



'Now You Hear Me': Contextualized Poetry in Enhancing Literacy and Character Formation

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RESEARCH ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: September 03, 2025 Reviewed: November 20, 2025 Accepted: December 21, 2025 Published: December 30, 2025</p> <p> Copyright © 2025 by the Author(s). This open-access article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.</p>	<p>Contextualized poetry is an effective tool to enhance English literacy and moral values and principles for L2 learners. Using descriptive thematic content analysis, this study uncovered the character-building themes and moral reflections of eleventh graders' close analysis of Now You Hear Me: a contextualized poetry used as an English learning resource in teaching literary analysis. From the prevalent themes of the 54 learners' outputs, and interrater reliability of Cohen's Kappa $\kappa=0.79$, which manifests substantial agreement, results revealed three emergent character-building themes: accountability, empathy, and self-discipline. These themes resonate a profound and ethical engagement of learners into ecological challenges, which are also viewed as moral imperatives. Thus, this study recommends that English language teachers develop contextualized learning resources such as environmental poetry to enhance writing literacy and promote character formation.</p>

Keywords: *contextualization, learning resource development, English language education, character building, poetry*

Introduction

Change is admitted as a fact to be constant and universal. These changes demand innovations, research, and reformation of policies – these are tools that help individuals adapt to the new shifts in the education system (Benito et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2021; Kamsker & Slepcevic-Zach, 2021; Pešikan & Ivic, 2021; Sheppard et al.,

2021). Today, English is considered the *de facto* language that bridges cultures in global villages. For an individual to be globally competent, one needs to be confident and proficient in the use of English, both in oral and written discourse. Understanding this reality demands a change, and quality English education that promotes literacy, partnered with character building.

Considering the report from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2025), and based on the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), about an estimated 18 million Filipino high school graduates are functionally illiterate since they are not able to read, write, compute, and comprehend. This finding raised an alarming concern about the quality of instruction delivered in the senior high school education of the Philippines. Thus, it necessitates changes and innovations to address this learning gap in English language education and to guarantee that every student acquires literacy and at least a certain degree of competency in it (Rafanan & Raymundo, 2024).

According to Mazzeo et al. (2003), contextualized instructional strategies are designed to seamlessly link the learning of foundational skills and academic or occupational content by focusing teaching and learning on concrete applications in a specific context that is of interest to the students. Contextualized materials enable the learners to gain a sense of belongingness in the content of the lesson. It provides learners with a clearer perspective of the environment they belong to, making them understand the learning competencies. Thus, contextualization is an approach that promotes learning in the English language learning.

One of the subjects in the Senior High School curriculum is the teaching of 21st-century literature from the Philippines and the World. The Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) in this subject for Quarter 1, Module 1 focused on writing a close analysis and critical interpretation of literary texts and a sense of adaptability of the Philippine Literary History. With these learning objectives, the students are expected to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of a literary work through a written close analysis: a reflection of learning or character building based on the literary piece in terms of form and theme, with a description of its context derived from research. Hence, the teacher-researchers utilized the poem *Now You Hear Me* as the literary text for these Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs).

Now You Hear Me' is an ICT-based learning resource evaluated and accredited by the Learning Resource Management and Development System (LRMDS) of the SDO Quirino. It underwent content validity evaluation from division supervisors and evaluators in learning resource development. The learning resource can be accessed using the link <https://online.fliphtml5.com/daviddichoso/rxwk/>.

Basically, *Now You Hear Me*' is a free verse allegory poem that presents elements that represent ideas and concepts beyond its literal meaning. Learners are expected to infer literary meaning from literal language based on usage (EN12Lit-Id-26) and analyze the figures of speech and other literary techniques and devices in the text (EN12Lit-Ie-27). The text contains allegorical lines that form imagery of global environmental problems that individuals face today. It presents a cause-and-effect relationship of the abusiveness of humans to the environment. The contextualized symbolisms found in the poem are Bugkalots, Ludong, Sierra Madre, Cagayan River, and Quirino. The material presents hand-painted visuals that explain the content of each paragraph.

This study aimed to evaluate the written outputs of the students by unravelling the themes that reflect literacy and character building derived from their submitted close analysis. Specifically, it expounded the character-building themes that emerged

from the learners' close analysis of *Now You Hear Me*, as well as the learners' moral reflections about the poem.

This study catapults the emerging role of contextualized poetry in teaching English language education that promotes literacy and character formation. By thematizing the learners' literary analyses, the study unravels how literary poetry improves metacognitive skills, and catalyst for moral and emotional development of learners. For teachers, it opens significant insights into how literary works can be integrated into values education that enhances learners' empathy, resilience, environmental awareness, and intergenerational responsibility. Moreover, for curriculum designers, learning resource developers, and policy makers, this study may be used as a basis in designing and developing materials in English language education that are anchored in contextualization and character building.

The context of this study is limited only to a senior high school in the Cabarroguis District, which is accessible to the researchers, and the participants are learners who had access to the learning resource '*Now You Hear Me*'. The subjective nature of the students' written output may not generally reflect the character traits of all the learners from the emotional, classroom, and cultural context in which '*Now You Hear Me*' was integrated as a learning resource in English. The study resonates with immediate reflection of the participants, and it does not track whether the character-building themes will result in long-term behavior or learned principles of the students. Moreover, this study is limited and focused on the understanding of learners' close analysis, and it does not make comparisons to other studies related to character formation.

In the conduct of this study, it is assumed that the students' close analysis of the ICT-based poetry '*Now You Hear Me*' plays a significant role in appreciating contextualization as an approach in enhancing literacy and building character in Senior High School students. The themes unraveled provided a paramount insight into the learned values and principles contributing to the holistic development of Filipino learners. Thus, this study projected the collaborative efforts in the design and development of '*Now You Hear Me*' as a learning resource, pressing toward the future of technology-enhanced language education for literacy and character building through contextualization and literature.

This study is anchored in the Transformative Learning Theory of Mezirow (1991), for it recognizes that the poem '*Now You Hear Me*' provokes reflective thinking. Thus, the learning resource enabled the learners to rethink and re-evaluate their assumptions and views on environmental awareness, changed their perspectives, and they committed to protecting the environment.

Contextualization of Learning Resources

According to Çakmak and Andujar (2025), contextualization is an approach that provides a relevant and meaningful link between new concepts and learners' prior knowledge and experiences, which enhances retention. They asserted that in English language learning, contextualization helps learners improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Smelda et al. (2014) highlighted that digitalization of learning resources, such as literary works, is an approach used in contextualization. Johnson (2002) also asserted that Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL) is unraveled when students value their learning to be relevant to the context of their realities.

In the context of this study, the contextualized poetry '*Now You Hear Me*' is a learning resource developed to enhance learners' critical analysis, which reflects their values and moral reflections learned.

Poetry as a Tool in Character Building

In the teaching of English language education, poetry plays a fundamental role in opening opportunities for learners to explore emotions, language, culture, and moral values (Dalal & Farrukh, 2024). Poetry is an auxiliary tool in provoking critical thinking among learners. According to Kuriakose and Jena (2024), patience, honesty, and empathy are improved when learners make use of reflective writing in processing their understanding of poetry. Poetry enables learners to express their personal experiences and hidden emotions, which helps learners enhance their self-confidence and emotional literacy, which are pivotal in their growth and development. Azizi et al. (2022) claim that moral self-development can be acquired through poetic inquiry. Reading and writing poetry cultivate character building and activate moral imagination. Reflections from poetry are based on visceral affective dimensions, which develop learners' humility and compassion. Furthermore, Rosalind (2024) underscored that poetry helps learners improve their moral reasoning and understanding of justice, courage, and integrity.

Based on the above-mentioned research, it has been evident that poetry serves as a tool in developing literacy through critical thinking and character building for learners. In the context of this study, 'Now You Hear Me' is a learning resource used in teaching Grade 11 learners the competency of writing close analysis, thus uncovering the prevalent themes developed from their outputs, which unravel the moral values learned. This highlights the need to maximize contextualization as a trending approach in teaching literature to ESL learners.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design- content analysis (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which primarily focused on understanding the participants' understanding or inference of the topic under investigation. In the context of this study, the study aimed at uncovering the character-building extracts and moral reflections, to generate themes from the learners' literary close analysis of the poetry 'Now You Hear Me'.

Participants and Locale of the Study

The selection of the participants was based on the criterion identified by the researchers (Weyant, 2022). In this study, the participants were Grade 11 learners enrolled in the subject 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World. The subject is considered one of the core subjects required in the K-12 curriculum of the Philippines. The participants were willing and allowed by their parents to submit a critical interpretation or analysis of the poetry 'Now You Hear Me'. The learners were from the Cabarroguis District of the Schools Division Office of Quirino for the School Year 2024-2025. The research context was selected because of its accessibility and convenience to the researchers.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers sought permission from the authorities in the Cabarroguis District of the Schools Division Office of Quirino. Afterward, the target respondents of the study were oriented on the objectives and procedures of the study and their consent was primarily sought by the researchers before the conduct of the study. Then, the learners were given one hour to write their literary analysis, composed of at least 300 words that are plagiarism-free, and no AI-generated content was detected. There were

54 literary analysis outputs collected through Google Drive, an online platform that allows multiple users to access the submission of outputs. Moreover, the submitted outputs were secured with passwords for privacy, ensuring that no other learner has access to the submitted requirements aside from the researchers.

Analysis of Data

In unravelling the character-building related themes and moral reflections of the learners in their close analysis of the poem 'Now You Hear Me', thematic analysis (Clark & Braun, 2006) was employed. According to Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis is the foundation of qualitative research, for it enhances one's ability to analyze qualitative data. Following the six-step Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the researchers repeatedly and rigorously familiarize themselves with the poem interpretation of the students to gain a full sense of the manuscripts. Initially, codes were assigned to recurring words, ideas, phrases, and symbolic preferences of the students. The codes were critically examined and grouped into broader themes such as accountability, empathy, and self-discipline. The themes were refined and reviewed to ensure consistency and relevance, and each theme is labelled based on its main idea. Lastly, the analysis consists of extracts from learners' literary interpretations, manifesting how the students constructed meanings from the poem 'Now You Hear Me'.

Thus, to establish coding reliability and consistency, two coders analyzed the students' outputs, and the computed coding agreement using Cohen's kappa yielded $\kappa=0.79$, reflecting substantial agreement between raters.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured to employ ethical considerations throughout the duration of the conduct of the study. The participants' identity was hidden unanimously by codes, ensuring no discrimination against participants' physical, religious, moral, social values, and cultural identity. The coded themes from the learners' close analysis will be shredded after five years without any complaint having been made after the publication of this paper. The study commenced after an approved letter to conduct the study was signed by the school principal of the research context. Moreover, a letter of parental consent was secured for learners who are under 18 years old. Furthermore, learners were allowed to accept or decline the opportunity for their close analysis to be used as research data in the present study.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of character-building themes and moral reflections of the students' close analysis of the poem 'Now You Hear Me'. In the presentation of results, each character-building theme is preceded by the moral reflections of the students' extracts.

Accountability

This theme highlights that environmental protection is considered a responsibility entrusted by God to every human being. The extracts highlight that it acknowledged failure to fulfil God's command:

God gave us a taintless nature; we don't do our obligations as humans. (S1)

Humans allowed the darkness to swallow the beauty of our nature; we are parasites. (S13).

Moreover, it emphasizes the need for proactive virtues to solve environmental problems, as evident in the following extracts:

We should make a move so that nature will not be destroyed. (S2)

The poem Now You Hear Me is a reminder on how to be responsible for our actions. (S10)

From these extracts, it can be underscored that the learners' realization of their roles to be members of the society who contribute significantly to the restoration of the environment resonates the affective impact of utilizing the poetry 'Now You Hear Me'. This theme can be associated with Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), which highlights that critical reflection of learners leads to a change of perspective and learning of new principles which enable them to act as responsible members of society. Moreover, according to Rozeboom (2024), empathy is a characteristic that seeks to understand the situation and needs of other individuals, underscoring the moral responsibility of a person to be a source of help in the problems that challenge societal development.

As one of the themes revealed, accountability demands that every individual be decisive in making life choices (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Accountability as Character Building Theme

Character Building Theme	Extracts	Moral Reflections
Accountability	<p><i>"God gave us a taintless nature; we don't do our obligations as humans." (S1)</i></p> <p><i>"We should make a move so that nature will not be destroyed." (S2)</i></p> <p><i>"The poem 'Now You Hear Me' is a reminder of how to be responsible for our actions." (S10)</i></p> <p><i>"Humans allowed the darkness to swallow the beauty of our nature; we are parasites." (S13)</i></p>	<p>Humanity neglects the responsibility to care for Mother Earth.</p> <p>Timely action is ethically required; inaction on environmental protection is wrong.</p> <p>People need to be responsible individuals who protect the environment.</p> <p>Humility to acknowledge that humans are the prime cause of environmental degradation.</p>

In the context of this research, it implies the need for understanding the probable outcome of decisions made in the daily way of living, in the utilization of natural resources, consumption of goods, and disposal of wastes. The extracts in Table 1 assert that the natural resources that people have do not belong to anyone, which also necessitates that they can be considered as shared ownership by everyone living in them. Thus, this reality demonstrates that environmental destruction is a collective crime against the natural environment, to the haven that serves as the only home. The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) explains self-regulation and reciprocal

determinism, which demands that every individual be held accountable for the decisions made. In the context of this study, learners realized the importance of making the right decisions in the consumption of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Empathy

The theme reflects a moral call for a change of behavior, a motivation for every individual to awaken the collaborative efforts in protecting the environment. The poem 'Now You Hear Me' serves as an ethical spotlight to the environmental challenges the world is facing. These presented extracts in Table 2 display the moral awakening of care and protection as payment for the received resources from the environment. The theme of empathy reflects Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1981). It emphasizes the moral reasoning of care and protection of the environment as payment for the resources from nature.

Table 2. Empathy as Character Building Theme

Character Building Theme	Extracts	Moral Reflections
Empathy	<p><i>"The poem 'Now You Hear Me' is all about the suffering of our nature." (S3)</i></p> <p><i>"My emotion was smashed; the poem touched my heart. I felt what Mother Earth is feeling." (S7)</i></p> <p><i>"We need to listen to what our nature wants to voice out." (S4)</i></p>	<p>Harming nature is wrong; feeling its suffering is morally necessary.</p> <p>Recognizing nature's agony is the first step towards the right changes in ecological footprints.</p> <p>Listening is a moral duty everyone needs to learn.</p>

Empathy is a characteristic that involves understanding the needs and situation of others, making it necessary for an individual to take action to help resolve the problems identified. In the context of this study, the extracts frame for ecological care as an emotional and ethical duty of every human being:

The poem Now You Hear Me is all about the suffering of our nature. (S3)

My emotion was smashed; the poem touched my heart. I felt what Mother Earth is feeling. (S7)

This theme urges every learner to be mindful of the environmental issues, "We need to listen to what our nature wants to voice out." (S4). This extract also resonates that recognizing the realities people experience due to environmental abnormalities is the first step towards an initiative to be responsive to the call for help from the planet Earth. According to Hoffman's Empathy Development Theory (2000), empathy has a developmental process that results in moral action. In this present study, the utilization of 'Now You Hear Me' served as an opportunity for learners to understand empathy as a moral value needed by humanity.

Self-Discipline

This character-building theme reflects the realization of the students on the importance of self-discipline. The extract “*As a student, I learned the importance of planting more trees.*” (S10) aligns with Aristotle’s Habituation, praxis over rhetoric, which highlights that virtue is learned through habit. Thus, participant S10 asserts that planting a tree creates a deeper sense of environmental responsibility. “*We need to throw garbage in the right bin; plant with friends and relatives*” (S8). This extract underscores that proper waste disposal must be a collective practice.

Moreover, MacIntyre (1984) emphasized that virtue is learned and sustained through practices, a collective effort shared by responsible individuals. Additionally, the extract “*Through this poem I also learned the importance of adopting environmental practices such as conserving water & electricity.*” (S3) opens a bracket on the positive aspect of frugality, particularly on natural resources; by using the resources wisely and cautiously, people perform a morally upright duty. Sandler & Cafaro (2005) argue that individuals should make it a habit to maximize the natural resources by using them according to needs, and not in wants or pleasures.

Table 3. Self-Discipline as Character Building Theme

Character Building Theme	Extracts	Moral Reflections
Self-Discipline	<p>“<i>As a student, I learned the importance of planting more trees.</i>” (S10)</p> <p>“<i>We need to throw garbage in the right bin; plant with friends and relatives.</i>” (S8)</p> <p>“<i>Through this poem, I also learned the importance of adopting environmental practices such as conserving water and electricity.</i>” (S3)</p>	<p>Planting a tree is a simple act that creates a deeper meaning of environmental awareness. Collective efforts create a macro effect on environmental preservation.</p> <p>Resource frugality is morally commendable, and it is a necessity.</p>

Conclusion and Future Works

This qualitative study uncovered the effectiveness of ‘Now You Hear Me’ as a contextualized environmental poetry in enhancing the learners’ literacy and character formation. Using descriptive thematic content analysis, the three emergent character-building themes are accountability, empathy, and self-discipline. These themes resonate a profound and ethical engagement of learners into ecological issues, which are also viewed as moral imperatives. Accountability accentuates stewardship as a God-assigned duty for every human being. The learner’s literary close analysis recognizes their collective negligence on environmental protection, thus calling them to moral renewal of their call as protectors of nature. This moral framing edifies the moral urgency of environmental failures and the urgency to responsibly address their restoration. Moreover, it magnifies that consequences are directly related to actions committed, thus, in the context of this study, the environmental disasters the world faces today are directly associated with the poor ecological decisions made. Learners recognize that

environmental degradation is rooted in humans' abusive nature toward natural resources.

Additionally, accountability echoes the moral principle of causality—that people's actions bear definite and equal consequences, either destructive or restorative. The theme of empathy exhibits this as an opportunity for affective and cognitive realization of the prevalent environmental conditions, which demands a collective and immediate course of action. The learners' moral understanding is driven by ethical and spiritual convictions, which recommend that environmental contextualized poetry can steward transformative values and attitudes of learners. The prevalence of empathy reflects the undeniable influence of the affective nature on moral formation. When learners empathize with the suffering of Mother Nature, they develop a deep sense of understanding that is based on moral values. The character of empathy develops a learner's environmental care and awareness. Furthermore, self-discipline capitalizes on the internalization of moral values and habitual acts.

Thus, this study recommends that English language teachers develop contextualized learning resources such as environmental poetry to enhance writing literacy and promote character building. Moreover, this study presents the need to evaluate learning resources developed through research.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors of this study declare no conflict of interest in the conduct and publication of this study. The researchers objectively carried out all procedures and analyses without any influence of external funding agencies. The study received no financial grants from any organization that could benefit from this study.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration Statement

AI tools were used in the preparation of the manuscript, particularly for grammar editing and formatting. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of the paper.