

Perceived Effects of Debates and Role-Playing in Active Learning among Grade 7 History Students

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of Grade 7 History students toward debates and role-playing as learner-centered strategies and their relationship with active learning in History education. Conducted at Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School, the study used a descriptive research design with 163 respondents selected from a total population of 282 Grade 7 students through stratified random sampling using the Raosoft Sampling Calculator. Data were gathered through a survey questionnaire that assessed students' perceptions of debates and role-playing and measured active learning in terms of physical, intellectual, and social engagement using a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument was developed from related literature and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, while data were analyzed through weighted mean and Pearson's R using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Findings showed that students generally agreed that debates and role-playing were effective teaching and learning activities in History, with positive effects on empathy, collaboration, participation, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and peer interaction. Students also assessed their physical, intellectual, and social engagement to a great extent. Statistical results revealed a significant and strong positive relationship between students' perceptions of debates and role-playing and their active learning, particularly in physical, intellectual, and social engagement. The study concluded that debates and role-playing promote meaningful, interactive, and student-centered History learning. It recommended the use of a proposed teaching guide to strengthen participation, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and overall engagement in History classes. The study supports SDG 4, Quality Education, by promoting learner-centered and engaging instruction, and may also relate to SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, through History education's contribution to civic consciousness, cultural identity, and nation-building. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational and institutional practices by providing teachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, and future researchers with practical support for improving active learning in History.

Keywords: Active Learning, Debates, Grade 7 History, History Education, Learner-Centered Strategies, Role-Playing, Social Engagement, Student Engagement

1. Introduction

History education plays an important role in developing learners' understanding of societal development, cultural identity, civic consciousness, and nation-building. In the Philippine context, it helps students appreciate the country's historical struggles, transformations, and contributions. However, many learners perceive History as less relevant in the digital age, while instruction often remains dependent on lecture-based methods that emphasize memorization rather than meaningful understanding. In response, active learning strategies such as debates and role-playing have gained importance because they encourage participation, critical thinking, and deeper engagement with historical content.

1.1 Active Learning in Grade 7 History Education

Traditional History instruction continues to limit students' engagement and understanding when lessons focus mainly on memorization and content coverage. Although educational reforms such as Republic Act No. 10533 and DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 emphasize learner-centered instruction, creativity, and higher-order thinking skills, the application of active learning strategies in History classrooms remains challenging. These challenges include limited instructional time, classroom management concerns, different levels of teacher preparedness, and the continued use of traditional teaching approaches.

1.2 Debates and Role-Playing as Learner-Centered Strategies

The study is anchored on the value of active learning activities in improving History instruction. Debates and role-playing are viewed as interactive strategies that allow students to participate more actively, think critically, and engage more deeply

with historical lessons. These activities support the shift from passive learning to student-centered instruction by encouraging learners to express ideas, interact with peers, and understand historical content through more meaningful classroom experiences.

1.3 History Instruction at Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School

In the local context, the study focuses on Grade 7 History students at Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School. Nationally, the study aligns with Philippine educational reforms that promote learner-centered teaching and higher-order thinking skills. In a broader educational context, the study responds to the need for instructional approaches that make History more engaging and relevant to learners in the digital age.

1.4 Perceptions of Debates and Role-Playing and Students' Active Learning

The study is conceptually based on the relationship between students' perceptions of debates and role-playing and their level of active learning in History. Active learning is examined in terms of physical, intellectual, and social engagement. Through this framework, the study considers how interactive teaching and learning activities may influence students' participation, comprehension, and engagement in History lessons.

1.5 Research Gap on Debates, Role-Playing, and Active Learning in History

Despite the recognized value of active learning strategies, their implementation in History instruction continues to face practical limitations. Student engagement and historical understanding remain limited when traditional methods dominate classroom instruction. This gap highlights the need to examine the effects of debates and role-playing on the active learning of Grade 7 History students. Specifically, the study investigates students' perceptions of these strategies, their level of active learning, and whether a significant relationship exists between perceptions of debates and role-playing and active learning.

1.6 Alignment with SDG 4 and SDG 16 through History Education

This study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on improving History instruction through learner-centered and interactive strategies. By examining debates and role-playing as active learning activities, the study supports efforts to strengthen student engagement, participation, critical thinking, and meaningful understanding. It may also relate to SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as History education contributes to civic consciousness, cultural identity, and appreciation of nation-building.

1.7 Educational and Institutional Sustainability of Active Learning in History

The study contributes to educational and institutional sustainability by providing evidence that may help improve instructional practices in History. For students, debates and role-playing may create more engaging learning experiences that strengthen physical, intellectual, and social engagement. For teachers, the study may offer practical insights for designing interactive and effective instructional approaches. For school administrators and curriculum developers, it may provide support for integrating active learning strategies into the curriculum, particularly in History. For future researchers, it may serve as a reference for further studies on learner-centered strategies and their role in improving History education.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design, which was appropriate for describing and analyzing students' perceptions and levels of engagement regarding debates and role-playing as active learning strategies in History.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School, which served as the locale of the investigation.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were Grade 7 students of Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School. The total population consisted of 282 students.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

From the total population of 282 Grade 7 students, 163 respondents were selected using the Raosoft Sampling Calculator with a 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation of students from the different Grade 7 sections.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a survey questionnaire aligned with the research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part assessed students' perceptions of debates and role-playing as teaching and learning activities, while the second part measured the extent of active learning in terms of physical, intellectual, and social engagement. Responses were quantified using a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument was developed through a review of related literature and studies, and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure consistency.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers first sought permission from the school administration before distributing the questionnaires to the selected respondents. Informed consent was secured prior to participation. The questionnaires were administered directly to the respondents, after which the responses were collected and organized for analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to process and interpret the data. Weighted mean was employed to describe students' perceptions and levels of active learning, while Pearson's R was used to determine the relationship between variables.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study by ensuring the confidentiality of responses, voluntary participation, and proper handling of data to maintain accuracy, integrity, and respect for the respondents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Perceptions of Debates and Role-Playing in History Class

3.1.1 Perceived Value of Debates and Role-Playing as Teaching and Learning Activities

The students generally agreed that debates and role-playing were effective teaching and learning activities in History class, as shown by the composite mean of 2.81. The highest result indicated that debates enhanced empathy and open-mindedness about the past, with a weighted mean of 3.01. Role-playing also received positive responses, particularly in improving collaboration and life skills, with a mean of 2.94, and in promoting unity through shared ideas and realistic scenarios, with a mean of 2.93. Meanwhile, the lowest mean of 2.71 showed that role-playing was perceived as less effective in improving comprehension, creativity, critical thinking, and real-world application. The findings suggest that debates strengthened students' empathy, perspective-taking, and critical reflection, which aligns with Bochra (2020), Aladwan (2024), and Baines et al. (2023), who found that interactive strategies improve communication, academic performance, knowledge retention, empathy, and democratic awareness. Role-playing also supported collaboration and experiential learning, reflecting Zhou (2019) and Brock et al. (2019), who emphasized its role in cooperative learning, engagement, and historical understanding. However, the lower ratings indicate that the effectiveness of role-playing depends on instructional design and role interpretation, which contrasts with Zhou (2019), and Tustin (2023), who emphasized its value in memory, decision-making, communication, and historical interpretation. Although Kialo Edu (2023) and Ying (2020) noted that role assumption and decision-making support experiential learning, the findings show that role-playing must be carefully structured and aligned with the curriculum to maximize its educational value.

3.2 Active Learning Through Debates and Role-Playing

3.2.1 Physical Engagement in History Learning

The students assessed their physical engagement through debates and role-playing to a great extent, as reflected by the composite mean of 2.77. The highest mean of 3.01 showed that students were able to embody the roles of historical figures and stand confidently in front of the class. This was followed by a mean of 2.92, indicating that debates and role-playing improved comprehension, information retention, and skill development. Other results showed that these strategies developed essential life skills, communication, problem-solving, active participation, and the ability to present ideas clearly, although the lowest mean of 2.61 showed a relatively lower rating in gaining an advanced understanding of history and change over time. These results indicate that debates and role-playing encouraged students to participate actively and physically in History learning. This supports Doolittle et al. (2023), who defines physical engagement as curiosity, motivation, and participation that enhance understanding and performance. The findings are also consistent with Zhou (2019), who explained that role immersion deepens understanding of historical causation and change over time, and Doolittle et al. (2023), who stated that physical engagement strengthens critical thinking and long-term memory through active participation. Similarly, Doolittle et al. (2023) emphasized the role of these strategies in cognitive and emotional development, while Doolittle et al. (2023) highlighted that interactive environments promote effective learning, questioning, and critical thinking.

3.2.2 Intellectual Engagement in History Learning

The students rated their intellectual engagement through debates and role-playing to a great extent, with a composite mean of 2.84. The highest mean of 3.13 showed that these activities encouraged students to sharpen their ideas and build

resilience. The results also showed that students were able to voice out their thoughts and support their views, as reflected by a mean of 2.91. Debates and role-playing also helped students remain flexible and creative when dealing with complex ideas, complete work that stimulated imagination, become familiar with other viewpoints, and improve their thoughts and speech. The lowest mean of 2.63 indicated that the learning process was perceived as intellectually rewarding and transformative, but to a relatively lower extent than the other indicators. The findings show that debates and role-playing enhanced intellectual engagement by strengthening students' critical thinking, communication, creativity, and ability to consider varied viewpoints. This supports Danielson (2021), who explained that such activities expose learners to different perspectives that strengthen analytical reasoning. The findings also align with Preskill et al. (2016), who associated meaningful learning with the internalization of knowledge, and Hattie & Donoghue (2016), who highlighted improved expression and argumentation in interactive learning. Likewise, Hattie & Donoghue (2016) emphasized intellectual engagement as a driver of originality and deep thinking. However, the lower mean suggests that further refinement is needed to fully strengthen open-mindedness, conceptual depth, and transformative learning.

3.2.3 Social Engagement in History Learning

The students assessed their social engagement through debates and role-playing to a great extent, as shown by the composite mean of 2.85. The highest mean of 3.15 showed that these activities enhanced students' connectivity, competence, and confidence with peers and mentors. The findings also indicated that debates and role-playing fostered a sense of belonging, identity, and fulfillment, with a mean of 2.97, and improved belongingness within the academic environment, with a mean of 2.91. Other results showed that these strategies supported personal development, civic participation, cultural awareness, connection through shared opinions, social networking, and teamwork. However, the lowest mean of 2.65 showed a relatively lower perceived effect in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. The results indicate that debates and role-playing strengthened students' social engagement by promoting collaboration, belongingness, confidence, and peer interaction. This supports Tamplin (2023), who described social engagement as participation that fosters connection, belonging, and social cohesion. The findings are also consistent with Belay & Tefera (2023), who emphasized that collaborative engagement promotes civic involvement and personal growth. However, the lower ratings suggest that the contribution of these activities to individual development, societal growth, and emotional well-being may not yet be fully maximized. This supports Laal & Ghodsi (2012), who noted that stronger outcomes depend on proper implementation, and Laal & Ghodsi (2012), who stressed cooperative learning as a driver of collaboration. The relatively lower result on stress and anxiety contrasts with Allen et al. (2021), who linked belongingness with improved mental well-being.

3.3 Relationship Between Students' Perceptions and Active Learning

The statistical analysis showed that students' perceptions of debates and role-playing had a significant relationship with their level of active learning. Physical engagement showed a strong predictive relationship, with $B = 0.833$, $p < 0.001$, and $R^2 = 0.653$, indicating that 65.3% of the variation in physical engagement was explained by students' perceptions. Intellectual engagement also showed a strong effect, with $B = 0.812$, $p < 0.001$, and $R^2 = 0.622$, explaining 62.2% of the variation in critical thinking and analytical skills. Social engagement likewise showed a strong relationship, with $B = 0.863$, $p < 0.001$, and $R^2 = 0.620$, indicating that 62% of social participation was influenced by students' perceptions. These findings confirm that students with more positive perceptions of debates and role-playing are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of physical, intellectual, and social engagement in History class. The result on physical engagement supports Doolittle et al. (2023) and Zhou (2019), who emphasized that physical involvement enhances motivation and understanding through immersive historical experiences. The result on intellectual engagement is consistent with Danielson (2021), Hattie & Donoghue (2016) who highlighted the role of debates and role-playing in developing reasoning, perspective analysis, and long-term learning. Similarly, the result on social engagement supports Laal & Ghodsi (2012) and Allen et al. (2021), who stressed that interactive learning fosters cooperation, empathy, and belongingness. Overall, the results demonstrate that debates and role-playing are effective strategies for promoting active participation, deeper learning, and meaningful classroom interaction in History education.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Debates and role-playing were positively perceived by Grade 7 History students as effective teaching and learning activities that promoted active learning to a great extent. These strategies enhanced students' physical, intellectual, and social engagement by encouraging active participation, deeper understanding of historical concepts, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. The findings also showed a significant and strong positive relationship between students' perceptions of debates and role-playing and their level of active learning, indicating that positive perceptions of these learner-centered strategies contributed to higher student engagement. Thus, debates and role-playing support meaningful, interactive, and student-centered learning experiences in History education, and the proposed teaching guide is appropriate for strengthening participation, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and students' overall engagement in History classes.

The proposed teaching guide may be utilized to improve the delivery of History lessons, particularly at Governor Feliciano

Leviste Memorial National High School. It may help students become more actively engaged in learning by fostering participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and meaningful understanding. For teachers, the guide may serve as a practical reference for implementing debates and role-playing effectively in the classroom. Future studies may also explore other learning activities that can further promote active learning in History classes, as well as other complex areas of Araling Panlipunan, to identify additional strategies that can make the subject more engaging, dynamic, and responsive to learners' needs.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study observed ethical considerations by ensuring the confidentiality of responses, voluntary participation, and proper handling of data to maintain accuracy, integrity, and respect for the respondents.

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