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THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN INDONESIA &
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT - UNIVERSITY OF PGRI ADI BUANA SURABAYA



International
Conference
2016

8 - 10
September 2016

University of PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya
Indonesia

PROCEEDINGS

“Creativity and Innovation in
Language Materials Development and
Language Teaching Methodology
in Asia and Beyond”

BOOK 4



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Male and Female EFL Student Teachers' Aesthetic Experiences of Reading and Responding to Literary Works

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the effects of reader-response-based literature instruction on male and female EFL student teachers' aesthetic experiences in reading and giving responses to literary works assigned. The study is underpinned by Rosenblatt's (2005) reader response theory by which transactional process between readers and text evoke personal reflections such as feelings and critical thoughts individually represented in enjoying and engaging the text. The negotiated response-based classroom practices to foster readers' needs, wants, and interests, included group and classroom discussions, peer-feedbacks, and writing journals. Two intact groups of the third grade of EFL teacher training of a private college in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia, participated in the study, all of whom took literary criticism subject, and were assigned to critically enjoy fictions. The first intact group ($N= 21$) included 5 male and 16 female students and the second one ($N= 18$) comprised 5 male and 13 female, respectively. A case study through program evaluation (Cohen et al., 2007) was aimed at uncovering how male and female pre-service teacher trainees reflected their process of aesthetically reading and responding to the text assigned. The data collection included classroom observation, documenting written journals, and administering questionnaires. The patterned 'themes' of reading process and response strategies as reflected in the illuminating data, support the findings. The findings suggest that female subjects of the two groups used more expressive strategies than male did. The study recommends that further studies focus on typical expressions in response strategies of both male and female.

Key words: reader response theory, transaction, aesthetic experience

Introduction

The paradigm shifts in literature teaching pedagogy from text- to reader response-based approach have brought out the arrays of massive discussions of current trends and directions in researches and classroom practices in the English speaking countries (especially in the U.S) as well as other parts of these spheres. The text-based approach is usually associated with New Criticism views that promotes close reading and response-based with Rosenblatt's transactional theory (Azorin, 1995; Many and Wiseman, 1992). In EFL contexts such as Indonesia, the less trending topic of literature pedagogy is subject to the governmental policies, society's literacy developments, and EFL teacher training centers' concerns in introducing literature studies. Yet, the academic policy at the research site of the present study supports literature-based literacy development for its EFL teacher trainees.

The changes of literature pedagogy at the research site have witnessed the classroom practices as done by several English literature instructors (Rachmawati et al., 2015).

Rachmawati's (2015) study on teachers' beliefs in response-based literature teaching as suggested by Rosenblatt (2005) at the research site indicated their typical literature classes that led to the students' free expressions of personal and critical accounts through journaling. Responding to literature, as Kelly (1990) argues can foster reading comprehension, discussion, and writing skills, and promote emotional involvement with and appreciation of literature. Tucker (2000) emphasizes that reader response pedagogy can liberate students through challenging strategies such as writing journals and group discussions. We, teachers as researchers, thus, assume that this academic atmosphere of literature classes potentially offers both the EFL trainers and the trainees of the college to enhance the quality of teaching related to the gender role.

Reader response theory also embraces the issues of male and female readers' stances in reading and responding to texts being read or enjoyed. The tendencies of different strategies in those literacy events have been much discussed in relevant studies. Apart from being stereotyped, females normally tend to be more sensitive to and emotional in approaching to texts being enjoyed than boys do. Kring and Gordon (1998) assert that men and women's different reader response tend to embrace such components as behavioral/expressive, experiential/verbal, and physiological ones. Kring and Gordon (1998) further argues that women are emotionally expressive than men, yet it remains unclear whether men and women differ in other domains of emotional response.

Relevant to the focus of the study, Chi (2009) argues that "Adolescence is also a time when the lives of boys and girls become even more sex-differentiated". Further, Chi's (2009) study suggests that females' responses indicated more empathy with characters than with situations, whereas males responded with empathy more with situations or events; moreover, in enjoying the story, males tended to criticize the characters did in the story, whereas females affectively commented the characters from their feelings. McBride (2009) clarifies that basically boys have different psychological potentials in terms of interests, approaching to problem solving, and multi-intelligences. Different neurological aspects of socialization process in life make boys different from girls in academic attainments. In a sense, those differences bring about pedagogical implications in classroom practices.

Other relevant studies generally indicate similar tendencies. Through analysis of literature circles, Lloyd (2006) suggests that girls prefer to use their feminist lens in responding to films. Hess et al. (2000) argue that women prefer to use more sadness in personally responding to literature than boys do. Al-Mahrooqi and Sultana (2012) also suggest that readers' backgrounds and schemata affect their responses to literary works: "Females share more similarities among themselves than male community".

In classroom literature discussion, Lloyd's (2006) study on male and female students' extent of engagement in literature discussions through literature circles suggesting that males tend to be concerned with heroic masculine storyline, and females tend to focus more on gender and race, related to critical pedagogy. On the basis of Bakhtinian view on *dialogic* classroom interaction (Shirkhani et al., 2015) and Vygotskian socioconstructivism (Donato, 2000), reducing the *monologic* one, reader-response based book clubs leads to readers' freedom in collaboratively expressing ideas by which male and female differently indicate their typical nature in responding and discussing stories. In the process of reading-responding to literature, scaffolding given by the more competent in the social classroom interaction plays an important role. Yet, other studies have indicated insufficient results. For example, Kadir's et al. (2012) study indicates that the subjects (secondary school students with equal gendered classroom) did their efferent reading concerning commenting on characters of the story. Thus, the present study is concerned with how to make it possible by the guiding question: "Can reader response teaching strategies give effects on male and female students' reader responses to literary works assigned?"

Methodology

Following the qualitative traditions and case studies (Cohen et al. 2007) and program evaluation (Nunan, 1992) the present study took place in an English education program of a private college in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia involving two intact groups. We, teachers as researchers, collaboratively did our study in an effort of improving the teacher trainees' varied reader response with reference to gender differences. The first group ($N=21$, with 5 males and 16 females) and the second one ($N=18$, with 5 males and 13 females) were given one semester interventions focusing short stories (in Introduction to Literature subject in the fourth semester in 2015-2016 academic year) by means readers response strategies. The selected classic short stories included "The Necklace", "The Chaser", "The Misery", "The Story of an Hour", "A Jury of Peers", and "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place". Collaboratively designed and implemented, the treatments allowed the trainees to aesthetically read the texts assigned and freely give responses to them. Emerging evidences were drawn from classroom observation, written journal projects, and questionnaires. The typical male and female trainees' ways of responding to story were categorized with reference to their engagement as reflected in their emotions (see Kring and Gordon, 1998). Varied reader response strategies occupied by males and females emerging from written journals were scrutinized on the basis of Beach and Marshall's (1991, p. 28-33) response categories, including *engaging*, *describing*, *conceiving*, *explaining*, *connecting*, *interpreting*, and *judging*. Additionally, the administered questionnaires entailed the trainees' perceptions of experiencing in aesthetic reading.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings are presented in this paper on the basis of the subjects' aesthetic experience in participating in response-based literature classes from classroom observation, types of reader response strategies occupied as shown in written journals, and the subjects' perception about response-based literature classes reflected in questionnaires. As the evidences indicated, the typical features of the reader response-based classroom allowed the trainees of both groups to more personally engage in the story, as well as to actively participate in classroom dynamics. The male and female trainees' emotional engagement in the story gradually improved as supported by the lecturers' guiding questions and scaffolding strategies. Yet, each group indicated their particular reflections with regard to male and female in-nature-differences.

The Case of Group A

Expressions of Aesthetic experience

Though still influenced by New Critics' strategies (text-oriented) of plot re-telling/summarizing, most male and female trainees tended to engage in expressing their feelings such sadness, happiness, and curiosity after reading the short stories assigned. Personal and critical comments of each trainee were still given to certain story elements such as its characters and plots. By up-loading their responses on their own blogs, they got "enjoyment" in responding to the short stories. Yet, female trainees got more engaged in doing it as seen in their enthusiasm.

Reader response strategies

Varied reader response strategies characterized the trainees' written journals. Female trainees mostly took emotional reactions to the stories and male trainees preferred to take critical stances than females. The former embraced such strategies as 'engaging' (such as the use of "I felt sad", "I was curious", "This made me disappointed"), and 'connecting/associating' to their own past experiences. The latter covered such strategies as interpreting and judging the quality of the stories. Yet, the use of describing strategies by both still dominated their responses in their journals.

Perception of experiences in reading

The male trainees tended to use their strategies of using plot description, arguing why the story was so, and using their knowledge and experiences to evaluate the story. In contrast, the female ones preferred to use their own emotional feelings to respond to the stories. They less frequently used retelling techniques in responding to the stories. Generally, both male and female trainees thought that reader response approach was meaningful for their increasing their interests in reading literary works.

The Case of Group B

Expressions of aesthetic experience

Both male and female trainees got engaged in the process of reading-discussing-responding to the stories, yet, female trainees' emotions indicated more tensions than their counterparts. Group and class discussions led the females to personally react to the story elements (the characterization, messages, and the quality of the story) by reflecting their own feelings and feminism issues or gender equality (when they enjoyed "The Necklace" for example). To compare with, males tended to be concerned with their evaluative comments to judge the quality of the story.

Reader response strategies

Compared to males, in their written journals, the females of this group preferred to frequently use their engaging ("I was sad", "I was happy when...", "It reminds me ...", "I felt ...", and the like), and conceiving strategies in responding to the stories. Some females also still used describing strategies to figure out the characters and their characterization. Being more critical, the males tended to more frequently use interpreting of the texts and judging (the quality of the story or messages) strategies in making their responses.

Perception of experiences in reading

The females of this group acknowledged that they tried to relate their own real life feelings and experiences when reading and responding activities. Moreover, they supported their responses by their own images or expectations. Most of them also claimed that they (only) sometimes retell the plot. To compare with, the males tended to focus more on characters and why the characters acted the way they did. Moreover, most of the males tended to focus on how to retell the story.

Discussion

The present study revealed that reader response pedagogy as illuminated by the principles of Rosenblatt's (2005) Reader Response Theory offers beneficial effects on the readers' psychological growth. The response-based classroom practices enabled the classroom community members to empower themselves in self-regulating in reading-discussing-responding-writing events. Apart from the limitedness in gearing males' total involvements, the alternative literature teaching approach could stimulate readers' eagerness to critically and personally react to the stories assigned. The study, as the previous ones have illustrated, conformed the tendencies of the female readers who generally take emotional stances, which is expressive (for example, Chi, 2009; Hess et al. 2000; Kring and Gordon, 1998). In addition, the male readers tend to be concerned with their own logic in giving responses. Yet, the study also argues that male readers also deserve chances to get more training in aesthetic reading and expressing emotional responses as their nature suggests.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The present study draws that reader response teaching strategies, to some extent, can empower both male and female EFL teacher trainees in responding to literary works. The females indicated their meaningful growths in free expressions. As far as the study is concerned, yet, the males still need improvements in typically reflecting their expressive responses. The

study, thus, recommends further studies focus on socio-cultural aspects of gender-based literature pedagogy that promotes Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory.

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