

Acceptance Speech of Dr. Enrique Niño P. Leviste

Thank you for this meaningful recognition. It is an honor to accept this award on behalf of our research team.

Our project embarked on a civic writing activity called “Letters to the Next President of the Philippines,” where Grades 9 and 10 students were invited to write about social issues they hoped the next president would address. Through 322 letters from students across public and private schools, urban and rural areas, and all major regions of the country, we were given an opportunity to listen to young Filipinos speak—clearly and compellingly—about the problems they see and the changes they aspire for.

Our research highlights the importance of civic writing as a pedagogical tool. It gives students a platform to engage with real-world issues, sharpen their critical thinking, and participate in public discourse. We also explored the sources of information students used, underscoring the need for stronger digital literacy and access to reliable digital infrastructure especially in our public schools.

This project affirms that education reform must take youth civic engagement seriously. Students, after all, are not passive recipients of knowledge; they are active change makers and innovators yearning for opportunities to make a difference. Education, in the words of education scholar and activist Paulo Freire, should not only function as an instrument that facilitates the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system, a system that customarily invites conformity to it. More importantly, education should aspire to become a practice of freedom or the means by which women and men deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their worlds. Our role as educators, then, is to provide students with spaces, tools, and encouragement to speak up and shape their communities.

We are immensely grateful to the University for supporting this work and for championing education that is both transformative and inclusive.

Maraming salamat po.