



**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**

www.ijepec.com



FORMING APPROPRIATE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF LITERARY RESPONSE IN L2

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 11.09.2021

Revised date: 10.10.2021

Accepted date: 15.11.2021

Published date: 30.11.2021

To cite this document:

Kamlun, K., Pudin, C. S. J., Edward, E. I., & Othman, I. W. (2021). Forming Appropriate Conceptual Frameworks: Towards a Framework for the Study of Literary Response in L2. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 6 (43), 97-109.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.643009

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to look into the notion of literary reading and response in L2 by pre-service teachers in Malaysia in order to improve teacher education. The researchers will provide an outline of Reader Response theories and how they affect the learning of literature in L2 in this study. The researchers will go over their conceptual framework, which was developed based on past research. This conceptual framework will be developed in order to conduct in-depth research on pre-service teachers' perceptions of literary reading in L2 and to assist them in improving their practises in the classroom. Using the conceptual framework, based on Reader Response Theory, it allows researchers to explore what types of responses pre-service teachers have to literary texts while they are involved in the reading process. Hoping that the experience will aid in the improvement of teaching and learning.

Keywords:

Literary Response, Reader Response Theory, L1, L2, Literature

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate literary reading and response in L2 by pre-service teachers in Malaysia with a view to improving teacher training. In this paper, the researcher will explain an overview of the theories of Reader Response and how they affect the learning of literature in L2 specifically in Malaysia. The researcher will further discuss the conceptual framework drawn from previous studies.

English Literature was first introduced in the Malaysian school system mainly because of the country's colonial past. It was also introduced because the public examinations were linked to the Cambridge Examination Board. Works of writers such as Harper Lee (American) and Chinua Achebe (African) were introduced to students, although it was biased toward English literary traditions. However, later in the 1990s, works of writers from other literary traditions like the British and the Indian were taught. Then, 1992, a Malaysian poet, Muhammad Haji Salleh works was taught in the Literature in English. In the most recent selection of texts chosen is a good mix of texts from different literary traditions and also from literary periods such as from the Shakespearean to the present day. There are now more works by Malaysian writers used in the Literature subject. This shows a significant change and development in the English language curriculum and Malaysian Literature in English.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education states in its English language curriculum policy document that the "aesthetic purpose of language use involves the ability to enjoy literary texts at a level appropriate to learners' ability. Learners are also expected to be able to express ideas, thoughts, beliefs and feelings creatively and imaginatively" as well as moral values which are also emphasized in the "area of language use" (pg. 7). The learning outcomes specified for the area of language used for aesthetic purposes involve listening, reading, viewing, and responding to literary works as well as to creative and imaginative expression in literary texts. These objectives encapsulate the reasons for teaching literature in the Malaysian ESL classroom. They are consistent with the models usually advanced for the teaching of literature in an ESL classroom. Carter and Long (1991) mentioned that there are three models often used in teaching and learning: the Cultural Model, the Language Model and the Personal Growth Model. The Cultural Model represented here views a literary text as a product, which means that it is treated as a source of information about the target culture. As for the Language Model, the aim is to encourage students to be more learner-centred. As the process of learning through the text progresses, they will also pay attention to the way language is used. The Personal Growth Model is a process-based approach and expects students to be more learner-centred. This model allows or encourages students to come up with their own ideas, thoughts and personal experiences.

The purpose of the Literature in English Programme (LiEP) is "to enable learners to enjoy literary texts at a level suited to their language proficiency and to develop in them the ability to express themselves creatively" (ECS, 2000:2). However, the issue of the teachers' ability to carry out the teaching is somehow destroying the emotional response and diminishing the aesthetic purpose of the LiEP projected by the Ministry of Education. As a result, the teaching and learning of literature as projected by the Ministry of Education has failed to engage students in the learning process. This is supported in a study done by Asmah (1987) which stated that UMESPP confirms that the English proficiency attained at the school level "is not sufficient to make university students effective readers." Therefore, students' reading

experience of literary works in L2 is strictly based on their proficiency levels as well as their skills. In addition, Brumfit (1981) explained that most reading syllabuses/ English syllabuses fail to develop knowledge in learners because they focus more on ability and skills.

Literature Review

Reading in a second language (L2) is not a monolingual event especially in Malaysia. When reading literature at L2 level, readers have access to their first language (L1) as they read, and many use it as a strategy to help comprehend an L2 text. Owing to difficulties in observing the comprehension process, more research has to be conducted to determine what role L1 plays in the reading strategies of L2 readers. Some empirical evidence reviewed also suggests that ‘literariness’ in the type of reading adopted through what is looked for and how meanings are produced in interaction with a text, as much as the linguistic features. Miall (2000) stated that the “current theoretical division in literary studies suggests the need to establish the empirical foundations of the discipline” (p.1), even though it has not achieved its target, especially in bringing new findings with regards to canon, stylistics and narrative responses. Therefore, in this section, the researchers will begin by discussing the historical background of Reader Response Theory especially in relation to reading literary works in L2. The key element of Reader Response is that the reader is central to meaning construction; and different readers respond differently. Kamlun & Mohamed (2018) backed up this claim, stating that individuals build their attitudes on learning as L2 learners through personal experience. In this case, reading should not be seen as a narrowly decontextualised psycholinguistic process. It should be seen as events and practices in which the identities and conditions, the previous experience and future hopes of readers contribute importantly to processes of active meaning construction from text (Hall, 2005: 84).

Reader Response Theory

Research on readers and literature began recognizably with I. A. Richards (1929). Richards was the founding figure of what is now called ‘reader-response criticism’. He is associated with ‘Practical Criticism.’ According to him, the meaning of a poem is up to the reader’s experience and response to it. He highlighted that the literature has an impact on the reader. He also stated that a literary work has a single meaning derived from what the reader is inferring in the text. Today, by contrast, Richards’ work is defined by other theorists as meaning is not simply found in a work but is also imposed by the reader according to his/her own experience and predisposition.

The Reader Response Theory is later focused on the academic setting. This is conceptualized by theorists such as Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), Iser (1978), and Fish (1980), whose works have focused on the reading process and on the relationship between the reader and the text. For example, Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) called this the Transactional Theory of Reading; the poem is conceived not as an object but as an experience shaped by the reader through the text. Based on this reader-oriented theory, meaning resides within the interaction between the reader and the literary work. The reader plays a vital role in making sense of the work. Relative to this, Chitravelu et al. (2005) believed that when the reader reads the literary text, the meaning will be constructed through the reading process. This process also emphasizes the importance of the reader’s role in interpreting texts. It rejects the idea that there is a fixed meaning in every literary work. The theory holds that individuals create their own meaning and interpretation through a “transactional process.” The transactional process that engages

the reader in meaning-making will draw the reader into an imaginary world that depends on various factors such as feelings, previous experiences, familiarity of the culture with the text and others. Therefore, the creation of meaning interpreted by the reader is unique and subjective.

In her work, "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading," Rosenblatt (1985) pinpointed her stand as follows: "A poem is what the reader lives through under the guidance of the text and experiences which are relevant to the text." She knew that many scholars would disagree with her idea. Therefore, she wrote, "The idea that a poem presupposes a reader is actively involved with a text is particularly shocking to those seeking to emphasize the objectivity of their interpretations." By stating this, Rosenblatt was referring to the formalists (the New Critics) especially regarding her view that a "poem" is cooperatively produced by a "reader" and a "text."

Such an approach to teaching literature differs from the New Critics' approach (Ali, 1994; Leggo, 2001). Formalists refer to "the poem itself" as a concrete "work of art" or "the real poem". They have no interest in how a work of literature makes a reader "live through" it as Rosenblatt defined it. New Critics assume determined positions toward literature. Reader Response views the act of reading as a transaction between readers and texts, a transaction in which readers use their lived experiences, convictions, personal opinions, and assumptions to interact with the ideas in the text and create personal meaning as a result of the transaction (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Therefore, the Reader Response approach consists of the development of an aesthetic relationship with a text. Fish, for example, also focused on the tenets of formalism. In his early work, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (1970), he pointed out that many schools of criticism see a literary work as an object, claiming to describe what it is and not on what it does. This misconstrues the real meaning of literature and reading. Fish also argued that literature does exist and is significant when it is read and therefore, the force is an affective one. Fish (1980) then argued that the reader constructs literary meaning and that 'aesthetics of reading' (according to Rosenblatt) can be produced on almost any text by the reader provided that the readers actual reading plays only a minimal constraining role.

Numerous researchers have found inspiration in the work of Rosenblatt, Iser, Fish and others, and have explored Reader Response Theory and its impact in the language classroom (Boyd-Batstone, 2002; Cherniwchan, 2002; Cox, 2002; Golden, 2002; Sumara, 1995). For example, Sumara (1995) used this approach to develop a method called "reading as a focal practice." He described focal practice as reading the text by stages to let the students read the text individually and then write their response in the form of a journal. Then the students review their reflections in order to develop a relationship with the journal. This will allow them to experience reading as a place where memories of lived experiences are found. The students then share their responses with different meanings/interpretations in the course of a "book club" setting. Afterwards, the students re-read the text and reflect with the objective of discovering if their original views have changed after they have shared their responses with their peers in the class. The aim of this practice is to encourage an aesthetic relationship between the students and the text. Miall (2000) called this experience 'dehabituation'. According to him, we dehabituate through literary reading, whereby we are allowed to consider other options for being in the world. This kind of reading prepares readers so that it

is easier for them to adapt to a certain situation. Miall says of this “it is an ‘offline’ way of experimenting with emotions or experiences that might have dangerous or unpleasant consequences in the real world, gaining insight into their interpretations so that they know better how to act when similar situations occur in reality (2004:6).”

A number of researchers in the field of literature and language teaching and learning have argued that the reader response approach has considerable potential for development in similar fields (Hall, 2005; Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Hanauer, 1995). However, although empirical research has been conducted to date to determine how reading in the literature and language class affects the learners’ attitude towards reading literary text and how it affects their reading in L2 using different approaches and methodology, more empirical research has to be conducted to investigate how reading might influence engagement in a literary text by responding to it aesthetically and critically. Therefore, in our own study, which is relevant to this, we will be looking at the pre-service teachers or trainee teachers’ responses to literary texts in L2.

Reading Engagement and Attitude

Studies of the students’ responses toward literary text in L2 are becoming popular among researchers in the field of literature and language education. For example, how literary reading arises out of interactions between certain texts, in certain contexts, and certain readers. For instance, how would readers react to literary texts in a different language and how would their own experiences affect their involvement in the reading process. Different researchers may focus on different interactions. However, there is a need of a full and convincing account to investigate the interaction of all three (interactions between certain texts, in a certain context, and certain readers). For example, Rorty (1999), cited in Sumara (2001), suggested that engagement in literary text is not just about identification with the characters, plots, etc. He highlighted how these literary texts encourage students to come up with a creative and critical interpretation which will lead to interactive and more meaningful learning. This is corroborated by a study conducted by Iskhak (2015) to determine the types of students’ responses to the text during the reading process based on the reader response theory, in which the researcher employed transcription and documentation of the students’ work. The reader-response theory was applied in the form of spoken and written activities. During the teaching and learning process, the teacher additionally used the Engaging, Describing, Conceiving, Explaining, Connecting, Interpreting, and Judging techniques. Furthermore, students engaged in the RRT-based reading process made Interpretive, Affective, Reflective, Associative, and Queries responses to the material. This dynamic reading process will allow the reader to elicit an emotional and cognitive reaction to the events and characters in a text. Active reading, emotional and intellectual participation in the text, meaning formation, and response elicitation are all important parts of literary discussions (Mart, 2019).

Hall (2005) clearly defined a research agenda but it is underpinned by a comprehensive overview of current theoretical and methodological perspectives on all aspects of literature use in English language classrooms. In Rosenblatt’s work, Hall asks the important question of whether, as the aesthetic approach seems to assume, a literary text is open to all readers or whether literary reading demands specialist skills. He went on to point out that the role of literature in the language classroom depends on which answer is given. Hall’s own

conclusion seems to be that reading capacity will always be unevenly distributed since it ‘amounts to much more than a decontextualized exercise of psycholinguistic “skills” and ‘involves a whole person, with an ongoing history and identity in construction’ (p. 158). He suggests that this is particularly true for L2 learners who, because they are struggling to achieve basic understanding, may ‘fall short of the “higher-order” form of comprehension which the reading of literature calls for in the form, for instance, of affective responses to foregrounded stylistic elements’ (p. 176). In relation to this, Miall & Kuiken (1994) stated that, in general, readers will find foregrounded text more striking and they will react differently to the text aesthetically. As a consequence, “readers will also generally relate to the same passages across a text, impelled by the parallelism of foregrounding (p.346).” Another study done by Miall & Kuiken (2001) examined readers’ responses toward literary text by focusing on the foregrounding element of a text and how readers feel towards the end. They focused on the central question, which allows us “to go beyond the spatiotemporal point of view and beyond the focalization of character, feeling, and experience (p.292).” Their aim was to develop an understanding of how readers reached for the ‘felt perspective’ or how they responded to the literary work aesthetically. Studies discussed in Louwse & Kuiken (2004) also clearly stated that foregrounding increases reader involvement in the reading. For example, Ingarden (1993) describes that imagery produced during reading may “fill in” what is implicit in an explicit way. This may be due to prior knowledge developed by readers through their own reading event.

Regardless of these claims and the enjoyment that students can derive from literature, Edmondson (1997) argued that literature, particularly for second-language learners, does not bring the much-acclaimed benefits mentioned by the advocates of literature in language learning. Similarly, Zyngier and Shepherd (2003: 7) in their survey of 74 first-year Brazilian undergraduates pointed out that:

Few students are emotionally moved by literature and even fewer actually enjoy the subject. It would be interesting to investigate why students maintain an emotional distance from literature, despite the fact that they report that they find literature relevant.

Their survey has demonstrated that in spite of the methodologies used in teaching literature, these approaches have not always been able to develop students’ interest in literature or enjoyment from reading literary texts. In short, their findings suggest that students do not automatically enjoy literature. Therefore, they have suggested further research into this area as to how readers perceive literature, its functions and how they respond to it. Hall (2005:189) also claimed that there is a need for research on the application of literature in language learning, particularly from the students’ perspectives on literature as there is a “relative neglect to date of students’ perspectives on LLE (Literature in Language Education).” This indicates that literature teaching and learning generally focus on the activities and materials used to develop language proficiency rather than the students’/learners’ own engagement in the reading process and what they gain from the text. A survey conducted by Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999) found that even first-year university students majoring in English language and literature experienced major problems in reading literary texts. A total of 48% of the participants agreed that they were not confident and efficient enough to read literary texts.

The Conceptual Framework

The works of Rosenblatt, Iser, Fish, Miall & Kuiken and Hall work have had a large impact on my own view of the potential of literature study to connect readers with the world and ultimately to have a role in promoting critical thinking and practices (1938, 1995). Rosenblatt's work seems similar to other researchers' ideas in terms of exploring different ways of how readers respond to literature and discover how readers intelligently interpret and act on their own responses to literary works (Sipe, 2003; Leung, 2003; and Patterson, 2003). This situation is a common phenomenon of curriculum around the world. In fact, some students may either face difficulty or show limited interest in engaging with literary works when they are expected to read and express their personal responses. This is because of their constant exposure to reading academic texts. Others, who do see the value of making literature a part of their academic experiences, may attempt to explore literature according to the norms acquired through their training of reading academic texts. This means that the learners may strive to approach a literary text as if they were about to read an academic text. In consequence, they might experience reading as an activity of searching for specific information rather than enduring the pleasure of aesthetic meaning-making as they react to the literary text.

Rosenblatt suggests that the transactional paradigm is applicable not only to reading literature but to all other reading events. The focus of the readers' attention, depending on the text and their purpose for reading, falls on a continuum between what Rosenblatt calls "aesthetic" and "efferent" poles. The focus on an 'efferent' stance is on what the reader will take away from the reading. (the term originates from a Latin word 'effere' which means "to carry away.") The focus on an "aesthetic" reading stance is on that which is lived through the act of reading and the term is derived from the Greek "aesthetic", which means "to sense" or "perceive." In aesthetic reading, the reader is attending to both what the verbal sign designates and the ideas, feelings, images, situations and characters that are evoked by the text.

In relation to this paper, Rosenblatt's work has helped the researchers to build a theoretical framework for the study of literary response in L2. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literary reading (1938, 1978) appealed to the researcher even before they actually understood it because of its recognition of the reader's contribution to the literary experience. Rosenblatt (1985) distinguished "text" as "the set of signs capable of being interpreted as symbols" and "work" as what "a reader elicits in a transaction with the text" (33). She uses the term "transaction" or "transactional" to avoid the use of the word "interaction" which suggests a relation between two separate entities. In Rosenblatt's theory the literary work is a joint venture of author and reader - something that is evoked when a reader meets a text in a different context. Rosenblatt (1977) argued that "the tendency to think of (the literary) work as an object, an entity, existing somewhere apart from author and reader, [is]... the greatest stumbling block in literary criticism and the teaching of literature."

The work of Kunjanman and Aziz on reader response work (2021) has aided researchers in developing a theoretical framework for the study of literary response in L2. Kunjanman and Aziz conduct a thorough evaluation of relevant published prior studies on the reader's reaction theory. The research examined range in time from 2013 to 2020, with a total of fourteen studies. The major goal of this systematic study is to illustrate an empirical information formulation discovered in past scholarly research on the Reader's Response

Theory using numerous approaches. The current discoveries in reader response theory are the subject of this thorough investigation. The findings focus on the advantages of applying the reader-response theory as well as the difficulties that a few researchers have encountered.

Spirovska (2019) examines the benefits and merits of the reader-response theory, as well as its potential shortcomings, in the situation stated. The reader-response theory and reader-response technique in class highlight the reader's critical participation in the literary and aesthetic experience when reading a literary text. The reader's understanding and impressions of a literary work, as well as the reader's experience, influence the reader's interaction with the text. Given the importance of students' reactions and involvement in the discussion of a literary text, it is clear that facilitating replies and students' involvement is critical, according to her research. Several conclusions can be derived from the study and the responses of the participants. One of the findings is that implementing the reader-response approach in a literature classroom can benefit students by increasing their participation and responsiveness to literary texts. Another advantage is that students become more conscious that literary books are important to their life, beliefs, and values.

Therefore, the conceptual framework that the authors could narrate to in the Malaysian context from this argument is through the Reader Response Theory portrayed by Miall and Kuiken in 1995. Reader-response theories bring readers into focus as active agents in the reading process. It is also important to look at what other scholars have done on the concept previously, and whether this is enough to answer the questions intended for the study. The authors explore how these concepts from Reader response theories based on seven psychometric properties as follow:

Table 1: Adapted from Miall and Kuiken, Reader Response Theory, 1995

Psychometric properties	
1. Insight	Reflects an approach to reading in which the literary text guides recognition of previously unrecognized qualities, usually in the reader, but also in the reader's world.
2. Empathy	Indicates projective identification with fictional characters. Some items reflect the extended "presence" of these characters, as though projective identification is regarded as a mean to make the characters seem "real" to the reader.
3. Imagery Vividness	Expresses imagery elaboration of a literary world that becomes vividly present not only visually, but also in feeling, sound, and smell.
4. Leisure Escape	Indicates approach to reading that emphasizes reading for pleasure and as an enjoyable and absorbing departure from everyday responsibilities.
5. Concern with Author	Reflects interest in the author's distinctive perspective, themes, and style, as well as the author's biographical place in a literary or intellectual tradition.
6. Story-driven Reading	Reflects an approach where the reader is focused on plot or story-line, with particular emphasis on interesting action and compelling conclusions.

7. Rejection of Literary Values	Represents the rejection of careful reading, of scholarly study, and of instructional presentation of literary texts. Reading literature is regarded as a compulsory and irrelevant task.
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Objectives

This study seeks to achieve its general objective of investigating the trainee teacher's own knowledge and experiences in reading literary texts in L2. It is crucial to explore these elements as they contribute to their later experiences when they become teachers. The key consideration is to explore how these trainee teachers describe their prior experience of literary reading in L2 focusing on the aesthetic dimension, which explore on the trainee teacher's feelings, emotions, and engagement toward reading literary texts.

Research Questions

The goal of this review is to give a synthesis of empirical data from relevant studies discovered over time on the theory, as well as the benefits and problems found in the studies analysed. This data will provide critical information for future research in this field. As a result, the following research question will be the main focus of this paper:

- 1) What types of responses are made by the trainee teachers toward the L2 text when they are involved in the reading process based on Reader Response Theory?

Research Methodology

The study intends to use a survey design in determining the type of responses made by the trainee teachers toward the L2 text when they are involved in the reading process based on Reader Response Theory. The key consideration is to explore how these trainee teachers describe their prior experience of literary reading in L2 focusing on the aesthetic dimension, which explore on the trainee teacher's feelings, emotions, and engagement toward reading literary texts. The study will sample 150 which involve trainee teachers in a selected higher institution in Malaysia. The participants will consist of trainee teachers undergoing a degree course to become teachers. They will also have gone through courses related to reading and literature. The main objective of having these trainee teachers is to get the perspectives on their literary reading experience and engagement before and after they enter the university. The study will collect both primary and secondary data, and the quantitative data generated will be analyzed using descriptive statistics which will include percentage distribution, mean and the frequency counts. The qualitative data from the study will undergo transcription and reported in themes and sub-themes. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables will be explained through multiple regression.

The following diagrams depict the stages involved in this research:

Table 2: Research Timeline

No	Stages	Instrument
1.	Trainee Teacher (General response on literary experience- e.g. background knowledge, interest, feeling, attitude, and engagement)	Questionnaire (Adapted and adopted from Miall and Kuiken <i>LRQ</i> Questionnaire, 1995) 6 sections: a. Demography (items on Background knowledge

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Insight (14 items) c. Empathy (7 items) d. Imagery vividness (9 items) e. Leisure escape (11 items) f. Rejecting literary values (9 items) <p>Interview Semi-structured interview questions *to extract TT responses *to extract TT ideas *to find out their interest, feelings, attitudes and engagement in reading literary texts in L2</p>
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Conclusion

In conclusion, to facilitate efforts to enhance teacher training, attempts in exploring and understanding what and how different factors have affected students' attitudes and engagements with literary text is necessary. Obviously, the identification and understanding of these factors and how they influence the students' responses can be used to assist more research efforts that may lead to discoveries and understanding of practices as well as real challenges in the teaching of literature. This will ultimately affect the pedagogical development of literature teaching and learning in the future.

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