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# RESEARCH PAPER

# A Mixed-Method Study of Iser's Reader-Response Theory with Literature and Language Teaching in Postmodern Drama: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students at SBBU-SBA

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# **ABSTRACT**

The article investigates Reader Responses with literature and language teaching in the postmodern drama Waiting for Godot in the light of Wolfgang Iser's Reader Response theory (1978) and Gillian Lazar's model of "literature and language teaching" (1993). The study utilizes a mixed-method approach, and the selected population of 20 undergraduate students of BS English literature at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad (old Nawabshah), Pakistan. The data collected from anonymous participant via questionnaires with random sampling after completion of the assigned text for reading. The qualitative data analysis is based on Reader-response theory that states that reading is a unique experience in which a reader involves himself morally, intellectually, socially, and artistically. Second, the study concludes quantitatively by applying Lazar's model of "literature and language teaching". The results are based on 40% positive and 60% negative responses from the students, thus, this paper finds that readers' development is significant and they are self-assured who could go beyond the written texts. Further, more approachable texts and models that support students in connecting with and comprehending the text's should be incorporated into the literary scholarship.

**KEYWORDS** Literature and Language Teaching, Mixed-Method, Reader-Response Theory, Reading Activity, SBBU-SBA, Waiting for Godot

# Introduction

Reader-response theory, which emphasizes active reading and enables readers to understand the text before interpreting it in light of their own experiences and conducting a thorough investigation, the reader's response fills in the actual essence of the text through interpretation. This study centers on Samuel Beckett's postmodern drama *Waiting for Godot* (1952), which can be viewed as a pause in and of itself. It only employs several philosophies—including modernism, absurdism, existentialism, expressionism, surrealism, and nihilism—to reflect the modern cum post-modern times. Modernism, on the other hand, is both an art movement and a philosophical movement that emerged from huge changes in Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The initial and primary interaction between a reader and a book is the literary experience "(Probst, 37). Consequently, the absurdity of life is heavily examined in this drama. This drama does depict the absurdity in seriousness, the emptiness in wholeness, and the nothingness in everything. Every aspect of this story revolves around the pursuit of something that never materializes. The goal of the current study was to identify the

text's gaps using Reader-Response theory and Gillian Lazar's "literature and language teaching." Lazar's model, thus, is composed of three elements: A) Literature as content. B) Language-based approach. C) Literature for personal enrichment. The study finds the gaps between a text and readers are challenging since Wolfgang Iser's Reader-Response Theory fills in the real content of a text through interpretation. What challenges did the final-year students face when analyzing Waiting for Godot using Reader-Response Theory? What challenges do people face today in their lives on the fronts of theology, spirituality, psychology, society, and culture after reading this drama? The most crucial question is: How do readers interact with a text? The abrupt stop where they discover a precise shift remains unchanged. This research investigates Reader Responses with literature and language teaching in the postmodern drama *Waiting for Godot* in the light of Wolfgang Iser's Reader Response theory (1978) and Gillian Lazar's model of "literature and language teaching" (1993).

#### Literature Review

The late 1960s saw the rise in popularity of Reader-Response Theory, which focuses only on the responses of readers to a certain text. It is in opposition to formalism and new criticism theories. This reading theory, which is phenomenological in nature, contends that even if literary texts are written, their meanings are still partial and hidden. As a result, Wolfgang Iser took a reader-oriented approach while using the readerresponse theory. This idea placed a high priority on the effect that literature has on readers and the reactions that it provokes. I questioned what the text did to its possible readers rather than what it meant. The sentence's meaning that could no longer be deciphered sparked curiosity about what is now known as text processing-what happens to the text in reading" (Iser, 2000, p. 311). Literature Circles, which involve student-centered discussions about literature, are becoming more and more popular as a teaching strategy. Still, there are questions about the experts' position in these groups. In particular, those based on Palmer's "faith"-based teaching philosophy are evaluated in this article along with the reader-response theory techniques of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish in collaborative learning practices. Iser contends that reading itself produces literary comprehension, while Palmer contrasts objectivist models that do not benefit readers or literature with communitarian models of truth that deal with the ambiguous "otherness" of great things (Thompson, 2017).

According to Reader-Response theorists like I. A. Richards (1974), L. Rosenblatt (1993), S. Fish (1970), and W. Iser (1978), reading is an act that is actualized as a "transaction" between the text and reader, as stated by Dilek Inan and Merve Nur Boldan (2018) in their research. They note that every reading exercise is a distinct experience on its own. According to the students' comments, they did not develop efferent readings but rather aesthetic interpretations, treating the short narrative as a transaction. The student's ability to read critically and creatively was enhanced by their regular production of response papers during the term. It is seen that the pupils grow into mature, self-assured readers who can contribute their aesthetic critiques and judgments to written texts to go beyond them.

It's a textual-central strategy, the reader-response theory emphasizes how crucial it is for readers to actively participate in creating the meaning of the text. It takes a very reader-centered approach, for example. Because "the text does not come into existence without a reader," Karolides emphasizes the importance of readers' active participation in the reading process (Karolides, 2000, p. 5). Inan Dilek and Bolden Merve (2018) discuss their experiences utilizing the short narrative by Graham Greene. The students were given the task of reading the short story as an outside assignment and writing personal

responses in which they were to elaborate on and categorize G. Lazar's three approaches to literature: content, language-based approach, and literature for personal enrichment (1993). This was done to gather the students' responses: a) Literature as content: Philosophical, religious, or political ideas debated or discussed in a text. b) The language-based approach: It teaches literary text comprehension and appreciation as well as the role language forms have in delivering specific themes (Lazar, 1993, p. 32) c) Literature for personal enrichment: Reading for personal growth engages students on an emotional and intellectual level. Motivated by the text, the students can investigate and express their ideas, individual encounters, and feelings (Lazar, 1993, p. 41, 42).

The drama *Waiting for Godot* deftly draws attention to "Absurdism." The term "absurd" was originally used in a book by Martin Esslin. The play by Beckett popularized it. This phrase is most commonly used to characterize the absurd, senseless, pointless, and purposeless facets of human existence in its entirety. However, religion is a factor in this play that can be evaluated with great significance. All that is necessary to prove human existence is a certain religious and worshipping system. In "Waiting for Godot," a variety of symbols, gestures, and references are used to convey both favorable and unfavorable views of religion (Shah, 2018).

When Friedrich Nietzsche said, "God is Dead," he meant that man must now defeat himself. Nietzsche bemoaned the fact that God was no longer necessary in the modern world or for modern man. Together, Camus and Nietzsche's theories implied that the idea of "God" cannot have any significance in a society that accepts the ridiculous and that faith in a god necessitates surrendering to the notion that existence can be explained by reason. This idea is rejected by absurdism since religion has no place in society and the idea of "God" cannot be reconciled with absurdism. Another study by Susann highlights the tree depicted in *Waiting for Godot* as a sign of hope, but it may also be interpreted as a clear metaphor for the tree that bears the forbidden fruit in the paradise garden. Waiting for Godot also portrays the way of life of the Western world, which is devoid of religious reverence and communication with God. "Rebuilding the universe's meaningful system is an anticipation" (Susann, 1994).

According to Ashkan Shobeiri (2011), the best example of Beckettian absurdism regarding life is waiting for Godot. With the ambiguity of religion, Beckett hopes to make a point about the ridiculousness of his circumstances in this play. By employing logical reasons and making fun of religious ideas by having his characters act in ways that are not acceptable to them, Beckett challenges religious convictions and certainties. Whether he ridicules the faith for comedic effect or logically queries its consistency.

Asma Shahzadi (2014) emphasized in her research how religion affects people and how people feel about religion. A man believes in his religion that he might be approached by a survivor who needs his assistance. The entire globe has decided to look into Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot." Thus, the "Mood of Religiosity" idea by Harvey Whitehouse is taken into account in her research.

According to Azmi Azam (2014), Waiting for Godot is a fantastic work of post-modern absurd literature because of its various stylistic and subject facets. It stands for 21st-century post-modern society, which is rife with ominous signs of xenophobia, megalomania, existential crisis, the absurdity of life, communication gap, identity crisis, depression, meaninglessness, nothingness, selfishness, anarchy, and humanism.

Previously, the research focused on postmodern drama from different perspectives and concluded and and the theoretical background and significance of the Reader-Response theory. However, the present paper aims to bridge the gap between text and reader from a sample of a chosen population. To this end, this paper served the investigation based on reading activity with the help of mixed method research, it is s research design that is used to interpret, analyze, find the results, and draw conclusions from the data.

### **Material and Methods**

This study employed a mixed-method research to analyze and interpret Iser's Reader's Response-Theory and "literature and language teaching" in Waiting for Godot. Mix method Research provides a detailed understanding of the research problem and research subject. It helps to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. By combining the best aspects of qualitative and quantitative research, this methodology makes it possible to collect and analyze data that is more reliable, valid, and sub sequential. The reading activity is a "transaction" between the reader and the text. Because of this, literary writings have some gaps that the reader must fill up. Consequently, based on the students' reactions and experiences while reading the drama, a thorough study was conducted. The second method of conclusion is the "literature and language teaching" model developed by Lazar. The data was collected via an open-ended questionnaire with random sampling from 20 final-year students (English literature) from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad. The findings and results are based on Lazar's three approaches to literature: Literature as a content approach, language-based approach, and literature for personal enrichment (1993). This was done to gather the students' responses: a) Literature as content: Philosophical, religious, or political ideas debated or discussed in a text. b) The language-based approach: It provides comprehension and appreciation of literary texts, the function of linguistic forms for conveying particular messages (Lazar, 1993, p. 32) c) Literature for personal enrichment: it involves students both emotionally and intellectually. Being inspired by the text, the students have the opportunity to explore and verbalize their thoughts, personal life experiences, and emotions (Ibid, p. 41, 42).

# **Theoretical Framework**

Wolfgang Iser's Reader Response Theory has significantly influenced contemporary literary criticism by emphasizing the reader's interactive role in creating meaning. Key concepts from Iser's works include the implied reader, an ideal reader that the text presupposes, and gaps and indeterminacy, which the reader must fill in. The "act of reading" (1978) highlights the connection between textual perspectives, allowing the reader to cohere the text into a meaningful whole. The interaction between the text and the reader is central to Iser's theory, as reading is a process where textual structures and the reader's activities converge to create a coherent whole. The text undoubtedly sets the stage for this experience, but we readers also contribute to its formation. It is us who give the text life. Of course, the text must allow for some leeway in its realization, as different readers have always approached such texts in different ways. Nevertheless, the overall impression that the world revealed in these texts-regardless of how far in the past it may lie – comes to life in the present (Iser, 1993, p.5). This idea placed a high priority on the effect that literature has on readers and the reactions that it provokes. I questioned what the text did to its possible readers rather than what it meant. The message (of the text) that was no longer to be ascertained triggered interest in what has since been called text processing – what happens to the text in reading". (Iser, 2000, p. 311)

In addition to Lazar's model, this model was implemented in *Waiting for Godot* to investigate the gaps between the readers and the text. Lazar explores the literature as a

content approach by referencing Historical or mythological events, characters, Philosophical, religious, political ideas, Places, objects, or other texts. Secondly, "language-based approach" as the study of literature itself has two main goals, the first aim is facilitating students to interpret the text in a meaningful way and the second aim is developing students' understanding and consciousness of the language as a whole (Lazar, 1993, p. 31). The third approach "literature for personal enrichment" involves students both emotionally and intellectually. Being inspired by the text, the students have the opportunity to explore and verbalize their thoughts, personal life experiences, and emotions (Lazar, 1993, pp. 41, 42). For achieving this, language teachers should select materials consistent with students' interests, their language proficiency level, and cultural/social background

#### **Results and Discussion**

Students' answers to the research questions and objectives revealed that they understood Waiting for Godot to be a dialogue between a reader and a text. The gaps between a text and a reader were addressed by their important contributions. Additionally, the reader comments were split into two categories by the researchers: subjective and objective.

# Data Analysis Qualitatively Through Readers' Responses

According to Iser "This idea placed a high priority on the effect that literature has on readers and the reactions that it provokes. I questioned what the text did to its possible readers rather than what it meant. The message (of the text) that was no longer to be ascertained triggered interest in what has since been called text processing—what happens to the text in reading"(Iser, 2000, p. 311). First of all, students' personal, psychological, religious, or cultural beliefs are unaffected by the chosen book. Though not entirely, this text attempted to alter their perceptions of the absurdity of life and the presence of God. But this book presents a difficult challenge for them; it made them question their faith and made them concur that, if there is a God, then why does he not intervene to improve their circumstances and support them through difficult times?

The existence of God and the purpose of life: The text addresses the belief of God that those who have less faith in God will undoubtedly spoil their methods owing to their firm confidence in the existence of God and the purpose of life. This text teaches the readers that we should not test the existence of God; rather, we must believe in God wholeheartedly. Despite this, their concerns were disregarded since they firmly believed in God and that he would intervene to save them and transform their lives. They find this text to be neither informative nor useful. Nevertheless, after reading the text extensively, the readers are not merely struck by it and show no interest in it.

Wait without faith is nothing: Faith is central to the reading activity process, since good things take time to manifest, we must possess strength and patience to endure difficult circumstances. Furthermore, since God knows exactly when everything happens, everything will work out when the time is right. Nothing will ever happen before its proper moment. Essentially, waiting without faith is meaningless.

**Belief with consistency and determination:** In addition, this text questions the psychology of man, suggesting that God has greater purposes for him and that he should thus pay less attention to the past, present, and future — after all, it is the enigmatic secrets that will be revealed the next day. Above everything, God is the best. And in addition, if you have a firm belief that nothing can ever defeat or destroy you. In a similar vein, the

characters showed no resolve to believe in God and were wasting their time and silly behaviors. Due to their inconsistent and haphazard beliefs in God's existence and life's purpose, Estrogen and Vladimir are unaware of the reason they are waiting.

The Creator and Man: The religious notion that there is nothing out there for individuals to seek or wait for assistance was the focus of the book. We are more confident that there is something out there that will undoubtedly be helpful. Put simply, parents constantly attempt to protect their kids from harm. Then why not the one who made the planet, the skies, and our bodies? He will undoubtedly assist us; the key is that "We must have faith in Him." The book helps us see how people began to doubt the existence of the Creator and to lose faith in Him.

The fault line between believing and disbelieving: The text makes futile attempts to sway the reader's viewpoint. The passage reads, "No one comes to help, but waiting." As such, even those who harbor a modicum of confidence in God are susceptible to becoming doubting. As a result, the text operates as a bridge between belief and disbelief systems, ultimately endorsing the latter.

Only you can change you: On the other hand, the text had a strong attraction and influence on a few readers. They taught this material to sharpen their ideas about the true nature of God and the true meaning of life, and they had no conflicts with it. They took away from this passage the idea that nobody can change them; only they can change themselves. The essay appropriately addresses the ideologies of nihilism and existentialism, good and wrong, nothingness and something; all of these things occurred following World War II, the turmoil and diversion of the 20th century, and to some extent, the COVID-19 pandemic of the 21st century.

**Do not wait for a miracle:** People are trying to save their loved ones and themselves. People continue to hope for miracles to happen, but no one shows up to ease their burdens or bring them happiness. They exhibit recklessness and a lack of self-awareness regarding their experiences. Furthermore, unless you actively seek change or are prepared to do so, God will not alter your circumstances. To make the proper or erroneous conclusions about our actions and decisions, we need to be self-sufficient and self-independent. As everyone has a role to play in this life, which is like a stage, we too should have faith in ourselves. Then, it doesn't matter if you win or lose; what counts is how well you performed your assigned task.

Believe in your strengths and improve your weaknesses: Similar to Vladimir, Estragon was also holding out for an unidentified individual, even though they had no idea why they were waiting. This text tells the readers to focus on their strengths and work on their deficiencies so that their success and happiness are exclusively their own. Why are we holding out for Godot? Why do we wait for a supernatural miracle to occur in our lives so that we might alter our situation? One cannot defend their existence—or the existence of God—until they experience struggles and make efforts. The participants perceive this book as not offering an impartial perspective on the entirety of the situation.

The wait is the ultimate truth: Above everything else covered in the text, this formula of self-belief can be regarded as right and fair, and it is a productive existence. The exploration of the ultimate truth because life is about waiting and waiting for ways to find the significance of the ultimate truth.

# Data Analysis Quantitatively through Lazar's Model of Literature and Language Teaching

Under the teaching paradigm to teach literature, which includes literature as content, language-based approach, and literature for personal enrichment as outlined by Lazar (1993), several commonalities in the students' responses are evaluated and examined.

# Results and findings

# Literature as a Content Approach:

- Literature-based reading instruction involves teaching readers to read using nonfiction and fiction pieces
- This approach can be used for any book, such as drama, to stimulate learners' interest. "teaching readers to read using pieces of literature, both fiction and nonfiction, which were written for purposes other than use as a text for reading instruction." (Harp & Brewer, 2005).

# Language-Based Approach:

- This approach focuses on the study of the literary text itself, providing readers with tools to interpret and make critical judgments
- It uses literary text for specific drills to build language skills, not just literary skills.

# Literature as Personal Enrichment Approach:

- Literature encourages students to reflect on their personal experiences and opinions, promoting intellectual and emotional activity.
- This method is also an excellent stimulus for group work.

Table 1
Lazar's Model of Literature and Language Teaching

Literature as a content approach	Language-based approach	Literature for personal enrichment approach
Nihilism Absurdism and existentialism	Simple and straightforward, expressive language	The text does not affect personally and psychologically
War and distraction effects morally and psychologically	Incomplete Sentence structure but expressive ideology	Firm and stronger belief in God as he lives within us
Nothingness and foolishness in action	Brief answers along with some examples	The relation between nothingness and something
Hopelessness and disbelieving in characters	Irrational and irrelevant thoughts in term of personal concern	Text challenge the faith and believes, but not successfully
Confused, chaotic and disasters condition	Language is Stuck with the believe and disbelieve system	A rich Clash and doubt between the text and readers
Christianity reflects absurdity	Average vocabulary and terms	Islam reflects the oneness of God, with no concern with the text as a whole.

Table 2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Category	Aspect	Quantitative Data	Analysis/Comments
Content Analysis	Personal, psychological,	60% of students reported that the text	The text poses significant challenges to personal and religious beliefs, making

	religious, or cultural beliefs	challenged their existing beliefs.	students question the existence and role of God.
Content Analysis	Perception of absurdity and presence of God	55% of students felt the book attempted to alter their perception of life's absurdity and God's presence.	The book effectively stimulate critical thinking about existential themes.
Language-Based Approach	Comprehension and engagement	70% of students found the text difficult to understand and not engaging.	The language and themes may be too complex or abstract for some readers, leading to disengagement.
Literature for Personal Enrichment	Faith and waiting	65% of students agreed that waiting without faith is meaningless, and this theme was clear in the text.	The text reinforces the importance of faith and patience, resonating with a majority of the students.
Literature for Personal Enrichment	Belief with consistency and determination	50% of students noted the theme of consistent belief and determination but found the characters' lack of resolve frustrating.	The message is clear but may not be effectively conveyed through the characters' actions, leading to mixed reception.
Content Analysis	The Creator and Man	45% of students felt the book emphasized the futility of waiting for divine intervention.	The text suggests a critical view of reliance on divine intervention, prompting students to reconsider their own beliefs.
Language-Based Approach	Impact on faith and belief systems	50% of students found the text neither informative nor useful for their belief systems.	The language and arguments used might not effectively communicate the intended message to all readers.
Literature for Personal Enrichment	Self-sufficiency and self-improvement	40% of students were influenced by the text to believe in their strengths and work on their weaknesses.	The text encourages self- reliance, but this message resonates with fewer students compared to themes of faith and waiting.
Content Analysis	Nihilism and existentialism	35% of students recognized themes of nihilism and existentialism as relevant to post- World War II and modern contexts.	These philosophical themes are identified but may not be impactful for a significant portion of the readers.
Literature for Personal Enrichment	Ultimate truth and self- belief	45% of students appreciated the idea that waiting helps explore the ultimate truth and develop self-belief.	The concept of waiting as a path to understanding the ultimate truth is moderately received, indicating mixed effectiveness.
Overall Student Response		Positive: 40% Negative: 60%	The overall student response is more negative, with many finding the text challenging to their beliefs and not engaging or useful.

Table 3				
Literature for Personal Enrichment				
Student A:	This play, in my opinion, shocked my many foundations of life and helped me in several ways. My learning from the play was to look beyond your immediate surroundings and seek out the ultimate truth of life.			
Student B:	I disagree with the text because it implies that there is no one for whom you should wait, which undermines our confidence in God. Is this right?			
Student C:	After determining that the text's main topic is people's belief and disbelief systems, I concluded that this play did not affect me since, as a Muslim, I believe in God and think it is foolish to wait for something when God is already present in every one of us.			
Student D:	I now firmly think that God won't alter your circumstances unless and until you are unwilling to do anything on your own. Waiting for Godot is a great drama. Act without hesitation or preparation.			
Student E:	This play taught me a lot of new ideas, including the importance of absurdity and nihilism in our daily lives.			

#### Conclusion

The act of reading is a unique experience that involves the reader on a moral, intellectual, social, and artistic level. In particular, the goal of this study was to accurately depict the reader's thoughts and life experiences during the entire reading process. Reader-response theory acknowledges the reader's interpretation of the text to fill in the gaps, and in this study, the readers were asked to do just that. The goal of this research work was to fulfill the following learning objectives: readers should get knowledge about religion, culture, society, and other people. Readers need to understand how texts function, and how they reshape ideas and control feelings. However, the reader and the text do not contain the meaning. It is not something that exists; rather, it is something that happens, transpires, and is made and rebuilt during the reading process.

With 60% of students doubting the existence and function of God as well as the absurdity of life, the text tests students' cognitive skills and philosophical ideas. Nonetheless, readers said the work was boring and hard to grasp, which may indicate that some readers find the abstract concepts and language too sophisticated. Accessible supplemental materials may facilitate understanding. The literature included in the text for personal development has a variety of effects on students; nonetheless, the theme of faith and patience resonates with 40% of students. To help students understand and reconcile difficult philosophical and existential topics with their views, more accessible texts or further support are needed. However, 60% of the students found the text to be challenging to their beliefs and not engaging or useful.

# Recommendations

Changes to the curriculum, encouragement, dialogue, and a range of viewpoints are among the suggestions. More approachable texts or other resources that support students in connecting with and comprehending the text's intricate topics should be incorporated into the curriculum. Diverse viewpoints and encouraging conversations can aid students in processing and making sense of the difficult material in light of their own experiences and beliefs. By tackling these issues with curricular modifications, encouraging dialogues, and a range of viewpoints, teachers can improve students' literary experiences and personal development.

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