

Exploring Themes of Selected Afro-Asian Literary Works: A Reader-Response Approach

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Abstract— This study aimed to explore the themes of the selected Afro-Asian literary works. The reader-response approach was utilized to determine the themes present in the literary texts. Also, a phenomenological approach was employed to highlight the information gathered on how students understood the themes of the selected literary works. The participants of the study were fourteen (14) Grade 8 students from La Filipina National High School. There were seven participants for the in-depth interview (IDI) and seven participants for the focus group discussion (FGD). This study obtained significant information that helped derive the themes from the selected four poems and four stories in Afro-Asian literature. The themes in the poems include patriotism, pride, and proud for I am an African Child; enlightenment for Till the Hearts End; abundance and happiness for After the Rain; and seize the day and benevolence for Rubaiyat and for stories are loyalty, love and self-sacrifice for The Soul of Great Bel; power, selfishness and abandonment, unconditional love and wisdom for The Story of the Aged Mother; brotherly love, jealousy, betrayed and hatred The Two Brothers; and ruthlessness and significance of material goods for Ali Baba and Forty Thieves. Moreover, the study emphasized the themes were conveyed as it reflects values and culture, understands the elements of the story, uses literary devices, utilizes context clues, and applies life meaning. Finally, the students shared insights on the importance of reading selected Afro-Asian literary works as it teaches life lessons, enhances comprehension, builds self-motivation, expands perspectives on different cultures, and reduces stress.

Keywords— Afro-Asian literary works, Philippines, Reader-response, Teaching English.

I. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, studying literature in formal education is an important avenue to language learning as it reflects the lexical entities and cultural representation of a literary work. Likewise, literature classes for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have also placed a strong emphasis on using literature to improve language competency skills. However, reading and comprehension skills are crucial and important aspects for the readers. Students from secondary schools have a hard time understanding literary works especially when dealing with themes from different contexts and cultures (Sagun, 2019).

Likewise, Afro-Asian literary works are works written by people of African-Asian descent. These include Asian nations including North and South Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, and African and Arab nations like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and India. One of the most striking similarities between African and Asian countries is the emphasis on family and ancestors. Both cultures see the family as the most important social group, and both civilizations practice ancestor worship to some extent. Similarly, contemporary Afro-Asian authors such as

Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest moral and political leaders whose works have influenced and continue to influence modern society, and other writers who work for freedom, equality, and peace as the common denominator of patriotism and love of country contribute to one of the notable themes in Afro-Asian Literature (Be, 2016).

Furthermore, the appropriate literature orientation and instruction were reflected in the level of students and in the Curriculum Guide (CG) set by the Department of Education (DepEd as a result, eighth-grade students are focused on Afro-Asian Literature, which requires students to understand various genres and themes offered by Afro-Asian countries as well as showed admiration for Afro-Asian history. Apparently, exposure to literature helps readers find, comprehend, and recognize themes found in African and Asian literary works. (Gonzales, 2014).

In connection, contextual reading is an active activity in which readers analyze literary texts using past information, diverse opinions, and personal experiences. Students are more likely to connect with literary books when they have numerous opportunities to form their own opinions about them as opposed to simply being taught by their teachers. Learners' answers to literary

texts are more valuable than someone reading the material for them. (Mitchell D., 1993).

Reader-response is an effective method for learners to increase their reading comprehension. It is also a top-down model, emphasizing what the reader understands from the text. This also recognizes that various readers will have diverse interpretations of literary works, stimulates students' enthusiasm for reading, and fosters their ability to read reflectively and deeply (Graves, 2011).

In the Philippines, students of eighth-grade level learn Afro-Asia literature from the first to the fourth quarter as prescribed by DepEd. To guide learners and students on the instruction and to attain conformity on the lessons to be delivered, the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) are followed. MELCs are a set of competencies with corresponding standards and duration. Out of the competencies set, selected literary works are used to deliver learning instruction. Likewise, all public institutions must follow the competencies set by the DepEd Central Office. Similarly, La Filipina National High School (LFNHS) is a public secondary school of the Division of Tagum City that puts MELCs as the center of instruction for all lessons to be delivered (Gonzales, 2014).

Related to the survey of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey conducted in 2018 revealed a disconcerting reality for the Philippines, as it obtained the lowest score in reading comprehension among the 79 nations that participated in the assessment (PISA, 2019). This outcome serves as a wake-up call, urging educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to critically examine the existing strategies and approaches employed in the country's educational system and explore innovative methods to enhance students' comprehension of text.

The researcher revealed not only a study that precisely examined the examination of themes in chosen Afro-Asian literary works but also how eighth-grade readers responded to the various literary works as part of their learning instruction in English Eight. Furthermore, this study revealed important concepts that might potentially create in the academic community and serve as a reference for teachers and students studying literature. The reader-response strategy of students in chosen Afro-Asian literary works was investigated in this study.

A. Research Questions

This study looked at the reader-response approaches of eight grade-level students from La Filipina National High School to selected Afro-Asian literary works. Especially, it answered the following questions:

1. What are the themes of selected Afro-Asian literary works?
2. How do themes convey the meaning of the selected literary works?
3. What are the insights of the participants on the importance of reading the selected literary works?

B. Theoretical Lens

The reader-response approach places significant emphasis on the reader and their role in interpreting a text. It acknowledges that readers bring their own background knowledge and personal experiences to the reading process, which influences how they assign meaning to a given text. In this approach, readers are expected to support their individual interpretations of a text by referencing specific evidence from the text itself. By incorporating the reader-response approach into literacy instruction, readers are provided with a framework to comprehend literary works that encompass not only an appreciation for themes but also an understanding of cultural contexts. (Graves, 2011).

II. METHODOLOGY

This research used two approaches. First, which was the main approach used, this qualitative research employed a reader-response approach in coherence to the first research question which was to identify the themes of selected Afro-Asian literary works. The foundation of this approach lies in the belief that a literary work truly comes to life when the reader actively engages with it and forms a personal connection (Woodruff and Griffin, 2017).

Another was the phenomenological approach as utilized to meet the objectives of this study. This was important in getting the insights of the readers upon reading the selected Afro-Asian literary works. A qualitative research design encompasses a range of analytical procedures aimed at systematically and descriptively collecting and validating social phenomena. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not rely on a single method, but rather employs various methods in a systematic manner to analyze and understand a particular subject. In the context of this study, qualitative research was employed to extract and interpret the experiences of students regarding their

diverse approaches to understanding literary texts through the reader-response approach. In this study, the phenomenological method of research was specifically employed. Qualitative research, including phenomenology, seeks to gather information through firsthand experiences and the truthful reporting of participants' accounts of actual events. The objective is to understand how the participants derive meaning from the literary works they read. By exploring their subjective experiences and interpretations, this research aims to delve into the participants' perspectives and uncover the rich and varied ways in which they make sense of the literary texts. (Creswell, 2007).

A. Research Participants

In this phenomenological study, the participants were from La Filipina National High School (LFNHS). The students' ages who participated in this study ranged from 14-15 years old from the homogenous class group from Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) as it concerns learners from the eighth-grade level who are studying Afro-Asian Literature as part of the curriculum. 14 participants in total; seven for In-depth Interview (IDI) and the other seven is for Focus-group discussion (FGD) allowing for a sufficient sample size to explore the phenomenon under investigation.

B. Data Collection

(1) Meeting with the adviser to seek guidance and approval from my research adviser, ensuring that my

research design is aligned with the objectives of the study.

- (2) Validated Themes of selected Afro-Asian Literature.
- (3) Asking permission to conduct the study.
- (4) Selecting and interviewing research participants (IDI & FGD)
- (5) Transcribing
- (6) Extracting of Themes related to questions 2 and 3.

C. Data Analysis

- (1) Interview the participants both for IDI and FGD.
- (2) Transcribing and analyzing the result based on the recorded voice from the interview.
- (3) Validating the results.

These were all done to complete the process of Triangulation which was described by Patton (2002), which involves the use of different methods, such as focus groups, individual interviews, and observations, to collect data. While both focus groups and individual interviews have their methodological limitations, they also possess individual strengths. Triangulation provides multiple sources of data that validate and crosscheck the findings of the interviews, thereby strengthening the study through methodological combination.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part provided details on the result of qualitative analysis to answer the following research questions.

Research Question no. 1: What are the themes of selected Afro-Asian literary works?

Table 1. Themes of the selected Afro-Asian Literature

TITLE	THEME	PASSAGE
I AM AN AFRICAN CHILD	Patriotism	(4th Stanza) “I am the son daughter of the soil Rich in texture and content Full of potential for a better tomorrow Teach me discipline teach me character teach me hard work Teach me to think like the star within me I am an African child”
	Pride	(5th Stanza) “I can be extra-ordinary Call me William Kamkwamba the inventor Give me a library with books Give me a scrap yard and discarded electronics Give me a broken bicycle Plus the freedom to be me And I will build you a windmill

	Proud	<p>I am an African child”</p> <p>(1st Stanza)</p> <p>I am an African child “Born of a skin the color of the chocolate Bright brilliant and articulate Strong and bold I’m gifted Talented enough to be the best I am an African child”</p>
TILL HEARTS END	Enlightenment	<p>(6th Stanza)</p> <p>“Words like drops from heaven Falling like wisdom, strength, peace, beauty, into waiting heart, These two small hands will move as this mind leads them, Will carry Buddha’s divine law Here to this earth, until this heart no longer beats.”</p>
AFTER THE RAIN	Abundance	<p>(Lines 1 and 2 of 1st Stanza)</p> <p>“Bright is the air now someone has hung diamonds on the trees;”</p> <p>(Lines 3 to 5 of 2nd Stanza)</p> <p>“and there, beneath the fig tree heavy with fruit the ripe fig bloat like scarlet pincushions on the pond.”</p> <p>(3rd Stanza)</p> <p>“Even the fish flash a more silvery scale in the lucent water.”</p>
	Happiness	<p>(4th Stanza)</p> <p>“To the broken gate down the road a schoolboy comes drenched to the skin but with a gleam in his eye; and whistling not knowing why.”</p>
Rubaiyat (Excerpt)	Seize the day (carpe diem)	<p>(Line 1 and 2 of 1st Stanza)</p> <p>“Not one returns to tell us of the road Which to discover we must travel, too.”</p> <p>(Line 4 of 2nd Stanza)</p> <p>“And answered, “Behold, myself, am heaven and hell.”</p>
	Benevolence	<p>(3rd Stanza)</p> <p>“Heaven’s but the vision of fulfilled desire, And hell the shadow from a soul on fire, Cast on the darkness into which ourselves, So late emerged from, shall so soon expire We are no other than a moving row Of magic shadow shapes that come and go</p>

		Round with the sun-illuminated lantern held In midnight by the master of the shadow.”
THE SOUL OF THE GREAT BELL	Loyalty	(1st Passage) “the Son of Heaven, Yong-Lo, of the “Illustrious” or Ming dynasty, commanded the worthy official Kouan-Yu that he should have a bell made of such size that the sound thereof might be heard for one hundred li.”
	Love	(6th to 7th Passage) “Now, Kouan-Yu had a daughter of dazzling loveliness whose name—Ko- Ngai—was ever in the mouths of poets, and whose heart was even more beautiful than her face. Ko- Ngai loved her father with such love that she had refused a hundred worthy suitors rather than make his home desolate by her absence; and when she had seen the awful yellow missive, sealed with the Dragon-Seal, she fainted away with fear for her father’s sake. And when her senses and her strength returned to her, she could not rest or sleep for thinking of her parent’s danger, until she had secretly sold some of her jewels, and with the money so obtained had hastened to an astrologer, and paid him a great price to advise her by what means her father might be saved from the peril impending over him.”
	Self-sacrifice	Line of Ko- Ngai to his father Kouan-Yu —“For thy sake, O my father!”
THE STORY OF THE AGED MOTHER	Power	(1st Passage) “Shinano was governed by a despotic leader who though a warrior, had a great and cowardly shrinking from anything suggestive of failing health and strength.”
	Selfishness and abandonment	(Line from 1st Passage) “Those were barbarous days and the custom of abandoning old people to die was not common.”
	Unconditional Love	Lines from 2nd Passage “Then he lifted his helpless old mother to his back and started on his painful journey up the mountain. The road was long and steep; then arrowed road was crossed and re-crossed by many paths made by the hunters and woodcutters.”
	Wisdom	(Lines from 2nd Passage) “So she stretched forth her hand and snapping the twigs from bushes as she passed, she quietly dropped a handful every few steps of the way so that they climbed, the narrow path behind them was dotted at frequently intervals with tiny piles of twigs.” (Line of mother to her child) “The mountain road is full of dangers. Look carefully and follow the path which holds the piles of twigs. They will guide you to the familiar way farther down”. (Line of the mother to the Governor) “Make a rope twisted straw,”
THE TWO BROTHERS	Brotherly Love	(1st Passage) “Once there were two brothers. Anpu was the elder, and Bata was the younger. When their parents died, Anpu was already married and had a house of his own, so he took his little brother with him and treated him like his son.”

	Jealousy	(3rd Passage) “Because Anpu loved his brother very much, his wife became very jealous and she wanted to destroy Bata.”
	Betrayed and Hatred	(Anpu to Bata) “Anpu became very angry. He sharpened his knife and waited for Bata in the stable. When the sun went down, Bata came home as usual, loaded with herbs, milk, and wood.” (Anpu to his Wife) “Anpu killed his wife and cast her to the dogs. Then, he sat down, poured ashes on his head, and mourned for his younger brother.”
Ali Baba and Forty Thieves	Ruthlessness	(Thieves to Kasim) “They cut his body into four parts and kills him.” (Mihriban to the thieves) “She boils a lot of oil and pour oil into these pots. She kills these men.”
	Significance of Material Goods	(3rd to 4th Passage) “After they go away, Ali Baba comes down. He says the magic words and goes into the cave. He can’t believe his eyes. The cave is full of all kinds of treasure. He loads his three asses with them. He goes out and says ‘Close sesame close!’ He gets home. He tells everything to his family. They want to count the gold. But it will take too long time so they decide to measure them with a bucket.” (13th Passage) “they get rid of these robbers and pass a very happy and wealthy life together.”

Themes of Selected Afro-Asian Literature were extracted as the bases of the reader response. In exploring themes of the selected Afro-Asian literary works, the proposition of Graves (2017) was used to analyze the themes. This is to answer first the research question dealing with the main ideas reflected in poems

and stories. Also, it connects to the reader-response approach as it deals with how the students use their prior knowledge and experiences to give meaning to a text, and they are required to justify their unique interpretations of a text with textual evidence.

Research Question No. 2: How do themes convey the meaning of the selected literary works?

Themes	Responses
Reflects Values and Culture	“The element of the story is usually presented in Afro-Asian Literature which helps me to understand the theme of the story’s symbolism and it also helps me to understand their values and traditions.” (IDI_003)
Understands the Elements of the Story	It is usually the plot, conflict, and characters where I understand the themes of the story. The character carries the theme of the story so we usually deepen our understanding of how the character will react and what they are against. (IDI_007)
Uses Literary Devices	“Rhyme is utilized to create rhythm and meter as a personality in dialogue. Figurative language to create setting and mood. Foreshadowing creates tension. Similes and metaphors create images ad these are all to convey the meaning the Afro-Asian Literature.” (IDI_006)
Utilizes Context Clues	“I search for it so that I can understand the meaning of it or by context clues.”(FGD_001)
Applies Life Meaning	“By reading Afro-Asian literature it can help us in our reading development and the message can be used in our daily lives.” (FGD_003)

The meaning of the selected Afro-Asian literary works was conveyed because it reflects values and culture. According to Rumbold (2006), engaging in reading for pleasure has a positive impact on students' reading achievement. Secondly, the participants in the study expressed that the understanding of elements of the story played a crucial role in their responses, supporting the conveyance of meaning and themes. Thirdly, the understanding of the selected Afro-Asian Literature was enriched using literary devices, such as symbolism and figurative language. Authors Johnson and Lee (2019) have highlighted the significance of these devices in conveying deeper meanings and evoking emotions within a literary work.

Also, the meaning of a literary piece can be discerned through the effective use of context clues, aiding readers in their understanding and interpretation of the text. Author Davis (2022) highlights the importance of context clues in decoding the intended meaning of a literary work.

Lastly is that the theme of selected Afro-Asian literary works was conveyed by applying life meanings. The participant's responses in the study highlight the significant impact of reading Afro-Asian literature on their values and realizations, emphasizing the profound influence these literary works have on their appreciation for life and their application of the messages in their daily lives (Amer, 2003).

Research Question no. 3: 3. What are the insights of the participants on the importance of reading the selected literary works?

Themes	Responses
Teaches Life Lessons	"Afro-Asian literary works teach me a very important lesson in our life. It is the value and respect of who we are and where we came from." (IDI_003)
Enhances Comprehension	"It helps by making the readers analyze the text using their prior knowledge and comprehension and vocabulary. By reading the literary works often they make their readers enhance their critical thinking skills." (IDI_001)
Builds Self-Motivation	"Reading Afro-Asian literary works provide us to do better and experience enjoyable experiences because we are all eager to learn about their wonderful literature. It also gives us inspiration and motivation to continue learning new things and strive to achieve our goals." (IDI_002)
Expands Perspective on Different Cultures	"It enables me personally to establish a broaden my perspective on its surroundings and other cultures." (IDI_004)
Reduces Stress	"It can lessen stress and enhancement mental health and lengthen your life. I can also discover more about their culture, beliefs, and other things." (IDI_004)

- Firstly, Afro-Asian literary works teach life lessons. This was also reflected to the claims of Tagore (2016) emphasizes that literature serves as a mirror to society, reflecting its virtues, flaws, and complexities.
- Secondly, Afro-Asian literary works have emerged as powerful tools for enhancing comprehension. Evident to the study of Graves (2011) which provides evidence that the reader response approach contributes to the improvement of reading comprehension and the active engagement of secondary students with texts.
- Thirdly, another notable insight into the importance of reading Afro-Asian literature is that it builds self-motivation, this notion aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Mikami (2020) of revealing a strong and statistically significant relationship between reading literature and the development of strong motivation.
- Fourthly, reading serves as a valuable avenue for expanding one's perspective on different cultures, Similarly, in their research on the impact of reading on cultural intelligence, Nartgün and Sungur (2016) found that exposure to diverse literary works enhances individuals' cultural sensitivity and promotes intercultural competence.

Lastly, reading Afro-Asian literature has been found to have a positive impact on reducing stress. This is also supported by the study of Hussain (2017) which was found out that engaging with literature, including Afro-Asian literary works, provides a form of relaxation and escapism for readers, leading to a decrease in stress and anxiety.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, conclusions are drawn in this section. Also, it presented the discussion, conclusions, implications for practice, and implications for further research supported by the themes that emerged during the data analysis.

The main objective of this study, as explicitly stated, was to examine the themes found in specific Afro-Asian literary works using a reader-response approach. This approach was essential in identifying the characteristics and themes that emerged from the study, enabling me to obtain accurate and dependable information on how these works influenced the participating students. Additionally, the study sought to understand the methods by which this shared knowledge was produced.

The phenomenological study effectively documented how students engaged with the selected Afro-Asian literary works using a reader-response approach. It specifically aimed to identify the shared experiences of the participants in relation to the phenomenon being investigated. Phenomenological studies are particularly concerned with understanding the subjective perspectives of individuals regarding events or phenomena based on their lived experiences. In this study, in-depth discussions and exchanges were conducted with the participants to capture the meaningful significance of their lived experiences related to the concept or phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012).

In relation, readers who are identified as students used their prior knowledge and experiences to give meaning to a text, and they are required to justify their unique interpretations of a text with textual evidence which is the aim of this study to illustrate the understanding and responses of the students upon reading the selected Afro-Asian literary works. A reader-response approach to literacy instruction lets readers understand literary works which include an appreciation of themes and culture. Also, it embraces differences among readers and acknowledges that people view pieces of literature in different manners, and encouraging students to look past

the words and search for deeper meanings out of context makes students think critically (Graves 2017).

Furthermore, the reader-response approach aligns with the fundamental aspect of fostering students' active engagement and personal connections with the literature they encounter. Graves et al., (2011) emphasize the existence of multiple instructional frameworks centered around students' reading experiences and personal responses to texts. By adopting this approach, educators take on the role of facilitators rather than mere lecturers, encouraging students to actively participate in transforming words into meaningful connections that resonate with their own lives. This approach not only enhances secondary students' reading comprehension but also promotes their interaction with texts.

Various strategies support the principles of the reader-response approach, including reader-response journals, reading workshops, and literature circles. These strategies are designed to cater to the diverse needs of different types of learners, such as gifted students, struggling readers and writers, English learners, students with learning disabilities, and general education students. This implies that the reader-response approach has the potential to positively impact literacy education in various educational contexts. These strategies embrace the diverse interpretative meanings that students derive from literary works based on their personal experiences and knowledge. Moreover, these methods hold students accountable for their thoughts by engaging them in purposeful activities while reading. Importantly, these instructional frameworks foster students' interest in reading and cultivate their ability to read reflectively and deeply (Graves et al., 2011).

Lastly, this investigation is likewise focused on insights into how the selected Afro-Asian literary works were understood by the students using the reader-response approach. It was in this structure of situation that 14 informants; seven from the in-depth interview (IDI) and seven for the focus group discussion (FGD) were asked to contribute and share their thoughts on the selected Afro-Asian literary works. It was good to note that the informants had realizations by sharing responses to the questions given. All my participants were at the eighth-grade level from La Filipina National High School.

A. Implication for Language Teaching

Useful for All Grades: The findings can help students in various grade levels studying Philippine or world literature.

1. **Improve Reading:** The reader-response approach helps students become better at understanding what they read.
2. **Customized Strategies:** Teachers can use specific methods to address each student's needs and weaknesses.
3. **Benefits of Literature:** Studying literature helps us understand different cultures and improves reading and thinking skills.
4. **Well-being and Literature:** Reading can reduce stress and help us develop emotionally.
5. **Widespread Influence:** The reader-response approach can benefit language teaching in general.
6. **Transformative Learning:** Studying literature helps us grow and have meaningful experiences.

B. Implication for Further Research

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Track students' progress over a full academic year to understand the long-term effects on reading abilities, critical thinking, and cultural understanding.
2. **Comparative Analysis:** Compare the reader-response approach with other methods to determine its unique benefits and effectiveness in engaging students with Afro-Asian literature.
3. **Cross-Cultural Investigation:** Explore the applicability of the reader-response approach in diverse Afro-Asian cultural contexts beyond Philippine literature.
4. **Teacher Training Impact:** Study the influence of teacher training programs incorporating the reader-response approach on instructional practices and student learning outcomes.
5. **Technology Integration:** Investigate how digital tools enhance engagement, critical thinking, and cultural understanding within the reader-response approach.

By exploring these research avenues, we can improve instructional practices, inform curriculum design, and enhance students' literary engagement, cultural awareness, and language proficiency.

C. Outcome of the study

Exploring themes from Afro-Asian literature using a reader-response approach has significant benefits:

1. **School-Level Impact:** Enhances language curriculum, improving reading, critical thinking, and cultural understanding skills.
2. **Division-Level Advancement:** Informs curriculum development and teacher training programs, fostering effective instructional strategies.

3. **Regional Significance:** Shared implementation across schools promotes standardized teaching practices and regional collaboration.
4. **National Implications:** Informs national policies, curriculum guidelines, and teacher training initiatives for improved language education and cultural appreciation.
5. **Cultural Preservation and Promotion:** Engaging with Afro-Asian literature preserves and promotes cultural heritage, fostering unity and appreciation.

This study positively impacts schools, divisions, regions, and the country by improving education, promoting cultural understanding, and contributing to national development.

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