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(ACER-N 2019)

"Education Innovation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in ASEAN Countries"

15th - 16th August 2019
Santika Hotel Tasikmalaya and Galuh University Ciamis, Indonesia

Organized by:
Kantor Kerjasama | Program Pascasarjana
FKIP | Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Universitas Galuh

Concurrent with:
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (I AM-STEM)
Galuh Edutechnological Pedagogy Conference
The International English Applied Linguistics Seminar and Workshop (TIE ALLSAW) Conference
Young Scholar Symposium in Comparative Education (YSSCE) Conference

Proceeding

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Proceeding Contents: Author interest-based selected articles (non-journal issues)

"CLASSROOM CRITICISM" ENGAGEMENT THROUGH READER RESPONSEJOURNAL WRITING PROJECT: A CASE STUDY AT AN EFL TEACHER TRAINING

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Abstract
The study aims at reporting the negotiated project of reader response journal writing at EFL pre-service teacher training. Reader response journal writing, underpinned by Reader Response Theory (RRT), is believed to have given meaningful effects on the trainees' perspectives and meaningful literacy experiences. An intact group of second year EFL teacher trainees (*N=22*),of a private college in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia, taking *Introduction to Literature* course, participated in the case study. The six-week observation of the reading-writing (literacy)-oriented project was focused on the trainees' ways of reading literary works assigned and collaboratively responding to them, critically sharing with their peers to take and to give inputs, and displaying their artistic works as their reader responses. Interviews with the trainees revealed the trainees' positive opinions towards reader response reflective journal writing. Observation of the classroom dynamics indicated the trainees' active participation as their reflected responses. The study suggests further studies deal with the response based-classroom interaction patterns viewed from systemic functional linguistics.

Keywords: Reader response theory, literary criticism, literacy, reflective journal, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

Research has indicated that literary works potentially offer EFL readers optimal rooms to share voices and get engaged in enjoying literary works and at the same time improving language competence. For example, Ali (1995) reports the teaching practice of literature in Malaysian context that could trigger the students' engagement in the target language. Through literature students normally can interpret their imagination and thought critically through their reflective ways such as response journal writing. Thus, literature is one of the suggested subjects in the school curriculum that can empower students to simultaneously think empathically as they have vicariously lived through life realities. Actually, there has been a paradigm shift in literature pedagogy from text-based to aesthetic reading. The former tends to be passive orientation in classroom, which is concerned with text or information of the text only, while the second is more concerned with readers' personal accounts, which is naturally aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1978, 2005b). Generally speaking, literature in EFL classroom provides multiple opportunities for lecturers/teachers to enhance the development of students' critical thinking skills (see Qomar, 2016). By reading and responding to literary works, one will empower him- or her-self to transact his or her ideas or feelings with the texts engaged in. So, teachers in literature class play an important role. One may teach students how to think, but without giving the necessary background and knowledge, they will not be able to pedagogically deliver and analyze the literature materials properly (see Willingham, 2007).

While the role of literature education is considered as vital, the attention of critical thinking in the English literature classroom still deficient, which still only focuses on language skill practice, vocabulary learning, and accounts of linguistic structures (Bahadur, 2012; Pineda, 2004; Qing, 2013). We strongly believe that in the context of EFL teaching, lecturers at college levels should not be restricted to the training of language skills, but to encourage and as a facilitator in student-centered reading classes. In other words, literature teaching in appropriate ways should be conducted to know how to use critical thinking skills through reflective journal writing. Hence, our study aims to analyze the response-based literature classroom dynamics and EFL teacher trainees' perspectives on the creating of classroom criticism through reflective journal writing project. To guide the study, two research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What students' engaging activities are reflected in reader response-based literature classroom that promotes journaling project?
2. What are the trainees' perspectives on the advantages of reader response journal?

Reader Response Theory (RRT) and Response Journals

Reader-response criticism, originated from Rosenblatt's (1978) RRT, is a school of literary theory that focuses on the reader or audience and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the content and <u>form</u> of the work. Reader response criticism started from the idea that the critic's interest ultimately ought to be focused on the reader than the text itself or the author. "Without readers, it seems safe to say, there would be a little reason to talk about literature; it was the reader who brought the text to life, who gave it meaning" (Lynn, 1952, p. 20).

According to Delahoyde (2011) reader response criticism was not a subjective, impressionistic free-for-all, nor a legitimizing of all half-baked, arbitrary, personal comments on literary works. Instead, it was a school of criticism which emerged in the 1970s, focusing on finding meaning in the act of reading itself and examining the ways individual readers or communities of reader experience text. These critics raise theoretical questions regarding how the readers join with the author/s/ to help the text mean. They determine what kind of reader or what community of readers the work implied and assisted to create. They also may examine the significance of the series of interpretations the reader undergoes in the reading process. Like New Critics, reader-response critics focus on what texts did; but instead of regarding texts as self-contained entities, reader-response criticism views plunge into what the New Critics called the affective fallacy, by questioning 'What did texts do in the minds of the readers?" As a matter of fact, a text can exist only as activated by the mind of the reader.

The reader response journal is basically a strategy used by students to record initial responses to their reading experiences. Students usually write journal entries immediately after they read a portion of a text, prior to sharing their ideas with peers or the teacher. Writing response journals provides ideal opportunities for students to deepen and expand their understanding of literature (McIntosh, 2010). Reader response theory

outlines principles for the teaching of literature. It was a clear departure from the prevailing theory at the time, New Criticism, which placed the text itself at the center of critical examination. McIntosh (2010), drawing heavily on the work of Rosenblatt (1978, 1983) and (Probst, 1994, 2004), believed that the task of teaching literature was to help students to think, not to tell them what to think. He encouraged teachers to provide student opportunities for "reading, responding, articulating questions and contemplating possible answers" cited in McIntosh (2010), Probst (2004, p. 18). To confirm his orientation to the same direction, Beach (1993) examined various theories of reader response, which shared a concern with how readers make meaning from their experiences with text. Beach's (1993, pp.7-8) tenets included textual, experiential, psychological, social and cultural theoretical perspectives. Further, Anson and Beach (1995), Parsons (2001) and Probst (2004) explored how to use response journals that can assist readers with making meaning from the text, enhance their reflections, and result in readers' greater engagement with texts.

Similar evidences also emerge in previous studies. For example, Pulverness (2007) argued literature could stimulate emotions, imaginations, experience and dreams that cannot be achieved through other types of text. Literary texts potentially enable learners to engage in meaningful context that increase can student motivation, and enable them to have fun during the classroom activities (Ghosn, 2002). For Connell (2000), in RRT the synthesizing process of aesthetic experiences was distinctive from non-aesthetic experiences because it involves 1) an organic immersion in the reader's prior beliefs and experiences; 2) a connection to emotional drives; and 3) a stimulation of imagination (p. 31). This concurs with Pike's ideas on aesthetic reading in the classroom as the transaction process (Rosenblatt's terms, 2005a) was the one where the shape of the gap or entrance in the text was determined by the shape of the reader who entered as well as the text being entered. Essentially, different readers possibly cause the gap to adopt different shapes. Further, "what was indeterminate for one reader may not be indeterminate for another" (Pike, 2003, p. 63). All this could be interpreted as if the act of reading were constituted by the potentialities offered at a dialogical level by both the text and the reader; it is the complementary relationship between text and reader that reconstitutes the aesthetic act of reading in a process of synthesis as expressed by both (Connell, 2000) and (Pike, 2003). Thus, EFL teachers should encourage students to freely talk about their reading experience.

METHODOLOGY

The present study used a case study approach, which used qualitative technique. As Fraenkel et al. (2012, p. 10) underlined that qualitative research concerned with developing explanation of social phenomena. It focused on a selected group of students studying English as a foreign language. The participants involved were 20 students of the fourth semester of English Department of Teacher Training College of a private university in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia. They were still in the medium level of English language

competence. Most of the students did not have any previous experience of working with literary text in the English classroom.

The entire data collection process was as follows: first, the authors observed students/trainees' activities in literature classroom during the process of making reflective journal writing, and after the students finished the reflective reader response journals, the authors analyzed the process and activity in literature classroom. Students'/trainees' portfolio also deserved analysis through categorizing the students'/trainees' critical thinking activities. Second, in gaining the students' perspective data, the authors administered an open-ended questionnaire to get the students' perspectives on the classroom project, specifically related to their perspectives on their experiences with literature reading in EFL. Finally, an interview with the participants was applied to validate all the information collected (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The interview was used not only to confirm information provided in the previous process, but also to understand the significance of reading proposal for students and to delve into those aspects that needed further research and to differentiate the level of distress of the EFL college students during criticizing a literary works.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Engagements and Activities in Literature Classroom

This study included data collection techniques such as classroom observation, questionnaire and interview. The classroom observation was conducted five times. In this case, the first and the third authors acted as non-participant observers observing the second author's classroom practice. Semi structured interview was also chosen to answer the research question number one: What students' engaging activities are reflected in reader response-based literature classroom that promotes journaling project? The data from questionnaire was expected to answer the research question number two: What are the advantages of reflective journal writing based on students' perspectives? The data from interview were expected to answer the research question number three and four, concerning the students'/trainees' challenges and its solution in handling the challenges in responding to a literary works.

The observation data analysis comprised explaining, interpreting, and concluding steps. The researcher conducted the first observation on March 15th to April 12th 2019. The observation revealed that the teacher gave explanation to students/trainees about the materials and tasks through teaching and learning process. The negotiated teaching process was considered theory-into-practice evidences corroborating and corresponding to RRT principles.

In the first session of classroom observation the classroom reflected that the students made a response to literary works. The lecture divided the students/trainees into some groups. Before giving responses, the trainees read literary works and discussed their responses with their friends. They did responses to the assigned literary works based on the questions given by the lecturer/teacher to dig up their critical responses. After they discussed their responses with their groups, they performed them in front the class.

During this activity the authors found a problem that the trainees had an obstacle in responding a literary works in developing syntactically appropriate expressions with no well-selected vocabularies, and no culturally accepted expressions (cf. Khatib, Rezaei & Derakhsan, 2011).

The second observation was conducted on March 23rd, 2019. In this session, the students went on giving critical comments to the assigned literary works. Different evidences of classroom engagements emerged. The trainees had fun in responding, asking and answering the questions related to the poem. It was indicated from the question addressed by one of the students/trainees to another group in asking and answering session. They said, "*If you were his wife what would you feel when he read the poem for you?*" They seemed to get laughs (to express their freedom) to hear that question, and other group member answered "*I would feel fly*". Drawing on that conducive atmosphere, the authors found that by linked the question to their real life the class would be fun and enthusiastic in learning literature. They started to engage in learning and feel comfortable in learning literature because it was illuminated by their experience, background and knowledge.

The third observation was conducted on March 30th, 2019. Different activities were created in every meeting. The next meeting demonstrated how students' critical thinking was triggered after the lecture used a poem poster created by a group in that literature classroom. The trainees started to be engaged in the assigned poem while criticizing it without the questions given by the lecture. They tried to use their life experience and imagination. That evidence is in line with Yang's (2002) study reporting that a student-centered approach in teaching literature led to positive attitudes towards the integration of literature in language classes.

The fourth session of observation showed the students' reaction to lecture's evaluation. After giving the trainees a chance to comment freely a literary works, the lecture evaluated the students' progress in responding to literary works. The lecture explained how they had to criticize the literature by using their own perspectives freely. Then, they were expected to be more creative in making and revising theie reflective journals. In this sense, Rosenblatt (2005a) argues that a reader interpretation of a text is not a description, but the re-creation the reader makes of the text.

The last observation of the students'/trainees' activity revealed different indication. The trainees not only gave critical comments but also performed the literary work messages in the class. In addition, they did a peer review in group. From the classroom observations, the authors saw, thus, that each session could shape the students' critical thinking

EFL Learners' Perspective of the Advantages on Reflective Reader Response JournalWriting

Administering questionnaire to the trainees (conducted on Mei 20th, 2019) was to figure out the trainees' opinions of advantages of reflective journal writing. Twenty of students conveniently answered the first question from open-ended questionnaire. They strongly agreed that reflective journal could give positive impacts on their critical thinking. They

thought that reflective journal could change the way they thought. The students felt stimulated by the process of making reader response due to the demand to think harder, not only to give responses to the literary works but also to self-reflect on their own purposes of writing the responses.

The following excerpts indicate the trainees' perspectives of the response activities and its benefits for being critical (AT, IM, trainees' pseudonyms).

AT*: Yes, here. Because both are interrelated, when we make a reader response we need critical thinking related to the literature that we have read from various perspectives.*

IM: *In my opinion the reflective journal on critical thinking can support students to think more critically about the phenomena that occur in the surrounding environment. And critical is also very important for students to show the quality of learning outcomes from their observations. The students can talk as they please without risk they will receive.*

DN: *Yes, it is. Critical thinking is not only building our knowledge but also involve current issues and further possibilities.*

The students'/trainees' comments on the teaching of literature above indicated that their critical thinking skills were influenced by learning the literary works. As Rosenblatt (1978, 2005a, 2005b) argues that the readers always brought their certain personal, cultural, and literary repertoires to their reading, which need to be explored and compared to. Readers' life experiences would uniquely characterize readers' responses. The trainees could engage in the writer's purpose and imagination after reading the literary works assigned. In this way, the trainees as active readers reconstituted the aesthetic act of reading in a process of synthesis (see Conell, 2000; and Pike, 2003). In addition, readers' responding process is normally influenced by contextual environments and social background, as well as future expectation (see Bressler, 1999).

Responding to EFL literary works also embraces activities of expressing feeling, increasing vocabulary, reading skill, and writing skill. It could be seen from their sharing opinions below (SY, NH, NA are pseudonyms):

SY   Yes, because I can express what I feel during reading some proses based on my own point of view.

NH   Yes, because we learn new vocabulary, search new vocabulary, and (it) *make(s) me to be poetic.*

NA: Yes, because the reflective journal on critical thinking can improve my writing skill especially in literature.

Process of making a response to literary works can indirectly trigger them to be a good reader and writer. As active readers and writers, they learned a lot of metaphorical meanings from new words they found as good models for their literacy improvements (see Tompskins, (1980).

And, readers also felt free in expressing their feelings and comments in making a response to a literary work as the following excerpts show (AT, SNK, AI, all pseudonyms).

AT Yes, it is quite helpful because by reflective we can find a new style of language and enrich vocabulary so it requires to critical thinking too.

SNK: I think it depends on the source and contents of the journal being read.

AI: Yes, of course, because after we read a lot of reading we also find many languages, many new terms, and knowledge. Our vocabulary and knowledge also increases so that our language skills are also fast developing or growing.

As the aforementioned questionnaire data suggested, the students/trainees perceived that reader response journal writing gave effects on their language growth after learning literary works. Additionally, the writing project also caused them to get imaginative, classical, metaphorical meaning or unnatural words in the target language used in literary works. Then, it safe to say that the utmost effects of the project seems to be potential for enhancing the trainees' nonthreatening conditions for writing exercises.

In this matter, this study was similar with the study conducted by Hiew (2010). He thought that writing fluency had been one of the difficult writing skills faced by low and average proficiency students. It required students to be able to write smoothly as ideas flow through their mind. He also thought that to increase students' writing fluency, reader response journal is the alternative way.

Furthermore, it also relevant with the study conducted by McIntosh (2010). He conducted the research in English language art. He thought that by implementing reader response journal the students would not only increase their writing skill, but also made them being creative in making a text.

Finally, this study was also similar with the study conducted by Iskhak et al (2017). They focused their study on investigating the effect of reader response journals on the quality of teacher trainees' responses to literary works. Using the reader response journal especially in literature classroom, the lecture found the strategy useful for developing learners' skill, as well for their knowledge in literature classroom.

From pedagogical considerations, the efforts of developing classroom criticism at EFL teacher training college through reflective journal still needs exploring in the framework of how the study identifies the types of critical and personal responses made by reader writers with different level of language competences. The use of RRT as underpinning theory also needs exploring in electronic modes as used by EFL teacher trainees with its pedagogical implications for their future classroom practices.

CONCLUSION

The present study has revealed the evidence of response based-literature classroom dynamics and interaction patterns and students'/trainees' perspectives on the use of reflective journal to create 'classroom criticism'. This theory-into-practice driving force can strengthen and enlighten the assurance of the successful classroom practice of literature in EFL teacher training, which offers pedagogical implications. Having made students/trainees get involved in new classroom practices of teaching English poems and stories, the negotiated project made them aware that there were no exact interpretations of the text, but more creative works are needed to be developed. Students/trainees also became more confident when giving their opinions about the reading and showed more interest when listening to others' interpretation. Thus, RRT made literature reading more

meaningful and real for the students. They became personally involved in the reading process because they brought all their life experiences into their text interpretations.

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