

Original Research Article

Assessing Civic Literacy in Elementary Social Studies amidst the Pandemic

Abstract

Assessment in the zenith of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges the teacher's administration of assessment and evaluation tools to identify learners' pace in self-learning. This study examined elementary social studies teachers' assessment tools and practices during the closing of schools and the zenith of distance learning through self-learning modules. Using content analysis, the researchers examined the self-learning modules (SLM), learning packets, and the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) as the components of the emergency curriculum. The findings exposed the exquisite adaptation of conventional assessment tools among the types of assessment manifested in the SLM. Monitoring and feedbacking, reporting students' ratings, and authenticity of students' work were the common problems encountered by teachers. The researchers recommended the utilization of alternative assessment tools to better address the dynamics of civic literacy and flexible appraisal of student achievement. Using technology for assessment will also enhance the delivery of assessment instructions and easiness in validating students' work.

Keywords: *Civic literacy, elementary social studies, assessment, civic education, Philippines*

Introduction

The ABC Life Literacy of Canada defines civic literacy as ‘the essential knowledge and skills for bringing change in the community’. This operational definition stresses two dimensions of civic literacy: civic knowledge and civic skills. Levine (2006) dispensed an array of definitions of civic knowledge. In his article, he encapsulated civic knowledge as the knowledge that the members of the society preserved, utilized, and created to participate as responsible and active citizens. At the same time, civic skills refer to critical skills necessary for civic engagement and participation (Kirlin, 2003). Civic skills are categorized into three: organization, communication, and collective decision making. The “Guardians of Democracy,” an online professional development program of the Illinois Civics Hub and Lou Frey Institute of the University of Florida, incorporated democratic values and promotion of democracy in their definition of civic skills. Amadeo (n.d.) enlisted crucial civic skills that an individual must uphold, such as critical thinking and collective action, and they include speaking, listening, collaboration, community organizing, public advocacy, and the ability to gather and process information. These civic literacy skills are common to be upheld and developed among social studies classes due to their epistemological concern on civic engagement and citizenship education. Specifically, elementary social studies exhaust most of its curriculum concern on civic literacy. In a democratic classroom, learners are involved in the democratic process, where learners are encouraged to participate in discussions such as current events and controversial issues that propagate the value of democracy. Assessing the skills of civic literacy entails a rigorous decision of selecting appropriate assessment tools or designing authentic assessments which correspond to the learning outcomes. Social studies teachers face daunting challenges in this time of high-held accountability for learning and standardized tests. The report of Guardians of Democracy expressed their concerns on the troubles of civic learning such as the emphasis of mathematics and science as part of the national standardized testing cut allocated time for social studies, the concerns of inculcating controversial issues in classroom discussions led to the avoidance of teachers to include to discuss important issues that affects the learners, and the omission of civic among national standardized testing solidify the exclusion of civics in the curriculum structure. These turmoils had been made worst when the COVID-19 pandemic smites.

Assessment in the zenith of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges the teacher’s administration of assessment and evaluation tools to identify learners’ pace in self-learning (Gil, 2021). Teachers are compelled to exhaust their resources in planning and monitoring for effective assessment tools for learning that will be adaptive to the implementation of the emergency curriculum. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in assessment for learning implies unprecedented challenges among school stakeholders. It requires teachers to design alternative methods and approaches for assessing learners’ development and remediating learning problems. Teachers who are digital immigrants will find it hard to design an assessment tool using digital tools than those who are digital natives. Though crafting assessment tools might be easy, but the digital divide causes trouble. Also, the lesser time allotment in distance

learning compromises the time for assessment. Teachers are directed to minimize the time for assessment to make way for more opportunities for learning. Adopting balanced assessment tools, focusing on higher-order thinking skills, and collecting relevant data on the learner's knowledge and skills attainment is daunting and reflective. Another challenge for teachers is on reinforcing learning and remedial methods. Support for learning is at stake, especially when both teachers and learners are distant. Consultation on learners' concerns and problems can be communicated successfully, but the remediation must be designed based on the student's difficulties and be delivered effectively to achieve the core learning competencies.

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Furthermore, the report of Guardians of Democracy: The Civic Missions of Schools underscores the challenges faced by schools that advocate for civic literacy and engagement. The existing curriculum that centers on standardized testing and economy-oriented curriculum compromises the relevant place of civic education as an integrated field of knowledge in social studies and even in the extracurricular activities executed by schools. The report continues with the total absence of civic content and competencies in the national and local standardized tests results to a lesser extent of priority in teaching civics to elementary and secondary students. Researchers argue that the problem with incorporating civic content in the National or State Testing is the complexity of measuring civic skills and dispositions. While civic knowledge can be measured through rote memorization, civic skills and dispositions are expected to manifest when learners are participating politically, such as voting, community engagement, writing a letter to a solon, and others. In addition, Barab, et al. (2007) explained that despite its inclusion [civic content] in current testing and assessment policies, it fails to boost learners' civic skills and knowledge.

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Advisory Committee for Testing and evaluation asserted that evaluation tools must target curriculum goals and objectives, must be able to enhance instruction, must assess both content and process, and must be authentic as possible. The results of such evaluations and assessments must solely be used for the development of effective instruction. While the Guardians of Democracy Report on promoting civic literacy for democracy asserts that the assessment data gathered from the learners will be used for diagnosing students strengths and weaknesses in civic concepts; evaluating the effects of the programs and the curricula; guiding educators for implementing effective instruction; needs-based allocation of resources; sanction and reward administrators, teachers, and students performances; and as a foreground for entering a new topic. The NCSS further suggests the adoption of a new approach in assessing learning outcomes in teaching social studies that focus on performance than knowledge (NCSS, 2013). The use of performance assessment in social studies was in high regard at the height of the C3 Framework and Inquiry approach in social studies. Drake and Nelson (2008) stated that performance assessments elicit data on three dimensions of your students' historical literacy. To begin, students who successfully complete performance assessment exercises exhibit their understanding of historical events, topics, and

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concepts. Second, students exhibit their reasoning capacity, which includes the ability to examine, evaluate, and synthesize historical facts. Thirdly, students exhibit their capacity for effectively communicating their historical knowledge and reasoning to a broader audience. Furthermore, the NCSS, in its effort to advance performance assessment over knowledge assessment, created the NCSS Performance-Based Clearinghouse, which provides (1) examples of social studies performance-based assessment measures conducted at local and state levels; (2) research findings that support the use of performance-based assessment to inform instruction, and (3) existing educational policies that can inform advocacy efforts for the inclusion of social studies performance-based assessment at the local, state and national level. The document also charged that performance-based assessments are ideal for social studies, for it contains powerful implications for preparing learners for the 21st century. Specific examples include but are not limited to discussion, writing, performances, projects, and presentations (Curry & Smith, 2017).

A longitudinal study conducted by Curry & Smith on the Assessment practices in Social Studies classrooms from 2013 to 2015 among K to 12 teachers indicated that knowledge-based assessments were ranked higher than performance-based assessments. The survey includes social studies teachers who are teaching civics in basic education where their common patterns of assessment in social studies are highly conventional. This study indicates that despite national and local standards recommended for social studies teachers to observe and apply in assessment and evaluation, the preference for assessing learners' rote memorization is still present because of its pedagogical convenience in administering and reporting. However, scholars and experts in social studies would like to see more application of performance-based assessments in the curriculum and classrooms. Curry and Smith (2017) recommended that professional development that will help teachers understand the academic impact of performance-based assessments among learners in social studies.

The UNDP conducted comparative national surveys on civic literacy and engagement among several countries (e.g., Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus) to support the democratization, human rights, and civil society programs and goals of the respective countries. However, in the case of the Philippines, there is an absence of such surveys to quantify the civic literacy of Filipinos. Nonetheless, there are active non-governmental organizations that promote citizenship education and civic engagement in the country. The Philippine Center for Civic Education and Democracy launched the Project Citizens in the Philippines (an adaptation of the Project Citizen by the Center for Civic Education) as a continuing project that sprouts from every corner of the country. The aim of the project is to develop a generation of young Filipinos that are committed and conscious citizens in seeking public interventions to solve the problems faced by the community. The impact of the project resulted in a significant increase in self-efficacy among high school students in civic participation through the effective delivery of direct learning experience and participative manner of facilitation of the project (Pingul, 2015).

The Philippine Center for Civic Education and Democracy as a non-governmental organization established in 2007 is dedicated to enhancing civic education to facilitate meaningful citizen engagement in democratic life. The organization is responsible for deepening the understanding of citizens on civic and democratic values through research, implementing innovative programs that invoke the citizens' sense of nationalism and patriotism, and being committed towards broader participation of citizens in governance. This pioneering organization that promotes civic education conducted several training, seminars, and workshops with themes on citizenship education from different corners of the country. Their Project Citizen, an adaptation of the project implemented by the Center for Civic Education, is a worldwide program that aims to increase students' democratic involvement, political efficacy, and civic engagement at the middle and high school levels. It is a strategy that entails educating teacher moderators in embedding democracy education in the classroom while also offering an opportunity for students to engage in community problem-solving and apply their citizenship learning in real life. The program has served around 3200 students from across the country in recent years. However, the short failing of their projects was the evaluation of whether the project's impact is practiced and observable among participants in the long run.

In order to identify the common assessment tools and implementation for civic literacy amidst the emergency curriculum, it is relevant to conduct an exploratory study in the field. This study will examine elementary social studies teachers' assessment tools and practices during the closing of schools and the zenith of distance learning through self-learning modules.

Methodology

This study adopted a content analysis on the learning packets, self-learning modules, and the Most Essential Learning Outcomes (MELCs) as the emergency curriculum in identifying the common assessment tools in civic literacy. The gathered data will be supported by claims from the elementary social studies teachers from the focus-group discussion. First, the researcher analyzed the MELCs as the basis for the development of self-learning modules and learning packets. The MELCs, as the word per se, contains the selected learning outcomes that are crucial for learners to achieve for survival that is adapted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MELCs is the curriculum guide for social studies teachers to design a self-learning module that is self-taught and fitted for learners in an isolated and independent learning setting. Each learning competency in the MELCs is expected to be achieved by learners guided by the self-learning modules and support from the teachers in a given specified time. This is also where assessment enters the learning process, where it is utilized as a tool for measuring the teacher's expectations and learners' performance matches. The research identified several learning competencies that develop civic literacy or engage learners in citizenship education. Based on the result, the Grade 4 Social Studies curriculum contains substantive learning competencies that showcase the acquisition of civic knowledge, skills, disposition, and participation among young

learners. In outlining the learning competencies that resonate with civic literacy, the researcher adopted the definition of civic literacy of Guardians of Democracy report on “The Civic Mission of Schools” (2011) where civic literacy contains civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that prepare the learner to become a responsible citizen. With these criteria, the identification of learning competencies becomes holistic and magnified.

The learning competencies will be juxtaposed with the self-learning modules and learning packets to draw the types of assessment tools used for assessing learners’ output given the learning competency. After repeated analysis of the self-learning modules, an outline of common assessment tools used to assess learners’ civic literacy had been grouped for interpretation and discussion. To cross-examine, a focus-group discussion had been conducted together with the social studies teachers to further elucidate the results and validate the findings.

Results and Discussion

Quarter	Week	Learning Competency
3rd	1	Natatalakay ang kahulugan at kahalagahan ng pamahalaan (Discuss the definition and significance of government)
	2-3	Nasusuri ang balangkas o istruktura ng pamahalaan ng Pilipinas (Analyze the Philippines government structure and framework)
	4	Nasusuri ang mga gampanin ng pamahalaan upang matugunan ang pangangailangan ng bawat mamamayan (Analyze the roles and responsibilities of the government in addressing the needs of each citizen)

	5-7	<p>Nasusuri ang mga programa ng pamahalaan tungkol sa:</p> <p>(a) pangkalusugan</p> <p>(b) pang-edukasyon</p> <p>(c) pangkapayapaan</p> <p>(d) pang-ekonomiya</p> <p>(e) pang-impraestruktura</p> <p>(Examine the government's programs on:</p> <p>a. Health</p> <p>b. Education</p> <p>c. Peace Resolution</p> <p>d. Economy</p> <p>e. Infrastructure</p>
	8	<p>Napahahalagahan (nabibigyang-halaga) ang bahaging ginagampanan ng pamahalaan</p> <p>(Value the government's role to its nation)</p>
4th	1	<p>Natatalakay ang konsepto at prinsipyo ng pagkamamamayan</p> <p>(Discuss the concepts and principles of citizenship)</p>
	2-3	<p>Natatalakay ang konsepto ng karapatan at tungkulin</p> <p>(Discuss the concepts on human rights and responsibility)</p>

	4-5	Naipaliliwanag ang mga gawaing lumilinang sa kagalingan pansibiko (Explain civic welfare pursuits)
	6	Napahahalagahan ang kagalinang pansibiko (Value the significance of civic welfare)
	7	Nasusuri ang bahaging ginagampanan ng mga mamamayan sa pagtataguyod ng kaunlaran ng bansa (Examine the roles and responsibility of a citizen towards national development)

Table 1. Grade 4 Learning Competencies that pursu^{ts} civic literacy

The Propagation of Written Tests in Social Studies

There were three (3) types of assessments that were adopted in designing the SLM. The developers used diagnostic assessment in the form of pre-test, formative assessment for enrichment, and summative assessment through post-test. The pre-test was a 5-item multiple-choice test that is served on the introductory part of the SLM to diagnose the learner's schema on the topic. Learners are instructed to answer the pre-test before proceeding to the next part of the module to gain an overview of the knowledge and skills that they are about to embark. This will also condition the student's mind for absorbing new knowledge, skills, and values and to stimulate their learning motivation towards the topic. Formative assessment was in a form of enriching the newly introduced concepts and identifying areas for learner's improvement. The enrichment activities were selected-response tests such as multiple-choice, true or false, and identification. Summative assessments are in the form of a post-test where, customarily, the item tests in the pre-test are utilized but revised or reorganized. This serves as the ultimate judgment for the acquisition of civic literacy among learner's for this assessment validates if the learners met the learning expectations for the whole SLM. Thus, it is blatantly observed in the SLM that despite the scholarly evidence on effective assessment and teacher's authority to select

assessment tools that are suitable for their learners, there is a proliferation of conventional paper-pen tests in assessing civic literacy.

As an integral part of acquiring civic literacy, scholars recommend that social studies teachers utilize authentic, adaptive, and alternative assessments to better collect information about student learning. However, assessing in an emergency curriculum is a struggle for teachers, especially for identifying developmentally appropriate assessment tools, designing assessments that parallel the curriculum expectations, consistent monitoring of activities, effective communication for feedbacking, and reporting students' performance. Though teachers may adopt various assessment tools that promote higher-order thinking skills, civic engagement, action civics, and service-learning, they prefer to use a selected-response test for learner's safety and avoid meticulous validation of their developed instrument by their immediate supervisors. This preference in assessing learners' civic literacy is consistent with the work of Caliskan & Kasiksic (2010) where social studies teachers prefer to use such type of selected-response test due to its time efficiency and convenience in checking. To ensure that the assessment hits the mark of their learning outcomes, teachers carefully construct their question items before distributing their SLM to their respective students. Though it is uncontested in the principles of assessment that well-designed multiple-choice questions can measure higher-order thinking in the cognitive domain (Scully, 2017), social studies teachers must carefully examine the construction, purpose, and expected result or answer of the question.

The report of Guardians of Democracy stressed that effective civic learning in a democratic classroom involves the incorporation of discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, especially those that explicitly affects the lives of its citizens, designing and implementing programs that connect the student's academic works towards community service (service learning), offer extracurricular activities that involve the different school stakeholders, encouraging students to participate in school governance, simulations on the democratic processes such as town hall activities, and holistic assessment of civic engagement. These indispensable learning experiences, if met in the SLM, requires that the social studies teacher develop a wholesome and authentic assessment that will eminently show the learner's civic performance in the community instead of being written on a piece of paper. As Blevins and Talbert (2016) also expressed their recommendations on an assessment that will assimilate in the innovations in civic education where learners are invited in an instructional setting to examine the community, choose an issue, research an issue and setting a goal, analyze power, developing strategies, and taking action to effect policy requires.

Monitoring students' performance is also a grueling task to execute especially when learners are assessed using traditional methods of assessment. Successful teaching of literacy uses an experiential learning approach in instruction (Fudge & Skipworth, 2017) and is best assessed using adaptive (Meuwissen, 2013) and authentic assessment (Sherinn, 2020). In these approaches, learners are invited to be directly involved in multiple discussions, have first-hand experience of the issue, relate to the existing situation, and produce a reasoned judgment

whenever plated with a civic-provoking activity. When presented with these civic learning strategies, assessing the freshly acquired civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions requires to be applied and observable beyond standardized tests. Using authentic assessment in assessing learner's quality of learning is supported by scholars (Levine & Ginsberg, 2015) –where it involves real-life application of what they have learned in the natural setting. Then using a rubric, learners are rated based on their performance or result on the criteria agreed by both parties prior to the execution or development of outputs. Authentic assessment manifests strong evidence on the civic competence of learners than a traditional type of administering an assessment. In this approach, learners are given a headstart on what will be assessed through the learning outcomes while making sure on target with their learning experiences. The end goal is for learners to express, demonstrate, and apply what they have learned in actual and acceptable performance or output, such as written components, constructed models, recorded visual presentations.

Another problem faced in this picture is the feedbacking and reporting stage. Myers (2017) suggests that feedback must be timely, specific, and corrective. Teacher's feedback on the student's work must be returned to the students or student's parents abruptly and comprehensively. It is recommended to provide feedback as soon as possible while the learner's focus is still on their previous work and to avoid being overwhelmed with a bunch of feedback with the rest of the subjects. Since the SLM are submitted weekly, depending on the student's pacing, feedbacking of their week-long work only happens once or never. Sometime's it becomes casual, informal, or written due to the limited contact of teachers with the students and their parents. Likewise, its nature had transformed from being corrective to reinforcing the learner's accomplishment. Thus, feedbacks are gradually omitted as a crucial element in the assessment process. This issue will also lessen the opportunity for learners in correcting, improving, and adjusting their works with the recommendations of their teachers due to the limited time allotment and the overloaded modules to accomplish.

The C3 Framework for Civics screams for the demonstration of democratic values and civic virtue. In comparison, the Inquiry Arc Model invites the learners to construct their own meaningful experiences and solve problems. Both of these curriculum frameworks demand the social studies teachers when assessing to select aligned, appropriate, and alternative methods that will be able to assess these critical dispositions. To provide a better way of assessing a learner's affective facet means choosing an adaptive assessment tool that is fit for the learning context. Parker (2014) encourages social studies teachers to utilize multiple indicators of learning in order to justify the deliberate performances of the learners. This means that teachers must collect an array of learning evidences from vicarious assessment tools to identify the student's achievement. This can be done by asking students to compile their creative and checked works in a portfolio or showcasing them in a performance. A mere score from their summative test in their SLM is just a piece of the puzzle. A good practice in assessing learners involves the adaptation of multiple indicators from anecdotal records to standardized test scores.

Alternative assessments amidst the pandemic

The National Council for Social Studies (1990) advocates for regular, rigorous, and consistent assessment of social studies education; assessment of student's progress in terms of knowledge, thinking skills, value judgment, and social involvement; and a diversity of assessment methodologies. However, social studies teachers are constrained to perform their best as typical classroom teachers when the pandemic struck. The government policies and programs were designed to mitigate the spread of the virus and limit contact between teachers and students. Though the mode of instruction shifted from traditional to independent and modular, the learning experiences and assessment tools remained constant. A teacher-made test is instructed in SLM to measure the learner's progress. Such quantitative assessments are common among SLM developed by the Department of Education and facilitated by Social Studies teachers. These types of assessments are numeric and restrict the learner's performance through a score, rating, or grades. It fails to assess the qualitative aspect of students' performance and runs the risk of paying no attention to students who perform better in tests.

A better way to assess students' performance amidst the pandemic was through alternative assessments. Ferlazzo (2021) pushes teachers to make the most of the pandemic period by experimenting with teaching and learning techniques that may suit their students while keeping their thrust in attaining learning standards. Alternative assessments are assessment methods that provide an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pen tests (Gronlund, 1998). These assessment tools can vary from performance, portfolio, and authentic assessment. Social studies teachers have defined alternative evaluation as "student socialization" and as "not only acquiring knowledge, but also using the knowledge" (Tay, 2013). This definition may be connected with the general framework of a project and performance evaluations, which are methods of alternative measurement and evaluation. Several scholars clamor social studies teachers to aim for more authentic assessment. Parker (2014) stressed that "assessments should be geared to finding out students' ability to apply knowledge and skills successfully in meaningful or authentic tasks. "Alternative assessments can also be in the form of structured observation on the student's ability to use what they have learned from their learning exploration stage, output-based or performance-based. This will allow students flexibility in their learning and performing tasks. Rather than focusing on a teacher-made test and indicating the student's performance based on rote memorization, engage students on how to apply the knowledge, skills, and values that they have acquired in authentic situations and real-life settings. However, despite these recommendations and teachers' prerogative to control the assessment procedure, teachers still prefer paper-pen tests for their practicality and acceptability.

Comment [AK3]: Some more elaboration on the alternative assessments used during the pandemic time should be included, it will present a proper analogy of the ways in which the assessment was handled by the teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Assessing students' civic literacy is a Herculean endeavor. Students' civic literacy is best assessed in the real-world scenario beyond teacher observation. It is highly recommended for teachers to maximize the utilization of alternative assessment tools to provide several indicators of learners' performance and pitfalls. The incorporation of a portfolio, authentic, and performance-based assessment in SLM can provide a different angle of the student's achievement. Using technology for assessment will also enhance the delivery of assessment instruction and easiness in validating students' work. There is no panacea, and different assessment tools are appropriate in different contexts. However, the changing democratic ideals of society, political polarization, attack on human rights calls for social studies teachers to critically assess learners' civic literacy to fit on the calling.

Comment [AK4]: These technology based assessment tools should be illustrated in the paper more vividly.

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