



Peer Review Report Form

Manuscript Title:	Smart Minds, Active Citizens: Examining the Role of Functional Literacy in the Civic Responsibility Among College Students
Type of Article:	Original Article

FIRST ROUND

Editor

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The reviewers acknowledge the significance of your manuscript and recommend several revisions to further improve its clarity, coherence, organization, and overall scholarly quality. In addition, you are advised to thoroughly review and validate all references included in the manuscript. Please ensure that all cited sources are accurate, accessible, and retrievable through Google Scholar to uphold the credibility and reliability of the study. Additionally, make sure to include the DOI or website link for every reference whenever available to facilitate verification and accessibility of sources. Furthermore, only sources that are cited within the manuscript should appear in the References section, and all entries listed in the References section must also be cited in the text. For example, if 20 unique sources are cited in the manuscript, then only those 20 sources should be included in the References section. Please also note that repeated citations of the same source within the text are counted as a single reference entry; therefore, the total number of references may be lower than the total number of in-text citations.

Reviewer 1

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The paper has a relevant topic and it connects functional literacy with civic responsibility in a timely way. The authors also presented clear numerical results, and the study may be useful for improving civic education among college students.

<u>Specific Comments and Recommendations</u>
The main issue is that the paper repeatedly suggests that functional literacy “affects,” “influences,” or “explains” civic responsibility, even if the study only used a descriptive-correlational design with quota sampling and self-reported questionnaire data. For example, the title and several parts of the discussion imply that functional literacy has a direct role in civic responsibility, and the result also states that 64.4% of the variance in civic responsibilities can be explained by functional literacy. This interpretation is too strong for the design used. A high correlation does not mean that functional literacy causes civic responsibility, because other factors such as family background, exposure to civic activities, school culture, socioeconomic status, political interest, and prior leadership experience may also be involved. I suggest that



the authors revise the title, abstract, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations to use more careful wording such as “is associated with,” “is related to,” or “has a significant relationship with,” rather than “affects” or “influences.” The authors may also acknowledge this limitation clearly and recommend future studies using regression with control variables, longitudinal design, or intervention-based design.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
	Accept the manuscript for publication.
/	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

Reviewer 2

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The paper presents a very timely and relevant study, especially in our local context where the gap between basic and functional literacy is a known issue. It is commendable that the study anchors its rationale on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to highlight the broader impact of functional literacy on sustainable communities.
<u>Specific Comments and Recommendations</u>
The biggest flaw of the study is using a self-reported questionnaire to measure functional literacy. You asked students to rate their agreement with statements like "I can easily read and understand emails". Functional literacy is an actual cognitive and practical skill, not a perception. By using self-assessment, you introduced a huge self-serving bias because students will naturally rate themselves highly. This ceiling effect is very evident in your results where the mean is 4.35 (Strongly Agree). I highly suggest that instead of a Likert scale survey, you should administer an objective, standardized reading and comprehension test to accurately measure their actual functional literacy level.
You used a sample size of 100 students selected through quota sampling across four departments. For a quantitative correlational design that aims to provide broad recommendations for LGUs and policy-makers, N=100 from a single institution is quite small to generalize. Please justify why this sample size is statistically sufficient for your target population, or better yet, consider expanding your respondents to make the data more robust and acceptable for a national-level journal.
Both of your variables resulted in very high scores, with functional literacy at a mean of 4.35 and civic responsibility at 4.46. Because both questionnaires were self-reported and likely given at the same time, the extremely high correlation of $r = 0.803$ might just be a result of common method variance rather than a true strong relationship. The respondents likely just answered "Strongly Agree" straight down the page. You need to acknowledge and discuss this limitation in your paper, and explain how you controlled for this bias during data gathering.



To meet the standards of the journal, the discussion needs more critical depth rather than just reporting the survey means and matching them with foreign literature. For example, your data shows that students scored lowest in understanding lease agreements and using coupons. Try to deeply analyze why these specific practical skills are lacking among Filipino college students using local context, rather than just stating that it happens. Focus on extracting data-driven insights that can genuinely inform our local outcomes-based education systems.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
	Accept the manuscript for publication.
/	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

SECOND ROUND

<u>Decision</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u>Reviewer 1</u>	<u>Reviewer 2</u>
Accept the manuscript for publication.	/	/	/
Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.			
Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.			