

The Effects of Writing Literary Response Paper on Different Aspects of Students' Attitudes toward Literature

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Abstract: *The present study was conducted to investigate the effects of writing literary response paper on different aspects of students' attitudes toward literature. To this end, 30 EFL learners studying English at Zabansara English Language Institute participated. They were divided into two groups; one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. To collect the data, the study was carried out in three phases. Both groups were pretested through the Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) at the first phase. During the second phase, consisting of two steps, the participants of the experimental group were asked to write literary responses to the selected texts during six weeks, while the participants of the control group were asked to discuss about the selected texts in class. After six weeks of treatment, the two groups were posttested through the LRQ questionnaire at the third phase. The analysis of the data was done using covariance (ANCOVA), t-test and descriptive statistics. The results demonstrated that the experimental group outperformed the comparison group. Finally, it was concluded that writing literary response paper affects EFL students' attitudes toward literature but reader type does not mediate the effect of writing literary response paper on EFL students' attitudes toward literature.*

Keywords: *Attitude, Literature, Literary response paper*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is more valuable in many countries all over the world. If students know their own language literature, studying English literature will be interesting and they will have contrastive analysis views between two languages; so students are faced with new complex contents and different usages of language. In addition, various genres have different effects as students can feel and adapt literature with their real lives (Lazar, 1993).

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The history of using literature in language curriculum to practice grammar, vocabulary, translation and writing refers to an era which grammar-translation method was applied in foreign language classroom all around the world (Richards & Rogers, 1986), in order to access great literature as well as help learners to understand their native languages better through translation and analyzing the target language grammar (Omaggio, 2000). Nevertheless, when audiolingualism and related methods appeared, in teaching and learning domains, they changed the minds with focus on oral skills rather than written.

In spite of the prominent role of literature in language study (Widdowson, 1982), for a long time, it was deprived from the language programs with achievement of linguistic proficiency aim. Some linguists such as Topping (1968) believed that literature must stay out of ESL curriculum because of lack of standard rules, cultural perspective and structural complexity. But in recent years, many educators consider the academic, intellectual, cultural, and linguistic advantages of the study of literature (Spack, 1985). In fact, there is an inseparable relationship between literature and language; literature is built on language (Naik, 2011 & Lalch, 2007); “Through literature, students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity” (Henning 1993, P. 24). Collie and Slater (1990, p. 3) indicate four major reasons to use literature in the classroom, “literature provides: (1) valuable authentic material, (2) cultural enrichment, (3) language enrichment, and (4) personal involvement”.

Many researchers (Carter and Long 1991; Lazar 1993; McRae 1991; Murdoch 1992; Oster 1989; Ali 1994; Commander 1994; Davis 1989; Ibsen 1990; Papalia 1987; Elliott 1990; Hirvela 1996) have confirmed possible usage of reader-response theory to literature in the language classroom; readers engage and create what Elliott (1990) calls “genuine responses”, that is, to what extent readers penetrate into texts significantly and meaningfully. Reader-response theory as an educational tool has played an effective role in teaching. This theory was introduced by Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995) called “transactional theory of literature”: an active relationship between the reader and the text.

Attitude, as well as literature, is concentrated researchers’ attention for many years. According to Candlin and Mercer (2001) students’ attitudes toward the language plays a significant role in their success in learning a language. Individual differences such as age, gender, language background and peer influences are some variables that influence language attitudes in learning a language (Merisou-Strom, 2007). Brown (2007) mentions that attitudes can be shaped by the social context; “develop early in childhood and are the result of parents and peers’ attitudes” (p. 192).

Research Questions

The research questions formulated for the purpose of this study are:

1. Does writing literary response paper affect EFL students’ attitudes toward literature?

2. Does reader type mediate the effect of writing literary response paper on EFL students' attitudes toward literature?
3. Which aspects of students' attitudes are affected more by writing literary response paper?

Theoretical Framework

Figures including Martha Nussbaum's (1997), Maxine Greene's (1995), and John Dewey's (1938), through narrative imagination, notion of literary imagination, and theory of education and experience respectively are the advocates of Rosenblatt's reader response theory and for this reason the framework of this study is on this foundation. They hold this belief that as students are to be prepared for the real world, they need to be ready to think in a way that they are able to show that they are able to understand others feelings or difficulties.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have been done on literature and students' attitudes. For instance, Davis, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh (1992) investigated undergraduates' attitudes toward the study of literature in a foreign language as well as factors affecting their opinions. Akyel and Yalçin (1990) examined EFL high students' perceptions of prose fiction, poetry and drama together with their resulting contributions in developing language competence and literary competence. Hirvela and Boyle (1988) examined ESL working adult learners' attitudes towards literature courses offered in a degree program in a university; they concluded that students' attitudes, teacher goals and suitable texts result a satisfied course for both students and teachers.

The significance of improving literary competence and student response is mentioned in a study have been done by Elliott (1990); he believes that literature can be effective if readers engage with its qualities, thoughts and emotions. In the other hand, Brumfit (1985, as cited in Elliott, 1990) emphasizes the process rather than the product and states that "The process of reading is a process of meaning-creation by integrating one's own needs, understanding and expectation with a written text" (P. 119). Likewise, Holland (1975, as cited in Carlisle, 2000) confirms that "readers recreate a story in their own style" (P. 201). Brumfit also expresses that generalizing a text to the other different personal and social aspects is a primary ability for an authentic reader. In doing so, Carlisle (2000) follows that teaching literature as an aesthetic experience must be done before starting reading as well as asking about what a reader elicit from a text.

In a study, focusing on Louise Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory, Holloway (2004) explores how to cultivate literary imagination and develop empathic understanding toward others. She discusses that each time teachers allow students to link their experiences to what they read; they gain a bit more understanding about themselves and others. To increase their understanding, they must often be able to use their imagination to place themselves in situations

far removed from their own. Once students are able to imagine through reading what life is like in the shoes of another, they can expand their understanding of the experience of others and develop empathy for people who are different.

In another study, Liaw (2001), in an investigation of literary responses in an EFL classroom discussed that literature, if taught in a response-based manner, needs not be only a vehicle for language teaching but also a form of cultural understanding that enhances the experience of reading in a foreign language. The results of this study were also in proportion to the current study. Liaw also argues that in contrast to Martin and Lauri's (1993) finding that some foreign language students did not find literature reading useful in improving their four skills in the target language, the students in the his study felt that they had gained confidence in reading English texts and even enjoyed it. On the other hand, his study supports the survey findings of Davis (1992) that FL students' positive attitudes toward literary study are related to the opportunity they are given to express their personal opinions, look for the underlying meaning of the text, and read about people and experiences from which they can draw personal relevance. Obviously, the results of the current study are also in consistent with Davis's study as well.

In addition, Ali (1994) found positive results about reader-response approach on advanced EFL students in reading class; Häusler Gross (2004) examined the influence of background knowledge for reader response to foreign language literary text; Kohl (1997) investigated the literary response of ludic adolescent readers to two stories and Carlisle (2000) described the application of reader-response theory in ELT through writing reading logs.

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants

To accomplish the hypothesized objectives of this study, 30 male advanced students of Zabansara English Language Institute, Sanandaj Branch, consisting of two classes were studied. The age range varied from 15 to 20. All the participants have passed the placement test of the institute, when they entered and started studying English there, as well as, the achievement tests at end of each semester; so they were homogenous in this regard. In fact, all the participants had not taken any English literature course during their education.

Instrumentation and Material

The following instruments and materials were used to accomplish this study; all data were collected through objective measures.

Questionnaire: A questionnaire entitled Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) was developed by Miall and Kuiken (1995) to provide scales that measure seven aspects of readers'

interest toward literary texts: Insight, Empathy, Imagery Vividness, Leisure Escape, Concern with Author, Story-Driven Reading, and Rejecting Literary Values.

These seven items are *first order factors*, while Miall and Kuiken group the scores into the *second order factors* named **Experiencing** and **Literal Comprehension**. The scores showed that there was a positive correlation among Insight, Empathy, Imagery Vividness, and Leisure Escape while scores in Story-Driven Reading and Rejecting Literary Values tend to correlate together. In that case, if the scores are higher in the first four factors, more like the Experiencing Reader (i.e. rates high in intensity of imagination), or higher in the two last factors, more like the Literal Comprehension Reader (i.e. high respect for traditional values and moral implications of a story).

Literary works: The materials were chosen for this study from different genres and themes, included three short stories, two poems and two short plays.

Literary response paper: To achieve the aim of this study, writing response to literature was conducted as a tool to engage students in literature in order to measure to what extent it would affect their attitudes toward literature.

Procedure

The participants of the study, who were 30 male advanced students, were put into two similar groups consisting of 15 students in each one; one group as the experimental group and the other as the control group. All data for this study were collected during two summer semesters of 2015 in two advanced level English classes. Each semester lasted six weeks (about one and half months) and met three times a week on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays for a 90 minute class period. To collect data for this study, the study was divided into three phases as follows:

- Pre-Treatment Phase: Administering the Literary Response Questionnaire as the pretest
- While-Treatment Phase:
 - Step 1: Familiarizing students with writing literary response paper
 - Step 2: Writing literary response paper
- Post-Treatment Phase: Administering the Literary Response Questionnaire as the posttest

Pre-Reading Phase. At the beginning of the first summer semester, the questionnaire (LRQ) was administered to the students in both groups during the first class meeting as a pretest. The survey contained 68 Likert-scaled questions from one to five that students complete it by putting a check mark into the appropriate box.

While-Reading Phase. This phase was divided into two steps. First the students were familiar with how to write literary response paper and then they started the second step which was writing literary response paper to the selected texts based on the purpose of the study.

Step 1: The first step included familiarizing students with writing literary response paper during the first summer semester. Only the experimental group received some writing samples and had sufficient in-class and out-of-class practices; their response papers were checked and turned in by the researcher to check their familiarization and understanding.

In order to check their capabilities and readiness to write literary response paper, at the end of first summer semester in one 90-minute-class period meeting, students in the experimental group read the selected short story and responded in writing into given printed writing sheets which had been prepared for this purpose. Before students started reading, they were given a set of questions for reader response activities and they were asked to use these prompts and were required to respond to at least five of them. This set of guide questions was developed by Probst (1988) in order to encourage reflection on several aspects of the act of reading; and it was used by Gross (2004) in his study. Students took about 30 minutes to read the story and then began to write responses. All students finished the task during the class period. Responses were collected and coded using the coding system by the researcher and the students' teacher as raters in order to check consistency of the raters' scores. The coding system will be described in detail in the next section. The interrater reliability of the raters' scores was measured through reliability Coefficient, Cronbach alpha and indicated the high correlation, that is, about 82%. This results of this step implied that students had sufficient practices to understand the instructions and responded to the prompt.

Step 2. Data collection of this step took place during the second summer semester for six weeks. Unlike the first step, out-of-class written response was used for the second step.

Each student in the experimental group was given a packet including a set of guide questions and 6 writing sheets to record their responses. The students' information was printed on the sheets as follows: name, age, gender, level, semester, title of the literary work, written response number and week number. The set of open-ended guide questions for reader response activities was geared to help students to organize their thoughts, emotions and ideas to respond to the literary texts.

Every week students in both groups received a printed selected text including two poems, two short stories and two short plays. The experimental group responded the texts in writing and turned them in until the end of that week. They were planned to respond to six selected texts in different genres during six weeks of the second summer semester. On the other hand, the control group read the texts and discussed them in the class.

The written responses of the experimental group were analyzed according to Category Coding System developed by Cox and Many (1989) to determine the content category of individual thoughts units. This coding system was used by Kohl (1997) in his study titled

“Literary responses of ludic adolescent readers to two short stories”. This system represented seven categories while were explained as follows:

- *Engaging*: It expresses how readers personally involve to the story and emotionally response to the text.
- *Connecting*: It states to what extent readers connect the text to their experiences, knowledge or to other texts.
- *Describing*: It contains readers’ description of the text, characters, events or actions.
- *Interpreting*: It interprets characters’ feelings, themes and authors’ intentions. It also contains predictions about the story.
- *Judging*: It indicates the judgment of the text, characters and situations.
- *Situating*: It includes readers’ statements about the text that shows they have read the text already or would like to share it with others.
- *Recalling*: It contains retelling the facts about the story or characters.

Post-Reading Phase. At the end of the second summer semester during the last class meeting, students in both groups completed the (LRQ) questionnaire again as a posttest.

Statistical Analysis

To achieve the aim of the study, the questionnaires which students in both experimental and control groups had completed as pre and posttests were analyzed to investigate and answer the research questions. Also, to find out the type of readers: Experiencing reader and Literal Comprehension reader, the mean score for first four factors (i.e. **Insight, Empathy, Imagery Vividness** and **Leisure Escape**) and two last factors (i.e. **Story-Driven Reading** and **Rejecting Literary Values**) was calculated; the fifth factor (**Concern with Author**) was ignored because according to the questionnaire’s authors, it does not fit easily into that pattern. All the results were analyzed using SPSS through ANCOVA, t-test and descriptive statistics.

3. RESULTS

The results of the study presented in three steps, providing answers for each of the research questions.

Q1: Writing literary response paper and EFL students’ attitudes towards literature

In order to testify the truth or falsity of the first research hypothesis, the researcher distributed the relevant questionnaire to the students both prior to and following the treatment

and the score means difference between the two groups, using One-way ANCOVA, was calculated. In so doing, SPSS Software Version 23:00 was utilized.

Before running One-way ANCOVA, a number of assumptions including the linearity for each group, the homogeneity of regression slopes between the covariate and the dependent variable for each group as well as the assumption of equality of variance are needed to be met.

Figure: 1
The linearity for each group

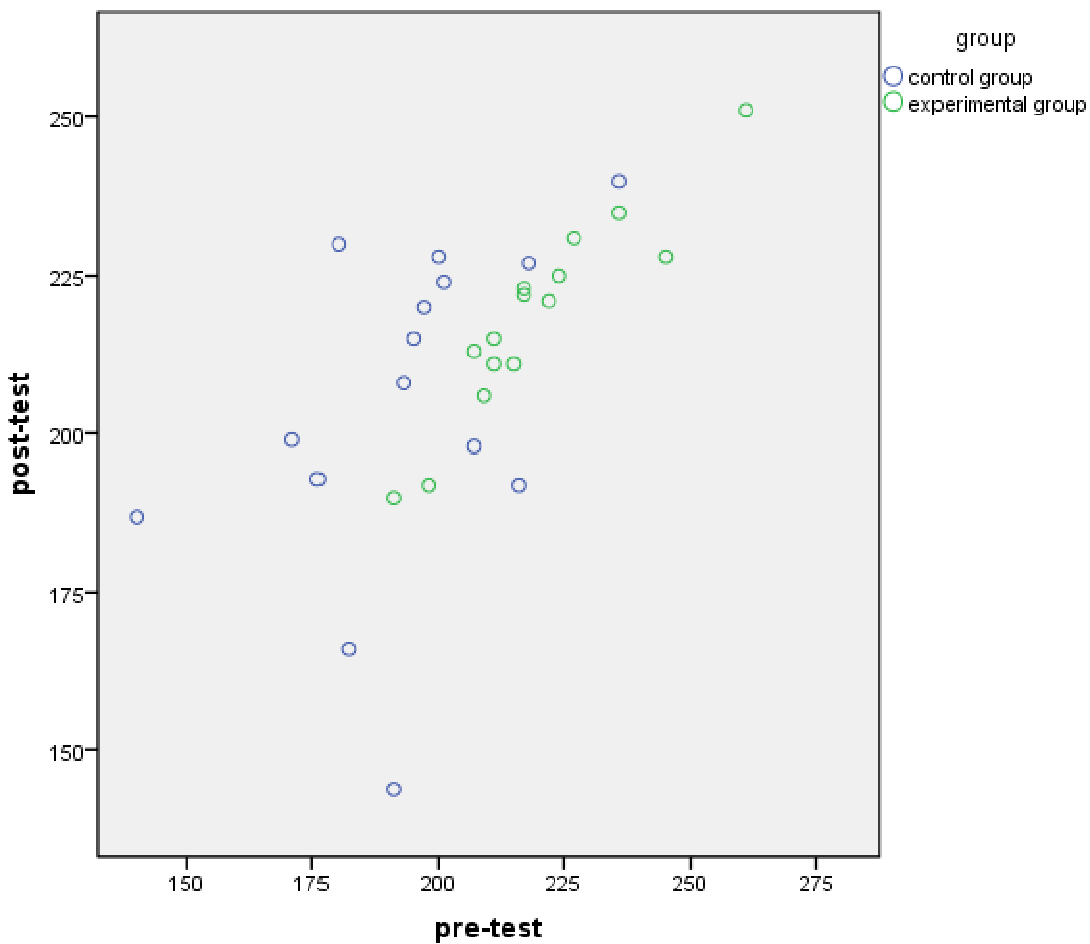


Table: 1

Tests of between-subjects effects for significant level of the interaction term

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5886.358 ^a	2	2943.179	9.361	.001	.409
Intercept	1865.394	1	1865.394	5.933	.022	.180
Pre	4512.725	1	4512.725	14.353	.061	.347
Group	34.516	1	34.516	.110	.043	.074
Error	8489.142	27	314.413			
Total	1356343.000	30				
Corrected Total	14375.500	29				

a. R Squared = .409 (Adjusted R Squared = .366)

The Sig or probability value was .335, safely above the cut-off (.05). There has not been violation of the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes.

Table: 2

Levene's test of equality of error variances^a for violation of the assumption

F	df1	df2	Sig.
9.499	1	28	.085

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + pre + group

Table: 3

Descriptive Statistics for students' attitudes toward literature

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	control group	204.73	26.078
experimental group	218.27	15.768	15
Total	211.50	22.264	30

Table: 4

Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5886.358 ^a	2	2943.179	9.361	.001	.409
Intercept	1865.394	1	1865.394	5.933	.022	.180
Pre	4512.725	1	4512.725	14.353	.061	.347
Group	34.516	1	34.516	.110	.043	.074
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The main ANCOVA results were presented in Table 4. The researcher tried to find out whether the groups were significantly different in terms of their scores on the dependent variable, that is, on the post-test. The line corresponding to the independent variable (in this case Group) was followed and read across to the column labeled Sig. Since the value in this column was less than .05 (here, .04), the groups differed significantly. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the students' attitudes towards literature scores for subjects in the experimental group and the control group, after controlling for scores on the pre- test administered prior to the intervention.

The effect size was also checked, as indicated by the corresponding partial eta squared value. The value in this case is only .07 (a moderate effect size). The guidelines (proposed by Cohen, 1988) for interpreting this value are:

.01=small effect,

.06=moderate effect,

.14=large effect.

Q2: Students' reader type and their attitudes towards literature

Table: 5

Frequency and percent of reader type

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid literal comprehension	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
experiential	17	56.7	56.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

As the table shows, the frequency of students who were literal comprehension was less than those who were experiential.

Table: 6
Independent Samples Test for reader type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
post-test	Equal variances assumed	2.7	.10	-1.38	28	.17	-11.19	8.07	-27.74	5.34
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.30	18.9	.20	-11.19	8.58	-29.16	6.76

As Table 1 indicates, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is *more* than .05 which is .17 and there is no significant difference in the mean scores on the dependent variable for each of the two groups.

Q3: Students' responses with respect to the factors of questionnaire

Table: 7
Frequency and percent of the factors of questionnaire

		Frequency	percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative Percent
Valid	insight	1335	20.3	20.3	20.3
	empathy	717	10.9	10.9	31.3
	imagery vividness	957	14.6	14.6	45.8
	leisure escape	1070	16.3	16.3	62.1
	concern with author	954	14.5	14.5	76.7
	story-driven reading	846	12.9	12.9	89.6
	rejecting literacy values	686	10.4	10.4	100.0
Total		6565	100.0	100.0	

4. DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis conducted to address the research questions and null hypotheses showed the results as follows:

The results of the analysis related to the first question rejected the first null hypothesis and showed that writing literary response paper affects on EFL students' attitudes toward literature. In order to compare the performance of the experimental and control group, analysis of Covariance One-way ANCOVA was employed. By doing so, there was a significant difference in the students' attitudes towards literature in the experimental group and the control group before and after treatment, in other words the experimental group outperformed the control group. This outcome of the present study can be considered as an additional support for some scholars theories in literature, such as Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995), John Dewey (1938), Maxine Green (1995) and Martha Nussbaum (1997). They all believe the outcome of education is for students to be prepared to face the world and make contributions to improve society. These contributions can begin when students learn to think critically and show empathy for others.

In order to test the second null hypothesis, to see if the difference between the two reader type groups (Experiencing reader or Literal Comprehension reader) mediate the effect of writing literary response paper and their attitudes towards literature, t-test formula was run and the results obtained from the data indicated that reader type did not affect EFL students' attitudes towards literature. Accordingly, the second null hypothesis was not rejected.

Based on descriptive statistic related to the third question to find out which aspects of students' attitudes were affected more by writing literary response paper, the percentages of the students' responses with respect to the factors of questionnaire from the most to the least included: 1) Insight (20.3 %), 2) Leisure escape (16.3%), 3) Imagery vividness (14.6%), 4) Concern with author (14.5%), 5) Story-driven reading (12.9%), 6) Empathy (10.9%) and 7) Rejecting literacy values (10.4%). Interestingly, 'Rejecting Literacy Values', is the least, suggesting that literature can play a significant role in language learning, at least from participants' perspective in this study. As insight in this study is defined as 'recognition of previously unrecognized qualities', the fact that it got the first place (20.3%) can also suggest that because the participants had this chance to get familiar with different literary contents and genres they could easily adapt themselves with the qualities and characteristics of literature as a tool to improve their English proficiency, by showing positive attitudes toward literary contents like stories.

5. CONCLUSION

This study can support other studies' findings on the issue of reader response to literature considering the study of students' attitudes in which it was carried out. However, some of the implications of this study are presented below:

Implications for Teaching and Teacher Training

This study investigated students' attitudes toward literature and writing literary response paper. Therefore, this study indicates some support for the use of writing literary response paper rather than the use of traditional teaching literature in classes. Moreover, teachers need to be familiarized with teaching writing literary response paper. So, it would be reasonable to allocate some time to the training of teachers in this regard.

Implications for Materials Development

Since literature can play an implicit significant role in learning English, the results of the present study supply the opportunities for materials developers and curriculum and syllabus designers to provide the content of teaching literary materials in English classrooms as well as using writing literary response paper as a useful tool to engage learners to learn English through studying literature. Meanwhile, integrating studying literature and writing responses improve reading and writing skills too.

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