

# **The Application of Reader-response Theory in Enhancing Student Teachers' Affective and Linguistic Growth: A Classroom Action Research in EFL Teacher Education in Indonesia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigates the significance of the application of Rosenblatt's reader-response theory for teaching literature in EFL teacher education in Indonesia. As the body of literature suggests, reader response strategies potentially offer students multilayered benefits such as promoting aesthetic experience, empowering students' voices, and improving students' motivation and interest in reading as well as literacy (reading-writing) achievement. Reader response strategies can potentially involve readers' cognitive and affective aspects that are indicated by their reflections of their active classroom involvement. In addition, their written reader responses may include varied strategies. The study, thus, is concerned with Beach and Marshall's (1991) seven types of strategies: engaging, describing, conceiving, explaining, connecting, interpreting, and judging. As an effort in improving the subjects from the psychological and linguistic perspectives, the study was concerned with classroom action research. The one semester long two cycle study was focused on the Prose class. The purposively selected student teachers (N=36) of varied racial and cultural backgrounds from the third grade of the English department and the teacher as the researcher participated in the study. The progress made by the students in each cycle of the teaching as reflected in literacy events such as group and classroom discussions and writing journals were qualitatively analyzed with reference to the emerging themes of students' response strategies. Categorization of response strategies of the subjects was based on the coded emerging reader responses with reference to aforementioned Beach and Marshall's (1991) seven response strategies. The findings suggest that there have been improvements in terms of their boldness and self-confidence in expressing ideas, involvement in classroom activities, and linguistic growth such as writing skill. In addition, the study offers pedagogical implications for the subjects' future classroom practices.

**KEYWORDS: EFL teacher education, reader-response, aesthetic experience**

## Introduction

Literary subjects play very important roles in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education. As the literature suggests, Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory, as one of prominent critical theories, has been considered as an inspiring movement in literature teaching pedagogy. Yet, its classroom practices need exploring. This study discusses the benefits of the application of reader-response theory in EFL literature classes at a teacher education college in Indonesia. The possible pedagogical implications of the study are likely to emerge from the embedded potentials driven from student teachers' personal experiences in responding to literary works assigned. EFL teacher candidates need to be well-informed of reader-response applications, since, as McIntosh (2010) suggests, they will benefit the students in their future practice in their own classroom contexts.

As the Indonesian newly-revised English curriculum (the 2013 curriculum) outlines, enjoying literary works for high school students taking Language Studies as their interest, is central to enhancing positive motivation in learning language and literacy. The present study is also underpinned by socio-pedagogic perspectives (Senior, 2006) that support the empowerment of an individual as a member of the community to actively interact with others and participate in negotiated classroom events. It is definitely challenging for teacher candidates to experience such reader-response-based classroom practices to get pedagogical benefits for their future classroom practices.

Philosophically, critical theory plays an important role in literature pedagogy. The body of literature suggests that critical theory has offered meaningful implications to both theoretical development and practical accounts. For example, Grossman (2001) notes that there has been a shift from structure- or text-oriented approach supported in New Criticism views, to aesthetic experience-based approach supported by reader-response theory. Grossman further argues that the former emphasizes on close readings and analysis of literary techniques. The latter is concerned with the role of the reader as an active meaning maker. Lynn (2008, p. 20) asserts that "...it is the reader who brings the text to life, who gives it meaning. Otherwise, it's just black marks on white page." Lynn further argues that reader-response theory leads to the readers' ways of making their personal responses that are idiosyncratic.

The reader-response approach tries to challenge traditional views offered by New Criticism. As Regan (1998) argues, one of the essential points of New Criticism, viewing the shift from author-to text-oriented analysis, promotes the interpretation of textual accounts. The possible or common questions will concentrate on the textual properties of the text such as alliteration, meter, rhyme, stanzaic division, and imagery, or other textual accounts. In contrast, reader response theory promotes readers' *aesthetic* experiences because of their being emotionally involved in reading. It emphasizes the creative role of the reader (Carlisle, 2000). Hong (1997) argues that reader-response theory has to do with the transaction process with the literary texts that promotes aesthetic reading. Different from *efferent* reading that is corresponding to text-based orientation, aesthetic reading refers to the reader's evocation in which "the reader selects ideas and synthesizes them into new experience" (Hong, 1997, p. 29). In a sense, believing in Rosenblatt's views, Tyson (2006, p. 173) speculates that in order for the transaction between text and reader to occur, the aesthetic approach must be carried out.

Historical notes on the origins and development of reader-response theory can shed light on the decision of choosing teaching pedagogy, which is a balanced support of theory-into-practice

directions and empirical evidence of reader-response approach to teaching literature in EFL contexts. For example, as Hirvela (1996) argues, reader-response theory's origins are in the field of literary criticism. Hirvela's concern is Rosenblatt's (1978, 1983, 1985, 1990) transactional theory emphasizing readers as active meaning makers in the more communicative contextual uses of literature in ELT. In the 'transactional' process the readers try to employ their experiences and social context to construct meaning. Karolides (2000, p. 12) asserts that readers play important roles in actively making meaning by arguing that "The words, in effect, have no symbolic meaning—are only marks on the page—until the reading occurs, until the literary work has been lived through by the reader." The process of making meaning of the text involves their schemata and feelings, and intertextualization strategy. In this case, Rosenblatt's views on the concept of 'aesthetic' and 'efferent' stances are very influential (Church, 1997). The aesthetic and efferent notions in reading show different readers' roles as discussed in studies of literature pedagogy. The former, which is more prominent, has to do with transactional reading by which readers use their own emotional capacities, the latter relates to readers' ways of focusing on textual features or information-driven understanding of the texts assigned.

The pedagogical implications of literature classes are indeed meaningful for student teachers. Studies on teachers' perspectives in teaching pedagogy suggest that past experiences of how they enjoyed literary works influence and shape their future classroom practices. For example, Cutri (2000) argues that teachers' beliefs of teaching are influenced by their past experiences. Relevant studies on response-based teaching pedagogy have revealed that pre-service teachers enjoyed their reading of literary works and indicated their language growth as well. Yet, as far as the present study is concerned, the student teachers at the research site had inadequate aesthetic literary experiences although they had taken the course 'Introduction to Literature' as a prerequisite subject. For example, during the lecture sessions they lacked confidence and were reluctant to express their ideas orally in English and contributing towards classroom discussions. In addition, their writing skills in responding to literary works were exceptionally poor. Their written personal reflection indicated that they had some text-oriented experiences of reading literature as their past practices, which were, as I speculated, influenced by New Criticism views. This tendency is considered non-literary in literary teaching pedagogy (Langer, 1994), which is not reader-response-based.

Another limitation indicates that, while the body of literature promotes the benefits of reader-response literature teaching in countries where English is the first language, studies on the application of reader-response theory are still rare in the EFL teacher education setting. This action-research-based study thus aims to highlight the mentioned problems and proposes the research question: Can the use of reader-response pedagogy enhance student teachers' aesthetic experiences and affective potential such as motivation and interest in reading literary works, as well as language competence?

## Literature review

### *Reader-response theory in ESL/EFL contexts: from theory to practice*

Studies on the application of reader-response theory indicate its significance to classroom practices concerning the teaching of literary genres such as poetry, fiction, and drama. Specifically, reader-response theory also offers reading-writing integration activities (Musthafa, 1994). Musthafa further argues that in reading and comprehending a text, the reader actively creates meaning and by doing so, she or he can bring into the text her or his schemata about the topic, sociolinguistic conventions, intentions, and other moral values and life perspectives. Pedagogically speaking, the teaching, then, should give students chances to be free in expressing

ideas and non-threatening classroom environments. Parallel with Musthafa's views, Tucker (2000) suggests reader-response pedagogy as remedy for students' apathy and reading and discussing literature can become alternative strategies. Tucker's empirical views have liberated students in the introductory literature course by providing such varied responding strategies that the students feel free to express their ideas, thus making them critical readers. The same tendencies of the meaningful influences of reader-response approach have also been represented in EFL classroom practices of literature instruction across levels of language growth and sociocultural contexts in Indonesia (Iskhak, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

Reader-response pedagogy has dominated the wide range of literacy-literature discussions in the English speaking countries and has been proven applicable in EFL contexts. Elliot (1990) revealed that reader-response strategies are meaningful for teaching fiction in the ESL context. Through engaging in individual and group discussions, students can easily and enjoyably understand the texts. Carlisle (2000) focuses his concern of the application of reader response on the use of reading logs in teaching novels. Carlisle's studies indicate that students have been stimulated to go beyond the first barrier of semantic understanding and move towards critical appreciation. The students' involvement in responding to texts includes such critical stances as anticipating/being retrospective, picturing, interacting, and evaluating. Gonzalez and Courtland (2009) show similar findings suggesting that the reader-response approach gives students the chance to engage in a contextual meaning making process, and it embodies the potentials to stimulate readers' interests in reading and enhance critical thinking. This study is concerned with the types of reader response strategies such as engaging, describing, conceiving, explaining, connecting, interpreting, and judging as suggested by Beach and Marshall (1991). To socioculturally enhance the reader response-based literature classroom dynamics, teachers can utilize (small) group multitasking as suggested by Baurain (2007). Multitasking, as Baurain argues, can cover six steps: 1. 'study', 2. 'teach', 3. 'create artistic works', 4. 'do metacognitive activities', 5. 'respond', and 6. 'write'.

Baurain also offers the details of each step. In the 'study' step, the students in groups answer the questions concerning the text by locating certain meanings and themes. 'Teach' refers to the task showing that groups prepare a reading activity to help classmates understand the text assigned. 'Create artistic works' is concerned with activities indicating that groups interact creatively with a reading to help it come alive for the class, in activities such as drawing, doing oral presentation or discussion, or practicing role-play or drama. 'Do metacognitive activities' enables groups to compare and contrast perspectives and issues within reading. The 'respond' step lets groups give personal responses as part of the interpretive process by creating dialogue journals. Lastly, 'write' is an activity that makes the groups discuss a potential exam essay question, and then work individually to write their own essays.

The aforementioned studies have clearly promoted the salient roles of reader response strategies in ESL/EFL contexts with reference to students' aesthetic experiences covering their interests, wants, enjoyment, freedom and critical thinking.

### ***Reader-response pedagogy in EFL teacher training***

The role of reader-response theory in EFL teacher training courses needs revisiting. The remaining questions correspond to whether or not student teachers can benefit from it. Studies indicate that reader-response strategies are pedagogically meaningful for the EFL teacher candidates. For example, Grisham (2001) reports his study about student teachers' developing conceptions of reader-response theory, specifically focusing on the importance of aesthetic response to students' engagement with and motivation for reading. His study shows that the

aesthetic reader stance predominated in students' written responses and discussions, and that students were more disposed to consider the aesthetic stance as important to the reader after their own participation in literature discussion circles.

Harfitt and Chu (2011) tried to help the L2 teachers engage with a creative text by actualizing reader-response theory. Their findings indicate that the participants were seen to have produced impressive responses to literary works assigned. In the Indonesian context, Citraningtyas's (2008) study of her own literature class reveals the same findings. The teacher candidates have benefitted from the uniqueness of the applied reader-response strategies. They have enjoyed reading literary works assigned and improved both their interests in reading, cultural awareness, and language proficiency. However, the aforementioned relevant studies did not address how such action-based studies could increase intellectual and affective capacities with reference to diverse input of the subjects. Thus, the present study is concerned with the application of reader-response theory to solve the problem of that inadequacy.

## **Methodology**

### ***Design***

Following qualitative traditions (Freeman, 2009; Hillocks, 1990; Stake, 2010) and the action research approach (Burns, 2009, 2010), the present study aims to improve student teachers' qualitative accounts of their aesthetic experiences and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) competence (see Gall et al., 2003). This study was based on Classroom Action Research (CAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart in Burns, 2010) consisting of plan-action-observation-reflection-based cycles and it is aimed to improve the teaching and learning in response-based literature instruction (see also Anthonimoolam, 2003). The investigation took two cycles as the sufficient expected data emerged. The study entails qualitative evidence which needs thick description and interpretive analysis. Stake (2010) argues that qualitative research tends to be interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic. In addition, as Stake further suggests, it requires triangulating, and the researcher should have strategic choices in encountering the potential threats.

### ***Subjects and research site***

The study involved 36 student teachers of a Teacher Training College in a private university in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia, who were enrolled in the Prose course offered in the fifth semester of their course of study. Prose is a course intended to enable the students to critically and aesthetically read and respond to prose fiction and get enjoyable experiences. It also has pedagogical implications for their future classroom practices. The participants had passed the introduction to literature course as the prerequisite subject. The study involved participants of different socio-cultural and racial backgrounds for the site is situated at the border zone of West Java and Central Java. The participants representing Javanese and Sundanese races originate from both areas. In addition, the teacher as the researcher participated in the study.

At the research site, the participants are required to finish their courses within eight semesters with around 150 credit hours to accomplish their Bachelor Degree of TEFL (termed 'Strata' or S-1 in Indonesia). To be professional EFL teachers, the students are offered inter-related courses that include proficiency subjects, content subjects, and pedagogical content knowledge, in which literature subjects consisting of poetry, prose, and drama are offered.

### ***Data collection***

The present study included the use of video-recorder, which was operated by a selected collaborator, to capture the subjects' psychological reflections and physical involvements as portrayed in classroom participation of each cycle. The videotaping process was focused on the negotiated prose class lasting two hours of each meeting throughout the semester. The observed classroom activities represented both teacher and students' actions, and psychological and physical entities that covered aesthetic responses corresponding to the principles of reader-response theory. The study was triangulated by different types of data emerging from other techniques of data collection. Reflective sheets and open questionnaires (Brown, 2009; Burns, 2010) were administered to investigate the subjects' experiences and perspectives about aesthetic reading of literature. In addition, creatively written reflections and response journals were assigned to uncover their aesthetic reader-response strategies.

As the nature of CAR indicates, each phase of the cycle resulted in different types of data. The 'planning' phase entailed the data of the preliminarily identified problems (lack of self-confidence, reluctance in participation, and low proficiency) faced by the subjects that were seen from the subjects' written reflection and the instructors' observation and field notes. The 'action' phase showed the interventions given, when the process of teaching took place. The 'observation' phase included the process of recording classroom practices that were done through literacy events such as discussions, writing conferences, and classroom interactions. In addition, the 'reflection' phase is the step for the teacher/instructor as researcher to decide on a further cycle.

### ***Data analysis***

The emerging data as the existing phenomena were qualitatively treated. The qualitative data were analyzed through reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and themes development (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Firstly, the transcripts of observed students' performances were categorized with reference to their psychological reflections of and physical participation in the reader-response-based approach. The former includes their confidence, joys, motivation, and expressed feelings (happy or sad). The latter covers such activities as laughter and active participation in discussions. Secondly, the student teachers' written journals showed their types of reader-response strategies that might include engaging, describing, conceiving, explaining, connecting, interpreting, and judging, as suggested by Beach and Marshall (1991), and perspectives on reader-response pedagogy. The subjects' reflected experiences of reading literary works by means of reader-response strategies were categorized into the emerging themes with reference to aesthetic stances, and interests and motivation in reading. To support the categorization process, coding was done to develop the theoretical construct of the relevant issue (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Varied reader responses of focal students, those considered as active participants, deserved analysis. In addition, the captured teacher's (as the researcher) ways of orchestrating the scaffolding process of the literature instruction were also meaningful for the analysis of data.

## **Findings and discussion**

### ***Findings***

The study comprising two cycles shows that reader-response-based literature instruction challenges the conventional or traditional classroom practices which are teacher-centered and text-oriented. The interventions given to the Prose class could trigger classroom dynamics that empowered struggling readers for the sake of each class member's intellectual and emotional involvement. The individual idiosyncratic entities assessed by observation and field notes

indicate that most students improved their courage, spirit, and self-confidence, along with their L2 competence (spoken and written skills). As the data indicated, each cycle differently entails the subjects' growing affective and linguistic attainments.

*The first cycle* lasted from the beginning of the course (first two-three meetings at the semester) to the mid-term, which was marked by writing the response journal. The instructional sequences were initiated by negotiating the requirements of accomplishing the Prose course followed by treating the subjects using reader-response approaches. The first two meetings of the instruction had shown the identified problems faced by the subjects. Afterwards, the reader-response-based treatment was carried out by stimulating students' emotional and physical involvements to read Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. The stimulating and triggering questions/tasks concerned their emotional response to the text, meaningfulness of the text, life experience, effect on the changing worldview, effect on their perception in the past, and their ways of personalizing their connection to the text. The additional explanations given by the instructor were intended to 'scaffold' the readers to get more immersed in enjoying the work assigned. The explanations covered response strategies moving from text- or information-based, usually focused on elements of fiction, to aesthetic ones, emphasizing on readers' feelings and emotions, as well as critical thinking.

The small group discussion consisting of three or four members, preceding the class discussion, was aimed at giving them exercises to respond orally. In so doing, they tried to be brave to express their ideas and lessen their reluctance. Within small student-led group discussions, each member's voice was heard. Social contact with one another seems to be the socialization process to build self-confidence. Classroom group discussion led to an active two-way communication between the presenters, group representatives, and the audience to share ideas, and thus 'dialogic' interaction took place. The audience were then stimulated to ask questions and comments.

The emerging personal aesthetic and intellectual responses reflected by the subjects characterized the classroom dynamics. For example, joy, laughter, and active engagement in classroom discussions were the unique features in the non-threatening classroom atmosphere. Freedom in expressing ideas was seen in the subjects' creative types of questioning and responding. For example, their ways of intertextualization of their own life perspectives or worldviews in oral responses stimulated the more challenging and interactive communication, which can enhance their L2 communicative competence. Their critical comments in discussion challenged each other to overcome their reluctance and bravely speak English. Language review of the ungrammatical expressions, instead of giving criticisms, was focused on the language awareness without making each classroom member feel inadequate; it was done at the end of the meeting/lecture session.

The ongoing classroom-based assessment of response-based instruction indicated that the treatment of each lecture section resulted in the subjects' higher self-confidence and fluency in using the target language. The revealed critical questions and comments were seen as stimulating drives for energizing the classroom dynamics. For example, in the classroom discussion of *The Pearl*, students asked the presenter questions such as: "*If you were Juana, what would you do? Would you sell the pearl?*" and, "*If I were Juana, I would do the same*". The questions seemed to be beyond the text, but those are the good points in reader-response strategies. The readers' critical commentaries of *The Pearl* varied in terms of moral values or philosophy of life related to the importance of money or wealth in keeping life happy. Some of them argued that money does not always bring happiness.

The next assessment was embedded in the given project for mid-term test, an individually written response journal. In stimulating creative and aesthetic responses, guiding questions were provided. To yield the emerging patterns of written responses, the study examined the categories as suggested by Beach and Marshall (1991). The indications are justified as the subjects' improved language growth and freedom as well as courage in expressing ideas. A student tried to comment: *"This novel is very interesting and easy to understand"*. The subject's perception about an experience of reading the work reflects an individual freedom and self-confidence of expression. Focal (male) student 1, Rudy (pseudonym), wrote his response to *The Pearl*: **"The Pearl is a good work" (judging strategy)**, *"I feel no respect (do not respect) to the doctor who has bad character (arrogant). I have this response because I dislike (engaging strategy) the arrogant who do (does) not care with other people"*. The excerpts show his self-confidence and personal perspectives about the quality of something or the personality of someone. To draw the ideology of the work, he asserted: *"The text meant to me, that I have to work hard to get much money, to cost many things but I have to be aware that there are people around me who need help"*. Through the dialogue journal, another (female) student gave her collaborative responses: *"I agree with your arguments, we need money but money is not everything in our life. The most important thing is that we have to struggle as hard as we can do to make our family happy and prosperous without being arrogant and have no care about others' fate"*. Her feedback clearly shows her critical thinking and freedom of speech.

Focal (female) student 2, Vita (pseudonym), responded to *The Pearl* with **"This novel is very interesting and easy to understand (judging)**. ...*The story is very interesting to read and it make(s) me curious to read until the end. I feel sad...Every incident give(s) me wisdom. The wealth cannot buy happiness. ..."* Though not grammatically written, her responses show smarter ways of responding by using judging, connecting (associating with life principles), and judging strategies, as well as other strategies such as conceiving, describing, explaining, and interpreting the messages of the story. Yet, their responses of the focal students still need improving in terms of their exploration and appropriate language usage. The second cycle was aimed to give the accounts through more intensive treatment by means of reader-response-based classroom discussion and sharing.

*The second cycle* of the treatment started after the mid-term assessment. More intensive response-based group and classroom discussions had shaped the student teachers' confident ways of expressing their ideas in responding literary works. The observation indicated increased participation of the subjects in the negotiated oral and written literacy (reading-writing) events. More frequently, creatively and well used-response strategies were evident. In spoken ways, their questions and answers were concerned with more complex life dimensions. Their written responses of the second term journal (for the last semester project) progressively varied in terms of the extent of broader horizons and linguistic competences.

The subjects' improvement in self-confidence and language growth can be revealed from both spoken and written discourses. Generally speaking, almost all participants confidently participated in either group or classroom discussion. In the written journal, the first focal student, Judy, more freely developed his responses to *The Pearl*. He asserted: **"The Pearl is a good novel (judging)**, ...*I feel no respect to the doctor who has bad character (arrogant) (engaging)*. *I have this response because I dislike the arrogant people who do not care to other people. The text meant to me, that I have to work hard to get much money, ..."* Another excerpt of his responses that show his philosophical views in life (moral values) is, *"At first I think wealth can make people happy because it can (can be used to) do many things, (to) buy clothes, vehicles, house and so on, ...The work changes the way I see the world, though I need money to pay everything,*



*money is not everything (conceiving), .... Among the literary works that I have read, The Pearl is more appealing to me, because it is a good work, it teaches a moral, these ideas are relevant to present condition, ...”(connecting).* More aesthetic response strategies, including other strategies used to describe and explain the story events, dominated his journal. Freedom in expressing his feelings and ideas indicates his high self-confidence and creativity.

The second focal student, Vita, also showed her progress in terms of her self-confidence and language use in journaling her responses. Her more varied response strategies characterized her journal: *“I think this story is very awesome because it can change my mind about life (judging). ...My favourite part (of the story) is when Kino, Juana, and their son Coyotito run away and hide in the mountains. I am afraid if the trackers found them. I feel what they feel” (engaging).* At another parts of journal, she also expressed, *“I love this story because it gives me many lessons that is useful for my life. I’m very curious to read it until the end” (engaging).* As her **conceiving** strategy, she says, *“I don’t understand why Kino throw the pearl into the sea”.* The second subject’s ways of responding to the work assigned indicate her aesthetic experiences of reading and enjoying it.

The two focal students’ reflections on reader-response-based literature instruction show their aesthetic experiences of enjoying the literary work assigned (*The Pearl*). In their response journals they also claimed that reader-response teaching pedagogy offers beneficial implications for their future classroom practices. Vita argues, *“There are some experts who states (suggests) the theory of reader-response, and we have to know all about it. It gives positive effect us to give response well.”*

### **Discussion**

Reader-response based literature instruction is meaningful for those who are concerned with self-empowerment in reading and enjoying literary works. This trend of literature pedagogy is notably discussed in multi-dimensional literacy studies in English speaking countries as well as EFL contexts in the framework of varied approaches to research methodology. This study suggests that reader-response strategy is worth applying in action-research perspectives in EFL teacher education to improve student teachers’ low self-confidence and spirit, and language mastery. Aesthetic experiences of having got involved and engaged in literary works can bring student teachers to reflect on their awareness as both common readers and the same time as teacher candidates, to whom pedagogical implications are offered.

The power of the reader-response approach is fruitful for EFL readers. The significance of response-based literature instruction deals with enjoyment, freedom, engagement, and language growth. Consistent with studies by Elliot (1990), the present study suggests that reader-response strategies play a meaningful enhancer role in teaching fiction. Enjoyment and freedom of the readers were evident in the process of meaning making of the texts. The non-threatening classroom situations with classroom criticism activities increase readers’ interest in reading and critical thinking (Gonzalez & Courtland, 2009). The aesthetic ways of responding to literary works can be seen from group and classroom discussions and journaling. When the subjects were involved in response-based-discussions, they showed greater participation, self-confidence, spirits, courage, motivation in expressing and sharing ideas. Their response journals evidently indicated their aesthetic experiences, and text-based responses have also (though less frequently) been used (see also Carlisle, 2000). In addition, their response journals indicated their varied response strategies as suggested by Beach and Marshall (1991), including such dominating strategies as **judging, engaging, conceiving, and connecting (intertextualization)**, which are aesthetic in nature.

Reader-response-based literature instruction at the research site also has pedagogical merits for the EFL teacher candidates. The patterned classroom interactions can be a model of how to cater to students' needs (Iskhak, 2013a). The embedded reflections of classroom practices in the study indicated the subjects' aesthetic experiences of reading and enjoying the work assigned, as reported in Grisham (2001). The negotiated project of writing response journals indicated their creativity in terms of their design (some of the journals were decorated with pictures and colorful illustrations) and varied critical comments. In doing so, the subjects became more creative (Harfitt & Chu, 2011). The emerging findings also support the direction of relevant studies at the EFL teacher education setting in Indonesia. The present study also empowers the subjects to be engaged in the reader-response-based teaching (see Citraningtyas, 2008) and to benefit from the pedagogical significance for their future practices.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

From this action-research based literature instruction, it can be drawn that reader-response theory is beneficial to the improvement of student teachers' inadequacies in studying literature, a subject central to content knowledge courses as offered in EFL teacher education. The study suggests that reader-response theory can be one of the underpinning theories in literature pedagogy for the betterment of EFL teacher training preparation. The idea of the proponent is that the trend of reader-response pedagogy offers potential benefits to solve problems in literature discussion such as psychological barriers (for example, low self-confidence and low motivation), grammatical inadequacies, and social maladjustment in classroom interaction. The study suggests that reader-response theory is applicable for teaching literature at EFL teacher education in improving the teachers' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor capacities, as well as linguistic competence. In addition, the application of reader-response theory in the research site also offers pedagogical implications for the student teachers' future classroom practices.

Reader-response theory deserves our comprehensive attention and understanding. As a new trend in the EFL context, though it has been widely explored in the US contexts of language arts education, reader-response-based instruction is frequently criticized for the measurability of the readers' unlimited subjective responses. The present study does not include the relevant issues of how to assess responses, but rather, it is concerned with an attempt to improve the quality of teaching-learning process. The present study recommends that further action-research-based studies deal with the same topic to explore and investigate the quality of responses in relation to gender and different sociocultural contexts, and the use of appropriate assessment techniques.

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