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Ernesto L. Bastida Jr.

Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas, Dasmariñas, Philippines, elbastida@up.edu.ph

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Relations Between Community Engagement Levels and Citizenship Competence Among Tertiary-Level Students at a Public Institution of Higher Education

Ernesto L. Bastida Jr.^{1*}

¹Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas, Dasmariñas, Philippines

*Correspondence email: elbastida@up.edu.ph

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Abstract

This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study seeks to explain the relationship between community engagement and citizenship competence among tertiary-level students at Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas, a public institution of higher learning in Dasmariñas in Cavite, Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to (1) determine students' level of engagement in various community development activities and their levels of citizenship competence; as well as (2) discuss and analyze the relationship between these two variables. Quantitative surveys were conducted on 331 students, followed by semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 30 purposely selected participants to gather follow-up data during the qualitative phases.

The survey revealed that tertiary-level students were deeply engaged in various themes of activities, from conflict resolution, environmental sustainability initiatives, economic efficiency efforts, sports and wellness activities, disease prevention programs, food security, and nutrition awareness promotion, and gender equality initiatives. They were moderately involved in disaster risk reduction, literacy enhancement, and innovation and technology activities. Further results indicate a significant relationship between students' community engagement and citizenship competence, and the more students are engaged in community-based activities, the more they become competent citizens. The students' values and attitudes and displayed citizenship competence are reflected in the categories of skills, knowledge, and critical understanding. Such positive relations demonstrate how students can foster positive attitudes, learn to value humanitarianism, and help build a sustainable community through community engagement activities.

Keywords: citizenship competence; higher education; tertiary students; sequential explanatory study; community-based activities

1. Introduction

This study focuses on examining the competence of higher education students and its relation with community engagement activity levels. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have played a crucial role in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) because they can develop new paradigms, educate students and hone their capabilities, and contribute to building sustainable societies (Ashida, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). The active participation of HEIs in addressing various global issues has dramatically contributed to the successful

realization of various social, economic, political, and cultural achievements. By utilizing students as an important human resource, HEIs can play a leading role in building partnerships with communities to enhance sustainability. An extensive body of research shows that colleges and universities tend to incorporate SDGs into different dimensions of their activities as a component of helping marginalized and vulnerable communities and collaborating with various sectors on research, outreach, and other development programs (Serafini et al., 2022). This research demonstrates the potential relationship between engagement activities to the quality of the students. This study explores existing literature regarding such relation and elaborates the methodologies and overall investigation of the relation between engagement activities and HEIs students' competence.

2. Community Engagement and Higher Education Students' Competence

As important allies for positive transformations of society, HEIs are committed to engaging students in community-based activities. With an understanding that developing students' capacity as citizens is essential to achieving a sustainable society, HEIs have incorporated community engagement into their curricula (Gruber, 2017). Citizenship competence refers to the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding necessary for effectively maintaining a democratic society (Barrett, 2021). Therefore, including training on citizenship competency in education can help citizens respond appropriately to local and global issues, pursue healthy lifestyles, and make informed decisions (Contreras & Aceituno, 2017; Escorza et al., 2014). In the era of globalization, values, beliefs, skills, knowledge, and systems have become increasingly interconnected, and therefore, the need to encourage competent citizenship among individuals has been a global concern (Bernardo et al., 2022; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019). In this context, HEIs are responsible for continually providing opportunities for students to actively promote human rights, peace, equality, cultural diversity, and sustainable lifestyles through community engagement (Bidandi et al., 2021; Farnell, 2020).

Community engagement activities provide HEI students with real-life experiences that can help them apply what they have learned in the classroom (Alday-Bersoto, 2019; Jacob et al., 2015). This type of service learning allows students to engage in their communities and benefit from additional opportunities to develop their values, skills, and knowledge for becoming competent citizens (Jain, 2009). McAlister (2013) states that students can develop contextualized and responsive approaches to making a positive impact when they are actively involved in their local communities. Through community-based initiatives, they can engage in active interpersonal communication with stakeholders and collaborate to address the social, economic, cultural, and ecological challenges facing their communities. They can also contribute to enhancing educational and skills-building opportunities to help the community improve its human resources. Additionally, they can serve as primary partners within the local community to improve the local knowledge economy and secure a sustainable future.

Indeed, HEIs play a critical role in building a more holistic vision for humanity and promoting social transformations to achieve sustainability goals. This study aims to clarify the relationship between community engagement and citizenship competence among tertiary-level students in Cavite, Philippines.

3. Methodology

This study seeks to (1) determine the level of engagement among tertiary-level students in various community development activities; (2) examine the citizenship competence of tertiary-level students in terms of the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge related to critical understanding; (3) analyze the relationship between the respondents' community engagement levels and citizenship competence; and (4) explain how tertiary-level students enhanced their citizenship competence through participation in community-based engagement.

The respondents of the study were first-year students at Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas, a locally funded institution of higher learning who were enrolled in a National Service Training Program (NSTP) course. In total, 331 students responded to the survey. Table 1 below shows the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of age and sex:

Table 1. Profile of respondents

| Profile | Specifications | Frequency | Percent |
|---------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Age | 18–26 | 316 | 95.47 |
| | 27–35 | 10 | 3.02 |
| | 36 or older | 5 | 1.51 |
| Sex | Female | 214 | 64.65 |
| | Male | 117 | 35.35 |

Table 1 shows that respondents aged 18–26 comprised 95.47% of the total sample. Further, most respondents were women, comprising 64.65% of all respondents. This composition indicates that almost all respondents were youths, which had a strong determining influence on their priorities, interests, and commitment regarding participation in community-based activities.

The researcher utilized a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design for this study. To execute this two-phase research design, the researcher carefully examined the results of the statistical analysis of the survey to identify unexpected findings, and these findings were then subjected to in-depth analysis in the form of follow-up interviews and qualitative discussions (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). The results of the quantitative and qualitative phases were combined and interpreted. The collection and analysis of the data were carried out according to a sequential explanatory research design and were divided into two phases, as presented in Figure 1.

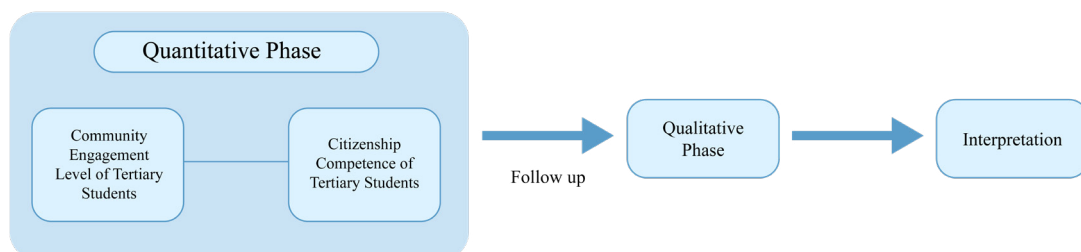


Figure 1. Mixed-methods sequential explanatory research process

During this phase, the researcher developed a survey instrument with a 5-point Likert scale to determine tertiary-level students' community engagement levels. On the one hand, the researcher adopted the indicative statements presented by Barrett (2021) to determine students' degree of citizenship competence. Descriptive statistics, such as weighted mean and standard deviation, were used to examine the collected data. Table 2 shows the rating scale that was utilized to interpret both results. Moreover, a chi-square test of independence was used to analyze the relationship between the respondents' community engagement and citizenship competence.

Table 2. Rating scale of the community survey

| Scale numerical value | Verbal description for community engagement level | Verbal description for citizenship competence |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| 4.20–5.00 | Highly engaged | Very competent |
| 3.40–4.19 | Engaged | Competent |
| 2.60–3.39 | Moderately engaged | Moderately competent |
| 1.80–2.59 | Slightly engaged | Slightly competence |
| 1.00–1.79 | Not engaged | Not competent |

The results of the quantitative phase were carefully analyzed to filter significant and unexpected findings. Such findings were further explored and explained through follow-up interviews. To execute the qualitative phase, the researcher purposely selected representatives from the samples who were involved in the quantitative phase. The researcher employed a matrix while selecting representatives to minimize potential bias. Table 3 presents the matrix used to choose the 30 participants to ensure equal representation. Age and sex did not influence the process of participant selection.

Table 3. Matrix of participant selection

| Two representatives from each program | Verbal description for community engagement level | Verbal description for citizenship competence |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Six students | Very engaged | Very competent |
| Six students | Very engaged | Competent |
| Six students | Engaged | Competent |
| Six students | Engaged | Moderately competent |
| Six students | Moderately engaged | Moderately competent |

To analyze the interviews, the researcher applied the thematic analysis of Braun & Clarke (2006). The qualitative phase did not determine the level of engagement but rather clearly interpreted the quantitative results in depth. Interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative results focuses on determining how community engagement influences the citizenship competence of tertiary-level students. Several constraints and enablers of the relationship between these two variables were also identified.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Determining the level of engagement of tertiary-level students in the following community development activities

Table 4 shows that tertiary-level students were engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities, with a general weighted mean of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 0.89. This indicates that tertiary-level students consistently uphold the value of respect for individual differences to secure cohesion among the group that they are working with. These students also find ways to help the community maintain peace and conformity. However, these students still need to enhance their skills for dealing with people who hold conflicting views and opinions by facilitating effective, action-oriented discussions and meaningful conversations.

In support of these findings, Bua and Dike (2017) found that the participation of university students in community activities to achieve effective conflict prevention and promote peacebuilding concepts is highly evident. Indeed, the study revealed that students' direct participation in decision-making processes and governance made students more aware of the importance of peacebuilding initiatives at universities.

Table 4. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students engaged in conflict resolution and peace-building activities

| Conflict resolution and peacebuilding | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. I participate in inter-community dialogue and exchanges related to maintaining peace and order and securing safe spaces for every individual while intelligently addressing conflicting views. | 3.21 | 1.15 | Moderately engaged |
| 2. I suggest tools and strategies for conflict prevention and management mechanisms to ensure meaningful conversations and a long-term commitment to peacebuilding initiatives. | 3.43 | 1.14 | Engaged |
| 3. I take advantage of training opportunities that allow me to gain insights and skills related to conflict-avoidance and management. | 3.53 | 1.16 | Engaged |
| 4. I maintain a good relationship with others despite the myriad of individual differences by thinking maturely and being open-minded. | 4.31 | 0.94 | Highly engaged |
| 5. I join in collaborative efforts and projects initiated by various organizations to learn positive values and take on responsibilities. | 3.45 | 1.17 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.59 | 0.89 | Engaged |

Table 5 demonstrates that students were engaged in environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation activities, with a general weighted mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.83. This table indicates that students emphasize their roles in protecting the environment and informing themselves and others about climate change. This sense of responsibility is strengthened by observing solid waste management, engaging in responsible consumption, participating in drives for environmental causes,

and joining environment-focused dialogues that are often initiated by *barangay* (smallest administrative division or village) officials and private partners.

McCowan et al. (2021) explain that the challenge of climate change has been a focal interest in educational research. In this context, university students have continually supported research and community-based programs intended to achieve sustainable development and mitigate climate change risks (He et al., 2022).

Table 5. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students engaged in environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation activities

| Conflict resolution and peacebuilding | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. I spearhead simple environmental awareness activities, such as tree planting, backyard gardening, and clean-up drives. | 3.81 | 1.05 | Engaged |
| 2. I use products that do not produce chemical pollutants that are harmful to the environment. | 3.82 | 0.95 | Engaged |
| 3. I take part in climate change dialogues and environment-focused seminars to better understand how I can protect our environment. | 3.49 | 1.13 | Engaged |
| 4. I observe solid waste management and household practices that support the reuse, reduce, and recycle (3Rs) policy. | 3.94 | 0.99 | Engaged |
| 5. I incorporate wise resource use and consumption into my daily activities. | 3.78 | 1.00 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.77 | 0.83 | Engaged |

Table 6 shows that tertiary-level students were engaged in promoting economic efficiency and enhancing the competitiveness of local businesses, with a general weighted mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.93. This implies that empowering local producers is a primary method that students use to increase the city’s economic competitiveness. They also use social media to popularize local products and reach consumers outside the city. Moreover, students also helped establish community gardens to maintain food stability, particularly during the pandemic period, when there was a sudden and unusual increase in the prices of essential commodities due to low crop yields and reduced food production.

Meanwhile, because Dasmariñas is an urbanized, first-class component city or city that has obtained a high annual income with a growing variety of subdivisions and industries, a limited number of agritourism sites and attractions can entice tourists and visitors. Hence, students were moderately engaged in posting tourist attractions that could offer meaningful experiences to tourists. In addition, students do not give considerable priority to reviewing the documents posted on the transparency board to examine the government’s budget appropriations and transactions.

Aurelio et al. (2022) found that university students’ awareness of and engagement with the tourism industry in the cities of Cavite Province, including Dasmariñas, was determined. Indeed, the study identified evidence that students have positive attitudes toward the

promotion of agritourism, as it is seen as ensuring that local produce will be advertised in the market and addressing existing problems in the provincial agricultural industry.

Table 6. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students engaged in promoting economic efficiency and enhancing the competitiveness of local businesses

| Economic efficiency and competitiveness | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. I spearhead establishing community gardens that provide additional sources of vegetables and food for the community. | 3.47 | 1.08 | Engaged |
| 2. I post tourism attractions and experiences that my local community offers on social media to boost the local tourism industry. | 3.39 | 1.13 | Moderately engaged |
| 3. I examine transaction documents, expenses, and receipts posted on the transparency board. | 3.29 | 1.17 | Moderately engaged |
| 4. I purchase locally made products and advertise these products to help small local producers obtain a larger stake in the economy. | 3.62 | 1.05 | Engaged |
| 5. I promote local products through social media and traditional advertising to support local industries and small enterprises. | 3.61 | 1.11 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.48 | 0.93 | Engaged |

Table 7. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities

| Disaster risk reduction and preparedness | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1. I join training workshops that deal with life-saving practices. | 3.20 | 1.24 | Moderately engaged |
| 2. I join quick response teams that help people secure their lives and receive necessary assistance during disasters. | 3.18 | 1.23 | Moderately engaged |
| 3. I spearhead donation drives that aim to collect relief goods and materials needed by the community. | 3.47 | 1.15 | Engaged |
| 4. I create and update the contingency and preparedness plans of our local community to ensure response readiness in the event of a disaster and to avoid casualties. | 3.28 | 1.20 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. I observe necessary measures and precautions during disasters and advise my neighborhood to do the same. | 3.58 | 1.07 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.34 | 1.03 | Moderately Engaged |

Table 7 demonstrates that tertiary-level students were moderately engaged in disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities, with a general weighted mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 1.03. This implies that students display reactive responses to the situation by engaging in donation drives and observing safety measures, especially during

natural disasters. Most students were moderately involved in proactive measures, such as drafting preparedness plans, attending essential training sessions, and receiving training to become part of a response team in the community.

The results detailed above are also confirmed by Nifa et al. (2018), who found that university students must clearly understand the importance of reducing the frequency of natural disasters in order to mitigate their detrimental consequences on economic stability, which, in turn, can adversely affect communities and local residents. Their study also revealed that university students actively participate in programs related to disaster risk reduction out of a conviction that it is an important method for building disaster resilience and a sustainable environment.

Table 8 shows that tertiary-level students were engaged in sports and wellness activities, with a general weighted mean of 3.61 and a standard deviation of 0.93. This reveals that students prioritize exercise, as well as physical and mental wellness. They manifest productive routines and essential practices that help them maintain a sound mind and healthy body, such as visiting familiar and favorite places, playing games, following personalized wellness routines, and attending sessions for sports and wellness. Although they are not involved in community-initiated sporting activities, they regularly engage in planned mental and physical health activities.

Table 8. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in sports and wellness activities

| | Sports and wellness | Mean | SD | Description |
|----|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. | I attend sports and wellness sessions, such as Zumba, aerobics, mental health seminars, dietary talks, and more. | 3.47 | 1.16 | Engaged |
| 2. | I developed my own wellness program that I engage in daily. | 3.59 | 1.13 | Engaged |
| 3. | I go to my favorite places where I can think about my decisions, problems, and perspective. | 4.05 | 1.00 | Engaged |
| 4. | I engage in several programs at the community sports development center, such as sports clinics and mini Olympics. | 3.27 | 1.29 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. | I participate in physical and mental games that can help me practice mindfulness and maintain physical fitness, ensuring that I maintain a healthy lifestyle. | 3.65 | 1.10 | Engaged |
| | General weighted mean | 3.61 | 0.93 | Engaged |

Similarly, Orhan (2020) found that students in higher education participate in sports for health purposes. They maintain regular weekly exercise schedules, which allow them to develop healthy exercise habits. Moreover, they uncovered that students engage in physical activity and sports for a variety of motivations, including losing weight, becoming physically fit, and maintaining good health.

Table 9 shows that tertiary-level students were engaged in sports and wellness activities, with a general weighted mean of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.76. This indicates that tertiary-level students are familiar with the importance of being vaccinated as a requirement for attending in-person classes and see vaccination as a primary form of

protection against the threat of another pandemic. The pandemic has negatively impacted students' health and daily lives, and vaccination is an important countermeasure for reducing the possibility of future negative consequences. Students also became more conscious of their own health during the pandemic, and they understand that maintaining personal health can contribute to protecting their families and the communities. Although students are keenly aware of the importance of practicing healthy habits, most students are only moderately engaged in disseminating information about diseases and physical health check-ups at health centers.

Siswati et al. (2021) found that students practiced health management strategies during the pandemic. Focusing on what students learned during the pandemic, the study revealed that students had come to understand the importance of their personal health, and this realization has become a driving force motivating them to be actively engaged in the promotion of physical health within the community through activities and programs that raise awareness of health management (Kim et al., 2020).

Table 9. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in disease prevention and health security activities

| Disease prevention and health security | | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|--|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. | I adhere to vaccination requirements to protect myself from contracting viruses and communicable diseases. | 4.29 | 0.87 | Highly engaged |
| 2. | I go to the community health center for regular check-ups to monitor my physical health. | 3.23 | 1.16 | Moderately engaged |
| 3. | I help the community disseminate information regarding diseases, emphasizing how diseases are contracted, the signs of certain diseases, how to prevent the spread of diseases, and which medications can be used to treat certain diseases. | 3.27 | 1.17 | Moderately engaged |
| 4. | I demonstrate healthy and hygienic practices that can help people prevent the spread of germs and diseases. | 3.67 | 1.03 | Engaged |
| 5. | I follow health workers' recommended disease control practices. | 4.04 | 0.96 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | | 3.70 | 0.76 | Engaged |

Table 10 shows that tertiary-level students were moderately engaged in promoting literacy and continuing education activities, with a weighted mean of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This implies that students do not display high participation rates in literacy promotion-related activities; however, some students do organize donation drives for students who lack school supplies and participate in literacy promotion initiatives that focus on teaching basic skills such as writing, reading, and counting. In addition, most students are engaged in establishing reading centers, creating adult education programs, and providing extended learning support for children.

Table 11 demonstrates that tertiary-level students were moderately engaged in innovation and emerging technology activities, with a weighted mean of 3.39 and a standard deviation of 0.93. This implies that academic requirements drive students' reliance on

technology. Innovative new learning tools in the present educational landscape have significantly changed how students acquire information. Although students are highly engaged in modernizing the learning process, they do not display high participation in efforts meant to increase understanding of ethical issues related to technology, create knowledge-producing tools and inventions, or reduce the digital divide in the present system. Rather, students are more interested in acting as passive recipients of knowledge than serving as active creators of knowledge-sharing mechanisms that can help improve public welfare.

Table 10. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in literacy enhancement and continuing education activities

| Literacy enhancement and continuing education | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1. I spearhead basic literacy programs that are aimed at teaching basic skills to youths who are not attending school. | 3.40 | 1.09 | Engaged |
| 2. I help build community reading centers to serve as an avenue for learners to appreciate the importance of reading. | 3.20 | 1.19 | Moderately engaged |
| 3. I implemented several training workshops for adults who want to acquire the skills and competencies relevant to survival. | 3.16 | 1.22 | Moderately engaged |
| 4. I conduct private tutoring sessions for young learners who have difficulty understanding school lessons. | 3.08 | 1.25 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. I donate learning materials to learners who do not have the ability to purchase school supplies and requirements. | 3.47 | 1.14 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.26 | 0.99 | Moderately engaged |

Table 11. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in innovation and emerging technology activities

| Innovation and emerging technologies | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1. I attend training workshops that deal with digital literacy, online learning, and the ethics of technology utilization. | 3.29 | 1.17 | Moderately engaged |
| 2. I keep up to date with the newest and most innovative features and products of technology, which are helpful to my daily activities, particularly my academic endeavors. | 3.81 | 1.00 | Engaged |
| 3. I propose innovative products and mini inventions that can provide a sustainable living for everyone in my community. | 3.16 | 1.23 | Moderately engaged |
| 4. I contribute to eradicating the digital range through fundraising activities, coordination efforts with other sectors, and initiatives to directly assist those who lack access to modern digital technologies. | 3.05 | 1.18 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. I apply innovative solutions and digital technologies to help myself adjust to new learning environments. | 3.62 | 1.15 | Engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.39 | 0.93 | Moderately engaged |

In this context, Schindler et al. (2017) revealed that it is crucial for colleges and universities to use technology to empower students to contribute positively to the community. They also found that using technology, such as social media platforms and other online tools, can enhance student engagement, enabling them to actively participate in building a community for sharing information that can benefit the community and citizens.

Table 12 shows that tertiary-level students were moderately engaged in food and nutrition activities, with a weighted mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.95. This implies that students prioritize food as a basic necessity of life. Most students practice healthy eating habits by consuming foods with high levels of vitamins and minerals that the human body requires. To ensure that food is organically grown, some create their own home gardens where they plant vegetables and medicinal herbs. However, not all these students participate in developing school-level policies regarding healthy food choices.

Correspondingly, Sogari et al. (2018) highlighted that university students' active participation in promoting healthy eating habits is dramatically influenced by the following factors: healthy living habits, food preferences, food knowledge, state of mind, university environment, media pressure, friends, and parental feeding practices. They emphasize that universities can both positively and negatively influence students' eating habits.

Table 12. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in food security and nutrition activities

| Food security and nutrition | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. I eat organic foods that are high in vitamins, minerals, enzymes, and micronutrients that keep my body healthy. | 3.83 | 0.98 | Engaged |
| 2. I engage in home gardening and urban agriculture to increase access to fresh products (vegetables and fruits). | 3.51 | 1.13 | Engaged |
| 3. I prioritize nutrients over price when buying food products. | 3.65 | 1.08 | Engaged |
| 4. I plant medicinal herbs that can be used for cooking because they are great enhancers for stews, grilled and fried foods, and soups. | 3.36 | 1.29 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. I help my school develop nutrition policies and food choices to ensure that proper nutrition is strictly followed. | 3.22 | 1.23 | Moderately engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.51 | 0.95 | Engaged |

Table 13 shows that tertiary-level students were engaged in initiatives and activities meant to promote gender equality, with a general weighted mean of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.29. This means that students view the concept and practice of gender inclusion positively and apply the principle of gender equality to their daily lives. Although gender equality is a relatively new concept, students are already seeking to increase public awareness around gender-sensitive issues by participating in related seminars and trainings, adopting gender-neutral language, and working to improve gender equality. Additionally, some students promote gender equality in school by engaging in related activities.

The findings below are also supported by Moreira and Oliveira (2022), who found that university students are actively participating in building communities that are more sensitive

to gender issues. Students can benefit from the support provided by schools in promoting gender equality to adjust how they participate in addressing gender issues and contribute to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Korenius, 2018).

Table 13. The community engagement level of tertiary-level students in activities intended to improve gender equality

| Gender and development | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. I attend seminars and training sessions on gender equality to contribute to building an empowering and nondiscriminatory community for sustainable development. | 3.50 | 1.17 | Engaged |
| 2. I use gender-neutral language when communicating with people to establish a culture of gender equality. | 3.43 | 1.26 | Engaged |
| 3. I support governmental and nongovernmental organizations in their fight against forms of gender discrimination, including gender-based violence. | 3.89 | 1.07 | Engaged |
| 4. I volunteer to help my school promote activities that improve gender equality and inclusion in the community. | 3.37 | 1.21 | Moderately engaged |
| 5. I utilize social media platforms to raise awareness regarding gender-sensitive issues and foster socially inclusive practices in different places. | 3.65 | 1.13 | Moderately engaged |
| General weighted mean | 3.57 | 1.29 | Engaged |

4.2. Examining tertiary-level students' citizenship competence levels

Table 14 presents students' citizenship competence levels in terms of values. The table indicates that students have demonstrated high competency in citizenship values. They understand the importance of human dignity and the rights that govern one's individuality and political self. They also place a high value on the freedom and equality of human beings under the democratic constitution. In addition, they maintain a high degree of respect for individual differences, which is an important marker of a pluralistic society. The positive assessment of diversity implicates their ways of knowing, living, and learning.

Basco-galanco and Mamolo (2019) similarly underscored that college students should adhere to a value system that recognizes individual differences, as this is pivotal for promoting civic welfare. In addition, possessing citizenship values that demonstrate respect toward others helps students establish harmonious relationships in the workplace, at home, and in their communities.

Table 14. Citizenship competence of tertiary-level students in terms of values

| Values | Mean | SD | Description |
|--|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Valuing human dignity and human rights | 4.42 | 0.81 | Very competent |
| 2. Valuing cultural diversity | 4.35 | 0.83 | Very competent |
| 3. Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law | 4.37 | 0.85 | Very competent |
| General weighted mean | 4.38 | 0.77 | Very competent |

Table 15 shows students' citizenship competence in terms of attitudes. The table demonstrates that students possess highly competent attitudes as citizens. Moreover, students' positive values have positively influenced their modes of understanding and feeling. Students' high regard for diversity and democracy has trained them to become respectful, open-minded, and responsible individuals, and these values are important for dealing with others and realizing conformity. They also maintain a positive mindset and attitude by believing in themselves and displaying unique and active approaches when adapting to various challenging situations. Moreover, students develop community-oriented thinking through sustained interactions with the community.

Table 15. Citizenship competence of tertiary-level students in terms of attitudes

| Attitudes | Mean | SD | Description |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Openness to cultural differences | 4.32 | 0.82 | Very competent |
| 2. Respect | 4.42 | 0.82 | Very competent |
| 3. Civic mindedness | 4.17 | 0.85 | Competent |
| 4. Responsibility | 4.31 | 0.83 | Very competent |
| 5. Self-efficacy | 4.21 | 0.83 | Very competent |
| 6. Tolerance of ambiguity | 4.14 | 0.82 | Competent |
| General weighted mean | 4.26 | 0.73 | Very competent |

Bernardo et al. (2022) emphasize that molding students into responsible citizens must also be supported by universities. Developing citizenship competencies among university students will help them in their future endeavors. In particular, it will help them obtain employment and practice proper ethics in the workplace and other social settings.

Table 16. Citizenship competence of tertiary-level students in terms of skills

| Skills | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. Autonomous learning skills | 3.99 | 0.85 | Competent |
| 2. Analytical and critical-thinking skills | 3.90 | 0.85 | Competent |
| 3. Listening and observing skills | 4.18 | 0.87 | Competent |
| 4. Empathy | 4.20 | 0.84 | Competent |
| 5. Flexibility and adaptability | 4.14 | 0.85 | Competent |
| 6. Linguistic, communication, and plurilingual skills | 3.91 | 0.87 | Competent |
| 7. Cooperation skills | 4.17 | 0.82 | Competent |
| 8. Conflict resolution skills | 4.03 | 0.86 | Competent |
| General weighted mean | 4.07 | 0.72 | Competent |

Table 16 displays students' citizenship competency in terms of skills. The table shows that students possess robust citizenship skills. Students have broadened and enhanced their set of skills relevant to civic literacy and global competency. These skills include authentic assessment, critical thinking, and linguistic competence. They have also improved their skills related to dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds and representing their factual situations, such as managing conflicts between individuals with diverse backgrounds, understanding others, and adjusting to various conditions and environments. These skills are considered essential to thrive in the current quickly changing society, which is driven by rapid knowledge diffusion and technological innovation.

In this context, Mravcová (2016) mentioned that for students to be globally competent, they must possess global citizenship skills that will enable them to respond appropriately to diverse situations. These skills are relevant to the values of respect, inclusion, community development, sharing, and reconciliation—all of which contribute to sustainable development (Pacho, 2020).

Table 17. Citizenship competence of tertiary-level students in terms of knowledge and critical understanding

| Knowledge and critical understanding | | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1. | Knowledge and critical understanding of the self | 4.13 | 0.81 | Competent |
| 2. | Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication | 4.03 | 0.80 | Competent |
| 3. | Knowledge and critical understanding of the world | 4.01 | 0.82 | Competent |
| General weighted mean | | 4.06 | 0.73 | Competent |

Table 17 presents the students' citizenship competency levels in terms of knowledge and critical understanding. This table shows that students are competent in citizenship knowledge and their critical understanding. These enhanced values, attitudes, and skills have allowed students to better understand the complexity of themselves, society, and the world. The rationalization of these developments expands students' critical perspectives, enabling them to grasp the composition of the world from a macro perspective while also understanding themselves from a micro perspective. In support of these claims, Schleicher and Ramos (2018) emphasized that being able to understand global diversity allows students to address local, global, and intercultural issues, which will help them better understand the world and value diversity.

4.3. Analysis of the relationship between respondents' community engagement levels and citizenship competence levels

4.3.1 Quantitative analysis

Table 18 shows that the respondents' overall mean level of engagement is 3.63, with an *SD* of 0.77, indicating that the respondents qualify as 'engaged.' Meanwhile, the general competence of the respondents displayed a mean of 4.24, with an *SD* of 0.68. Generally, the respondents showed a high level of citizenship competence. Testing the correlation between the community engagement level and citizenship competence using a chi-square test of independence revealed a chi-square value of 77.05 and a *p* value of less than .01. The results offer sufficient evidence that there is a significant relationship between the

two variables. This indicates that the more students are engaged in community-based activities, the more they become competent citizens. That is, being consistently engaged in various activities helps students acquire the skills and values needed to thrive in a complex society. The humanitarian causes they are involved in teach them the significance of collaboration, empathy, solidarity, and responsibility regarding nation-building and achieving development goals.

Table 18. Relationship between community engagement levels and citizenship competence levels among tertiary-level students

| Variable | Mean | SD | Description | Chi-square value | p value | Relationship |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-------------|------------------|---------|--------------|
| Level of community engagement | 3.63 | 0.77 | Engaged | 77.05 | < .01 | Significant |
| Citizenship competence | 4.24 | 0.68 | High | | | |

Providing opportunities that enable students to actively participate in community-based activities significantly helps students become responsible citizens. It provides them with learning opportunities that maximize their potential and help them embody the citizenship values necessary for building a sustainable community (Jeffes et al., 2012).

4.3.2 Qualitative investigation

The following themes were generated from the interviews with the 30 purposely selected participants who were part of the initial sample from the quantitative phase. The seven themes further support and clarify the findings and unexpected results discussed above. These themes are also important for explaining the valuable insights that can be applied to possible interventions, policy formulation, and educational planning.

Theme 1: Community engagement emphasizes praxis-oriented learning

The analysis of this theme demonstrated that learning from the community helps students process their critical-thinking skills and ethical perspectives by being exposed to different aspects of life. It also enables them to reflect critically on the social problems and issues facing humanity. Four students emphasized that community involvement deepened their understanding of their true and communal selves, as their experiences enabled them to integrate into a more extensive learning system where they could apply their conceptual knowledge to better understand real-life experiences. Students who became immersed in such systems developed decision-making skills and engaged in reflective practices grounded in a research commitment to social change, enabling them to have meaningful and productive civically engaged lives.

Carlisle et al. (2017) explain in their study that community engagement exposes students to authentic learning activities that broaden their knowledge and understanding of various social, political, economic, and cultural issues as well as develop their problem-solving skills. Additionally, it allows students to take effective action to address the needs of the community (Bandy, 2011).

Theme 2: Community engagement fosters positive values and attitudes

The analysis of this theme confirmed that engaging in the community improves the community and fosters positive values among students. The persistent connections established through dealing with other individuals allow students to enhance their civic-mindedness and open-minded attitudes. These two attributes encourage positive conceptions of the self that are imbued with a sense of responsibility and genuine care for humanity. Six students collectively agreed that understanding the situations of others through community-based activities made them realize that acceptance and respect for diversity are the primary mechanisms for upholding human dignity and self-empowerment in all forms.

The study by Afzal and Hussain (2020) also accentuates that community-based activities can serve as an important mechanism for students to broaden their perspectives and learn from the various stories and situations of different people. Through active engagement in community-based activities, students can develop their citizenship skills, which, in turn, can be used to motivate others to contribute to collaborative efforts at establishing inclusive and equitable communities.

Theme 3: Community engagement is fueled by solidarity and empathy

The analysis of this theme showed that maintaining engagement is one of the challenges faced by students. Financial, physical, mental, and social limitations pose several constraints on students when engaging in community activities. Consequently, these constraints sometimes generate more problems that lessen students' motivation to become involved in various causes. Eight students explained that coordinating with various groups is necessary to make the project work and to successfully implement its stages. Establishing connections is one of the challenges confronting students, as they need to possess adequate social capital and financial resources to secure a connection. However, they also stated that some nongovernment organizations, local government institutions, and civil societies conform with the provision requiring that they provide assistance and actively contribute to securing the resources necessary to carry out community-based development plans.

Mansione et al. (2022) similarly highlighted that students' motivation to engage in community activities is typically influenced by social segregation, which replaces solidarity with a culture of atomization. Community-based activities grounded in solidaristic relationships promote relational quality, encouraging students to support community development goals.

Theme 4: Community engagement ignites humanitarianism

The analysis of this theme revealed that addressing a community's needs in simple ways translates into voluntary benevolence. Students' exposure to and engagement with various community activities drives them to understand the principle of impartiality and the value of justice and democracy. Fifteen students stated that they have gradually developed a concern for others, the environment, and the world through continuous involvement in humanitarian projects.

However, in interviews, students also revealed that as much as they desired to have consistent and advanced engagement with the community, time and financial constraints

restrict them from doing so. Therefore, they sometimes settle for reactive measures when responding to the needs of the community, and therefore, they wish to be involved in the planning and policy-making stages of community-based activities, as this would enable them to become more familiar with technical knowledge and more prepared to assist others. In addition, they also wanted to receive additional training in understanding official transactions so they could be responsible citizens who think critically to benefit the general welfare of the community.

Providing additional evidence for this assertion, Young (2022) explains that exposing students to community work gives them a clearer view of the humanitarian issues facing the local community. They can better understand how valuable humanitarian practices are, how important respect and protection of individual rights are, how to deal with conflicts, and how to act for the betterment of the community and its people.

Theme 5: Community engagement increases the number of advocates

The analysis of this theme shows that advocacy for good causes increases significantly as students become exposed to various development projects initiated within the community. The use of technology and social media platforms, in particular, allows students to inform the general public regarding the worthy causes they support, which can motivate other individuals to join in these activities. Sixteen students mentioned that they regularly advocate for environmental awareness, sports, and wellness, gender equality, economic competitiveness, as well as peace and order. They also explained that well-established agencies and organizations can intensify students' participation in the causes mentioned above, as organizations can provide the necessary funds for community-based projects.

Meanwhile, eight students further explained that some causes, such as disaster preparedness and basic literacy, usually oblige students to undergo intensive training and a series of workshops before they can join a cause. Therefore, few of them have become interested in these initiatives, as additional effort, money, and time is required.

Sullivan-Owomoyela and Branelly (2009) relate that community-based activities require a collaborative effort to address the community's diverse needs. The more people engage in community work, the better the outcomes are. Thus, involving students in community engagement can add to human resource capacity, which, in turn, helps support programs and activities that advocate for community development (Little, 2011).

Theme 6: Community engagement values one's existence

Analysis of this theme highlights the value of community immersion in nurturing existential intelligence. Community exposure teaches students to be more socially aware and involved in addressing social problems. Frequent interaction with the community and the implementation of projects have pursued life clarifications and have turned into the direction of their own lives. Additionally, consistent relational communication with others contribute positively to students' lifelong learning process. Seven students stated that they developed deep-thinking and comprehensive analysis skills that they can apply to specific situations. They also argued that community engagement had helped them better understand their life purposes, better comprehend the concepts of human dignity and human rights and understand the reasons for their existence. Moreover, three students emphasized that community services helped them become more mature, expand

their worldviews, and discover their unseen potential—all of which contributed to improving life satisfaction and their ability to understand the meaning of their existence. As mentioned by Eldardiry et al. (2021), allowing students to immerse themselves in community-based activities can help them gain experience that may translate into a life purpose, and for this reason, teachers put significant time and effort into supporting community projects.

Theme 7: Community engagement builds sustainable communities

The analysis of this theme found that achieving sustainable development is the ultimate objective of community-based initiatives. The concerted efforts of students generate positive changes and nurture a commitment to improving the lives of all individuals, regardless of differences, and to creating a more equitable and progressive society. Although some students do not become actively involved in these efforts, they can still help the community sustain its progress by participating in community-based activities. Such participation empowers other people and cultivates the individual potential needed to realize further improvements in the city. Almost all the students agreed that community engagement creates a strong support system that can help the community during crises. They collectively stated that serving the community allows people to make charitable contributions to humanity and respond to the adverse effects of pandemic situations. For instance, they brainstormed the idea of establishing a community pantry that could have served as a food bank to reduce food insecurity during the peak of the pandemic.

Student participation in community-based activities can be an integral component of achieving sustainable development (Torsdottir et al., 2023). As a human resource, students can play a vital role in establishing a safer and more inclusive community. Therefore, it is necessary that schools also promote community-based learning to internalize a sense of shared responsibility, solidarity, and empathy for building a sustainable community among students (Baldrige et al., 2017).

4.4. Result interpretation

The quantitative and qualitative results validated and confirmed the statistically significant relationship between community engagement and citizenship competence among tertiary-level students. Community engagement is seen as one of the drivers of sustainable development, and it can benefit the schools of Dasmariñas and the local community. Tertiary-level students' interactions and communication with the community through community-based activities have fostered positive values and strengthened the inculcation of competent citizenship and human rights awareness.

Although students showed competitive levels of participation in some activities, they still need to engage more critically in community planning by examining transaction documents, taking a proactive approach to solving community problems, constantly contributing to enhancing community literacy and adhering to ethical standards in knowledge production. The results also identified several enablers and constraints of active participation in community-based activities. Enabling factors include positive concern for and attitudes toward local communities, technology-based information dissemination, and grassroots decision-making, as well as an appropriate understanding of human dignity, democracy, diversity, and the authentic self. Meanwhile, the

constraining factors included time and financial constraints, stakeholders' involvement, and the establishment of connections.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that community engagement positively impacts students' holistic development, as they gain values and become familiar with positive practices relevant to the realization of the school's vision and mission. Through active engagement, students can gradually develop loyalty and devotion to promoting human dignity and national sovereignty. Involvement in conflict resolution allowed students to demonstrate respect and display deference to the values of democracy, justice, conflict resolution skills, and diversity when confronted with people with conflicting views and opinions. Responsibility, tolerance of ambiguity, and civic-mindedness were also nurtured through participation in environment sustainability projects and food and nutrition initiatives. Indeed, these activities enabled students to put their humanitarian principles into practice and care for their surroundings. Likewise, cooperation skills and empathy were magnified in crisis and disaster situations, as students showed compassion when responding to the needs of victims; this is similar to the compassion displayed when establishing a community pantry.

Maintaining a healthy body and sound mind has positively contributed to students' self-efficacy. A student's confidence and belief in themselves is affected by their physical and mental health. During the pandemic, students practiced effective listening and observation regarding the events happening around them, and they were conscious of the techniques for preventing COVID-19 transmission in order to maintain personal health.

Additionally, students' ability to communicate effectively was further enhanced through engagement with intellectual discourses, tutoring sessions, and expertise-sharing opportunities. Moreover, autonomous learning skills can best be honed through innovating tools, eradicating the digital divide, and facilitating information dissemination. Students must be trained to become knowledge producers instead of consumers. Lastly, increased gender awareness allows students to practice flexibility, adaptability, and critical thinking as they change their attitudes and perceptions toward gender roles.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates how community engagement plays a critical role in enhancing understanding of the complex and complicated nature of social reality, promoting recognition of culturally diverse living arrangements and structures. It also creates functional and democratic citizens who pursue productive civic and social lives oriented around community development goals, whether in social, legal, economic, or political contexts. Engaging in community-based development activities helps safeguard the right and responsibilities of each student to become a catalyst for social change and contribute to achieving a more secure and sustainable society.

Based on the above discussion, this study offers some recommendations. There is a need for schools to review their NSTP curriculums. Students should be encouraged to participate in community planning and needs assessments. Grounding the NSTP in a multidisciplinary perspective will allow teachers and students to significantly contribute to the knowledge economy of Dasmariñas.

In addition, the Community Extension Center of the institution must designate a representative for each domain of each community-based activity (e.g., a content person for emerging technologies and innovation) who will take charge of communication, partnership, and networking responsibilities. There is also a need for institutions to establish a Social Policy Center for the realization of SDGs. This center would serve as a primary platform for intellectual discourse and inputs oriented toward developing feasible strategies and policies to achieve SDGs on both the school and local community levels with the goal of achieving sustained and improved citizenship competence.

On this basis, future studies should be centered on the development of inclusive approaches to community engagement for empowering marginalized and underrepresented practices and curricula that can increase students' understanding of their roles in community development as national and global citizens. Furthermore, scholars are also encouraged to conduct longitudinal and cross-sectional studies with the aim of examining how community engagement contributes to students' success in a changing society.

Author Contribution

The main contribution of the author is the utilization of mixed methods research design to further explore the roles that community engagement plays in strengthening citizenship competence of the students. The results also solidify the importance of involving tertiary students in community planning, assessment, and evaluation rather than in the implementation itself, making them active contributors to the development. The direct participation of the students in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of any community development activities helps them secure a sustainable future.

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The author declares no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

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Author Biography

Ernesto L. Bastida Jr. is currently working as the Vice President for Research and Linkages of Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas. He obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies majoring in Education and Development from College of Public Affairs and Development (CPAf) at University of the Philippines Los Baños as a Class Valedictorian. He finished his Master of Arts in Communication Arts (with academic distinction) in the same university while Master of Arts in Education majoring in Educational Management at Laguna State Polytechnic University (recipient of Best Thesis Award). He finished his Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English (Cum Laude) at Polytechnic University of the Philippines. His research interests include curriculum development, indigenous education, community development, social policy, education management, language and communication, and equality studies.