

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Previous Study

Previous studies have explored the application of Reader-response theory in various context.

1. Studies on Reader Response towards Literary Works

Some studies investigated reader or students' response towards literary works. For instance, Harlina et al. (2024) investigated "Howl's Moving Castle" novel through the analysis of Goodreads review to examine readers' engagement with the text. The result found that types of response by Beach (1993) which are dominant among readers are textual and experiential. However, this study focuses on more readers' review of a novel through online platform rather than students' responses in educational context.

Similarly, the study from Ali (2023) explored reader response toward classic literary work entitled "Sons and Lovers" written by D.H. Lawrence from feminist perspective through literary analysis. The result reported that social, cultural, feminist factor influence how reader respond to the "Sons and Lovers". Nevertheless, this study mainly discussed about literary interpretation and feminist perspective rather than students' responses towards film as literary text.

Likewise, Adhitya (2023) analyzed "Disaster in Planet POA" through Goodreads cyber literary site. The result found that readers have different reception while respond to the novel and most reception types that

appear are negotiated type and dominant type. Furthermore, only three readers who choose opposition type. Although the main discussion in this study is about readers' reception, but it focusses on more online readers rather than students in classroom context.

In addition, Damayanti et al. (2023) examined the twin characters in the novel "Fangirl" by Rainbow Rowell based on Reader-response analysis. The result showed that several characteristics found in twins name Cath and Wren are caring, anxious, fearful, impulsive, headstrong, forgiving, enthusiastic, and wised. However, this study focuses on more character analysis in novel instead of investigating students' personal responses toward film.

Meanwhile, Nong (2024) investigated how readers make meaning when they read minimalist poetry by applying Reader-response theory. The result showed that minimalist poetry motivates readers' active participation because when making meaning, it based on their personal experience, emotion, and imagination so it motivates them to be active participation. Similarly, Kumar (2025) examined the role of readers response theory in understanding readers' reception and interpretation of contemporary young adult literature. The result found that readers actively make meaning based on their personal experience, emotions, and social background. Both studies discuss about readers' active role in constructing meaning, but they focused on written literary text rather than film in EFL context.

On the other hand, R. W. A. Dewi (2020) explored children's responses towards film "The Great Showman" use Richard Beach Reader-response theory. The result found that there are four responses appears among children's responses namely textual, experiential, psychological, and social responses. Although this study uses film, but it focuses on children's responses rather than senior high school students.

Overall, previous studies show that Reader-response is widely used to analyze readers' engagement, response or interpretation, and meaning construction towards literary text. Those studies also show that response or meaning can be influenced by personal background, experience, social, psychological and cultural background. Furthermore, they also indicate that Reader-response theory can be applied not only in written text such as novel, poetry, but also through audio visual like film.

2. Studies of Readers Response in the EFL Context or Literacy Education

Several studies have also discussed about the implementation of Reader-response in the EFL context or literacy education. For example, Adewoye (2022) examined the application of Reader-response theory in EFL teaching and learning in Nigeria. The result found that Reader-response approach has a good potential in improving students' English proficiency. However, its effectiveness is still limited because the current secondary school curriculum does not provide enough knowledge foundation. Similarly, Ilyas et al. (2025) investigated the literary work using Reader-response theory to promote EFL students' critical reading skill. The result

showed that there are five elements of critical reading found among students' responses namely reflecting, analyzing, interpreting, commenting, and reasoning. In addition, students become actively participate in vocabulary development and authentic resources. Although both studies discuss the application of Reader-response theory in EFL context, but it focuses on more students' language proficiency and critical reading skill rather than students' personal responses.

In a similar vein, by Lee & Gopal (2023) examined literary work through Reader-response journals among undergraduate students. The result reported that the Reader-response journals improved students' aesthetic stance. Moreover, Monica et al. (2023) examined how reader response-driven self-reflection strategy is used by EFL students in learning literature and whether it is effective or not. The result showed that the use of the reader response-driven self-reflection strategy is effective and it can motivate students to read critically. However, both studies focus on more students' reflection and reading effectiveness rather than explore students' responses towards film.

Furthermore, Rahmat (2023) investigated how students' response to short story differ through knowledge telling and knowledge transforming processes. The result found that there is positive relationship between knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming processes and the short story content also benefit students in several ways. Although this study discusses students' response towards literary work, but it focuses on students'

cognitive processes in responding to short story rather than investigating students' responses toward film in educational context.

In addition, Pratiwi (2024) examined students' response through Billy Collins' *Introduction to Poetry*. The result explained that students' involvement with poetry improve their critical thinking and emotional literacy. Similarly, Setiani et al. (2023) examined seven readers response strategy to improve students' literacy ability through drama. The result found that students' literacy is improved at the second attempt in implementing seven readers response strategy. Another study by R. B. Febriani et al. (2024) investigated EFL students' engagement in reading drama entitled "The Other Player" and the way they make interpretation of it. The result showed that students actively involving, enjoying, and relating the story to personal experience when reading drama. Students also relate themselves to the drama and write into reflective writing such as essay and journal reflection. Although these studies show that Reader-response activities can improve students' literacy engagement, but the studies mainly use written text such as poetry and drama rather than film.

Overall, previous studies show that Reader-response has positive impact in EFL learning and literacy education. The studies also show that Reader-response activity can improve students' critical reading skills, literacy ability, aesthetic stance, emotional literacy, the development of vocabulary, and students' engagement in literary learning.

Based on the previous studies above, the similarity with present study lies in the focus on examining Reader response theory. Previous studies have discussed about Reader-response theory in literary works, drama, and EFL learning context. However, studies that specifically focus on students' response towards film as literary text are still limited. This gap is significant because understanding how students response or interpret to film as a form of literary work allows students to actively construct meaning, connect the text to their personal experiences, and develop critical thinking (Ijabah & Asdar, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating students' responses to film through Reader-response theory.

B. Underlying Theory

1. Literature Teaching in EFL Context

In EFL classrooms, teachers often use poems, short stories, novels, or plays to help students build their language skills; like picking up new words, understanding grammar, or practicing reading (Bahrudin et al., 2022; Kakar, 2025; Kaowiwattanakul, 2021). It is an interesting way to make lessons more engaging, but it usually treats literature as just a helping tool for language practice rather than something worth studying on its own. By doing this, students end up seeing these texts more like worksheets to complete instead of rich stories or poems full of deeper meaning, emotions, and ideas to explore. It is in line with studies conducted by Bist & Kandel (2025) and N. S. Dewi et al. (2025) who explain that literature is often used as a tool to support learning outcome such as language proficiency and

reading comprehension, by giving more attention to grammar and text structure rather than to students' interpretation and making meaning.

Research shows this trend is pretty common: lessons focus heavily on spotting grammar rules, text patterns, or basic facts, leaving little room for students to share their own thoughts, feelings, or connections to the story. For example, in the study by Salhab (2025) literature stories were used in reading lesson through read aloud method. After listening to the story, students participated in the discussion about characters and events, learned key vocabulary from the text and retold the story used their own words. These activities shows that literature stories are mainly used as a tool to improve oral language skill and reading comprehension rather than provide space for students to interpret or respond to the text. As it can be seen in result of the study by Bist & Kandel (2025) who explain that literature instruction is often focused on language outcomes, especially language proficiency and reading comprehension. However, the interpretation of literary text by students is often given less attention. This phenomenon can hinder the real use of literature—like sparking critical thinking, building empathy, or firing up creativity—which is what literature is meant to do. For this reason, it is worth rethinking how we teach literature in EFL settings, finding ways to blend language goals with chances for students to really connect with and dig into the texts (Kaowiwattanakul, 2021).

2. Critical Thinking

a. Definition of Critical Thinking

In the EFL context, literature learning does not only function as a bridge to increase students' engagement with literary text, but also to develop critical thinking skills. This in line with the study by B. R. Febriani et al. (2022) which state that literature learning is considered to provide opportunities for students to increase their critical thinking, emotional awareness, and involvement with literary work. When students engage with literary text, they also engage in process such as analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating, which are part of critical thinking component. Through these processes, students can develop their critical thinking skills. This is supported by Mohammed & Jasim (2024) in their study, where the result of the study show that there is significant improvement of critical thinking skills among students when they engage with literary text especially short story and poetry.

Based on the explanation above, it is important to understand the meaning of critical thinking. According to Facione (1990), critical thinking is a thinking process with a clear goal, where individuals control and evaluate their own thinking to make logical judgments, which includes interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, drawing conclusion, and explaining idea based on evidence, concept, method, as well as context. This means that critical thinking is an active process where individuals are required to understand information, analyze the idea

inside, and evaluate it. So, they can make judgment based on evidence and logical reasons. Furthermore, a critical thinker has several characteristics. According to Facione (1990), a critical thinker is individuals who are curious, open-minded, and well-informed. They are able to evaluate information fairly and considered different perspective. In addition, they also think carefully in a complex situation as well as reconsider ideas they have and try to find accurate solutions which is related to the problem or issue faced.

b. Core Skills of Critical Thinking

Based on Facione (1990), critical thinking consist of several indicator or core skills namely interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. However, this study only focuses on four core skills namely interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference.

1) Interpretation

Facione (1990) explains that interpretation refers to the ability in understanding and expressing meaning including categorization, decoding significance and clarifying meaning. When readers respond to a text, they may classify information, interpret the meaning and purpose of a text, and explain their understanding with their own words. They also organize the ideas, identify both explicit and implicit meaning, and construct meaning based on their

understanding of a text. In this study, readers' response can be categorized as interpretation when readers are able to understand the content of a text, classify or organize information, identify the main idea or message, and restate the meaning of a text in their own words.

2) Analysis

In his book, Facione (1990) describes that analysis is an ability to identify relationship among ideas, statements, or information, including examining ideas, detecting arguments, and analyzing argument. When readers engage with the text, they may compare the idea, identify problems and its causes, and understand reasons that support certain opinions or events. Furthermore, readers' response can be categorized as part of analysis skill when they are able to identify relationships between ideas, compare different points in the text, know the causes and effects, and identify reasons that support a statement or opinion.

3) Evaluation

Evaluation is an ability to assess the credibility of the information, including assessing claims and evaluating arguments. When readers response to a text, they may give their opinion, decide whether an idea is acceptable or not, and provide reasons to support their arguments. Furthermore,

readers' response can be categorized as part of evaluation skill when they can express their opinion related to the text, argue or judge the acceptability of an idea, provide reasons to support their argument or judgement, and evaluate whether the information of a text is acceptable or not (Facione, 1990).

4) Inference

This skill focuses on the ability to draw conclusions based on available information. It involves making conclusions, predicting possible outcome, developing ideas from the given information. When it comes to reader response, it can be categorized as inference when the readers can draw conclusions make predictions, and provide ideas based on the text.

Beside core skills of critical thinking proposed by Facione (1990), critical thinking can also be seen from a behavioral perspective. Horenstein (2011, as cited in Harlina et al., 2024) explains that good critical thinking involves self-correction, careful monitoring of logical reasoning, and ongoing reflection on one's thinking processes.

3. Reader Response Theory

a. Definition

A reader response study is often used in the field of literature which focuses on analyzing readers' response toward literary work. Ilyas

et al. (2025) explained that reader response study is a study which focus on readers' active participation in interpreting and building meaning from a text. This theory explains meaning is not fixed in the text, but it is built from the interaction between reader and the text. It can also be influenced by readers' knowledge of a text or genre, personal experience, psychological condition, social, and cultural (Beach, 1993).

b. Types of Responses

There are five types of Reader-response proposed by Beach (1993) namely textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural.

1) Textual Response

Beach (1993) explains that textual response focuses on how readers use their knowledge or previous information of a text or genre while responding to literary work. In this type of response, readers tend to focus on story structure, plot, characters, genre patterns, narrative characteristics. For example, when reading an action story, readers use their previous knowledge related to action genre to predict the story. Another example can also be seen in the study by Rahimipour (2021), he explains that in pre-reading activities students are asked to read the story at home and get used to vocabulary and after that students are also asked to give brief summary related to elements of the story including theme, plot, characters, etc. These activities may encourage students

to respond to the story textually as their interpretation is influenced by their understanding of the story conventions.

2) Experiential Response

Different from the textual, experiential response focus on more how readers link their experience when reading a text such as identifying themselves with the characters, visualizing scenes or events, relating personal experiences to the text, and building their own understanding of textual world. As Beach (1993) state in his book, this type of response involve readers' interaction with a text. For example, readers link their personal experience when interact with the characters or plot of a story. As it can be seen in the result of the study by Lee & Gopal (2023) who examine the effectiveness of the Reader-response journals in the literary work analysis among Malaysian TESL undergraduate students. In the study, they explain that one of participant name Bella who compared the loss experienced by the persona's uncle in the poem entitled *Old Love* with her grandmother's experience of losing her husband. This activity allows readers to interpret the text through personal experience, interact with the text, and build positive connection to it. This result also shows that personal experience can influence readers' interpretation with the text.

3) Psychological Response

This response refers to how readers connect their mental process while reading a text. This type of response may involve cognitive process (reasoning, concluding, comparing, making interpretations, understanding cause and effect), readers' thought, the character's emotion and feelings, motivations, inner conflicts, psychological reactions toward characters in the film. Beach (1993) explains that this type involves cognitive and subconscious process of readers. For example, when reading story about sexual harassment, readers who has experiencing it before may feel anxious and afraid, rather than who never experience it. Another example can also be seen in the result of the study by Lee & Gopal (2023) where a students named Ivy stated that she was positively affected by message of the poem entitled *Phenomenal Woman* which increase her self-confidence. This indicates that readers' emotion can influence how they interpret to the text.

4) Social Response

Social response refers to how social environment shapes the way readers respond to literary text. In this type of response, readers may pay attention to social aspects presented in the story such as the perspectives, attitudes, or

values of the community. Their responses may also be influenced by discussion sessions, interaction with other readers, social background, or the change of opinion after involving in the social discussion that discuss about the related text. For example, readers may respond to the text differently after they join a discussion about the story. Yohana et al. (2026), in their study, explain that social response can be developed through group discussion where students can share their ideas together related to the literary text. This activity allows students to respond collaboratively and may consider various point of view. This also shows that group discussion or other community discussion can influence the way readers interpret to the text.

5) Cultural Response

This response focus on how cultural background of readers influence the way they respond or interpret to the text. This type of response may be influenced by cultural values, beliefs and region, moral values, social norms, historical background, educational background. For example, when reading story about marriage culture, the readers may respond differently based on their culture. Another example of cultural response can also be seen in the study by Nadifah & Roifah (2025) where readers from Madurese background

interpret the *Topeng Gulur* ritual in a short story depend on their knowledge of Madurese culture. They explain that the ritual originally came from animism and dynamism and connected it to current religious practice such as *istisqo* prayers. Meanwhile, readers from outside Madura viewed the ritual as part of Madurese cultural and were more interested in its cultural meaning and symbolism. This shows that cultural background influence how readers respond or perceive the story.

4. Film as Literary Text

Film is a medium that combine audio and visual element. Utami et al. (2025) explain that film is an audiovisual medium consist of moving image and sound to talk about the theme, emotion and it has function as social and cultural communication. In literature, a work cannot exist without medium. Every literary work is presented in the certain form which influence how story is told and understood by readers or viewers. The medium not only present the story but also determine what story can and cannot express (Kozłowski, 2024). For example, written text expresses the emotion of the story through a written language, readers only can imagine it without knowing the real visual of the emotion. Meanwhile, through a film, a story can express its emotion into visual or moving image. Therefore, film can be seen as literary work because it presents narrative through its own medium using audio visual elements.

Films belong in the literary family because they weave narratives, characters, and themes just like novels or plays do—they're stories brought to life through clever plots, heartfelt dialogue, and meaningful symbols. While books rely on words to build worlds and emotions, films achieve the same with scripts, camera work, striking imagery, and rhythmic editing. Mario Klarer captures this beautifully in *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, listing film as a core genre next to fiction, poetry, and drama. He highlights its dramatic blend of spoken words and visuals, plus the bonus that we can pause, rewind, and revisit scenes repeatedly, much like lingering over key passages in a novel (Klarer, 2005).

5. Synopsis of the Film *Akeelah and the Bee*

Film *Akeelah and the Bee* mentioned in this research refers to the film produced by Doug Atchison and released in 2006. This film tells the story of Akeelah Anderson, an eleven-year-old girl who lives in South Los Angeles and becomes interested in spelling bee competition and begins to prepare for it under the guidance of Dr Larabee, a professor at university who becomes her mentor. Through the film, Akeelah faces several challenges including personal and family's doubt about her ability, social expectation. In addition, she also competes with many participants who are also good at spelling bee. However, with the support from her mentor and community, she can develop her confidence and skill, then win the competition.

a. Plot of the Film

1) Orientation

The story begins by introducing Akeelah Anderson, a student who is good at spelling bee but lack of confidence and motivation in school.

2) Rising Action

After joined the spelling bee competition in her school, she realizes her potential, she then receives spelling bee training from Dr. Larabee as to achieve higher level of spelling competition. During this process, Akeelah faces several challenges including personal and social challenges.

3) Climax

The climax happens when Akeelah is in National Spelling Bee competition where she must compete with competent participants from different region.

4) Resolution

At the end of the story, Akeelah deal with her fears and prove her abilities. Then, she successfully performs and wins the competition with support from her community.

b. Theme of the Film

The film presents several themes such as motivation, education, and the important of support from family and community. First, the motivation theme can be seen when Akeelah prepares for the spelling

bee competition. Although, she lacks confidence and community support, she still tries hard for the competition. Second, this film also highlights the education theme through Akeelah's experience in participating spelling bee competition. The film depicts how learning and academic achievement can help someone to develop their potential. Last, this film also present theme related to support from family and community. This theme can be seen when Akeelah receive the support from her family, friends, and community which then it helps her to deal with her fears, doubt, also insecurity and wins the competition.

C. Theoretical Framework

This research uses Reader Response Theory by Beach (1993). This theory explains meaning is not fix in the text, but it is built from the interaction between reader and the text. It can also be influenced by reader's knowledge of a text or genre, personal experience, psychological condition, social, and cultural as explained in Beach theory of Reader-Response which categorize response into five types namely textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural (Beach, 1993). In this research, these types are used as main framework to investigate tenth grade students' responses to the film *Akeelah and the Bee*. The response will be categorized into types that match with the response, and it will be analyzed which type of response is most dominant towards the film.

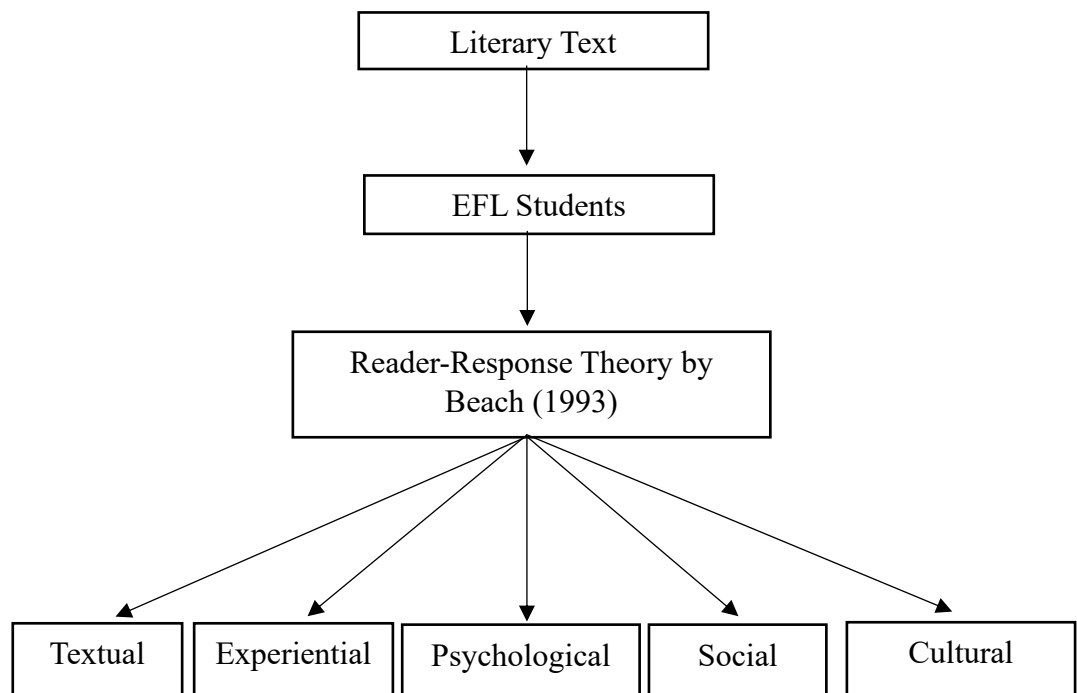


Figure 2. 1 Theoretical Framework of the Study