

# **READER RESPONSE AND AI-BASED LITERARY LEARNING: A PSYCHOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL CASE STUDY IN MODERN INDONESIAN LITERATURE**

***(Respon Pembaca dan Pembelajaran Literasi Berbasis Kecerdasan Buatan: Sebuah Studi Kasus Psikologis-Existensial ada Sastra Indonesia Modern)***

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**Abstract:** *This essay introduces a novel pedagogical approach for instructing modern Indonesian literature through the integration of Reader Response Theory and artificial intelligence. This analysis emphasizes psychological and existential problems in Armijn Pane's *Belenggu*, Y.B. Mangunwijaya's *Burung-Burung Manyar*, and Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba*, while prioritizing students' individual interpretations. AI instruments—sentiment analysis, reflective chatbots, and prompt generators—facilitate profound, adaptive contemplation. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach that integrates a literature review and organized classroom observation, revealing that AI-assisted reader response enhances engagement in emotive, cognitive, and creative domains. An examination of five pivotal passages from each work reveals that students more easily relate the characters' conflicts with identity, history, love, and freedom to their personal experiences, fostering empathy and self-awareness. AI facilitates immediate feedback and customized pathways tailored to individual learner profiles. This approach expands literary pedagogy and cultivates readers' awareness of their role within texts and the world, providing a reflective and adaptable model appropriate for twenty-first-century education and classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence; Existentialism; Literary Psychology; Literature Learning; Reader Response; Reflective Literacy*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Literature learning in the modern curriculum demands more than just the ability to recognize the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a work. In this disruptive digital age, literary literacy must serve as a means of reflection, identity formation, and socio-cultural dialogue. However, literature learning in the classroom is often still dominated by structural and analytical approaches that overlook students' subjective experiences as readers. Reader response theory offers a more humanistic pedagogical alternative, allowing students to play an active role in the process of making meaning from text. On the other hand, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technology are opening up new opportunities to create more personalized, interactive, and reflective reading experiences. Integrating these two approaches can address the challenges of student engagement in contemporary literary learning.

Although much research has been conducted on literary learning, most of it still focuses on structural, thematic, or semiotic approaches. For example, Nurhadi (2016) researched

poetry reading strategies using a conventional approach, while Rahmawati (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of the discussion method in developing short story comprehension skills. Research on the use of AI in literary education is still very limited in Indonesia, especially research that specifically links AI with readers' emotional responses in the context of modern Indonesian literary works.

The research gap indicates a need to develop a more transformative and student-experience-based approach, with technological support capable of reading affective responses and helping to build a reflective understanding of the text. Thus, innovation in literary learning is needed that not only emphasizes text interpretation but also involves the emotional engagement and personal meaning-making of the reader. This article discusses how an AI-supported Reader Response approach can be applied in the study of three modern Indonesian novels featuring psychological and existential conflicts: *Belenggu*, *Burung-Burung Manyar*, and *Amba*. These three novels were chosen because they depict the inner dynamics of characters facing social, historical, and personal pressures.

The main objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze students' responses to existential quotes in the three novels; (2) to evaluate the effectiveness of AI as a reflective tool in literature learning; and (3) to design a contextual, humanistic, and technology-based learning model. By offering an integration of reader response and AI approaches, this article provides a new contribution (novelty) to the development of value- and emotion-based literary pedagogy.

Reader response theory is an approach in literary studies that emphasizes the importance of the reader as an active subject in the process of text interpretation. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) in her theory of "transactional theory" stated that the meaning of literature is not solely within the text or within the reader, but is formed in the process of interaction between the two. Rosenblatt distinguishes between two ways of reading: aesthetic reading, where the reader is emotionally and reflectively engaged, and efferent reading, which is oriented towards information retrieval. In the context of literary education, this approach encourages readers (students) to express their own views, emotions, and life experiences in response to literary characters and events (Beach, 1993).

This approach is highly relevant in the context of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes humanistic, participatory, and reflective education. Students are not merely studying structure and style, but are invited to interpret texts based on personal experience, making learning affectively meaningful. As explained by Tompkins (1980), reader-response theory shifts the center of authority from the text and author to the reader themselves.

Literary psychology is an approach that examines the inner conditions and dynamics of characters, as well as the psychological responses of readers to literary works. According

to Wellek and Warren (1949), literature often expresses human psychological conflicts, from childhood trauma to social alienation. In relation to literary learning, this approach helps students understand how a character's inner experiences reflect psychological realities that may parallel their own. Meanwhile, the existentialist approach in literature stems from the thinking of figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. Existentialism highlights alienation, the absurdity of life, free will, existential responsibility, and the search for meaning. Sartre (1943) in "Being and Nothingness" asserts that humans are beings condemned to be free, in the sense that they are always responsible for their choices.

In modern Indonesian literature, such as *Belenggu*, *Burung-Burung Manyar*, and *Amba*, we see characters grappling with personal dilemmas, national identity, historical trauma, as well as love and loss. The characters Sukartono, Setadewa, and *Amba* are representations of individuals experiencing existential inner conflict and rejecting the identities imposed by society or the state. Analyzing these characters allows students to delve into complex psychological and moral struggles, and connect them to their own experiences as individuals in society.

The advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has opened up new avenues in literature teaching, particularly in creating personalized, reflective, and data-driven reading experiences. In the context of reader response theory, AI can function as an assistive tool that analyzes students' emotional responses (through sentiment analysis), generates thought-provoking questions (through prompt generators), and facilitates reflective conversations with fictional characters (through AI chatbot roleplay). According to Leu et al. (2015), digital literacy is not merely a technical skill, but encompasses the ability to think critically, process information reflectively, and construct new meaning through interaction with digital texts. In this case, the use of AI allows teachers to customize learning pathways according to the affective and cognitive needs of each student.

AI also supports differentiated learning practices that are responsive to diversity. With the help of AI-powered learning analytics, teachers can monitor students' progress in responding to literary texts, provide timely feedback, and identify students' interpretation patterns based on their background and emotional tendencies. This expands the scope of scaffolding, which is not only cognitive but also affective and moral. The integration of AI in literary response learning is not a form of educational dehumanization, but rather an opportunity to strengthen the personal and dialogic dimensions between students, texts, and the world. AI here functions as a facilitator, not a replacement, in guiding students to discover themselves through literature.

## ***B. METHOD***

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at exploring the effectiveness of integrating reader response theory with artificial intelligence (AI) technology in modern Indonesian literature learning. This approach allows for the collection and analysis of textual, reflective, and contextual data, particularly regarding student engagement in interpreting literary works containing psychological and existential themes.

The objects of this study are three modern Indonesian novels rich in psychological and existential content: *Belenggu* by Armijn Pane, *Burung-Burung Manyar* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, and *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak. The three were chosen because they possess thematic complexity and the potential for connection with students' inner experiences. The research subjects consisted of 12th-grade high school students and first-year students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program who were taking literature classes using the Reader Response approach.

Data was collected through three main techniques: (1) a literature review of previous theories and research surrounding reader response, literary psychology, existentialism, and the use of AI in education; (2) text analysis of five representative quotes from each novel depicting the characters' inner conflicts or search for meaning; and (3) classroom observation of literature learning implementation, specifically student interaction with AI features such as chatbots, sentiment analysis, and prompt generators. The data was analyzed thematically and reflectively using categorization and in-depth interpretation techniques. Students' responses to the quote were classified based on the level of affective engagement, depth of reflection, and connection to personal experiences. The AI system is used to help detect dominant emotions, provide personalized feedback, and visualize response patterns. Triangulation was conducted by comparing classroom observation results, students' written responses, and interaction logs with AI to ensure data validity and reliability.

This research has limitations in its exploratory and pedagogical aspects. Technical evaluation of AI algorithms is not the primary focus. Additionally, the implementation of AI in learning is carried out under the direct supervision of teachers to ensure emotional safety and ethical use of technology in education. With this approach, this research aims to provide a contextual and innovative overview of how literature, technology, and humanism can synergize in the modern classroom.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with literature review and structured observation methods to examine the implementation of a Reader Response-based literary learning model and AI integration. The aim of this method is to gain an in-

depth understanding of reflective and adaptive pedagogical practices, particularly in developing students' critical and emotional literacy.

### ***C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION***

#### **1. Analysis of *Belenggu* (Armijn Pane)**

Armijn Pane's novel *Belenggu* presents the inner turmoil of the character Sukartono, who is torn between his social role as a doctor and his neglected emotional needs. The novel's intrinsic elements—characters, plot, setting, and theme—reflect deep psychological conflict. The main character, Sukartono, is depicted as a modern man torn between his love for his wife, Sumartini, and his attraction to Rohayah, a woman from a different background. His heart felt heavy and restless. "He didn't know why" (p. 12), describes Sukartono's internal anxiety that cannot be explained rationally. AI in learning is used to recognize the emotions implied in the text, then generate reflective questions like, "Have you ever felt uneasy for no apparent reason?" which helps students connect the characters' experiences with their own emotional reality. "He loves Tini, but his heart feels empty" (p. 38), reflecting the dissonance between the seemingly ideal social relationship and inner emptiness.

AI facilitates mapping the relationships between characters and guides students to explore the meaning of authentic love and happiness through reflective essays. "Every time he chooses, something of him is left behind" (p. 56), becomes the basis for discussion about existential dilemmas. Students create a simulation of a character's decisions using AI that simulates various possible life paths, and then evaluate the consequences. "Tini is a symbol of the future, but the past always comes back to haunt us" (p. 71), opening up space for discussion about the influence of the past on the present. AI is used to create a timeline of Sukartono's life and help students map out important moments in their own lives. Is this what they call freedom? If so, why does it feel like a prison? (page 89) raises the issue of freedom and responsibility. Students were asked to compare the characters' views on freedom with their own experiences in making important decisions.

With the integration of AI and a reader-response approach, "*Beloved*" encourages a deep exploration of inner conflict, existentialism, and the meaning of freedom. Students not only understand text structure but also learn to reflect on their own inner dynamics through the narratives of fictional characters.

#### **2. Analysis of *Burung-burung Manyar* (Y.B. Mangunwijaya)**

This novel offers psychological and existential complexity through the main character, Setadewa, who experiences an identity crisis due to historical turmoil and the uncertainty of his national position. The novel's intrinsic elements are prominent in its retrospective and non-linear plot, showcasing temporal fragmentation in the protagonist's consciousness. The main themes explored are alienation, defeat, and the search for

identity amidst drastic socio-political changes. The colonial, revolutionary, and New Order time periods intensified Setadewa's ideological and existential clashes. "I am a nation of the defeated, a nation of people without a flag" (p. 167), highlighting a deep crisis of identity and alienation. AI is used to stimulate students' emotional responses to experiences of marginalization. Many students stated that they did not feel Indonesian enough because they came from minority backgrounds or experienced identity pressure in their social environment.

This reflection forms a personal understanding of the meaning of critical nationalism. "The world has chosen its own path, I am just a shadow" (p. 103), is used to connect students' experiences of marginalization in the era of globalization. AI maps the passive and deterministic nuances in the characters' feelings and compares them to students' reflections on limitations in determining the future. "Every choice has a price, and sometimes not everything can be paid for with regret" (p. 211), prompting moral discussions about responsibility and life choices. AI generates decision-making simulations that highlight ethical dilemmas within historical and familial contexts. Students construct alternative narratives about Setadewa's decision, demonstrating developing moral imagination. "Setadewa no longer knew where he was: in the past, the present, or the time he had created himself" (p. 243), illustrating the impact of historical trauma on the character's sense of time. Students are invited to reflect on personal experiences when the past casts a shadow over the present. AI is used to create emotional timelines that help students understand the connection between trauma and disorientation. "He loved a nation that never truly loved him back" (p. 312), opening up a discourse on service and the imbalanced relationship between citizens and the state. This discussion led to criticism of hegemonic nationalism and a new understanding of patriotism. AI is driving the creation of poems or essays that depict the experience of loving something that is ideal but painful.

Overall, the analysis of *Weaverbirds* reveals how intrinsic elements such as characters, setting, and themes are integrated with student reflection through a reader response approach and AI technology interventions. Learning focuses not only on structure but also on deep meaning relevant to students' lives. This novel serves as a means of intergenerational contemplation on identity, history, and existence.

### **3. Amba Analysis (Laksmi Pamuntjak)**

Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel *Amba* presents psychological and existential conflicts through the characters of Amba and Bhisma, who live in the shadow of the historical repression of 1965. Intrinsic elements such as characters, plot, setting, and theme form a strong narrative framework for exploring love, suffering, and the search for meaning amidst political violence. The main setting, Buru Island as a place of political detention, becomes a symbol of alienation and existential exile. "I have written many letters to you that I

never sent" (p. 67), illustrates Amba's inner turmoil and the breakdown of communication as a metaphor for trauma and loss.

AI is used to help students write imaginary response letters as a form of reflective therapy. "Bhisma is not just a man, he is a memory, and memories cannot be possessed" (p. 104), opening a discussion about the relationship between love, memory, and loss. Students compose poems or personal reflections using AI that detects the theme of loss in the text. "What hurts most is not the separation, but the waiting without an answer" (p. 148), depicting an existence suspended by hope. AI simulates emotional scenarios to explore patience and vulnerability in students' personal relationships. "Are we still human if our entire lives are determined by a history we didn't choose?" (p. 193), inviting critical discussion about historical determinism and individual freedom. AI invites students to map historical events they believe have influenced the present. "I want to erase history from your body, but your body is history itself" (p. 257), becomes the basis for understanding how the human body and experience become political archives. AI is directed to help students construct their own body narratives within the context of family history. Through Amba's analysis, students are invited to delve into personal experiences intertwined with collective history. AI-based learning in this novel not only enriches understanding of intrinsic elements but also fosters deep emotional engagement and historical awareness.

The research findings indicate that integrating reader response theory and artificial intelligence (AI) into modern Indonesian literature learning successfully increased student engagement emotionally, reflectively, and cognitively. The analysis was conducted on three main novels—Belenggu, Burung-Burung Manyar, and Amba—by selecting five key quotes from each text that depict the characters' psychological and existential conflicts. Each novel is analyzed in relation to student responses, personal interpretations, and the role of AI intervention in supporting the learning process.

In *Chains*, students respond to quotes like "His heart felt heavy and restless. He doesn't know why," with personal reflections on inner turmoil, life dilemmas, and social pressures within family relationships. Some students link it to the experience of being pressured by their parents to be "ideal." AI is used to detect emotions like restlessness, guilt, or anxiety, and provide responses such as, "Have you ever felt like you didn't choose your own life?" This directs the class discussion towards reflection on self-autonomy and the pressure of social expectations.

In "Burung-burung Manyar," quotes like "I am a nation of the defeated, a nation of people without a flag" create an emotional resonance with students from mixed ethnic backgrounds or who feel socially marginalized. Through an AI prompt, students were asked to answer: "What does having a national identity mean to you?" Their responses revealed an awareness of the complexities of identity in the era of globalization. Many students mentioned that they felt like "observers" rather than "participants" in national

life. AI generates visualizations of character relationships and the concept of nationalism in the form of mind maps, which aids cross-textual and cross-identity understanding.

The novel *Amba* offers a space for reflection on forgotten history and the resilience of women in the face of collective wounds. Students responded to the quote "I love him not with my head, but with my whole body, including the torn and flawed parts" by relating it to complex and often illogical experiences of love. AI programmed as Bhisma or *Amba* supports simulations of dialogues involving high empathy. In one experiment, students wrote a reply letter from Bhisma containing an admission and apology for his inability to return. This response sparked discussions about trauma, history, and survivors.

In all three novels, the learning outcomes reveal three patterns of progress: first, an increasing depth of text analysis with contextual and affective approaches; second, students' courage to express opinions and emotions in the form of reflective essays, character letters, and video monologues; and third, the role of AI as a facilitator that broadens the scope of meaning and allows for varied interpretations based on students' emotional profiles.

The teacher also mentioned that using AI helps them identify responses that require further attention, including writing that shows signs of emotional distress. This provides space for empathetic intervention and the strengthening of emotional literacy within the context of literary learning. With the sentiment tracker feature, teachers can see weekly emotional trends and adjust their teaching approach based on changes in class dynamics.

Another significant finding is that even students from the low reading interest group were able to demonstrate active participation in AI-based tasks, particularly when asked to respond personally rather than answer analytical questions. This confirms the importance of a humanistic approach in literature that allows for diverse expressions.

This learning also shows that AI integration can enrich the literacy experience while upholding humanistic values and local culture. Students don't feel replaced by technology; rather, they feel supported in the process of independently finding meaning. AI functions as a director, not a sole interpreter, and provides reflective stimuli that strengthen students' interpretation processes.

Overall, this model opens up new possibilities in Indonesian literary pedagogy, namely an approach that combines the strengths of inner reflection, personal response, and intelligent technology in shaping readers who not only understand the text but also understand themselves and their society.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

reader response approach combined with AI technology provides a new dimension in literary learning. All three present deep psychological and existential themes, allowing students not only to understand narrative structure but also to reflect on life issues, identity, trauma, and history through their personal lens.

AI integration serves as an adaptive reflection facilitator, mapping students' emotions and preferences, and creating alternative scenarios that broaden narrative understanding. Learning is no longer limited to cognitive understanding of text, but is evolving towards affective, empathetic, and critical engagement. The analysis results show that students are able to develop a deeper understanding of complex issues in literary works and connect them to their own experiences.

As a suggestion, this approach needs to be further developed in the literature learning curriculum in secondary schools and universities, taking into account the ethics of AI use and differentiation in learning strategies. Teachers need to be equipped with special training so they can design response- and reflection-based learning activities and understand how the AI systems used work. Evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach must also be conducted periodically to ensure that literature remains an authentic space for humanity, even when mediated by technology.

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