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Aesthetic vs. efferent reading in reading comprehension courses in the Iranian EFL context

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Even though literature has been suggested for use as a means of teaching language in reading comprehension courses, it has been viewed from an efferent perspective (what can be gleaned from the content), not an aesthetic one (what can be gained from the experience). This paper discusses whether aesthetic reading can lead to aesthetic transaction and more engagement of readers with texts in EFL reading courses. The effect of the aesthetic transaction and all its components (6 factors) on the dependent variable of reading comprehension was studied with two groups of participants. The control group received non-literary texts and the experimental group received literary texts during the 8 weeks of the research. The results indicated that (1) the aesthetic transaction components are requirements for appreciating literary texts in particular and reading comprehension skills in general, and (2) aesthetic reading is a suitable alternative for the efferent reading mostly practiced in reading comprehension courses.

Keywords: aesthetic; efferent; interaction; transaction; reading comprehension; EFL; Iran

Introduction

Reading comprehension, as one of the main courses of *English Language and Literature* and *Translation* majors in EFL educational contexts, aims at developing students' reading skill. Nevertheless, literature as a means of aesthetic transaction in such reading comprehension courses has received little consideration. Rosenblatt (1994) distinguishes between efferent and aesthetic reading, defining the former (from the Latin "efferre", meaning *to carry away*) as reading in which the reader is concerned with what they will carry away (also sometimes described as reading for information) while the latter is when "the reader's primary concern is with what happens during the actual reading" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). Aesthetic reading requires lived experience, since readers bring about their own text through interaction with the original text. Based on this view, the meaning-making process plays an active role. In reading comprehension courses, students should be able to create meaning in terms of how they perceive the text. They are no longer "implied readers" or "ideal readers"; rather, they are real readers when their role in the literary world helps shape pedagogical aspects of literature (Hansson, 1992). If aesthetic reading becomes the main concern, the reader is no longer the invisible eavesdropper, and pre-reading activities can be replaced by contextual discovery.

This paper focuses on the potential of using the aesthetic reading of literature as a vehicle for reading comprehension. In this context it is important to makes a distinction between *reading* literature and *studying* it as described by Widdowson (cited in Quirk & Widdowson, 1985). Reading literature entails seeing how language is developed to create a different reality. Whereas, studying literature refers to acquiring knowledge of

and about literature. Studying literature, therefore, seems to be impossible without also learning to read literature which cannot take place when the focus is on language usage because that requires learners' *literal* rather than *literary* response. It requires a focus on language use which shifts attention from the text-based meaning to a meaning-making process between the reader and the text. This perspective aligns with Widdowson's (1979) view of reading "not as a reaction to a text but as an interaction between writer and reader mediated through the text" (p. 74).

A literary text is not only a stimulus for readers to link their past experiences and concepts with verbal symbols, but it is also a basis for seeking certain hypotheses to select, reject and order their understanding. This is achieved through an ongoing process of transaction in which the elements simultaneously condition each other (Rosenblatt, 1994). This is similar to Piaget's (1970) proposal for the ongoing process of assimilation and accommodation or Bruner's (1996) notion of spiralling.

A literary text also requires attention to the imprints of past encounters, not just to the words but their referents in different contexts both in life and in other literary works, to the overtones of feelings (Rosenblatt, 1994), ideas and associations. These are important constituents that together with other elements make the list of aesthetic transaction factors investigated in this study.

Wiseman and Many's research (1991) also showed that familiarizing students with aesthetic transaction factors helps them approach a text with a more aesthetic stance. More specifically, when they experienced the aesthetic reading, they used a significantly more aesthetic position in their reaction (responses) to new literary texts. In much the same way, Rodriguez and Hernandez (2015) found that transactional reading not only increased students' engagement in the act of reading, but also improved their critical thinking skills. Other studies (Babaee & Wan Yahya, 2014; Chen, 2015; Monica, 2016; Stavik, 2015; Yilmaz, 2012, to name a few) have further shown how literary texts can engage EFL students in aesthetic transaction and improve both their reading comprehension and literary appreciation.

The present study investigates the effect of aesthetic (transactional/reader-response) reading in the EFL context of Iran as a tool for improving reading comprehension.

In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language from junior high school, and EAP and ESP courses are offered for non-English majors at university level. English Literature and Translation are the two main programmes offered in university departments of foreign languages and require a literary background in English Literature. The overarching objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the factors influencing the reading comprehension behaviour patterns of Iranian students of English Literature
2. To select a set of aesthetic transaction dimensions describing an experience typical for these students
3. To determine whether these students experience aesthetic transaction with all its elements.

These objectives were translated into thirteen research questions, eleven of which addressed the relationships between and among the ten factors of aesthetic transaction proposed by (Rosenblatt, 1994). The remaining two research questions related to the dependent and independent variables that investigated the relationship between reading comprehension and aesthetic transaction as well as the contribution of aesthetic transaction to improving reading skills are the focus of this paper:

1. Is there any significant relationship between the reading comprehension of the literary text and the aesthetic transaction experience?
2. Can an aesthetic transaction approach contribute to the students' reading comprehension skills especially when literary texts are used?

Based on the characteristics of reading that involves aesthetic transaction, the proposed factors (Rosenblatt, 1994) are as follows:

- F_1: **aesthetic transaction** which could be positively connected with the experience in reading literary texts and includes the following parameters: inspiration and enthusiasm towards the text, specific absorption of attention to the reading, feeling and living through the text; recalling the past encounters, attention not only to the sounds and rhythm but also to the kinds of overtones of feeling, sense, idea, association, and images as the text is read.
- F_2: **attraction of reading** which takes the reader's attention away from the mechanical impulse of curiosity toward pleasurable activity of the mind by the transaction taking place through reading.
- F_3: **specific meaning** which is conducive to going beyond the semantic aspect of the text and looking for the specific meaning with the particular visual or auditory characteristics.
- F_4: **speed** in reading which requires subjects not to be in haste, rather, to live the text.
- F_5: **attention to form** which is not just the linguistic aspect; it is attention to sounds and rhythm in relation to overtones of feelings, senses, ideas, associations and images that are formed, and the personal and qualitative elements experienced as the text is read.
- F_6: **past encounters** which requires learners to think about the references of the words and recall past encounters, if any, when they read the words of the text.
- F_7: **accuracy in reading** which requires learners to accurately read the text.
- F_8: **complete unconsciousness**, i.e., learners are not conscious of anything but what they read.
- F_9: **absolute contextualization** of what is read which means total dependency of understanding on the context in which the text is presented.
- F_{10}: **lack of total neutralization** which means that learners cannot be disinterested in the ideas presented in the text if they want to comprehend the text fully and if they are supposed to experience aesthetic transaction.

All the factors were related to the research dependent variable (reading comprehension or one of its components) and the independent variable (aesthetic transaction).

Method

Participants
The participants were 240 junior students randomly selected from two branches of the Islamic Azad University in Iran. They had passed three courses of *Introduction to Literature 1* and *2* and *Simple Poetry*, so all participants were assumed to be at the same level of proficiency in terms of familiarity with literary texts. The participants were divided into experimental and control groups (each with 120 participants) which received literary and non-literary texts, respectively. For ease of data management and

analysis, each group was subdivided into 4 groups of 30 participants. Thus, there were four experimental subgroups and four control subgroups.

Instruments and data collection

Data were collected using texts, a students' questionnaire (Appendix 1) and two paired experts' questionnaires (Appendices 2 and 3).

Texts

Literature and TEFL professors teaching at the two participating locations contributed to the selection of texts. Eventually, four literary texts for the experimental subgroups were selected from abridged storybooks classified at Stages 3-4 within the Iranian national system (corresponding to approximately level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference). Also, four texts from among the texts not covered in the course syllabus of the reading comprehension course were selected from the in-house reading comprehension course book for the control subgroups. Text topics and their difficulty levels are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Texts and their difficulty levels

Text Number	Type	Topic	Readability*
1	Literary	War	69.53
2	Literary	The Story of an Hour	73.71
3	Literary	The Ninny	77.66
4	Literary	The Gift of the Magi	74.62
5	Non-literary	The Man Booker Prize	44.90
6	Non-literary	The First Computer Programmer	45.09
7	Non-literary	Visit Angkor Wat	46.32
8	Non-literary	Scottish Independence	53.48

*Obtained by Flesch readability formula

Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire items were first elicited from classroom discussions and informal interviews with a pilot group. A 35-item questionnaire was developed and pilot tested twice. Then two faculty members with MA and PhD degrees proofread the final 30-item draft and verified the face and content validity. The reliability index for the questionnaire was .83 using Cronbach alpha. Of the 240 questionnaires given to the 8 groups, 228 were returned (a response rate of 95%).

Experts' Questionnaire

The experts' questionnaires sought to identify the factors that best determine an aesthetic transaction. The questions were designed based on Rosenblatt's ten-factor proposal. Using the Delphi method and interviews with 15 faculty members, Factors 7, 8, 9, 10 (Table 2) were eliminated, and the list was edited and finalized with 6 factors.

Table 2. Kendall W test of concordance

Factor	F_1	F_2	F_3	F_4	F_5	F_6	F_7	F_8	F_9	F_{10}	Test Statistics	
					Descriptive Statistics							
N	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	N	15
Mean	**4.67**	**4**	**3.33**	**3.33**	**3.27**	**3.2**	**1.93**	**2.33**	**2.33**	**2**	**Kendall's W**	**.763**
Std. Deviation	.488	.535	.418	.488	.458	.414	.704	.617	.724	.535	Chi-Square	102.941
Mean Rank	**9.6**	**8.4**	**6.43**	**5.97**	**6.27**	**6.37**	**2.4**	**3.57**	**3.6**	**2.41**	df	9
											Asymp. Sig.	.000

Data analysis
Data were analysed to test the following directional hypotheses:
1. There is a significant relationship between reading comprehension of the literary text and aesthetic transaction experience
2. An aesthetic transaction approach can contribute to the students' reading comprehension skills especially when literary texts are used.

These hypotheses were tested using the following non-parametric tests:
1. Kendall *W* test of group concordance was used to determine the aesthetic transaction factors in reading comprehension of literary texts.
2. Spearman correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension (labelled in the tables as "Total Factors") of literary texts.
3. Mann-Whitney *U* test compared the means of the two groups.
4. Regression analysis was used to discover the linear relation between the aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension of literary and non-literary texts.
5. Friedman Two-Way ANOVA obtained the mean rank of the factors involved in reading comprehension.

The results of these tests are reported below.

Kendall W test of group concordance
Kendall *W* test was used to test the concordance of the experts' (i.e. the faculty members') opinions about the factors. At the .05 level of significance, there was concordance about ranking the determining factors 1-6 involved in reading comprehension (Table 2).

Factors 7 to 10 were eliminated because of the low means (the mean of the Likert scale for these factors was 3). Therefore, the conceptual model of the research was formed in a framework of a 6-factor model including aesthetic transaction, attraction (in reading), specific meaning, speed in reading, form (of the text) and past encounters. Based on this conceptual model, the main research hypothesis was formed as:

There is a positive relationship between the aesthetic transaction and the reading comprehension of literary texts

and a matrix of correlation among the 6 factors was designed.

Spearman correlation coefficient to investigate the relation between the aesthetic transaction and the reading comprehension of literary texts

Setting the level of significance at .05, the Spearman correlation coefficient was used to determine the relation between the aesthetic transaction and its components (factors 2 to 6 one by one) and the reading comprehension (considered as the Total Factors). Since the research is related to eight texts (four literary and four non-literary), a matrix of correlation coefficients was obtained for both literary and non-literary texts (Tables 3 and 4). The correlation between the aesthetic transaction and the reading comprehension (Factors 2 to 6 labelled Total Factors) of the first literary text was .564 and with each component of reading comprehension being .595 (attraction), .489 (specific meaning), .702 (speed), .518 (form) and .488 (past encounters). For other literary texts (2, 3 & 4), similar results were obtained (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation matrix for literary texts

| Text | Factors | Spearman Correlation | | | | | | Total Factors |
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	
Literary 1	Factor1	1	.595**	.489**	.702**	.518**	.488**	.564**
	Factor2		1	.363	.644**	.442*	.385*	
	Factor3			1	.550**	.702**	.717**	
	Factor4				1	.503**	.464*	
	Factor5					1	.502**	
	Factor6						1	
Literary 2	Factor1	1	.706	.292	.584**	.524**	.183	.639**
	Factor2		1	.289	.696**	.639**	.264	
	Factor3			1	.352	.002	.285	
	Factor4				1	.697**	.262	
	Factor5					1	.185	
	Factor6						1	
Literary 3	Factor1	1	.672**	.377*	.617**	.378*	.588**	.669**
	Factor2		1	.299	.701**	.706**	.541**	
	Factor3			1	.453**	.172	.426*	
	Factor4				1	.727**	.603**	
	Factor5					1	.510**	
	Factor6						1	
Literary 4	Factor1	1	.818**	.547**	.745**	.677**	.715**	.831**
	Factor2		1	.519**	.634**	.667**	.739**	
	Factor3			1	.562**	.634**	.536**	
	Factor4				1	.688**	.636**	
	Factor5					1	.570**	
	Factor6						1	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The case of low *r* between some factors (e.g., Factors 2 and 6 in Literary 1) may be explained in terms of the nature of the factors. That is, in the case of Literary 1, Factor 2

(attraction of reading) shows low correlation (.488) with Factor 6 (past encounters) probably due to lack of, or little trace of, the readers' past encounters with the topic or situations in the text, and thus, minimal attraction to the text.

A comparison of Tables 3 and 4 shows that there is a significant correlation between aesthetic transaction and all the other factors for literary texts, while for non-literary texts in which little aesthetic transaction is involved, the correlations are not significant.

Table 4. Correlation matrix for non-literary texts

Text	Factors	Spearman Correlation						
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Total Factors
Non Literary 1	Factor1	1	**.280**	**.477****	**.033**	**.334**	**.235**	**.404***
	Factor2		1	.288	.298	.016	.201	
	Factor3			1	.088	.421*	-.030	
	Factor4				1	.042	-.161	
	Factor5					1	.030	
	Factor6						1	
Non Literary 2	Factor1	1	**.188**	**.231**	**.152**	**.254**	**.376***	**.270**
	Factor2		1	.113	.312	.336	.401*	
	Factor3			1	.001	.005	.464*	
	Factor4				1	.386*	.465*	
	Factor5					1	.540**	
	Factor6						1	
Non Literary 3	Factor1	1	**.157**	**.268**	**.258**	**.023**	**.129**	**.229**
	Factor2		1	-.423*	-.019	.369	-.175	
	Factor3			1	.176	.149	.425*	
	Factor4				1	-.184	.142	
	Factor5					1	.446*	
	Factor6						1	
Non Literary 4	Factor1	1	**.205**	**.382**	**-.358**	**.048**	**.408***	**.132**
	Factor2		1	.248	.163	.227	-.133	
	Factor3			1	.015	.120	.168	
	Factor4				1	-.092	-.294	
	Factor5					1	-.047	
	Factor6						1	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The highest *r* in Table 4 (.477) belongs to F_1 and F_3 (aesthetic transaction and specific meaning) in Non-Literary 1. This fair correlation may imply that the readers were mainly seeking specific meanings in the text with regard to the definition/description of this kind of literary text, but that no considerable attraction of the text, or required low speed, or attention to form or past encounters were involved (low r between other factors and in other non-literary texts).

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test

This test provided the statistical comparison of the means of the two groups and their subgroups (those dealing with one of the literary text and those dealing with one of the non-literary text) whose data distributions are not normal. μ_1 is the parameter for non-literary texts and μ_2 for literary texts. The results obtained at .05 level of significance indicate that there are significant differences between the two groups with regard to each literary and non-literary text (1 to 4). The aesthetic transaction was more observed in reading literary texts than non-literary texts (Table 5).

Table 5. Mann-Whitney test for literary and non-literary texts

Mann-Whitney Test	Texts							
	1		2		3		4	
Text Type	Lit.	Non-lit.	Lit.	Non-lit.	Lit.	Non-lit.	Lit.	Non-lit.
Frequencies	27	29	30	29	32	28	28	25
Mean Rank	40.93	16.93	37.63	22.10	42.08	17.27	25	18.04
Sum Rank	1105	491	1129	641	1346.5	483.5	980	451
Mann-Whitney U	56		206		77.5		126	
Z	-5.507		-3.475		-5.5		-4	
Sig. (2-tailed)	**0.000**		**0.001**		**0.000**		**0.000**	

Regression analysis for testing the linear relationship between aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension in literary and non-literary text

Using Flesch (1984) readability formula for texts, the results indicate that the slope of the regression line for literary texts increases as the level of the texts became increasingly difficult, while it decreases for non-literary texts (Table 6). With the level of confidence at .05, there is a linear relationship between aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension for literary texts but not for non-literary texts (Table 7).

Table 6. Difficulty level of literary and non-literary texts based on Flesch's (1984) formula

Type	Text Topic	Regression	Readability
Literary	(1) War	0.55	69.53
Literary	(2) The Story of an Hour	0.659	73.71
Literary	(3) The Ninny	0.73	77.66
Literary	(4) The Gift of the Magi	0.839	74.62
Non literary	(1) The Man Booker Prize	0.324	44.90
Non literary	(2) The First Computer Programmer	0.302	45.09
Non literary	(3) Visit Angkor Wat	0.287	46.32
Non literary	(4) Scottish Independence	0.111	53.48

Table 7. Regression analysis for aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension

Dependent Variable	Reading Comprehension							
	Literary				Non Literary			
Text	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
R	0.55	0.659	0.73	0.839		0.302	0.287	0.111
R Square	0.302	**0.435**	**0.532**	**0.703**	0.105	0.091	0.083	0.012
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.586	0.304	0.39	0.459	0.616	0.793	0.616	0.715
Sig	**0.003**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.000**	0.086	0.111	0.138	0.597

Predictors: (Constant), Factor1

Friedman two-way analysis of variance

To obtain the mean rank of the determining factors in reading comprehension from the students' viewpoint, Friedman analysis was used. As shown in Table 8, attraction (F_2) was always the most important factor from the students' viewpoint while attention to form (F_5) was the least important factor in reading literary texts. Compared with the Kendall test results, it can be observed that experts ranked attention to form (Factor 5) higher than speed (Factor 4), while students believed otherwise.

Table 8. Friedman analysis of mean rank for literary texts compared with Kendall's

Rank Table	Friedman								Kendall	
	Mean Rank								Mean Rank	
Factor	Literary 1	Rank-ing	Literary 2	Rank-ing	Literary 3	Rank-ing	Literary 4	Rank-ing	Experts	Rank-ing
F2	4	1	3.98	1	3.81	1	3.80	1	8.40	1
F3	3.15	2	3.48	2	3.52	2	3.79	2	6.43	2
F4	2.78	4	2.17	4	2.58	4	2.38	4	5.97	5
F5	1.96	5	2.02	5	1.95	5	2.2	5	6.27	4
F6	3.11	3	3.35	3	3.14	3	2.84	3	6.37	3
N	27		30		32		28			
Chi – Square	24.984		36.732		29.859		26.662			
df	4		4		4		4			
Sig	.000		.000		.000		.000			

Findings and discussion

This research investigates whether aesthetic reading with literary texts can be implemented for the purpose of reading comprehension improvement. The following general questions and directional hypotheses were formed:

1. Is there any significant relationship between reading comprehension of the literary text and aesthetic transaction experience?
    H$_1$: There is a significant relationship between reading comprehension of the literary text and aesthetic transaction experience.

2. Can an aesthetic transaction approach contribute to the students' reading comprehension skills especially when literary texts are used?
    H$_1$: An aesthetic transaction approach can contribute to the students' reading comprehension skills especially when literary texts are used.

Finding 1

Positive significant correlation is observed between aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension in the literary texts (Table 3). More specifically, there are positive significant correlations between F_1 (aesthetic transaction, composed of: inspiration and enthusiasm toward the text, specific absorption of attention on the reading, feeling and living through the text, recalling the past encounters, and attention not only to the sounds and rhythm but also to the kinds of overtones of feeling, sense, idea, association, and images as the text is read) and F_2 (attraction of reading), F_3 (specific meaning), F_4 (speed) and F_5 (attention to form) in reading literary texts. As shown in Table 3, the highest correlation coefficients are observed between F_1 and F_2 (attraction of reading) and F_1 and F_4 (low speed required for reading literary texts) for the four literary texts,

F_1-F_2: .59, .70, .67, .81
F_1-F_4: .70, .58, .61, .74

This can reasonably justify the higher degree of aesthetic transaction when readers are attracted to a text and read at low speed. Conversely, low correlation coefficients are observed between the same factors in the reading of the non-literary texts (Table 4):

F_1-F_2: .28, .18, .15, .20
F_1-F_4: .03, .15, .25, .35

The highest correlation coefficient in the non-literary texts matrix is between F_1 and F_3 (specific meaning) in the Non-literary Text 1 (.47), which is not meaningful compared to the correlation coefficients in the literary texts. The general low correlation coefficients in the non-literary texts imply that such texts do not engage the readers in the aesthetic transaction, and therefore, what happens is an efferent reading of non-literary texts without the involvement of aesthetic factors.

Finding 2

The non-parametric test of means (Mann-Whitney Test, see Table 5) reveals that the hypothesis suggesting the equality of the means of the two groups (reading literary and non-literary texts) could not be retained. In other words, aesthetic transaction occurs

more in the experimental group's reading of literary texts than the control group's reading of non-literary texts.

Taken together, Findings 1 and 2 demonstrate that there is a significant relationship between reading comprehension of the literary text and aesthetic transaction experience (the H_1 for Research Question 1).

Finding 3

The regression analysis (Table 7) indicates that there is a linear and direct correlation between aesthetic transaction and reading comprehension for the experimental groups, i.e., the R^2 for literary texts 1, 2, 3, and 4 are .30, .43, .53, and .70 respectively. However, for non-literary texts 1, 2, 3, and 4, the R^2 indices are .10, .09, .08, and .01 respectively, and not meaningful. This means that an increase in the magnitude of aesthetic transaction can lead to an increase in the slope of the regression line related to the reading comprehension of literary texts but not for non-literary texts. However, to draw a firm conclusion, this study must be replicated with readers with higher proficiency levels and texts with higher levels of difficulty.

Finding 4

Since the literary and non-literary texts were given to eight separate groups, the comparison between regression analysis and readability of the texts seems to be auxiliary to the study. The comparison shows that there is a direct correlation between the level of difficulty of the literary texts and the slope of the regression line, that is, the more increase in the difficulty of the literary texts, the more increase in the slope of the line. However, for non-literary texts the result is the opposite. The increase in the difficulty of the texts shows a decrease in the slope of the line. This leads to the conclusion that an increase in the level of difficulty of the literary texts increases the aesthetic transaction while for non-literary texts, aesthetic transaction decreases as the level of the texts become increasingly difficult.

Finding 5

The results obtained from the Friedman analysis of variance indicate that the first 3 factors (namely: attraction, specific meaning, and past encounters) were ranked from 1 to 3 respectively in both students' and experts' rankings. However, there is a difference between these rankings in factor 4 (speed) and factor 5 (attention to form). Students considered speed to be more important than form while experts ranked the opposite. This is probably due to the different perspectives of students and teachers in terms of the learning and teaching process in general, and students' focus when they are engaged in reading literary texts, in particular. Based on Rosenblatt's description (1994), attention to form refers to the reader's attention to sounds and rhythm in relation to overtones of feelings, senses, ideas, associations and images that are formed, and the personal and qualitative elements experienced as the text is read. These results may imply that students need to slow their reading pace in order to attend to form, while experts believe that when readers pay attention to form including all the elements mentioned above, the reading speed may automatically drop.

Summary of findings

The results presented above indicate that the use of an aesthetic approach in reading comprehension courses may contribute to students' comprehension of the texts especially when literary texts are used (Research Question 2). The findings also reveal that literary texts can generally engage learners more in *transaction* than in *interaction* with the texts, a process that may attract readers more to the text, which in turn can cause them to read at a lower speed in order to understand the content and form as a whole.

The findings of this study are in line with previous research conducted on aesthetic and efferent reading. For instance, Hunt and Vipond (1987) found that through "pragmatic framing", which provided clues to connect literary texts to personal experiences, participants' aesthetic reading led to deeper understanding of the text. This supports the role of Factor 6 (past encounters) in the elicitation of meaning claimed in the present research. Hunt and Vipond's study also showed that speed in aesthetic reading decreases significantly which further highlights the role of speed (Factor 4) because aesthetic reading requires attentive reading at a slow pace. Hunt and Vipond finally advocate "literary transaction in which writers and engaged readers collaborate in making of reading" (p. 182).

Bedee's study (2010) confirms the role of Factor 2 (attraction of reading) in motivating second graders who participated in literature circles compared to another group of second graders who only listened to the teacher reading the texts aloud. The significance here lies in the aesthetic transaction that takes place while students are engaged in literary discussions which facilitates their learning, and fairly improves both their motivation to read and their reading comprehension skills.

As further support to encouraging aesthetic reading in the classroom, Martin (1987) showed that it not only improves students' meaning making of a text through transacting with it, but also improves their writing through reading.

Conclusion

The present study was motivated by the challenges that EFL teachers face when selecting texts to teach reading comprehension skills. Conventional materials mostly focus on efferent reading with interaction at the heart of the process whereas, reading a literary text inevitably engages readers in an aesthetic transaction.

The results reported in this paper show a fair correlation between aesthetic reading and students' engagement in the reading of literary texts, but no significant relationship was found with non-literary texts. The aesthetic transaction experience with literary texts investigated in this study supports Isere's reception theory and the phenomenological approach (Shi, 2013). The findings are also in line with Wiseman and Many's study (1991) which reported that using an aesthetic approach in teaching can develop an aesthetic experience in students when they respond to literary texts. In addition, Iskhak's findings (2016) that his adult student teachers who approached the literary texts with more cognitive maturity felt more confident when it came to text criticism and self-expression, are beyond the scope of the current study but it is not unreasonable to suggest that such benefits may extend to all students engaging with the aesthetic approach.

It can be suggested that reading which involves aesthetic transaction involves all the aspects of aesthetic reading discussed above because it is *inspiring* which in turn attracts the reader's *attention* to the text, their *accuracy* in what they read, and their *complete unconsciousness* of anything but the text. This type of reading does not require haste or

high *speed*, but a deliberate processing of the content. Attention to the content arouses *feelings* toward the same, and may activate the reader's schemata and cause the *recall* of past experiences. This is the point where attention is focused far beyond sound and rhythm; rather, it is focused on *sense and overtones of feelings, ideas, and images* as the text is read. The reader is also aware of *contextual* clues to infer meaning beyond word level, rather to get the *specific meaning* intended for the reader to infer. The aesthetic transaction, which exceeds the one-to-one interaction between the reader and the text experienced during efferent reading, may also contribute to the reader's critical thinking skills.

Suggestions for further research

This study did not take into account participants' gender. It would be wise in future studies to investigate the impact of gender on participants' aesthetic transaction while reading literary and non-literary texts. Similarly, further studies could consider the impact of language proficiency level on the degree of aesthetic transaction. Such a consideration was not possible in this study due to the largely homogeneous group of participants in terms of their proficiency.

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Appendix 1: Students' Questionnaire

Dear Participant,
We would appreciate your participation in this research about the use of literary texts in reading comprehension courses. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and you are not required to provide your name. We are interested in your personal opinion.

Thank you very much for taking part in this study.

Please put an 'X' in the box that best indicates the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Idea	Disagree	Strongly Agree
After reading the text, I felt I can find a solution to the problems in life.					
After reading the text, I felt I can easily interpret it and talk about it.					
While I was reading the text, I felt great enjoyment.					
While I was reading the text, I was experiencing the similar thing in the text.					
I didn't feel competent enough to meet the high demands of the situation or the text in general.					
I was so absorbed in the text that I didn't consider reading it as a task or an activity.					
Although I spent a lot of energy and attempted a lot to get the hidden meaning, I enjoyed reading it.					
Because I didn't enjoy reading the text, I didn't try to fully comprehend it.					
Because there was no insistence on any particular interpretation of the text, I enjoyed reading it.					
The text itself was not important for me. I was just looking for a solution to the problem I felt.					
I was so involved in the text that I was not aware of the passage of the time. (i.e. I lost the track of time).					
While I was reading, I delved into the deep layers of the text and I was looking for the concepts underlying the text.					
What the words were implying interested me.					
Although I knew the meaning of most of the words, some of the words were more loaded with particular meanings.					
When I was reading the text, just the meaning of most of the words was important for me and nothing else.					
The text was like any other ordinary texts I have read so far.					
In order to get the meaning of the text, speed is a determining factor.					

I don't feel there is any difference in reading the text fast or slowly.					
Having perfect grammatical knowledge helps a lot in understanding the text.					
The more I read the text, the more I got confused.					
The text was very easy to be read.					
The sounds, rhythm, and appearance created a melodic text which required particular attention.					
Like the text of a newspaper or a scientific text, it was just giving me certain piece of information in the form of statements.					
There was no trace of personal and qualitative elements (experience) involved while I was reading the text.					
While I was reading the text, I was feeling a kind of experience I had in the past.					
The text and personal attitudes were not interwoven so that I can see myself in the text.					
I was so absorbed in the text that I was not detached from the text as a reader. Rather I had lived experience of what I was experiencing.					
Even after finishing the text, I felt a new experience had been formed in my mind.					

Appendix 2: First Experts' Questionnaires

Professors' Questionnaire 1:

Dear Colleague,

The following question is related to a research project titled
Aesthetic Vs. Efferent Reading in Reading Comprehension Courses in the Iranian EFL Context

As an expert, please answer the question by mentioning as many factors as you consider important.

Your participation in this research is much appreciated.

Thank you.

    Question: What are the determining factors involved in comprehending a literary text?

Appendix 3: Second Experts' Questionnaires

Professors' Questionnaire 2:

Dear Colleague

The following questionnaire is based on your opinion about the question answered in the previous questionnaire. As an expert, how do you rank the following items, presented in the form of questions, based on their significance in the comprehension of a literary text?

Thank you very much for your participation.

Factor	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Is aesthetic transaction matter of importance in reading literary texts?					
Does specific meaning help subjects have a better comprehension?					
Does speed in reading mean to be in haste?					
Is it possible to read a text without any attention to the form?					
Is it possible to comprehend a text in which there is no attraction?					
Is it useful to recall the past encounters in reading the words of a text?					
Is reading comprehension just a matter of understanding?					
Does reading comprehension involve feelings and emotions?					
Is it possible to read a text and understand it while it is decontextualized?					
Is it possible to read a text (especially a literary one) in a neutral way?					