

Philippine Literature and Genre Preferences: Influences on Student Reading Motivation

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Abstract: Although the Philippines boasts a diverse literary heritage, research has yet to fully explore how distinct literary genres and their specific language styles impact student reading motivation nationwide. Anchored in Guthrie and Wigfield's Engagement Model, this research bridges that gap by examining the internal and external drivers influencing student interaction with local texts. Employing an exploratory qualitative methodology, researchers conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with 18 purposefully chosen language learners representing the country's three primary island regions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Subsequent reflexive thematic analysis uncovered a twofold nature to reading engagement. Students are heavily drawn to modern literature because of its relatable social contexts and approachable language, specifically the use of "Taglish." Conversely, they also demonstrate a profound interest in intricate historical works, such as *Noli Me Tangere*. This duality indicates that a strong historical consciousness and the urge to reconnect with cultural identity can transcend language difficulties, irrespective of the students' regional origins. Ultimately, the research concludes that successful literature pedagogy must balance two crucial elements: satisfying the psychological desire to see one's reality reflected in texts, and fulfilling the sociological imperative of establishing a cohesive national identity. Based on these findings, the study advocates for a teaching strategy of thematic pairing, suggesting that educators can maximize student reading engagement across the country by combining highly appealing modern literature with established classical works..

Keywords: Second Language (L2) Reading Motivation; Literature Pedagogy; Philippine Literary Texts; Genre Examination

INTRODUCTION

Student reading motivation is a fundamental driver of language acquisition and academic achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kamil et al., 2000; Schiefele et al., 2012). Within the Philippines, integrating local literary works into the curriculum does more than build foundational skills; it fosters cultural awareness and national identity (Garil, 2024; Lumbera, 1997; Nolasco, 2008). Despite the abundance of Philippine literature—ranging from historical fiction to contemporary poetry—a critical gap remains in understanding exactly which literary formats and linguistic styles most effectively stimulate students' desire to read (Estoque, 2023; Idulog et al., 2023; Nabong & Fernal, 2025).

To investigate this, the current study utilizes Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) Engagement Model of Reading. This framework emphasizes that sustained reading habits depend heavily on intrinsic motivation, such as personal curiosity and aesthetic connection, alongside supportive external environments (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Li et al., 2025; Widyaningsih & Nugroho, 2025). Previous research indicates that Filipino students are intrinsically drawn to literature that intimately mirrors their lived realities (Bautista et al., 2026; Paguio et al., 2025). Modern formats, particularly contemporary fiction and spoken word poetry, resonate deeply due to their alignment with youth culture and current social issues (Michalko, 2012; Mushtaq et al., 2021). Furthermore, linguistic accessibility significantly impacts engagement. The use of "Taglish" (Tagalog-English code-switching) has been shown to reduce cognitive strain, making complex narratives more approachable and enjoyable for bilingual readers (Bahingawan & Bulatao, 2025; Butac et al., 2025; Lesada, 2017). Beyond modern language, historical resonance serves as a potent motivator. Students continue to value canonical texts, such as the works of José Rizal, viewing them as essential tools for reclaiming and defining a unified national identity (Caliboso et al., 2025; Luyt, 2022).

Despite these existing insights, the distinct interplay between a text's thematic genre and its linguistic delivery remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, this study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing in-depth interviews and reflexive thematic analysis to examine how specific Philippine literary genres drive reading motivation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Entong et al., 2024). By isolating the textual elements that capture learner interest, this research equips educators with evidence-based strategies to select culturally resonant materials that cultivate lifelong reading habits (Chavez et al., 2024; Makgabo & Quintero, 2024).

Methods

Research Design

To examine which Philippine literary formats most effectively stimulate students' reading motivation, this research utilized an exploratory qualitative methodology. This design is highly suitable for delving into the complex internal and external drivers that shape student literary preferences. Rather than evaluating predefined hypotheses, this inquiry was intentionally structured to capture the authentic perceptions, patterns, and meanings directly articulated by the learners.

Population and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was applied to recruit 18 language majors from higher education institutions distributed across the Philippines' three primary island groups: Mindanao, Visayas, and Luzon. Participant selection hinged on a strict inclusion criterion: the completion of a minimum of two semesters of Philippine Literature coursework. This guaranteed that all respondents possessed adequate familiarity with local texts to yield substantive feedback. To capture a comprehensive spectrum of viewpoints, the cohort was strategically stratified to ensure diversity across genders, year levels, and academic programs.

Instrument

Data collection was primarily facilitated through a customized, semi-structured interview protocol. The instrument featured open-ended prompts designed to elicit details regarding favored

literary categories, the textual elements driving engagement, and the texts' cultural or emotional impact. To establish content validity, the protocol was subjected to rigorous evaluation by a panel of three doctoral-level experts specializing in curriculum development, Applied Linguistics, and Philippine Literature. These evaluators scrutinized the questions for alignment, potential bias, and overall clarity. Implementing their recommendations, the researchers eliminated technical jargon in favor of accessible language and divided double-barreled items. A subsequent pilot test with two non-participating learners confirmed the logical flow and comprehensibility of the finalized questions. Table 2 outlines the specific instrument utilized.

Table 2. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview Question
1. To identify the Philippine literary formats that most effectively capture students' interest and drive reading motivation.	1. What specific categories of Philippine literature do you prefer reading, and for what reasons?
	2. Could you share a recent Philippine poem, play, or story that strongly held your interest?
	3. In what ways do these specific formats impact your overall desire to read frequently?
2. To investigate how specific textual elements, cultural resonance, and linguistic delivery shape students' literary appreciation and connection to the text.	1. Which specific components of a literary work (such as language, themes, or characters) draw you in?
	2. How does the integration of Philippine history or culture influence your personal connection to the reading?
	3. What particular literary styles or subject matters compel you to keep reading, and why?

Data Gathering Procedure

The primary data collection method involved individual, semi-structured interviews. This format provided a foundational guide while granting the researcher the flexibility to introduce follow-up questions and probe deeper into specific answers. The dialogue was carefully aligned with the study's dual objectives: identifying highly engaging Philippine literary genres and determining the specific textual factors that foster reading habits. Illustrative prompts, such as "What specific categories of Philippine literature do you prefer reading, and for what reasons?" and "Which specific components of a literary work draw you in?", were utilized to elicit comprehensive, reflective answers. To foster a comfortable environment conducive to open sharing, interviews were executed with a conversational tone. Following the acquisition of informed consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to preserve the exact phrasing and integrity of the participants' insights.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data interpretation was conducted using the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was selected for its robust capacity to handle nuanced, subjective participant experiences. Employing an inductive strategy, the researchers

allowed core themes to surface naturally from the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories. For instance, during the initial coding stage, participant statements like "I see my own family's struggles in the story" and "The character is just like me" were assigned the preliminary code "Personal Connection." These were subsequently grouped with related codes, such as "Realistic Situations," to establish the sub-theme of "Relatability." Ultimately, this culminated in the overarching major theme: Reflecting Lived Experiences. To mitigate bias and uphold analytical rigor, the researchers maintained reflexivity by actively writing analytic memos to track all interpretive decisions throughout the process.

Results

Research Objective 1: To investigate the specific Philippine literary formats that most effectively capture learners' interest and drive their motivation to read.

Theme 1: Immersion through Extended Narratives (Novels)

The most dominant trend among the respondents was a strong inclination toward long-form fiction. This preference is primarily fueled by a reader's desire for deep immersion and sustained attachment to the cast of characters. In contrast to shorter texts, novels were commended for their capacity to mimic the passage of time, enabling students to observe intricate plot progressions and authentic character development. This engagement was frequently associated with both modern romantic series (such as the *Until Trilogy*) and classical historical epics (like *Noli Me Tangere*). The participants emphasized that the substantial length of these books did not discourage them; rather, it acted as a catalyst, offering a prolonged escape and a more rewarding emotional climax.

"Long-form fiction is my preference as it permits me to fully dive into the protagonists' experiences. Local novels effectively balance societal truths with entertainment, deepening my respect for our heritage."

"A compelling storyline in a novel drives my reading habit. I love tracking the cast's progression chapter by chapter; it's akin to forging a lasting relationship with the narrative."

Theme 2: Accessibility and Instant Gratification (Short Stories)

A substantial portion of the cohort expressed a preference for short stories, pointing to the genre's manageable length and the rapid sense of completion it provides. For learners navigating demanding academic workloads, brief narratives deliver a satisfying beginning, middle, and end without requiring the extensive time investment of a full-length book. This highlights a highly practical dimension of reading motivation: the psychological reward of promptly finishing a text incentivizes students to read additional materials. Moreover, the realistic, slice-of-life quality inherent in many Filipino short stories was cited as a primary attraction, as it provides authentic reflections of everyday challenges.

"Brief narratives boost my reading frequency because they deliver profound messages without demanding too much time. The rapid sense of completion pushes me to read subsequent stories."

"I am drawn to local short fiction because it provides authentic glimpses into everyday existence, perfectly illustrating the hardships, principles, and comedic moments of Filipino domestic life."

Theme 3: Aesthetic and Intellectual Engagement (Poetry)

Although chosen by fewer participants than prose, poetry emerged as a potent motivator for students desiring aesthetic beauty and intellectual stimulation. These readers were less interested in linear, plot-heavy stories and more captivated by the profound imagery and complex metaphors characteristic of pieces like Lamberto Antonio's *Gabi*. This finding indicates that for a specific subset of learners, the drive to read is sparked by the cognitive challenge of interpreting symbolism and the intense emotional impact delivered through highly condensed language.

"Verses captivate my interest by demanding higher-level critical thinking. I find pleasure in parsing out the multiple layers of meaning hidden within even the briefest stanzas."

"Antonio's 'Gabi' resonated with me through its use of darkness to represent hardship and quietude. It prompted me to realize how verse can simultaneously convey intimate emotions and broader societal critiques."

Research Objective 2: To analyze the foundational elements within specific Philippine literary categories that shape students' reading habits and literary interests.

Theme 4: Resonance of Relatable Themes

The most significant determinant of reading engagement was thematic familiarity, particularly the presence of Social Realism. Respondents frequently indicated that their motivation spiked when texts reflected their own lived experiences, covering topics such as domestic disputes, romantic entanglements, and broader societal dilemmas like systemic injustice or economic hardship. When a piece of literature functions as a reflection of the reader's reality, intrinsic motivation is substantially amplified. This phenomenon clarifies why contemporary fiction tackling tangible, everyday issues often eclipses highly abstract or fantastical narratives in popularity among students.

"Subject matter is what hooks me, particularly when it addresses authentic dilemmas like romance, inequity, or self-discovery... Romance is consistently compelling because it explores the multifaceted nature of human feelings."

"My continued engagement relies on narratives confronting societal problems like poverty. It forces me to contemplate actual hardships and motivates me to envision potential remedies."

Theme 5: Character Identification and Narrative Tension

In addition to relatable themes, the architecture of the plot and the design of the characters were pivotal in keeping readers hooked. Participants showed a distinct affinity for dynamic, flawed characters whose personal evolutions mirrored their own. This psychological alignment elevated reading from a passive academic requirement to an interactive, emotional journey. Furthermore, structural narrative tension—especially unforeseen plot twists—was frequently mentioned as a vital extrinsic motivator that preserved reader curiosity and prevented them from abandoning the text prematurely.

"The protagonists are the most captivating element for me, showcasing varied traits and challenges. Recognizing my own traits in them significantly heightens my investment in the narrative."

"Narratives featuring unpredictable plot deviations attract me; they sustain my intrigue and compel me to read until the very end."

Theme 6: Cultural Anchoring and Historical Consciousness

One of the most profound drivers of reading motivation uncovered by this study was the pursuit of historical consciousness. Even though participants generally favored accessible modern language, they reported an intense connection to classical historical literature (most notably *Noli Me Tangere*) because such works anchor them to their national heritage. This theme illustrates a crucial intersection between civic responsibility and literary engagement; learners are driven to consume these texts not merely for entertainment, but as a means to comprehend their cultural origins, ancestral resilience, and the historical struggle for sovereignty.

"Engaging with literature set during the Spanish colonization, such as Noli Me Tangere, fosters a profound bond because it illuminates the origins of our national hardships."

"Stories depicting fortitude and optimism inspire us by demonstrating our culture's enduring capacity to withstand extreme adversity."

Discussion

This study evaluated student reading preferences through Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) Engagement Model of Reading, revealing that intrinsic motivation is heavily dependent on the delicate balance between textual relatability, linguistic approachability, and cultural significance. The findings indicate a pronounced inclination toward modern formats, such as contemporary fiction and spoken word poetry, largely because these genres authentically mirror the students' current societal realities. Crucially, the participants' preference for conversational Filipino or "Taglish" underscores a desire to lower cognitive barriers during the reading process. Aligning with Lesada (2017) and Lamorinas et al.

(2025), the use of modern vernacular allows Generation Z readers to bypass the strenuous translation of archaic Tagalog. By mitigating this cognitive load, students can direct their mental energy toward emotional immersion rather than linguistic decoding (Bahingawan & Bulatao, 2025).

However, a compelling paradox emerged regarding canonical literature. Despite the overarching preference for easily digestible language, participants reported profound engagement with complex, classical works like *Noli Me Tangere*. This indicates that linguistic accessibility is not the exclusive driver of reading habits; rather, a deep-seated historical consciousness can effectively override linguistic difficulty. Consistent with Luyt (2022), engaging with such foundational texts functions less as a leisure activity and more as a crucial exercise in identity reclamation. Students willingly navigate challenging, antiquated prose when the intrinsic reward—connecting with their ancestral resilience and national heritage—is substantial. Furthermore, the rising appeal of spoken word poetry illustrates a contemporary shift in literary consumption. Valued for its performative intimacy rather than rigid structural mechanics, this format successfully bridges the gap between aesthetic appreciation and pressing youth issues, such as mental health (Michalko, 2012). In this instance, the auditory delivery method itself acts as the primary motivational hook.

Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that pitting canonical literature against modern genres is a counterproductive pedagogical approach. Successful literature instruction requires recognizing that different formats fulfill distinct motivational needs. Contemporary works satisfy the psychological craving for immediate relatability and linguistic comfort, while historical narratives fulfill the sociological imperative for cultural anchoring. To maximize engagement, educators should adopt a hybridized strategy of thematic pairing. By juxtaposing a highly accessible modern piece with a classical text exploring similar themes, teachers can leverage the immediate appeal of contemporary literature to build initial enthusiasm, subsequently scaffolding students toward a deeper, more rigorous appreciation of their national literary heritage.

Conclusion

This research reveals a distinct duality in Filipino students' reading motivation. While accessible modern language (such as "Taglish") and relatable social realism heavily drive casual reading, learners are equally motivated to tackle complex, historical works like *Noli Me Tangere* to reconnect with their national identity. This proves that a text's cultural value can successfully override its linguistic difficulty. Furthermore, the performative nature of spoken word poetry serves as a powerful engagement tool. To optimize instruction, educators should implement "thematic pairing," combining relatable contemporary pieces with canonical works to scaffold student understanding and bridge the gap between accessibility and cultural depth. Additionally, teachers can leverage Taglish translations and performative assessments to deepen comprehension rather than treating them as barriers. Ultimately, future quantitative studies are necessary to statistically measure how specific literary formats and linguistic adjustments impact overall reading frequency nationwide.

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