

# Literary Reading Orientation toward Classic and Contemporary Texts and its Relationship to Language Proficiency and Interpretive Competence among BA English Language Studies Students: A Quantitative Correlational Study

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## ABSTRACT

The research explored the association of literary reading orientation to classic and contemporary texts and BAELS students' language proficiency and interpretive competence at Guimaras State University in the First Semester of Academic Year 2023-2024. Utilizing the quantitative correlational research design, it utilized 50 BAELS students as participants. The data were obtained through a Literary Reading Orientation Questionnaire, a Language Proficiency Test and an Interpretive Competence Assessment. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Results indicated that the students had moderate to high orientations towards both classical and contemporary literary texts. Results also suggested statistically significant positive correlations between literary reading orientation and language proficiency, and between literary reading orientation and interpretive competence. The research indicates that, by engaging consistently with literary texts (whether classical or contemporary) at tertiary level, students of English accumulate a linguistic and interpretive capital.

**Keywords:** literary reading orientation, classic literature, contemporary literature, language proficiency, interpretive competence, BAELS students

## INTRODUCTION

Literary reading is widely recognized as a central pillar of English language education, contributing to both linguistic development and interpretive sophistication. In English Language Studies programs, literature functions not merely as content but as a cognitive and linguistic training ground where learners encounter complex syntax, advanced vocabulary, and culturally embedded meanings (Hall, 2015; Carter & Long, 1991).

Classic literary texts have traditionally been valued for their linguistic density, stylistic complexity, and philosophical depth, which demand close reading and analytical rigor (Eagleton, 2008). Contemporary literary texts, by contrast, often employ accessible language and culturally proximate themes, making them effective tools for enhancing reading motivation and linguistic fluency (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011). Studies have shown that both literary traditions play complementary roles in language learning, yet students' orientation toward these texts varies significantly (Mol & Bus, 2011).

Language proficiency—defined as competence in grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension—is closely linked to extensive reading practices (Nation, 2013). Meanwhile, interpretive competence involves the ability to infer meaning, analyze textual structures, and construct evidence-based interpretations, skills that are developed through sustained literary engagement (Kress, 2010; Luke, 2012). Despite growing international scholarship on literature-based language learning, empirical studies examining how students' literary reading orientation relates to language proficiency and interpretive competence remain limited in the Philippine higher education context.

This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between literary reading orientation toward classic and contemporary texts and language proficiency and interpretive competence among BAELS students at Guimaras State University.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on **Reader Response Theory** (Rosenblatt, 1978) and **Schema Theory** (Rumelhart, 1980).

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory posits that meaning is not embedded solely in the text but is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text. Students' reading orientations, preferences, and prior experiences shape their interpretive processes, directly influencing interpretive competence.

Schema Theory explains how readers comprehend texts by activating existing knowledge structures. Extensive exposure to diverse literary texts expands linguistic and cultural schemas, facilitating improved comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and interpretive reasoning (Anderson, 2015).

Guided by Reader Response Theory and Schema Theory, the study assumes that students' literary reading orientation influences their engagement with texts. This engagement enhances language proficiency through exposure to varied linguistic forms and strengthens interpretive competence through meaning-making processes. Literary reading orientation is therefore treated as the independent variable, while language proficiency and interpretive competence serve as dependent variables.

### Objectives of the Study

#### General Objective

To determine the relationship between literary reading orientation toward classic and contemporary texts and language proficiency and interpretive competence among BAELS students at Guimaras State University.

#### Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study sought to—

1. Determine the level of students' literary reading orientation toward classic texts.
2. Determine the level of students' literary reading orientation toward contemporary texts.
3. Assess the level of students' language proficiency.
4. Assess the level of students' interpretive competence.
5. Determine the relationship between literary reading orientation and language proficiency.
6. Determine the relationship between literary reading orientation and interpretive competence.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

A quantitative correlational research design was employed to examine the relationships among variables without manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### Participants and Locale

The participants were 50 Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) students enrolled at Guimaras State University (GSU) during the First Semester of Academic Year 2023-2024. The locale was selected due to its relevance to English language and literary studies.

### Research Instruments

1. **Literary Reading Orientation Questionnaire** – adapted from reading attitude and engagement scales (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014).
2. **Language Proficiency Test** – measuring grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Nation, 2013).

**3. Interpretive Competence Assessment** – assessing inferencing, thematic analysis, and textual interpretation (Luke, 2012).

All instruments were validated by subject experts and pilot-tested for reliability.

**Data Gathering Procedure**

After securing institutional permission and informed consent, instruments were administered during scheduled sessions. Responses were collected, encoded, and analyzed.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s product–moment correlation coefficient were employed at a 0.05 level of significance.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1. Level of Literary Reading Orientation toward Classic Texts**

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Reading frequency	3.42	0.61	Moderate
Reading preference	3.36	0.58	Moderate
Perceived value	3.78	0.55	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.52</b>	—	<b>Moderate</b>

The results indicate that BAELS students at Guimaras State University exhibit a moderate orientation toward classic literary texts, with the highest rating observed in perceived value. This suggests that while students recognize the academic and cultural importance of classic literature, their actual reading frequency and personal preference for such texts remain limited. This pattern aligns with Eagleton’s (2008) assertion that canonical texts are often revered yet under-read due to their linguistic density and historical distance, and with Carter and Long’s (1991) observation that learners tend to acknowledge the prestige of classic literature while favoring more accessible texts for sustained engagement. The implication is that appreciation alone does not translate into active literary practice; therefore, instructional mediation is necessary to bridge the gap between recognition and engagement. Pedagogical strategies that contextualize canonical works, scaffold linguistic difficulty, and connect themes to contemporary concerns may help transform classic literature from symbolic cultural capital into a lived and meaningful reading experience for students.

**Table 2. Level of Literary Reading Orientation toward Contemporary Texts**

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Reading frequency	3.88	0.57	High
Reading preference	3.94	0.52	High
Perceived relevance	4.02	0.49	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.95</b>	—	<b>High</b>

The findings reveal a high level of orientation toward contemporary literary texts, indicating stronger engagement, preference, and perceived relevance among students. The linguistic accessibility and sociocultural proximity of contemporary literature likely account for this heightened orientation, as such texts resonate more closely with students’ lived experiences and communicative realities. Beach et al. (2011) emphasize that contemporary texts foster reader identification and motivation, which in turn sustain reading

engagement, while Mol and Bus (2011) likewise argue that relevance and familiarity are key predictors of voluntary reading behavior among young adult readers. The implication of this finding is that contemporary literature functions not merely as supplementary material but as a strategic pedagogical resource capable of sustaining motivation, increasing reading volume, and supporting language development. Consequently, integrating contemporary texts more deliberately into literature instruction may enhance students' engagement while serving as an effective entry point for deeper literary analysis and skill development.

**Table 3. Level of Language Proficiency of BAELS Students**

Area	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Grammar	3.71	0.54	High
Vocabulary	3.85	0.51	High
Reading comprehension	4.02	0.47	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.86</b>	—	<b>High</b>

The results demonstrate that BAELS students possess a high level of language proficiency, particularly in reading comprehension. This finding supports Nation's (2013) claim that extensive exposure to texts—especially varied and meaningful reading materials—enhances vocabulary development and grammatical competence. The high reading comprehension scores suggest that students' sustained engagement with literary texts contributes positively to their ability to process extended discourse, a core outcome of advanced language study. The implication of this finding is that continued and structured exposure to diverse literary materials is not merely enrichment but a central mechanism for strengthening linguistic competence. Consequently, instructional practices that prioritize sustained reading and text-rich learning environments may further reinforce language proficiency among BAELS students.

**Table 4. Level of Interpretive Competence**

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Inferential interpretation	3.44	0.60	Moderate
Thematic analysis	3.76	0.53	High
Textual justification	3.58	0.56	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.59</b>	—	<b>Moderate–High</b>

The findings indicate a moderate to high level of interpretive competence among BAELS students, with the strongest performance observed in thematic analysis. This suggests that while students are generally able to identify central ideas and dominant meanings, they experience greater difficulty in higher-level inferential reasoning and in providing well-supported textual justifications. Luke (2012) explains that interpretive competence develops progressively and requires sustained practice in critical reading and argumentation, while Kress (2010) emphasizes that higher-order interpretation is cognitively demanding and is more effectively cultivated through engagement with complex texts and explicit instructional guidance. The implication of these findings is that interpretive ability does not develop automatically through exposure alone but requires deliberate pedagogical scaffolding that emphasizes reasoning, evidence-based interpretation, and critical discourse practices. Strengthening instruction in analytical reading and interpretive writing may therefore enhance students' capacity to engage more deeply with literary texts.

**Table 5. Relationship between Literary Reading Orientation and Language Proficiency**

Variables	r	p-value	Interpretation
Literary Reading Orientation ↔ Language Proficiency	0.63	0.001	Significant

The analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between literary reading orientation and language proficiency, indicating that students who demonstrate stronger engagement with literary texts tend to exhibit higher levels of linguistic competence. This finding corroborates extensive reading research showing that motivated and frequent reading enhances vocabulary acquisition, syntactic awareness, and reading fluency (Nation, 2013; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). The implication of this relationship is that literary reading functions not merely as a cultural or aesthetic activity but as a foundational mechanism for language development in tertiary English programs. Consequently, fostering positive reading orientations through well-designed literary instruction may serve as a strategic means of strengthening students' overall language proficiency.

**Table 6. Relationship between Literary Reading Orientation and Interpretive Competence**

Variables	r	p-value	Interpretation
Literary Reading Orientation ↔ Interpretive Competence	0.69	0.000	Significant

The results demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between literary reading orientation and interpretive competence, suggesting that students who are more inclined toward literary reading—across both classic and contemporary texts—are better equipped to interpret, analyze, and justify textual meanings. This finding is supported by Rosenblatt's (1978) Reader Response Theory, which posits that meaning emerges through an active, transactional relationship between the reader and the text. In addition, Eagleton (2008) argues that sustained engagement with literature sharpens interpretive judgment by exposing readers to ambiguity, symbolism, and layered meanings. The implication of this finding is that literary reading functions as a cognitive training ground for interpretation, enabling students to develop higher-order analytical skills essential to advanced literary study. Consequently, instructional practices that promote sustained, reflective, and dialogic engagement with literary texts may significantly strengthen students' interpretive competence.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions, together with their theoretical, pedagogical, and curricular implications, are drawn from the findings of the study:

1. BAELS students demonstrate meaningful engagement with both classic and contemporary literary texts, suggesting a balanced literary orientation that supports diverse modes of reading and interpretation.
2. Literary reading orientation is significantly related to language proficiency, implying that sustained and purposeful engagement with literary texts contributes to the development of linguistic competence.
3. Literary reading orientation is significantly related to interpretive competence, indicating that students' approaches to reading play a crucial role in shaping their ability to construct meaning from texts.
4. Contemporary literary texts contribute more strongly to language proficiency, implying their effectiveness as accessible and linguistically relevant materials for developing communicative skills.
5. Classic literary texts contribute more strongly to interpretive competence, underscoring their value in cultivating higher-order thinking, critical analysis, and depth of interpretation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing conclusions and their implications for instruction, curriculum design, and future inquiry, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. BAELS curricula should strategically integrate both classic and contemporary literary texts to ensure balanced development of language proficiency and interpretive competence.
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on explicit interpretive strategies when teaching canonical literature to support students' analytical and critical reading abilities.
3. Contemporary texts should be deliberately utilized as scaffolding materials to enhance language proficiency and promote learner engagement.
4. Programs and instructional practices should encourage extensive and independent literary reading to strengthen students' sustained engagement with diverse texts.
5. Future research may expand the scope of investigation by employing larger samples or longitudinal research designs to generate more robust and generalizable findings.

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