

# Development and Implementation of a Humanities-Play Integrated Education Program for Elementary School Students

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## Abstract

This study aims to develop and evaluate the educational significance of a humanities-play integrated education program designed for elementary school students residing in the border regions of South Korea. Cheorwon, Gangwon-do, the program's site, is a border area experiencing urban decline in terms of physical, social, and economic functions, with lingering security concerns among residents. Therefore, a practical approach considering socio-cultural aspects is needed to improve the quality of life for these residents. The humanities-play integrated program introduced in this study combines humanities texts with various play activities designed to stimulate physical and cognitive engagement, supporting healthy self-identity formation among elementary students in border areas. During the development phase, the program was structured to connect humanities values and play activities through elements of creativity, spontaneity, simplicity, repetition, and real-life relevance. Since 2022, a total of seven program sessions have been conducted, with survey satisfaction rates ranging from 87% to 99%. The findings indicate that integrating humanities and play promotes positive self-recognition and confidence among students, receiving high engagement and positive feedback. In conclusion, the humanities-play integrated program demonstrates an educational effect in fostering healthy self-identity in elementary students from border areas.

*Keywords:* humanities-play integrated education, elementary education, socio-cultural approach, local revitalization program

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## Introduction

Since the early 1960s, the Republic of Korea has experienced rapid urbanization alongside remarkable economic growth, causing large numbers of people to migrate to urban areas. As cities expanded physically to accommodate the influx of new residents, many provincial city centers, apart from a few major metropolitan areas, began to show signs of deterioration in physical infrastructure, social structures, and economic viability.

This issue is also closely related to Korea's unique historical context. After signing the Armistice Agreement in 1953, the country grappled with the underdevelopment of border regions due to various regulations, as well as lingering security concerns among local residents. In an effort to revitalize these declining urban areas—including those in border regions—the government has implemented a range of policies. These initiatives involve improving the physical environment, bolstering local commercial districts, fostering new industries and job opportunities, enhancing cultural and welfare services, and promoting greater community participation. However, earlier urban regeneration projects focused primarily on upgrading physical infrastructure, which has not led to truly sustainable or equitable development. In fact, existing studies on the key areas and factors of urban regeneration have shown that social and cultural considerations can be more significant than the physical environment alone. Accordingly, there is growing demand for practical strategies that go beyond merely updating outdated physical spaces and instead comprehensively address the social and cultural factors required to improve residents' quality of life.

This study focuses on Cheorwon-gun in Gangwon State, a border region on the Korean Peninsula that has been experiencing a steady outflow of residents. Although population decline stems from multiple factors, previous data indicates that educational support is a particularly pressing concern.

In a survey targeting young adults between the ages of 19 and 29 from 800 households in Cheorwon, respondents identified “Employment Support” (37.8%), “Business Attraction” (16.2%), and “Improving the Education System and Cultivating Future Talents” (15.9%) as critical measures for encouraging population inflow. This finding underlines the importance that local residents place on education.

A separate satisfaction survey targeting households with preschool- and K–12-age children revealed that 55.5% of respondents felt there were “insufficient” educational opportunities outside of formal schooling. This finding highlights the lack of diverse learning experiences as a significant concern.

Taken together, these results suggest that, in order to improve the overall quality of life for local residents, there is a pressing need not only to enhance the educational environment but also to provide a broader range of learning experiences that nurture future generations.

In response, this study designed and implemented a humanities–play integrated education program for elementary school students in Yangji Village, Cheorwon-gun. The program was made possible through a multi-party MOU aimed at revitalizing Yangji Village, involving the Yangji Village Residents' Council, Geunnam Elementary School, the Gangwon National University Education-Research Group for Local Regeneration and Humanities Care Experts, and the Yangji Village Urban Regeneration Field Support Center. By reading humanities texts and engaging students in a variety of physical and cognitive play activities, the program

sought to offer diverse learning experiences for elementary school children in a border region and to support healthy identity formation.

The purpose of this study is to introduce the development and implementation of the program, describe the outcomes achieved, discuss its educational significance, and identify areas in need of further improvement.

### **Program Details**

**Location:** The program was conducted at Geunnam Elementary School in Yangji Village, Cheorwon-gun, Gangwon Special Self-Governing Province, Republic of Korea.

**Implementation Period:** The program ran once per semester from June 2022 to October 2024, with each session lasting five weeks for a total of six sessions.

**Target Participants:** Each session was offered to two classes from grades 2 to 6 at Geunnam Elementary School, with class sizes ranging from 7 to 15 students.

**Operation Details:** The teaching staff generally included a lead instructor, responsible for overall planning and class delivery, and an assistant instructor.

On a single day, separate two-hour sessions were offered during the regular curriculum—one program tailored for lower grades and another for upper grades. The content of these two programs were different.

### **Program Planning**

#### ***Importance of Reading Humanities Texts***

1. Reading humanities texts helps children develop integrated thinking skills about themselves and the world, while fostering positive social behavior.
2. It opens a path to emotional healing by allowing children to resolve underlying, unresolved feelings.
3. Lessons gained from reading act like a “vaccination,” helping children understand and tackle the problems they will encounter in life.

#### ***Linking Humanities Education With Play***

Play is far more than just fun; it is crucial for well-rounded development, contributing to children’s physical, cognitive, and social growth. When combined with play, humanities education can provide more dynamic and effective learning experiences. The impact of humanities is amplified when receptive and expressive activities are combined. Values found in humanities texts are more deeply internalized—and can deliver new meaning—when paired with a variety of physical and artistic play activities. Moreover, play-based expressions are especially helpful for children whose language skills are not yet fully developed, as they offer additional ways to communicate and explore ideas.

### ***Key Elements of Program Design***

1. Creativity: Activities should be designed to spark creativity by connecting humanities readings with playful engagement.
2. Voluntary Participation: Students should participate by choice. While instructors may encourage engagement, they do not force it. Notably, students who were initially reluctant often showed increased enthusiasm as the sessions progressed.
3. Simplicity and Repetition: The humanities concepts introduced should be easily understandable for the students' age level and reinforced through repeated exposure to maximize learning.
4. Real-World Relevance: The values and insights gained from humanities education should relate directly to students' everyday lives and offer possible solutions to real-life challenges.

### ***Additional Details***

Texts and play activities were adapted according to the students' grade levels. Lower-grade students primarily read picture books, while upper-grade students focused on folktales and myths. To support hands-on play activities, the instructor prepared sample materials so all students could participate without difficulty within the allotted time.

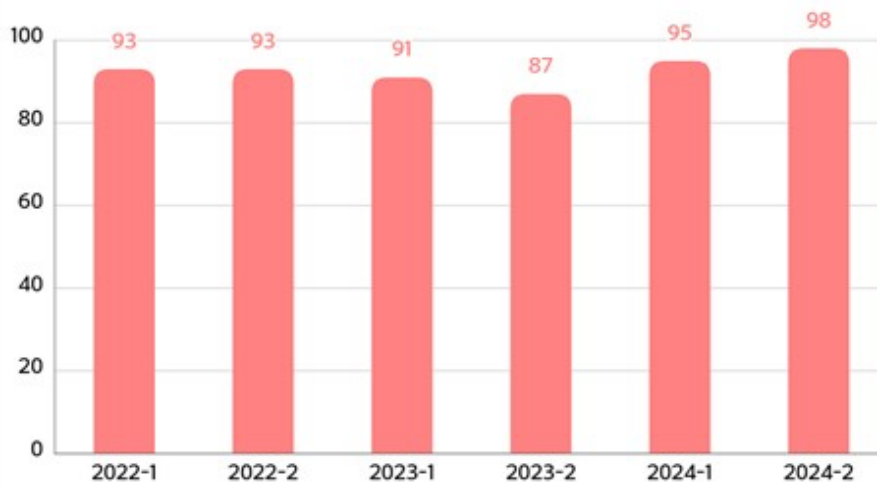
The program also prioritized cooperative activities with minimal competitive elements. One key emphasis during class was that there are no "correct" answers. Students were encouraged to freely express their ideas, while being guided to communicate their opinions appropriately.

### **Quantitative Results**

A survey was administered to program participants, focusing on the following nine items:

1. Overall Satisfaction
2. Appropriateness of Group Size
3. Suitability of Teaching Methods
4. Quality of Facilities
5. Level of Participant Engagement
6. Knowledge Acquisition Before vs. After Program
7. Relevance to Real-World Applications
8. Course Satisfaction
9. Instructor Satisfaction

Figure 1: Overall Satisfaction of Elementary Students With the Program (%)



## Qualitative Results

### *Student Feedback Summary*

- I liked how the teacher explained the stories in a fun way.
- The teacher was kind and caring, which made it enjoyable.
- It was so much fun; I want to take this class again.
- I hope other friends get a chance to join this class, too.
- At first, I felt shy because it was my first time doing a humanities program, but it became really fun later on.
- I thought reading books would be boring, but the sessions got more interesting as time went on.
- I feel my friendship with my classmates grew stronger through these lessons.

### *School Teacher Feedback*

- This program offered a valuable opportunity for students to engage with literary texts and traditional stories they rarely encounter.
- During the humanities lessons, the children appeared enthusiastic and genuinely happy.
- The students have become better at expressing their own ideas.

## Educational Significance of the Program

1. Emotional Development: The program nurtured students' imaginative thinking and deepened their self-understanding, contributing to healthier self-concepts. Through in-depth study of humanities texts and cooperative play activities, students strengthened their social skills and improved peer relationships.
2. Cognitive Development: By reading stories, students learned to engage with texts more deeply, boosting both concentration and vocabulary. Additionally, they showed strong interest in using their imaginations to create original stories during play activities.

## **Conclusion**

This study designed and implemented a humanities–play integrated education program for elementary school students in a border region. Its goal was to broaden students’ learning experiences and help them develop a healthy sense of self. Across six sessions, participants’ satisfaction ranged from 87% to 98%. The program also successfully sparked interest in humanities among students who were not previously familiar with such content, having a positive impact on both their emotional and cognitive development.

Moreover, because this program was planned with social and cultural considerations in mind, it represents a practical strategy for improving the quality of life for residents of Cheorwongun.

However, since the program was short-term and focused on non-physical interventions, further in-depth research is needed to quantitatively assess its positive effects and explore its sustainability over the long term.

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