



Exploring the Perceptions of Junior High School Students Towards Historical Texts

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ABSTRACT

Understanding how students perceive learning world history through historical texts is an underdeveloped area of research in the field of history education. As such, this study investigated how secondary students perceive learning world history as content of Araling Panlipunan (AP) through historical texts. This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design involving 123 junior high school students to determine their perceptions of using historical texts in studying world history as a content area of AP. Semi-structured interviews and surveys were administered to obtain data about their perceptions of historical texts in their classes. Findings show that perceptions of the use of historical texts are influenced by the content and layout of the reading material, how these texts are utilized in class, and students' interest in and perceived relevance of the text's content. Building on this, the development and use of historical texts must be carefully undertaken to achieve positive results.

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Introduction

Studying world history in the context of basic education remains a significant challenge as students across various educational contexts often find historical texts unengaging, resulting in poor comprehension and low academic performance (Butterbaugh, 2021; Cuayzon, 2021; Issar, 2021). The heavy reliance on traditional teaching methods in history, particularly

textbook reading and passive instruction, limits students' ability to connect with global historical narratives. In the Philippines, the disengagement mirrors broader patterns observed in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, where learners struggle to relate to foreign terms, abstract concepts, and distant historical events (Kim, 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Students in both local and international contexts often perceive history as dull or irrelevant, particularly when historical texts are presented without meaningful context or interaction (Issar, 2021; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Although some students find value in historical reading (Ebro, 2022), the effectiveness of using historical texts to deepen understanding remains underexplored—especially in culturally responsive ways suited to the Filipino context.

Historical Texts and Critical Thinking

Engaging with historical texts is essential for developing students' historical literacy, particularly skills such as source evaluation and information corroboration—critical competencies in the 21st century. Nokes (2017) emphasizes that historical literacy goes beyond content knowledge, requiring deeper cognitive engagement to foster critical historical thinking. This aligns with the view that historical thinking should be central to history education, enabling students to critically analyze sources and construct coherent narratives from complex information (Thorp & Persson, 2020). Moreover, a strong link exists between students' interest in history and their development of critical thinking skills, suggesting that engaging lessons can enhance analytical abilities. Active involvement with historical texts promotes this skill development and deepens students' interest in history (Montelibano et al., 2023). Research shows that curricula incorporating comparative analysis of diverse perspectives boost student engagement and encourage questioning of historical narratives. This process fosters an appreciation for multiple viewpoints and prepares students to make evidence-based decisions, a crucial aspect of responsible citizenship (Cowgill & Waring, 2017). The connection between interest and skill acquisition underscores the importance of student's ability to evaluate sources and corroborate information when conducting historical inquiry (Aftyka, 2021). Thus, systematic engagement with historical texts is a vital pedagogical strategy for fostering both historical literacy and sustained interest in the subject. However, a gap remains on how Filipino learners engage with historical texts within the context of world history, highlighting the need for studies that examine culturally relevant strategies for using historical reading to promote historical literacy and analytical skills.

Historical Texts and Student Perception

Reading historical texts is a core practice in history education, exemplified by the Stanford History Education Group's "Reading Like a Historian," which promotes critical thinking through historical inquiry (Fogo et al., 2019; Reisman et al., 2018; Reisman & McGrew, 2018). This engagement fosters students' appreciation for diverse perspectives and supports informed decision-making based on evidence, which is essential for responsible citizenship (Cowgill & Waring, 2017). Despite evidence showing that diverse sources improve historical comprehension and critical thinking (Bennet, 2013; Culminas-Colis et al., 2016; De La

Paz et al., 2014), there is limited research on how these approaches resonate with students' perceptions. For example, ter Beek et al. (2022) highlight connections between reading skills and historical reasoning but do not explore students' specific views on historical texts. Similarly, the Research Schools Network (2024) emphasizes the importance of literacy in history learning but overlooks the subjective experiences of students, which are crucial to understanding their engagement with historical content. Research on reading and writing strategies reveals gains in comprehension but lacks a focused examination of students' attitudes toward historical texts (Wissinger et al., 2021). This gap limits insight into how students perceive and value historical readings, which could inform the development of more engaging curricula and creative teaching methods. Recognizing these perceptions among Filipino students is essential, as student engagement with historical content significantly shapes academic performance and informs their development as informed citizens in a diverse and evolving society. Thus, this study explores Filipino students' perception of world history through their use of historical texts.

Framework of the Study

This study adopts Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism as its theoretical lens, framing students' learning of world history through historical texts as a socially mediated process. In this view, meaningful knowledge is constructed through collaborative interactions with teachers and peers. Vygotsky emphasizes that learning occurs through social engagement, where individuals actively create understanding by interacting with others in educational settings (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, as cited in Davis et al., 2017). Students develop historical understanding through small-group discussions, peer tutoring, and classroom debates—activities that involve dynamic exchanges with classmates, teachers, and even parents. This idea becomes possible when teachers become facilitators in a dialogue. They guide students by posing thought-provoking questions and integrating relevant historical texts, enriching the learning experience (Powell & Kalina, 2009, as cited in Davis et al., 2017). In Araling Panlipunan, where world history is a core component, a social constructivist approach supports the development of key competencies, including meaning-making, communication, and reflection (Salandanan, 2012, as cited in Ebro, 2022).

The effectiveness of historical texts in learning depends not only on their content but also on students' social interactions and cultural contexts, such as family background (Porat, 2004, as cited in Zakai, 2018; Seixas, 1993, as cited in Burgos-Videla et al., 2025). While reading is often treated as an individual task in many classrooms (Bus et al., 2024), this study argues that students' perceptions of learning world history through historical texts must be understood within interactive, teacher-guided, and socially grounded learning experiences.

Purposes of the Study

This study determined junior high school students' perceptions towards using historical texts in studying world history as a content of AP. The specific objectives of this study are the following:

1. Determine the perspectives and the factors affecting these perspectives of Grade 8 students toward historical texts used in studying world history;
2. Identify how perception towards historical texts affects the student's participation in a world history class and
3. Determine how students understand the content of world history through the historical texts they read.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach to understand students' perceptions of historical texts in the context of studying world history. This design combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a sequence of phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative data was collected and analyzed first to build exploratory results, and from this, a quantitative phase was conducted to generalize the initial findings. Results from the quantitative phase were interpreted to build on the initial qualitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach enables researchers to capture nuanced perceptions through in-depth qualitative methods before quantifying generalizations across larger populations (Paonam, 2024), particularly where limited research exists on how Filipino students engage with historical texts in AP. Data for the qualitative phase (Phase 1) were collected and analyzed to explore the initial perceptions of junior high school students regarding the use of historical texts in their world history class through focus group discussions (FGDs) among student participants and class observations. To further generalize the initial findings on student perception of historical texts in world history classes, a quantitative phase (Phase 2) followed, utilizing a survey questionnaire designed for junior high school students. This survey was developed based on data gathered during the first phase of the study. This sequential approach enabled the researchers to create context-specific instruments grounded in students' experiences.

Sampling Procedure and Participants

The study involved teacher education institutions (TEIs) and their partner schools, as per their Memoranda of Agreement with the Schools Division Office of Manila (SDO-Manila). This study employed a stratified sampling method, which identified the target population elements into distinct groups. For Phase 1, two schools from SDO Manila—both medium-sized and urban schools—were selected for unstructured classroom observation of Grade 8

classes, and 14 Grade 8 students participated in the FGD. Two teachers, one from each school from SDO Manila for this phase, also attended as key informants of the study. In Phase 2 of the study, 123 Grade 8 students from two additional urban schools in SDO Manila—both categorically large schools—participated. The study was granted a clearance to proceed by a research ethics review board of a higher education institution. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and their guardians, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw without any consequences. Furthermore, the researchers adhered to strict confidentiality protocols to protect the data and privacy of the participants. All personal data was anonymized and securely stored electronically, with access restricted to authorized persons only.

Instruments

Phase 1 employed a researcher-created focus group discussion (FGD) protocol and guide, which consisted of eight questions designed to identify factors influencing students' perceptions of the texts used in their classroom. Using the Content Validity Index (CVI) formula, its CVI is 1.00, indicating excellent content validity.

For Phase 2, the researchers developed a survey questionnaire based on the initial findings regarding students' perceptions of historical texts used in world history classes. These questions were designed to determine the effects of the identified factors on the students' perceptions, which they answered through a written survey using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from '*Lubos na Sumasang-ayon*' (Strongly Agree) to '*Lubos na Di-Sumasang-ayon*' (Strongly Disagree). The survey, with an initial section on demographic data, was composed of three parts— (1) Content and Lay-out of Historical Texts; (2) Utilization of Historical Texts; and (3) Reception and Effectiveness of the Historical Text, totaling 22 items.

Phases 1 and 2, the content of the instruments, and their face validity were evaluated by two experts in social studies education and one current social studies teacher. Specifically for Phase 2, the CVI of the instrument is .95, indicating good content validity, and its Cronbach's Alpha reliability index is .874, indicating good internal consistency.

Data Collection and Analysis Framework

The researchers conducted a two-phase data collection procedure aimed at exploring students' perceptions of learning world history through historical texts. The first phase involved an unstructured observation of Grade 8 AP classes at two high schools in Manila, where the researchers observed the classroom environment, students' behavior, and their interactions with the teacher. This was followed by a focus group discussion with randomly selected students and the subject teacher, who served as the key informants, to gather information about their perceptions of world history and the reading activities involved. The researchers coded the responses using thematic analysis (Javadi & Zarea, 2016) to identify the key factors influencing students' perception of world history texts and their learning.

In Phase 2, the researchers developed a survey questionnaire based on the data gathered from the first data collection phase. Another set of grade 8 students from two different high schools in Manila were the respondents to the survey questionnaire. The data received from this phase were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The outcome of this phase was a narrative of the student's perceptions and attitudes toward reading world history texts, which affect their learning of world history as a content area in Social Studies.

Table 1 summarizes the data collection and analysis framework of the study, showing an exploratory-sequential mixed methods design.

Table 1

Matrix of Data Collection and Analysis Framework

	Data Source	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Factors influencing their Perception	Students (Phase 1)	Observation	Thematic Analysis
Effect of the Factors that Influence their Perception	Students	Focus Group Discussion	
	Teachers	Key Informant Interview	
Perception of Students			
Effect of their Perception of their Performance	Students (Phase 2)	Survey	Descriptive Statistics

Results and Discussion

This section presents the student perspectives on using historical texts in their world history classes. The identified perspectives, as shown in Table 2, were generated from the thematic analysis of responses from Phases 1 and 2 of the data collection.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview Responses

In-vivo statements	Code	Themes
<i>"Yung iba po hindi ko po maintindihan kasi po masyado pong malalim na word na Tagalog"</i> (The other information is hard for me to understand because of the complex Tagalog words used.) <i>"...mas maganda ang mga mabababaw na mga salita." -S2</i> (...it is better to use a word that easily to understand.)	Language Appropriateness	
<i>"Age and language appropriate po siya kasi madali po naming maintindihan kasi tugma po sa knowledge namin." -S4</i> (Age and language appropriate because it easier for us to understand and it complement our existing knowledge)	Age Appropriateness	Content and Lay-out of Historical Text
<i>"Mas naiintindihan po namin kapag gumamit ng mga visual aids habang nagtuturo si Sir." -S1</i> (We understand the (text) more if our Teacher had visual aids (and pictures) in teaching the lessons.)	Layout	
<i>"Medyo mahirap po siya intindihin, pero po kapag binasa na po ng paulit-ulit maintindihan niyo po ng mabuti." -S2</i> (It's a bit difficult to understand; however, once you read it all over again, you'll understand it well.) <i>"...nahahabaan po (mga pinapabasa)"</i> (The content was too lengthy to read)	Content	
<i>"Actually po minsan lang po kami gumamit ng libro. Minsan po parang may binabasa lang po kami ang may sasagutan. Usually po talaga ginagamit po namin is TV, pinapanood po sa amin ni Sir." -S3</i> (Actually, we rarely use our books, while in other times, we just read and answer the questions. Usually we utilize TV, watching what our teacher instructed) <i>"Mostly, secondary ang source na ginagamit po namin katulad ng mga modules o books na ginagamit at mga resources sa internet." - S1</i> (Mostly, we utilized secondary sources such as modules or books that we used, and resources on internet)	Utilization of Materials	Historical Texts in Instruction

“Actually ang binibigay naming mga reading materials ay nanggagaling din sa mga modules. Para at least naka align dun yung mga binabasa nila at the same time nando’n din ‘yung content, nando’n din ‘yung MELCS ng DepEd...” -S5

Modules

(Actually, the readings that we were given are from modules. From that, it aligns more closely with all the reading materials. At the same time, the content of MELCS and DepEd are also present...)

“For me same-- nakakatulong ang mga babasahin na galing sa internet at galing sa government. Mas nakakatulong yung nagsasalita yung teacher sa harap yung libro binabasa ng malakas.” -S1

(For me, the reading materials from the internet and from the government were effective. It’s more helpful if our teacher reads the books aloud)

Material
Effectiveness

Reception and
Effectiveness
of Historical
Texts

“Effective po sya, when I read po, it give me advance lesson po on subject ... Di po talaga ako palabasa, I usually learn po pag nagtuturo si maam.” - S2

(The reading materials were effective; when I read (the books), it provided me with advanced lessons on our subject ... I am not really into reading; I tend to learn when our teacher leads the discussion)

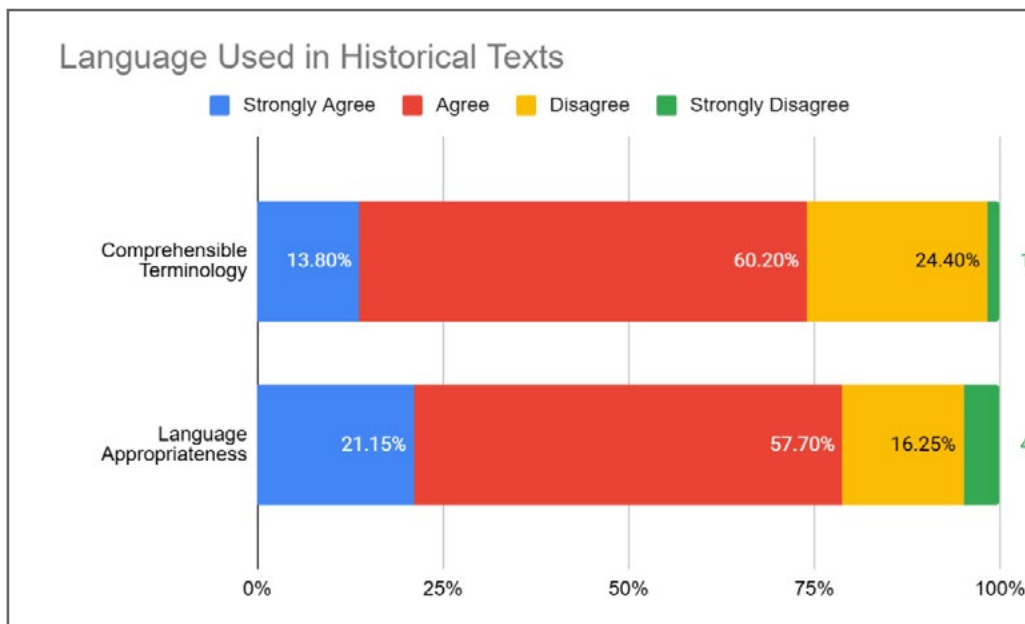
With the study’s objective to determine junior high school students’ perception towards using historical texts in studying world history, it revealed that their perception could be summarized by the following: (1) Content and layout of historical texts, (2) Historical texts in instruction, and lastly, (3) Reception and effectiveness of historical texts. The following subsections discuss these perspectives and their impact on student participation in their world history class, as well as their understanding of the content of world history.

Content and Layout of the Historical Text

In world history classes, students grasp the reading materials more effectively when the language is easy to understand, age-appropriate, and the layout is visually appealing. This perception examines the essential role of language and information in historical texts, focusing on their comprehensibility and appropriateness for the student's age group. Figure 1 shows student responses to the language used in the historical texts they read in class.

Figure 1

Language Used in Historical Texts

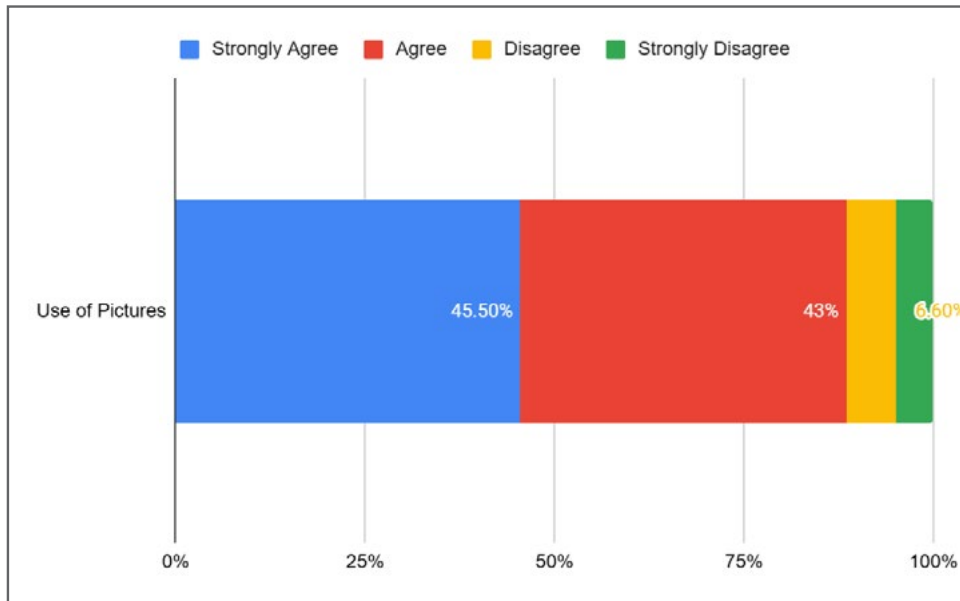


The survey shows that 60.2% of respondents found the terminologies comprehensible, while 57.7% agreed the language used suited their level of understanding. This suggests that clear language and well-defined objectives significantly enhance comprehension, aligning with Osman and Çiçek's (2021) findings on the importance of clarity in educational materials. Selecting texts that build fluency and vocabulary is crucial, as a limited vocabulary can hinder engagement and understanding. Hence, the use of Readability text metrics can aid teachers in providing age-group-appropriate texts (Das et al., 2019). Ligudon and Ildefonso (2022) also emphasize that teacher guidance during reading is crucial for deepening students' understanding of historical content.

Students recognize that including graphics and photos in historical texts greatly aids in conveying content and improving comprehension, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Use of Pictures in Historical Texts



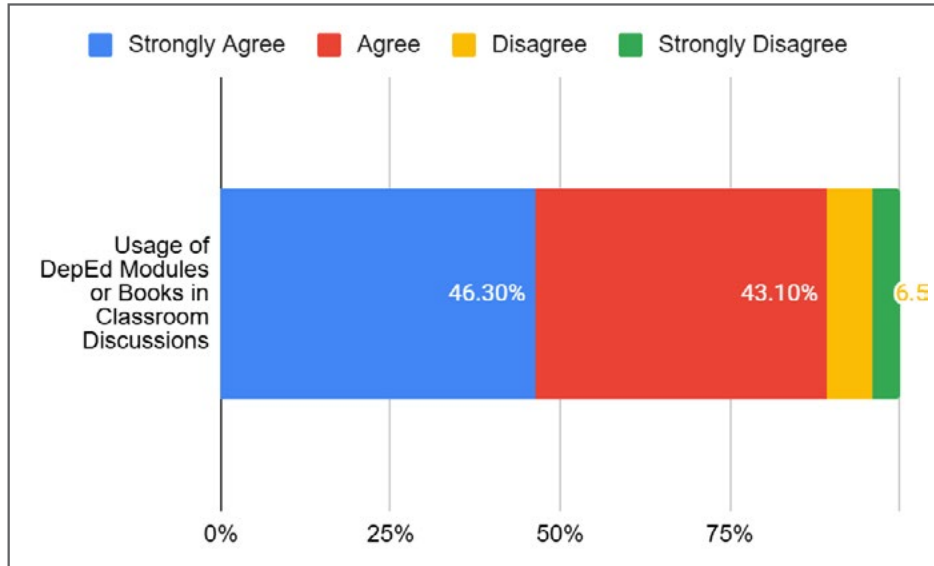
While historical texts focus on verbal comprehension, integrating images is crucial for fostering deeper critical engagement. Other studies support this notion—a vital approach to history textbook images reveals how visuals can challenge and enrich students' interpretations of events (Bharath, 2022). Furthermore, the study on visual literacy in history education emphasizes that images not only engage students but also enhance their analytical skills, allowing them to navigate and critically assess historical narratives (Gabowitsch & Topolska, 2023). Studies by Raiyn (2016) and Hoshangabadwala (2015) reinforce the notion that visual elements significantly enhance student engagement, underscoring the need for comprehensive educational materials that cater to diverse learning styles.

Historical Texts in Instruction

In the Philippine public education system, most historical texts used in the classroom are designed and procured by the government to align with the national curriculum for students in public schools. Participants have stated that their subject teachers provide the reading materials for their world history classes and use them in class discussions, as shown in Figure 3.

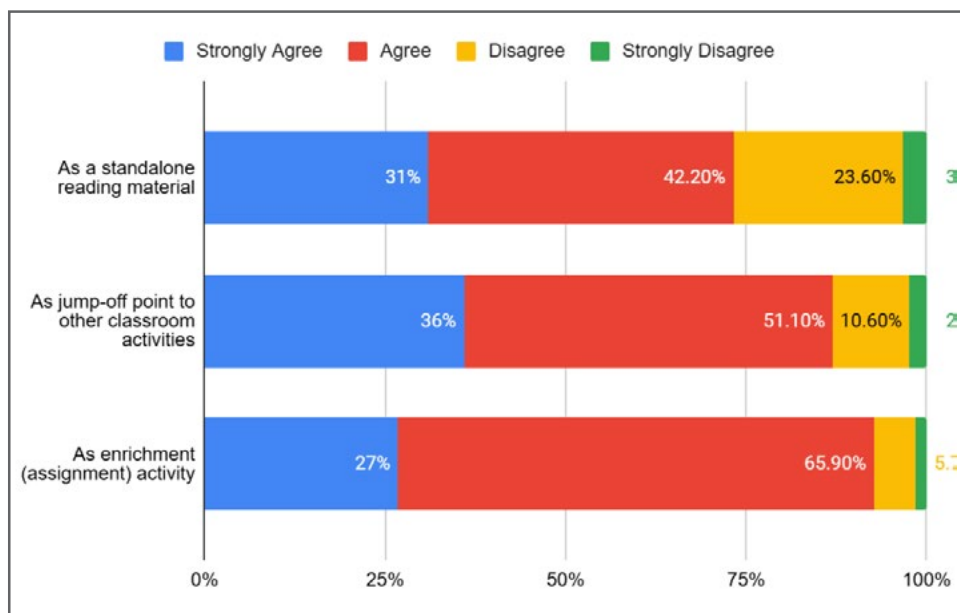
Figure 3

Use of DepEd Modules or Books in Classroom Discussions



It is essential to note that both the government and the subject teacher were able to provide reading materials that support student learning in world history (Dizon, 2020; Gatus & Vargas, 2022; Wissinger et al., 2021). However, this study revealed that in world history classes—even if procured by the government or provided by their subject teacher—the majority use secondary sources as historical texts. Similarly, Soininen (2022) revealed that U.S. history textbooks also lack the use of primary sources, leaving teachers to find and utilize primary sources in their discussions. In the FGD, S1 and S5 stated that the secondary sources they used in their world history classes came from DepEd modules, also known as Self-Learning Modules (SLMs). These historical texts are organized according to the content of the AP curriculum.

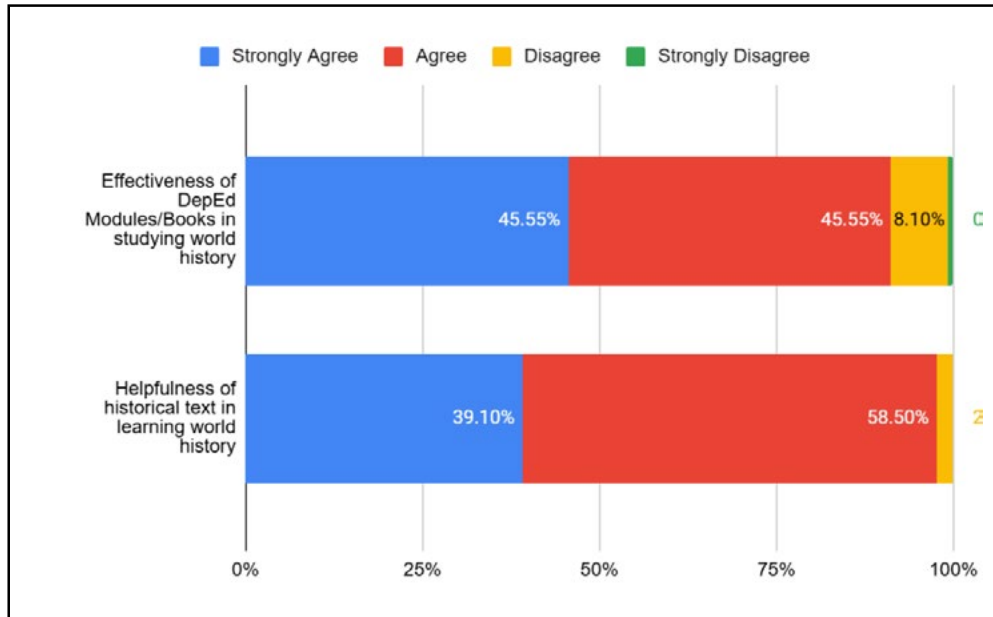
So, what do students do with these historical texts from their modules? Historical texts were provided to students as a starting point for discussion or activity, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4*Use of Historical Texts for Instruction*

Data also shows that historical texts were mainly used as enrichment activities or as homework for their class. However, S3, in the FGD, had expressed dismay as they rarely use texts in class. From these data, historical texts in Philippine classrooms are primarily used as reading materials for enrichment or motivation and not as a “source of historical information.” Although relevant studies have demonstrated the benefits of using primary sources in teaching history and developing historical thinking skills (Culminas-Colis et al., 2016; Ojha, 2016; Soininen, 2022), the historical texts used by students are still primarily secondary, which represents a missed opportunity to expose them to the discipline of history. Analyzing historical texts is key to developing historical thinking, which can be effectively fostered through inquiry-based learning and text-based discussions (Gholam, 2019; Reisman et al., 2018).

Reception and Effectiveness of Historical Texts

While students primarily engage with secondary sources as historical texts in their world history classes, this practice effectively broadens and deepens their understanding of the content. Figure 5 shows an overwhelming 91.1% of students found government-sanctioned modules helpful, while an impressive 97.6% deemed them effective for studying world history.

Figure 5*Perception of the Effectiveness of Historical Texts Used*

This positive perception relates to students' exposure to modular learning during the pandemic, which emphasized these methods to enhance their connection with historical texts. Students perceived both learning materials (modules) and the modality (modular learning) as equally effective and helpful in the teaching and learning process (Cos et al., 2021; Desabayla et al., 2023; Roque, 2022; Villegas, 2021).

Figure 6 illustrates the impact of historical texts on students' interest in learning world history content ; a significant majority, 87.8%, agreed with this sentiment. The relevance of the historical texts to the topics discussed and students' current experiences plays a crucial role in increasing interest in world history. While 75% of learners agree on the relevance of historical texts in their classes, 21.8% feel the texts are 'unrelatable' due to a lack of contextualization by teachers. Students perceive history as less relevant due to the inherent nature of the discipline, which focuses on past events, and a lack of context that links these events to present and future challenges.

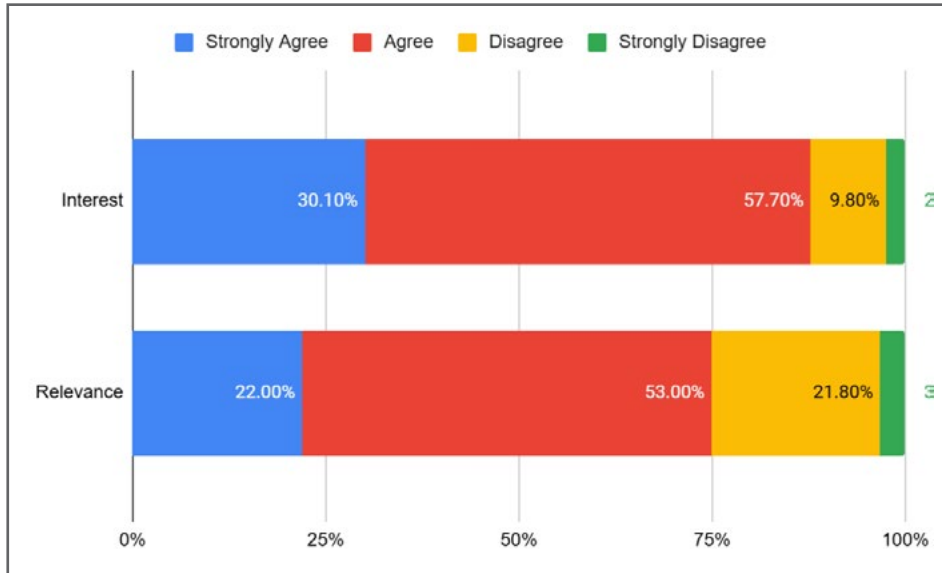
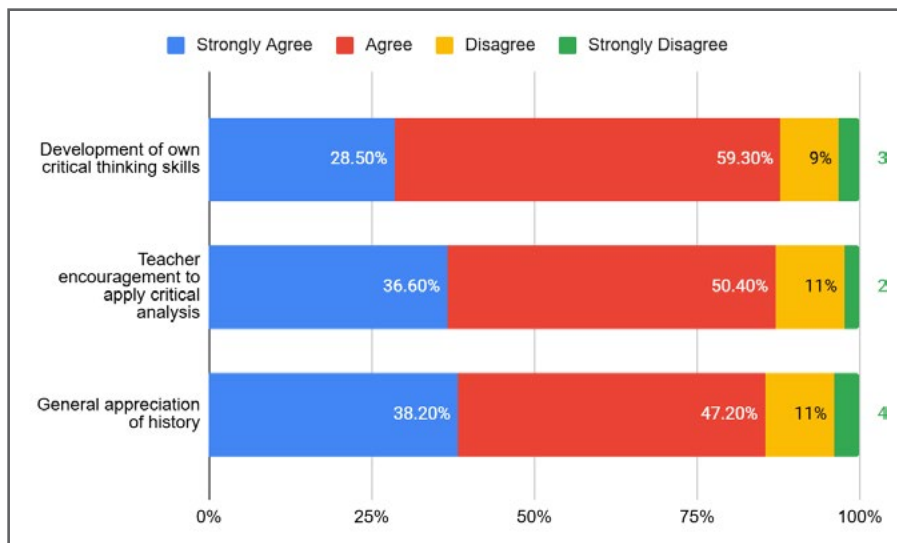
Figure 6.*Perceived Interest in Learning World History and Relevance of Historical Texts*

Figure 7 highlights other perceived uses of historical texts in world history classes. While most students agree that historical texts help develop critical thinking, encourage analysis, and foster appreciation for history, a few respondents still express varying degrees of disagreement, indicating a need for a more contextualized student engagement with historical texts.

Figure 7*Perceived Uses of Historical Texts*

In Ghana, textbooks with contextual information enhance students' understanding of historical events, demonstrating effective strategies applicable in other settings (Oppong & Essiaw, 2024). Students tend to appreciate world history more when they actively engage with texts, as text-based discussions support content learning and foster an appreciation for history (Madrado & Dio, 2020). It not only enhances students' understanding but also makes learning more meaningful, making history a relevant part of their lives, and addressing the perception that history is boring and irrelevant to their lives (Zhang & Ma, 2023).

In exploring the perceptions students hold regarding historical texts in their world history classes, it becomes evident that their responses are shaped by the content and visual presentation of these materials, as well as how they are integrated into classroom activities and aligned with students' interests. Conducting this study through self-reports and focus group discussions offered insights into how these texts are perceived and utilized, informing educators about their effectiveness. Grounding instruction in students' experiences and perspectives not only enhances participation but also encourages critical reflection on historical narratives. These findings align with international research, which regards the use of historical texts as vital for developing historical thinking and essential analytical skills (Soininen, 2022). Despite its recognized value, the use of historical texts in classes often prioritizes content over sourcing and contextual analysis (van Nieuwenhuysen et al., 2017). Taken together, both local and international perspectives highlight the importance of not only integrating historical texts into instruction but also in ways that are contextually meaningful, reflective, and grounded on student engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the factors that affect the perception of eighth-grade students in their world history classes through a mixed-method approach grounded on the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky. Three themes were identified by the researchers, namely, content and layout, instructional utilization, and perceived relevance, that influence students' engagement and understanding.

The content and layout of the books used by teachers in the classroom have a significant impact on students' openness to reading and studying. Age-appropriate content and comprehensible language for the learners' age group should be used, as measured by readability text metrics, to reduce the struggle to understand the text's content.

The utilization of historical texts for instruction, regardless of whether the historical texts used were primary or secondary sources, showed favorable judgments over the activities their teachers employed using these texts. Inquiry-based learning and text-based discussions can be effectively utilized to engage with historical texts in world history classes.

Most students find these reading materials useful and relevant, perceiving them as helpful in developing critical thinking skills. This contrasts with other studies that have pointed out that students have a negative perception of learning history because it is perceived as boring and irrelevant. Secondary students were found to have an alternative view and reception of learning history through the use of historical texts. Learning history can be helpful and relevant for learners, provided that the texts they use in class can be contextualized in the current lives and contemporary issues the world faces following a constructivist point of view. Moreover, integrating project-based learning (PBL) into the classroom empowers students to connect the lessons of historical texts to contemporary societal challenges. It deepens understanding and makes history more meaningful and relevant, countering the view that it is boring or disconnected from students' lives.

Grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, this study emphasizes the importance of a contextualized and collaborative approach to teaching world history. The Department of Education could integrate well-curated historical texts into the AP curriculum, and this requires collaboration with historians, linguists, and archivists to ensure historical accuracy, cultural relevance, and age-appropriate language. Teacher professional development programs should emphasize inquiry-based instruction and strategies, such as "Reading Like a Historian," to build students' historical thinking and critical literacy. These practices foster student engagement by connecting past events to present-day realities, consistent with constructivist learning principles. To support this, instructional materials should prioritize readability, engaging layout, and alignment with students' cognitive and cultural contexts. Pre-service teacher education should also integrate historical literacy and material development into pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) training. These approaches help bridge the gap between theory and practice from the outset of teacher preparation.

This study acknowledges limitations in scope due to its small sample size and specific context, which affect its broader applicability. Given its exploratory nature, further research is needed. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a cross-sectional study investigating learners' reading abilities about the historical texts used in class. This can provide a more robust understanding of how learners perceive world history through texts, particularly by exploring digital historical texts and examining the relationship between teachers' professional development and the effective use of these texts.



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