ENHANCING IRAQI READERS' CAPACITY IN CREATING MULTIPLE RESPONSES BY CONSIDERING READER-RESPONSE THEORY AS A DYNAMIC DETERMINER OF MEANING

1. QAYSSAR ABBAS ABDULRIDHA, 2. HJI AZMI ABDUL LATIFF
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, UTHM

Abstract: Reader-response theory is a theory of producing multi-layers of interpretations and meanings. The purpose of the study is to assess and evaluate EFL Iraqi readers’ ability to produce various literary responses when they are involved with the process of reading literary text based on reader response strategy. Methodology: For this study, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with five participants to investigate the types of generated responses through the process of reading the literary text, Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Interviewing each participant on two separate occasions meant that any changes in their responses to the literary text could also be examined. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. The raters’ codes were entered into a separate table for each participant for the pre-interview and post-interview. Cohen’s kappa and percent agreement were also calculated for each participant and overall to determine inter-rater reliability. Main Findings: The researcher identified a lot of categories of responses from the process of reading a literary text, 'Hamlet' such as: descriptive responses, affective responses, interpretive responses, inferential responses, associative responses, and reflective responses. The participants showed two different responses during pre-interview and post-interview. As a result, the level of the participants' ability in showing various and different interpretations is increasing and developing. All these responses are generated from the tasks-based on RRT, the readers themselves became as active determiners or seekers of multi-layers of meanings. This study recommends and suggests implementing tasks- based on RRT as an invaluable element to increase and support the process of perception and understanding the literary texts in the EFL literature classes. Undergraduate Iraqi learners who were enrolled in the English language course at the department of English, Faculty of Education for Human Sciences, participated in this study.

Keywords: Reader-Response Strategy; Iraqi readers; dynamic determiners of meaning; multiple responses; Pedagogical importance; Multilayers of meaning, Learners’ reading literature

1 INTRODUCTION

The process of reading literary texts requires personal responses from readers [1]. This study presents a pedagogical plan for reading and appreciating a literary text with an effective inspiration by using a Reader-response theory-based strategy. The researcher goals to widen his learners’ capacity in interpretations of texts instead of being dependents only on the meaning of written words, he tries during his study to replace his readers' ability with seekers multilayers of meanings instead of one meaning or one interpretation to a literary text. The overriding purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to determine the type and range of participant responses to reading a literary text. This study aims to generate various responses behind one literary text in literature classes when the Iraqi learners involved in the process of reading literary text. Reader-Response recognizes that readers “always add certain individual, cultural, and literary experiences to their reading, which needs to be reconnoitered and compared [1]. In this re-reading process, readers rebuild the structure and meaning of ideas expressed by others. They need to do a careful, active, reflective and analytical reading. Improving the process of explanation or a strong interpretation needs a very mindful proficiency of all of these processes and changes in the reading process, understanding the best of individual responses and finally, comparing them with others [2]. As a result, many researchers considered Reader-response theory as an active agent of determining the meaning behind the texts such as Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert, Ronald Barthes and Louise Rosenblatt. RRT focuses on what texts do to the mind of the readers, rather than regarding a text as something with dynamic properties [3]. This theory includes the following activities during process of reading literary text. It makes students get experiences from reading tasks; enables students to be critical readers who are capable of determining multi meanings in texts; also, it makes students in an active role, not passive [4].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many previous researchers used Reader-Response strategy in teaching literary texts such as [4], [5], [6], [7], [8] and [9]. Reader-response theory is a literary theory, it focuses on the cultural and educational background of the reader. Reader response is the outcome of getting the full meaning of a literary text [10]. The proponents of Reader Response Theory believe that a text cannot be read with objectivity. Reader response is important to understand the full meaning of a text specified to the reader’s response [10]. According to [11] “There is a mutual connection between reader and literary text; there are many interpretations for generating individual literary works” because “text remains only words written on paper until a reader transforms them into a group of meaningful words”.

According to [11] that a text has many signals and perceptions to different readers and those different readers explain a text from several point views. According to [15] the Reader-Response theory presents a significant role and positive impact on students’ reactions and reflections in generating various ideas and thoughts about literary texts in English classes. There are multiple
3. METHODOLOGY
This study was conducted in one of EFL Iraqi classes at the English department, Faculty of Education in Iraq 2018/2019. It was a pre-post one group design. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview as a pre-interview and post-interview to observe the generated responses in participants' pre-interview and post-interview. The semi-structured interview format was selected due to its ability to facilitate the interview event while also producing qualitative data that can be more readily analyzed than data generated through open-ended interviews [16]. The researcher interviewed participants both at the start and the end of the semester. The purpose of this approach was to allow the interviewee more flexibility in the nature and order of questions asked in response to participant answers, and to give the interview event a more conversational style, thereby helping put participants at their ease [17]. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to gain a more nuanced understanding of participant responses to literary reading [1]. Interviewing each participant on two separate occasions meant that any changes in their responses to the literary text could also be examined.

4. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS
The researcher did the following steps, firstly, he transcribed the recordings of the semi-structured interview. The transcriptions were next checked for accuracy against the original recordings, before being anonymized and presented to two raters for analysis. Secondly, he gave transcriptions into two raters. Rater1 was an English teacher with around 34 years of experience working in educational institutions at the time of the study. The rater holds an MA in English and was selected for the study due to his length of English teaching experience and expertise. The researcher met with the rater to discuss the nature of the research and to ask for his participation in the analysis process. After the rater agreed to participate, the researcher reviewed the semi-structured interview questions and analysis framework with the rater to ensure that both raters systematically approached the analysis. The rater was next given anonymous versions of the semi-structured interview transcripts which he rated independently of rater2. Rater 2, who was the current researcher, applied the same analytical framework to the anonymized versions of the qualitative data as Rater1. As stated above, both raters worked independently of each other, and Cohen’s kappa was used to determine inter-rater reliability for each transcript (from the semi-structured interviews and for overall levels of agreement (both overall and for the pre- and post-interviews separately).

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data [19]. [20] Provide a six-phase guide which is a very useful way of conducting a thematic analysis as follows: firstly, the researcher should be familiar with data by reading and re-reading the transcriptions. Secondly, generating initial codes, thirdly, search for themes. A theme is a pattern that captures something significant and interesting for the research question. Fourthly, reviewing the themes, defining the themes and finally writing up. This approach involved the construction of a conceptual Framework based on [1] and [13]. The conceptual framework featured the following responses to participants’ literary reading responses:

- **Descriptive responses** - describe or depict the general characteristics of the characters.

- **Affective responses** – express respondents’ feelings and affection towards the events of the story.

- **Interpretive responses** - represent respondents’ attempts to interpret or explain the meanings of the story based on the fundamental events of the story.

- **Inferential responses** - attempt to see not only content of the text, but also look for multiple layers of meanings behind the text.

- **Associative responses** - relate to the respondents’ memories. These can be divided into a. personal experience; and b. literary background.

- **Reflective responses** – meditative responses, reflect past events, present needs, attitudes and preoccupations which relate to the ideas of the text. Reflective responses can be personal beliefs; and literary reading.

The researcher used participant identity numbers on each transcription rather than names, and no markers that could be used to identify semi-structured interview participants featured in the transcript. The thematic analysis approach used was top-down in that codes used to analyze the data emerged from a conceptual framework that was based on the literature while also being closely aligned with the study’s research questions and objectives. The responses featured in this conceptual framework were each assigned a value to assist with the data analysis process. These were:

- No meaningful response - 0
- Affective - 1
- Associative - personal or literary - 2
- Descriptive – 3
- Inferential - 4
- Interpretive - 5
- Reflective - literary or personal – 6
These were used by the raters to assign codes to words, phrases, passages, and other parts of text from the semi-structured interview data that reflected the theoretical underpinning of the codes. During the initial coding process, the raters took notes on the data, including the different types of responses featured in each interview, and their justifications for assigning it a specific code. These notes helped understand the different response types and guided the researcher in selecting excerpts characterizing each response type presented in the Results. The raters’ codes were then entered into a separate table for each participant for the pre- and post-interviews, while an overall participant response tables were also constructed. SPSS was used to analyze Cohen’s kappa (κ) to determine inter-rater reliability.

[14] States that Cohen’s kappa can range from -1 to +1. A value of 0 indicates a random level of agreement between raters, while 1 indicates a perfect agreement level. The author states that, although negative kappa values are theoretically possible, they are unlikely to occur. The assumptions of Cohen’s kappa include that raters judge the data on a nominal/categorical scale, both raters assess the same data or observation, each response has the same number of response categories, and that the two raters are independent of each other and evaluate all observations [18]. All assumptions were met by the current research.

[14] Claims that any values below 0.60 should be treated with a great deal of caution, and recommends the following: 0-.20 indicates no agreement, .21-.39 minimal agreement, .40-.59 weak agreement, .60-.79 moderate agreement, .80-.90 strong agreement, and above .90 indicates almost perfect agreement.

1.00 represents perfect agreement between raters. It is the interpretation of kappa values that have been used here. Table 1 indicates that overall inter-rater agreement across the pre- and post-interview percentages ranged from 69.2%–100%, with an average of 86.1%. Cohen’s kappa values for all pre- and post-interviews ranged from 0.63 to 1.00, and had an average of 0.83. Kappa values for participants 1 (κ=1.00), 2 (κ=0.90), and 4 (κ=0.90) were either strong or perfect based on [14] suggested interpretation. For participants 3 (κ=0.63) and 5 (κ=0.71), these indicate moderate levels of agreement. The overall kappa value for all pre- and post-interviews of 0.83 was strong.

Table 1: Cohen’s kappa and percent agreement for all participants. (Pre- and post- interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview No.</th>
<th>Cohen’s kappa (κ)</th>
<th>% agreement</th>
<th>No. of agreement</th>
<th>No. of disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. CONCLUSION

The researcher identified a lot of categories of responses from the process of reading a literary text, “Hamlet” such as descriptive responses, affective responses, interpretive responses, inferential responses, associative responses and reflective. The participants showed two different responses during the pre-test and post-test. As a result, the level of the participants’ ability in showing various and different interpretations is increasing and developing. All these responses are generated from the tasks-based on RRT, the readers themselves became as active determiners or seekers of multi-layers of meanings. The most frequently occurring responses across all participants was reflective (n = 76), interpretive responses (n=60), inferential responses (n=55), Descriptive responses (n=21), associative responses (n=27), affective responses (n=19).

Table 2: Responses categorized by 2 raters across all participants (pre- and post-interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Label</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no meaningful response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferential</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>29.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>260</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
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</table>

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank the staff of Faculty of Education, department of English in Thiqar University who presented all the facilities in the data collection. Also, the author would like to thank all the participants who kindly accepted to participate in achieving the goals of this study. Also, the author would like to thank his supervisor on his efforts and notes.

7. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirmed that there was a positive effect of RRT on students’ ability to produce a lot of literary interpretations behind one text. This recommends that instructors of teaching literature must not be dependent on traditional exercises in literature classes, but they must be allowed to live as a work of art, making the reader see, think, feel and reflect. EFL instructors should be trained to use the RRT in coaching literary texts. Workshops may be organized by the Ministry of Education to show the positive influence of tasks-based on Reader-Response strategies in instruction.
REFERENCES


