

Is Reader Response Approach Still Relevant in ESL Classrooms?: Mitigating Young Malaysian Readers' Disinterest through Scriptwriting Activities to Teach Literature

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Abstract

Literature in Education has been integrated into the Malaysian primary English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum, whereby pupils are expected to experience at least three years of exposure to the Contemporary Children's Literature (CCL) programme by the end of primary schooling. However, previous studies have reported pupils' lack of interest in learning literature, often attributed to the continued use of traditional and less engaging instructional approaches. To address this issue, scriptwriting activities were incorporated into the teaching of literature through the Reader Response Approach (RRA). This study aimed to identify the challenges encountered in the teaching and learning of CCL in a primary ESL classroom and to examine the usefulness of RRA through scriptwriting activities. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with ten Year 6 pupils using six open-ended questions. The findings revealed three main challenges in learning literature: limited vocabulary, lengthy literary materials, and a lack of guidance and learning resources. Despite these challenges, the use of scriptwriting activities enhanced pupils' understanding of literary texts, as pupils were able to produce scripts based on poems and short stories. Increased interest and engagement in the CCL programme were also observed. This study highlights the potential of scriptwriting as an effective pedagogical approach in primary ESL literature classrooms. The findings suggest that integrating scriptwriting activities within the Reader Response Approach offers a practical and engaging alternative to traditional literature instruction in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms.

Keywords: Literature in Education, Contemporary Children's Literature, English as a Second Language, Scriptwriting, Reader Response Approach, Primary ESL Classroom

Introduction

In line with 21st-century educational priorities, the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and adaptability has become increasingly important alongside academic achievement. The World Economic Forum (2025) highlights these competencies as key skills required for future work and lifelong learning. Reading and literature play a central role in developing these competencies, as engagement with literary texts encourages learners to move beyond basic decoding to analyse meaning and interpret perspectives critically. Literature also supports learners' readiness for reading by fostering interest and engagement in a collaborative learning environment (Abdulrazzaq et al., 2024). Such engagement extends beyond language development, providing a foundation for critical thinking and an understanding of diverse perspectives (Zondi, 2025).

Literature in Education (LiE) remains integrated in the syllabus for primary English as Second Language classrooms, as it has long been implemented in Malaysian education curriculum. The Contemporary Children's Literature (CCL) programme was first introduced in 2005 as an intensive reading program by the national Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) aiming to improve English language teaching through exposure towards story books or children literature. As stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), the LiE module is made compulsory at primary school levels within the second wave of introducing structural change and is expected to be executed within the existing school hours. Literature teaching hours are not separately allocated in DSKP/KSSR, it is embedded in English Language Arts. Based on syllabus, pupils will learn 1 short story, 1 graphic novel, 1 poetry anthology (Mohaideen et al., 2020; Sidhu et al., 2010). English totals 300 minutes per week (5 × 60-min periods) in national primary schools or 210–240 minutes in some reports; 150 minutes or 60–90 in SJK (Hamid & Aziz, 2020). Literature allows children to experience various ways of using language which later shorten the gap between written and spoken language. This initiative underscores the recognized value of literature in developing not only language acquisition but also broader cognitive abilities such as critical thinking, creativity, and memory in second language learners (Abdulrazzaq et al., 2024; Zondi, 2025). Thus, this notion was hoped to expose pupils to English language education through the literature component.

Literature plays an essential role in enhancing language learning and cognitive engagement in ESL classrooms. In fact, by integrating literary texts into language instruction, it can provide authentic language input, expand vocabulary, and promote student motivation and critical thinking (Lina & Arshad, 2024). Additionally, literature-based activities have been associated with deeper engagement and language proficiency development (Hussein, 2025). In Malaysian context, the Contemporary Children's Literature programme serves as a crucial platform for fostering these skills among primary school students, aligning with the broader educational goals of developing 21st-century competencies (Hussein, 2025; Zondi, 2025). The implementation serves as an attempt to mediate the declining interest in English language learning and to cultivate a more holistic understanding of the language beyond mere grammatical structures (Yusof & Sulaiman, 2024; Zondi, 2025). Yet research continues to report challenges in achieving sustained language improvements, underscoring the need for more engaging pedagogical approaches in literature instruction (Jabar, 2025).

This mirrors the pupils' interest in learning literature in class. According to Hamid & Aziz (2020), ESL learners have the tendency to display disinterest in literature due to a lack of understanding. This is further supported by Rajan and Ismail (2022) whereby pupils often show absence of interest in learning literature as it is deemed as a burdening subject. Such a scenario poses a concerning issue as literature supposedly brings excitement and eagerness for pupils to learn. Literature offers lively, enjoyable and high-interest readings (Sidhu et al., 2010). In addition to that, obsolete methods of teaching such as the 'chalk-and-talk' approach or 'teacher-centred patterns' should be put on hold (Mustakim et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2018). Educators should find different approaches in teaching literature and try navigating towards pupil-centred activities. Hence, there is a need for further exploration in research to be done in this context.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the learning challenges encountered by primary ESL pupils in engaging with the literature component and to examine the usefulness of the Reader Response Approach (RRA) through scriptwriting activities in addressing these challenges. The study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Year 6 pupils learning Contemporary Children's Literature in a Malaysian primary ESL classroom. As this research adopts a qualitative case study design conducted in a single school, the findings are intended to provide contextual insights rather than broad generalisations.

This study was conducted to address the following research questions:

- 1 What are the learning challenges observed in a Malaysian primary literature component as part of ESL classroom?
- 2 How useful is RRA in teaching a literature component through the use of scriptwriting activities, especially in the present context?

In the present educational landscape, the Reader Response Approach (RRA) is increasingly recognised as a relevant pedagogical framework for literature instruction, particularly in ESL classrooms characterised by diverse learner backgrounds and varying levels of language proficiency. This approach emphasizes the active role of the reader in constructing meaning from a text, later fostering deeper engagement and personal connection with literary works (Raudyatuzzahra, 2023). RRA positions pupils as active meaning-makers who construct understanding through personal experiences, emotions, and prior knowledge when engaging with literary texts (Rosenblatt, 1988). This interactive process allows learners to develop critical thinking skills by interpreting and analysing texts, while also enhancing their language proficiency through exposure to varied linguistic structures and narrative conventions (Lo & Shi, 2024). This active participation in meaning-making is crucial for enhancing motivation and comprehension among ESL learners who might otherwise find traditional, teacher-centred approaches alienating and unstimulating (Durriyah et al., 2023). RRA can aid in transforming literature from a daunting academic exercise into a more relatable and enjoyable experience by emphasizing personal interpretation or reducing reliance on teacher-based analysis (Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2024). In line with this theoretical perspective, the analysis focused on how pupils expressed personal meaning, engagement, and interpretation of literary texts through their scriptwriting activities.

Literature review

Reader Response Approach

One potential pedagogical approach that can be employed to teach literature in an ESL classroom is the use of critical lenses. RRA is one of the earliest critical theories that helps readers to better appreciate the reading of literature. Rosenblatt (1988) explained that both reading and writing share a necessary involvement when interacting with a text. During the writing process, the writer starts with a blank page, followed by producing a text which is then received by the reader who reads the written or printed text and later formulates meaning out of reading the text. Similarly, a reading transaction involves three aspects – a reader, a text and within a context.

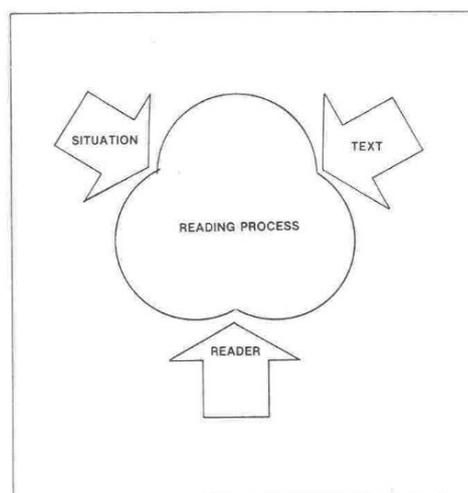


Figure 1. Reading Transaction (Hunt & Vipond, 1985)

The reader's level creates a two-way relationship between the text and reader. This reflects on the aspect of what is known by the reader and the feeling and desires from reading (Iskhak et al., 2020). It gives opportunity for the reader to relate the ideas and life experiences to the text read and later produce interpretations of the literature. Readers' understanding of literary text will differ as it will be influenced by one's personal and academic experience, contextual factors and sociocultural background (Rodríguez, 2018). Additionally, readers act as active agents of (re)constructing and (re)making new meanings and creative creators who construct texts through transactions that provide other perspectives of the literary text (Iskhak et al., 2020). According to Connell (2000), RRA enables learners to experience analysing literature which relates to learners' personal life experiences via transacting and empowering the learners in blending intellect and emotion through aesthetic stance. These later aids the minds and emotions to respond towards the verbal stimuli offered by the text. (Gönen, 2018; Iskhak et al., 2020; Rodríguez, 2018). Therefore, RRA helps readers in advancing written and verbal language skills through the responses that represent readers' intellectual and emotional being. (Gopal et al., 2022). This further helps to improve the readers' communicative competency by nurturing expressive utterances as reader responses and collaborative sharing of ideas as well as feelings in literature circles (Iskhak et al., 2020; Ma, 2025).

Past studies confirm RRA's efficacy in primary ESL/EFL. For instance, reader-response as the preferred method by pupils for poetry (e.g. Mora et al., 2020), aiding in enhancing

critical and creative thinking skills (Rashtchi, 2019) as well as improving reading comprehension via transactional reader-response theory (Abdulrazzaq et al., 2024; Niño & Páez, 2018). In Malaysian primary school ESL CCL contexts, studies on RRA usage remain limited but highlight transactional reader-response elements amid challenges like minimal literary integration and teacher creativity in Year 4 classrooms, where approaches including "transactional reader-response methods" were observed alongside comprehension work (Sidhu et al., 2010). For instance, it was documented upper primary CCL implementations emphasizing aesthetic responses via lived experiences, aligning with Rosenblatt's theory to negotiate meaning between text and pupils' prior knowledge for emotional/spiritual growth under MNEP (Sidhu et al., 2010). Similarly, Rawian et al. (2022) stated integrated children's literature like Big Books in Year 4 KSSR for imaginative responses and comprehension (plot/characters/morals), fostering personal engagement akin to RRA. While Abidin & Wai (2020) advocated dynamic poetry responses in primary to build reading skills beyond efferent stances.

The role of CCL among learners

Malaysia was first introduced to the CCL programme in 2005 but was only fully implemented in 2007, involving pupils between the age of 10 and 12 years old who are mainly Year 4 to Year 6 pupils. The purpose of this programme was to aid pupils in improving their English language acquisition through reading simple fiction. The objectives of the CCL programme are to instil and inculcate the reading habit, enrich pupils' vocabulary and language content, enhance pupils' thinking skills, promote cultural understanding in the Malaysian context, improve pupils' English language proficiency and provide lively, enjoyable and high-interest readings. Through CCL, it also provides a continuum of learning abilities for literature soon encountered in the Secondary school. Meanwhile, the framework of CCL implementation in Primary school context is indicated in Figure 2.

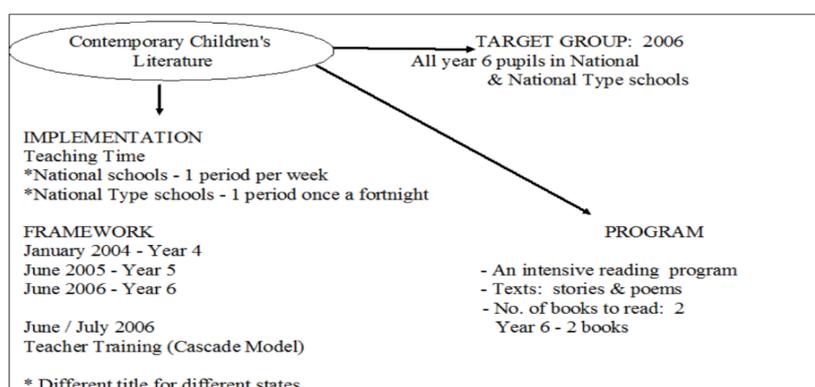


Figure 2. The framework of Contemporary Children's Literature for Primary School (MOE, 2006).

In the context of national primary school, pupils are expected to read at least 2 books per year. This includes a compilation of poems and short stories. As mentioned by the CDC, the CCL exploits the introduction of story books or children's literature to improve English language. There are also several other benefits underlined by CDC in the inculcation of CCL in the curriculum for learners (MOE, 2006). The framework remains relevant in the current educational context, as its core objectives continue to align with contemporary pedagogical priorities. In particular, the focus on improving English language proficiency and cultivating

reading habits remains central to ongoing educational reforms and broader 21st-century learning goals in Malaysia (Tee & Samah, 2025). This relevance is further reflected in the Ministry of Education's integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages into the English Language Curriculum, which seeks to align national language standards with international benchmarks for proficiency and communication (Fadzli & Ismail, 2023). Consistent with this, exposure to a range of literary forms, such as poetry and short stories, contributes to language proficiency and fosters a more meaningful engagement with the target language (Hussein, 2025).

Research studies on CCL implementation in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms reveal both strengths and persistent problems, particularly regarding pupil interest. The strengths highlighted includes the teachers' recognition that CCL could assist to improve their pupils' language proficiency, provide suitable and appropriate texts that matches pupils' levels, and great potential for enhancing pupils' language learning via imagination or literacy expansion shall it be properly executed (Mustakim et al., 2014; Sidhu et al., 2010). However, there are also limitations dominating classroom instructional practices which constantly run with great emphasis on Question and Answering (Q&A) comprehension activities, minimal opportunity for classroom or group discussion, insufficient literary elements integration. Additionally, child-centred activities are largely ignored in favour of teacher-centred patterns. Hence, leading to low pupil interest towards lively, enjoyable and high interest reading aims are undermined (Mustakim et al., 2014; Sidhu et al., 2010). Studies urge adequate and proper training to boost confidence and align practices with objectives like instilling reading habits (Sidhu et al., 2010).

Scriptwriting and Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document

The Assessment Standard Document (DSKP) which is used in primary schools under the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR), comprises the objectives and evaluation for pupils to achieve by the end of 6 years of primary schooling. Under the Language Arts Content Standards, teachers focus on the pupils' ability to enjoy and appreciate different text types, to express personal response to texts and to respond imaginatively to text (MOE, 2022). Significantly to this research, the Learning Standard 5.3.1 specifies an expectation of the pupils to respond imaginatively and intelligibly by creating simple stories and simple poems as well as other imaginative responses which are considered as appropriate. This focuses on planning, preparing and producing creative work with a focus on language use.

Since scriptwriting is a form of creative writing practice, this qualifies its worthiness as a research object under the discipline of creative writing (Baker, 2013). The first is to create new experiences. Scriptwriting enables pupils to develop new writing skills which allows a probability for joyful learning. Acquiring this new skill allows pupils to also possess a new form of writing, which can be used in their future endeavours. This creative aspect contributes to enriching pupils' vocabulary and language content, aligning with the broader goals of the CCL program to enhance overall English language proficiency (Mustakim et al., 2014). Secondly, scriptwriting is related to pupils' interest. By including the use of scriptwriting activity in ESL classrooms, it creates opportunities for pupils to experiment in the field that they find exciting. For instance, movie making or theatre presentation, this later turns into a source of motivation among pupils to learn the literary text more. This aligns with findings suggesting that creativity-based learning increases motivation and supports more engaging language

learning experiences (Avila, 2015; Luo, 2015). Lastly, pupils develop ways to analyse texts critically and creatively. Scriptwriting creates reasons for pupils to immerse in the form of story, characterisation, understanding and interpreting the story. This process not only deepens their comprehension of narrative elements but also fosters higher order thinking skills through creative adaptation (Alwasilah, 2024). Additionally, scriptwriting motivates pupils in comprehending the English learning context which they will engage with (Michaud & Hooper, 2016).

Scriptwriting and 21st-Century Skills in ESL Literature Classrooms

The application of scriptwriting in ESL literature classrooms provides a practical approach to developing 21st-century skills. Scriptwriting supports the development of the 4Cs—Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Communication, within language and literature learning contexts. This approach moves beyond traditional rote learning by engaging pupils in deeper cognitive processes during text interpretation and production (Kapkir et al., 2024). Through group-based scriptwriting tasks, pupils collaborate to interpret literary texts, negotiate meanings, and articulate ideas, thereby strengthening collaborative and communicative competencies. The activity also encourages critical thinking as pupils analyse literary elements, infer implicit meanings, and make decisions related to plot, characterisation, and dialogue. Creativity is evident when pupils reconstruct literary texts into original scripts, allowing for imaginative expression and personal interpretation of meaning (Hossain, 2024; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). From a sociocultural perspective, the development of the 4Cs through scriptwriting aligns with Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasises that learning occurs through social interaction within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development, where guidance from more knowledgeable peers enables learners to perform beyond their independent capability (Vygotsky, 1978). In collaborative scriptwriting settings, peer support allows pupils to participate meaningfully in literary interpretation and language production. Such scaffolded interaction reflects the principles of the Reader Response Approach, in which meaning is actively constructed through learners' engagement with texts and shared interpretation, leading to increased independence and deeper comprehension over time (Wu & Bakar, 2025).

Methodology

Research design

In order to identify the challenges in learning literature and determine the usefulness of RRA in scriptwriting activities in class, it is only fair to conduct qualitative research through the form of a case study. A case study mainly examines real life phenomena through thorough contextual analysis over a few activities and their relationships (Noah, 2018). The suitability of case study is undeniable as it allows in-depth and holistic research by examining data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007).

Sampling and Population

This research was conducted in a suburban primary school in Kota Kinabalu. Kota Kinabalu is the capital of Sabah in East Malaysia with a population density of 598 persons per square kilometre (Mapa, 2019). The population comprises various ethnicities, including Bumiputera (70.4%), encompassing indigenous groups like Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau, Murut, Chinese (27.4%), Indians (0.6%), and others (1.6%) (Jenie et al., 2021; Johon & Puyok, 2022; Lai & Tey, 2021; Mapa, 2019). Sabah's multi-ethnic features Kadazan-Dusun and Bajau as

predominant group with over 100 sub-ethnicities, which reflects rich cultural diversity that exposes pupils to varied traditions, languages, and perspectives potentially enriching creativity in product creation like scriptwriting (Hussin et al., 2018). In this study, 20 participants aged 12 years old from a suburban school were involved in this study. These participants were chosen based on their years of exposure towards learning literature in an ESL classroom. They had first encountered literature since they were 10 years old (Year 4) totalling 3 years of learning literature. These 3 years have exposed them to some degree of different literary genres namely poems, short stories and graphic novels. These participants are generally pupils from different cultural backgrounds which are the Kadazan Dusun, Bajau and Malays (as shown in Table 1). The diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of these pupils, where English is not their native language, further strengthen the research approach that could account for varied interpretations and expressions, ultimately influencing their engagement with scriptwriting activities (Xin-Li et al., 2022).

Table 1

Distribution of the Population

	Descriptions	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	7	35%
	Female	13	65%
Ethnic	Malay	2	10%
	Kadazandusun	17	75%
	Bajau	1	5%

The level of English proficiency among pupils ranges from low to fairly proficient, reflecting common patterns observed in Year 6 ESL classrooms in Sabah, where a significant number of learners continue to demonstrate low proficiency despite more than three years of exposure to English. This situation is highly influenced by learners' multi-ethnic first language (L1) backgrounds, including Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau, and Malay, limited use of English beyond the classroom as well as broader regional declines in English proficiency (Ghulamuddin et al., 2021; Mohaideen et al., 2020; Rawian et al., 2022). Since the population consists of 20 pupils in a classroom, only 10 were selected randomly via simple random sampling through assigning a number, and random selection was carried out to ensure equal probability of participation. This sampling selection was adopted to reduce biases and to ensure fair representation of the population. This selection is particularly advantageous as it allows for a balanced representation of the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds within the classroom, ensuring that the collected data encompasses a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

Research Instrument

This research employs a semi-structured interview which is a flexible qualitative data collection method guided by a predetermined interview guide to ensure consistent coverage of key areas in a conversational style, while allowing follow-up clarification and wording to fit the interviewee context as well as pursuit of detailed responses (Adams, 2015; Mustakim et

al., 2014; Stofer, 2019). It poses as an instrument to gather data where a self-developed interview protocol was designed to retrieve answers for the research questions. Through this approach, recurring patterns could be identified and highlighted to inform future research. The use of a semi-standardised interview format ensured that key questions and topics were addressed with each interviewee, while open-ended questions allowed for in-depth responses alongside limited structured elements to facilitate comparability across participants (Adams, 2015; Xu, 2009).

The interview comprised six questions, which enables the researchers to compare participants' responses within a consistent context. As presented in Table 2, the interview protocol consisted of six open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' responses regarding the use of CCL and the development of scriptwriting.

Table 2

The Interview Protocol

1	Do you normally understand what is written in the CCL book?
2	Which component of literature in CCL do you prefer? Why?
3	Do you find it difficult to understand the requirements of scriptwriting?
4	What is the most difficult part in scriptwriting?
5	Does scriptwriting help you to understand the poem/story better?
6	Do you prefer scriptwriting to be done in a group or individually?

In this process, two professionally trained English teachers were selected as content experts to serve as inter-raters for the interview questions. The interview instrument subsequently underwent expert validation to establish content validity. In line with qualitative research practices, expert review is emphasised to ensure that interview questions are relevant and aligned with the research questions. This process allowed for revisions to improve clarity and accuracy, while also enhancing the credibility of the study through independent expert feedback (Bryant, 2024; Mohaideen et al., 2020; Mora et al., 2020). Feedback obtained from the experts confirmed that the interview questions were clear, unambiguous, and appropriately addressed the research objectives, therefore strengthening the instrument and supporting the interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

A total of ten individual interviews were conducted, with one interview carried out for each participant. Each interview lasted approximately five to six minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Word document. Data collection was concluded when sufficient saturation was observed, whereby recurring patterns related to pupils' learning challenges and perceptions of scriptwriting were repeatedly identified, and

no substantially new insights emerged in subsequent interviews. This approach aligns with qualitative research principles that emphasise data saturation as a key indicator of adequate depth and richness of data for meaningful thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The transcribed data were then analysed using thematic analysis. It is a method to identify, analyse, and highlight patterns which are themes derived from the data (Byrne, 2021). The process consists of six consecutive steps which is listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Braun and Clark's 6-step process (Byrne, 2021)

Step	Description
Familiarization	This initial phase involved close immersion in the data through repeated reading of the entire dataset. Transcription was undertaken as part of this process to enhance familiarity with both the content and its contextual meaning. During this stage, preliminary notes and observations were recorded to capture emerging impressions arising from this in-depth engagement with the data (Byrne, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).
Generating initial codes	This phase involved systematically working through the entire dataset to identify and label features of the data that were relevant to the study. Codes were developed as concise, descriptive, or interpretive labels to capture both explicit content and underlying meanings, ensuring that all data relevant to the research questions were appropriately identified (Byrne, 2021).
Searching for themes	Once all data items have been sorted by codes, different codes are reviewed and combined according to shared meanings. This involves examining patterns across the dataset to form potential themes or sub-themes (Byrne, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).
Reviewing themes	The candidate themes were evaluated by reviewing them against the entire dataset through a two-stage process. First, the coherence of the data within each theme was examined to ensure internal consistency. Second, the themes were assessed in relation to the overall dataset and the research questions to determine their representativeness. Where necessary, themes were refined, merged, or discarded to enhance clarity, distinctiveness, and analytical accuracy (Byrne, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).
Defining and naming themes	Each finalised theme was subjected to detailed analysis to clarify its scope, focus, and underlying narrative. This process involved determining what each theme revealed about the data, selecting representative data extracts to illustrate it, and assigning a clear, concise, and informative name that accurately captured its core meaning (Byrne, 2021).
Producing the report	In the final stage, the themes were reported through a coherent narrative supported by data extracts and linked to the research questions and relevant literature, with writing integrated throughout the analytical process (Ahmed et al., 2025; Byrne, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

In the defining and naming the themes, a detailed analysis of the themes finalised was done. The scope and focus of themes were determined and appropriate titles were given to each theme selected. Table 4 summarizes the themes derived from the interview.

Table 4

Themes Derived from the Interview

Research Questions	Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
Do you normally understand what is written in the CCL book?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Often encounter unfamiliar words 2. Only know words in first language 	Vocabulary-related difficulties	Limited Vocabulary
Which component of literature in CCL do you prefer? Why?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Story is too long 2. Difficult to read 	Text length and complexity	Lengthy literary materials
Do you find it difficult to understand the requirements of scriptwriting?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No dictionary 2. Constantly need help to understand 	Insufficient learning support	Lack of guidance and materials
Does scriptwriting help you to understand the poem/story better?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Able to understand better 2. Explored more than before 	Improved comprehension	Deepens understanding of literary text
Do you prefer scriptwriting to be done in a group or individually?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Works better with peers 2. Prefers group work 	Peer-supported learning	Collaborative learning

The initial codes were categorised as experiential codes, as they were derived directly from pupils' reported experiences and perceptions during the interviews. These experiential codes were subsequently reviewed and clustered into themes through thematic analysis. Lastly, the write up was made to further explain and elaborate the themes. Thorough and significant outcomes were discussed under each theme to answer the questions of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are being discussed based on both research questions.

Learning challenges in the literature classroom

Based on the interview executed with the pupils, the limitations encountered in the learning of literature in primary ESL classrooms can be divided into three challenges.

Limited Vocabulary

The first obstacle identified is the participants' limited vocabulary range in the English language. This is indicated in a comment expressed by P1- "There are words in Malay that we wanted to use, however, we are facing a hard time to find the meaning of the particular word in English". This is further supported by P3 saying that they had "known how to construct the sentence, but sometimes if there is a word in a sentence, they have a difficult time in figuring it out." This demonstrates a common challenge in language acquisition where a lack of lexical knowledge impedes comprehension, even when grammatical structures are familiar (Hamid & Aziz, 2020). This linguistic barrier often forces learners to rely on their first language for

translation, highlighting a gap in their English lexicon (Mohamad et al., 2024). These are also proof of the pupils' facing hurdles by having inadequate amounts of exposure towards a variety of vocabulary. Such deficits in vocabulary can significantly hinder a student's ability to engage with and understand English as a Second Language learning materials, especially complex literary texts (Mustakim et al., 2014). Pupils who are facing this problem will require more time to digest the materials given to them. The struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary is a prevalent issue among primary ESL pupils, leading to difficulties in text comprehension and overall engagement with literary works (Mohaideen et al., 2020; Radi & Zabit, 2025). If such a situation is left unattended, it will hinder the pupils from fully comprehending grasping the gist of materials given to them and what more to make production out of it.

Lengthy Literary Materials

Another limitation faced is pupils' perceptions towards literature to be materials that are too lengthy. This research uses materials that are provided by the Ministry of Education for Primary school learners. Based on the feedback gathered, pupils show more preferences towards poems due to its length to be shorter as compared to short stories. This presents a significant pedagogical challenge, as extensive textual demands can overwhelm young learners and lead to disengagement, especially when vocabulary knowledge is limited (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2020). Pupil's feedback on preferred components in literature stated that if the pupils were to choose between poem and graphic novel, they would rather have poem as it is shorter. This indicates that voluminous texts, such as short stories, often overwhelm young learners, particularly when combined with an inadequate lexicon and limited prior exposure to varied vocabulary (Rawian et al., 2022). Such preferences suggest that teachers should consider the length and complexity of literary materials to maintain pupils' engagement and facilitate comprehension, especially for those with developing English proficiency (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021; Siang et al., 2021).

Table 5

Chall's model of reading development (1983)

Chall's model of reading development highlighted 6 stages of reading.

Stages	Descriptions
0	Pre-Reading: Emergent Awareness
1	Initial Decoding: Age 6-7
2	Confirmation/Fluency: Age 7-8 (Simple Texts)
3	Reading To Learn/Comprehending Reader: Age 9-13 (Recognizing themes, new experiences, ideas via wide text/viewpoints)
4	Multiple Viewpoint: Age 14-18
5	Construction: Age 18 onwards (Synthesis)

The data sample of this study includes Year 6 pupils within the age range of 9 to 13 falling under Stage 3: comprehending reader, whereby pupils are expected to engage complex literary texts independently. It is by then pupils will be starting to recognise themes, read in order to learn new experiences, recognise important issues and obtain complex knowledge.

However, shall pupils find the materials given bores them, it will lead to refusal in learning. Pupils tend to portray absence of interest in literature as a result of complexity of literature materials (Hamid & Aziz, 2020). This serves as a challenge towards educators too in selecting the appropriate materials to be used in teaching and learning sessions. This aligns

with findings suggesting that uninteresting or unappealing texts contribute to student disengagement and hinder knowledge acquisition (Rajan & Ismail, 2022). The pupils' interests in reading lengthier literature materials such as short novels is lower. This indicates that text length and perceived difficulty are critical factors influencing student engagement and motivation in literary studies, particularly among young learners (Rawian et al., 2022). An appropriate approach needs to be taken to address this issue.

Lack of Guidance and Resources

In addition to that, pupils who are of lower proficiency in English language will require extra guidance from the teacher. According to pupils, they do not immediately understand the meaning of the story or poem and the English language is hard for them. Extra measures had to be taken to aid this issue. Pupils who are having difficulty in understanding the materials given will have slower progress as compared to their other advanced peers. This gap underlined the need for differentiated instruction and targeted interventions to bridge learning disparities and ensure equitable literacy engagement among all pupils (Abidin & Wai, 2020).

Furthermore, pupils with lower proficiency levels are more likely to experience feelings of exclusion, highlighting the importance of adopting differentiated instructional strategies and providing individualised support to promote fair and inclusive learning outcomes, particularly for learners struggling with language proficiency (Sidhu et al., 2010). Based on the data gained pupil will refer to the teacher for words that could not be understood. If the task were to be assigned as homework, no dictionary is available at home to refer to. This highlights another limitation faced by the pupils which is having limited resources as reference available. The lack of readily available dictionaries and supplementary learning tools limits pupils' ability to comprehend texts independently, thereby increasing their reliance on teacher support for vocabulary development and contextual understanding (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Pupils come from different backgrounds, thus access towards additional materials will differ. This then poses a threat in learning literature in primary ESL context. The disparity in resource availability can worsen existing learning gaps, particularly for pupils who lack consistent out-of-school support and access to reference materials (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2020).

Reader Response Approach and the usefulness of scriptwriting activities to teach literature

RRA was applied in the teaching of literature with the pupils and production had been made through scriptwriting. Based on the interview, the usefulness of scriptwriting activity was portrayed in two elements.

Deepens understanding on literary text

The activity of scriptwriting requires the pupils to fully understand what had been mentioned in the literary text given. In order to produce a script, the metaphor gained from the poem, or the short story must be well perceived. Based on the implementation of scriptwriting, it enables pupils to break down the short story into several parts. Which leads to deeper interpretation of the story read and later enhances their understanding of the literary text. The process of deconstruction and reconstruction inherent in scriptwriting ensures pupils to actively engage with the text, thereby fostering a more profound and memorable learning experience (Hamid & Aziz, 2020).

The scriptwriting activity promotes deeper understanding of the text and the author's purpose. Pupils will have the opportunity to encounter the overall picture of a scene, character development and literary devices in order to portray the events in the literary text read (Bedard & Fuhrken, 2011). These findings are further supported by pupils' responses, which revealed that translating each action in the poem into a script enabled them to express their understanding through varied modes, particularly role-playing. The data indicated this active involvement shifted pupils from passive reading to more interactive engagement with the text, which then strengthened their comprehension and retention of literary concepts.

In analysing the responses, it was evident that scriptwriting encouraged pupils to approach the literary text more analytically, allowing them to identify implicit meanings and underlying assumptions that might otherwise remain unnoticed. This engagement fostered higher-order thinking skills, as pupils demonstrated the ability to interpret, evaluate, and reflect on the text beyond surface-level understanding (Sidhu et al., 2010). Furthermore, the findings showed that scriptwriting provided pupils with opportunities to reconstruct the text creatively based on their own interpretations, enabling them to relate literary issues to their everyday experiences. Such meaningful engagement contributes to the development of overall literary competence and supports the cultivation of lifelong learning skills (Xu, 2009).

Promotes Collaborative Learning

The findings indicated that the scriptwriting activity was conducted in groups rather than individually to encourage active participation among pupils. Data from classroom observations and pupil responses showed that collaborative scriptwriting enabled pupils to work together in interpreting literary themes and developing shared understanding, thereby supporting peer-to-peer learning and mutual support (Choo et al., 2017). The findings further revealed that scaffolding occurred when pupils with lower English proficiency received assistance from peers who demonstrated stronger language abilities. Pupils were observed seeking guidance from more proficient peers, which helped to balance individual contributions during the scriptwriting process.

This pattern of interaction reflects principles of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as more proficient learners guided their peers, contributing to both individual and collective comprehension of literary texts (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2020). In addition, the findings showed that collaborative scriptwriting encouraged the development of communication and negotiation skills, as pupils articulated their interpretations and reached agreement on narrative decisions and character portrayals (Luo, 2015). Such collaborative engagement was also found to foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership of the creative output, mirroring real-world collaborative practices (Mandarani & Megawati, 2024).

Pupils also preferred working in groups as it allowed them to delegate tasks during the scriptwriting activity. This delegation included identifying the meanings of targeted vocabulary, determining themes within the literary text, and selecting suitable phrases for inclusion in the script. The task delegation not only improved efficiency but also enabled pupils to contribute based on their individual strengths, thereby reinforcing learning through collaboration. Pupils' responses further suggested that collaborative discussions supported the production of quality scripts, reflecting principles of translanguaging drama pedagogy, in which collaborative talk provides opportunities for learners to practise, evaluate, and create

meaning through language use (Dutton & Rushton, 2022). The findings also align with research indicating that peer discussions enhance vocabulary development and cognitive growth, supporting pupils' progression from the pre-writing to the writing stage (Ghafar et al., 2023). In addition, pupils reported that completing the scriptwriting task in groups helped ensure task completion, as active interaction among group members made the process easier and more manageable.

The findings reflect the emphasis of 21st-century pedagogy on the four core competencies known as the 4Cs—Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Communication. The data indicated that scriptwriting activities supported the development of all four components simultaneously, particularly through the creative use of English for authentic communication (Luo, 2015). In terms of collaboration, the findings showed that group-based scriptwriting enabled pupils to work collectively in interpreting literary themes, developing shared understanding, and delegating tasks. Pupils collaborated in identifying word meanings, determining themes, and selecting appropriate phrases for inclusion in the script. This peer-to-peer interaction and mutual support were evident in the way pupils shared responsibilities and worked together to complete the task, highlighting the importance of teamwork in the learning process (Mandarani & Megawati, 2024; Selvaraj & Aziz, 2020).

The findings also highlighted the role of communication in scriptwriting activities. Pupils were required to articulate their interpretations, express ideas clearly, and engage in discussions to negotiate narrative choices and character portrayals within their groups. This interaction supported the development of both speaking and writing skills, as pupils refined their scripts through continuous oral discussion and collaborative decision-making (Skylar, 2023). Furthermore, the findings indicated that scriptwriting engaged pupils in critical thinking as they analysed literary texts, inferred implicit meanings, and made informed decisions related to plot, character development, and dialogue construction (Yu & Mohammad, 2019). Creativity was also evident when pupils transformed their interpretations of poems or stories into original scripts, translating analytical insights into innovative narratives and expressive storytelling (Avila, 2015). Overall, the integration of 21st-century skills through scriptwriting emerged as a holistic pedagogical approach that supported not only pupils' linguistic development but also their preparedness to engage with complex academic and real-world challenges (Thornhill-Miller et al. 2023; Pentury et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Overall, this study indicates that the use of scriptwriting through the Reader Response Approach (RRA) supports pupils' engagement and understanding of literary texts in primary ESL classrooms. In the present context, RRA remains relevant as it allows pupils to take an active role in constructing meaning by relating texts to their own experiences and understanding, rather than relying solely on teacher explanation. This learner-centred orientation aligns with current classroom needs, particularly in encouraging participation and deeper engagement with literature. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its small sample size, short duration, and focus on a single instructional approach, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Challenges related to pupils' limited vocabulary, the length and complexity of literary materials, and restricted access to reference resources were also identified. Future research may therefore consider longer implementation periods, larger

samples, and the use of multiple instructional approaches, alongside greater emphasis on scaffolding and access to learning resources to further support pupils' learning in ESL literature classrooms.

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