EXPANDING HORIZONS THROUGH RESEARCH IN THE BASIC EDUCATION

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One noteworthy advancement in the Philippine educational setting is the inclusion of research subjects into the junior and senior high school curricula. This initiative does not only bring the nation to align with global educational standards, but also encourage and cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning among students. Through the integration of research components into the basic education, the Department of Education (DepEd) is preparing the youth to contribute and traverse effectively along an increasingly complex and information-rich world.

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Going back to earlier times, research activities in the Philippine basic education were rare and limited. Most often, research was confined to higher education institutions. The implementation of the K to 12 program, mandated by Republic Act 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, introduced a modification of the paradigm. This program extended basic education, adding two senior high school years. The program emphasized the integration of research subjects across various grade levels. In junior high school, research is usually embedded within subjects like Science and English for regular programs. Moreover, the special program for Science, Technology and Engineering offers research subjects for grades 9 and 10. These focus on investigatory projects and scientific research writing. By senior high school, students engage in more specialized research courses, such as Practical Research 1 and 2, and Inquiries, Investigation and Immersion which delve into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies, respectively.

Research subjects are instrumental in developing and enhancing critical thinking abilities of students. Engaging in research encourages learners to question assumptions,

analyze data, and draw evidence-based conclusions. A study by Sanchez et al. (2023) underscores how junior high school learners became more critical thinkers through the integration of research into their curriculum. Students learned to use data in decision-making. These findings reflect a culture of research that promotes careful analysis and evidence-based conclusions.

Research subjects have also been closely linked to improved academic performance and increased student engagement. Based on a study conducted at Bestlink College of the Philippines, grade 11 Humanities and Social Sciences students who participated in research activities developed enhanced skills and knowledge. Evidently, this engagement positively affects their academic performance. Moreover, such hands-on experiences with research prepared them for future research endeavors.

In the face of benefits and advantages, challenges in the integration of research into the high school curriculum still emerge. Oftentimes, students encounter difficulties with research subjects. Lack of foundational research knowledge, challenges in formulating research topics, and limited resources are some of the obstacles that impede a smooth research journey. Leonares (2019) identified these issues among senior high school students. Such concerns call for better planning and preparation, stronger implementation strategies, and more substantial support in earlier grade levels.

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One factor that helps ensure the success of research integration is teacher preparedness. Professional development and teacher training may determine the outcomes of learners' research. Students who will study and conduct the research need a teacher to direct, supervise and monitor the process. Educators must possess adequate research skills and pedagogical strategies to effectively guide students. Arrieta and Masarigan (2021) highlighted the significance of faculty development programs to enhance research competencies among teachers. Such programs are critical for equipping educators with the essential tools to foster a culture of research in schools.

To pave the way towards the establishment of a research-oriented culture in schools, a multifaceted approach should be used. One vital aspect should focus on developing a curriculum that integrates research components. Gopez and Demeterio (2023) highlighted the need for a dedicated research program within the senior high school curriculum to cultivate a culture of scientific inquiry. By having a clear guide to how research skills can be incorporated in different subjects, research may eventually take a vital place in the regular classroom. Another facet is one of the most commonly identified factors in improving educational outcomes - professional development for teachers. As formerly mentioned, well-trained educators with adequate research experience takes a large portion in influencing the success of research outcomes. Lastly, adequate resources should be provided to carry out studies, experiments, and other research methodologies. All these aim to build a culture of research in the junior and senior high schools.

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Integrating research subjects in Philippine junior and senior high schools embodies a transformative movement headed to a modernized and improved education. By promoting critical thinking, enhancing academic performance, and preparing students for future tasks and trials, this initiative brings education to new horizons, promising endless possibilities. However, for this potential to materialize, policies should be crafted, and programs should be established to address the challenges in implementation, support teacher development, and cultivate a research-oriented culture within schools.

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