Functional Pragmatic Analysis in Building Students' Contextual Understanding of Literary Works

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# Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of a functional pragmatic approach in developing students' contextual understanding of literary works. The functional pragmatic approach emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting text meaning, considering the social, cultural, and situational backgrounds that influence communication in literature. In literature education, this method helps students go beyond understanding the literal content of a text. It encourages them to explore the deeper layers of meaning by considering the relationship between the author, the reader, and the broader societal context in which the text was produced. The research employs a qualitative case study design, engaging literature students as participants to examine how this approach is implemented in real classroom settings. The study utilizes several data collection techniques, including observations, interviews, and document analysis. These methods allow the researcher to comprehensively understand how the functional pragmatic approach is applied during literature lessons and its impact on students' comprehension. The findings indicate that this approach significantly enhances students' ability to critically analyze the meaning of texts and deepen their understanding of the social and cultural contexts embedded in the literature.Additionally, it fosters an appreciation for the values and messages conveyed through literary works. The study's implications suggest that incorporating a functional pragmatic approach in literature instruction could powerfully support the development of students' contextual understanding and critical thinking skills. By emphasizing the importance of context in literary analysis, this approach can help students engage with texts on a deeper level, making literature more meaningful and relevant to their lives.

**Keywords**: *Functional pragmatics, literary analysis, literature education, critical thinking skills*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is crucial in language education, helping students understand culture, values, and societal norms. It allows them to explore emotions, identity, and conflict while reflecting its time and place's cultural and social contexts (Wellek & Warren, 1990; Kustyarini, 2014; Lazar, 2023). By analyzing literature, students gain insights into the traditions and beliefs of different communities, fostering cultural appreciation and broadening perspectives. For example, literature from various regions exposes students to diverse ways of life, promoting tolerance and openness. Literature also addresses deep emotional themes like love, loss, and happiness, helping students manage their own emotions through complex characters and situations (Eagleton, 2008; Ahyar, 2019). It encourages reflection on personal identity, further fostering empathy and self-understanding. In addition, literature teaches problem-solving and negotiation skills as students examine how characters resolve conflicts and explore moral and ethical dilemmas. This enhances their critical thinking abilities (Moody, 2003; Baker, 2006; Ramadhana et al., 2022). Students develop strong analytical and argumentation skills essential for language development by analyzing themes, characters, and writing styles. The functional pragmatic approach is important here, as it helps students interpret literary works by considering the context of language use—such as the author's intentions, social background, and the reader's experiences. This approach teaches that meaning is shaped by words and the broader contextual factors surrounding the text.

The functional pragmatic approach offers a different perspective in teaching literature. This approach emphasizes the context of communication and the purpose of language use in real-life situations (Tarigan, 2015: 32). This approach focuses on how meaning is shaped through social interaction and how language is used to achieve specific communicative goals. In the context of literature, this approach encourages students to view literary texts not only as written works but as products of the complex interaction between the author, the reader, and the social context. In functional pragmatics, context plays a crucial role in shaping meaning, encompassing various elements. First, the social context reflects the cultural background, norms, and values that influence how people communicate. For instance, literary works written during a specific period often reflect the social issues relevant at that time, providing insights into the views and beliefs of society during that period (Leech, 1983; Halliday, 2014). Second, situational context refers to the specific situation in which communication occurs, including the setting, communicative goals, and the relationship between the sender and receiver of the message. Understanding the situational context can help students analyze how interactions in literary texts unfold. Third, historical context depicts events or historical conditions that can influence the meaning of the text. Therefore, students need to understand how historical context, whether major events or social changes, shapes themes and characters in literature, adding an extra dimension to their analysis of literary works (Bennet, 2004; Mu'in, 2017; Caulfield, 2024).

The functional pragmatic approach also emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the author and the reader. Every author has a specific purpose in creating a work, and understanding this intention helps readers capture a deeper meaning (Ahimsa, 2012; Khoirul, 2021). In literature education, this approach helps students understand that meaning is shaped by the text and the interaction between the author, reader, and social context. It encourages students to explore how their own interpretations can influence their understanding of the text (Iser, 1978; Griffith, 2022). Furthermore, functional pragmatics emphasizes that meaning in literature is dynamic and can change depending on context (Yanti, 2021). A text may have different interpretations over time, as shifting social and cultural norms can alter how we understand literary works. For example, feminist themes in literature may be interpreted differently across generations. The functional pragmatic approach also teaches students that every use of language has a specific purpose, such as conveying information, expressing emotions, or prompting action. Students learn to recognize these goals in literature and develop analytical skills to identify contextual elements that affect meaning. This approach helps students make diverse interpretations and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the text within its broader context.

Functional pragmatic analysis encourages students to think critically about the hidden meanings in literary works. Instead of just understanding what is written, students are prompted to consider why and how these meanings are formed, and how they can vary depending on the reader’s perspective and social context. This approach helps students become active, critical readers and deepens their appreciation of literature as a reflection of life experiences (Tung & Chang, 2009). Students explore how word choices, writing styles, and other elements influence meaning, learning to recognize how authors convey specific messages and how different readers interpret the same text. As a result, students engage actively with the text, analyzing and interpreting its meanings critically. This research is significant because applying a functional pragmatic approach in literature teaching can substantially impact students' development. The study raises two key research questions: 1) How is the functional pragmatic approach applied in the context of classroom literature learning? and 2) What are the implications of applying the functional pragmatic approach on students' understanding of social and cultural values in literary works?

This research is significant because the functional pragmatic approach can greatly impact students' development. It raises two main questions: how the approach is applied in literature classrooms and how it affects students' understanding of social and cultural values in literature. The approach helps students move beyond passive reading and think critically about texts and their contexts, which is important in the current information age where evaluating sources is crucial. Without this research, literature education might remain stuck in traditional methods that focus only on text analysis, limiting students' ability to understand texts' broader social and cultural relevance. This approach helps develop social awareness, empathy, and effective communication skills, which are valuable for students' personal and professional lives. This research offers a fresh way to teach literature, linking it to wider social and cultural contexts, and can significantly improve the quality of literary education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate and comprehensively understand how the functional pragmatic approach is implemented in literature education (Cresswell, 2018; Merriam, 2015). This method enables the researcher to gather data from the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of students and teachers involved in the learning process. The study utilizes a case study design, focusing on how the functional pragmatic approach is applied and experienced within the context of literature classes attended by the 2022 cohort of the English Language Education Program at the State University of Surabaya. It focuses on these classes' teaching and learning activities, specifically exploring how the functional pragmatic approach is integrated into the curriculum and classroom practices. Through this design, the researcher examines specific experiences within these classes and understands the broader context affecting teaching and learning in literature education (Endraswara, 2003; Yin, 2018). This approach allows the researcher to comprehensively understand the classroom context, practices, and learning dynamics.

***Data Collection Techniques***

Data for this research are gathered through several key techniques. First, in-depth interviews are conducted with 5 literature teachers and 47 students to understand their experiences in implementing the functional pragmatic approach. These interviews are expected to provide insights into the participants' perspectives, challenges, and perceived benefits. Second, classroom observations are carried out during literature lessons. This observation aims to examine the application of the functional pragmatic approach in the interaction between the teacher and students and the use of teaching materials in the classroom. These interactions are recorded to identify communication patterns and the concrete implementation of the method. Finally, documentation will be collected, including lesson plans, student assignments, and instructional materials. These documents provide further context and support understanding of the practices applied, helping to reveal how the method is integrated into the teaching and learning activities. Together, these techniques ensure that the study captures both the process (how the approach is applied) and the impact (how it influences student learning and engagement), leading to a comprehensive understanding of the functional pragmatic approach in literature education.

***Data Analysis Techniques***

The collected data is analysed using thematic analysis based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is chosen for its flexibility and systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process begins with transcribing interviews and observation notes to facilitate a deeper examination of the data. Next, coding is performed by identifying and assigning codes to emerging themes from both the interviews and observations. This coding process serves to organize the data and help identify significant patterns. Then, thematic analysis is conducted, where the data is grouped based on themes that are relevant to the research questions, such as the application of the functional pragmatic approach and its relationship to the socio-cultural context.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings from the observations and interviews reveal that applying the functional pragmatic approach in literature education provides a solid framework for students to engage with literary works more deeply and contextually. The teacher utilizes this approach by connecting the meaning of literary texts to the social and cultural contexts in which they were created, helping students realize that meaning is shaped not only by the written words but also by social interactions and the author's intent. For instance, while analyzing the classic Great Expectations by Charles Dickens, the teacher emphasizes the historical and social context during the time the book was written, aiding students in understanding how the issues raised in the text relate to the societal conditions of that period. In this context, comprehending the social hierarchies and economic changes in England during the Industrial Revolution is incorporated into the novel's reading, helping students grasp the story's background more thoroughly. During the discussion of Great Expectations, students are invited to share their thoughts on the following quotation:

“My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice.”

In their analysis, students interpreted the quotation as illustrating the social context of Pip’s family and the difficult realities of the lower class in Victorian England. Pip is brought up by his sister, Mrs. Joe, harshly and critically, which reflects how children from lower social backgrounds were often raised strictly to prepare them for a life filled with challenges and inequality. In contrast, the quotation concerning Miss Havisham, a wealthy character, on page 112 emphasizes the sharp contrast between social classes and the advantages that come with wealth:

“She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table.”

The students describe Miss Havisham as a symbol of the upper class, trapped in wealth, pride, and isolation. In Dickens' portrayal, Miss Havisham always wears her extravagant wedding dress, symbolizing status, luxury, disappointment, and failure in love. Her wealth is reflected in the expensive fabrics and jewelry she wears, but the dress has faded over time, symbolizing the decay and emotional emptiness that accompany her affluence. Based on this understanding, students are able to highlight how the upper class in England during that time often lived in luxury but experienced emotional emptiness or alienation. Miss Havisham exemplifies someone who, despite her high status, remains stuck in the past and unable to move forward. During the learning process, the lecturer encourages students to analyze how wealth and status can isolate someone from real life, even causing them to lose emotional connections and life satisfaction. By understanding the depiction of Miss Havisham, students can reflect on Dickens' critique of upper-class values that prioritize status and appearances over emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships.

“We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us.” – Chapter 34.

This quotation appears when Pip and his friend, Herbert Pocket, attempt to live a lifestyle that matches a higher social class. They feel compelled to spend money in order to keep up with the standards of the upper class, even though they are aware that this often provides only shallow satisfaction. The quotation reflects the extravagant nature and social pressure to maintain status, demonstrating how individuals in society at that time were driven to live up to social expectations, even if it meant sacrificing their own comfort or financial stability. In Victorian England, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, a new class emerged with a strong desire to attain the lifestyle of a "gentleman." Social status and image became incredibly important, even for those who could not truly afford such luxury. By providing this background, the teacher can help students understand how Dickens uses the character of Pip to criticize English society's obsession with status and wealth, and how such social pressure can damage one's character and morals. Through this approach, students can see that Great Expectations is not just a story about Pip’s personal journey, but also a reflection of Dickens' social commentary on injustice and the falseness within English culture of his time. Students are then asked to analyze characters and their interactions, as seen in the following quotation:

In chapter 14 the protagonist, Pip, whose aspirations to rise above his working-class origins and become a "gentleman" demonstrate the Victorian era's fascination with wealth and status. Pip's transformation and internal conflict expose the impact of class expectations and societal judgment on his identity and values.

“It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home. There may be black ingratitude in the thing, and the punishment may be retributive and well deserved; but, that it is a miserable thing, I can testify.”

This quote powerfully conveys Pip’s inner turmoil, where his sense of shame is directly linked to his desire to rise above his station. The functional pragmatic approach to analyse this moment in Great Expectations invites students to consider how societal values shape personal identity, particularly through the lens of social mobility and self-worth. By examining Pip’s struggle within the rigid Victorian class structure, students are encouraged to see how Dickens uses Pip’s shame not as a personal failing, but as a critique of society’s influence on individual self-perception. Victorian society prized wealth, status, and "gentility" as markers of success, often marginalizing or undervaluing those in the working class. Pip’s shame about his humble background—despite his loyalty to his guardian, Joe—reflects an imposed societal pressure to abandon his origins in pursuit of an ideal that defines worth solely by social rank and outward success. Through this lens, Dickens exposes the harm of such values. The functional pragmatic approach allows students to discuss how Pip’s journey reveals the psychological cost of valuing status over integrity. Pip’s relationship with Joe suffers as he internalizes society’s view that his background is something to be hidden or overcome. This, in turn, leads him to feel estranged from himself and those who truly care for him, highlighting the emotional and relational toll of societal expectations. Another powerful quote from later in the novel reflects the regret Pip feels for distancing himself from Joe and his origins, as well as his understanding of himself and how he perceives the views of others about him and his friends.

“In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice.”

“He calls the knaves, jacks, this boy!... And what coarse hands he has. And what thick boots!”

This statement reflects Pip’s eventual recognition of the inherent injustice in judging people based on class. By connecting these personal reflections to broader societal norms, students see how Pip’s narrative serves as Dickens’s vehicle for critiquing a social order that forces individuals to sacrifice authentic relationships and self-respect for the sake of superficial advancement. Through this approach, students gain insight into how class-based judgments and aspirations for upward mobility ultimately shape and, at times, distort one’s identity. Here, Pip begins to realize that his working-class status is considered inferior by the upper class. Functional pragmatic analysis allows students to understand how Pip’s experience with Estella’s disdain shapes his desire to become wealthy and esteemed. In this way, Dickens critiques the social system that discriminates based on status and encourages individuals like Pip to change themselves in order to gain social acceptance.

The pragmatic approach in analyzing Great Expectations provides deep insight into the social structure of Victorian England, marked by significant class and economic disparities. By focusing on Pip’s relationships with characters such as Joe Gargery, a simple and honorable blacksmith; Magwitch, a convict who ultimately becomes Pip’s benefactor; and Miss Havisham, a wealthy woman living in bitterness, Dickens clearly portrays the dynamics between different social classes. Their interactions reflect how social class shapes individuals' identities, expectations, and worldviews. Through the pragmatic approach, students can understand how Pip, as the main character, responds to the social and economic pressures he faces. Pip feels ashamed of his humble background and aspires to become a "gentleman" to gain social recognition. This desire often puts him at odds with his moral values and loyalty to those who love him unconditionally, such as Joe. Pip’s transformation from an innocent country boy into an ambitious young man demonstrates how rigid class structures and materialistic values of the time can corrupt morals and personal relationships.

Dickens implicitly critiques a society that idolizes social status and wealth through Pip’s journey. Social class influences how others perceive individuals and shapes their self-perception. For instance, Pip feels ashamed of Joe, despite Joe being the most sincere and kind-hearted figure in his life. This sentiment reflects how societal standards demean those in lower classes, even if their moral values are far superior. The functional pragmatic approach also helps students understand the social context behind Dickens’s motivations for writing the novel. Through Pip’s story, Dickens demonstrates that a person’s worth should not be measured by wealth or social status but by their character and relationships with others. This critique elevates Great Expectations beyond a personal tale, turning it into a social commentary that challenges readers to question the values they take for granted.

This approach enriches students’ reading experience by encouraging them to see how language, context, and character interactions reflect broader social issues. Students are guided to grasp the narrative framework and explore the moral messages and societal critiques Dickens intended for both contemporary and modern audiences. To deepen their understanding, students engage in creative activities, such as writing essays on the relevance of the novel’s themes to current issues or adapting the story into a drama set in a different social context. The process concludes with a reflection activity, where students evaluate their learning by answering questions about what they discovered regarding the text’s social context and how these lessons influence their perspectives on social issues. This approach ensures that students not only comprehend the story literally but also uncover deeper meanings, develop critical thinking skills, and appreciate the relevance of literature in understanding societal and cultural dynamics.

The application of the functional pragmatic approach in literature education has significant implications for students' understanding of social and cultural values in literary works. With this approach, students are encouraged not only to read and understand the plot but also to connect the story's content to the social and cultural context in which the work was written and to contemporary conditions. The functional pragmatic approach encourages students to see how social aspects such as social class, cultural norms, and moral values influence characters and the story's development. For example, when studying \*Great Expectations\*, students not only follow Pip’s individual journey but also understand how his social status and personal ambitions reflect the pressures and expectations of British society during the Industrial Revolution. In this way, students can grasp that literary works often contain critiques of social structures or specific cultural issues, making them more sensitive to similar problems in contemporary society.

The functional pragmatic approach in literature education helps students understand the plot and characters and develops essential critical and reflective thinking skills. Through this approach, students are encouraged to view literary works as reflections of their time's social and cultural values, and to assess how the issues raised can be applied to or compared with current social conditions. For example, when students identify issues such as social inequality in Great Expectations, they learn to evaluate how Dickens portrays class differences between characters, like Pip and the wealthy families he encounters. From this, students can ask, what impact does social inequality have on individuals in this story, and how is this issue still relevant in society today? This process helps students analyze how social factors influence the behavior and motivations of individuals in the story and their impact on societal structure. Additionally, the approach teaches students to evaluate and connect themes in the story, such as economic disparity or family values, with their own personal values or those in their own society. Students can compare views and values from the past with modern life, which helps them appreciate differing perspectives. Through this process, students realize that literature is not just entertainment, but also a tool for understanding various issues and social norms, and for forming a deeper understanding of historical contexts and universal human values. This approach enriches students’ interpretations of literary works and teaches them that a text can have multiple layers of meaning and moral messages that transcend time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, applying the functional pragmatic approach in literature education significantly impacts students' understanding of social and cultural values in literary works. This approach helps students comprehend the story in depth and trains them to think critically and reflectively. By connecting issues raised in the literary work, such as social inequality or family values, with historical contexts and modern life, students are able to evaluate the relevance of these themes and appreciate diverse perspectives. More than just entertainment, literature becomes a rich learning tool, equipping students with the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret the values embedded in the text to reflect the complex and meaningful human experience. The study presents significant limitations that should be addressed in future research. One key issue is the small sample size, which is confined to specific literature classes within a single academic program, limiting the extent to which the findings can be applied to broader educational settings or diverse student groups. While the insights provided are valuable, they may not fully capture the variability present in other contexts.

Additionally, the exclusive reliance on qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, introduces a degree of subjectivity. Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches that integrate qualitative and quantitative data to mitigate this. This would enable a more comprehensive and balanced evaluation of the approach's effectiveness, ultimately producing outcomes that have a meaningful impact on students’ overall development.

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