
Design and Process: Unveiling the Literature Syllabi

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Abstract — This study explores the lived experiences of tertiary literature educators in designing and refining course syllabi within Philippine higher education. Through semi-structured interviews, the research uncovers the reflective processes and meaning-making practices that guide instructors in conceptualizing, structuring, and selecting content for literature courses. Findings reveal that educators anchor syllabus design in alignment with course objectives, institutional policies, and CHED guidelines, while attending to the diverse backgrounds, competencies, and learning needs of students. Participants emphasized the deliberate balance of classical and contemporary texts, the systematic sequencing of topics, and reliance on compendiums, prior syllabi, and collegial guidance. Educators also reported challenges including limited preparation time, scarce instructional and technological resources, difficulties in selecting appropriate texts, and the need to balance academic rigor with student capacities. The study demonstrates that syllabus development is a reflective and iterative process shaped by both institutional and classroom contexts, highlighting the importance of institutional support, access to resources, and ongoing professional development to enhance literature instruction in higher education.

Keywords — *syllabus design, tertiary education, pedagogical challenges, reflective practice, curriculum development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the tertiary level, a syllabus is a planned course outline that each instructor is required to prepare for every term or semester, serving as a guide for the course of study (Inocian, 2010). Its design and development greatly influence students' academic involvement, analytical thinking

skills, cultural understanding, and admiration for literary traditions and advancements. To promote meaningful learning outcomes, the syllabi must maintain a balance among tradition, relevance, and creativity given the changing demands of higher education and the complex character of literary study, including the rise of postcolonial, feminist, and multicultural viewpoints.

Despite the critical importance of literature syllabi design, there remains a notable lack of comprehensive research examining how tertiary educators develop, organize, and select the content of these syllabi. Existing literature highlights the complexity of the task, where educators must navigate institutional mandates, diverse student backgrounds, and rapidly changing literary landscapes. The process entails deliberate decision-making around text selection, thematic organization, pedagogical goals, and assessment strategies. Educators must also accommodate constraints such as time limitations, resource availability, and curriculum standards, all while striving to nurture students' analytical, cultural, and ethical capacities.

This study focuses on tertiary educators' lived experiences regarding literature syllabus design, aiming to uncover the nuances of their decision-making processes and identify recurring challenges. In doing so, it centers educators' voices, capturing their reflections on balancing competing demands and innovating within structural constraints. The research is guided by two fundamental questions: (1) How do tertiary educators design their literature syllabi in terms of structure and content selection? (2) What are the primary challenges encountered in developing and refining their pedagogical approaches through syllabus design? Addressing these questions through a phenomenological lens offers depth and insight into the intersection of educational theory and practical syllabus implementation in contemporary tertiary literature education.

Review of Related Literature

The syllabus functions as a multifaceted resource—a contract, guide, and roadmap that structures the teaching-learning process and shapes academic engagement (Tarling, 2024; Wagner, 2023).

According to Mulyatiningsih (2015), effective syllabus design begins with thorough needs analysis, ensuring alignment between course objectives and diverse learner profiles, including linguistic abilities and cultural backgrounds. In addition, international scholarship highlights the

essential role of needs analysis in syllabus development to tailor content and pedagogy to student characteristics and learning contexts. For instance, the Cambridge IGCSE World Literature syllabus emphasizes selecting texts and materials appropriate to students' age, cultural backgrounds, and educational settings, thereby fostering skills in literary interpretation, critical thinking, and cultural empathy (Cambridge International, 2025).

Moreover, international literature programs typically employ various syllabus structures—chronological, thematic, and genre-based—each designed to achieve distinct pedagogical aims such as providing historical context, enabling in-depth thematic exploration, or enhancing comprehension of literary forms (Regmi, 2022). Educators worldwide continue to negotiate challenges of balancing curricular breadth and depth within limited instructional time while integrating canonical and contemporary voices and differentiating instruction to accommodate heterogeneous student populations (Hassani, 2023; Paknehad et al., 2024; Wagner, 2023).

Phenomenological studies have introduced a reflective, experiential dimension to syllabus development, emphasizing educators' ongoing revisions based on student feedback, institutional demands, and evolving disciplinary insights (Hansen et al., 2019). Internationally, there is increasing advocacy for collaborative and transparent syllabus creation processes that incorporate stakeholder input, including that of students, to enhance relevance and democratize learning. The adoption of digital technologies further facilitates interactive, accessible, and adaptive syllabus formats, aligning with contemporary pedagogical trends (Stacey et al., 2024).

Recent research highlights a deliberate effort in Philippine higher education to align literature syllabus design with cultural nationalism and values formation. For instance, Eustaquio (2025) examines the integration of Philippine literature as a transdisciplinary subject in college curricula. This work argues that incorporating Philippine literary texts fosters cultural awareness and enriches student identity, contributing to the holistic development demanded by contemporary academic goals.

Aligned with CHED Memorandum Order No. 25 (2016), which advocates outcomes-based education (OBE) for Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs), Ramos-Payno (2022) investigates how literature syllabi are crafted to include socially relevant themes such as gender sensitivity and environmental consciousness. These themes promote critical engagement beyond

literary appreciation, demonstrating a shift towards responsive and transformative pedagogy in Philippine tertiary education.

Other studies document the curricular challenges faced by Filipino literature educators in balancing canonical and contemporary texts while adopting flexible teaching methods. Maramag (2023) explores how syllabi have adapted to K-12 reforms and diverse student readiness, highlighting scaffolding strategies to foster inclusivity and academic rigor. Concurrently, institutional curriculum reviews, such as that by CLSU (2025), reveal ongoing efforts to synchronize local syllabi with both national frameworks and international standards, enhancing curricular responsiveness.

Furthermore, literature on collaborative syllabus development within Philippine higher education reveals growing advocacy for instructor-student co-creation of syllabi to improve transparency and learner engagement. Corpuz et al. (2016) emphasize the democratic potential of such practices in Philippine tertiary settings. The widespread adoption of technology-augmented learning has also expanded the modalities for syllabus delivery, facilitating interactive and accessible literature education across diverse student populations (UNESCO, 2023).

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences of tertiary educators involved in literature syllabus development. Phenomenology focuses on unveiling the essence and shared meanings of experiences as lived by participants. This methodology is particularly suited to examining how educators perceive, interpret, and make sense of the complex and dynamic process of designing literature syllabi (Medina, 2022).

Purposive sampling was employed to select informants with substantial experience in tertiary literature instruction and active engagement in syllabus design. To ensure data richness and relevance, participants were required to have taught literature-related courses for one to four semesters, capturing perspectives from educators with early to moderate experience in syllabus development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect descriptive, in-depth data, enabling participants to openly share their perspectives, decision-making processes, and

challenges encountered. The interview protocol encouraged reflective dialogue on syllabus structure, content selection, contextual factors, and pedagogical philosophies (Abdallah, 2025; Ramos-Payno, 2022).

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data, capturing the core essence of participants' experiences (Exploring Academia, 2024: PMC, 2022). The principle of epoché or bracketing was rigorously observed throughout the study, with the researcher consciously setting aside prior assumptions to focus solely on the participants' perspectives and minimize bias (Abdallah, 2025).

Ethical considerations were carefully upheld by prioritizing the confidentiality and anonymity of all informants, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the data collected. Identifiable information was removed, and all responses were securely managed. Prior to participation, individuals were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights through an informed consent process, including their option to withdraw at any stage without any consequences (Capulso et al., 2024).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis organized according to the two main research questions in the Statement of the Problem revealed two sets of interrelated themes:

A. Designing the Literature Syllabus Structure and Content Selection

Alignment with Course Objectives and Institutional Standards. The three informants emphasized that designing a literature syllabus begins with ensuring alignment with course objectives, program outcomes, and institutional policies. Informant 1 highlighted that course competencies serve as the primary basis for determining syllabus content, explaining that “I make sure to check the skills and competencies in the course objectives and program outcomes as a basis for determining the content of my syllabus to ensure alignment.” Similarly, Informant 2 shared that syllabus development starts with identifying what students should accomplish by the end of the course, stating that “the first thing I usually do when designing a literature syllabus is to

consider the objectives and goals that must be achieved by the students at the end of the semester.” Informant 3 also emphasized the role of institutional frameworks, noting that “as a beginner, I rely heavily on CHED guidelines and our department’s policies. They help me know what competencies must be covered and what structure to follow.”

These responses suggest that syllabus design in literature courses is guided by outcome-based education principles, where instructional content and assessment strategies are aligned with intended learning outcomes. The emphasis on institutional frameworks also indicates that educators rely on curriculum standards to ensure consistency and quality in instruction.

Careful Selection of Texts Based on Relevance and Student Needs. All informants underscored the importance of selecting literary works that are pedagogically relevant and suited to students’ backgrounds and reading abilities. Informant 1 explained that student readiness and comprehension ability influence text selection, stating that “I am considering my students whether they have the prior knowledge or they have the capability to comprehend complex literary texts.” Informant 2 also emphasized relevance and accessibility, explaining that “one of the key factors I consider when selecting literary works is their relevance and alignment with the learning outcomes and objectives... I also make sure that there are accessible materials available so that my students can easily access the literary pieces.” Meanwhile, Informant 3 highlighted the importance of cultural representation and relatability, sharing that “I choose readings that are relatable and not too overwhelming at first. I also try to include stories from different regions so students can see themselves in the readings.”

The findings suggest that literature instructors adopt a student-centered approach to text selection, recognizing that engagement and comprehension are influenced by learners’ cultural backgrounds and academic readiness. This practice reflects the broader pedagogical principle that meaningful learning occurs when instructional materials are both relevant and accessible to students.

Balancing Classical and Contemporary Literature. Balancing classical and contemporary texts emerged as a shared concern among the participants. Informant 1 explained that he intentionally includes both forms to give students a broader understanding of literature, noting that “I make sure that there is representation for both. I include the essential and known

classical text and contemporary texts to give them an idea of what literature is like in the current time.” Informant 2 added that the balance depends on the literary period being discussed, explaining that “the initial texts should be under the English literature which provide classical works... while the middle term and finals usually focus on contemporary works which reflect current issues and more relatable context for students.” Informant 3 also supported this perspective, stating that “classical works give students a strong foundation, while contemporary texts help them connect literature to present-day issues.”

This theme highlights that literature educators intentionally combine historical literary foundations with contemporary perspectives to enrich students’ literary understanding and maintain engagement.

Structured and Logical Organization of Topics. The organization of topics is carefully structured in a progressive and developmental manner by all three informants. Informant 1 described using a scaffolded approach, explaining that “I start from simple to complex topics in order to make sure the vertical alignment of the lesson.” Informant 2 similarly emphasized logical progression, stating that “I start from foundational topics like the history of literature, then move to short stories, poems, and eventually more complex works like novels.” Informant 3 also organizes lessons chronologically to support students’ understanding of literary evolution, sharing that “I usually follow a chronological flow, from precolonial to contemporary, because it helps students see the progression of Philippine literature.”

These responses indicate that literature instructors intentionally structure their syllabi to promote scaffolded learning, allowing students to build foundational knowledge before engaging with more complex literary texts and concepts.

Reliance on References, Compendiums, and Peer Guidance. The informants all rely heavily on available academic resources and professional collaboration when developing their syllabi. Informant 1 explained that “I am always referring to the compendium first and I am always trying to filter the most necessary topics,” while also consulting colleagues’ syllabi. Informant 2 similarly highlighted the use of multiple references, stating that “usually a previous syllabi used by fellow instructors or other colleges... and literary criticism found on the internet help me decide whether to add or change the literary pieces.” Informant 3 also emphasized the importance of

existing resources, noting that “I check previous syllabi, CHED guides, textbooks, and online resources. I also look at what more experienced teachers recommend.”

These findings suggest that syllabus development is not an isolated activity but rather a collaborative and resource-based process, where educators draw from institutional materials and professional communities to ensure effective course design.

B. Challenges in Developing and Refining Pedagogical Approaches

Complexity of Selecting Appropriate Literary Works. One of the most prominent challenges shared by the informants involves identifying appropriate literary works for inclusion in the syllabus. Informant 1 highlighted that the absence of reference materials can complicate content selection, explaining that “some literature subjects do not have a syllabi compendium which makes it hard to determine the right content.” Informant 2 also described similar challenges, stating that “sometimes I have to question whether the text is still relevant, too easy, or maybe too difficult for students to grasp.” Informant 3 echoed this concern, noting that “the hardest part is deciding what to include and what to leave out. Philippine literature is so rich, and it’s easy to overload the syllabus.”

These findings suggest that selecting appropriate literary works is a multi-faceted process that involves balancing academic significance, students’ comprehension and readiness, and time constraints within the semester. In practice, instructors must make careful judgments to ensure that the syllabus provides meaningful learning experiences without overwhelming students, demonstrating the nuanced and reflective nature of curriculum design in literature courses.

Time Constraints and Limited Preparation Period. The informants identified time-related challenges as significant obstacles in syllabus preparation. Informant 1 explained that “teaching loads are only given at the start of the semester, so the time to craft a syllabus is limited.” Informant 2 added that resource limitations often require last-minute adjustments, which affects the preparation process. Informant 3 similarly noted that “sometimes I have to finalize the syllabus quickly, so I don’t get to refine it as much as I want.”

These responses suggest that structural and administrative factors such as the late release of teaching assignments and institutional scheduling, can significantly influence the quality and comprehensiveness of syllabus development. In practice, these time constraints may limit educators' ability to incorporate innovative teaching strategies, select optimal literary texts, and align activities with learning outcomes, highlighting the need for institutional support to allow for more deliberate syllabus planning.

Resource and Equipment Limitations. The lack of classroom resources and technological equipment also emerged as a major challenge. Informant 1 described how technological limitations affect teaching methods, explaining that “technology is a huge factor that would make this possible but in our classrooms, internet connection is not available. Televisions are also not accessible because of the lack of other necessary materials like extension cords and HDMI.” Informant 2 also mentioned that resource limitations sometimes require replacing certain literary works due to lack of available materials. Informant 3 further explained that “sometimes technology becomes a barrier, especially if students have limited access or if the tools complicate the lesson instead of helping it.”

These responses suggest that inadequate resources and technological constraints not only limit the range of instructional strategies that instructors can employ but also affect syllabus content and delivery. The findings highlight the need for institutional support to provide sufficient classroom equipment and accessible materials, which are critical for facilitating innovative and effective literature instruction.

Balancing Academic Rigor with Student Capacity and Engagement. All informants expressed concerns regarding the balance between academic expectations and students' learning capacities. Informant 1 noted that “the short-attention span of students makes it challenging to make the lessons engaging.” Informant 2 also observed that “most of the time the literary works and activities included in the syllabus are suitable for the learning goals; however, the reading levels and interests of the students are not aligned with the selected works.” Informant 3 described the difficulty of maintaining high academic standards while supporting struggling learners, stating that “I don't want to lower the standards, but I also don't want them to feel discouraged.”

These responses indicate that literature instructors continuously negotiate between upholding intellectual rigor and providing learning experiences that are accessible and motivating. The findings underscore the importance of adaptive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and the careful selection of texts to ensure that students are challenged appropriately while remaining engaged and capable of achieving learning outcomes.

Need for Flexibility and Differentiated Instruction. The informants emphasized the importance of flexibility and differentiated instruction when dealing with varied student backgrounds and readiness levels. Informant 1 shared that “I make sure to include differentiated instruction in my lessons... to ensure its appropriateness.” Informant 2 similarly emphasized adaptability, explaining that “there are times when my strategies work well with one class but not with another, so I need to adjust my approach by giving differentiated instruction depending on my students’ interests and needs.” Informant 3 also described using varied learning activities, noting that “I try to vary my activities, discussions, reflections, and group work so students can participate in different ways.”

These responses suggest that flexibility and differentiated instruction are essential pedagogical approaches in literature teaching. By adjusting instructional strategies and incorporating varied learning activities, educators are better able to support diverse learners and create a more inclusive and responsive learning environment.

Need for Institutional and Peer Support. The educators also expressed a strong need for institutional and peer support to enhance syllabus development and teaching approaches. Informant 1 emphasized the value of professional learning opportunities, stating that “seminars and brown-bag sessions would help me a lot.” Informant 2 likewise recommended “seminars, training workshops, and mentoring to stay updated on new methods and approaches.” Informant 3 also highlighted the importance of collegial support, noting that “guidance from experienced colleagues and access to sample syllabi would help a lot.”

These findings suggest that institutional initiatives and collaborative professional networks are essential in supporting educators’ continuous professional growth. Access to training, mentorship, and shared instructional resources can help literature instructors enhance their syllabus

design and pedagogical practices, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching and learning experiences.

Continuous Learning and Growth through Experience. All informants emphasized that experience plays a crucial role in improving syllabus design and pedagogical approaches. Informant 1 explained that “I learned to consider several factors when crafting my literature syllabus like the program and course objectives, the compendium, and the interests and capabilities of my learners.” Informant 2 noted that “with seminars, training workshops, and consulting with fellow instructors, it has become much easier for me to design and refine the syllabus compared to when I first revised it.” Informant 3 also described syllabus development as an evolving process, stating that “a syllabus is always a work in progress... each class gives me feedback on what works and what doesn’t.”

These findings suggest that syllabus design in literature courses is a dynamic, reflective practice, where instructors integrate lessons learned from prior teaching experiences, peer consultations, and professional development activities. Continuous learning enables educators to adapt their instructional strategies, refine content selection, and create more effective and responsive learning environments for students.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that tertiary literature instructors approach syllabus design as a deliberate and reflective process shaped by institutional requirements, course objectives, and the diverse needs of learners. While the educators demonstrate intentionality in selecting relevant texts, balancing classical and contemporary works, and sequencing topics logically, they also encounter significant challenges, including limited preparation time, resource and technological constraints, and the need to balance academic rigor with varying student capacities. Their experiences highlight that effective syllabus development is an evolving practice grounded in continuous learning, professional collaboration, and adaptive pedagogical strategies. The results underscore the need for sustained institutional support, access to updated resources, and opportunities for faculty development to enable more responsive and pedagogically sound literature instruction in higher education.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that higher education institutions provide structured support for literature instructors through workshops, training sessions, and mentoring programs focused on syllabus design, content selection, and innovative pedagogical strategies. Regular seminars and peer-sharing sessions can help educators stay updated with contemporary literary trends, instructional technologies, and best practices, fostering continuous professional growth. Institutions should also ensure access to adequate instructional resources, such as updated literary compendiums, digital libraries, and multimedia teaching tools, to enable the integration of diverse texts and interactive learning experiences.

Educators are encouraged to engage in collaborative syllabus development, sharing insights and consulting colleagues to enhance the relevance and quality of course content. Reflection on teaching practices, student feedback, and iterative revision should be institutionalized as part of professional development, ensuring syllabi remain responsive to students' needs. Syllabi should incorporate flexible and student-centered approaches that accommodate diverse backgrounds, competencies, and learning styles. By including both classical and contemporary texts and providing varied learning activities, instructors can balance academic rigor with student engagement and inclusivity.

Moreover, educational policymakers and program administrators should regularly review and update curriculum frameworks and syllabus guidelines to ensure alignment with CHED standards, outcomes-based education principles, and culturally relevant teaching objectives. Such alignment will support consistent learning outcomes while allowing educators to innovate within structured parameters.

Finally, further research is recommended to explore the impact of technology-augmented syllabus delivery, collaborative instructor-student syllabus co-creation, and longitudinal studies on student learning outcomes, providing additional insights for refining literature syllabus design in Philippine higher education.

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