



Research in Management and Humanities

DWIJMH VOL. 5 NO. 3 (2026) ISSN: 2980-4817

Available online at www.dwijmh.org

Journal homepage: <http://www.dwijmh.org>

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Integrating 21st century skills in Araling Panlipunan practices, challenges, and enhancement strategies

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: May 27, 2026

Received in rev. form. July 10, 2026

Accepted: August 20, 2026

Published: September 10, 2026

Keywords: *21st-century skills integration, Instructional guide development, Araling Panlipunan education, Instructional material validation, Contextualized teaching strategies*

JEL Classification: I20

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop and validate a contextualized instructional guide designed to integrate 21st-century skills into Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan. Using a developmental-descriptive research design, the study involved expert validators and Grade 6 teachers from private elementary schools in Laoag City. The instructional guide was evaluated across three domains: content quality, instructional quality, and technical quality. Data were gathered using a structured validation checklist and analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. Results revealed that the instructional guide obtained very high validity ratings in all domains, indicating strong alignment with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) and effective integration of 21st-century skills. The findings suggest that the developed guide is a practical and reliable resource for enhancing classroom instruction and bridging the gap between curriculum policy and actual teaching practices.

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Introduction

Education systems today face the challenge of equipping learners not just with foundational knowledge but also with essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, digital literacy, and civic responsibility (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). Global frameworks like UNESCO Education 2030 and OECD Future of Education 2030 stress the importance of integrating these skills to foster lifelong learning and cultivate adaptable, socially responsible individuals.

International research indicates that while numerous education systems have embraced competency-based reforms, the implementation is inconsistent, often hindered by insufficient teacher training and a preference for abstract over contextual application (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

In the Philippines, the K–12 curriculum similarly incorporates these competencies, particularly within Araling Panlipunan, which has significant potential for nurturing critical and reflective thinking (DepEd, 2023; Reyes, 2024). Nevertheless, a persistent gap exists between policy aspirations and actual classroom practices, especially in public schools where limited resources, inadequate training, and traditional teaching methods prevail. Moreover, studies in the Philippines reveal similar issues, including restricted ICT access, challenges in fostering higher-order thinking, and a continued dependence on rote memorization (IJNRD, 2025; IJAMS, 2025). These obstacles are particularly evident in regions like Central Luzon, where disparities in resources and professional development further limit instructional innovation.

In practice, educators frequently find it difficult to effectively align 21st-century skills with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), often relying on disjointed materials that fail to consistently encourage higher-order thinking. This situation underscores a systemic need for structured, contextualized instructional support. To address this gap, the study focuses on developing an evidence-based instructional guide aimed at assisting Araling Panlipunan teachers in effectively integrating 21st-century skills into their teaching.

Literature review

This literature review brings together international and local research on inclusive education, classroom management strategies, and associated challenges to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how teachers handle learner diversity in inclusive classroom settings.

Overview of 21st-century skills in education

Literature consistently emphasizes the importance of integrating 21st-century skills into teaching and learning processes. These competencies, which include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy, are widely recognized as essential for preparing learners to navigate complex and rapidly changing social and technological environments (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2022). Educational systems globally have shifted from content-centered instruction toward competency-based frameworks that prioritize the application of knowledge in real-world contexts (Partnership for 21st Century Skills [P21], 2007).

Theoretical foundations of 21st-century skills integration

The integration of 21st-century skills is grounded in established learning theories. Constructivist theory emphasizes active learning, where students construct knowledge through experience (Bruner, 1990). Social constructivism further highlights the role of collaboration and interaction in knowledge development, suggesting that learning is inherently social (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, transformative learning theory supports the development of critical thinking and reflective practices by encouraging learners to question assumptions and engage in deeper meaning-making processes (Mezirow, 2023).

These theoretical perspectives collectively justify the use of learner-centered and inquiry-driven instructional approaches.

Policy context and curriculum alignment

Global and national policy frameworks strongly advocate for the integration of 21st-century skills. Despite these efforts, studies reveal a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom implementation (OECD, 2022). In the Philippine context, the K–12 curriculum mandates the integration of these competencies; however, research indicates that only a limited percentage of teachers consistently align their lesson plans with 21st-century skills (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2024). Contributing factors include insufficient professional development, lack of instructional resources, and limited institutional support (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023). These gaps highlight the need for tools that translate policy into actionable classroom practices.

Instructional approaches for skill development

Effective instructional approaches play a crucial role in the development of 21st-century skills. Strategies such as inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning have been shown to enhance student engagement and promote higher-order thinking (UNESCO, 2023). These approaches encourage learners to explore problems, work collaboratively, and apply knowledge in authentic contexts (OECD, 2022). However, successful implementation requires careful planning, alignment with learning competencies, and access to well-designed instructional materials that guide both teachers and learners (PIDS, 2024).

Challenges and the need for contextualized instructional materials

Despite the recognized benefits of innovative instructional strategies, their application in classrooms remains uneven. Challenges such as limited teacher training, inadequate access to technology, and reliance on traditional teaching methods continue to hinder effective integration (DepEd, 2023; OECD, 2022). Moreover, existing instructional materials often lack contextual relevance, making it difficult for teachers to adapt them to specific classroom settings (Miettinen, 2022). These limitations underscore the importance of developing structured, contextually appropriate instructional guides that provide clear strategies, align with curriculum standards, and support teachers in implementing 21st-century skills effectively.

Statement of the problem

The study aimed to develop an Instructional Guide that integrates 21st-century skills into Araling Panlipunan 6.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What 21st-century skills were commonly integrated by teachers in teaching Araling Panlipunan 6 in terms of:
 - 1.1 information, media, and technology skills;
 - 1.2 learning and innovation skills;
 - 1.3 communication skills; and
 - 1.4 Life and career skills?

2. What were the challenges encountered by the teachers in integrating 21st-century skills in teaching Araling Panlipunan?
3. What are the enhancement strategies in the integration of 21st-century skills in teaching Araling Palipunan, and how valid are they?

Methodology

A developmental–descriptive design was used to develop and validate an instructional guide for 21st-century skills integration in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan. Experts from selected Laoag City private schools evaluated the guide using a checklist, with results analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. Ethical protocols were strictly followed.

Research design

This study employed a developmental–descriptive research design, which is appropriate for the systematic creation and validation of instructional materials. The developmental component focused on designing a contextualized instructional guide that integrates 21st-century skills into Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan, while the descriptive component was used to evaluate the quality and validity of the developed material based on expert judgment. This design is widely used in educational research involving material development and validation because it allows both product creation and empirical evaluation.

Research setting

The study was conducted in selected private elementary schools in Laoag City. Participants consisted of expert validators purposively selected based on their professional qualifications and experience in curriculum development and instruction. These included master teachers, head teachers, curriculum specialists, and subject coordinators in Araling Panlipunan. Their expertise ensured a credible and informed evaluation of the instructional guide.

Population and sampling

The population of this study consisted of all Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan teachers from the private schools in Laoag City identified in the previous section. A total population sampling technique was employed, wherein every eligible teacher from these schools was included in the study. This approach ensured comprehensive and representative data collection, capturing the full range of perspectives and instructional practices in teaching Araling Panlipunan within private educational institutions in Laoag City. Consequently, the findings of this study provide a robust foundation for understanding and improving instructional practices in similar educational settings.

Data collection

Before data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate school authorities. The instructional guide and validation checklist were then distributed to the selected experts, who were given sufficient time to review the material and complete their evaluations. Afterward, the accomplished checklists were retrieved, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and ranking, while the qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. For the validation results, the weighted mean was computed to determine the overall ratings of the experts, while the standard deviation was used to measure the variability of their evaluations. The results were interpreted using a predefined validity scale, such as Very High, High, Moderate, and Low.

Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. The validators participated voluntarily, and their informed consent was obtained before the evaluation. They were assured that their identities and responses would remain confidential and anonymous. All collected data were used solely for research purposes and handled with integrity and professionalism.

Presentation and analysis of results

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings on the integration of 21st-century skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan instruction in selected private schools in Laoag City. Data were gathered through lesson plan analysis, teacher interviews, and expert validation of the developed instructional guide. The presentation of findings follows the study's research questions and conceptual framework.

The first section examines the extent to which key 21st-century skills are integrated into instruction. These include information, media, and technology skills; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life and career skills. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the strengths and gaps in current instructional practices. The second section presents the challenges encountered by teachers in integrating these skills, as identified through thematic analysis of the interview data. The final section presents the results of the experts' validation of the developed instructional guide.

Integration of 21st century skills in Araling Panlipunan 6 lesson plans

Table 1. presents the integration of information, media, and technology skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan lesson plans. Information literacy was most prevalent (95.45%, rank 1), followed by visual literacy (83.33%, rank 2). Media literacy appeared in only 7.58% of plans (rank 3), while technology and digital literacy were absent (both rank 4).

The findings are consistent with literature showing that information and visual literacy are emphasized in both national and international educational frameworks (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; OECD, 2022; Reyes, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). However, the limited integration of media, technology, and digital literacy suggests a continuing gap between curriculum policy and classroom practice. Previous studies have linked this gap to insufficient teacher training, limited resources, and inadequate access to technology (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025; Villaluz & de la Cruz, 2024). These findings underscore the need for targeted support and instructional strategies that promote a more balanced and comprehensive integration of 21st-century skills.

Table 1. 21st Century Skills Integrated in Teaching Araling Panlipunan 6: Information, Media, and Technology Skills (n=66)

Domain	21st Century Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Information, Media, and Technology	Information Literacy	63	95.45	1
	Visual Literacy	55	83.33	2
	Media Literacy	5	7.58	3
	Technology Literacy	0	0.00	4
	Digital Literacy	0	0.00	4

Source: Lesson plan analysis and teacher interview data, 2025.

Learning and innovation skills integration

Table 2. shows the integration of learning and innovation skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan lesson plans. Critical thinking was most frequently incorporated (92.42%, rank 1), followed by creativity (59.09%, rank 2), reflective thinking (48.48%, rank 3), and openness (45.45%, rank 4). Problem solving was least integrated (21.21%, rank 5).

The findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the strong curricular focus on critical thinking (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; Reyes, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). However, creativity and reflective thinking were integrated less consistently, reflecting challenges also identified by Miettinen (2022) and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2024). The limited emphasis on problem-solving further suggests the need for enhanced teacher training and greater use of project-based and problem-based instructional approaches (DepEd, 2023). Overall, while critical thinking was prominently integrated, gaps remained in the broader development of learning and innovation skills.

Table 2. 21st Century Skills Integrated in Teaching Araling Panlipunan 6: Learning and Innovation Skills (n=66)

Source: Lesson plan analysis and teacher interview data, 2025.

Domain	21st Century Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Learning and innovation skills	Critical Thinking	61	92.42	1
	Creativity	39	59.09	2
	Reflective Thinking	32	48.48	3
	Openness	30	45.45	4
	Problem Solving	14	21.21	5

Communication skills integration

Table 3. presents the integration of communication skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan lesson plans. Interactive communication was most frequently included (89.39%, rank 1), followed by collaboration (56.06%, rank 2), interpersonal skills (45.45%, rank 3), and teamwork (42.42%, rank 4). Intrapersonal

skills were less emphasized (30.30%, rank 5), with non-verbal communication (19.70%, rank 6) and communication in diverse environments (1.52%, rank 7) rarely addressed.

These results reflect a strong focus on verbal and collaborative skills, consistent with national curriculum priorities (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; Reyes & Santos, 2023). However, the limited inclusion of non-verbal and culturally responsive communication aligns with literature highlighting gaps in comprehensive communication skills development (PIDS, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2022). This underscores the need for targeted teacher training and curricular support to foster a broader range of communication competencies.

Table 3. 21st Century Skills Integrated in Teaching Araling Panlipunan 6: Communication Skills (n=66)

Domain	21st Century Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Communication Skills	Interactive Communication	59	89.39	1
	Collaboration	37	56.06	2
	Interpersonal Skills	30	45.45	3
	Teamwork	28	42.42	4
	Intrapersonal Skills	20	30.30	5
	Non-verbal Communication	13	19.70	6
	Communicating in Diverse Env.	1	1.52	7

Source: Lesson plan analysis and teacher interview data, 2025.

Life and career skills integration

Table 4. presents the integration of life and career skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan lesson plans. Informed decision making was most frequently addressed (57.58%, rank 1), followed by self-discipline (42.42%, rank 2). Resilience (16.67%, rank 3), intercultural understanding (10.61%, rank 4), future orientation (9.09%, rank 5), and adaptive leadership (3.03%, rank 6) were rarely incorporated.

These findings highlight a gap between curricular intentions and classroom practice, as reflected in national and international literature (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; Reyes, 2025; OECD, 2022). The limited emphasis on higher-order and future-oriented skills underscores the need for enhanced teacher training and institutional support (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; IJNRD, 2025).

Table 4. 21st Century Skills Integrated in Teaching Araling Panlipunan 6: Life and Career Skills (n=66)

Domain	21st Century Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Life and Career Skills	Informed decision making	38	57.58	1
	Self-discipline	28	42.42	2

Resilience and adversity management	11	16.67	3
Intercultural understanding	7	10.61	4
Adaptive leadership	2	3.03	5

Source: Lesson plan analysis and teacher interview data, 2025.

Thematic analysis of the challenges of teachers in integrating 21st century skills in teaching Araling Panlipunan 6

Table 5. presents the major themes, codes, and significant teacher responses regarding challenges in integrating 21st-century skills. Despite reforms like K–12 and MATATAG promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2022), only 29% of teachers regularly implement these skills (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024; DepEd, 2024). Thematic analysis revealed persistent issues: limited resources and technology, inadequate training, curriculum overload, student readiness, traditional teaching, large classes, and insufficient parent or community support. Teachers cited lack of ICT access, insufficient training, and overcrowded classes as key barriers, reflecting both systemic and classroom challenges. These findings are consistent with local and international research (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025; Villaluz & de la Cruz, 2024; Reyes & Santos, 2023), highlighting the need for enhanced training, resources, and partnerships. The table specifically outlines each challenge, related codes, and direct teacher responses, offering clear insights for targeted policy and program improvement. These challenges collectively underscore the complexity of achieving comprehensive and sustainable 21st-century skills integration in actual classroom settings across diverse educational contexts, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated interventions and long-term institutional support to address persistent gaps.

Table 5. thematic analysis of the challenges of teachers in integrating 21st century skills in teaching Araling Panlipunan 6

Theme	Codes	Significant Responses
Resource/technology constraints	Lack of ICT; Inadequate materials; Unreliable access	“Teachers report limited access to computers and internet, hindering digital literacy.”
Limited training/instructional support	Need for digital resources; Insufficient training; Lack of instructional guides	“Teachers express the need for more targeted training and clear, practical guides.”
Time/curriculum constraints	Content-heavy curriculum; Limited time; Rigid schedules	“Overloaded lessons and rigid timetables do not allow for skill-based activities.”
Student engagement/readiness	Low participation; Varied prior knowledge; Motivation issues	“Teachers struggle to engage all students, given diverse backgrounds and readiness.”

Traditional teaching approaches	Teacher-centered practices; Resistance to change; Limited use of modern strategies	“Shifting from traditional lecture to student-centered methods remains difficult.”
Large class size/management	Overcrowded classrooms; Limited monitoring; Individual attention issues	“Large class sizes make it hard to monitor and support each learner’s development.”
Parent/community support	Need for parental involvement; School support; Community partnerships	“Enhanced parent and community support is needed for successful skills integration.”

Source: Thematic analysis of teacher interviews, 2025.

Enhancement strategies for integrating 21st-century skills

Based on the identified challenges, enhancement strategies were designed, implemented, and validated by expert reviewers. These strategies included modular lesson plans that systematically integrate critical thinking, collaboration, digital tasks, and real-world contexts. The lesson plans were designed to be adaptable to different classroom settings and levels of student readiness.

A contextualization framework was also incorporated to connect the lessons with Philippine history and current issues, thereby ensuring cultural relevance and alignment with DepEd requirements (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022). Adaptable formative and authentic assessment tools were provided to monitor students’ development of 21st-century skills. In addition, the instructional guide included teacher support materials, such as implementation rubrics, sample activities, and differentiated instruction strategies, to facilitate its effective classroom application.

Development of an instructional guide integrating 21st-century skills in Araling Panlipunan 6

To address the challenges and gaps identified in the integration of 21st-century skills, a comprehensive instructional guide for Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan was developed as the main output of the study. The guide was designed to be modular, adaptable, and aligned with the Department of Education’s Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). It integrates critical thinking, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, and life and career skills into the lessons.

The instructional guide is organized into modules according to the academic quarters, with each module covering a major topic in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan. Each lesson presents specific learning objectives, detailed learning activities, and the explicit integration of one or more 21st-century skills. These skills are classified into four domains: information, media, and technology skills; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life and career skills.

The guide also contains varied activities that promote active and student-centered learning. These include collaborative group work, inquiry-based tasks, mapping activities, reflection exercises, and technology-based projects (Reyes & Santos, 2023; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025). These activities allow students to

apply their knowledge while developing essential skills in communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and digital literacy.

Each lesson includes formative and authentic assessment tools, such as multiple-choice questions, short-answer exercises, performance tasks, and reflective assignments. These tools enable teachers to assess both students' understanding of the lesson content and their development of 21st-century skills (OECD, 2022). The guide also contextualizes the lessons by connecting Philippine history with local experiences and contemporary issues. This approach strengthens the cultural relevance of the content and supports DepEd's emphasis on contextualized instruction (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022).

Validity of the instructional guide

The *Integrating 21st-Century Skills in Araling Panlipunan 6: Practices, Challenges, and Enhancement Strategies* was developed to integrate essential competencies into Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan instruction. It was designed to strengthen information, media, and technology literacy; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life and career skills. It also provides practical strategies that promote active participation, adaptability, problem-solving, and holistic learner development. These features align with national and international educational frameworks that emphasize student-centered learning and the development of future-ready learners (DepEd, 2023; OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). The instructional guide was evaluated by five experts, including experienced Araling Panlipunan teachers, master teachers, curriculum specialists, and educational leaders. The validation covered three major constructs: content quality, instructional quality, and technical quality. Table 4.1 presents the summary of the experts' evaluations.

Table 6. Summary of the Validity of the Integrating 21st-Century Skills Instructional Guide in Araling Panlipunan (n = 5)

Construct	Composite Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Content Quality	4.95	Very Highly Valid
Instructional Quality	4.95	Very Highly Valid
Technical Quality	4.93	Very Highly Valid
Overall Mean	4.94	Very Highly Valid

Source: Data collected from five expert validators using a rating-scale checklist with comment sections, 2025.

Legend:

Range of Means Descriptive Interpretation

4.51–5.00	Very Highly Valid
3.51–4.50	Highly Valid
2.51–3.50	Moderately Valid
1.51–2.50	Somewhat Valid
1.00–1.50	Not Valid

As shown in Table 6, the instructional guide obtained an overall mean of 4.94, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. All three constructs received composite means within the highest validity range, indicating that the expert validators considered the guide appropriate in terms of its content, instructional design, organization, language, and visual presentation.

Content quality obtained a composite mean of 4.95, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This construct covered the integration of information, media, and technology skills; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life and career skills. These competencies are emphasized in the Philippine K–12 curriculum and international frameworks promoting adaptable, innovative, and socially responsible learners (DepEd, 2023; OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

The integration of information, media, and technology skills received a mean of 5.00. This indicates that the guide provides activities that encourage learners to locate, interpret, evaluate, and use information from different sources. It also incorporates technology-supported and media-related tasks that connect Araling Panlipunan instruction with contemporary learning practices. This feature responds to the continuing need for instructional resources that bridge the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom implementation (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2024; UNESCO, 2023; Villaluz & de la Cruz, 2024).

Learning and innovation skills likewise obtained a mean of 5.00. The rating demonstrates that the guide provides meaningful opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, inquiry, and problem-solving. Its activities encourage students to analyze information, reflect on issues, develop ideas, and apply their learning to real-life situations. These competencies are essential in preparing learners to respond to changing academic and social demands (DepEd, 2023; OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Communication skills received a mean of 4.80, which was still interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This indicates that the guide provides opportunities for learners to express their ideas, communicate their understanding, exchange perspectives, and participate in collaborative discussions. Although this indicator obtained a slightly lower mean than the other content indicators, the rating confirms that communication is effectively incorporated into the lessons.

Life and career skills received a mean of 5.00. This result shows that the guide includes activities that develop responsibility, adaptability, initiative, teamwork, productivity, and other competencies applicable beyond the classroom. Their integration allows learners to connect their knowledge of historical, civic, and social issues with practical situations. The findings therefore demonstrate that the guide's content is aligned with educational standards for developing future-ready learners (DepEd, 2023; PIDS, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

Instructional quality also obtained a composite mean of 4.95, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This construct covered the appropriateness and engagement of teaching strategies, promotion of active participation and higher-order thinking, support for diverse learning needs, and clarity and practicality

of instructions. These indicators reflect the importance of student-centered, inclusive, and clearly structured instruction in integrating 21st-century skills (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; PIDS, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

The appropriateness and engagement of the teaching strategies received a mean of 5.00. This indicates that the activities are suitable for Grade 6 learners and can promote their interest and participation. The guide uses varied strategies, including collaborative learning, inquiry-based tasks, reflection activities, and contextualized learning experiences. These approaches support active and student-centered instruction (DepEd, 2023; Reyes & Santos, 2023).

The promotion of active student participation and higher-order thinking also received a mean of 5.00. The activities require learners to analyze information, solve problems, explain their reasoning, make decisions, and apply knowledge to meaningful situations. These strategies move beyond the simple recall of information and provide opportunities for deeper learning. They are consistent with research emphasizing critical thinking and learner engagement as essential elements of contemporary instruction (Miettinen, 2022; Reyes & Santos, 2023).

Support for diverse learning needs obtained a mean of 4.80, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This result indicates that the activities can be adjusted according to students' readiness, abilities, and classroom circumstances. Although this indicator received a slightly lower mean, its rating confirms that the guide provides a strong basis for inclusive and differentiated instruction. This feature is consistent with the need for educational materials that provide meaningful learning opportunities for students with varying needs and abilities (DepEd, 2023; PIDS, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

The clarity and practicality of the instructions for teachers received a mean of 5.00. This indicates that the procedures, learning activities, and assessment directions are clearly presented and can be applied in classroom settings. Clear and practical instructions assist teachers in organizing the lessons, facilitating activities, and achieving the intended learning outcomes. Taken together, these indicators demonstrate that the guide provides a sound instructional framework for active, inclusive, and higher-order learning (DepEd, 2023; Miettinen, 2022; Reyes & Santos, 2023).

Technical quality obtained a composite mean of 4.93, also interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This construct covered the guide's organization, language, visuals, and layout. These technical elements contribute to the usability, accessibility, and clarity of instructional materials for teachers and learners (Garcia & Martinez, 2017; OECD, 2022; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025).

The organization and ease of use of the guide received a mean of 5.00. This indicates that its modules, lessons, activities, and assessments are presented in a logical sequence. The clear organization enables teachers to locate the materials they need and understand the flow of each lesson.

Language clarity and accuracy also received a mean of 5.00. This finding indicates that the language used in the guide is understandable, appropriate, and free from errors. Clear language supports the correct interpretation and implementation of lesson procedures, activities, and assessment tasks.

The visuals and layout received a mean of 4.80, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. This result indicates that the visual presentation and arrangement of the content contribute to the guide's readability and support understanding. Although the indicator obtained a slightly lower mean than organization and language, it remained within the highest validity category. This finding supports literature emphasizing that purposeful visual elements and structured layouts improve the accessibility and comprehensibility of instructional materials (Garcia & Martinez, 2017; UNESCO, 2023).

Overall, the results show that the guide possesses very high content, instructional, and technical validity. Its strong integration of 21st-century skills, student-centered strategies, support for diverse learners, clear instructions, logical organization, appropriate language, and effective visual presentation contribute to its potential usefulness in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan instruction. These results are consistent with research emphasizing the importance of high-quality, contextually appropriate instructional resources in addressing contemporary educational demands (DepEd, 2023; OECD, 2022; PIDS, 2024; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025; UNESCO, 2023; Villaluz & de la Cruz, 2024).

The findings establish that the instructional guide is valid based on expert evaluation. However, the ratings reflect the experts' assessment of its quality and appropriateness and should not yet be interpreted as evidence that the guide improves classroom practices or student learning outcomes. Its effectiveness may be further established through actual classroom implementation and outcome evaluation.

Results and discussion

The findings showed uneven integration of 21st-century skills in Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan. Information literacy (95.45%), critical thinking (92.42%), and visual literacy (83.33%) were the most frequently integrated skills, consistent with national and international frameworks (DepEd & NEQMAP, 2022; OECD, 2022; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; UNESCO, 2023). In contrast, digital and technology literacy were integrated less consistently, while media literacy received the least emphasis at 7.58%. Resilience, intercultural understanding, future orientation, and adaptive leadership were also given limited attention. This supports the finding that teachers tend to emphasize cognitive competencies more than digital and socio-emotional skills (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2024).

The major barriers included limited ICT resources, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, curriculum overload, teacher-centered practices, and limited parental and community support. These challenges are consistent with previous research emphasizing the need for teacher development, adequate resources, and stronger school-community partnerships (Miettinen, 2022; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025; UNESCO, 2023).

To address these gaps, the study developed a modular and contextualized instructional guide integrating information, media, and technology skills; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life and career skills. The guide obtained an overall validity mean of 4.94, interpreted as Very Highly Valid. Content and instructional quality each received a composite mean of 4.95, while technical quality obtained 4.93. These results indicate that the expert validators considered the guide relevant,

instructionally appropriate, well-organized, and technically sound (DepEd, 2023; Garcia & Martinez, 2017; OECD, 2022; PIDS, 2024; Reyes & Santos, 2023; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2025; UNESCO, 2023; Villaluz & de la Cruz, 2024).

The study was limited to selected private schools in Laoag City; therefore, the findings may not apply to public schools or other geographical areas. The instructional guide was designed specifically for Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan and evaluated by only five expert validators. Moreover, the study did not directly measure its effects on student achievement or the development of 21st-century skills. Thus, the validation results establish the guide's perceived quality and appropriateness but not its actual classroom effectiveness.

Given these limitations, future studies may include public schools, other geographical areas, grade levels, and subject areas to determine the guide's broader applicability. Classroom implementation studies may also examine its short- and long-term effects on student achievement and 21st-century skill development. Researchers may further develop digital or blended versions of the guide and involve teachers in participatory action research to support its continued evaluation and improvement.

Theoretical Contribution

The study translates constructivist and social constructivist principles into an instructional guide that promotes inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and active knowledge construction (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Its critical questioning and reflective activities also support transformative learning by helping students connect historical and civic concepts with contemporary issues and experiences (Mezirow, 2000). The study further demonstrates how international 21st-century skills frameworks may be contextualized for Philippine education (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Practical Contribution

The study provides Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan teachers with modular lessons, contextualized activities, differentiated strategies, implementation rubrics, and authentic assessment tools. These materials may help teachers integrate skills that received limited attention, particularly media and digital literacy, resilience, intercultural understanding, future orientation, and adaptive leadership. The findings may also guide administrators in planning teacher training, improving ICT and instructional resources, and strengthening school-community partnerships.

Conclusion

The study found that Grade 6 Araling Panlipunan instruction integrates foundational 21st-century skills, particularly information literacy, critical thinking, and communication. However, gaps remain in digital and media literacy, problem-solving, resilience, and adaptive leadership. These gaps are associated with limited ICT access, insufficient teacher training, curriculum overload, and inadequate community support.

To address these concerns, the study developed and validated a modular instructional guide containing practical, contextualized, and skills-based learning strategies. Expert evaluation established the guide's clarity, relevance, and instructional appropriateness, demonstrating its potential as a useful classroom resource. Overall, effective integration of 21st-century skills requires appropriate instructional materials, sustained institutional support,

continuous professional development, and stronger collaboration among schools, teachers, families, and communities.

Author's contribution statement: The study is conceptualized and written by the author

Ethical review statement: The study was carried out after permission from the school authorities and informed consent from the respondents.

Conflict of interest statement: There is no conflict of interest.

Funding: The study was funded by the author

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