

Reconceptualizing Literary Theory Pedagogy: Bridging Abstract Epistemology and Contextual Interpretation

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v7i1.1283>

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the gap between students' conceptual understanding of literary theory and their ability to apply theoretical frameworks in textual analysis in higher education. The research was conducted among students enrolled in a literary theory course at Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo. It aims to reconceptualize literary theory pedagogy by integrating interpretative practice, collaborative learning, and digital mediation. This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design through the implementation of a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model integrated with an e-learning platform. Data were collected through classroom observations, student discussion records, reflective writings, and analysis of students' interpretative assignments. The findings indicate that conventional lecture-centered approaches tend to present literary theory as abstract and declarative knowledge, which results in fragmented theoretical understanding and limited metatheoretical awareness among students. When learning activities were reorganized around interpretative problems derived from literary texts, students began to engage with theory as an analytical tool rather than as a static conceptual system. Collaborative discussions and peer feedback encouraged dialogic interpretation, while digital learning platforms extended reflective engagement beyond classroom time and enabled students to revise their analytical arguments. The study shows that integrating Problem-Based Learning with e-learning environments fosters a more reflective and contextual learning process, transforming literary theory into a practical framework for critical interpretation in higher education.

KEYWORDS

Literary theory pedagogy; Problem-Based Learning; interpretative analysis; digital learning; epistemic mediation; humanities education; higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of higher education in the twenty-first century requires fundamental changes in learning approaches, particularly in the fields of the humanities and literary studies. Universities are no longer expected to function merely as spaces for the transmission of knowledge, but also as arenas for developing students' critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills. In this context, the teaching of literary theory and criticism becomes a crucial component within literary studies programs because it plays a significant role in shaping students' conceptual frameworks for understanding, interpreting, and evaluating literary

works in a scholarly manner. However, in practice, the teaching of literary theory in many universities is still dominated by conventional approaches that are textual and lecturer-centered, which often leads to a gap between students' conceptual understanding and their ability to apply theoretical frameworks in the analysis of literary works (Hidayat & Susanto, 2020).

The gap between theoretical understanding and its application in literary analysis is a relatively common phenomenon in literary education. Students are often able to memorize key concepts in literary theory such as structuralism, poststructuralism, feminism, or cultural criticism, yet they encounter difficulties when required to apply these concepts in critically reading and analyzing literary texts. This phenomenon indicates that the teaching of literary theory has not fully succeeded in developing the analytical competencies that constitute the primary objective of literary education in higher education institutions. Several studies suggest that this gap is often caused by learning methods that provide limited opportunities for students to actively construct knowledge through engagement and reflection (Suryana et al, 2022). Therefore, a learning approach is needed that encourages students to participate more actively in the learning process while simultaneously connecting theoretical concepts with the practice of literary analysis.

One approach considered effective in addressing this issue is the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) integrated with digital learning technologies. The PBL model positions students at the center of the learning process by encouraging them to solve authentic problems through discussion, exploration of learning resources, and critical reflection. In the context of higher education, PBL has been shown to enhance students' critical thinking abilities, analytical skills, and problem-solving capacities (S. Wang, 2022). The integration of PBL with learning technologies such as e-learning further strengthens the potential of this model, as it allows the learning process to take place in a collaborative, flexible, and digitally enriched environment. The use of technology in learning also aligns with the development of the Technology-Enhanced Learning paradigm, which emphasizes the use of digital technologies to enrich students' learning experiences (Unsriana, Ariana, n.d.).

In the field of literary studies, the implementation of a problem-based learning model has significant potential to improve students' understanding of literary theory. Through this approach, theory is no longer treated as an abstract concept detached from the practice of textual analysis, but rather as a conceptual tool used to address interpretive problems in literary works. Students are encouraged to analyze literary texts through particular theoretical frameworks, discuss their findings collaboratively, and reflect upon the interpretive processes they undertake. This approach is consistent with the constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through the interaction between learning experiences, reflection, and academic dialogue (Hassad, 2010).

Nevertheless, the implementation of innovative learning models such as PBL in the teaching of literary theory remains relatively limited, particularly in higher education institutions in Indonesia. Many literature programs still rely heavily on lecture-based methods as the primary strategy for delivering theoretical material. This condition indicates the need to develop more innovative and contextual learning models to enhance the effectiveness of teaching literary theory and criticism. In the context of higher education in the Global South, this challenge becomes increasingly significant as universities in these regions face the dual demand of improving the quality of learning while simultaneously adapting to the rapid development of digital technologies in education (Sangwa, Butera, Mutabazi, 2025).

Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo, as one of the growing higher education institutions in Eastern Indonesia, also faces similar challenges in improving the quality of learning within its English Literature program. Students in this program are expected not only to understand literary theory conceptually but also to apply it critically and systematically in the analysis of literary works. Therefore, innovation in learning design is necessary to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the practice of literary analysis. The development of a problem-based learning model integrated with e-learning represents a strategic alternative to address this need while simultaneously strengthening students' academic competencies in literary theory and criticism.

Based on this background, the present study aims to develop and examine the effectiveness of an e-learning integrated Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in improving students' understanding of literary theory and criticism as well as their ability to apply theoretical frameworks in the analysis of literary texts. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of technology-based learning models in literary studies and practical contributions to improving the quality of literary theory instruction in higher education, particularly at Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo and other higher education institutions in the Global South.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequential explanatory design, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of literary theory pedagogy within the context of higher education. This approach allows the researcher not only to measure improvements in students' analytical abilities statistically, but also to explore the epistemological processes that occur during the implementation of the learning model. The mixed-methods approach was chosen because the teaching of literary theory is not merely related to conceptual mastery, but also involves changes in ways of thinking, interpretive competence, and students' critical awareness of literary texts and their socio-cultural contexts.

The sequential explanatory design was conducted through two main stages. The first stage involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data through tests measuring students' ability to analyze literary texts and questionnaires examining students' perceptions of literary theory. The second stage consisted of qualitative exploration aimed at providing deeper explanations for the quantitative findings through classroom observations, analysis of students' essays, and reflections on the learning process. This design enables the study to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how students construct theoretical knowledge while simultaneously applying literary theory in the practice of textual interpretation. Furthermore, this approach aligns with contemporary educational research paradigms that emphasize the integration of learning outcome measurement with analysis of the learning process itself (Creswell, 2014).

In addition, this research design is both developmental and evaluative, as it does not merely observe existing learning phenomena but also examines the effectiveness of a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy integrated with e-learning, which was specifically designed to bridge the gap between the abstraction of literary theory and students' contextual interpretive practices. Therefore, this study contributes to the development of a literary theory pedagogy model that is more contextual, reflective, and responsive to the needs of university students.

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted among students of the English Literature Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo, particularly those enrolled in the course *Literary Theory and Criticism*. The selection of this research setting was based on the consideration that literary theory courses represent a core component of literary studies curricula and often involve high levels of conceptual complexity, which frequently create challenges for students' comprehension. Within this context, the study seeks to explore how innovative pedagogical strategies can assist students in connecting theoretical concepts with the practical analysis of literary texts in a more contextualized manner.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, a sampling technique based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Memon, Ramayah, Ting, Cheah, 2024). The participants consisted of students currently enrolled in a literary theory course who had already acquired basic experience in analyzing literary works. The selection of this group enabled the researcher to observe directly the dynamics of literary theory learning and the development of students' analytical competencies during the pedagogical intervention.

The participating students also represent the broader context of higher education in the Global South, where the teaching of literary theory often encounters structural challenges such as limited access to academic resources, the dominance of lecture-based instruction, and the gap between abstract Western theoretical frameworks and students' lived learning experiences. Consequently, the context of Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo provides an important analytical space for examining how pedagogical innovation can enhance the quality of literary theory instruction in local contexts while also contributing to global discussions on higher education reform.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Characteristics	Description
Institution	Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo
Study Program	English Literature
Course	Literary Theory and Criticism
Level of Study	Mid-semester undergraduate students
Participation Criteria	Students currently enrolled in a literary theory course

Research Materials

The learning materials used in this study were designed to support the implementation of a problem-based pedagogical model that encourages students to actively apply literary theory in the process of textual interpretation. The instructional materials consisted of several main components, namely literary texts, literary theory modules, and an online learning platform that facilitated students' discussion and reflection.

The literary texts used in this study included selected short stories and novels characterized by thematic complexity and social relevance, allowing students to analyze them through various literary theoretical approaches. The selection of literary texts was not based solely on their aesthetic value but also on their potential to generate critical discussions concerning issues of identity, power, culture, and diverse human experiences. By engaging with texts that contain rich interpretive possibilities, students were encouraged to examine how theoretical frameworks can illuminate different dimensions of literary meaning.

In addition to literary texts, this study employed a literary theory module covering several major theoretical approaches, including structuralism, feminism, and postcolonialism. The module was designed in a contextualized manner by presenting theoretical concepts

concisely and supplementing them with examples of how these theories can be applied in the analysis of literary texts. This approach was intended to help students understand literary theory as a dynamic analytical tool rather than merely as an abstract set of concepts to be memorized.

Furthermore, this study utilized an e-learning platform to support collaborative learning processes. The platform was used to facilitate online discussions, peer feedback among students, submission of textual analysis assignments, and reflective learning activities. The integration of digital technology in the learning process enabled students to engage more actively with course materials and expand academic dialogue beyond the temporal and spatial limitations of the classroom environment.

Research Instruments

This study employed multiple research instruments to collect data comprehensively and ensure that the findings accurately reflected the learning processes taking place during the pedagogical intervention. The primary instruments included literary text analysis tests, an analytical essay assessment rubric, a student perception questionnaire, classroom observations, student reflective writings, and document analysis of learning materials and assignments.

The literary text analysis test was used to measure students' ability to identify key literary theoretical concepts and apply them in the analysis of literary texts. This test was administered in two stages: a pre-test conducted before the implementation of the learning model and a post-test conducted after the intervention. The comparison of these results allowed the researcher to quantitatively measure improvements in students' analytical abilities.

An analytical essay assessment rubric was employed to evaluate the quality of students' arguments in analyzing literary texts. The rubric was developed by considering several important aspects, including the accuracy of theoretical concept usage, the integration of theoretical frameworks with textual evidence, the coherence of argumentative structure, and students' ability to relate textual analysis to broader social and cultural contexts.

In addition, a student perception questionnaire was used to identify students' attitudes toward the learning of literary theory. The questionnaire examined several dimensions, including the perceived difficulty of literary theory, the relevance of theoretical frameworks to textual analysis, and students' overall learning experiences throughout the instructional process.

Table 2. Research Instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Type of Data
Literary text analysis test (pre-test & post-test)	Measure students' ability to apply literary theory in textual analysis	Quantitative
Analytical essay assessment rubric	Evaluate the quality of students' arguments	Quantitative
Student perception questionnaire	Measure students' attitudes toward literary theory learning	Quantitative
Classroom observation	Examine learning interactions	Qualitative
Student reflection	Identify metacognitive changes	Qualitative
Document analysis	Analyze students' assignments and discussions	Qualitative

Procedure of the Study

The implementation of the research followed several systematic stages designed to ensure that the data collection process was conducted in a structured and consistent manner. The

first stage involved an initial diagnostic phase, which was carried out through a pre-test measuring students' ability to analyze literary texts and a questionnaire examining students' perceptions of literary theory. This stage aimed to identify the initial conditions of the learning process and the difficulties experienced by students in understanding theoretical concepts.

The second stage involved the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning model integrated with e-learning. During this phase, students were presented with various interpretive problems related to literary texts and were asked to analyze those texts using specific literary theoretical approaches. The learning process was conducted through group discussions, presentations of analytical findings, and feedback from both the lecturer and fellow students.

The third stage consisted of reflection and evaluation of the learning process. In this stage, students were asked to write reflective responses concerning their learning experiences and how the use of literary theory helped them develop deeper interpretations of literary texts. This phase also included the administration of a post-test to measure changes in students' analytical abilities after participating in the instructional intervention.

Table 3. Stages of the Research

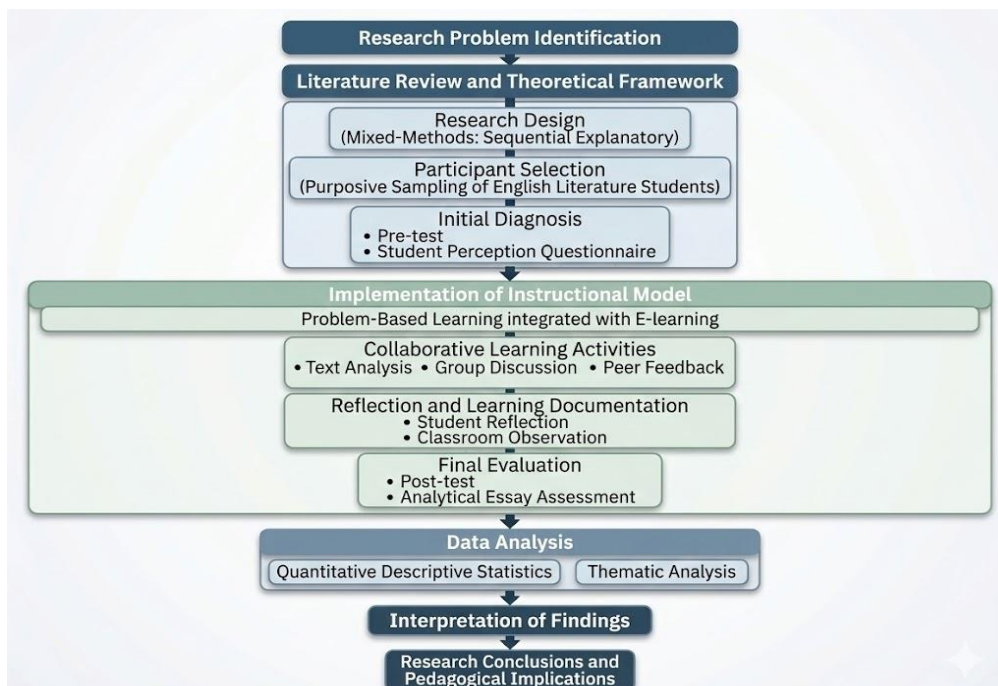
Stage	Activity
Initial diagnosis	Pre-test and literary theory perception questionnaire
Pedagogical implementation	Problem-Based Learning integrated with e-learning
Collaborative discussion	Textual analysis and peer feedback
Epistemological reflection	Metatheoretical discussion on the use of theory
Final evaluation	Post-test and analysis of students' essays

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted through two primary approaches: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was employed to measure the improvement of students' analytical abilities in applying literary theory by comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test. This analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics to examine the distribution of scores as well as changes in the average level of students' analytical competence before and after the instructional intervention.

Meanwhile, qualitative analysis was used to explore more deeply how students understand and apply literary theory in the process of textual interpretation. The qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, student reflections, and essay analyses were examined using thematic analysis, a method aimed at identifying patterns of meaning that emerge within the research data. Through this process, the researcher was able to identify shifts in students' modes of thinking, the interpretive strategies they employed, and the dynamics of discussion that occurred throughout the learning process.

Research Methodology Flow Diagram



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Epistemological Gap in the Teaching of Literary Theory

The findings of this study indicate that the primary problem in the teaching of literary theory and criticism lies in the gap between students’ conceptual mastery of theoretical frameworks and their ability to apply these theories contextually to literary texts. While students are relatively capable of explaining theoretical definitions at a declarative level, they encounter considerable difficulty when asked to conduct theory-based analyses of literary texts.

The quantitative data reveal variations in the level of difficulty students experience when applying several approaches to literary theory, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of Students Experiencing Difficulty in Applying Literary Theories

No	Theoretical Approach	Percentage of Difficulty
1	Structuralism	40%
2	Feminism	35%
3	Postcolonialism	30%

The data indicate that theoretical frameworks characterized by complex conceptual structures and abstract terminology tend to be more difficult to operationalize in practical textual analysis. This phenomenon suggests the existence of an analytical transfer gap, namely the failure to transform conceptual knowledge into interpretative practice. From the perspective of educational methodology, this condition reflects a gap between declarative knowledge and applied competence (Chen, 2012).

Patterns of Students’ Analytical Weaknesses

An analysis of students’ essay responses reveals that the principal weakness does not lie in their understanding of theoretical definitions, but rather in their ability to connect theoretical

concepts with textual evidence. These patterns of analytical weakness can be classified as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Patterns of Analytical Weakness in the Application of Literary Theory to Texts

No	Analytical Indicator	Percentage of Students Experiencing Difficulty
1	Identifying theoretical concepts within the text	48%
2	Linking theoretical concepts with textual quotations	52%
3	Developing systematic interpretative arguments	57%
4	Constructing coherent and reflective analysis	60%

The table demonstrates that the higher the level of analytical complexity required, the greater the difficulty experienced by students. The most significant weakness appears in the construction of coherent and reflective analysis (60%), which represents an important indicator of higher-order thinking skills.

These findings suggest that previous instructional practices have largely focused on conceptual comprehension and have not sufficiently encouraged processes of problematization and critical reflection. Within the framework of constructivist pedagogy, the learning process should position students as active subjects in the construction of meaning rather than merely as passive recipients of information.

Dominance of the Transmissive Approach in Instruction

Data obtained from classroom observations and student questionnaires indicate that the instructional process prior to the pedagogical intervention was predominantly characterized by an expository or transmissive approach. Students reported that classroom sessions largely consisted of theoretical explanations delivered by the lecturer rather than practical exercises in textual analysis. The composition of these learning experiences is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Patterns of Literary Theory Instruction Before the Intervention

Learning Component	Percentage
Lecturer's explanation of theoretical concepts	70%
Textual analysis discussions	20%
Interactive use of e-learning platforms	10%

The dominance of conceptual explanation (70%) suggests that theory was treated primarily as an abstract object of study rather than as an interpretative tool for analyzing literary texts. The limited integration of learning technologies also restricted opportunities for analytical exploration and collaborative engagement among students.

This condition reinforces the finding that the crisis in the teaching of literary theory is not merely a methodological issue but an epistemological one: theory tends to be positioned as a finalized conceptual system rather than as a dynamic analytical instrument for interpreting textual realities.

Pedagogical Transformation through Problem-Based Learning Integrated with E-Learning

Following the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) integrated with e-learning, a significant shift emerged in the analytical patterns demonstrated by students. Literary theory was no longer introduced merely as a set of abstract definitions; instead, it functioned as a conceptual framework for addressing concrete interpretative problems.

Students were presented with textual problems that required the application of specific theoretical approaches. They were subsequently asked to identify relevant theoretical concepts, relate these concepts to textual evidence, and construct interpretative arguments based on their analysis. This pedagogical approach compelled students to operationalize theoretical frameworks within authentic analytical practices.

Evaluation results indicate substantial improvement in several areas of students' analytical competence, including the ability to identify key theoretical concepts within texts, connect theoretical frameworks with textual data, develop evidence-based arguments, and construct systematic and reflective interpretations.

These improvements demonstrate that problem-based learning is more effective in bridging the gap between theoretical abstraction and textual context than traditional expository teaching methods.

Reconstruction of the Epistemology of Literary Theory Pedagogy

The findings of this study highlight that the core problem in the teaching of literary theory does not merely stem from insufficient analytical practice but rather from the epistemological positioning of theory within the learning process. When theory is treated as a collection of concepts to be memorized, students tend to remain at the level of declarative understanding. Conversely, when theory is framed as an analytical tool, students are encouraged to integrate conceptual knowledge with contextual interpretation.

This transformation reflects a shift from a transmissive paradigm toward a constructive-dialogical paradigm in literary theory pedagogy. Within this paradigm, theory is no longer perceived as a rigid structure of knowledge but as a flexible and contextual interpretative framework.

Accordingly, the results of this study validate the hypothesis that the gap between expectations and reality in the teaching of literary theory arises from the dominance of conceptual instruction without the integration of contextual problematization. The reconstruction of pedagogy through problem-based learning and technology-enhanced learning environments proves effective in bridging the divide between epistemological abstraction and the practical interpretation of literary texts.

Fragmentation of Theoretical Understanding and Failure of Conceptual Integration

Beyond the problem of conceptual operationalization, this study also identifies the presence of fragmented theoretical understanding among students. Students tend to perceive literary theories as isolated entities rather than as components of an epistemological tradition that interacts dynamically within the historical development of literary thought.

Approaches such as structuralism, feminism, and postcolonialism are frequently studied as separate “content units” rather than as historical and ideological responses to preceding paradigms. When students were asked to conduct a comparative or integrative reading of a literary text using two theoretical approaches simultaneously, the majority encountered considerable difficulty. The findings are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Indicators of Fragmented Theoretical Understanding

Evaluation Indicator	Percentage of Students
Able to explain theories separately	72%
Able to compare two theories epistemologically	34%
Able to integrate two approaches within a single analysis	28%
Demonstrate awareness of the ideological assumptions of theory	22%

The data reveal a significant gap between descriptive understanding and metatheoretical awareness. Students tend to master definitions of theories but have not yet developed a deeper understanding of the ontological, epistemological, and ideological assumptions underlying those theoretical frameworks.

Therefore, the problem of literary theory instruction is not merely technical in nature but operates at the epistemological level, particularly in terms of how theories are constructed, contextualized, and understood as systems of knowledge.

The Affective Dimension in Literary Theory Learning

The study also found that the affective dimension plays a significant role in shaping students' analytical performance in literary theory courses. Prior to the pedagogical intervention, students' perceptions of literary theory were largely dominated by negative associations such as "abstract," "complex," and "difficult to apply." The distribution of students' perceptions before the intervention is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Students' Perceptions of Literary Theory (Pre-Intervention)

Dominant Perception	Percentage
Too abstract	68%
Difficult to apply	61%
Not relevant to local contexts	47%
Interesting and intellectually challenging	19%

However, after the implementation of problem based learning, a significant shift in students' attitudes was observed. Students began to perceive theory not merely as a conceptual burden but as a practical analytical tool for interpreting literary texts.

This transformation indicates that pedagogical reconstruction simultaneously influences both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. When theory is presented within the context of concrete interpretative problems, its abstraction loses its intimidating character and instead becomes a reflective instrument for critical inquiry.

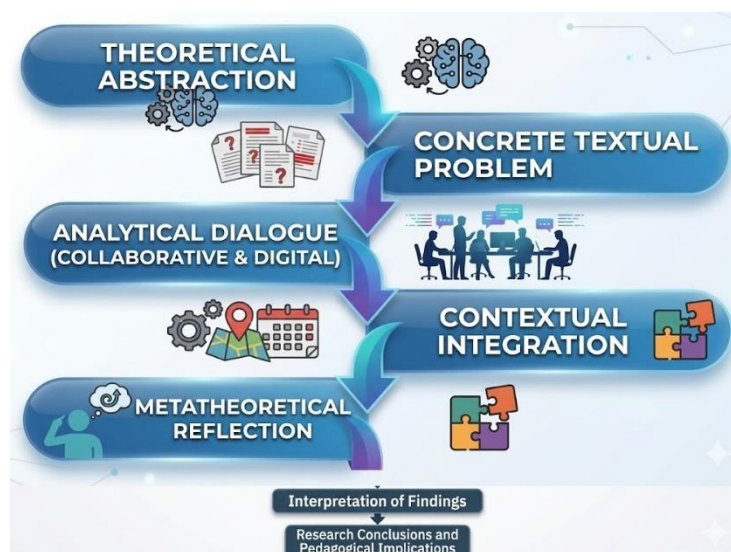
Technology as an Epistemic Mediator

The integration of e-learning within the instructional model indicates that technology functions as an epistemic mediator, serving as a medium that extends and facilitates the process of meaning construction. Rather than merely acting as a technical support tool, digital platforms become spaces where interpretive knowledge is negotiated, refined, and collaboratively developed among students.

Students utilized the digital learning platform to revise their analyses iteratively, provide and receive peer feedback, engage in discussions that incorporate multiple interpretive perspectives, and independently access additional scholarly references. These activities enabled students to interact with literary theories not only as conceptual frameworks but also as practical interpretive tools applied within collaborative analytical processes.

Online interaction also extended the duration of reflection and allowed students to revise their arguments through dialogical engagement. This process fostered a learning environment that was more iterative, reflective, and dialogic compared with traditional face-to-face instructional models that are typically constrained by limited classroom time.

Conceptually, this pedagogical transformation can be illustrated as follows:



Enhancement of Argumentative Capacity and Contextual Awareness

The figure illustrates that technology does not operate independently; rather, it reinforces the processes of problematisation and epistemological reflection within the learning environment.

Post-intervention evaluation revealed a significant improvement in the quality of students' argumentative abilities. Analysis of the final essays indicated that students employed theoretical terminology with greater precision, explicitly connected theoretical concepts with textual evidence, organized their argumentative frameworks more systematically, and related literary texts to broader socio-cultural contexts. A comparison between the conditions before and after the intervention is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Comparison of Analytical Competence Before and After the Intervention

Competency Indicator	Before (%)	After (%)
Integration of theoretical concepts with textual evidence	38%	71%
Coherence of argumentation	40%	74%
Contextual reflection	33%	69%
Awareness of theoretical assumptions	22%	58%

The data demonstrate that the digitally integrated problem-based approach improves not only students' technical analytical skills but also their epistemological awareness. Students gradually developed the ability to recognize the assumptions underlying theoretical frameworks and to apply them critically within the interpretive process.

Implications for the Reconstruction of the Literary Theory Curriculum

These findings carry structural implications for curriculum design in literary theory courses. Curricula organized linearly according to classifications of theories tend to reinforce epistemological fragmentation, as students perceive theoretical traditions as isolated conceptual units rather than interconnected intellectual developments.

Conversely, a curriculum structured around interpretive problems and textual case studies allows literary theory to function as an analytical instrument rather than merely as conceptual knowledge to be memorized. Curriculum reconstruction should therefore incorporate several

key elements: the integration of textual problems from the beginning of the course, case-based analytical practices rather than theoretical memorization, explicit metatheoretical reflection, and the use of digital platforms as collaborative learning environments.

Such transformations signal a shift from an informative paradigm, in which knowledge is transmitted as static information, toward an interpretative constructivist paradigm, where knowledge is actively constructed through analytical engagement with texts and contexts.

Global Implications: The Global South and Higher Education Reform

Within the context of the Global South, these findings resonate with broader structural challenges in higher education. Many universities in developing regions adopt Western literary theories as epistemological canons without adequately contextualizing them within local socio-cultural realities (D’haen, 2024) This condition produces an epistemic dualism in which theory remains global and abstract, while students’ lived experiences remain local and contextual.

The pedagogical model developed in this study offers a strategy for bridging this divide. Literary theory is not rejected but recontextualized through locally grounded socio-cultural problems, allowing students to engage critically with theoretical frameworks while relating them to their own interpretive contexts.

In this sense, pedagogical reform becomes part of a broader agenda of epistemological decolonization, which involves transforming the way theories are used rather than merely replacing Western theories with local ones. The goal is to enable students to critically negotiate theoretical perspectives within diverse interpretive contexts.

Higher education reform in the Global South therefore requires the integration of several strategic agendas, summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Strategic Agendas for Higher Education Reform

Reform Agenda	Transformational Focus
Humanities Curriculum	From theoretical classification to textual problem-solving
Metatheoretical Literacy	From conceptual memorization to epistemological awareness
Epistemic Digitalization	From content distribution to interpretive dialogue

Accordingly, reconceptualizing literary theory pedagogy should be understood not merely as a methodological innovation but as an epistemological repositioning that contributes to broader efforts to reform higher education at a global level.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, this study demonstrates that the crisis in the teaching of literary theory largely stems from the dominance of abstract conceptual instruction without sufficient interpretive practice. The fragmentation of theoretical understanding, affective resistance among students, and the limited development of metatheoretical reflection collectively reinforce the gap between theoretical concepts and contextual interpretation.

However, when literary theory is positioned within concrete interpretive problems, supported by collaborative dialogue and digital mediation, an epistemological transformation begins to emerge. Under these conditions, theory is no longer perceived as a static system of abstract concepts but rather as a contextual and productive reflective tool for interpreting literary texts.

Therefore, the reconstruction of literary theory pedagogy represents a strategic step toward the development of an interpretative constructivist paradigm in twenty-first-century higher education. This shift enables literary theory to function not merely as conceptual

knowledge but as an active intellectual framework through which students critically engage with texts, contexts, and broader socio-cultural realities.

Epistemological Crisis in the Teaching of Literary Theory

The research data indicate that the primary difficulty experienced by students does not lie in the lack of access to information, but rather in the failure to integrate theoretical abstraction with interpretive practice. This phenomenon suggests the existence of an epistemological crisis in the pedagogy of literary theory. In many instructional settings, theory is taught as a stable and final conceptual system rather than as an interpretive framework that is dialogical and open to reinterpretation.

Within the tradition of constructivist pedagogy, knowledge is not transmitted linearly from instructor to learner but is constructed through the interaction between conceptual understanding and experiential engagement (X. Wang & H. Chen, 2024). However, the findings of this study indicate that prior instructional practices were still dominated by a transmissive paradigm. Consequently, students often remained at the level of declarative knowledge without reaching the stage of applicative competence. The gap between “knowing that” and “knowing how,” as described in educational methodology, becomes particularly evident in the context of literary theory instruction (S. Ballard, n.d.).

The fragmentation of theoretical understanding identified in this study where students learned structuralism, feminism, and postcolonialism as separate conceptual units reflects the absence of metatheoretical awareness. Yet the intellectual history of literary theory demonstrates that each theoretical approach emerges as a response to preceding paradigms (J. Lin, 2023). Without such historical and epistemological awareness, students tend to apply theoretical frameworks mechanically rather than critically.

Analytical Transfer Failure and Higher-Order Thinking

The quantitative data reveal that students experienced significant difficulty integrating theoretical concepts with textual evidence and constructing coherent arguments. These findings confirm the presence of analytical transfer failure, namely the inability to transfer conceptual knowledge into analytical practice.

From the perspective of cognitive taxonomy, the ability to integrate theory and text belongs to the levels of analysis and evaluation, which are categorized as higher-order thinking skills (Chan, Wong, 2025). When instruction focuses primarily on understanding theoretical definitions, students are not sufficiently trained to develop systematic argumentative structures.

Furthermore, literary theory is fundamentally an interpretive practice that requires critical reflection on language, ideology, and social context (Storm, 2025). When students fail to operationalize theory, it suggests that the learning environment has not yet created sufficient opportunities for problem-based inquiry and interpretive exploration.

Affective Dimensions and the Transformation of Students' Perceptions of Theory

This study also reveals that affective factors play a significant role in the learning of literary theory. Students' perceptions of theory as “abstract” and “impractical” indicate the presence of a psychological distance between conceptual knowledge and learning experience.

Within critical pedagogy, the affective dimension is regarded as an integral part of meaning construction (Zembylas, 2021). When students feel intimidated by abstraction, they tend to avoid interpretive exploration. However, after the implementation of problem-based learning, a significant change in perception was observed. Literary theory began to be perceived as a tool that supports analysis rather than as a conceptual burden.

This transformation indicates that pedagogical reconstruction can reshape not only students' cognitive structures but also their affective orientation toward knowledge. Theory becomes more "alive" when it is connected to concrete problems that are relevant to students' intellectual experiences.

Technology as an Epistemic Mediator

The integration of e-learning in this study demonstrates that technology does not merely expand access to information but also functions as an epistemic mediator. Digital platforms enable extended reflection, iterative revision of arguments, and sustained collaborative dialogue.

Within the discourse of digital pedagogy, technology is understood as a space for knowledge production rather than merely a medium for content distribution (Paulus, T. M. 2023). The findings of this study support this perspective. Students demonstrated improved argumentative capacity after participating in online discussions and peer-feedback activities.

Thus, the digitalization of learning is meaningful only when accompanied by a transformation of the underlying pedagogical paradigm. Without an epistemological shift, technology risks reproducing transmissive instructional models in a faster and more technologically sophisticated format.

Curriculum Reconstruction and Global Implications (Global South)

In the context of the Global South, the teaching of literary theory often adopts Western theoretical canons in a normative manner without sufficient contextualization. This condition produces an epistemic dualism: theory operates as a global abstraction, while students' lived experiences remain local and contextual.

The pedagogical approach developed in this study offers a strategy for bridging this dualism through contextual problematization. From the perspective of the decolonization of epistemology, pedagogical transformation does not imply rejecting Western theories but rather repositioning them as dialogical tools that can be negotiated with local experiences (Chiramba, Motala, 2023).

Higher education reform in the Global South therefore needs to include the reconstruction of learning epistemology. Universities cannot rely solely on improving accreditation status or increasing international publications; they must also transform pedagogical practices within the classroom (Ramli, Razali, Gadeng, Diana, Hariadi, 2025).

Consequently, the findings of this study contribute to the international discourse on humanities pedagogy by emphasizing that the crisis in literary theory education is fundamentally an epistemological crisis. Its solution lies not merely in methodological innovation but in repositioning the way theory is understood and practiced.

Reconceptualizing Theory as Hermeneutic Practice

The findings of this study reveal that students' difficulties are not merely technical analytical issues but are rooted in the way theory itself is conceptualized. Prior to the pedagogical intervention, theory was treated as a fixed set of concepts that needed to be "applied" to literary texts. This approach created a hierarchical relationship between theory and text, where the text merely served as an object for conceptual verification.

However, within the hermeneutic tradition, understanding is inherently circular and dialogical, emerging through the interaction between the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text (Pietzner, n.d.). Through the problem-based learning model implemented in this study, students began to treat theory not as a tool of interpretive domination but as a lens that could be tested, negotiated, and revised during the reading process.

This transformation marks a significant epistemological shift: from a linear application model toward a hermeneutic dialogical model. In practice, students no longer merely “matched” theoretical concepts with textual quotations but developed interpretive arguments that considered the historical, ideological, and social contexts of the text. This indicates that literary theory is more productive when understood as a process rather than a fixed product.

Metacognitive Development and Theoretical Awareness

Student reflection data also indicate an increased awareness of their own cognitive processes when conducting textual analysis. Students began to recognize why they selected particular theoretical approaches and how their theoretical positions influenced interpretation.

In educational psychology, the ability to monitor and evaluate one’s own thinking process is referred to as metacognition (Ilma, Al Muhdhar, Rohman, Sapta Sari, 2022). In the context of literary theory education, metacognition serves as the foundation for theoretical awareness. Students not only understand the content of theories but also recognize their epistemological implications.

The development of metacognitive awareness is crucial because literary theories always carry specific ontological and ideological assumptions. Without reflective awareness, students tend to use theoretical frameworks normatively. As metatheoretical awareness increases, students become capable of questioning theoretical limitations and considering alternative interpretive possibilities.

Dialogical Dimensions and the Formation of Interpretive Communities

The pedagogical intervention developed in this study also highlights the importance of social interaction in meaning construction. Group discussions and online forums generated argumentative dynamics that enriched individual interpretations.

Within reception theory, textual meaning is not entirely inherent in the text itself but is formed through communities of readers (Benwell, Procter, Robinson, G. 2012). The findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative learning creates a space for negotiating meaning and expanding students’ interpretive horizons.

The interpretive community formed through structured discussion allows students to recognize that a single text can be read through multiple legitimate theoretical perspectives. This awareness of interpretive plurality constitutes an essential competence within humanities education.

Integrating Local Contexts in the Production of Meaning

One of the important contributions of this study is the integration of local contexts into the teaching of literary theory. Students began to connect theoretical frameworks with the social and cultural realities they personally experience. This process enhances the relevance of theory and reduces the distance between epistemological abstraction and lived experience.

Within the framework of sociology of literature, texts always exist within networks of social and ideological relations (Tsang, n.d.). When students connect theoretical analysis with local contexts, they understand texts not merely as aesthetic artifacts but as social practices with ideological implications.

This approach also expands the horizon of humanities pedagogy in developing countries. Rather than positioning Western theory as a final authority, the learning process opens a dialogical space between global theoretical frameworks and local experience, thereby strengthening students’ intellectual autonomy in constructing contextual interpretations.

Theoretical Contributions to the Pedagogy of Literary Theory

Conceptually, this study proposes an integrative pedagogical model that can be formulated through three principal dimensions:

1. Epistemological Dimension, theory is understood as a dialogical interpretive lens.
2. Pedagogical Dimension, problem-based learning stimulates the integration of conceptual knowledge and analytical practice.
3. Technological Dimension e-learning functions as a space for reflection and collaborative dialogue.

This model addresses a gap in the literature on literary theory pedagogy, which has historically focused more on theoretical content than on pedagogical strategies for teaching theory. Within higher education, particularly in countries of the Global South, this approach offers an alternative to learning environments that remain overly textual and expository.

Furthermore, the model supports the transformation of humanities education toward a reflective and transformative paradigm. Education is no longer oriented toward the reproduction of concepts but toward the production of meaning and the development of critical consciousness.

Implications for Higher Education Reform

Within global discussions on higher education reform, there has been a strong tendency toward standardization, international accreditation, and performance indicators of academic productivity (Ratuva, S., 2021) However, this study demonstrates that the quality of education is not determined solely by institutional governance but also by pedagogical transformation within the classroom.

The reconceptualization of literary theory pedagogy developed in this research suggests that curriculum reform must address the epistemological foundations of learning. Without transforming the way knowledge itself is conceptualized, structural innovations risk losing substantive significance.

In the context of universities in the Global South, this approach has the potential to function as an adaptive model that strengthens students' analytical capacity while simultaneously maintaining the social relevance of humanities education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the gap between students' conceptual understanding of literary theory and their ability to apply it in textual analysis represents a fundamental problem in the teaching of literary theory in higher education. In conventional instructional practices, literary theory is often presented as a set of abstract concepts that must be mastered declaratively. As a result, students tend to be able to explain the definitions of various theoretical approaches but encounter difficulties when required to use those theories as analytical frameworks for systematically reading and interpreting literary texts.

The findings of this research indicate that these difficulties are not solely related to the conceptual complexity of literary theories but are also closely associated with the pedagogical approaches employed in the learning process. Instructional practices that position theory primarily as informational content delivered through expository lectures lead students to perceive theory as knowledge detached from interpretive practice. Such conditions contribute to the fragmentation of theoretical understanding and the limited development of students' metatheoretical awareness regarding the epistemological assumptions underlying different approaches to literary criticism.

The implementation of a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model integrated with e-learning, as developed in this study, demonstrates that pedagogical approaches oriented

toward interpretive problem-solving can effectively help students connect theoretical concepts with the practice of textual analysis. Through problem-based learning, theory is no longer treated as an abstract conceptual framework but rather as an analytical tool used to examine interpretive problems within literary works. Collaborative discussion, critical reflection, and the use of digital learning technologies further expand the space for academic dialogue, enabling students to revise and deepen their interpretive arguments.

Overall, the findings of this research highlight the need for a paradigmatic shift in the pedagogy of literary theory within higher education. Literary theory should be positioned as a dialogical and contextual interpretive framework rather than merely as a static system of concepts. In the context of higher education institutions in the Global South, this approach also carries significant implications for the reform of humanities curricula by integrating global theoretical frameworks with students' socio-cultural experiences. Consequently, the reconceptualization of literary theory pedagogy represents not only a methodological innovation but also a strategic step toward strengthening the role of the humanities in twenty-first-century higher education.

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