From Academic to Community: An Immersion of Grade 8 RS/VE Students

Jericho Y. Baybayan*[1], Elbert G. Alibo[2]

[1,2] Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, Philippines

ABSTRACT: This study examined the impact of a community-based extension program on the values formation and real-life application of learning among Grade 8 Religious Studies and Values Education (RS/VE) students of Notre Dame University Junior High School. Anchored on the MATATAG Curriculum's emphasis on holistic, experiential, and values-based learning, the study focused on a community immersion conducted at Bahay Maria, a shelter for abandoned, sick and elderly individuals in Cotabato City. Using a descriptive-evaluative research design, data were gathered from 68 purposively selected students through a researcher-made questionnaire administered before and after the immersion to assess their expectations and actual experiences. Descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test were employed for data analysis. Results revealed that students entered the program with positive, value-oriented expectations, particularly in empathy, moral responsibility, and application of school-learned values. Their actual experiences likewise reflected meaningful engagement, strengthened empathy, and enhanced moral awareness. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between students' expected and actual experiences, indicating that the program effectively met learners' anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, qualitative interpretation of the findings demonstrated that community immersion facilitated the translation of academic learning into concrete acts of service, while fostering social responsibility and awareness, especially toward the elderly. The study concludes that community-based extension programs are effective platforms for integrating values education with authentic community engagement.

KEYWORDS: Community immersion, Experiential learning, MATATAG Curriculum, Social responsibility, Values education.

INTRODUCTION

Holistic education in the 21st century must transcend intellectual vigor by transforming students to become morally and socially responsible and provide meaningful service to society through community extension programs. Excellence in studies must be twofold, so that it cuts both ways for the student's intellectual and moral life. These ethical and personal approach guides students not only in learning abstract concepts and theoretical discussions in the four corners of the classroom, but also transforms them to become socially aware through experiential and community-based learning. In this way, students are given real-life experience of embodying within them the core Filipino values of Makabansa (patriotism), Makatao (humanity), Makalikasan (environment-conscious), Makadiyos (God fearing).

A key to this endeavor is that the MATATAG Curriculum's Instructional Design Framework promotes holistic formation through experiential and values-based learning, especially within the Values Education subject area (Department of Education, 2024).

It accentuates the practical application of values to community action and meaningful service. True to its commitment to social transformation, Notre Dame University-Junior High School commits itself to this endeavor by engaging students in experientially-based learning opportunities through community extension programs. While extension programs respond to the welfare of the community, the same corresponds to the University's Educational Organization Management System (EOMS) Policy, committing itself to the holistic development of students both in their intellectual and values formation (NDU EOMS, 2025).

Consistent with this policy, Notre Dame University-Junior High Schools Grade 8 students of Religious Studies and Values Education conduct extension programs that give them the opportunity to internalize the values necessary for their character development and values formation. In this way, students can connect their learnings in the classroom to actual and real-life settings.

This study explores the impact of immersing grade 8 students in community extension programs particularly in translating academic values education into real-life service and social responsibility at Bahay Maria, a shelter run by the Archdiocese of Cotabato for the abandoned sick and elderly. Students' direct interactions with the elderly provide them with learning opportunity and first-hand experience to practice compassion, service, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity-core values that are

emphasized in grade 8 values education. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore how community extension programs aligned with the MATATAG framework can further enhance the moral and affective development of learners. Hence, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. What are the expectations of students prior to the program?
2. What is the experience of students during the conduct of the program?
3. Is there a significant difference in the expected and actual experience of students in the program?
4. How does a community-based extension program help students apply their learning from academic to real-life situations?
5. How does a community-based extension program develop students with a sense of responsibility and social awareness, particularly in service for the elderly?

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference in the expected and actual experience of students in the program

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design, which is appropriate for examining students' expectations, experiences, and perceived outcomes of participation in a community-based extension program. Descriptive evaluative designs are commonly used in educational research to assess perceptions and program effectiveness based on participants' responses.

Setting and Respondents

The study was conducted at Bahay Maria Foundation, a home for abandoned sick and elderly individuals located in Cotabato City, BARMM, Philippines. The respondents were Grade 8 students of Notre Dame University–Junior High School who were enrolled in Religious Studies and Values Education. Out of the total population of 336 students, 68 students participated by responding completely to the research instrument.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was utilized, selecting students who directly participated in the community immersion program at Bahay Maria and completed both the pre-immersion and post-immersion questionnaires.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire was used to gather data on students' expectations prior to the immersion and their actual experiences after the program. The instrument focused on self-awareness, beliefs and values, emotions and attitudes, decision-making and teamwork, and personal growth and social responsibility.

Using the Aiken's Content Validity Index, the content validation resulted to a value of 0.75 which says that the instrument is very valid. The five-point Likert scale used were 5 – Excellent, 4 – Very Good, 3 – Good, 2 – Fair, and 1 – Needs Improvement. Aiken's Validity Index as narrated by Irawan and Wiluyeng (2020) was calculated through the formula, wherein V = Validity of Aiken's Index, S = The score awarded by the rater minus the lowest possible rating a rater can award, C = The highest possible rating a rater can award, and N = The number of raters rating the test questionnaire. The Validity of Aiken's Index or V obtained in each item is then classified by Irawan and Wilujeng (2020) into different categories with respective decisions, namely $0 \leq V \leq 0.4$ as Invalid, $0.4 < V \leq 0.8$ Medium Validity, and $0.8 < V \leq 1$ Very Valid. The content validity through Aiken's Validity Index is 0.75 which said that the instrument is medium valid.

After content validation the respondents rated each of the question with a 4-point Likert Scale namely, 4 – Strongly Agree, 3 – Agree, 2 – Disagree, and 1 – Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was validated by three expert validators to ensure content validity.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured through a formal letter submitted by the religious studies teacher to the school principal. Upon approval, coordination was made with the University's Office of Social Development for proper endorsement and scheduling with Bahay Maria. Prior to the immersion, students were given a questionnaire to assess their expectations. The immersion activity was then conducted at Bahay Maria with the participation of the students, the RS teacher, and the researcher.

After the immersion, students answered a second questionnaire to determine their actual experiences. The collected data were then tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used for problems 1 and 2. A paired samples t-test was applied for problem 3 to determine the significant difference between students' expected and actual experiences. Qualitative interpretation of quantitative results was employed to address problems 4 and 5.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Expectations of students prior to the program

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Self-Awareness			
1. I expect feeling confident in dealing with the elderly.	3.01	.503	Agree
2. I expect gaining understanding about myself through community extension.	3.46	.531	Agree
Beliefs and values			
1. I expect helping the elderly is my utmost responsibility.	3.57	.498	Strongly Agree
2. I expect this program will help me live out the values I learn from school.	3.63	.486	Strongly Agree
Emotions and attitudes			
1. I expect feeling a sense of fulfillment in extending a helping hand to the elderly.	3.43	.555	Agree
2. I expect I can be happy hearing stories of the elderly.	3.50	.533	Strongly Agree
Decision making and teamwork			
1. I expect helping the elderly is the right thing to do.	3.68	.471	Strongly Agree
2. I expect full cooperation and teamwork among the members of each group.	3.35	.567	Agree
Personal growth and social responsibility			
1. I expect that I will become more socially responsible to the needs of the community.	3.32	.609	Agree
2. I expect I will develop sense of empathy and understanding for the elderly and those who are in need.	3.65	.512	Strongly Agree
Overall	**3.46**	**.527**	**Agree**

Note: 3.50 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.50 – 3.49 Agree, 1.50 – 2.49 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.49 Strongly Disagree

Table 1 reveal that students entered the community extension program with generally positive and value-oriented expectations, as reflected in the overall mean of 3.46 which is interpreted as Agree. Among the ten statements, the three highest-rated expectations were: "I expect helping the elderly is the right thing to do" with a mean of 3.68, "I expect I will develop sense of empathy and understanding for the elderly and those who are in need" with a mean of 3.65 and "I expect this program will help me live out the values I learn from school" with a mean of 3.63. These high ratings indicate that students strongly anticipated the immersion program as a moral and values-driven activity, emphasizing ethical responsibility, empathy, and the application of school-taught values to community service.

In contrast, the three lowest-rated expectations were: "I expect feeling confident in dealing with the elderly" with a mean of 3.01, "I expect that I will become more socially responsible to the needs of the community" with a mean of 3.32, and "I expect full cooperation and teamwork among the members of each group" with a mean of 3.35. Although still interpreted as Agree, these lower means suggest that prior to the immersion, some students expressed uncertainty regarding their confidence in interacting with the elderly, the extent of their social responsibility, and group dynamics during the activity. This may reflect limited prior exposure to direct service-learning experiences.

Overall, the findings suggest that while students strongly expected the program to reinforce values and moral responsibility, they were comparatively less certain about their personal confidence and collaborative skills. This highlights the importance of actual immersion experiences in strengthening self-efficacy and teamwork among learners.

Table 2. Experience of students during the conduct of the program

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Self-awareness			
1. I felt confident in dealing with the elderly.	3.12	.561	Agree
2. I gained understanding about myself through community extension.	3.51	.532	Strongly Agree
Beliefs and values			
1. I realized helping the elderly is my utmost responsibility.	3.47	.559	Agree
2. The program helped me live out the values I learned from school.	3.57	.581	Strongly Agree
Emotions and attitudes			
1. I felt a sense of fulfilment in extending a helping hand to the elderly.	3.44	.632	Agree
2. I was happy hearing stories of the elderly.	3.37	.571	Agree
Decision making and teamwork			
1. I realized helping the elderly is the right thing to do	3.75	.469	Strongly Agree
2. There were full cooperation and teamwork among the members of each group.	3.26	.661	Agree
Personal growth and social responsibility			
1. I became more socially responsible to the needs of the community.	3.29	.600	Agree
2. I developed sense of empathy and understanding for the elderly and those who are in need.	3.59	.525	Strongly Agree
Overall	**3.44**	**.569**	**Agree**

Note: 3.50 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.50 – 3.49 Agree, 1.50 – 2.49 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.49 Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents students' actual experiences during the community immersion, yielding an overall mean of 3.44 which is interpreted as Agree, indicating that the program was positively received. The three highest-rated experiences were: "I realized helping the elderly is the right thing to do" with a mean of 3.75, "I developed sense of empathy and understanding for the elderly and those who are in need" with a mean of 3.59, and "The program helped me live out the values I learned from school" with a mean of 3.57. These results demonstrate that the immersion effectively strengthened students' moral convictions, empathy, and capacity to translate classroom-based values into real-life actions.

Meanwhile, the three lowest-rated experiences were: "There was full cooperation and teamwork among the members of each group" with a mean of 3.26, "I became more socially responsible to the needs of the community" with a mean of 3.29, and "I was happy hearing stories of the elderly" with a mean of 3.37. Although these statements were still positively interpreted, the relatively lower means suggest that some students encountered challenges in group collaboration, emotional engagement, or fully internalizing broader social responsibility beyond the immediate activity.

Comparing Tables 1 and 2, the results indicate that students' actual experiences largely met or slightly enhanced their initial expectations, particularly in areas related to moral judgment, empathy, and values application. Notably, confidence in dealing with the elderly and ethical decision-making improved during the immersion, affirming the effectiveness of community-based extension programs as experiential learning platforms. These findings support the role of immersion activities in deepening students' affective and moral development through authentic engagement with the community.

Table 3. Difference in the expected and actual experience of students in the program

Factors		Mean	N	SD	t	df	p	Interpretation	Decision
Experience	Expected	34.60	68	2.968	.699	67	.487	Not Significant	Accept Ho
	Actual	34.38	68	3.091					

Table 3 presents the results of the paired samples t-test conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference between the expected and actual experiences of Grade 8 students who participated in the community immersion program at Bahay Maria. The mean score for the expected experience was 34.60, while the mean score for the actual experience was slightly lower at 34.38. The computed t-value of $t(67) = 0.699$ with a p-value of 0.487 indicates that the difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

This result suggests that students' expectations prior to the immersion were closely aligned with their actual experiences during the conduct of the program. The absence of a significant difference implies that the community-based extension activity effectively delivered what students anticipated in terms of values formation, emotional engagement, social responsibility, and moral development. As such, the immersion experience was neither substantially better nor worse than what students initially expected, but rather consistent and congruent with their preconceived notions.

Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted, affirming that there is no significant difference between the expected and actual experiences of the students in the program. This finding reinforces the effectiveness of the community immersion at Bahay Maria as a well-structured experiential learning activity that successfully translated classroom-based Values Education into meaningful real-life engagement. Moreover, the result supports the role of carefully planned community extension programs in meeting learners' moral and affective learning expectations while fostering authentic social involvement.

Application of Learning to Real-Life Situations

The community-based extension program enabled students to apply classroom-based learning to real-life contexts by engaging directly with the elderly. Through interaction, service, and reflection, students practiced compassion, empathy, and responsibility values previously discussed in academic settings. The consistency between expected and actual experiences demonstrates that experiential learning effectively bridges theory and practice.

Development of Responsibility and Social Awareness

The program fostered students' sense of responsibility and social awareness by exposing them to the realities of aging, abandonment, and care for the elderly. Students developed empathy and moral accountability, recognizing service as both a social and personal responsibility. This exposure deepened their understanding of social issues and encouraged active citizenship.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Students' expectations prior to the community immersion program were generally positive and value-oriented. The findings revealed that students expected the program to help them live out the values learned in school, develop empathy for the elderly, and affirm that helping the elderly is the right thing to do. However, relatively lower expectations were observed in terms of confidence in dealing with the elderly and group cooperation, indicating initial uncertainty in personal capability and teamwork before the immersion.

Students' actual experiences during the conduct of the community immersion program were likewise positive and meaningful. The results showed that students experienced strengthened moral convictions, increased empathy, and effective application of values learned in the classroom. While students reported fulfillment and moral growth, comparatively lower ratings were noted in teamwork, emotional engagement, and perceived social responsibility, suggesting areas that may benefit from further support and structured guidance.

There was no significant difference between the expected and actual experiences of students in the program. Statistical analysis using a paired samples t-test revealed that students' expectations were closely matched by their actual experiences during the immersion. This finding indicates that the program was able to meet students' anticipated outcomes and validates the effectiveness of the community extension activity.

The community-based extension program effectively helped students apply their academic learning to real-life situations. Through direct interaction with the elderly at Bahay Maria, students were able to translate theoretical concepts from Religious Studies and Values Education into concrete acts of service, compassion, and ethical decision-making, thereby reinforcing experiential and values-based learning.

The community-based extension program contributed to the development of students' sense of responsibility and social awareness, particularly in serving the elderly. Exposure to the lived realities of the elderly fostered empathy, moral responsibility,

and heightened awareness of social issues, encouraging students to view service not only as an academic requirement but as a personal and social obligation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that community-based extension programs serve as effective platforms for translating academic learning into meaningful real-life experiences. The immersion at Bahay Maria allowed Grade 8 RS/VE students to embody values taught in the classroom, reinforcing holistic formation as envisioned by the MATATAG Curriculum and the university's educational mission.

Moreover, the absence of a significant difference between expected and actual experiences suggests that well-designed extension programs can meet learners' moral, emotional, and social expectations. Community immersion not only enhances students' values formation but also cultivates empathy, responsibility, and social awareness, making it an essential component of holistic education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Stakeholders

1. School Administrators and DepEd may strengthen policies and institutional support for community-based extension programs aligned with the MATATAG Curriculum to promote holistic and values-based education.

2. Teachers and School Staff may integrate structured orientation, guided reflection, and collaborative activities before and after immersion to enhance students' confidence, teamwork, and values internalization.

3. Parents and Guardians may actively reinforce at home the values of empathy, service, and social responsibility developed through students' participation in community immersion activities.

Recommendations for the Paper and Future Research

1. Future studies may utilize a mixed-methods approach to gain deeper insights into students' values formation and lived experiences during community immersion programs.

2. Researchers may conduct longitudinal and multi-site studies to determine the sustained impact of community-based extension programs on students' moral and social development.

3. Comparative studies may be undertaken to evaluate differences between students exposed to immersion programs and those who are not, strengthening evidence of program effectiveness.

REFERENCES

1. Academ-e Multi Media Solutions Inc. (2025, May 9). *The new MATATAGE GMRC and VE curriculum - Academ-e Philippines*. Academ-e Philippines - DepEd Compliant Digital Learning Content for Filipino Grade 1-6 Students. https://www.academ-e.ph/the-new-matatag-curriculum-guide/gmrc-and-ve-cg-2023/.
2. Department of Education. (2024). Instructional Design Framework for the MATATAG Curriculum. https://matatagcurriculum.com/matatag-instructional-design-framework/.
3. Irawan, E., & Wilujeng, H. (2020). Development of an online mathematical misconception instrument. Journal of Physics: Conference Series. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345162423_Development_of_an_online_mathematical_misconception_instrument