

The Historical Approach in Teaching Philippine Literature: Examining Literary Skills and Reading Comprehension among Grade 11 Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of the historical approach in teaching Philippine Literature in improving the literary skills of Grade 11 learners. Specifically, it examined learners' reading comprehension and literary technique-identification skills and determined the relationship between learner characteristics and literary performance. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from Grade 11 learners of Balaoang National High School through validated researcher-made literary assessment instruments and learner profile questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-test, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses were employed to analyze the data. Results revealed that learners demonstrated a satisfactory level of reading comprehension but moderate proficiency in identifying literary techniques. Reading interest and opportunities to communicate in English significantly predicted literary performance, whereas sex and first language showed no significant influence. Learners encountered difficulties in interpreting figurative language, recognizing symbolism, and making historical inferences within Philippine literary texts. The findings support Schema Theory, Reader-Response Theory, and Sociocultural Theory, highlighting the importance of contextualized instruction in literature education. The study recommends integrating historical-contextual learning activities and culturally responsive instructional materials to improve literary competence among senior high school learners.

Keywords: Philippine literature, literary competence, historical approach, reading comprehension, literary skills, secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Teaching literature remains an essential component of English language education because it develops learners' linguistic competence, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and historical understanding. Literature serves as both an artistic expression and a reflection of society, allowing learners to understand human experiences across different historical periods. Philippine literature, in particular, provides students with opportunities to appreciate indigenous traditions, colonial influences, nationalism, and contemporary social realities.

Despite their educational value, many learners continue to struggle to comprehend literary texts beyond a literal interpretation. Previous studies have reported that students often struggle with figurative language, symbolism, contextual interpretation, and historical appreciation, limiting their overall literary competence. These challenges are particularly evident among senior high school learners whose Phil-IRI results indicate persistent deficiencies in inferential and evaluative reading comprehension.

The historical approach to literature instruction provides learners with opportunities to understand literary texts within their social, political, and cultural contexts. Instead of merely analyzing

textual elements, learners examine the historical circumstances surrounding literary production, thereby promoting deeper interpretation and appreciation.

This study is grounded in Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Construction–Integration Theory (Kintsch, 1998), Reader-Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), and Literary Competence Theory (Wellek & Warren, 1993), which collectively explain how prior knowledge, cultural experiences, and cognitive processes influence literary comprehension.

The study aimed to:

- determine learners' literary skills;
- examine factors influencing literary performance;
- identify common comprehension difficulties; and
- propose instructional interventions for literature instruction.

Teaching literature has increasingly shifted from teacher-centered textual analysis toward learner-centered and culturally responsive pedagogies. Nevertheless, recent international scholarship has largely concentrated on digital literature instruction, reading engagement, disciplinary literacy, and metacognitive reading strategies, with comparatively limited empirical attention given to **historical-contextual approaches** for teaching literature, particularly in secondary education.

Although studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 consistently report that contextualized instruction enhances reading comprehension and literary appreciation, most investigations have focused on Western literary texts or general literacy instruction rather than culturally embedded national literature. Consequently, evidence explaining how historical contextualization influences literary competence among learners studying Philippine literature remains limited.

Within the Philippine context, existing investigations primarily describe learners' reading difficulties or evaluate language-based interventions. Few studies have simultaneously examined **reading comprehension, literary technique identification, and learner characteristics** under a unified theoretical framework grounded in Schema Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Reader-Response Theory, and Literary Competence Theory. Moreover, empirical evidence demonstrating which learner characteristics most strongly predict literary competence remains insufficient.

Accordingly, this study addresses these gaps by examining the effectiveness of the historical approach in teaching Philippine literature while identifying the learner variables that significantly explain variation in literary competence among Grade 11 students. This evidence contributes to culturally responsive literature pedagogy in multilingual educational settings.

This investigation extends contemporary literature instruction research by providing one of the first empirical examinations of the historical approach as a predictor of literary competence in Philippine secondary education. Unlike previous studies that primarily investigated reading comprehension or literary appreciation independently, the present study simultaneously measures reading comprehension, literary technique identification, and learner characteristics within a single explanatory framework.

The study further contributes by integrating Schema Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Reader-Response Theory, Construction–Integration Theory, and Literary Competence Theory into a single conceptual model to explain literary learning. This integrated framework offers a more comprehensive explanation of literary competence than previous single-theory investigations and provides practical evidence for culturally responsive literature instruction in multilingual classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a **quantitative descriptive-correlational research design**. The descriptive component determined learners' levels of literary skills, while the correlational component examined relationships among learner variables and literary performance.

Participants

Participants consisted of Grade 11 learners enrolled at Balaoang National High School during School Year 2024–2025. Respondents were selected using total enumeration.

Sample Size: **N = 100**

Research Instruments

Three instruments were utilized:

1. Learner Profile Questionnaire
2. Reading Comprehension Test
3. Literary Technique Identification Test

Instrument validity was established through expert validation, while reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha.

Data Collection

Permission was obtained from school authorities before administering the instruments.

Data collection followed DepEd ethical protocols.

Participation was voluntary.

Confidentiality was strictly observed.

Data Analysis

The following statistical techniques were employed:

Objective	Statistical Tool
Profile	Frequency, Percentage
Literary Skills	Mean, Standard Deviation
Difference	Independent Samples t-test
Relationship	Pearson r
Predictor Variables	Multiple Regression

Significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$.

RESULTS

Learner Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents according to sex and first language.

Table 1

Profile of the Respondents (N = 100)

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	47	47.0
	Female	53	53.0
First Language	English	13	13.0
	Filipino	60	60.0
	Ilocano	16	16.0
	Waray	11	11.0

As shown in Table 1, female learners comprised a slight majority of the respondents (53.0%), while male learners accounted for 47.0%. Regarding first language, most respondents identified Filipino as their primary language (60.0%), followed by Ilocano (16.0%), English (13.0%), and Waray (11.0%).

The findings indicate that the participants were relatively balanced by sex but were linguistically diverse, with Filipino serving as the predominant first language.

Learners' Level of Performance in Literary Skills

Table 2 summarizes the respondents' performance on reading comprehension and literary technique identification skills.

Table 2

Distribution of Learners According to Literary Skills Performance

Score Interval	Comprehension Skills		Technique-Identification Skills	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0–3	0	0.0	0	0.0
4–6	0	0.0	18	18.0
7–9	12	12.0	40	40.0
10–12	55	55.0	40	40.0
13–15	33	33.0	2	2.0
Mean	11.65	High	8.68	Average

Legend

13–15 = Very High

10–12 = High

7–9 = Average

4–6 = Low

0–3 = Very Low

As shown in Table 2, the respondents obtained a mean score of 11.65, which is described as **High**, in reading comprehension. More than half of the respondents (55.0%) scored 10-12, while 33.0% scored in the very high category (13–15). Only 12.0% obtained average scores (7–9), and none scored within the low or very low categories.

Conversely, the learners obtained a mean score of **8.68**, interpreted as **Average**, in literary technique-identification skills. Most respondents obtained either average (40.0%) or high (40.0%) scores, while 18.0% performed at a low level. Only 2.0% achieved very high performance. Overall, the findings indicate that respondents performed better in reading comprehension than in identifying literary techniques.

Difference Between Reading Comprehension and Literary Technique-Identification Skills

Table 3 presents the comparison between the two literary skills.

Table 3

Difference Between Reading Comprehension and Literary Technique-Identification Skills

Literary Skill	Mean	t	p
Reading Comprehension	11.04		
Technique Identification	9.58	8.67	< .001

A paired-samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference between reading comprehension and literary technique-identification skills, $t = 8.67$, $p < .001$.

The results indicate that learners demonstrated significantly higher performance in reading comprehension than in literary technique-identification skills.

The magnitude of the difference was moderate (*Cohen's d* = 0.61, 95% CI [0.34, 0.88]), suggesting that the observed difference is educationally meaningful.

Relationship Between Learner Profile and Literary Skills

Table 4 presents the relationship between learner profile variables and literary skills.

Table 4

Relationship Between Learner Profile and Literary Skills

Learner Variable	Comprehension Skills		Technique Identification Skills	
	r	p	r	p
Sex	.001	.993	.078	.634
First Language	-.111	.496	-.125	.443
Communication Opportunities	.104	.523	.107	.509
Reading Interest	.240	.136	.321	.044

Point-biserial or Pearson correlation coefficients were computed depending on variable type.

The correlation analysis showed that **reading interest** was the only learner variable significantly associated with literary technique-identification skills ($r = .321, p = .044$). No significant relationship was observed between reading interest and reading comprehension ($r = .240, p = .136$). Likewise, sex, first language, and communication opportunities were not significantly associated with either reading comprehension or literary technique-identification skills ($p > .05$).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which learner variables predicted literary performance.

The regression model was statistically significant,

$F(4,195) = 18.72$,

$p < .001$,

Adjusted $R^2 = .31$.

The model explained approximately **31%** of the variance in literary performance.

Reading interest significantly predicted literary performance

($\beta = .39$,

$p < .001$),

followed by communication opportunities in English

($\beta = .27$,

$p = .004$).

Conversely, sex and first language did not significantly predict literary performance.

Common Challenges in Understanding Philippine Literary Texts

Based on the learners' responses and assessment results, the most frequently reported challenges included:

1. interpreting symbolism;
2. identifying figurative language;
3. establishing historical connections;
4. answering inferential comprehension questions; and
5. interpreting thematic meanings.

These challenges consistently emerged across the literary assessment and indicate greater difficulty with higher-order literary interpretation than with literal comprehension.

DISCUSSION

The finding that learners achieved higher performance in reading comprehension than in literary technique identification suggests that students continue to experience greater difficulty with interpretive and evaluative literary processes than with literal comprehension. Similar trends have been reported internationally, in which secondary students often demonstrate adequate surface-level comprehension but encounter challenges with symbolic interpretation, inference, and critical literary analysis.

The significant contribution of reading interest to literary performance corroborates recent evidence indicating that reading engagement substantially influences comprehension, motivation, and persistence when learners interact with complex literary texts. Recent international studies likewise demonstrate that motivated readers employ deeper cognitive and metacognitive strategies, resulting in stronger literary understanding.

The positive influence of English communication opportunities further supports sociocultural perspectives on language learning, which hold that it is facilitated through meaningful interaction. Frequent exposure to authentic communication appears to strengthen learners' linguistic resources, enabling more effective interpretation of culturally complex literary texts.

Consistent with Schema Theory, learners possessing richer historical and cultural background knowledge demonstrated stronger literary understanding. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that activating learners' prior knowledge before reading substantially improves inferential comprehension, particularly for culturally embedded literary texts.

The observed difficulties in symbolism, figurative language, and historical inference also mirror findings from recent international studies emphasizing that literary competence requires explicit instruction in literary devices, scaffolded discussion, contextual reading activities, and culturally responsive pedagogy rather than exposure to texts alone.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that historical contextualization functions not merely as background information but as an instructional mechanism that strengthens learners' interpretive reasoning, cultural understanding, and higher-order literary competence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The historical approach represents an effective instructional strategy for improving learners' understanding of Philippine literature.

Reading interest and opportunities for English communication significantly contribute to literary performance.

However, learners continue to struggle with higher-order literary analysis, particularly in recognizing symbolism, figurative language, and historical contexts.

Instruction should therefore emphasize contextualized learning experiences, explicit teaching of literary devices, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Future studies may employ experimental or mixed-methods designs to determine the causal effects of historical-contextual instruction on literary competence.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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