significant and nonsignificant demographic comparisons reported in the thesis.*

Domain	Age p	Sex p	School-type p
Flag design	.537	.704	.452
Flag-raising ceremony	.027	.030	.039
Pledge to the flag	.036	.271	.130
Flag retreat	.214	.447	< .001
National anthem	.012	.004	.064
Makadiyos	< .001	< .001	.087
Makatao	.001	.001	.009
Makakalikasan	.204	.014	.013
Makabansa	.003	.007	.838
National motto sub-total	< .001	< .001	.046
Overall awareness	< .001	.001	.038

Implications for the Tayabense Youth Patriots Program

The results supported the development of the proposed Tayabense Youth Patriots Program (TYPP), which the thesis designed to promote accurate knowledge of Republic Act No. 8491 and deepen appreciation of national symbols. A useful implementation sequence would begin with brief diagnostic checks of national-flag design and specifications, proceed to guided demonstrations of hoisting, lowering and ceremonies, and then introduce student-led reflection on the national motto and community responsibility. The program's emphasis on knowledge, guided practice and reflection is compatible with experiential learning principles (Kolb, 2015) and civic-education program evidence (Piñgul, 2015).

TYPP was an output proposed on the basis of survey findings; the thesis did not experimentally measure post-implementation change. It would therefore be inaccurate to describe the program as already improving patriotic behavior or compliance. A future implementation study could establish baseline knowledge, assess fidelity of delivery and compare subsequent knowledge and participation using appropriate measures. Liu et al. (2021) and Cohen et al. (2021) underscore the value of systematically assessing citizenship programs rather than inferring their success solely from participation.

CONCLUSION

Among the 566 surveyed Grades 7–10 students in selected Tayabas City public and private schools, reported awareness of the Heraldic Code was generally high, particularly for familiar patriotic ceremonies, the national anthem and the national motto. The relatively lower means for national-flag design (3.20) and specifications (3.23) indicate identifiable technical and conceptual gaps. Differences by age, sex and school type appeared in selected areas but were not universal, and the findings do not support causal explanations of those differences. The study contributes local comparative evidence for designing focused heraldic-literacy instruction while recognizing that self-reported awareness cannot establish actual compliance or behavioral change.

Recommendation

School leaders and Araling Panlipunan or values-education teachers should use the lower-scoring domains to prioritize short, explicit lessons on the design, specifications and lawful display of the Philippine flag. Flag ceremonies should be accompanied by guided explanations of their purpose, supported by demonstrations, student questioning and brief learning checks. Professional coordination across public and private schools could encourage consistent interpretation of Republic Act No. 8491 and applicable Department of Education guidelines.

The Schools Division may consider piloting the proposed Tayabense Youth Patriots Program as a structured combination of legal-literacy activities, student-led commemorations, reflective discussion and community participation. Parents and guardians may reinforce respectful observation and discuss the historical and civic meaning of national symbols at home. Future researchers should verify the thesis's reported aggregate mean, repeat the study in other divisions, examine the reliability of subscales and assess whether implementing the proposed program improves objectively tested knowledge or observed civic practices over time.

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