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Responding To Drama: The Efl Students' Reader-Response Literary Analysis

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Abstract

This article presents the EFL students' reader-response literary analysis of an English drama. The study aims to investigate the EFL students' engagement in reading drama as one of the literary genres and the way they make a Reader-Response literary analysis of the drama. The writer carried out the present research by analyzing the students' reflective essays in which they respond to an English drama entitled "The Other Player" written by Owen G. Arno. The study consists of 9 student participants enrolling in *the Introduction to Literature* subject at an English Education Program of one private university in West Java. *Introduction to Literature* subject was taught to English as a Foreign Language students in the university and is a subject that introduced the students to literature and literary works and led the students to evaluate, describe, and analyze literary works. In responding the given drama, the students were asked several questions. Then, the students answered the questions based on their interpretation and understanding. The study revealed several findings. The findings of the first part revealed that the students showed active engagement in the reading of drama because they were able to tell their enjoyment of the story, make a relation between the story and the other's life experiences, and make judgments and arguments about the things happened in the story. The finding of the second part revealed that the student participants were able to actualize themselves upon the drama they were reading and put it into the reflective essays or reflections.

Key Words: drama, literary analysis, reader-response, reflection.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas tentang analisis karya sastra dalam ragam drama yang dilakukan oleh mahasiswa dengan menggunakan pendekatan Tanggapan Pembaca (*Reader-response approach*). Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui bagaimana mahasiswa pembelajar Bahasa Inggris terlibat dalam telaah drama sebagai salah satu ragam dalam karya sastra dan bagaimana mereka membuat analisis karya sastra dengan pendekatan *Reader-response*. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menganalisis esai refleksi mahasiswa yang merupakan cara bagaimana mahasiswa-mahasiswa tersebut memberi tanggapan terhadap sebuah drama berbahasa Inggris yang berjudul "The Other Player" karya Owen G. Arno. Penelitian ini melibatkan 9 orang mahasiswa pada mata kuliah *Introduction to Literature* pada prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas swasta di Jawa Barat. Mata Kuliah *Introduction to Literature* diberikan pada mahasiswa untuk mengenalkan kesusastraan dan karya sastra kepada mahasiswa dan mengajak mereka untuk dapat mengevaluasi, menggambarkan, dan menganalisis karya sastra. Dalam menuliskan tanggapan mereka, para mahasiswa diberikan beberapa pertanyaan sebagai bahan diskusi, kemudian mereka menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut sesuai dengan pemahaman dan interpretasi mereka masing-masing. Penelitian ini menghasilkan beberapa temuan. Temuan pada bagian yang pertama menunjukkan keterlibatan mahasiswa yang aktif dalam pembacaan drama karena mereka dapat menjelaskan pendapat mereka tentang cerita dalam drama tsb. Mereka juga dapat mengaitkan cerita dengan pengalaman-pengalaman sehari-hari. Selain itu mereka juga bisa memberikan argument-argumen tentang apa yang terjadi di dalam cerita tsb. Temuan pada bagian kedua

menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa dapat mengekspresikan diri dari cerita drama yang mereka baca dan menuliskannya dalam esai refleksi.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Karya Sastra, Drama, Tangapan Pembaca, Refleksi



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INTRODUCTION

Drama is a genre of literature that has specialties compared to poetry or fiction. Teaching drama in EFL classrooms has merits in that it provides the students the opportunity to enrich their critical thinking ability, as well as Prose and Poetry, does. What makes drama different from other kinds of literature is that drama is made not only to be read and comprehended but also to be performed on stage. In English language teaching, drama, as a genre of literature, plays a great role in improving the students' oral skills in English. As conveyed by Lazar (1993) one of the reasons why a teacher needs to make use of drama is that it improves the student's oral skills, pronunciation, confidence, and non-verbal features, as also suggested in the present study. Concerning improving the students' fluency in speaking English, he explained that since most plays are rich in dialogue, using a drama with the students is beneficial and exciting for the students to focus on conversational dialogue. The drama's dialogue might differ from that of daily conversation, but it can be used to highlight certain important features of conversational discourse. Other reasons suggested by Lazar are that drama performance can improve the students' involvement (motivation and group cohesion), meaningful contexts (language acquisition and memorization), and exposure to language in conversation (what someone means, ordering and sequencing in exchange, and status and relationship). He also suggested that with groups that respond well to drama activities, putting on one scene or a short play, can be both enjoyable and rewarding. This possibly means that performing one script of drama, or play, in groups can enable the students to practice their language skills, especially the skill of speaking English. Besides that, the member of a drama performance group, when rehearsing, can be peers to the other group members. Drama is one of the literary works taught to the students of the English Education Program of one private university in West Java. It is introduced to the students in a literary subject as one genre of literature. Another definition of drama comes from Chin and Glencoe (2002), who defined drama as a story told mainly through the characters' words and actions (Chin & Glencoe/McGraw-Hill., 2002). Following this definition, they explained that the drama story unfolds on a stage or television screen.

Some studies are related to teaching drama to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Among them were Nanda and Susanto (2021). In their study, the writers conducted a research project on using drama in EFL classrooms to explore the student's knowledge and learning and the teacher's perceptions of the implementation of drama for the students in the classrooms. The findings of their study revealed that the students showed good engagement and comprehension abilities. Also, the teachers' perceptions reflected the pedagogical context, which offered possibilities for cultural production in language learning (Nanda & Susanto, 2021).

Another study concerning the teaching of drama to EFL students was carried out by Angelianawati (2019). In the study, she reviewed current theories and research findings on the

use of drama in English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language teaching and learning "to better understand the use of drama to facilitate learning in EFL classrooms". Her study revealed that drama is essential to portray one or another through actions and words. EFL classrooms excitingly promote the students' language skills, thinking skills, and creativity (Angelianawati, 2019). A similar thought was revealed by Ratih (2019). She carried out a study that described the implementation of drama and dramatic activities in teaching English literature. She also investigated the students' opinions on the performance of drama as a technique to teach English literature. The study's findings revealed that drama was an alternative way that facilitated the learners to experience autonomous learning and allowed the student to show their ability in front of the audience (Ratih, 2019). Another study stating the importance of using drama in English Language Teaching (ELT) was carried out by Wahyuningtyas *et.al* (2022). They believed that drama had some functions that could be found in ELT activities (Wahyuningtyas & Savitri, 2022).

Literary works are the products of literature. It can take the forms of poems, short stories, novels, and drama. These literary works are classified as the genres of literature or literary genres. As Febriani *et al.* (2020) put it, "Reading literary works involves the ability to think critically to understand what authors intend to convey through their works" (Febriani *et al.* 2020). They also stated that the students' analysis of literary works encouraged their critical thinking about plots, characters, etc. This opinion followed that of another previous study conducted by Nurhamidah *et al.* (2019) stating that literary works reflected the 'selves' of the author in a more possible way (Nurhamidah *et al.*, 2019).

Making Reflections, or reflective essays, is compulsory for the students in teaching literature to English as a Foreign Language students. This becomes one of the ways that the students acknowledge what they have learned from and interpret from a literary work, as also stated by Adeani *et al.* (2020). It is from the student's reflections that the teacher can assess and examine the way the students responded to literary work. Sharif and Zainuddin (2017) highlighted reflective writing as it was believed that written reflection was more potential than oral discussion since it provided a permanent record for later referencing (Sharif & Zainuddin 2017). That is not all. Writing activity and critical thinking are two subjects that contribute to each other, i.e., students can generate ideas through writing, and writing facilitates students. Critical thinking (Rohayati, 2017). Thus, in the context of education, it might be implied that reflections or reflective essay was fostered through writing reflective portfolios. R

Reading and responding to various text sources is very lucrative since it can boost critical thinking (Rohayati, 2017). There are multiple ways that EFL students can respond to literature. The present study used the reader-response approach to literary analysis to facilitate the students' responses to literary works. By using this approach, the students can actualize themselves in literary works. The reader-response approach is one approach to analyzing literary works that emphasizes the reader's role in drawing their personal experiences, opinions, feelings, and interpretation of literary works. This view echoed that of Iskhak *et al.* Al (2020) claims that Reader-response in reading-writing literary works generally resulted in creative responses that included the readers' intellectual and emotional accounts (Iskhak *et al.*, 2020). Having previously discussed Reader-response based on the previous studies, the writer concludes that the Reader-response approach emphasizes the readers' freedom in responding to literary works. Someone who reads and has sufficient knowledge can present their critical thinking and write effectively and adequately (Rohayati & Lilies, 2019). Thus, the emphasis lies on the reader's role in interpreting a text.

The present study is aimed at investigating the students' engagement in reading drama as one of the literary genres along with prose (short stories and novels) and Poetry, and how the students respond to drama by sharing their self-enjoyment, analysis, questions, and analysis to

the given drama. To be made it clear, in the present study, the writer focuses on the students' working on the drama as one authentic materials of literature rather than on drama which is performed on a stage. The novelty of the current research lies in applying the Reader-response approach to literary analysis in finding out how English as a Foreign Language students respond to a drama as one of the literary genres.

METHODS

The present study was designed in a qualitative method. It focused on implementing drama in English learning classrooms of an English Education Program in one private university in West Java. Regarding the site of the study, the context of literary subjects are among the subjects taught to the students. There are three subjects belong to the literary subjects, namely *Introduction to Literature*, *Literary Criticism*, and *Literature for Language Education*. For the current study, the writer conducted the study on the students who had enrolled in the *Introduction to Literature* subject. In the subject, the students are introduced to literary genres and exposed to reading various literary works of the three genres of literature, such as poems, short stories, and drama.

The present study was aimed at investigating e students' engagement in reading drama as one of the literary genres and how the students respond to drama by sharing their enjoyment, analysis, questions, and evaluation of the given drama. Discussing how the students get engaged in reading drama and respond to drama, the writer employed a qualitative research design, which emphasizes describing a particular activity, situation, field, and behavior of people in-depth and in a detailed way, as defined by Fraenkel and Wallen, cited by Adeani, Febriani, and Syafryadin (Adeani et al., 2020). The qualitative study employed a document analysis of the student's reflection essays.

Research Participants

The present study participants consisted of nine undergraduate students who had enrolled in a literary subject named *Introduction to Literature* taught at the English Education Program of one private university in West Java. The nine students have completed the issue and thus have reflected on a drama given to them in the classroom.

Research Instrument

This study was carried out by analyzing the students' portfolios of reflective essays. The drama assigned to the students was entitled "The Other Player"ritten by Owen G. Arno (Bode, n.d.). The drama was chosen considering it contained an unpredictable ending and offered twisted conflict that can arouse the students' critical thinking. Also, the language used in the drama is familiar since the dialogue was delivered in such a way that is usually used in daily conversation. The student's reflection essays were analyzed to examine how they get engaged in the story and how they responded to drama.

Research Procedures

In writing their reflection essay, the students were provided with some discussion questions to stimulate their interest and their interpretation of the story of the drama. The discussion questions consisted of five items of questions and were as follows:

- a. What do you know about the major characters' relationship with their leading role in the story?
- b. Why do you think the story challenges your stance of agreeing with the main character's choice of doing something you prefer?
- c. Write five sentences representing your judgments for thinking the story deserves high appreciation.

- d. Make a kind of mind mapping (e.g., skeleton) of the story you have enjoyed.
- e. What would you do to make the story more interesting if you were the writer?

The students should also include their students' engagement (for instance, feelings when reading it), their associations with other life experiences, and their explanation of why the story happened in their reflection, as well as the discussion questions that previously have been mentioned in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A brief explanation of drama, reflective essay, and the Reader-response approach has been previously presented. The current study was conducted by assigning the students to read a drama entitled "The Other Player" by Owen G. Arno. The study examines the EFL students' engagement in making a literary analysis of an English drama and how the EFL students make a Reader-response literary analysis of the drama. This section attempts to elaborate on the results of the present study.

The EFL students' engagement in making a literary analysis of an English drama

From the reflective essays written by the students enrolled in the subject of *Introduction to Literature* at the English Education Program of one private university in West Java, it appeared that the students could engage themselves with the story of the drama assigned to them. Their engagements could be seen from several ways: 1) the way they conveyed their feelings; 2) how they made a connection with others' life experiences; 3) how they analyzed and evaluated the events that happened in the story; and 4) the reasons why the story was as it was. Also, they could make evaluative judgments and arguments for the events that happened in the story of the drama. Having read the drama, the students were asked to write a reflection or a reflective essay. As previously explained, the students' reflections record what they mentally encountered while reading the drama. In doing so, the writer asked the students to follow Gibbs' reflective cycle model of reflection. This model provides a structured way of writing that can help give ideas to the students on what to write in their reflections. Gibbs' reflective cycle model consists of six stages. Adeani et al. elaborated that the stages included the Description stage, the Feeling stage, the Evaluation stage, the Analysis stage, the Conclusion stage, and the Action Plan stage (Adeani et al., 2020).

Writing reflection is effective in literature classes since it allows the students to express what they had in mind when reading a literary work and record it in the form of writing so that teachers can find out what the students had understood and interpreted from the story, as well as evaluated and analyzed it. A view on the effectiveness of using reflective writing or reflection was stated by Sudirman (2021, who said that reflection allowed students to reflect on their actions and perform with the maximum skill, knowledge, and confidence through reflective journals (Sudirman et al., 2021). Reflection, therefore, is a way for the participant teacher to acknowledge the students' engagement in making a literary analysis of the drama. This view echoed a previous expert saying that reflection could be defined as a cognitive process to learn from experience (Sööt & Viskus, 2015).

The EFL students' Reader-response Literary Analysis of the drama

The research questions addressed the issues of how the students got engaged in a reading drama entitled "The Other Player" written by Owen G. Arno, and how the students respond to the drama. The first issue was analyzed by asking the students some questions. It is followed by the second issue which was analyzed by assigning the students to make a reflection including their enjoyment and feelings, their associations with other life experiences, and their explanation of why the story happened in their reflection. The first part of this section which

discussed the students' engagement with drama by examining each student-participants answers to the questions given to them is given in the following paragraphs.

Drama, as one of the genres belonging to literature, has several merits. Through drama reading, students are provided with authentic material. This means that the students learn the language, in this case, the English language, from authentic literary work, rather than from textbooks. Through drama, the students are also allowed to peek at other people's lives and learn lessons by relating them to their own experiences. This view is supported by Rahimipour who believed that the students need to utilize drama to enhance their understanding of life experiences (Rahimipour, 2020).

In answering the first question, "What do you know about the major characters' relationship with their leading role in the story?" the first student said that she knew little about Jeffery and Peter and thought that the relationship between the two characters was not good. She added that the relationship between Collin and Jeffrey was complicated but touching at the same time. The second student described Jeffrey as Peter's rival in a tennis match. The third student highlighted the competition in which Jeffrey cheated on victory in the tennis match by stealing Peter's "lucky" racket. The fourth student also highlighted the rivalry between Jeffrey and Peter in the school tennis match. The fifth student answered the first question by describing Jeffrey and Peter's contradictory characteristics. The sixth student revealed the truth in her own opinion about Jeffrey and Peter, putting Jeffrey as the antagonist while Peter is the protagonist. The seventh student also put Jeffrey as the antagonist and Peter as the protagonist. The eighth student highlighted Jeffrey's father as superior because he made the biggest donation. To respect and preserve Jeffrey's father so as not to stop giving funds, the school provided special treatment for these rich children based on how much their parents donated to the school. The last student saw Peter and Jeffrey as schoolmates but rivals in a tennis competition.

In answering the second question, "Why do you think the story very much challenges your stance of agreeing with the main character's choice of doing something you prefer?", the first student answered that she thought it was all right if Jeffrey always wanted to win in every competition because he wanted to show his father and get attention from him, which he lacked. The second student said she liked that Peter dared tell Jeffrey's father the truth. The third student answered that the main character was explained as a good person who was perfect and flawless. The fourth student said that he believed Jeffrey was a good son and an example for other children. The fifth student said she liked Jeffrey's ambition and deserved a victory for his hard work. The sixth student said that she fancied Peter's attitude. The seventh student said that she thought an unjust action was portrayed in the story. The eighth student noted that she was angry with Jeffrey due to his bad attitude. The last student answered that she liked it and that the truth was revealed in the end.

In answering the third question, "write five sentences representing your judgments for thinking that the story deserves high appreciation", the students gave various answers representing their judgments for thinking that the story deserved high appreciation. To mention them, some students wrote, "This story was unique and special," "This story gives much value to the reader," "This story increases the reader's thinking critically," and "The story is suitable for every people," and The story gives the reader motivation to change to be better."

In answering the fourth question, "Make a kind of mind mapping (e.g., skeleton) of the story you have enjoyed," each student makes a mind mapping based on what they understood from the story of the drama. In answering the fifth question, "What would you do to make the story more interesting if you were the writer?" all students gave various answers, such as "If I were the writer, I would add the character of this story. The character will be the additional character that will make the story clear. I am quite dissatisfied with the conclusion of the story. It doesn't clear and will make the reader confused about what happened. What is the ending of the story?"

The second part of this study was to determine how the students respond to the drama by analyzing the students' reflections. Nine students' reflection essays were analyzed to examine how the EFL students made a Reader-response Literary Analysis on a drama. This part required the students to make a reflection in term of their enjoyment and feelings, their associations with other life experiences, and their explanation of why the story happened in their reflection.

The first student wrote her reflection in quite a short but meaningful way. At the beginning of her reflection, she summarized the story and introduced the main characters involved in the story. Later she described her feelings when she was reading the drama and finding out that Jeffrey had passed away. She also acknowledged her curiosity about how the story ended. In the next paragraph of her reflection, she made a relation of experience that happened in the story. She learned from the story that she needed to be careful and give proper attention to her loved ones. Unfortunately, she did not elaborate on why the story happened based on her own opinion.

The second student wrote a longer and more detailed reflection. She acknowledged her impression of the main characters. She also gave a summary of the story. In the next part of her reflection, she related the story to others' experiences. She explained the improper communication among family members that resulted in risking one's life. Thus, according to the student's essay, the story happened because of the lack of communication between a father and his son.

Responding to the drama, the third student wrote several points. Firstly, she conveyed her judgments about the main characters and acknowledged her disappointment and anger that Peter did not return the racket while she could not find out why Peter did so. Secondly, she related the characters' lives in the drama to her own life experiences by pointing out that the events in the story often occurred in real life. Thirdly, the student interpreted that the story aimed to tell people about the consequences of the mistakes people usually make and encourage them to be more honest, loving, and braver. Lastly, she wrapped up it by saying that the story had been outstanding.

The reflection essay written by the fourth student showed thoughts similar to those of the previously discussed students. He made a summary of the story. He also conveyed his feelings and ideas related to the events that happened in the drama. Lastly, he told the story of his own experience by stating that he had never come to the situation described in the story.

The reflection of the fifth student showed that the student made it to describe the characteristics of the main characters in the drama. It also revealed the student's feelings and thought about the story. The reflection also included the student's relation of her own experience to the events told in the story. Lastly, she pointed out that the story was good since it contained interesting values of life.

The sixth student wrote a very detailed reflection. She successfully described how she felt when reading the drama, how she thought about the main characters, and how she was curious about how the story ended. She also associated the level of drama with others' experiences. She concluded that there were parents who still thought that money was everything. The explanation of why the story happened in the story was also elaborated in her reflection essay. According to her, several reasons for each problem occurred in the story. The student also added an evaluative judgment and appropriate arguments for judging the quality of the story.

The reflection essay of the seventh student was less detailed than the previous one. However, she conveyed her confusion about which character was the good one and the bad one. She could not infer whether or not Peter and the other way around is good, and vise versa. She also presented a summary of the story, and he attempted to relate the story to her own experience by comparing the story of "The Other Player" with other literary stories.

The reflection essay written by the eighth student included her engagement with the story, her association with others' life experiences, her explanation of why the story happened, and

evaluative judgments as well as appropriate arguments for judging the quality of the story. As so did the ninth student who made similar thoughts and judgments to other previous students.

CONCLUSION

The present study has elaborated how the students had been engaged in making the literary analysis of a drama entitled "The Other Player" written by Owen G. Arno by using the Reader-Response approach. The study has also elaborated on how the students expressed their feelings and opinions after they read the drama. In addition, the students are encouraged to relate what they understood from the drama to their own experiences. The students showed active engagement in the reading of drama because they were able to tell their enjoyment of the story, make a relation between the story and the other's life experiences, and make judgments and arguments about the things happened in the story. Based on the findings of the study, the writer finds the merits of using drama in English as a Foreign Language classrooms as follows. Firstly, the use of drama in English as a Foreign Language classrooms is beneficial to stimulate the students' engagement and critical thinking skills. Secondly, the students were able to the major characters' relationships with their leading roles in the story. Thirdly, The students were able to explain why the story very much challenges their stance of agreeing with the main character's choice of doing something they prefer. Fourthly, the students were able to convey their judgments for thinking that the story deserves high appreciation the next benefit is that the students were able to explain how would they do to make the story more interesting if they were the writer. And last but not the least, the student's engagement in the story of drama was shown since they were able to make a personal engagement (i.e. likes and dislikes) towards the story, make a connection between the story to the real-life experience, and make judgments (analysis and evaluation) reflected in their reflective essays.

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