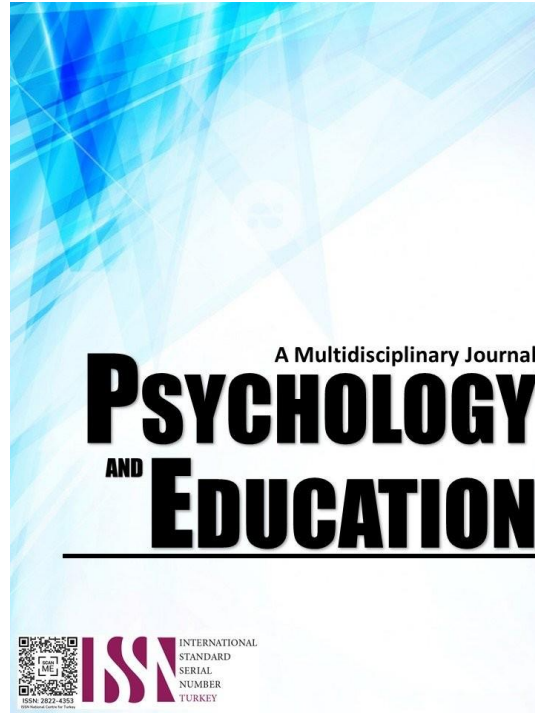


SOCIO-POLITICAL AWARENESS, RESEARCH, AND KNOWLEDGE (SPARK) PROGRAM AND THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENTS



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Socio-Political Awareness, Research, and Knowledge (SPARK) Program and The Civic Engagement of Humanities and Social Sciences Students

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Abstract

The SPARK Program is designed to enhance the socio-political awareness of HUMSS students at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School (KNCHS-SHS) by promoting civic engagement and experiential learning. This study evaluates the program's effectiveness and acceptability through the participation of 155 students and 8 Program Moderators and Faculty members. The study employed a quantitative design to assess the impact of the SPARK Program on civic engagement among KNCHS Senior High School students in the HUMSS strand. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to gauge the program's acceptability from both Program Moderators and Faculty members and student-participant perspectives aspects such as content, appropriateness, engagement, and social impact as well as to measure dimensions of civic engagement (behavioral participation, civic awareness, and social relationships). The sample size was estimated using Slovin's formula for the SPARK Program student-participants, and Program Moderators and Faculty members were selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize the findings and inferential techniques (correlation analysis) to determine the relationships between program acceptability and civic engagement. Findings reveal that the program is highly acceptable among administrators, master teachers, moderators, and coordinators, particularly in terms of content and appropriateness, aligning effectively with institutional goals. Students rated the program positively in engagement and social relationships, highlighting its success in linking discussions with real-world socio-political issues. The study also shows that students are highly engaged in civic activities, excelling in behavioral dimensions, civic awareness, and social relationships. Staying informed and understanding the importance of voting received the highest ratings. A significant positive correlation underscores the influence of the program's acceptability on students' civic involvement. Based on the findings, the study recommends expanding the program to other institutions, enhancing its activities to sustain engagement, and conducting regular assessments to ensure alignment with educational objectives.

Keywords: *spark program, civic engagement, humanities and social sciences students*

Introduction

Social and political awareness among citizens is a critical component of a functioning democracy and an engaged society (Dewey, 1916). An informed populace holds leaders and institutions accountable, ensuring transparency and reducing corruption (Putnam, 2000). Education plays a crucial role in shaping an informed and engaged citizenry. In the Philippines, the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand within the K-12 curriculum of Department of Education (DepEd) is designed to cultivate students' understanding of social, political, and cultural issues.

In Finland and Sweden, civic education is integrated into the standard curriculum through phenomenon-based learning and youth councils, providing students with direct engagement in governance (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Lonka, 2018). Similarly, the Democratic Knowledge Project at Harvard University equips students with media literacy skills and historical perspectives on democracy to combat misinformation (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2020).

These international models highlight the best practices that can enhance civic education, such as embedding it more deeply within the curriculum, incorporating media literacy training, and fostering hands-on governance experiences.

DepEd Order No. 34, s. 2022 streamlines the K to 12 Curriculum by focusing on the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). Although HUMSS specialized subjects primarily emphasize theoretical concepts, the curriculum also includes the subject "Community Engagement, Solidarity, and Citizenship," which aims to immerse students in community environments and enhance their understanding of social dynamics. Despite these efforts, students continue to struggle with engaging in real-world socio-political participation.

The Socio-Political Awareness, Research, and Knowledge (SPARK) Program was developed as an innovative initiative to bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and real-world civic engagement. By offering HUMSS students an immersive and interactive framework to explore social and political issues, the SPARK Program aims to cultivate an individual who is not only knowledgeable but also proactive in their communities.

Despite the K to 12 MELCs Curriculum and the promising framework of the SPARK Program, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the translation of theoretical civic education into practical civic participation within the Filipino context. Studies have shown that while Filipino students may possess basic political knowledge, their actual participation in governance, activism, and civic discourse remains low (Edera, S.M, et. al, 2023). Additionally, research indicates that misinformation and digital echo chambers further

hinder students' ability to engage in informed political discussions (Navo, M.T. & Balsomo, E., 2021). Although these studies have noted challenges among students, few have systematically evaluated whether programs like SPARK can effectively foster critical thinking and active civic engagement. These challenges highlight the need for innovative, interactive, and practical approaches to socio-political education.

This study aims to address this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of the SPARK Program at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School – Senior High School. Specifically, the study will examine how the program influences students' civic engagement, critical thinking, and ability to navigate contemporary socio-political challenges. The findings are expected to inform educators, policymakers, and academic institutions about potential curricular reforms that could better align theoretical instruction with practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the SPARK (Social and Political Awareness, Research, and Knowledge) program on the civic engagement of KNCHS - Senior High School students in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of acceptability of SPARK program as assessed by program moderators and faculty in terms of?
 - 1.1 Content
 - 1.2 Appropriateness
2. What is the level of acceptability of the SPARK program as assessed by SPARK program student-participants in terms of?
 - 2.1 Student Engagement
 - 2.2 Social Impact?
3. What is the level of civic engagement of HUMSS student-participants in terms of?
 - 3.1 Behavior
 - 3.2 Civic Awareness
 - 3.3 Social Relationships?
4. Is there a significant relationship between SPARK Program and civic engagement of HUMSS students?

Literature Review

This literature underscores a strong theoretical and empirical foundation that supports the use of curriculum supplements such as the SPARK Program in enhancing civic engagement and multicultural competence in educational settings. Banks and Banks (2019) argue that integrating diverse, culturally responsive content into curricula is not only instrumental in promoting critical thinking and empathy but also in fostering a more inclusive and socially just learning environment. This perspective is complemented by Torney-Purta et al. (2001), whose international study demonstrates that robust civic education is key to developing adolescents' civic knowledge and participation, thereby preparing them for active citizenship. Further reinforcing this notion, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) conceptualize engagement as a multifaceted construct that encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, suggesting that well-structured programs like SPARK can significantly enhance student motivation and involvement. Eccles and Barber (1999) add that participation in extracurricular activities is linked to positive developmental outcomes and strengthened social relationships, which are essential for fostering a sense of community and civic responsibility.

Moreover, Kahne and Middaugh (2008) highlight the importance of addressing the civic opportunity gap by ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to participatory civic learning experiences. Complementing these insights, studies by Liou (2004) and Doolittle and Faul (2013) demonstrate the practical benefits and challenges of implementing curriculum supplements aimed at enhancing civic skills, further emphasizing the need for such programs to be contextually relevant and adaptable. Collectively, these studies provide a compelling justification for the SPARK Program, suggesting that a curriculum supplement that integrates multicultural education, structured engagement, and equitable civic opportunities can play a transformative role in preparing students to be knowledgeable, active, and responsible citizens.

The study by Astin et al. (2000) provides a solid foundation of empirical evidence that has significantly influenced both research and practical applications in the field of service-learning. Its comprehensive analysis of multiple studies establishes it as a cornerstone for investigating how educational experiences foster positive outcomes, such as increased civic engagement. This research offers practical guidance, enabling educators and policymakers to design programs that are not only academically sound but also directly contribute to student empowerment and community involvement. Additionally, its findings are notable for their replicability across diverse educational contexts, illustrating that the benefits of service-learning hold true regardless of institutional or cultural differences. Together, these strengths make the study an invaluable resource for understanding and advancing effective, community-engaged educational practices.

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative research is a systematic investigation that involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to explain phenomena, test theories, or identify relationships among variables. Typically, quantitative research employs instruments such as surveys, experiments, or structured questionnaires to gather data that can be quantified and analyzed statistically, with the goal of generalizing findings to larger populations (Creswell, 2014). This method allows a collection of data from a larger sample size, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. A scale was used to quantify students' civic engagement levels, as recommended by DeVellis (2016) for measuring attitudes and perceptions.

To examine the relationship between SPARK program levels of acceptability and students' civic engagement, Babbie (2020) noted that correlational studies could determine associations between variables. Through this design, the study was able to identify the impact of SPARK program among HUMSS students in KNCHS-SHS.

Participants

The respondents of the study were the SPARK program student-participants of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand, program moderators, and faculty at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School Senior High School (KNCHS-SHS). For the level of acceptability of SPARK program, out of seven (7) master teachers, two (2) were a respondent since they were the subject group head under HUMSS Strand, three (3) program moderators, one (1) activity coordinator and one (1) approving authority who is a principal. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher intentionally selects participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that are deemed essential to the research question, Nikolopoulou (2022). For the second part of acceptability level and civic engagement, the respondents were taken from the SPARK program student-participants of HUMSS Students. According to Bobbit (2023), Slovin's formula is a simple mathematical equation used to estimate the minimum sample size needed for survey research when the total population size is known. The sample was selected using Slovin's Formula $n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$ for the level of civic engagement.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data, designed based on previous studies on civic engagement and educational program evaluation (DeVellis, 2016). To evaluate the level of acceptability of the SPARK Program, the researcher crafted an expert-validated instrument consisting of forty (40) items divided into four sub-sections. Part 1 focused on the SPARK program's contents of activities, comprising ten (10) items answered by program moderators and faculty. Part 2 examined the SPARK program's appropriateness of activities, also consisting of ten (10) items answered by program moderators and faculty. Part 3 addressed the SPARK program's student engagements and interests, with ten (10) items answered by student-participants. Finally, Part 4 assessed the SPARK program's social impact, consisting of ten (10) items answered by student-participants. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of acceptability of SPARK program as perceived by program moderators and faculty, and student-participants.

Procedure

The data-gathering procedure is a critical component of research studies. A well-designed data-gathering procedure ensures that the data collected is accurate, consistent, and reliable. It minimizes errors and biases, leading to more trustworthy results and conclusions. The diagram below depicts the data collection process's sequence.

First, the researcher sought the approval of the Dean of Graduate School at SKSU to conduct the study. A permit to conduct the study was likewise sought from the office of the Senior High School Assistant Principal for Academics to gain access to the school's resources, facilities, and HUMSS students of KNCHS-SHS. After the office of the Senior High School Assistant Principal for Academics approved, the researcher distributed the survey questionnaires to the intended respondents, including SPARK Program student-participants, program moderators and faculty, and retrieved them immediately after the respondents completed the questions.

Data Analysis

The study utilized several statistical formulae to treat the data for presentation, analysis, and interpretation. To answer problems 1, 2, and 3, the researcher used frequency, mean, and weighted mean to determine the level of acceptability of the SPARK program and the civic engagement level of the SPARK Program student-participants. The arithmetical average of each clause in the questionnaire was identified. To answer problem 4, the researcher used the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) to determine the relationship between the level of acceptability of the SPARK program, as assessed by the student-participants, and their civic engagement level.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data gathered in this study. The results are presented in the succeeding tables with corresponding discussions and explanations. It also answers specific problems stated in the previous section.

Table 1. *Level of Acceptability of SPARK Program by Program Moderators and Faculty*

Indicator	SD	WM	Description
A. Content	0.50	4.54	Strongly Agree
B. Appropriateness	0.54	4.60	Strongly Agree
Overall	0.52	4.57	Strongly Agree

Based on the data on table 1, the findings confirm that the SPARK Program is not only well-conceived in terms of content but is also exceptionally appropriate for its intended educational context where Banks and Banks (2019), contend that educational programs with a culturally diverse and interdisciplinary curriculum can significantly enhance stakeholder acceptance and effectiveness.

Table 2. *Level of Acceptability of SPARK Program by Student-Participants*

Indicator	SD	WM	Description
A. Engagement and Interest	0.81	3.97	Agree
B. Social Impact	0.80	4.00	Agree
Overall	0.80	3.98	Agree

Based on the data on table 2, these findings confirm that the SPARK Program is generally acceptable to its student-participants, as reflected by mean scores that consistently fall within the “Agree” range. This suggests that student-participants perceive the SPARK Program as effective in fostering both

active participation and supportive peer networks. Structured, school-based programs play a pivotal role in enhancing student engagement and social connectedness. For example, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) found that extracurricular activities can significantly improve students’ engagement levels by providing environments where they actively participate in discussions, develop leadership skills, and build lasting social bonds. Similarly, Eccles and Barber (1999) demonstrated that involvement in structured programs not only facilitates academic and personal growth but also promotes stronger social relationships among peers.

Table 3. *Level of Civic Engagement of SPARK Program Student-Participants*

Indicator	SD	WM	Description
A. Behavior	0.47	4.01	Frequent
B. Civic Awareness	0.48	4.14	Frequent
C. Social Relationships	0.58	4.11	Frequent
Overall	0.52	4.09	Frequent

Based on the data on table 3, the findings demonstrate that the SPARK Program not only promotes active behavioral participation in community initiatives but also fosters an informed and interconnected student body. As what Kahne and Middaugh (2008) found in their study - incorporating interactive and participatory strategies within educational programs significantly enhances civic behaviors, civic awareness, and the capacity for building supportive social networks. Similarly, Torney-Purta et al. (2001) reported that effective civic education not only increases adolescents’ knowledge of civic issues but also fosters a commitment to community involvement and responsibility.

Table 4. *Relationship between SPARK Program Acceptability Level and Civic Engagement Level of SPARK Program student-participants in KNCHS-SHS*

Variables Correlated	Mean	SD	R	p-value	Extent of Relationship	Remark
Acceptability	3.98	0.19	0.88	6.18192E-35	High	Significant
Civic Engagement	4.10	0.24				

Table 4 presents the relationship between SPARK Program Acceptability Level and Civic Engagement Level of SPARK Program student-participants in KNCHS-SHS. The correlation coefficient $r = 0.88$ indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables being analyzed. This suggests that, in general, as one variable increases, the other variable tends to increase as well. The sample size of 155 provides a robust basis for this analysis. Additionally, the t -statistic of 16.17 (with 153 degrees of freedom) is very high, and the corresponding p -value of 6.18×10^{-35} is exceptionally small. This extremely low p -value means that the probability of observing such a strong correlation by chance is virtually zero, confirming that the relationship is statistically significant. This implies that the acceptability level of SPARK Program influences the civic engagement of SPARK Program student-participants in KNCHS-SHS.

This result conforms to the study of Eccles and Barber (1999), who found that participation in well-regarded extracurricular activities—particularly those that include civic and community components—is linked to positive civic behaviors and enhanced social responsibility. Their work suggests that when a program is not only accessible but also perceived as meaningful and relevant, students are more likely to develop a strong sense of civic duty and engage actively in community initiatives.

Astin et. al. (2000) highlighted strong associations between participation in service-learning programs and increased civic awareness—echoing the findings in the SPARK Program data, where higher acceptability was linked with heightened civic engagement. Essentially, when students perceive a program as valuable and well-integrated, they are more apt to participate in societal and community functions.

The SPARK Program is designed to enhance the socio-political awareness of HUMSS students at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School. By focusing on civic engagement and experiential learning, SPARK aims to develop critical thinking and active citizenship. The program, however, faces challenges in widespread implementation across educational institutions while current approaches, such as DepEd's social sciences education, prioritize theoretical concepts over practical engagement, leaving a gap in fostering active, real-world citizenship. This study conducted in February 2025 during the fourth quarter of the school year 2024-2025 evaluates the program's effectiveness in fostering political and social awareness. The research involved one hundred and fifty-five (155) student-participants and eight (8) moderators, faculty members, administrators, and coordinators to assess its effectiveness and acceptability. Based on the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data of this study, the following findings were: For the level of Acceptability of the program, program moderators, faculty members, administrators, and coordinators strongly perceive the SPARK Program as effective in the content dimension with a total weighted mean of 4.54 since it excels in introducing students to diverse socio-political perspectives with a total weighted mean of 4.75. Furthermore, the findings highlight a strong agreement on the SPARK Program's appropriateness with a total weighted mean of 4.75, particularly noting that its objectives align effectively with the institution's educational goals with a total weighted mean of 4.50. This underscores the program's relevance and alignment with the school's mission. For the level of Acceptability of the program, student participants rated the Engagement and Interest dimension with an average weighted mean of 3.97, reflecting their general appreciation for the program's ability to involve them actively in discussions with a total weighted mean of 4.14. Additionally, the Social Relationships dimension received an average weighted mean of 4.00, showing that the program effectively promotes social awareness and community engagement by linking classroom discussions with real-world issues. The level of civic engagement among student participants reflects that, in the behavioral dimension, students actively take part in activities fostering civic involvement, as shown by an overall weighted mean of 4.01. Notably, staying informed received the highest rating at 4.58. Regarding civic awareness, a stronger engagement is observed with an overall mean of 4.14, highlighting the importance of voting, which also scored 4.58. In terms of social relationships, students frequently experience positive interactions that enhance their civic involvement, as indicated by an overall mean of 4.11, with group activities with friends receiving a high rating of 4.54.

There is a significant and strong positive correlation between the acceptability level of the SPARK Program and the civic engagement level of its student participants, as evidenced by a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.88$ and a p -value of 6.18×10^{-35} . This indicates that the program's acceptability greatly influences the level of civic involvement among SPARK Program students at KNCHS-SHS.

Conclusion

The SPARK Program is highly promising content because of its acceptability. The student-participants of the SPARK Program are very high in terms of student engagement and social impact. The students are highly engaged in the SPARK Program particularly in Behavior, Civic Awareness, and Social Relationships. The share Program is a reliable predictor of civic involvement and participation.

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