

## Exploring Literary Interpretation through Extensive Reading: A Reader Response Perspective on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

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### Abstract

This study aimed to analyse the implementation of extensive reading with a reader-response technique in developing students' literary text interpretation skills in the context of English as a Foreign Language. If Extensive Reading more often discusses increasing fluency and reading motivation, there is still very limited discussion about Extensive Reading that focuses on reader responses with transactional theory in literary interpretation. Students construct personal interpretations using texts of their own choosing both classical and modern literary text. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews and recording in the form of reflection journals (Book Response Form) and student projects. The data were analysed by theme analysis approaches to determine patterns of response, reading strategies and growth of students' interpretation skills. The results of the study suggest that the adoption of extensive reading based on literary texts with a reader-response strategy is effective to boost students' interest in reading, motivate active involvement in learning, and create deeper interpretive abilities students not only understand the literal meaning, but are also able to discern latent meanings. However, this study also indicated that the limitations of vocabulary and the awareness of cultural context are still the key impediments in reading. This research concludes that the integration of extensive reading and reader-response approach is an effective strategy in improving the interpretation ability of literary texts of EFL students

**Keywords:** *extensive reading, reader-response, literary text, interpretation, EFL*

### INTRODUCTION

The enhancement of students' critical and interpretive thinking and linguistic skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) gives priority to The pedagogical use of literary texts in such an educational setting is a promising approach that can enhance the quality of teaching. Sukiman et al. (2019) stated that literature is not just a language learning tool, it also promotes critical thinking, introspection and the understanding of difficult concepts. According to Suprayogi et al. (2021) and Arini & Sulistyarini (2021),

the reader-response approach focuses on the reader to find out that the meaning of a text is not fixed but constructed through the reader-text interactions based on the reader's experience, knowledge and social environment. Therefore, teaching literary texts in an EFL setting provides students with opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills that are relevant to the concerns of the 21st century. (Wulandari & Purwani, 2022)

In the Extensive Reading course for English Education students, the right method and fun teaching materials are needed. Extensive reading gives students the freedom to choose reading materials according to their interests and ability level, so that it can increase intrinsic motivation in reading. Day (2015) argues that Extensive Reading encourages learners to develop positive reading experiences, which may contribute to deeper engagement with texts and more meaningful learning outcomes.

The reading material for the Extensive Reading course is focused on reading fiction texts as it relates to interest in genres and long texts. In the context of the use of literary texts, extensive reading allows students to engage emotionally and intellectually with the texts they read. This is in line with research findings that show that freedom of choice of texts can increase students' interest in reading and involvement in the learning process (Rejeki et al., 2023). In addition, continuous reading activities also contribute to improving students' vocabulary, understanding of context, and interpreting skills.

However, the implementation of extensive reading in EFL learning still faces various challenges. One of the main problems is the low interest of students in reading English texts, especially literary texts. In addition, the limitations of vocabulary and understanding of cultural context are obstacles in understanding the meaning of texts in depth (Purwani, 2021). Several studies show that EFL students are often only able to understand the literal meaning of texts without being able to perform more complex interpretations (Sinulingga, 2022; Firdiansyah, 2022). This condition shows that a learning approach is needed that is able to integrate linguistic and interpretive aspects simultaneously.

The reader-response approach offers a solution to these problems by placing students as active subjects in the reading process. Through this approach, students are encouraged to provide personal responses to texts, relate the content of the text to personal experiences, and develop interpretations based on textual evidence (Mart,

2019). Reader-response not only improves text comprehension, but also encourages students to think critically and reflectively (Subhan, 2021; Afifah et al., 2023). Thus, the integration of extensive reading and reader-response approaches is a potential strategy in improving the quality of reading learning in EFL classrooms. The researcher in this case uses a reader-response approach based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory perspective.

In a broader theoretical perspective, the development of interpretive and critical thinking skills through literary texts can also be understood within the framework of academic literacy and critical literacy. Literary allows students to not only understand the content of the text, but also analyze the structure, themes, and values contained in it. This is in line with the concept that literary learning can be a means to develop evidence-based argumentation skills, critical evaluation, and reflection on social and cultural issues (Rejeki et al., 2023; Afifah et al., 2023). Thus, the use of literary texts in EFL learning has high relevance in shaping students' academic competence comprehensively.

In addition, the development of research methodologies in the field of language education shows the importance of using a systematic analytical approach in understanding learning trends and practices. Bibliometric approaches and scientific mapping, for example, have been used to identify knowledge structures, research trends, as well as scientific collaborations in various fields (Liu & He, 2023; Zhao & Strotmann, 2021). Although the context of this research is different, the systematic approach provides a methodological foundation for understanding how the concepts of extensive reading and reader-response develop in the academic literature. This shows that this research has not only practical relevance, but also a theoretical contribution to the development of EFL studies.

Based on existing literature reviews, there is a research gap that needs to be studied further. Most previous research has placed more emphasis on the use of literary texts or extensive reading separately, without integrating the two within the framework of a reader-response approach. In addition, research that specifically examines how such integration can improve students' interpretive abilities in the context of EFL is still limited. Therefore, this research has novelty in combining three main aspects, namely extensive reading, literary texts, and reader-response approaches, in one comprehensive learning framework.

Based on this description, the purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of extensive reading with a reader-response approach with transactional theory from Rosenblatt in improving the interpretation ability of literary texts of EFL students. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a literature-based learning model, as well as a practical contribution for lecturers in designing more effective learning strategies. The formulation of the problem in this study is: **How is the implementation of extensive reading with a reader-response approach based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory in improving students' literary text interpretation skills in the context of EFL learning?**

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative research design with an interpretive descriptive approach that aims to deeply understand the process of implementing extensive reading with the reader-response approach of Rosenblatt's transactional theory in EFL learning. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore students' experiences, responses, and interpretations of literary texts in a contextual and holistic manner. The main focus of the research is on the learning process, students' interaction with texts, and how meaning is constructed through reading experiences. Epistemologically, this research is based on a constructivist paradigm that views that knowledge and meaning are formed through interactions between individuals and their environment, including the texts read (Suprayogi et al., 2021; Arini & Sulistyarini, 2021). Thus, this study not only aims to describe the phenomenon, but also interpret the dynamics that occur in the literary-based reading learning process. This design allows researchers to capture the complexity of students' responses to literary texts in the context of EFL learning in a more in-depth and meaningful way.

## **Research Context and Participant**

The subjects of this study are all students of the fifth semester English Education study program totaling 6 people who took the Extensive Reading course at Billfath University. The selection of subjects is carried out taking into account that students at that level already have sufficient English language skills to read literary texts, but are still in the stage of developing interpretive skills. The diverse characteristics of participants in terms of language skills, reading interests, and academic background

are important considerations in data analysis, as these factors affect the way students understand and respond to literary texts (Rejeki et al., 2023; Firdiansyah, 2022). Thus, the variety of participants actually enriches the research data and allows for a more comprehensive analysis.

However, the implementation of extensive reading in EFL learning still faces various challenges. One of the main problems is the low interest of students in reading English texts, especially literary texts. In addition, the limitations of vocabulary and understanding of cultural context are obstacles in understanding the meaning of texts in depth (Widayanti et al., 2025). Several studies show that EFL students are often only able to understand the literal meaning of texts without being able to perform more complex interpretations (Sinulingga, 2022; Firdiansyah, 2022). This condition shows that a learning approach is needed that is able to integrate linguistic and interpretive aspects simultaneously.

### **Extensive Reading and Reader-Response Activities**

The application of Extensive Reading follows the principle of learner autonomy, allowing students to choose literary texts according to their interests, reading preferences, and level of language proficiency. Students are encouraged to read a variety of literary works, including classical and contemporary literary texts. Consistent with Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory, students are encouraged to adopt an aesthetic reading attitude (Sun, 2020). Instead of focusing solely on extracting information from the text, they are invited to engage emotionally and personally with the literary work. Students are encouraged to relate texts to their experiences, beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds. Through this process, literary interpretation is seen as a dynamic process of constructing meaning that arises from the reader-text transaction (McLean & Rouault, 2021).

To facilitate reader response activities, students are required to maintain reading reports throughout the semester. The reading report documents the literary texts they read, text summaries, personal reflections, emotional reactions, important passages, and individual interpretations. These reports serve as a record of students' reading experiences and provide evidence of how they construct meaning through their interactions with literary texts.

In addition, students participate in class discussions where they share their responses and interpretations with peers. This discussion encourages students to reflect on how their personal experiences affect their understanding of literary texts. At the end of the reading cycle, students complete an individual project that synthesizes their reading experience and demonstrates their literary interpretation. These activities are specifically designed to facilitate text-reader transactions, aesthetic engagement, personal responses, and the construction of meaning, which are core principles of Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory. (Rosenblatt, 1978)

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through classroom observations, report readings, semi-structured interviews, and project documentation.

### **Classroom Observation**

Classroom observations were conducted throughout the semester to document student participation in Extensive Reading activities and reader responses. Observations focus on students' engagement with literary texts, participation in discussions, interaction with peers, and evidence of interpretive thinking. Observation notes are recorded systematically after each session.

### **Reading Reports**

Students' reading reports served as one of the primary sources of data. Throughout the semester, students documented the literary texts they read and recorded summaries, personal reflections, emotional reactions, significant quotations, and interpretations of the texts. These reports provided valuable insights into students' reader-text transactions, personal responses, and meaning construction processes. Furthermore, the reports enabled the researcher to trace the development of students' literary interpretation skills over time

### **Semi-structured Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the semester to obtain a deeper understanding of students' reading experiences and interpretation processes. The interview protocol was developed based on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory and focused on students' aesthetic reading experiences, personal responses, meaning

construction processes, and challenges encountered while reading literary texts. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### **Project Documentation**

Students' final projects are collected as additional data. These projects provide additional evidence on how students synthesize their reading experiences and develop literary interpretations throughout the course. These projects also demonstrate students' ability to connect literary texts with personal experiences and broader social or cultural issues.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis begins with an introduction through repeated reading of observation notes, interview transcripts, reading reports, and project documentation.

Guided by Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory, the initial coding process focused on identifying the evidence:

1. Text-reader transactions;
2. Aesthetic reading experience;
3. Personal responses to literary texts;
4. This means the construction process; and
5. Development of literary interpretation skills.

The codes are then organized into broader categories and themes. Similar patterns are grouped together to produce meaningful themes that reflect students' literary interpretation experiences. These themes are reviewed and refined through continuous comparisons across multiple data sources. Finally, the themes are interpreted in relation to Rosenblatt's theoretical framework to explain how Extensive Reading and reader response activities contribute to the development of students' literary interpretations.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis of classroom observations, reading reports, interviews, and project documentation reveals five interconnected themes that explain how Extensive Reading integrated with a reader response approach contributes to the development of students' literary interpretation skills. Guided by Rosenblatt's Transactional Reading Theory, these findings suggest that literary interpretation emerges through reader-text

transactions, aesthetic engagement, personal responses, and meaning-construction processes.

### **Reader-Text Transactions during Extensive Reading**

The findings revealed that students were actively involved in transactions with literary texts during the Extensive Reading process. Instead of reading just to get information, students interact with the text by relating textual events, characters, conflicts, and themes with their prior knowledge and personal experiences. These interactions become evident through class discussions, reading reports, and interview responses.

Observational data showed that students used a variety of strategies when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or difficult passages. Four out of six students frequently note down and review specific parts of the text, while the remaining two students prefer to focus on understanding the storyline before returning to the problematic part. Further interview data showed that students actively negotiated meaning by rereading passages, deducing meaning from context, and consulting dictionaries when necessary.

These findings reflect Rosenblatt's notion of the reader-text transaction, in which meaning emerges through the interaction between the reader and the text rather than simply being within the text itself. Students do not passively receive information; Instead, they actively participate in constructing meaning by drawing on their personal linguistic knowledge, experience, and perspective.

### **Personal Responses through Extensive Reading**

Another prominent finding is the emergence of personal responses through aesthetic reading experiences. Students report that the freedom to choose literary texts based on their interests increases their willingness to read and engage with English literary works. Four out of six participants stated that they became more motivated to read because they were able to choose stories that reflected their personal interests and preferences.

Reading reports reveal that students often express emotional reactions to the characters, events, and conflicts presented in the text. Instead of focusing solely on factual information, students respond to stories by expressing empathy, curiosity, joy,

and personal reflection. During interviews, some students explained that they became emotional in the narrative because they were able to connect the story to their own lives.

These findings illustrate Rosenblatt's concept (1978) of aesthetic reading, in which readers focus on their lived experiences while reading. Literary texts become meaningful because students experience them personally and emotionally. Therefore, the process of reading goes beyond linguistic comprehension and becomes a reflective activity in which students explore their feelings, values, and perspectives.

These findings support previous research showing that student autonomy and personal engagement play an important role in fostering motivation and meaningful reading experiences in the context of Extensive Reading. The opportunity to choose a hand-picked literary text encourages students to participate more actively in reading activities and strengthens their emotional connection with literary works.

### **Meaning Construction through Literary Engagement**

Analysis of reading reports shows that students are gradually moving beyond literal comprehension and begin to build personal meaning from literary texts. Four out of six students were able to relate the character's themes, conflicts, and experiences to situations in their own lives. Instead of just summarizing the story, students reflect on the significance of the event and interpret the message based on their personal experiences.

Interview data revealed that students often associate literary events with real-life situations. Some participants interpreted the story as a lesson about friendship, perseverance, family relationships, or personal growth. Others reflect the moral values and social issues represented in the narrative. This interpretation varies across students, even when they discuss similar texts, suggesting that the construction of meaning is influenced by individual experiences and perspectives.

These findings strongly support Rosenblatt's argument that literary meaning is not fixed in the text but emerges through the reader's interaction with the text. Students build different interpretations because each reader brings unique experiences, emotions, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds into the reading process. As a result, literary interpretation becomes a dynamic process of meaning-making rather than identifying one correct answer.

These findings also demonstrate the value of reader response activities in promoting reflective thinking. Through reading reports and discussions in class, students are encouraged to articulate their interpretations, justify their responses, and reconsider their perspectives based on alternative viewpoints presented by their peers.

### **Development of Literary Interpretation Skills**

The findings further reveal the development of students' literary interpretation skills during the implementation of the Extensive Reading activity. Analysis of reading reports and project documentation shows that students gradually develop the ability to identify implicit meanings, recognize themes, analyze character motivations, and interpret moral messages embedded in literary texts.

Four out of six students demonstrated the ability to move beyond literal understanding and engage in deeper interpretation. Their written responses increasingly contain references to symbolism, character development, and thematic issues. Observational data also showed that students became more confident in expressing interpretations during class discussions and increasingly supported their arguments with textual evidence.

The development of interpretive skills shows that Extensive Reading combined with reader response activities provides opportunities for students to engage in high-level thinking processes. Through repeated interaction with literary texts, students learn to examine a variety of perspectives, evaluate textual evidence, and formulate personal interpretations (Woodruff & Griffin, 2021). These abilities are an important component of literary literacy and critical thinking in EFL education.

These findings are consistent with Rosenblatt's transactional perspective, which emphasizes that literary interpretation develops through sustained engagement with the text and active participation in the process of meaning-making. These findings also suggest that literary texts can serve as valuable resources for promoting critical reflection and interpretive competence among EFL learners.

### **Linguistics and Cultural Challenges in Literary Reading**

Despite the positive results, students continue to face challenges related to vocabulary knowledge and cultural understanding. Five of the six participants reported

difficulty in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, while one participant highlighted challenges associated with cultural references presented in literary texts.

Classroom observations reveal that students often use digital dictionaries, contextual guessing strategies, and peer discussions to overcome comprehension difficulties. The reading report also showed that students regularly took notes on foreign words and attempted to identify meanings through contextual analysis. While this strategy helps facilitate comprehension, vocabulary limitations sometimes interfere with the reading process and reduce students' confidence in interpreting the text.

Similarly, cultural references embedded in literary works sometimes create barriers to understanding. Students sometimes struggle to interpret different social norms, historical contexts, and cultural practices from their own experiences. This difficulty affects their ability to fully understand certain events and their implicit meanings in the narrative. (Alptekin, 2006; Keshavarz et al., 2014)

While Rosenblatt's theory emphasizes the construction of personal meaning, the findings suggest that successful text-reader transactions also require adequate linguistic and cultural resources. Therefore, reader response activities must be accompanied by appropriate linguistic and cultural scaffolding to support the process of literary interpretation of students.

The overall findings revealed that the combination of Extensive Reading and the reader response approach provided rich opportunities for EFL students to interact with the text and reader, to produce personal responses through reading aesthetics, to make meaning, and to develop their skills of literary interpretation. Even with the vocabulary and culture challenges.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the implementation of Extensive Reading integrated with the reader response approach based on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory contributes positively to the development of literary interpretation skills of EFL students. Through ongoing engagement with hand-picked literary texts, students actively participate in reader-text interactions, building meaning by connecting textual experiences with their personal backgrounds, emotions, values, and prior knowledge.

These findings reveal that Extensive Reading encourages students to move beyond literal understanding towards a deeper interpretation of literature. Students develop the ability to identify themes, analyze characters, recognize implicit meanings, and

formulate personal interpretations supported by textual evidence. The freedom to choose literary texts according to one's interests also increases reading motivation, engagement, and emotional engagement in the reading process, which reflects Rosenblatt's concept of aesthetic reading.

In addition, reader response activities such as reading reports, reflective journals, class discussions, and individual projects provide meaningful opportunities for students to articulate, negotiate, and refine their interpretations. These activities facilitate the construction of dual meanings and promote critical and reflective thinking, showing that literary understanding is a dynamic process that arises from the interaction between the reader and the text.

Despite these positive results, the study also identified challenges associated with limited vocabulary knowledge and inadequate knowledge of cultural backgrounds. These factors sometimes hinder students' understanding and interpretation of literary texts. Therefore, while Extensive Reading and reader response strategies effectively support the development of literary interpretation, additional linguistic and cultural scaffolding is still needed to maximize students' reading experience.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that EFL lecturers should provide greater opportunities for students to engage with literary texts through autonomous reading activities and reflective responses. Creating a learning environment that encourages personal interpretation, discussion, and critical reflection can help students develop not only linguistic competence but also literary literacy and higher-level thinking skills.

In conclusion, the integration of Extensive Reading and reader response approaches based on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory provides an effective pedagogical framework to improve EFL students' literary interpretation skills. This approach strengthens reading motivation, promotes active engagement with literary texts, facilitates the creation of personal and critical meaning, and supports the development of literary literacy among EFL learners. As a result, it offers a valuable alternative to teaching literature in an EFL context where students are expected to be active, reflective, and independent readers.

However, this study was limited by the small number of participants and its focus on a single educational context. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted carefully and cannot be generalized to all EFL settings. Future research may involve larger groups of participants, different levels of education, and diverse cultural contexts to further

investigate the effectiveness of integrating Extensive Reading approaches and reader responses in developing literary interpretation skills.

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