



Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students Participating in Community Service: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Community service provides students with avenues for them to contribute to their communities while improving personal values, social relationships, and a sense of responsibility. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of senior high school students who participated in community services in selected barangays of Tanjay City, Negros Oriental. This study conducted semi-structured interviews validated by the research adviser wherein twelve selected participants were targeted through purposive sampling. The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis in which it determined common patterns and themes from the participants' experiences. The findings revealed 9 major themes (1) Finding Purpose and Fulfillment Through Meaningful Community Engagement, (2) Personal and Interpersonal Development Through Community Service, (3) Social Influences and Encouragement in Community Service Participation, (4) Challenges in Balancing Service and Personal Responsibilities, (5) Longing for Recognition and Appreciation, (6) Resisting Temptations, (7) Community Commitment For Community Belonging, (8) Respect for Diverse Beliefs, (9) Building Meaningful Social Connections Through Community Service. The results of this study created deeper understanding about the lived experiences of senior high school students who volunteered in community activities. The findings offer perspective for community organizations in developing programs that encourage active involvement among student participation in community service. Ultimately, the findings indicate that community service serves not only as a way for students to help their communities but also as a chance for personal growth, positive relationships, and a deeper sense of belonging.

Keywords: *Community service, senior high school, Tanjay City, lived experiences, personal development, qualitative phenomenology*

Introduction



Community cleanliness plays a crucial role in the overall prosperity, health, and security in a community for its residents. One way to promote community clean-ups is by conducting community service programs where Senior High School students can volunteer to use their time and skills to help others while also developing valuable life and social skills. These factors not only benefit students socially, emotionally, and academically, but it also encourages them to develop valuable skills in leadership, empathy, civic responsibility, and social awareness amongst their fellow students. However, students also encounter difficulties that coincide with their participation in these programs, such as struggling to balance their academic workload, managing time outside of their service, and difficulties that arise with scheduling and planning, which may influence how senior high school students view these activities.

According to (Gemar, 2025), the factors that drive students' participation in fields like these include altruism, social connections toward their community, as well as refining their academic standpoint in order to develop their career, while changes such as conflicts in schedules and transportation difficulties still remain prominent. Despite the known benefits community service participation yields, there is still a limited understanding of the lived experiences of Senior High School students who participate in these types of events. Altruism emerged as the primary motivation, though challenges such as scheduling conflicts and transportation were reported, particularly in island schools. Community engagement was recognized as vital in nurturing leadership and social responsibility Vince N.A., (2026). A community's cleanliness is an important factor to take into account when creating a safe and secure environment for its residents. Community service programs are activities where senior high school students volunteer their time and skills to help others and serve their community, and in some cases, being able to gain academic benefits from their school. Students who provide their services for their community allow both them and their community to be able to build a stable foundation for both their youth and for their society. These activities are designed not only to complement classroom instruction but also to develop students' leadership skills, empathy, and civic identity (Mary J.C., 2025). Through these activities, students gain experiences that may shape their values, attitudes, and personal growth.

This study aims to understand and explore the lived experiences of Senior High School students involved in community service programs in Tanjay City. By understanding their lived experiences, their insights, and the challenges that they may have faced, this study aims to provide the necessary information that may help schools implement, enhance, strengthen, and better facilitate their community service programs, better support their students, and encourage greater participation by the youth in community service and engagement. The findings of this study may also benefit Senior High School students by helping them gain a deeper understanding of the value of community service, encouraging greater participation, and inspiring personal growth, leadership, empathy, and civic responsibility. Teachers and community service coordinators may use the insights to improve the planning and implementation of volunteer activities. Likewise, the Local Government Unit (LGU), barangays, and community organizations may use the findings to strengthen partnerships with schools and promote greater youth participation in community development

Although previous studies have already identified the motivations, difficulties, and the benefits that come with a senior high school students' participation in community service activities (Mary J.C., 2025; Gemar, 2025; Vince N.A., 2026), these findings mainly focus only on the factors regarding the students' participation towards the program. There remains a limited amount of data and research surrounding the lived experiences of these Senior High School students, more specifically, the students that reside within Barangay San Isidro, Santa Cruz Viejo, San Jose, Ilaud, Barangay 7, Barangay 9, Barangay 3, and Barangay 8.

Furthermore, little information is known about how students personally view or understand the meaning of community service, the difficulties these students may face, and how these activities and experiences may influence their development as both a student and a person, their view of their position within a community, and their view on their future. Addressing this gap will provide valuable insights for schools in enhancing and strengthening their community service programs that will better cater to students' needs and their experiences. Moreover, the findings may assist teachers, community service coordinators, the Local Government Unit (LGU), barangays, and community



organizations in providing better support for student volunteers and youth interested in community service, civic engagement, and youth development.

Moreover, this study aims to answer these questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Senior High School students while participating in community service activities?
2. Why do Senior High School students engage in community service activities?
3. How has participating in community service influenced the personal growth, values, and sense of social responsibility of Senior High School students?

Literature Review

Community service has long been recognized as an important component of students' holistic development, providing opportunities to apply classroom learning in real-life situations while fostering leadership, empathy, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Through active participation in volunteer activities and community-based programs, Senior High School students are exposed to meaningful experiences that shape their personal values, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and develop essential life skills. As a result, community service has become an important educational practice that promotes both academic learning and character development.

Numerous studies have examined various aspects of community service participation among students, including its influence on personal growth, the factors that motivate students to volunteer, and the challenges they encounter while balancing academic responsibilities with community involvement. Previous research consistently highlights the positive outcomes of community service, such as increased self-confidence, improved leadership and communication skills, stronger empathy, and a heightened sense of civic responsibility. At the same time, existing literature also identifies common barriers to participation, including time constraints, academic workload, limited institutional support, and logistical difficulties that may affect students' willingness and ability to engage in volunteer activities.

Despite these valuable contributions, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on the measurable benefits, motivations, and challenges associated with community service participation. Comparatively fewer studies have explored how Senior High School students personally experience these activities and how they interpret the meaning and impact of community service in their own lives. Understanding these lived experiences is essential because it provides deeper insights into students' perspectives, emotions, and personal reflections that cannot be fully explained through quantitative findings alone.

Therefore, this literature review examines previous studies related to three major themes: (1) Community Service and Students' Personal Development, (2) Motivation of Senior High School Students in Participating in Community Service, and (3) Challenges Experienced by Senior High School Students in Community Service. By synthesizing these related studies, the review establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation of the present study while identifying the existing research gap. It also highlights the need for a phenomenological approach to better understand the lived experiences of Senior High School students participating in community service, particularly within the selected barangays of Tanjay City.

Community Service and Students' Personal Development

In the context of youth development as a whole, community service is considered one of the most impactful ways for holistic character development and skill enhancement. Rather than acting merely as an extracurricular activity, civic engagement acts as a learning ground where students, mainly those who are in senior high school, refine both their interpersonal and cognitive abilities simultaneously. Through direct participation in community service programs, volunteer initiatives, and community-based activities, students are placed in situations that require them to communicate effectively with others as well as utilizing teamwork in order to solve problems that they might encounter. These experiences allow them to apply the knowledge gained inside the classroom to practical situations,



utilizing learning while developing ideas and strategies that are difficult to cultivate through traditional, classroom taught instructions.

Several studies consistently highlight the role of civic engagement in strengthening students' leadership and interpersonal communication abilities. To exemplify this, Castro et al. (2024) found that active participation in civic duties significantly boosts students' teamwork, public speaking, decision-making, and leadership capacity. Their findings suggest that students who engage regularly in community service programs become more confident in taking up leadership roles to properly coordinate with their peers and making informed decisions under intense situations. Similarly, Headrick (2024) demonstrated that participation in civic engagement programs develops civic leadership, which, in turn, generates a stronger sense of responsibility toward the community. Additionally, it also molds students' social awareness as well as their team collaboration. Together, these findings indicate that community service serves as a practical environment where students develop essential leadership abilities while simultaneously learning the importance of cooperation and active participation in solving community problems.

Beyond the development of leadership and collaboration, these studies also emphasize the influence of community service on students' personal values, ethics, and empathy. As students engage with individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, they become increasingly aware of the realities experienced by others, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of societal issues. As noted by Estrera (2024), service-learning and volunteerism are crucial to developing positive character and cultivating empathy toward others. By integrating academic learning with community involvement, service-learning enables students to connect internal classroom concepts with external social experiences while encouraging reflection on the possible consequences of a student's actions. These experiences contribute to the development of compassion, integrity, and civic responsibility that are not limited to a classroom setting.

The integration of leadership development and character formation is further reflected in the findings of Salam et al. (2019), who reported that engagement in community service programs further improves a student's confidence, critical thinking skills, and civic responsibility. Their study suggests that participation in community service programs encourages students to analyze complex social issues and to evaluate possible solutions with others. In this way, community service not only enhances cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving but also enforces social development, hard work, and confidence. These combined outcomes describe how civic engagement provides students with opportunities to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally through meaningful participation in real-world community experiences.

Motivation of Senior High School Students in Participating in Community Service

Motivation is a crucial factor in the participation of each senior high school student in civic engagements. There are many particular reasons and motivations that influence the drive of a student's willingness to participate in community service. According to the findings of Alzaareer and Abdalla (2023), students were motivated to participate in community activities due to their personal beliefs and desire to help their community. Their study shows that gaining knowledge and enhancing skills are also one of the reasons why students are motivated to volunteer in serving their community. By participating in school and community activities, students develop important qualities such as leadership, teamwork, empathy, and social responsibility. These findings suggest that participating in such activities provides experiences that positively influence students' overall character development.

Participants' willingness to participate is driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Calvez & Bual, 2024). Evidence from the study shows that students in senior high school sought to develop their ability to gain awareness and to connect with the community due to seeing an opportunity to help individuals and communities in vulnerable situations and create a beneficial social impact. In addition, there are also students who are motivated to engage in community outreach programs because of external factors. HUMSS students taking Community Engagement, Solidarity, and Citizenship (CSC) see that learning and understanding the course is needed to complete assessments



and performance tasks, which is a requirement to pass the subject and avoid getting undesirable results like failing the subject or disappointing others (Deci & Ryan, 2016, as cited in Calvez & Bual, 2024).

The study of Ryan and Deci (2020) explained that people may volunteer in programs because of their intrinsic motivation, such as internal satisfaction, or it may also be due to their extrinsic motivation, such as receiving external rewards or academic requirements. The study supports the findings that senior high school students are willing to engage in public service activities because they want to contribute to helping their community and because they see that it helps them meet their needs academically.

In another case, volunteering in such activities can help students cope up with what they are going through (Tsai et al., 2024). According to their study, participating in community services can help people cope up with loneliness, stress, and other personal struggles. Their findings suggest that volunteers continue to participate in such activities since it can help them reduce their negative feelings through helping their community.

Challenges Experienced by Senior High School Students in Community Service

Although community engagement offers countless opportunities for a students' personal and social development, participation is often accompanied by difficulties that may limit a students' willingness to participate in community service programs. Senior high school students are expected to balance academic performance as well as their extracurriculars and their personal lives. Therefore, participating in community service may inflict more harm than do good for them. These challenges show that a students' involvement in civic engagement is influenced not only by their own motivation, but also by other contributing factors such as: institutional support, resource availability, and academic stress as well as pressure.

A recurring challenge seen in other studies is the difficulty in balancing civic engagement with personal and academic responsibilities. Headrick (2024) found that an excess of academic workload and difficulties regarding institutional acceptance prevent students from properly focusing on community service programs. Likewise, Yusof, N. et. al.(2020) reported that as students participate in community service programs, there is little space between practice and execution when participating in community service programs as well as a lack of cognitive freedom which, in turn, frames community service as a whole as an unpleasant, tiring, and harsh environment for its participants, mainly students. All in all, these findings suggest that while students recognize the value and importance of community service programs, the constant pressure of their personal and academic life often reduces the amount of time and energy a student may devote to volunteer work. This further highlights the need for institutions to consider how civic engagement opportunities can be integrated better into students' academic experiences in order for students who participate in such programs to feel less stress when balancing said programs with school work and personal difficulties.

In addition to time constraints, the availability of resources and institutional support also affects how students participate in community service. Calvez and Bual (2024) identified that limited resources, time constraints, and improper institutional support are common obstacles being faced by students that participate in community service. These findings state that successful civic engagement is not linked only to a student's willingness to participate as schools and organizations play an essential role in providing financial and administrative support that is necessary for community service programs. Without these forms of assistance, a student may encounter barriers that affect both the quality and sustainability of their participation.

Similarly, Mori (2025) further emphasizes that a students' civic engagement is shaped by the broader educational environment in which these programs take place. The study highlights the importance of support from schools in creating opportunities that encourage students to participate in community service programs whilst addressing the problems that students encounter in the process. Through recognition and responding to these challenges, institutions can better support students in maintaining active involvement in civic engagement alongside their academic responsibilities.



Research Gap

Community service has long been recognized as an important activity that contributes to the personal, social, and civic development of young people. Through volunteering in community activities, students not only contribute to the improvement of their communities but also develop valuable knowledge, skills, and attitudes that prepare them to become responsible and active citizens. Castro et al. (2024) found that participation in civic engagement activities enhances senior high school students' leadership, teamwork, communication, social awareness, and decision-making skills. Similarly, other studies have emphasized that community service promotes empathy, civic responsibility, and personal growth among student volunteers. While these studies provide valuable evidence regarding the positive outcomes and benefits of community service, they primarily focus on the skills students develop or the factors associated with participation.

However, there remains limited research that explores community service from the perspective of the students themselves, particularly regarding how they experience these activities, interpret their experiences, overcome the challenges they encounter, and describe the meaning that community service holds in their lives. Furthermore, existing studies have generally been conducted in different educational and community settings, making it difficult to determine whether their findings accurately reflect the experiences of Senior High School students in Tanjay City. Specifically, there is limited literature focusing on students from Barangays San Isidro, Santa Cruz Viejo, San Jose, Ilaud, Barangays 3, 7, 8, and 9. Addressing this gap is important because understanding students' lived experiences can provide deeper insights into how community service influences their personal growth, values, leadership, and sense of social responsibility. The findings of this study may also serve as a basis for schools, community service coordinators, barangays, and the Local Government Unit (LGU) in strengthening and improving community service programs that better address the needs and experiences of Senior High School students.

Methodology

Community cleanliness is an important factor in maintaining the health, safety, and overall well-being of individuals in a society. One way to support this is through community service programs, where Senior High School students volunteer their time and effort to contribute to community development. These activities not only help address environmental and social issues but also provide students with opportunities to develop important life skills. Research has shown that participation in service-learning and community engagement activities can enhance students' social responsibility, critical thinking, and personal growth (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). Through these experiences, students are able to connect what they learn in school to real-life situations, making their learning more meaningful and practical.

This study uses a qualitative research design and employs a phenomenological approach to understand and explore the lived experiences of Senior High School students involved in community service programs. The phenomenological approach enables the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' personal experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attach to their involvement in community service. To achieve this, sixteen (16) semi-structured interviews are conducted among selected Senior High School students from the barangays of Barangay San Isidro, Barangay Santa Cruz Viejo, Barangay 7, Barangay 9, Barangay 3, Barangay Ilaud, Barangay 8, and Barangay San Jose. The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the common themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' experiences.

Students participate in community service for different reasons, which are often influenced by both personal and external factors. Some students are motivated by a genuine desire to help others and give back to their community, while others participate due to academic requirements or opportunities for personal development. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), motivation plays a significant role in how individuals engage in activities, particularly when they find personal value and meaning in what they do. This suggests that students who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to have positive and meaningful experiences in community service. In addition, volunteering has also been linked to improved emotional well-being and a stronger sense of purpose among students, making it beneficial not only for the community but also for the students themselves.



Research Design

This used a research design called Phenomenological Analysis. This kind of research helps the researchers understand what people think and feel about experiences. This study aims to know what the students thought about community service so this method was most fitting. This study did not just want numbers or statistics; rather, it plans to know how the students felt and what they thought about their experiences.

Using a phenomenological approach was the most practical because it fits with what the researchers wanted to find out. Previous studies show that community service helps students learn skills like leadership and empathy, as this study focused more on what the students think and feel when they participate in community service. Other studies have looked into why students participate in community service and what problems they face. Though countless researchers have already conducted studies regarding similar phenomena, this study wanted to know more about what the students in Tanjay City think and feel.

This research design also helps the researchers answer the research questions. This research aims to know what the students think about community service, what problems they have, and how it affects them. Using phenomenology, this study helps understand the students' experiences and what those experiences mean to them. Every student is different, so the researchers used a phenomenological approach to look at each student's experiences.

To collect the data, the researchers conducted interviews with the students. Asking them questions about their experiences with community service. Since it is relevant to the study to know what they thought and felt before, during, and after doing community service. Additionally, by asking about what they learned and how it affected them a guide was used to make sure the right questions were asked. The students could answer in their own words and through this, follow-up questions could be asked if more information was needed.

Students were chosen carefully in order to conduct this study. Only students who have participated in community service programs before, were chosen for this study. Through this, the researchers were able to get information from the students who held the required knowledge on this certain activity and experience. After the interviews, the researchers wrote down as well as recorded everything the students said in order to avoid misinterpretation of the data. Moreover, the researchers reread and revisited the recording of what the participants said in order to understand their experiences more properly. Then themes and ideas were formulated and grouped together.

By using this research method, this study hopes to understand more about what Senior High School students in Tanjay City think about community service. This study aims to help schools and community organizations make community service better for the students. This study can help said organizations understand what the students need and what they think. Ultimately, this study wants to help community service programs that promote leadership, empathy and social awareness.

Research Locale

This study took place in Barangay San Isidro, Barangay Santa Cruz Viejo, Barangay San Jose, Barangay Ilaud, Barangay 3, Barangay 7, Barangay 8 and Barangay 9 in Tanjay City. Based on the established criteria, the selected barangays were chosen to understand the experiences of Senior High School students who have participated in community service activities in these areas.

These barangays contain community service programs and volunteer activities that will help the researchers understand how these participants feel about community engagement and how it affects their growth, values, leadership, empathy and sense of social responsibility. The barangays were chosen in this study to help the researchers achieve its goal, which is to gain knowledge about the experiences of Senior High School students who participated in community service in their local communities.

By conducting this study in these barangays, the researchers can gather meaningful information from the participants who have participated in community service. The findings of the study will be useful to schools, teachers, community service coordinators, barangay officials, the Local Government Unit, and community organizations. They



can use our findings to improve community service programs and get young people involved in community development.

Research Participants

The people who participated in this study were Senior High School students who have done community service activities and live in Barangay San Isidro, Barangay Santa Cruz Viejo, Barangay San Jose, Barangay Ilaud, Barangay 3, Barangay 7, Barangay 8, and Barangay 9 in Tanjay City. These students were chosen because they have experience with community service and can share their experiences regarding their participation in these programs.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. This method is good for the study because it allows the researchers to choose students who have the experience and can give the required information about said experiences with community service. To be part of the study, the students must be currently enrolled in Senior High School and have participated in at least three community service activities, whether they are school-based or community-based as long as they are within the last year (2025). Moreover, the student must be in Senior High School (Grade 11 or Grade 12) and must be willing to share their personal experiences during an interview with the researcher.

We will not include students who have not done any community service activities because they cannot give us the information we need. We want to have a group of participants so we can talk to each of them in detail and really understand their experiences. This will help us get an understanding of how Senior High School students think and feel about community service.

Research Instrument

This study uses a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument to gather data from the participants. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions designed to explore the lived experiences of Senior High School students participating in community service. It includes an introduction to obtain informed consent, warm-up questions to establish rapport, core questions aligned with the objectives of the study, probing questions to elicit more detailed responses, and closing questions to conclude the interview. The semi-structured format will allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions whenever necessary, enabling participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences while ensuring that all relevant topics are covered during the interview.

Before the actual data collection, the semi-structured interview guide underwent pilot testing with **two (2) Senior High School students** who have similar characteristics to the target participants but will not be included in the actual study. The pilot test aims to assess the clarity, relevance, sequence, and comprehensibility of the interview questions. Based on the participants' feedback and the researcher's observations, necessary revisions were made by modifying, adding, or removing questions to improve the interview guide. This process was useful to ensure that the instrument was suitable for collecting rich and meaningful data aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis to assess the qualitative data collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview responses were transcribed verbatim and then reviewed a lot of times to develop a greater understanding of the participants' experiences and to identify important ideas related to their participation in community service. The researchers discovered significant words, phrases, and statements from the transcripts and assigned codes according to the participants' responses. These codes were grouped according to their similarities, common meanings, and patterns to cultivate general themes. The researchers reviewed and revised themes by comparing them with the original responses the participants gave, this was to ensure that they clearly represented the participants' experiences.

Finally, the themes were categorized and interpreted according to their core concept and their connection to the research questions. Through this process, nine main themes were developed, representing the participants'



experiences of personal development, social relationships, challenges, community involvement, and sense of belonging through their engagement in community service.

Data Gathering Procedures

Pre-Data Gathering

First, the researchers constructed and tested the semi-structured interview guide to guarantee that the questions were aligned with the objectives of the study. After the researchers have finished validating the interview guide, they coordinated with their advisor to discuss the study and determine potential participants who were qualified based on the criteria. After completing the initial coordination, the researchers requested authorization from the school principal before conducting the study. Once it had been approved, the researchers used purposive sampling to select participants. The researchers explained the purpose of the interview to every participant and provided them with consent forms, while also distributing parental or guardian consent forms since the participants are minors. After collecting the signed consent forms, the interviews were scheduled at a favorable time for the participants.

During Data Collection

The researchers met with each participant individually on the scheduled interview day. The purpose of the study and the interview process were explained by the researchers before starting the interview and each participant were reminded that their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Researchers also requested to audio-record the interview. Once all procedures were completed, the researchers began to conduct the face-to-face semi-structured interview. The researchers may or may not have asked follow-up questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses, and only if needed. Throughout the interview, the researchers took notes to record observations, such as non-verbal cues and participants' reaction.

After Data Collection

After the interview, all audio recordings were transcribed by the researchers verbatim or word for word to ensure that the participants' responses were correctly documented. Before organizing and coding the data, the researchers were required to review the transcripts for accuracy. Thematic analyses were then used to analyze the collected data and to identify the common themes and patterns from the participants' lived experiences. Instead of the participants actual names, the researchers utilized pseudonyms or participant codes to protect the participants' privacy. The researchers securely stored all interview recordings, transcripts, and related documents and were only accessible by the researchers.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and quality of this qualitative study, the researchers established the trustworthiness of the findings by following the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility was established by selecting participants through purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants had firsthand experience in participating in community service activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a validated interview guide, allowing participants to openly describe their lived experiences. The researchers also used member checking by allowing participants to review the summaries or interpretations of their responses to verify that these accurately reflected their intended meanings.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and data collection procedures. By clearly describing the context of the study, future researchers may determine whether the findings are applicable to similar settings or populations.



Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researchers maintained a consistent interview procedure for all participants and documented every stage of the research process, including participant selection, data collection, transcription, coding, and thematic analysis. This audit trail allows other researchers to understand how the findings were generated and enhances the consistency of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability was maintained by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' actual responses rather than the researchers' personal opinions or assumptions. Interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and coding records were carefully preserved throughout the study. The researchers also practiced reflexivity by remaining aware of their own biases and ensuring that interpretations were supported by the participants' narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed and followed throughout the conduct of the study to ensure that protection of the participants is present in the study as well as fairness and honesty. Before conducting an interview, permission was obtained from the research adviser, school principal, and the interviewee. Participants of the study are informed about the procedures involved in our data gathering and they are reminded of their rights before they take part in the interview.

Participation in the research study is voluntary. The participants were given a consent form to sign indicating that they understood the aim of the study and have agreed to taking part in it. It is also included in the consent form that participants are able to refuse to answer any questions given by the interviewer and withdraw from participating in the study without any consequences.

To ensure that the privacy of each participant is protected, their identities were kept anonymous by using participant code names instead of their legal names. All of the information that is gathered from the interviewer were treated as confidential and were used for research purposes only. Audio recordings from the interview were stored securely and would only be accessible by the researchers and the research adviser to ensure that the protection of the participants is followed. In addition, the recordings and data gathered from the interview were disposed of properly after the research study is completed to ensure the participants that the data cannot be used to attack them personally and that the data was for research purposes only.

The interview guaranteed that the questions within were not presented to cause physical or psychological harm to the participants. Respect for the participants were strictly followed by the researchers to ensure that they did not feel uncomfortable during the interview. Honesty and fairness were maintained throughout the making of the study and all the data gathered were not altered to ensure that the study follows ethical standards correctly.

Although the researchers utilized A.I. tools, all tools were used only to correct grammar mistakes, punctuation, and elegant variation in order for the different aspects of the study to sound less redundant and repetitive. Throughout this study no A.I. was used in order to generate or organize findings to ensure authenticity, personal capability, to avoid citing false references and to avoid spreading incorrect information.

Findings & Discussion

Codes	Themes
Helping others	Finding Purpose and Fulfillment Through Meaningful
Involvement Through Scouting	
Meaningful impact	
First Hand Experience	
Personal Development	



Willingness to participate	Community Engagement
Opportunities in participating	
Positive satisfaction	
Sense of fulfillment	
Enjoyment and challenges	
Epiphanies of Privilege	
Personal Growth	
Impact on Community	
Memorable and joyful experience	Personal and Interpersonal Development Through
Family influence	Community Service
Social improvement	
New perspective	
Social encouragement	
Family influence	
Scouting Encouragement	
Skills Matched Criteria	Social Influences and Encouragement in Community
Motivated exploration	Service Participation
Church Service	
Church Encouragement	
Social pressure	
Conflicting priorities	
Interaction challenges	Challenges in Balancing Service and Personal
Challenge in managing participants	Responsibilities
Academic Stress and Social Connection	
Time Constraints	
Seeking Recognition	Longing for Recognition and Appreciation
Difficulty resisting temptations	Resisting Temptations
Supporting the community	
Service commitment	
Passion in helping	Community Commitment for Community Belonging
Community belonging	
Fulfilling service	
Understanding different beliefs	Respect for diverse beliefs
Meaningful interactions	Building Meaningful Social Connections Through
Teaching and collaboration	Community Service
Strengthens relationships	
Personal growth	

According to the study's findings, the majority of participants view community service as more than just a duty. Based on the results, many of them said that their experiences were "unforgettable", particularly when they were able to assist others and truly witness the results of their efforts. They found the experience to be more satisfying and intimate as a result. Additionally, it was noted that their personal development was aided by their community service. Some participants acknowledged that they initially felt uncomfortable or shy, but that they eventually grew more at ease when interacting with others. As a result, it appears that their participation gradually increased their self-assurance and social skills.

The results also suggest that the participants were motivated by both external and internal factors. Some participants said they joined because of family, friends or organizations, while others came up with reasons of their own later, like wanting to help or get more involved in the community. Participants also stated some challenges



faced by them such as time management, dealing with different personalities and sometimes lack of resources. "But they still thought it a worthwhile experience.

Overall, the findings indicate that community service plays a role in the development of students in different aspects. It helped them improve their communication skills, build relationships, and develop values such as patience and responsibility. Although not all experiences were easy, most participants still viewed community service as something beneficial and worth continuing.

Finding Purpose and Fulfillment Through Meaningful Community Engagement

In order to discuss these findings further, we must also discuss the basis on the themes created by the researchers. This theme discusses the experiences of some of the senior high school students and how they find their purpose in their participation in community service. Mentioned in the theme itself, these students find purpose and fulfillment in their service as stated by Participant (1): "I became kinder", their service allowed them to develop deeper feelings and become a kinder individual. Additionally, stated by Participant (2): "Community service is really part of my life", as they participated in community service, it became more engraved into their lives that they now consider it as a part of it and feels obligated to participate in it not only for themselves, but for their community as well. Lastly, as stated by Participant (10): "I learned that even sharing my time, skills, and abilities can make a positive difference in the lives of others.", through their service they realized the impact of their participation towards the livelihood of other individuals. This theme shows how participating in community service can positively influence one's life and their view of the world around them. Further supported by Estrera (2024)'s study, where service learning and volunteerism are crucial to developing character and cultivating empathy towards others.

Personal and Interpersonal Development Through Community Service.

Students develop not only themselves as a person when participating in community service, but they also develop their communication skills that allow them to communicate with others on a much better level than before they started their service. This theme specifically focuses on the development of a students' communication skills during their service and how this helped them grow and interact with others regardless of whether or not they were their companions during service or the people they meet in public. Their participation helped them improve their interpersonal communication skills that would be beneficial to them when applying for academic scholarships as well as their personal development in order for them to become a more functioning member of society. Stated by Participant (2),(3), and (4): "My social skills have developed for me to be able to speak with others better.", service allowed them to be able to communicate with others more easily through continuous exposure to settings involving communicating with others. Moreover, stated by Participant (1): "My confidence was boosted.", service allowed them to develop their confidence in order to face others that they may not know. Supported by the findings of NCFE Editorial Team (2025), participating in community service boosts a students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and reduces stress and anxiety while also improving their interpersonal skills to promote communication and teamwork. Although discussed by the findings of Feng and Li (2025), participation in community service leads to the alienation of students from their peers. When they feel that their service is purely one sided – transactional, they feel like machines built to serve rather than being able to communicate with other humans which leads to emptiness both before and after their service. Their findings suggest that students who participate in community service, more often than not, experience social detachment and emotional emptiness solely because of their participation in service. However, as stated by the current findings of the study, students who participate in community service develop better communication skills that allow them to be able to overcome challenges rather than sinking deeper into them. Therefore, even though a handful of studies state otherwise, students who reside in Tanjay City who participate in community service often develop their skills better after their participation in community service.

Social Influences and Encouragement in Community Service Participation

Some students choose to participate in community service in order to experience the feeling of providing for their community as a mere student – a mere teen. Although some students participate in community service because they typically see others participating and/or they are requested by their peers or parents. . This theme centers around the influences students receive and experience that would lead them to participate in service. As stated



prior, students usually participate in community service willingly to develop themselves as a person. While some also join because they want to experience it alongside peers, some also participate because they receive incentives that may benefit them academically. As Participant (3) stated: "I was influenced by 'Nanay, where she told me how nice it was to be involved in being a catechist.'" They were influenced by a close family member to participate in the service because of how it made them more in line with their religion, as well as being able to better themselves and to be able to help other people. Moreover, as Participant (5) stated: "I wanted to experience the feeling of being a catechist." Their purpose of joining was only through their own willingness of wanting to experience the feeling of being a catechist, which then blossomed into an actual desire to help others rather than just being a one-time participatory activity. Lastly, as stated by Participant (7): "I joined the ministry because someone encouraged me to. P6's sister encouraged me to join.", the reason they joined was because of peer encouragement and the feeling of being able to work alongside friends, which, similar to Participant (5), also blossomed into an actual desire to be able to help other individuals rather than participating merely to be able to work alongside close friends. This is further supported by the study of Alzaareer and Abdalla (2023), students were motivated to participate in community activities due to their personal beliefs and desire to help their community. Additionally, by Shusheng, Liheng, and Xin (2026), seeing peers post about their community service online prompts others to join in because they envy the experience.

According to the findings, students usually find motivation to participate due to their own intrinsic beliefs-- their own morals and principles that they think could benefit their community in multiple ways as well as participating in community service because of peer-related influence and being able to associate with their peers in school, outside, as well as in service. On the other hand, the findings of Dik, Morse, Reed, and Shimizu (2026) state that when students volunteer for service based on their own beliefs and are then exposed to unforgiving, mindless, and highly administrative tasks, they experience extreme motivational burnout, which in turn will result in forfeiting or quitting the service because of a lack of motivation. Moreover, based on the findings of Mittal (2021), once community service becomes mandatory, students are stripped of their willingness to participate because of their community or schools influence in their participation regardless of whether they provide incentives. Even if incentives are provided, a student's motivation will still differ from when they join willingly rather than being mandated. However, as stated by the findings, even when faced with challenges that threaten their motivation to keep going with their service, the students still find a reason to persevere and find meaning in their service in order to help their community.

Challenges in Balancing Service and Personal Responsibilities

Participating in community service requires time and effort, which can sometimes conflict with household chores, schoolworks, and other personal activities. This theme emphasizes the difficulties and challenges that senior high school students experience when trying to perform their responsibilities in community activities while also managing their personal and family obligations. As stated by Participant (2): "I have experienced a lot of challenges including finance, overlapping priorities, my mother, judgment from others, and organizing the actual events." This participant often has problems with their overlapping priorities, including their academic and household responsibilities, wherein there are times when her mother does not allow her to participate due to having to fulfill these responsibilities. In addition, stated by Participant (6), (9), and (10): "One of the biggest challenges was balancing my school responsibilities and community service activities.", This statement shows the struggle of senior high school students having to divide their time in balancing their time as a student and having to carry out their responsibilities as a community service participant. The statements of the participants show that participating in community service requires the volunteers to manage both personal service responsibilities simultaneously. Supported by the findings of the study of George-Pascal, Hawkins, and Graybeal (2020), people who actively volunteer in services and are still learning at school experience challenges in managing the time required for service-learning with their academic and family responsibilities. Along with this, the study of Grimmond et al. (2019) adds support to the theme since they have proved that students who study-work are consistently short in time since they are busy fulfilling their responsibilities everyday. The study also stated that oftentimes, the students neglect their physical and mental health just to balance their busy schedules, which then leads to the decline of their well-being.



Consistently, the findings present that senior high school students encounter challenges with balancing their responsibilities as a participant in community services and their other personal responsibilities. In contrast to these findings, the study of Alsuwaidi et al. (2022) examines the relationship between service participation and academic performance. The study used quantitative measures to determine the relationship between the two factors. The findings of Alsuwaidi et al. (2022)'s study present the outcome that their study had a positive relationship between the two factors. Their study suggests that actively participating in community services does not interfere with the academic performance of students. In fact, they even stated that students who participated most are the students with higher grades. Similarly, the study of Do et al. (2024) indicates that participating in services while learning does not necessarily hinder the students' academic performance. According to their study, engaging in service-learning may even help students obtain higher grades, remain studying, and graduate. The studies of Alsuwaidi et al. and Do et al. both present opposing perspectives compared to the findings of George-Paschal, Hawkins, and Graybeal (2020) and Grimmond et al. (2019).

Longing for Recognition and Appreciation

Participating in community services involves sacrificing one's time, dedication, efforts, and personal resources to help, teach, and contribute to the community. Yet these sacrifices are often ignored, unnoticed, and unacknowledged by peers, teachers, family members, and the community itself. This theme shows us that participating in community service is not just about facing obstacles such as multitasking, time management, and challenges in managing participants, but also about challenges that seek recognition, receiving genuine gratitude, and validation of one's contribution to the community. Stated by participant (7): "I wish that someone would acknowledge what I have done." This statement shows that this participant values being seen, thanked, and acknowledged for their contributions, sacrifices, time, and hard work in their community, as they have experienced the feeling of invisibility, being ignored, being undervalued, and even being unimportant to others.

This experience is supported by Mlambo and Mayekiso (2025), who explain that student volunteers have a fundamental need for respect, acknowledgement, and appreciation — and when these esteem needs go unmet, they feel undervalued, invisible, and lose motivation to continue their service. Similarly, Eisner et al. (2009) note that failing to recognize volunteers' contributions creates an organizational culture where their work is taken for granted, leading to discouragement and reduced participation over time. Furthermore, Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan (2019) add that when volunteers feel their efforts are invisible or overlooked, their sense of purpose weakens and they are far less likely to sustain their involvement in community activities.

Resisting Temptations

Participating in community services involves individuals remaining committed to their responsibilities despite encountering different distractions and temptations in their lives. These may include the desire to prioritize personal activities, spend time with friends, catch some rest, use social media, or choose more convenient activities instead of committing to their responsibilities. This theme emphasizes how participants experience the need to resist these temptations to remain dedicated to their responsibilities and continue contributing to the community. It reflects their self-discipline, commitment, and ability to prioritize their responsibilities even when they face activities that may be more enjoyable or personally appealing. Stated by participant (8): "One of the difficulties I experienced was temptation and missing opportunities." This statement shows that the participants encountered situations where they had to resist temptations and make choices between their personal interests and their responsibilities in community service. The mention of "missing opportunities" also suggests that participating in community service may sometimes require them to sacrifice or set aside other activities they could have experienced. This highlights the struggle participants face in balancing their personal desires with their commitment to community service. Despite these temptations, their participation reflects their willingness to prioritize their responsibilities and remain committed to contributing to the community.

This experience is further supported by the findings of Bureau and Vallerand (2021), who note that sustained volunteer engagement requires continuous self-regulation and resistance to immediate personal gratification, as volunteers frequently weigh personal leisure against their service obligations, and giving in to such temptations can weaken long-term dedication. Additionally, Wright and colleagues (2023) explain that when volunteers perceive



their service as less immediately rewarding than other available activities, they experience greater internal conflict and temptation to disengage; however, those who maintain a strong sense of purpose and personal investment in their work are better able to persist despite these pulls. Consistent with these observations, despite encountering tempting alternatives and the regret of foregone opportunities, participants demonstrate resolve and prioritize their community responsibilities over personal desires, showing that their commitment goes beyond initial willingness to join; it also involves the ongoing discipline to stay involved even when it is difficult or less appealing to do so.

Community Commitment for Community Belonging

Participating in community service not only helps students develop themselves, but it also provides students with opportunities to connect with others while contributing to the needs of their community. Through community service, the participants were able to interact with their community members, share responsibilities, and work toward common goals. Active participation and meaningful involvement in these community activities create a stronger sense of belonging. Community commitment for community belonging signifies the dedication and willingness of the participants to participate and take responsibilities within their community. As stated by participant (1): "For me, community service means to help one's barangay and its people by providing my time and effort." The participants view community service as an act of helping their community. Participant (2): "Community service is really part of my life. I believe community service is not only an activity. It's like my day or my year is not complete without making these or without fulfilling the service that a community needs." The participant does not see community service as a one-time activity but as something meaningful that has become part of their life. Participant (6): "For me, now that I've joined, I'd say it is really needed because you get the passion to help others." The participant recognizes the importance of community service and appears to have encouraged a greater sense of motivation to contribute to the community. Participant (11): "For me, community service means participating in activities in your community." This statement portrays active participation as an important part of community service.

This finding is supported by Forder (2019), who explains that meaningful contributions to social groups allow teenagers to recognize their value and place within their communities. Active participation in schools and communities can strengthen their connection to the groups they belong to, suggesting that community commitment and meaningful involvement can foster a stronger sense of belonging in the community. Community commitment is demonstrated by the participants' willingness to give their time, effort and participation to activities that benefit their community. These responses show that community is not only viewed as an obligation but as a meaningful way of helping others. Through continuously participating, helping community members, and taking responsibility, participants are given opportunities to interact with others and become more involved in their community. These experiences can strengthen their connection to the community they are serving which contributes a sense of community belonging. Thus, the participants' dedication to community service shows how active involvement and meaningful contribution can strengthen students' connection with their community.

Respect for Diverse Beliefs

Community service participation involves interaction between students and people with diverse beliefs, backgrounds, and communication styles. This theme addresses how senior high school students can cope with diverse perspectives, experiences, and relations with other people to achieve common goals of communities. As Participant (3) says, "The differing beliefs of the children, their own stories, and the way they interact with each other." According to Participant (3), there are some backgrounds of participants in service activities, and he/she pays attention to three important aspects, namely "differing beliefs," "their own stories," and "the way they interact." Thus, the participant treats diversity as an experience based on personal beliefs, personal stories, and interactions between other people. The ability to cope with diversity is the awareness of how personal background influences communication styles and relations between people in a group. Recognition of various beliefs, backgrounds, and interactions is the awareness of the fact that all people have diverse values defined through personal experiences. In student community participation, this perspective implies active listening and empathy. Rather than thinking that all people share similar perspectives and communicate in a certain way, students should realize differences between people.



The literature provides empirical evidence of such participant experiences within the context of community service. According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate and behave effectively and appropriately based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This piece of literature is relevant since it proves that awareness of different beliefs and individuals' narratives is the prerequisite for cognitive flexibility, which was noted by Participant (3) in relation to the need for recognizing individual backgrounds to interact successfully. In the same way, Starr, Yngve, and Jin (2022), who explore the influence of group dynamics in organized events, mention problem-solving skills development in terms of teamwork and communication. Collaboration with different personalities requires tolerance and adaptability. The results confirm the essence of the core idea since it is clear that cooperation with various ways of communication helps people create an effective solution for conflict resolution. Finally, Bringle and Hatcher (2011) provide information on civic learning through service and discuss how community engagement facilitates social awareness development. In this case, the literature explains the "their own stories" component of the participants' responses.

The findings indicate that involvement in community initiatives is a true chance to develop social awareness. Through observing how people interact with others and communicate with each other, the students can adjust their conversations in order to fit all people. It helps to make the process of collaboration more inclusive as well as to avoid any possible conflicts between community members.

Building Meaningful Social Connections Through Community Service

Participating in community service helps provide Senior High School students with multiple opportunities to interact with different people, develop relationships, and improve their communication skills. This theme emphasizes how community service becomes a meaningful experience where students can connect with their fellow volunteers. As stated by participant (1), "Yes, I managed to become closer to other people and manage to become friends with them," which shows that participating in community service allows the participants to deepen their connections with other people. Similarly, participant (9) stated, "Yes, it strengthened my relationships, especially with my fellow Girl Scouts," showing that community service can reinforce existing social bonds through collaborative actions. Furthermore, Participants (2), (3), (4), and (11) described improvements in their communication skills. Participant (3) stated, "For me, the way I communicate with others has improved," while Participant (11) shared that gaining communication skills made it easier for them to understand other people. These statements show that community services are not just about doing things for the community but also allow students to interact with others and work with different people from different backgrounds. Students have the opportunity to share their ideas, reflect on how others see things, and connect with people by working with volunteers and members of the community. This is supported by Afzal and Hussain (2020), whose qualitative study showed that taking part in community service helps students to enhance their ability to interact with others while also gaining a positive and meaningful learning experience. Similarly, Llenares and Deocarís (2019) found that students who often joined volunteer activities had better communication and interpersonal skills than those who participated less frequently or were volunteering for the first time. This relates to the participants' experiences in the present study, where more than one of them became more confident when communicating with others and developed stronger connections.

Consistently, the findings of the present study show that community service can serve as an avenue for senior high school students to strengthen their social relationships and develop their communication skills. In contrast to these findings, the study of Held et al. (2019) presents a slightly different perspective on how students develop relationships through community-based service-learning. Rather than primarily focusing on the improvement of students' communication skills, their study examined the learning relationships students formed with different individuals during community-based placements. Their findings showed that students developed important learning relationships with their peers, supervisors, and other members involved in the community setting, indicating that the relationships formed during service-learning may serve not only as social connections but also as sources of learning and professional development. Similarly, Beebe et al. (2021) found that students involved in academic service-learning developed communication skills through experiences such as building rapport with specific groups, interacting with professional teams, and working with community partners. These studies complement the findings



of the present study because they show that relationships and communication are interconnected within service experiences. However, while the participants in the present study mainly emphasized becoming closer to other people, making friends, and becoming better at communicating, the studies of Held et al. (2019) and Beebe et al. (2021) place greater emphasis on relationships as a means of learning, professional interaction, and developing communication competencies. This difference suggests that the impact of community service on students' social development may vary depending on the type of service activity, the people they interact with, and the purpose of their participation. Nevertheless, both perspectives demonstrate that community service provides students with meaningful opportunities to interact with others, strengthen relationships, and develop communication skills that can be valuable both within and beyond the community service setting.

Conclusion

Based on the real-life stories shared by the participants, community service was seen as something that helped them grow in many ways. Their experiences showed that volunteering made them feel like they were doing something. They found a sense of purpose and a way to give back to the people around them. At first, some people might have thought of community service as something they had to do. As they spent time doing it and met new people, they started to see its real value. Even small things like helping someone can make a difference. Their time volunteering also made them more confident when talking to others. Along the way, they learned how to communicate, be more understanding, be patient, take responsibility, and lead. Working with people from different places helped them learn new ways of thinking and be more thoughtful about others. These experiences showed that community service can teach things that are not usually taught in school.

The participants also said that community service helped them make friends and feel more connected to the people in their area. Working with volunteers and local people gave them chances to build friendships and learn how to work together. It was not always easy. They had to manage community service along with school chores at home, family duties, and their own activities. Some also had money problems, not supplies worries, parents being judged by others, problems planning events, and trouble with some people. Still, they found their time valuable. The happiness they felt from helping others, the friendships they made, and the things they learned made the challenges worth it.

Overall, the real experiences of the Senior High School students in Tanjay City show that community service can be a part of growing as a person. It helps students help others while also learning about themselves, gaining skills, making friends, and seeing the needs of their community. At the time, the challenges they faced show that community service programs need to think about students' schoolwork, family duties, supplies, and personal limits. Schools, local groups, and the city government of Tanjay City might think about creating programs that are organized and focused on students. These programs should have time, good support, and enough supplies. When students are given chances without being pushed too hard, community service can be easier and more rewarding. In the end, the stories of the students show that community service is not about giving time and energy to others. It is also a way for students to learn, grow, make connections, and become more responsible and caring for people in their community.

Recommendations

Future researchers who may use this study as a reference or to continue this study in the future are encouraged to further the scope of this study to not only a select few barangays in Tanjay City, but the whole city as well as all of its barangays. Additionally, while the present study focused on the personal experiences of Senior High School students in Tanjay City, future studies could include students from different grade levels, schools, age groups, or communities and compare their experiences. Researchers may also include the perspectives of teachers, parents, community leaders, and other individuals involved in community service to provide a more comprehensive view of how these activities affect students and the community. Researchers who may choose to continue this study are encouraged to focus more as well on the academic effects of community service, as only a small portion of the study



was dedicated to students affected from an academic standpoint. As for those using this study as a reference for a similar study or for a different place in which community service is also practiced, the researchers may use the findings of this study to examine whether or not the experiences of the students in Tanjay City are similar to those of students situated in different areas.

Furthermore, this study employed a qualitative approach, but other qualitative research designs may be considered by future researchers to investigate the topic from different angles. For example, a phenomenological study may examine the lived experiences of students participating in community service in more depth, whereas a case study may investigate a particular community service program and its effects on the students and the community being served. Researchers can also conduct focus group discussions where participants share their experiences and compare them with each other. These approaches can give a better insight into specific aspects of community service, such as the motivations of students volunteering, their interactions with community members, the difficulties they encounter, and how their experiences help in their growth as a person.

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