



# The Effect of the Reader Response Approach on Secondary School EFL Students' Reading Comprehension of Narrative Texts

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## Abstract

The present study aimed to introduce an alternative method for teaching the novel in Egyptian secondary schools. Teachers stated that there is no agreed upon method for teaching stories and novels. In addition, there is no Teacher Guide for teaching the novel provided by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the Effect of the Reader Response Approach (RRA) on Egyptian Secondary School EFL Students' Reading Comprehension of narrative texts. For this purpose, the researcher designed a Program to teach the novel: Gulliver's Travels based on the Reader Response Approach. One group comprising 35 Egyptian female students at a second-year secondary school participated in the study. A Reading Comprehension test was used to measure their comprehension of the novel at three comprehension levels. Results indicated the effectiveness of the Reader Response Approach in enhancing students' reading comprehension and critical thinking. This finding proves that the RRA program had a significant impact on the participants' overall reading skills.

**Keywords:** Reader Response Approach, EFL Reading Comprehension, Narrative Texts, EFL Literature

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in utilizing literature in foreign language (FL) and second language (SL) classrooms (Amer, 2003). Recent research explains the various benefits of using literature in L2 learning (Cho, et al., 2005; Hess, 2006). Literature provides L2 learners with a combination of pleasurable, comprehensible, authentic linguistic input and a low affective filter (Krashen, 2004).

Literature provides L2 students with authentic sociolinguistic input and a low affective filter. Literature provides authentic samples of text-types and registers. Moreover, literature presents a rich authentic source of learning new words, new expressions, and grammatical structures (Duff and Maley, 2007, p. 6). Research indicates that reading literature lead to increase in vocabulary size and awareness of the interrelationships among words (Hess, 2006; Krashen, 2004).

Van (2009) believes using literature in the EFL/ESL classroom is in line with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. Literature encourages student-centered activities and collaborative group work.

Research on using literature in EFL teaching and learning indicates that the Reader Response Approach is a pedagogically effective approach to teaching literature (Amer, 2012). Based on *Constructivism*, the RRA views the reading process as a transaction between the reader and the text in which the reader, with his past personal experiences and cultural beliefs interacts with the events in the text. Hence, meaning is constructed as a result of this interaction (Swaffar, 1988:124). In other words, through the interaction between himself and the text events, the reader reflects and self-constructs his idiosyncratic meaning. This implies that meaning is not inherent in the narrative text. Hence, we have different interpretations of the text.

## Statements of the Problem

Informal interviews by the researcher with fifteen teachers of English in five secondary schools revealed that there are no agreed upon method for teaching stories and novels. Unfortunately, there is no Teacher Guide for teaching the novel provided by the Ministry of Education for teaching the novel. Teachers indicated that their aim was to enable students to memorise the events and characters of the story. When asked to describe the method they use in

teaching stories and novels, most teachers reported that they asked students to read a part or a chapter at home. In the classroom, teachers asked students to read some parts silently. Then they asked students some comprehension questions focusing on the content of the story or novel. Hence, teachers need to use an alternative method for teaching the novel in which students respond to the text and express their own ideas, opinions and feelings freely. Therefore, the teacher should accept “multiple interpretations” to a text rather than just one “correct interpretation” (Rosenblatt, 1995). From a pedagogic perspective, “multiple interpretations” allow for creative and critical thinking to take place in an atmosphere where there are neither threats nor any compulsion to learn for the “correct” answer.

### Method

Hence, the present study aims to investigate the effect of the Reader Response Approach on secondary school female students’ reading comprehension of novel.

### Research Question

The present study addressed the following major question: What is the effect of the RRA on the students’ overall reading comprehension of the novel?

This question has three sub-questions related reading comprehension levels:

- a. What is the effect of the RRA on the students’ literal comprehension skills?
- b. What is the effect of the RRA on the students’ inferential comprehension skills?
- c. What is the effect of the RRA on the students’ critical comprehension skills?

### Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the overall reading test in favor of the post administration.
2. There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the literal comprehension skills in favor of the post administration.
3. There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the referential comprehension skills in favor of the post administration.
4. There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the critical comprehension skills in favor of the post administration.

### Design

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-post one-group design. The group received instruction in RRA based- program.

### Participants

One second- year class was selected randomly from The Old Secondary Experimental Language School for Girls in Kafr-El-Sheikh Governorate. The class comprised 35 students. Almost all of them were 17 year olds. They were

also similar regarding their economic, social and schooling background.

### Instrument

A pre-post Reading Comprehension test was used in the study. It comprised three reading passages. After each passage, there are six reading questions. The reading questions may be multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, or true and false questions.

### Aims of the Reading Test

In accordance with the English syllabus objectives, the test assessed some reading comprehension skills at three main levels as follows:

#### A) Literal comprehension skills

- a- Recognizing explicit main ideas.
- b- Identifying explicit information and details.
- c- Identifying time and sequence.

#### B) Inferential comprehension skills

- a- Inferring implied main ideas.
- b- Inferring implied meaning.
- c- -Guessing the meaning of words from context.

#### C) Critical comprehension skills

- a- Identifying relationships between ideas.
- b- Identifying the overall organizational pattern.
- c- Identifying the reader’s opinion.

### Validity of the Reading-Writing Test

The preliminary version of the test was submitted to a jury of TEFL experts and English language senior teachers and supervisors who had long experience in teaching English in secondary schools in general and teaching second year students in particular. They were given instructions to check the validity of the test in terms of:

- a) The suitability of the reading comprehension texts to students’ level
- b) The suitability of the item to the stated skill
- c) The sufficiency of items to cover the identified skills
- d) The clarity of the test items and instructions

In light of the jurors’ comments, the following modifications were made:

- a) The reading texts were shortened.
- b) Some items were reassigned as measuring different sub-skills.

### Piloting the Test

The test was piloted on a random sample of students (28) other than the sample of the study. The test was piloted in order to:

- a) Measure its reliability.
- b) Measure item difficulty, easiness and discrimination.
- c) Estimate the time allotted for completing the test.

In the light of the students’ responses:

- a) Some ambiguous words were replaced
- b) The optimum time for completing the test was set.
- c) The reading texts were shortened

### Test Reliability

The split- half method was used to obtain the reliability of the test. The Pearson

Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was .07. This shows that the test was reliable.

**Materials**

**1. Teacher's Guide**

The major aim of this guide was to familiarize the teacher with reference to:

- a) Benefits of using literature in teaching and learning English.
- b) Explanation of the Reader Response Approach.
- c) The objectives of using RRA in the treatment
- d) Teaching procedures
- e) The role of the teacher
- f) The role of students
- g) Formative and summative assessment techniques.

**2. The Reader Response Approach Program Aims**

- 1. Familiarize students with:
  - a) Benefits of using literature in learning English
  - b) The Reader Response Approach
- 2. Introduce *Gulliver's Travels* novel to students:
  - a) Present a short introduction about the author *Jonathan Swift*
  - b) Present a short summary of the novel
- 3. Present content and teaching steps of each session
- 4. Discuss new vocabulary and grammatical structures in the novel
- 5. Present reading comprehension activities with reference to *literal, inferential and critical* levels.
- 6. Practice group work.
- 7. Present formative and summative assessment activities.

**Results of the Study**

**The first hypothesis:**

There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the overall reading test in favor of the post administration.

In order to verify this hypothesis, the researcher compared the pretest mean score to that of the posttest mean score on the overall reading and writing performance test. The researcher used t. test for dependent group to determine the significance of the difference between the pre-test and posttest. Table (1) below shows the results.

**Table (1): t-test result for the difference between the mean scores of the pre-post total reading test**

Variable		N	M	SD	df	t	Sig.
Total Reading	Post	35	12.26	1.094	34	5.104	.000
	Pre	35	10	2.378			

Table (1) shows that the posttest mean score ( $M=12.26$ ) is higher than the pretest mean score ( $M= 10$ ) and there is a statistically significant difference ( $t= 5.10$ ) at .01 level. This proves that the RRA program had a significant impact on the participants' overall reading skills. Therefore, hypothesis one is verified.

**The second hypothesis**

There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the literal comprehension skills in favor of the post administration. Table (2), below, shows that the posttest mean score for literal comprehension ( $M= 4.6$ ) is higher than the pretest mean score ( $M= 3.14$ ) and there is a statistically significant difference ( $t= 3.67$ ) at .01level. This proves that the RRA program had a significant impact on the participants' literal comprehension reading skills. Therefore, hypothesis one is verified.

**The third hypothesis**

There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the referential comprehension skills in favor of the post administration. Table (2) also shows that the posttest mean score for inferential comprehension ( $M= 5.03$ ) is higher than the pretest mean score ( $M= 4.5$ ) and there is a statistically significant difference ( $t= 1.99$ ) at .01level. This proves that the RRA program had a significant impact on the participants' inferential comprehension reading skills. Therefore, hypothesis one is verified.

**The fourth hypothesis**

There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean score in the pre and post administration of the critical comprehension skills in favor of the post administration. Table (2) also shows the posttest mean score for critical comprehension ( $M= 3.37$ ) is higher than the pretest mean score ( $M= 2.63$ ) and there is a statistically significant difference ( $t= 3.13$ ) at .01level.

**Table (2): t-test result for the difference between the mean scores of the pre-post reading levels**

Reading		N	M	SD	df	t	Sig.
Literal	Post	35	4.60	1.333	34	3.679	.001
	Pre	35	3.14	2.427	34		
Inferential	Post	35	5.03	.954	34	1.999	.054
	Pre	35	4.51	.951	34		
Critical	Post	35	3.37	.910	34	3.138	.004
	pre	35	2.63	1.00	34		

These results, shown in Table (2), prove that the RRA program had a significant impact on the participants' reading comprehension at all levels.

**Discussion**

The results indicate the effectiveness of the RRA program. These results may be attributed to the effect of the types of reading questions and activities. The reading questions and activities did not focus on literal content of the novel. In other words, these questions required students to construct new meanings and express their own interpretations of the events and characters' behaviors. They encouraged students to reflect critically on their life, cultural values and personal experiences.

The reading questions and activities provided students with rich input. The group and class oral discussions of these questions and activities provided students with authentic opportunities to listen to different meaningful interpretations and points of views. During the sessions,

the teacher continually reminded the students that there was not just one correct interpretation to the questions, and there could be as many acceptable interpretations as possible.

This, in turn, lessened their reluctance to express their ideas freely and raised their self-confidence level with reference to their reading ability. Moreover, the reading activities encouraged students to think, compare and accept others' views.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the present research shows that using literature in teaching English as a foreign or second language gives students the chance to re-examine their beliefs, thinking, and life. Literature provides L2 students with a combination of pleasurable, authentic sociolinguistic input and a low affective filter. It offers authentic samples of a very wide range of styles, registers, and text-types. It provides students with meaningful opportunities to reflect on concepts, recognize real life problems, explore causes and solutions, and compare their values and life styles with other cultures. Moreover, literature presents a rich authentic source of learning new words, new expressions, and grammatical structures. Students show increase in vocabulary size and awareness of the interrelationships among words.

These results are consistent with the results of (Biglari and Farahian 2017), Garzón and Castañeda-Peña (2015) and Nafisah (2014).

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