

USING READER-RESPONSE THEORY TO TEACH SHORT STORIES TO FRESH -YEAR EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The Reader-Response Theory (RRT) considers learners as an active participant in extracting meaning from a literary work, depending on his/her prior experience. Teaching English literature critically enables readers to connect the written text to their prior knowledge and to build a sense of the work. Fresh -year students' inability to comprehend and critically analyze a brief academic text revealed that they are not familiar with the various reading genres. Thus, the study question is: How much does the RRT aid in the skill development of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students? The project intends to teach fresh-year students about short stories by introducing and utilizing the RRT. 100 students from the faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Economics-Technology for Industries (UNETI) participated in the current study, which utilizes a questionnaire, observation, and analysis of students' written assignments with the overall goal of collecting data as soon as possible. However, the findings showed that EFL students learned how to complete an academic written piece after using this strategy. Additionally, it strengthens their ability to think and increases their inventiveness.*

Keywords: *fresh-year EFL students, RRT, short stories teaching, critical theory*

I. Introduction

The teaching of English literature has suffered in the past few years, not because teachers lack the necessary material, but because of teachers' perceptions of the texts. They used to find joy and significance in reading written texts. Additionally, they once made their students respect the literature (Karolides, 2000). EFL teachers today affirm that reading literature involves deep, meaningful comprehension, enabling students to negotiate, interpret, compare, and, most crucially, decode meaning.

The work is to introduce undergraduate English students enrolled at UNETI, to RRT of teaching literature. The main goal is to concentrate on closing the gap between writing and reading short tales. Additionally, the study highlights the value of literary texts as real resources that support the instruction of reading-writing skills and foster critical thinking among students. However, due to the serious shortcomings that they reveal in their writing, reading and writing are two crucial abilities that are difficult for EFL students. Furthermore, students are unable

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to interpret assigned texts. Consequently, the investigator poses the subsequent queries:

- a) What strategy could improve the students' reading and writing skills?
- b) What are the main responses that occur when a short story is set up?
- c) Can the students write a summary of the given text?

II. Literature review

Reading literature requires readers to engage in a complex process of reflection, retrieval, and recollection to construct multiple interpretations of the text. According to Yang (2002), there are frequently social tensions and challenges when reading literature. Put differently, it necessitates individual responses from readers. The reader constructs meaning through the selection and reflection on his or her answers. To do this, students must demonstrate the following abilities.

- To distinguish between facts and opinions
- To comprehend the meanings and the tone of the narration
- To find information on the issues mentioned in detail
- To discover connections between the actions or events.
- To make moral reasoning and fair decisions.
- Most importantly, to apply the knowledge they have gained from this process in other domains. The relationship between the text and the reader is depicted in the accompanying graph, but that between the author and the text remains undefined and unclear.

The relationship between the text and the audience was described by Spirovska (2019, p. 22) as follows:

“The RRT views the text and reader interaction as mutually dependent.” The reader’s comprehension and perceptions are influenced by the text. The text is actively shaped by the reader. According to Mart (2019), the RRT is predicated on the text’s premises and the reciprocal interaction that exists between the reader and the literary work. Readers typically “explain,” “analyze,” “synthesize,” “argue,” “interpret,” “evaluate,” “solve problems,” “infer,” “reason logically,” and “to apply,” according to Burn (2005). These are all useful critical thinking skills.

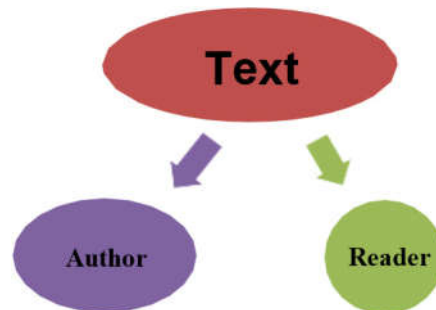


Figure 1. Rosenblatt's RRT

According to Rosenblatt (2005), there are two different ways to interpret a text, and the RRT concentrates on the reader’s experience, particularly the emotional response:

- Reading for joy: the reader derives pleasure from a certain piece of literature.
- Reading because a student has to; the teacher assigns a text for the class.

According to Rosenblatt (2005), each student’s schemata is the foundation of RRT. To put it another way, everyone uses their past knowledge to create and interpret meaning. Because there is an interaction between the reader and the text, she refers to RRT as “transactional.” Every academic work contains an experience because the reader and the text are interdependent. Thus, learning happens organically on a personal

level. Every reader, however, interprets a work differently, as they each bring their unique backgrounds, worldviews, and knowledge to the discussion. Thus, understanding and making sense of text go hand in hand.

Rosenblatt (2005) states that the RRT has two types of readings:



Figure 2. *Efferent-Aesthetic readings*

Reading for joy and instructive materials serve quite distinct purposes. Every reader has to cultivate both types of reaction.

- The efferent component focuses on reading for information and getting various responses from students. Efferent comprises a memorizing element that contains details about characters' names, places, events, etc.

- The aesthetic component focuses on establishing an emotional connection between the reader and the text and, most significantly, on relating the literary work to students' lives. The aesthetic component pertains mostly to literary works and characterizes the reader's emotional response to the content. Purves and Rippere (1968) state that teachers should use both response types in the classroom to balance the teaching of form and meaning-making in language.

Examples of strategies utilize the RRT

RRT has significant implications for classroom practice. It is typical for teachers to design post-reading or follow-up exercises that promote distinctive and personalized answers:

- Brainstorming, also known as webbing, is the process of identifying students' prior knowledge through

practical classroom applications both before and after reading. Consequently, brainstorming stimulates an individual's schemata.

- During reading a text aloud, a well-liked reader-response theory-based exercise is called "making bonds," in which students employ the following three categories of relationships:



Figure 3. *Text's connections*

Connecting the reader, text, and transaction, meanings are induced, and comprehension is attained.

A literary work must provide a connection to the reader's past experiences, interests, fears, and hopes in order for it to be vivid. In this sense, Wolfgang (2000) suggested that, when responding, readers draw on their own experiences. The student will be independent, prepared to engage in class discussion, and motivated to study the literary work further as a result.

Schmidt (2002) considered several questions that teachers might inquire about while applying RRT:

- What is...?(knowledge)
- What is...? (comprehension)
- What is connected/related? (application)
- What are the important elements...? (analysis)
- What does...mean? (synthesis)
- What is the value...? (evaluation)

Helping students with literary reflection

When teaching a literary work, the main goal is to help students think critically

about what they have learned from the book. Students must recognize the moments when experiences have led to overly sentimental or biased reactions. In contrast, they must carefully consider how they responded to different parts of the text to demonstrate comprehension if prior experience or knowledge prohibited them from participating in the work in an appropriate manner (Tyson, 2006; Holden & Schmit, 2002). Therefore, the following assertions should be the teacher's main focus:

- Group together students and reading materials.
- Give students a wide variety of literary works.
- Encourage honest and open responses.
- Challenge students to investigate those responses and discover something about themselves.
- Promote toleration.
- Encourage mutual comprehension.

III. Methodology

3.1. Research instruments

To ensure triangulation, the researchers employed three study instruments: an extensive essay analysis, classroom observations, and a structured questionnaire distributed to 100 students in each group of 20. The instructor analyzed the students' written work for 2022-2023 and identified two groups. The researchers observed five groups and examined the written assignments

completed by her students. The results are studied qualitatively and quantitatively to ensure research validity and credibility.

3.2. Participants

Students of UNETI who registered to continue the academic year 2022-2023 make up the research sample. The investigation is a case study that includes many students chosen at random by the researchers. To ensure the dependability of the research, the researchers conducted this work with 100 fresh-year students from the faculty of Mechanical Engineering at UNETI on the basis of the teacher's evaluation of the students' interest and level of English competency. The teachers said the student's English skills were average and balanced. In addition, students showed little interest in the narrative text concerning legends or the English language. As a result, the student experimental groups for 2022-2023 are distinct from one another.

IV. Findings and discussions

4.1. Findings

The teachers assigned two short stories. The first narrative is "A coward," and the second story is "The chapel." These two literary works are designed for use in the 2022-2023 academic year.

4.1.1. Analysis of students' questionnaire

Q1: When reading a literary text, do you...?

Table 1. Students' perception of the literary texts

Options	Students	Percent (%)
read for joy	20	20
compare the culture target with your own	86	86
go through books critically.	57	57
connect the event of the story	71	71
apply moral reasoning	42	42

Twenty out of 100 respondents said they read for joy, according to the preceding data, with 20% representing the minority. 86 students said they compare the target culture with their own mother culture when reading a text. Since 57% fit this description, it is imperative that the

target culture be used in foreign language classrooms. 71 respondents assumed that when reading a text, they make connections between the facts and events in the story's sequence. It's also important to note that 42% said they could read critically.

Q2: While reading, do you....?

Table 2. Students' post-reading text analysis

Options	Students	Percent %
give explanation	57	57
analyze and interpret	71	71
evaluate and infer	60	60
show off your creativity.	100	100

According to Table 2, 57 % informants explain terms and events as they read. To comprehend the text and respond to the teacher's comprehension questions, 71 interpret and analyze it. The overwhelming majority of respondents (60%) deduce and evaluate authentic material. Once they have read the required content, 100% of the students become creative.

Observation

In the 1st term of the 2022-2023 school year, the researchers gave each of five groups a text. "A coward" is the name of the narrative. After that, they allowed the students about thirty minutes to carefully read it. Some students pretended to read while others read intently, as watching. The researchers began asking questions to evaluate the students' comprehension after they finished the given text. From simple to complex, the questions ranged in difficulty.

The material was mostly selective and social, which is why fresh-year students found it compelling. It therefore stimulates the students' interest and feelings. In addition, the researchers used simple, intelligible language and style throughout.

Post - Reading

When teaching literary texts and having students write summaries at the lesson's conclusion, RRT significantly influences both activities. The researchers used techniques to improve students' critical thinking skills in using RRT. These strategies include the researchers' comprehension questions; asking students questions promotes understanding. They will then be able to observe the text's structure. Put otherwise, the researchers used Rosenblatt's (2005) theory to apply RRT, having the students read two distinct types of texts:

1. Efferent reading.
2. Aesthetic reading.

First of all, the assigned material, "A coward," was a story that triggers the students' attention, for it is a romantic academic text. Hence, students read it for joy since it was a designed task. Secondly, students read it because they had to extract some meanings and draw conclusions.

The Efferent Reading

For information, the teachers encouraged their students to read the story. To ultimately guide the students,

the teachers asked them to read the story aloud in class before assigning some comprehension problems. Because the teachers urged them to extract information such as the story's setting and time, as well as the introductions of the protagonists, the students found the short story enjoyable and the process of closely examining the text easy and manageable. To stimulate their interest, the teachers would frequently have their students guess what would happen next in the short story. They also instructed them to read carefully about the main events and to highlight the important details, then retell the story's episodes using their own sentence structures. Introducing students to the many processes they should take when working with a text is the main goal of efferent reading.

Learning new words and understanding how to flow from one occurrence to the next (the logical sequence of facts) are two of the main takeaways from reading. For example, in the 2nd term of the 2022-2023 school year, students are given the assignment "The chapel" and are encouraged to read between the lines to learn about "The chapel" and her family, her love, and the things that drove her desire to come to Trinidad from India. In addition, accepting accountability and honoring commitments are the main themes of the short story that will be disclosed. Regarding "The chapel" students deduce (via oral conversation) that the protagonist experiences certain familial issues and that teenage elopement in India is a result of oppression, poverty, and domestic abuse. Students gave multiple examples that sparked lively discussion.

Aesthetic Reading

Students need to read the work closely and participate fully in its

experiences. The author's advice in the conclusion of "A Coward" carries a moral lesson. The teacher exploited the students' emotions by having them compare their relationships. Put another way, the author concluded his tale by saying that small elements in a person's life—rather than a mansion, automobile, or large sum of money—are what really count in a relationship. A few students nodded, indicating that they agreed with the author's assertion that "small details could also encompass a simple smile."

More significantly, the teachers encouraged the students to read and make connections between the text and their own culture, as literature and culture are closely related and enhance one another. It is important to note that literature conveys values and ideas through culture. Literature has an impenetrable influence on civilization, like a deep ocean. Consequently, to achieve the main goal of acclimating students to the target culture, EFL teachers should incorporate the former as a substantial component of their foreign language classes. Therefore, it is important to learn about various cultures and form connections with the students' realm.

4.1.2. Analysis of the written productions of students

After reading, the researchers instructed their students to rewrite "The chapel" and "A coward" utilizing the knowledge they had gained from the efferent and aesthetic readings. Additionally, the researchers assigned homework and asked students to write a book report on the real material, including everything from the story's beginning to its climax and conclusion. The researchers posed these questions to the students:

- Make another title suggestion.

- State the location and time.
- Introduce the main characters.
- Summarize the key events.
- Summarize the story's conclusion.
- Create a new ending.

The researchers explained how to apply grammar, vocabulary, and various writing techniques. Above all, they encouraged students to design their own to strengthen their critical thinking abilities. Students used creativity in this section; each student offered a satisfying conclusion to the short story.

After scrutinizing the students' extended essays, the researchers found that because they had previously covered these tactics in the methodology, students did not perceive paraphrasing and summarizing procedures as a major barrier. They discovered that, by following the researchers' directions, they could summarize the prescribed text. Above all, using RRT during class discussions enabled students to make sense of and compare the target and mother cultures. Because the vast majority of people use the past tense incorrectly, it is important to note that applying what they have learned in grammar was difficult and complex.

4.2. Discussion

To facilitate comprehension and teach the students how to examine a literary piece, the researchers used RRT by posing a series of questions to them (starting a dialogue). Students were prompted to compare the two cultures through comprehension questions; for instance, they could draw conclusions about the foreign culture. Most significantly, students are able to examine the stories and put themselves in the shoes of the characters when short stories are taught

utilizing the RRT. A few of them managed to incorporate their past experiences into the learning environment. Notably, students appreciated hearing each other's conclusions as they summarized the short stories using terminology.

The findings from the students' questionnaire match those from the study of the written assignments and the observation. Because the book is engaging and has cultural significance, students read a lot (aesthetic reading). Additionally, when teachers help comprehension by posing questions that range from broad to specific, students conclude and compare their culture with the foreign one. Asking students about the texts and progressing from a simple query to the finish sparks discussion among the students, improving their communicative skills and cultural knowledge.

The RRT process encourages students to embrace diverse perspectives (Rosenblatt et al., 2013). The aforementioned student response samples show that they accepted the various interpretations of the story and offered different ideas and opinions. Additionally, Truong (2009) asserts that it is crucial that readers' emotions, experiences, and background knowledge be reflected in students' responses.

In brief, the outcomes for 2022-2023 are consistent with one another. Thus, the RRT improves the language proficiency and skills of EFL students. Fresh-year students utilize texts to provide a variety of replies, including summaries of the prescribed short tales, reasoning, inference, comparing cultures, analyzing the author's language, and explaining events. Ningrum (2018) claimed that students' comments reveal readers' thoughts, emotions, and background knowledge. As a result, the researchers

must choose a text that is appropriate for the students' level of English competence and needs. A suitable literary work must immerse learners and engage them in the reading-writing processes.

V. Conclusions, pedagogical implications and suggestion

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the RRT approach to teaching short tales, along with the teachers' use of it to fresh-year students. By generating meanings from the text, students become aware of many reading interpretations of the literary work and are encouraged to express themselves. The RRT instills in the students a sense of motivation, independence, and curiosity about the material they have studied. An exciting new encounter is valued when compared to their own culture and prior experience. By using the RRT, students are guided toward critical thinking and, consequently, creativity. EFL students can use literature to practice using the English language and learn how to listen to their peers by using the RRT. In summary, teaching literature is essential and should be included in EFL classes since it fosters students' critical thinking and creativity.

In addition to the activities outlined in the findings, teachers may utilize journals or role-playing as additional activities to carry out an RRT-based reading process. Nonetheless, teachers should consider how well the book aligns with students' English proficiency and how best to elicit the text's response from the class. Additionally, it is advised that future researchers conduct research in a separate skill using a different set of materials if they wish to study the use of RRT.

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SỬ DỤNG LÝ THUYẾT PHẢN HỒI CỦA NGƯỜI ĐỌC ĐỂ DẠY TRUYỆN NGẮN CHO SINH VIÊN EFL NĂM THỨ NHẤT

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Tóm tắt: Lý thuyết phản hồi của người đọc coi người học là người tham gia tích cực vào việc rút ra ý nghĩa từ một tác phẩm văn học tùy thuộc vào kinh nghiệm trước đây của họ. Sinh viên năm nhất chưa thể hiểu hết và xem xét kỹ lưỡng một văn bản học thuật ngắn, điều này cho thấy rằng họ chưa biết về các loại bài đọc khác nhau. Câu hỏi nghiên cứu theo hướng này là: RRT đóng góp ở mức độ nào vào sự phát triển các kỹ năng của sinh viên EFL? Nhằm mục đích giới thiệu và ứng dụng RRT vào việc giảng dạy truyện ngắn cho sinh viên năm nhất, nhà nghiên cứu đã tiến hành khảo sát này dựa trên 100 sinh viên khoa Cơ khí tại Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp. Một bảng câu hỏi, phiếu quan sát và phân tích bài viết của sinh viên được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu này để bao quát thu thập dữ liệu trong một khoảng thời gian nhất định. Kết quả cho thấy rằng sau khi thực hiện phương pháp này, sinh viên EFL đã nhận thức được cách thực hiện một bài viết mang tính học thuật và cũng giúp củng cố kỹ năng tư duy cũng như tăng cường khả năng sáng tạo của họ.

Từ khóa: giảng dạy truyện ngắn, lý luận phê phán, lý thuyết phản hồi của người đọc, sinh viên năm thứ nhất

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