



Research Article

TRACES OF THE KONSTANZ SCHOOL IN VIETNAM'S 2018 LANGUAGE ARTS AND LITERATURE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at how ideas associated with the Konstanz School of reception aesthetics are taken up in Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum, focusing in particular on how literary reading is framed. Based on a qualitative analysis of the curriculum framework and key policy documents, it examines the ways in which reception-oriented perspectives appear in the stated aims, expected learning outcomes, and broader pedagogical orientations. Two tendencies become visible, although they do not always operate consistently. The curriculum places clear emphasis on historical and social context while acknowledging the learner's active role in interpretation – an orientation that can be read in relation to Jauss's notion of the "horizon of expectations." It also adopts a competency-based view of literary reading that foregrounds interaction between text and reader, echoing central assumptions in Iser's work. However, these theoretical resonances remain uneven. In many instances, they are sustained at the level of curricular language but only weakly translated into concrete guidance for classroom practice. Rather than simply tracing theoretical influences, the article therefore asks how far such ideas can actually inform teaching. This shift in focus brings into view a more persistent issue: the distance between reception-oriented intentions and their pedagogical realisation is not incidental, but structurally embedded in the way the curriculum articulates its aims. Seen in this light, the article contributes to curriculum studies by clarifying the selective incorporation of reception aesthetics in Vietnam's current reform, while also problematising the assumption that theoretical alignment necessarily leads to pedagogical transformation.

Keywords: curriculum analysis; Hans Robert Jauss; literary reading instruction; reception theory; Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum; Wolfgang Iser

1. Introduction

Reception-oriented perspectives occupy a central place in theoretical debates on literature education, but they are not always carried through consistently into curriculum

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design. In many contexts, ideas drawn from reception aesthetics and reader-response theory appear mainly as broad pedagogical commitments – for instance, in the claim that students should play an active role in interpretation. Yet they often provide only limited guidance on how literary reading ought to be organised in actual classroom practice (Freund, 1987; Probst, 2004). The gap between what curricula endorse in principle and what they make possible in instruction remains a familiar issue, but one that is not merely technical; it points to a greater difficulty in translating theory into pedagogical form.

Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum can be understood within this broader context. The document emphasises active reading, contextualised interpretation, and learner engagement (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2018b), pointing to a shift in discourse toward competence-based and reception-oriented approaches. A similar tendency has been noted in Vietnamese scholarship, where literary reading is described as a multidimensional, strategic, experiential, and interactive process (Hoang, 2014; Duong, 2014; Do, 2018; Nguyen, 2019). Taken together, these studies suggest a move away from transmission-based models and toward a stronger focus on students' reading activity and meaning-making. Even so, the extent of this shift remains uncertain. Reception-oriented and constructivist principles are widely acknowledged, but their systematic operationalisation – especially with respect to the more specific concepts associated with the Konstanz School – remains uneven and, in some respects, under-articulated. It is therefore still an open question how far reception aesthetics actually shapes the conceptual structure and pedagogical orientation of the current curriculum.

Against this backdrop, the present study asks how key ideas associated with the Konstanz School, particularly those developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, are taken up in the curriculum's formulation of objectives, expected learning outcomes, and pedagogical orientations for literary reading. Rather than assuming their influence, the analysis examines how these ideas are embedded in curricular discourse and, just as importantly, where their translation into pedagogical terms begins to falter. In doing so, the article aims not only to identify the presence of reception-oriented perspectives but also to clarify the limits of their practical realisation.

2. Research object and method

2.1. Research object

In this study, Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum is treated as a body of policy documents, with a focus on its overall design and, more specifically, on how literary reading is characterised within the subject (MOET, 2018b). The corpus draws on official texts issued by the Ministry of Education and Training during the 2018 reform, notably the General Education Curriculum framework and the subject curriculum for Vietnamese Language Arts and Literature (MOET, 2018a). These documents articulate the subject's aims, expected learning outcomes, competency structure, and broad pedagogical orientations.

Within this corpus, the analysis centres on three questions that are closely linked to reception-oriented thinking. First, how does the curriculum position the learner as a reader, and how is the student's role in literary interpretation described? Second, to what extent are historical, social, and cultural contexts recognised as part of the interpretive process? Third, does the curriculum treat literary meaning mainly as something to be transmitted, or as something that takes shape through the interaction between reader and text? Taken together, these three lines of inquiry provide a conceptual entry point for examining possible alignments between the curriculum's approach to literary reading and key ideas in reception aesthetics and reader-response theory (Freund, 1987; Jauss, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1978).

The study deliberately restricts its scope to curriculum documents understood as policy texts. It does not extend to textbooks, teaching materials, or classroom practice. This delimitation follows from the study's purpose: the aim is not to evaluate implementation or student outcomes, but to examine the theoretical assumptions and design orientations embedded in the curriculum itself. By focusing on curricular discourse, the study clarifies how literary reading is framed at the level of policy and design, while also opening up directions for further inquiry into classroom practice.

2.2. Research methods

The study uses qualitative document analysis as its main method. The analysis is guided by a theoretical framework drawn from reception aesthetics, with a focus on the work of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations is used to see how the curriculum presents readers as historically and socially situated in their interpretations (Jauss, 1982). In parallel, Iser's ideas about text-reader interaction and textual indeterminacy inform the analysis of how meaning-making is framed as an active process that arises from engagement with literary texts (Iser, 1978). These perspectives are considered alongside broader reader-response discussions that emphasise the transactional nature of reading and the central role of the reader's experience (Freund, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1978).

The analysis proceeds through close reading combined with theory-informed interpretation. Passages referring to literary reading, interpretation, and learner engagement are first located in the curriculum documents. They are then coded using three analytical lenses derived from reception aesthetics: (1) the way the learner is positioned as a reader, (2) the ways contextual or experiential horizons are invoked, and (3) how literary meaning is framed – either as something given or as something that emerges through interaction between reader and text. The coded segments are interpreted in relation to the concepts of Jauss and Iser to identify patterns of overlap and tension between reception theory and curricular discourse. The purpose is not to measure implementation, but to clarify how reception-oriented assumptions are built into the curriculum's design and language.

Because the focus is on curriculum discourse, the study does not include classroom observation, intervention, surveys, or statistical analysis. It relies instead on qualitative

reasoning grounded in work on reception aesthetics, reader-response criticism, and curriculum studies (Kunjanman & Aziz, 2021; Probst, 2004). This approach allows the analysis to trace how ideas from reception theory are taken up in the curriculum and to note where there is a gap between their conceptual presence and their translation into orientations for teaching literary reading.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, coding choices and interpretive categories were repeatedly checked against the theoretical framework. Ambiguous passages were revisited in later readings and, when necessary, discussed with colleagues familiar with reception theory and curriculum studies in order to refine the interpretations.

2. Findings and discussion

This section examines how reception-oriented ideas are reflected in the discourse of Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum. It focuses on the curriculum's objectives, expected learning outcomes, and pedagogical orientations for literary reading, and considers the extent to which reading is framed as an interactive process between text and reader.

3.1. *Reception-oriented perspectives in the objectives of Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum*

A closer look at the curriculum objectives suggests more than a simple shift in emphasis. The curriculum frames literary learning as a process in which students engage with texts to construct meaning and deepen their understanding of both literature and human experience, rather than merely receiving fixed bodies of knowledge. At the level of general aims, it states that the subject should help students “discover themselves and the world around them, develop an empathetic understanding of human beings, cultivate a rich inner life and humane ways of living and acting, foster a love for the Vietnamese language and literature, nurture an awareness of national origins and cultural identity so as to contribute to preserving and developing Vietnamese cultural values, and develop an openness to the cultural achievements of humanity and the capacity for international integration” (MOET, 2018b, p. 5)¹. Read in this light, literary engagement is not treated as the extraction of information, but as a process in which meaning emerges through the interplay between textual representation and the reader's personal and social experience. This shift, however, is not entirely straightforward, as the curriculum does not consistently indicate how such meaning-making should be supported in practice.

This orientation aligns with a central premise in reception aesthetics, although the connection is not made explicit in the curriculum itself. As Wolfgang Iser argues, “the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader” (Iser, 1978, p. 21). In a related vein, Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations highlights the role of the reader's engagement with the text. He maintains that literary understanding is shaped by

¹ Author's translation

historically and socially conditioned expectations that readers bring to a work; literary texts “evoke in readers the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts,” which may then be “varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced” in the course of reading (Jauss, 1982, p. 83). At the same time, such theoretical resonances should not be overstated, since they remain largely implicit rather than systematically articulated.

A similar orientation can be observed where the curriculum links literary reading to students’ own experiences, values, and perspectives. It highlights the role of literature in “enabling students to connect literary texts with personal experiences and social life” (MOET, 2018b, p. 82)². From a reception-theoretical perspective, this suggests that interpretation is understood as taking shape through the interaction between textual meaning and the reader’s horizon of understanding. Even so, the extent to which this interaction is pedagogically structured remains unclear.

Notably, the curriculum does not explicitly invoke the conceptual vocabulary of reception aesthetics. Instead, reception-oriented assumptions remain embedded – and at times only partially articulated – in the way reading is framed as an experiential and interpretive practice rather than as the passive intake of predetermined meanings.

3.2. Reception-oriented elements in the expected learning outcomes

Reception-oriented ideas become most visible when we examine the expected learning outcomes for literary reading across grade levels. These outcomes specify the competencies students are expected to develop through engaging with literary texts and, in doing so, offer a clearer indication of how reading is conceptualised within the curriculum.

A first point concerns the emphasis on multiple interpretations and personal response. Students are not only required to identify textual information but also to articulate and justify their own understanding and evaluation of literary works. For instance, the curriculum asks them to express personal feelings, thoughts, and evaluations about characters, events, and artistic elements in literary texts (MOET, 2018b). This shift, however, is not without tension, as the criteria for evaluating such responses are not always clearly specified.

This orientation resonates with Iser’s account of literary reading, in which texts are characterised by a degree of indeterminacy. As he argues, “the text contains gaps that the reader must fill in, and it is through these gaps that the text becomes operational” (Iser, 1978, p. 169). Such gaps call for the reader’s imaginative participation and make reading an interpretive activity rather than a mere act of decoding. Seen in this light, the curriculum’s focus on students’ interpretive responses can be understood as an educational translation of this idea, albeit one that remains implicit rather than systematically developed.

The expected learning outcomes further highlight students’ active and evaluative engagement with literary texts. They are expected to “take an active, confident role as co-creators in the reception of literary works, expressing personal feelings, thoughts, and

² Author’s translation

evaluations about characters, events, and artistic elements as they enthusiastically construct meaning for the text” (MOET, 2018b, p. 82)³. From a reception-theoretical perspective, this suggests that meaning is not treated as fixed in advance, but as something that emerges through the reader’s work with the text. Even so, how this process is to be scaffolded in classroom practice remains less clearly articulated.

Notably, the curriculum does not explicitly invoke the conceptual vocabulary of reception aesthetics. Instead, these reception-oriented assumptions appear in a pedagogically translated form, embedded within a broader competence-based framework. This translation, while productive, also raises questions about the extent to which theoretical coherence is maintained in the shift from conceptual discourse to curricular design.

3.3. Reception-oriented orientations in the organization of literary reading activities

Reception-related assumptions can also be seen in how the curriculum describes the organisation of reading activities in the classroom. It states that “In teaching literary reading, teachers should help students independently discover the messages and meanings of the text, thereby contributing to filling in its ‘gaps.’ Teachers may offer guiding suggestions, but they should not allow their own analysis and commentary to substitute for students’ thinking; they should avoid read-and-copy practices and minimise rote memorisation” (MOET, 2018b, p. 83)⁴. What is notable here is the expectation that students carry out the interpretive work themselves, rather than simply follow a pre-given explanation.

This view is very close to Iser’s account of reading. He argues that “the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence” (Iser, 1978, p. 275). In other words, meaning does not sit fully inside the text waiting to be extracted. It takes shape through what readers do with it.

The curriculum also places clear emphasis on discussion. Students are expected to share their interpretations and respond to those of others. Reading, in this sense, is not an individual act only. It unfolds through exchange. From a reception-theoretical perspective, this points to the idea that interpretation develops across multiple acts of reading within a community of readers.

Even so, the guidance remains quite general. The curriculum encourages engagement and discussion, but says little about how these should be organised in actual lessons. How, for example, should teachers support students as they work through different interpretations? What kinds of questions or tasks would make this process visible? These points are left largely open. As a result, reception-oriented assumptions are easier to see at the level of curricular language than in the concrete procedures offered for classroom practice.

Taken together, these orientations indicate that the curriculum implicitly incorporates several principles associated with reception aesthetics, as synthesised in Table 1.

³ Author’s translation

⁴ Author’s translation

Table 1. Conceptual correspondences between reception aesthetics and Vietnam’s 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum

| Key concept in reception aesthetics | Core theoretical idea | Corresponding discourse in the Vietnam’s 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum | Pedagogical implication for literary reading |
|--|---|---|---|
| Horizon of expectations (Jauss) | Readers do not come to literary texts empty-handed; their interpretations are shaped by expectations formed through historical and social experience. | The curriculum presents literary reading as a means for students to relate texts to their own experiences and to social life, encouraging them to connect what they read with their own perspectives. | Reading is framed as an interpretive process in which students draw on their own experiences and perspectives as they make sense of literary texts. |
| Historical reception of literature (Jauss) | Literary meaning develops over time as different readers engage with the text and respond to one another. | The curriculum places strong emphasis on discussion, the sharing of ideas, and attention to context as key elements of literary learning. | Understanding a literary text grows through dialogue, classroom discussion, and the exchange of different interpretations among students. |
| Text–reader interaction (Iser) | Meaning takes shape through the interplay between the text’s structure and the reader’s interpretive work. | The curriculum presents literary competence, in part, as the ability to interpret and evaluate texts through active engagement with literary works. | Literary reading is understood as an active process, not simply the passive reception of fixed meanings. |
| Indeterminacy and textual gaps (Iser) | Literary texts include indeterminate elements that invite readers to participate in completing meaning through interpretation. | The expected learning outcomes encourage students to articulate their own responses and interpretations when engaging with literary texts. | Classroom reading activities allow for multiple interpretations and encourage students to articulate their own understanding of texts. |

Looking across the curriculum, its objectives, expected learning outcomes, and pedagogical guidance, a consistent pattern can be seen. Literary reading is treated as an activity students carry out, rather than something they simply receive. The curriculum repeatedly highlights personal engagement, attention to context, and the sharing of interpretations. These elements suggest that meaning develops through students’ active work with texts, rather than being presented as a fixed set of ideas to be transmitted.

This pattern is not confined to a small number of isolated references. It runs through different parts of the curriculum. What emerges is a broader way of framing the learner: not as a passive recipient, but as a reader whose understanding takes shape through interaction with the text and with other readers. Looking at these elements side by side makes it easier

to see how literary reading is being conceptualised and how it connects to wider discussions of reader-centred approaches in literature education.

These observations also connect with what has been discussed in international research. Work on reception-oriented pedagogy has long pointed out that recognising the reader's role is not enough on its own. Students need structured opportunities to work through meaning, both with texts and with each other. Beach (1993) and Appleman (2009), for example, show how teaching frameworks can help students see how interpretation is shaped by textual features, cultural perspectives, and the strategies they use. More recent studies continue in this direction. Schrijvers et al. (2019) highlight the need to balance openness in interpretation with explicit instructional support that enables students to develop their literary understanding.

From this perspective, the Vietnamese curriculum can be understood as part of a broader international shift toward reception-oriented approaches to literary learning. At the same time, it also reveals a familiar difficulty. Moving from theoretical ideas to concrete classroom guidance is not straightforward. This tension provides a starting point for the final discussion on what reception-oriented perspectives can offer for understanding and developing the teaching of literary reading.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

A careful reading of the findings indicates that central ideas from reception theory are already present in Vietnam's 2018 Language Arts and Literature Curriculum, informing its aims, expected learning outcomes, and general approach to literary reading. This signals a shift – at least to some extent – from viewing reading as the reception of fixed knowledge toward understanding it as a process of meaning-making. At the same time, this shift should not be overstated. In several instances, these ideas remain at the level of curricular discourse and are not consistently translated into clear, actionable guidance for lesson design and classroom practice.

For teachers, this raises a more immediate concern: what, in concrete terms, should reading tasks do? They cannot function merely as checks of correct understanding. These tasks, instead, need to be deliberately designed as opportunities for interpretation, firmly grounded in textual evidence. In practice, this means creating activities that guide students to develop, compare, and refine their interpretations, rather than simply offering unsupported personal responses. At the same time, not all classroom practices are yet aligned with this shift. The design of classroom talk, in particular, becomes crucial. If textual meaning is seen as taking shape through readers' engagement, then discussion formats, guiding questions, and scaffolding are not secondary features; they become central to how students are positioned as active participants in literary reading.

Assessment practices need to follow this logic, but doing so is not straightforward. It is relatively easy to assess what students recall; it is far more demanding to evaluate how they interpret. Alongside checking content knowledge, assessment should give greater weight to students' ability to justify their interpretations, draw on textual evidence, and

engage with alternative readings. This, in turn, calls for more refined criteria—ones that can capture not only final answers, but also the quality and process of interpretation.

At the level of curriculum design, concepts from reception aesthetics can be translated into practical principles for sequencing reading tasks, selecting and grouping texts, and supporting the gradual development of reading competence across grade levels. Yet such translation is neither automatic nor risk-free. It needs to build carefully on what current curriculum documents, textbooks, and teaching materials have already achieved, rather than assuming an absence of reception-oriented thinking.

Seen from this perspective, reception theory does not replace existing approaches to teaching reading. It complicates them. It offers an additional lens through which the role of the student as reader – and the organisation of reading activities – can be reconsidered. What remains uncertain, however, is how far these theoretical insights can travel into actual classroom practice. This is where further empirical work becomes necessary. It is not only a matter of examining classroom practice more closely, but also of designing and testing instructional models that can turn these theoretical suggestions into workable approaches across different contexts. Without such efforts, the claims put forward here remain largely provisional and in need of further refinement.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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DẤU ẤN CỦA TRƯỜNG PHÁI KONSTANZ TRONG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH NGỮ VĂN 2018

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết tìm hiểu những tư tưởng cơ bản gắn với mỹ học tiếp nhận của Trường phái Konstanz được phản ánh như thế nào trong Chương trình Ngữ văn năm 2018, đặc biệt trong định hướng dạy học đọc hiểu văn bản văn học. Dựa trên phương pháp định tính – phân tích tài liệu – đối với khung chương trình và các văn bản hướng dẫn chính thức, bài viết xem xét việc thể hiện quan điểm lấy người đọc làm trung tâm trong mục tiêu chương trình, chuẩn đầu ra và các định hướng sư phạm của môn học. Kết quả phân tích cho thấy có hai xu hướng tiếp nhận nổi bật. Thứ nhất, chương trình nhấn mạnh vai trò của bối cảnh lịch sử – xã hội cùng với sự tham gia tích cực của người học trong quá trình kiến tạo nghĩa, từ đó gợi đến khái niệm “tâm đón đợi” của Jauss. Thứ hai, quan niệm đọc văn học theo định hướng phát triển năng lực đặt trọng tâm vào sự tương tác giữa văn bản và người đọc, tương thích với những nội dung cốt lõi trong lý thuyết tiếp nhận của Iser. Tuy nhiên, các tương ứng lý thuyết này phần lớn mới dừng lại ở cấp độ diễn ngôn chương trình và chỉ được chuyển hóa một phần thành các chỉ dẫn sư phạm cụ thể cho hoạt động dạy học. Nghiên cứu này đã góp phần làm rõ cách mỹ học tiếp nhận được tiếp thu một cách chọn lọc trong việc đổi mới chương trình giáo dục ở Việt Nam, đồng thời chỉ ra khoảng cách giữa định hướng tiếp nhận ở cấp độ chương trình và việc vận dụng chúng trong thiết kế hoạt động dạy học đọc hiểu văn học.

Từ khóa: Chương trình Ngữ văn 2018; Hans Robert Jauss; dạy học đọc hiểu văn bản văn học; lý thuyết tiếp nhận; phân tích chương trình; Wolfgang Iser