

Enhancing Indonesian students' literary interpretation through affective stylistics, mood-tone, and cultural contrast

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Abstract

This study examined how Indonesian EFL undergraduates interpreted English literature by integrating affective stylistics, mood–tone analysis, and cultural contrast into a unified interpretive framework. Employing a qualitative interpretive case study, data were collected from 24 literature majors in North Sumatra through close-reading tasks, think-aloud protocols, and semi-structured interviews. All instruments underwent expert validation and interrater reliability checks to ensure consistency in affective and tonal coding. Data were analyzed thematically to trace how students' cognitive-affective responses unfolded during real-time reading. Using selected passages from *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hunger Games*, the findings revealed three systematic distortions: affective misalignment, marked by reduced emotional cues; tonal misclassification, where markers of probability were interpreted as certainty; and moral domestication, marked by the simplification of ethical ambiguity into binary judgments. These patterns demonstrated an affective cultural overlay, in which readers unconsciously replaced foreign affective cues with culturally familiar ones. The study underscored the need for pedagogical interventions that foster interpretive flexibility and minimize culturally driven misreadings.

Keywords

affective stylistics, cultural contrast, English literature, Indonesian EFL students, mood-tone

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching Indonesian students to interpret English literature extends beyond mastering vocabulary and grammar; it requires the development of sensitivity to affective cues, tonal subtleties, and culturally embedded moral frameworks that shape narrative meaning. In many Indonesian classrooms, literary instruction still emphasizes thematic summaries, character identification, and plot reconstruction, leaving the dynamic cognitive–affective processes through which readers engage with stylistic signals insufficiently examined. As a result, students may successfully decode surface-level narrative information while simultaneously overlooking deeper layers of emotional nuance, tonal ambiguity, and symbolic meaning embedded within the text.

This study introduces the concept of affective cultural overlay, defined as the subconscious process through which readers replace subtle emotional signals in a literary text with culturally familiar affective expressions (Ativie et al., 2025). Rather than simply misunderstanding vocabulary

or grammar, readers actively reshape the emotional structure of the narrative so that it aligns with culturally preferred ways of expressing feelings, interpreting moral dilemmas, and evaluating character behavior. This process generates systematic interpretive distortions in which ambiguity, irony, or restrained emotional tone is simplified into culturally recognizable emotional categories such as explicit sadness, clear anger, or morally definitive judgments.

Within the framework of affective stylistics, reading is understood as a temporal process in which meaning unfolds through moment-to-moment emotional and cognitive responses to stylistic cues. Each sentence, clause, or narrative shift invites the reader to revise expectations, reinterpret previous information, and emotionally reposition themselves within the narrative. When readers fail to attend to these affective cues, interpretation becomes reductive, collapsing complex emotional trajectories into static judgments.

For instance, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Indonesian students frequently interpret the narrator's feelings toward Mustafa Sa'eed as either admiration or condemnation, overlooking the deliberate oscillation between attraction and suspicion embedded within the narrative. Ambivalent statements such as "*aku tidak sepenuhnya percaya padanya, tetapi aku mengaguminya*" are often simplified in classroom discussion into categorical statements like "*aku suka dia*" or "*aku tidak suka dia*." This transformation eliminates the emotional tension that structures the narrative, demonstrating how interpretive simplification reshapes literary meaning.

This tonal shift aligns with Halliday's mood-tone framework (Dahhan et al., 2025), which examines how grammatical choices encode stance and interpersonal meaning. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, declarative clauses with modal probability ("*it might have been fine to stay longer*") express tentativeness and introspective hesitation. However, Indonesian translations often use the indicative ("*pasti akan menyenangkan jika kami tinggal lebih lama*"), eliminating the original uncertainty. This transformation from possibility to certainty reshapes the character's inner state and compresses Woolf's subtle tonal layering. Such flattening mirrors a cultural preference for assertiveness and clarity in Indonesian prose, as identified by Ruswandi et al. (2025) in cross-cultural pragmatics. The shift not only reflects linguistic habit but also reveals interpretive tendencies toward definitive expression, potentially distancing readers from the narrative's psychological ambiguity, a hallmark of Woolf's modernist style.

Cultural contrast (Uzma et al., 2025) helps explain how moral, symbolic, and expressive frameworks shape the ways readers interpret English literary texts. In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ugwu's ethical trajectory embodies contradictions, that is, acts of care intertwined with complicity in violence. However, many Indonesian students who are more familiar with traditional narratives that employ binary moral classifications, such as *Serat Centhini* or *Bunga Rampai Sastra Nusantara* tend to categorize Ugwu as either "*(good) baik*" or "*(evil) jahat*." This inclination often results in interpretive closure, exemplified by conclusions such as ("*pada akhirnya dia menjadi orang baik*"), even though the novel deliberately avoids such definitive judgment. These patterns indicate that students' moral reasoning is shaped by culturally ingrained evaluative habits, and that texts requiring the recognition of ethical ambivalence may be unconsciously reshaped to fit more familiar moral schemas.

Although the introduction references multiple literary examples to illustrate interpretive phenomena, this study intentionally focuses its empirical analysis on three globally recognized contemporary novels: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. These texts were selected for three methodological reasons: their distinct narrative styles, their familiarity among Indonesian students, and their interpretive complexity. First, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, meaning is often conveyed through emotionally reflective dialogue. For instance, in Chapter 12 ("The Mirror of Erised," approx. p. 208 in many Bloomsbury editions), Dumbledore tells Harry: "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live." The line functions as philosophical reflection rather than simple advice, warning against emotional fixation on unattainable desires. However, many Indonesian students interpreted it only as direct moral instruction. In Indonesian translation "*Tidak baik terus-menerus hidup dalam mimpi dan melupakan kehidupan nyata*" the reflective nuance may easily be reduced to a disciplinary message, especially if the emotional context of Harry longing for his parents is overlooked. A similar

interpretive shift appears in Chapter 17 (“The Man with Two Faces,” around p. 297) when Dumbledore states: “To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.” While the sentence expresses philosophical acceptance of mortality, students often read it as simple encouragement toward bravery. The Indonesian rendering “*Bagi pikiran yang tertata dengan baik, kematian hanyalah petualangan besar berikutnya*” shows how metaphorical reflection can be interpreted as literal motivational language.

These passages illustrate how Rowling’s narration requires readers to recognize emotional nuance and reflective tone beyond the literal wording. Second, *The Hunger Games* presents a different challenge through its ironic dystopian narration, where meaning emerges from contradiction between language and context. In Chapter 1 (around p. 6 in the Scholastic edition), Katniss describes her district as: “District 12: Where you can starve to death in safety.” The phrase is ironic social criticism, as “safety” contradicts the reality of starvation under authoritarian rule. Indonesian students often interpreted the line literally as a geographic description. The Indonesian translation “*Distrik 12: tempat orang bisa mati kelaparan dengan aman*” demonstrates how the irony may disappear if the contradiction is not recognized. Third, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* presents symbolic and allegorical narration that demands interpretive inference. In Chapter 2 (“The Shadow of the Past,” approx. p. 50–60 depending on edition), Gandalf explains the Ring’s power with the statement: “The Ring was trying to get back to its master.” The sentence anthropomorphizes the Ring, symbolizing the agency of evil and the seductive nature of power. Indonesian students often interpreted the line as simple fantasy description. In Indonesian translation “*Cincin itu mencoba kembali kepada tuannya*” the symbolic meaning may be obscured if read literally.

Another well-known line appears in the poem about Aragorn in Chapter 10 (“Strider”): “All that is gold does not glitter.” The metaphor suggests that true worth may remain hidden beneath humble appearances. However, many students interpreted it literally as a statement about metals. The Indonesian translation “*Tidak semua yang berkilau itu emas*” further complicates interpretation because Tolkien deliberately reverses the familiar proverb. These examples demonstrate how Tolkien’s epic narrative requires readers to interpret metaphor, symbolism, and mythic meaning beyond surface description. Taken together, the three novels provide complementary interpretive challenges central to the study’s concept of *affective cultural overlay*: emotional nuance and reflective dialogue in *Harry Potter*, irony and dystopian satire in *The Hunger Games*, and symbolic allegory in *The Lord of the Rings*. Because these texts are widely known among Indonesian students through translations, films, and popular culture, interpretive difficulties observed in the classroom are unlikely to stem from unfamiliar plot content. Instead, they reveal how Indonesian EFL readers negotiate emotional cues, irony, and moral symbolism in English literary discourse. The recurring misinterpretations suggest that the difficulty lies not only in vocabulary but also in cultural interpretive frameworks, particularly the tendency to prioritize explicit moral statements over implicit emotional or symbolic meanings.

These implications are pronounced when Indonesian affective norms clash with Anglophone literary discourse. In Saramago’s *Blindness*, the narrator’s clinical, comma-laden style is dismissed by Indonesian students as cold and indifferent (“*penulisnya seperti tidak peduli*”), yet affective stylistics exposes it as a calculated technique to sustain discomfort (Efendi et al., 2025). Without guided instruction, this affective tone disappears, and the text’s emotional logic is overlooked. Comparable mismatches occur in popular works: *Harry Potter*’s muted mourning is exaggerated to suit Indonesian grief conventions; *The Lord of the Rings*’ morally ambiguous ring is flattened into absolute evil; and *The Hunger Games*’ irony is misread as literal sincerity. Such distortions reveal that cognitive-cultural gaps in EFL literary interpretation are systemic rather than incidental.

In addition to affective cultural overlay, this study identifies another interpretive phenomenon called interpretive compartmentalization. This occurs when readers separate emotions that actually happen at the same time in a narrative and interpret them one by one instead. In many literary texts, characters experience multiple emotions simultaneously for example, fear together with compassion or sadness together with hope. However, some readers process these emotions sequentially, interpreting a scene first as fear and only later recognizing compassion. This sequential reading simplifies the character’s psychological complexity and alters the emotional rhythm of the

narrative. A brief example appears in *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. Early in the novel, the narrator Saleh Omar states: “I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker.” (early chapter, around p. 4 in many editions). The sentence carries several emotions at once: shame, vulnerability, and quiet resistance to the labels imposed on him. However, readers influenced by affective cultural overlay may interpret the line only as humiliation or as simple factual information, overlooking its layered emotional meaning. When interpretive compartmentalization occurs, readers may first understand the statement as social humiliation (“a refugee”) and only later recognize the deeper reflection on identity and dignity. In the narrative itself, these emotions coexist at the same moment: Saleh simultaneously expresses vulnerability, self-awareness, and subtle irony about the bureaucratic language defining his identity. Interpreting these emotions sequentially simplifies the character’s inner conflict. Thus, affective cultural overlay and interpretive compartmentalization often operate together. Cultural reading habits may lead readers to focus on the most explicit emotion while ignoring others that occur simultaneously. As a result, complex emotional states in literary narratives may be interpreted in a simpler and more linear way, reducing the layered meaning intended by the author.

The research problem arises from observing that Indonesian students often misinterpret English literature due to affective misalignment, tonal misclassification, and moral domestication. These issues stem not only from language proficiency but also from challenges in stylistic decoding, cultural schema use, and real-time emotional processing. Without targeted teaching, these misreadings persist even in advanced EFL learners, limiting their interpretive range. The research problems emerge from observations that Indonesian students frequently misinterpret English literature, influenced by affective misalignment, tonal misclassification, and moral domestication such as: (1) How do affective stylistics, mood-tone, and cultural contrast arise in literary interpretation among Indonesian EFL learners? (2) To what extent do students’ difficulties in decoding stylistic features, applying cultural schemas, and processing emotions in real time contribute to misreadings? Addressing these questions is essential for designing teaching strategies that enhance both linguistic proficiency and literary interpretation skills.

Existing scholarship on EFL reading comprehension and intercultural pragmatics (Sastromiharjo et al., 2025; Rezeki & Rahayu, 2025) has primarily focused on vocabulary acquisition, syntactic understanding, or pragmatic competence. However, relatively little research examines how affective stylistics, mood–tone recognition, and cultural interpretive frameworks interact during literary reading. Chang’s research (2024) about the investigation of Taiwanese readers often lacks concrete pedagogical strategies to foster interpretive flexibility. Furthermore, Indonesia’s sociolinguistic environment is characterized by multilingualism, oral storytelling traditions, and high-context communication practices. In such communicative environments, emotional meaning is often conveyed indirectly through shared cultural context rather than through explicit textual signals. These sociolinguistic features may influence how readers interpret emotional nuance and narrative tone in English literary texts. Addressing this gap is essential because interpretive sensitivity to emotional cues, tonal shifts, and symbolic meaning contributes not only to literary comprehension but also to broader intercultural communication competence.

This study proposes a three-stage instructional model: first, affective cue tracking to detect emotional shifts in the text; second, mood–tone calibration to connect grammatical structures with tonal intent; and third, cultural contrast to juxtapose the text’s moral-symbolic framework with students’ own cultural understandings. Suggested activities include parallel readings in English and Indonesian, reflective discussions on emotional changes, role-plays to explore varied tonal interpretations, and analysis of symbolic allegories across cultures. These interventions aim to minimize misinterpretation while enhancing students’ interpretive agency. Integrating affective stylistics, mood–tone, and cultural contrast establishes a robust framework to address the specific challenges faced by Indonesian EFL readers. By engaging with affective cultural overlays and promoting interpretive compartmentalization, teaching strategies expand rather than suppress local reading habits. The objective is not to impose Anglophone norms but to cultivate adaptable interpretive skills that accommodate diverse emotional and moral perspectives. In an era of global–local cultural exchange, such competence is essential for both literary comprehension and broader intercultural understanding.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative interpretive case study design to examine the context-sensitive processes of literary interpretation among Indonesian EFL students. Operating within an interpretive paradigm, it investigated how students derive meaning from English literature through three analytical frameworks: affective stylistics (Ativie et al., 2025), mood–tone analysis (Dahhan et al., 2025), and cultural contrast (Uzma et al., 2025). The approach focused on tracing readers’ cognitive–affective trajectories, identifying divergences in interpretation, and connecting these to cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical factors present in the texts, rather than producing numeric measures of understanding.

The participants comprised 24 undergraduate English Literature students at Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI), North Sumatra. To ensure a multifaceted analysis, the study also involved 5 lecturers drawn from diverse academic departments to serve as interdisciplinary evaluators. Students were categorized as upper-intermediate to advanced English learners using multiple indicators. Institutional placement records showed that participants had obtained TOEFL equivalent scores ranging from 520 to 600, or IELTS scores between 6.0 and 7.0. In addition, all participants had completed advanced courses in literary criticism, translation studies, and discourse analysis, ensuring that they possessed sufficient linguistic competence to engage with authentic literary texts without simplified adaptations. Furthermore, they represented diverse cultural backgrounds, including Javanese, Bataknese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese to explore the influence of local cultural repertoires on interpretive practice. The study analyzed specific passages from the following texts:

Table 1. The Contemporary Novels

Literary Work	Book Title	Chapter	Chapter Title	Page Range
Harry Potter	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	Chapter 35	“Beyond the Veil”	pp. 801–808
	Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Chapter 26	“The Cave”	pp. 561–567
	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	Chapter 23	“The Yule Ball”	pp. 428–433
The Hunger Games	The Hunger Games	Chapter 5	“The Capitol”	pp. 63–68
	Catching Fire	Chapter 2	“President Snow’s Visit”	pp. 21–26
	The Hunger Games	Chapters 11–13	Selected propaganda announcements	Selected passages
The Lord of the Rings	The Fellowship of the Ring	Chapter 2	“The Shadow of the Past”	pp. 59–66
	The Two Towers	Chapter 8	“The Stairs of Cirith Ungol”	pp. 706–710
	The Return of the King	Chapter 5	“The Steward and the King”	pp. 968–972

The procedure followed seven systematic steps. First, the excerpts were selected to exemplify distinctive narrative voices, tonal registers, and cultural symbolism. Second, texts were presented in their original form to maintain stylistic and affective integrity. Third, guided reading tasks directed students’ attention to affective stylistics, mood–tone, and cultural contrast. Fourth, three primary data types were gathered: written interpretations in English, oral discussion transcripts, and Indonesian translations of key sentences (Juliarta & Hikmahyanti, 2024). Fifth, all discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and verified for accuracy. Sixth, reflective reading logs captured emotional responses, tonal perception, and cultural associations. Seventh, these logs were merged with primary data to provide a metacognitive layer for analysis.

The data procedure adopted a four-step iterative cycle designed for analytical precision. First, pre-reading cultural and stylistic activation was initiated through targeted contextual briefings on genre conventions, historical frameworks, and authorial stylistics to prime interpretive readiness.

Second, guided close reading was executed, with excerpts read aloud and students pausing to document immediate affective responses, tonal inflections, and symbolic indicators, deliberately avoiding preformulated interpretations. Third, independent interpretive construction was undertaken, requiring concise English analyses articulating perceived emotional tone, symbolic structures, and narrative positioning without recourse to dictionaries or online aids. Fourth, collaborative re-examination occurred, wherein small groups cross-compared interpretations, identified divergences in mood and tone recognition, and interrogated cultural associations with minimal pedagogical mediation. All textual and oral productions were systematically coded for text–response correspondence, enabling precise cross-case analysis by directly linking interpretive claims to explicitly referenced textual stimuli (Zaib & Anwar, 2025).

Data analysis integrated within-text microanalysis and cross-text thematic synthesis through five stages. First, affective stylistics coding segmented interpretations by reading sequence to capture moment-to-moment emotional engagement, annotating cue recognition, omission, and misalignment. Second, mood–tone analysis employed systemic functional grammar to identify mood structures and tonal markers, systematically recording misclassifications. Third, cultural contrast coding examined interpretive overlays influenced by local cultural repertoires, categorizing them as emotive expressivity transfer, moral framing imposition, and symbolic literalization. Fourth, triangulation compared written, oral, and translation data to detect modality-specific divergences and inconsistencies. Fifth, cross-case synthesis revealed consistent patterns, including overdramatized restrained grief, literalized allegories, and flattened irony, forming the foundation for targeted pedagogical recommendations (Umedilloevna & Gafurovna, 2025). Ethical clearance was secured, participation remained voluntary, pseudonyms preserved confidentiality, and all data were securely stored, with withdrawal rights rigorously upheld throughout the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Affective Misalignment in Interpreting Emotional Climax

The analysis revealed consistent affective misalignment in students' reading of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Sirius Black's death). Applying affective stylistics (Ativie et al., 2025), findings showed that students often compressed complex grief into simple sadness, missing metaphorical ruptures, sensory distortions, and restrained tonal cues. Interview excerpts echoed this: "I thought Lupin was just calm, not concealing sadness" and "I didn't think the room's silence was important." Halliday's mood analysis (Dahhan et al., 2025) indicated repeated misclassification of dynamic emotions such as disbelief, contained anger, and shock into purely tragic frames, paralleling Schmidt et al. (2025) finding that Asian EFL learners struggle with Western tonal subtleties. Cultural contrast (Uzma et al., 2025) explains this via differing mourning norms: Javanese and Batak grief tends toward public expressiveness, whereas Rowling's style favors restraint, creating cultural affective overlay. Such misreadings arose from cultural decoding patterns rather than language deficits, underscoring the need for pre-reading cultural framing, guided metaphorical analysis, and Indonesian–English literary cross-comparisons to build intercultural reading competence.

Tone Displacement in Narrative Voice Recognition

The analysis found tonal displacement in students' interpretations of Katniss Everdeen's sarcastic voice in *The Hunger Games*, where dry humor masks anxiety and critiques of power. Many misread irony as sincerity, weakening ideological resistance into plain description. For instance, "Oh, joy" and "Fantastic" were interpreted as genuine rather than sarcastic, aligning with the view of tension–defiance oscillation. Interviews confirmed this literal reading: one student believed "Oh, joy" conveyed happiness; another read "Fantastic" as praise, both missing contextual cues. Mood analysis highlighted tone misclassification, while cultural contrast model linked the issue to Indonesian discourse norms, where sarcasm is less overt. This gap is both linguistic and cultural-affective, requiring targeted tone-recognition training (Hui, 2024). Techniques such as role-play contrasting literal and sarcastic delivery, alongside Indonesian–English irony comparisons, can enhance tonal sensitivity, interpretive precision, and intercultural competence.

Table 2. Affective Misinterpretation Analysis from Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	Harry felt as though a part of him had been ripped away, leaving a gaping wound that no magic could heal.	Lupin’s grip on Harry’s arm was firm, his voice steady, though his eyes betrayed a storm he fought to contain.	The world seemed to contract around the veil, every whisper of the chamber swelling into unbearable silence.	A cold finality settled over him, as if the world had chosen this moment to end a chapter without warning.
Student interpretation	“Harry felt pain because Sirius died, and it was very sad.”	“Lupin was calm and holding Harry.”	“The room became silent.”	“Harry felt it was the end.”
Identified issue	Emotional flattening, loss of metaphorical depth	Tone misclassification; missed internal turmoil	Sensory reduction; mood compression	Loss of metaphorical closure
Corrected interpretation	Harry’s grief is depicted as a metaphysical rupture, symbolizing the irreversible loss of a surrogate father figure.	Lupin maintains outward composure, but subtle cues (eyes betraying storm) signal deep suppressed grief.	The narrative amplifies sensory distortion to evoke Harry’s disorientation and emotional shock.	The “end of a chapter” frames death as narrative rupture, deepening the sense of shock.
Indonesian translation	<i>Harry merasakan seolah bagian dari dirinya telah tercabut, meninggalkan luka yang tak dapat disembuhkan sibir.</i>	<i>Gengaman Lupin pada lengan Harry kuat, suaranya tenang, meski matanya mengkhianati badai yang ia tahan.</i>	<i>Dunia seakan menyusut di sekitar tirai, setiap bisikan ruangan membengkak menjadi kesunyian tak tertahankan.</i>	<i>Sebuah kepastian dingin menyelimutinya, seakan dunia memilih saat ini untuk mengakhiri bab tanpa peringatan.</i>
Error type	Affective underreading	Mood–tone misreading	Affective cue loss	Figurative misinterpretation
Pedagogical intervention	Guided metaphor analysis highlighting depth of emotional imagery	Training on recognizing incongruent verbal–nonverbal cues	Sensory imagery decoding workshop	Literary metaphor scaffolding

Cultural Dissonance in Symbolic Object Interpretation

The analysis reveals marked cultural dissonance among Indonesian students interpreting *the One Ring in The Lord of the Rings*, with attention centering on magical traits like invisibility and Sauron’s control while neglecting allegories of power, corruption, and moral burden. Using affective stylistics, this literal orientation hindered recognition of the ring’s corruptive force, diminishing affective engagement. Mood–tone perspective shows tonal nuances between awe and menace collapsed into generic “scary” labels, erasing cues of moral erosion. Interview data confirm this gap: one student called the Ring “*just a magic tool*,” another stressed “*physical danger*,” indicating weak symbolic literacy. Intercultural lens ties this to local folklore patterns, where magical items are wholly good or evil, contrasting morally ambivalent ring. The study advises comparative mythology, such as drawing parallels with *the keris*, to build allegorical decoding skills, strengthen symbolic interpretation, and enhance intercultural competence in reading morally complex texts (Shaffaqt et al., 2025).

Table 3. Tone Displacement Analysis from The Hunger Games

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“Oh, joy,” I mutter, as the cameras catch every angle of my sparkling dress.	“Lovely,” I say, watching Peeta’s face on the giant screen, bruised but smiling.	“A real treat,” I whisper, as the anthem drowns the cries of the dying.	“Fantastic,” I say, as the Gamemakers unleash fireballs in our path.
Student interpretation	“Katniss is happy about her dress.”	“Katniss thinks Peeta looks lovely.”	“She feels it’s a treat.”	“She thinks it’s fantastic.”
Identified issue	Misreading sarcasm as sincerity	Missed ironic distance	Literal uptake of irony	Overliteralizing
Corrected interpretation	Katniss’s “joy” is sarcastic, critiquing Capitol spectacle.	“Lovely” is ironic, underlining the brutality of the Games.	Ironic phrase critiques Capitol’s pageantry over tragedy.	Sarcastic “fantastic” criticizes lethal Capitol tactics.
Indonesian translation	<i>“Oh, senangnya,” gumamku, saat kamera menangkap setiap sudut gaunku yang berkilau.</i>	<i>“Indah sekali,” kataku, melibat wajah Peeta di layar besar, memar tapi tersenyum.</i>	<i>“Sungguh sebuah suguhan,” bisikku, saat lagu kebangsaan menenggelamkan tangis kematian.</i>	<i>“Fantastis,” kataku, saat Pembuat Permainan melepaskan bola api di jalur kami.</i>
Error type	Tone misclassification	Irony misinterpretation	Sarcasm misreading	Tone flattening
Pedagogical intervention	Role-play with sarcastic intonation	Comparative irony analysis	Context-based irony decoding	Prosody awareness training

Table 4. Cultural Dissonance Analysis from The Lord of the Rings

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	It was a small ring, plain and unadorned, yet it seemed to breathe with a life of its own.	It betrayed its bearer’s heart, whispering in a voice only the soul could hear.	It called to him, promising power beyond mortal reach, and yet the promise stank of decay.	In its presence, the will faltered, as if shadows took root in the mind.
Student interpretation	“The ring is alive.”	“The ring talks to the owner.”	“The ring gives power.”	“The ring makes people scared.”
Identified issue	Literalization of personification	Literal voice reading	Loss of moral paradox	Reduction of psychological metaphor
Corrected interpretation	“Breathe” conveys corruptive presence, not literal life.	“Whisper” symbolizes internal moral temptation.	Promise is tainted; power leads to ruin.	Shadows represent gradual moral corruption.
Indonesian translation	<i>Itu cincin kecil, polos, namun seakan bernafas dengan kehidupannya sendiri.</i>	<i>Ia mengkhianati hati pemiliknya, berbisik dengan suara yang banya jiwa dapat dengar.</i>	<i>Cincin itu memanggilnya, menjanjikan kekuatan di luar jangkauan manusia, namun janji itu berbau kebusukan.</i>	<i>Dalam kehadirannya, kebendak melemah, seakan bayangan berakar di pikiran.</i>
Error type	Symbolic misreading	Allegory flattening	Paradox ignorance	Moral corruption underreading
Pedagogical intervention	Figurative-symbolic reading training	Allegorical exercises	Literary paradox identification drills	Symbolic mental imagery analysis

Mood–Tone Interchange in Ambivalent Scenes

The study revealed that Indonesian students frequently misinterpret complex mood–tone interchanges in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*’s cave scene, collapsing nuanced emotions such as fear, urgency, and protective care into a single fear-focused mood. Halliday’s systemic functional framework shows this flattening obscures the tension between danger and compassion in Dumbledore’s frail yet steadfast mentorship, disrupting oscillations essential to affective stylistics (Ativie et al., 2025). Interviews confirm this: one student remarked, “*I only felt scared; I didn’t notice Dumbledore’s gentle care,*” while another perceived only danger, revealing sequential rather

than concurrent emotion processing. Cultural contrast theory suggests Indonesian narratives often segment emotions, unlike Rowling’s blend of dread and warmth. Aligning with Wang et al. (2025), explicit instruction in tonal layering, mood tracking, and dramatization is recommended.

Table 5. Mood–Tone Interchange Analysis from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“You have to make me keep drinking, even if you have to force it down my throat,” Dumbledore said, his eyes meeting Harry’s with a strange mix of severity and trust.	Harry’s hands trembled as he dipped the goblet again, the metallic tang filling the air like an unspoken warning.	The green potion burned in his mouth, yet he whispered, “It’s all right, Harry,” as if the words could shield the boy from fear.	The Inferi broke the water’s surface, their eyes pale and hands reaching, but Harry felt Dumbledore’s fingers squeeze his arm: a wordless promise of protection.
Student interpretation	“Dumbledore orders Harry to make him drink.”	“Harry is afraid.”	“Dumbledore reassures Harry.”	“Dumbledore holds Harry’s arm.”
Identified issue	Loss of tonal duality	Narrow mood reading	Underplayed self-sacrifice	Loss of symbolic gesture
Corrected interpretation	Severity coexists with deep trust in Harry’s loyalty.	Tang of potion foreshadows danger while showing Harry’s reluctant resolve.	Tone shows protective reassurance despite personal agony.	Squeeze conveys vow of guardianship in the midst of threat.
Indonesian translation	<i>“Kau harus membuatku terus minum, bahkan jika harus memaksanya ke tenggorokanku,” kata Dumbledore, menatap Harry dengan campuran ketegasan dan kepercayaan yang aneh.</i>	<i>Tangan Harry bergetar saat ia mencelupkan piala lagi, aroma logam memenuhi udara seperti peringatan yang tak terucap.</i>	<i>Ramuan hijau itu membakar mulutnya, namun ia berbisik, “Tidak apa-apa, Harry,” seolah kata-kata itu bisa melindungi anak itu dari rasa takut.</i>	<i>Para Inferi menerobos permukaan air, mata mereka pucat dan tangan terulur, namun Harry merasakan jemari Dumbledore meremas lengannya: janji tanpa kata untuk melindungi.</i>
Error type	Tone simplification	Sensory mood reduction	Sacrificial tone underreading	Gesture–tone misinterpretation
Pedagogical intervention	Tone layering exercise	Sensory cue integration workshop	Tone-intent linkage training	Symbolic body language analysis

Narrative Distance Misidentification

Indonesian students often misidentified narrative distance in *The Hunger Games* entitled *Capitol propaganda*, frequently taking unreliable narration literally. Using affective stylistics, the analysis shows students missed irony and critique, interpreting biased statements as sincere. Limited exposure to English political rhetoric hampered recognition of lexical bias and mood–tone markers. One student said, “*I thought the peacekeepers really brought peace*,” while another missed sarcasm in “*orderly celebrations*.” Literal translations reinforced euphemism e.g., “peaceful industry” accepted at face value, concealing oppression. Cultural contrast indicates the lack of intertextual frameworks for decoding euphemistic political language. These misreadings were both cultural and affective, not merely linguistic, allowing the narrator’s ideology to pass unchallenged. Pedagogically, “narrative distance drills” could integrate reader-response, cultural contrast, and critical discourse analysis could train students to identify euphemistic framing and contrast narrator claims with counter-voices (Yasin et al., 2025). Students could also learn to connect fictional propaganda to Indonesian political rhetoric. Such practice will enhance their intercultural literary competence.

Table 6. Misidentification of Narrative Distance in The Hunger Games

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“The peacekeepers have graciously restored harmony to District Eleven, ensuring a return to the joyful labors that define our prosperity.”	“Citizens rejoiced as order was restored and the gentle hand of the Capitol guided us back to unity.”	“Thanks to our vigilant protectors, the troubling unrest has been replaced with peaceful industry.”	“Under the Capitol’s watchful eye, every citizen finds their place in the great tapestry of Panem.”
Student literal translation	<i>“Penjaga perdamaian dengan murah hati memulihkan keharmonisan di Distrik Sebelas, memastikan kembalinya pekerjaan yang menyenangkan yang menentukan kemakmuran kita.”</i>	<i>“Warga bersukacita saat ketertiban dipulihkan dan tangan lembut Capitol membimbing kami kembali ke persatuan.”</i>	<i>“Berkat pelindung kami yang waspada, kerusakan yang mengganggu telah diganti dengan industri yang damai.”</i>	<i>“Di bawah mata Capitol yang waspada, setiap warga menemukan tempat mereka dalam permadani besar Panem.”</i>
Corrected translation	<i>“Pasukan penjaga perdamaian memulihkan ‘ketertiban’ di Distrik Sebelas, memastikan penduduk kembali ke kerja paksa yang oleh Capitol disebut sebagai ‘kemakmuran’.”</i>	<i>“Warga tampak dipaksa bersukacita ketika Capitol memulihkan ‘ketertiban’ dengan kontrol ketat, yang disebut sebagai ‘tangan lembut’ secara sarkastis.”</i>	<i>“Capitol mengklaim bahwa kerusakan telah diganti dengan kerja paksa, menyebutnya ‘industri damai’ untuk menutupi represi.”</i>	<i>“Capitol menggambarkan pengawasan total sebagai ‘menemukan tempat’ dalam struktur yang menindas.”</i>
Type of misinterpretation	Euphemism taken literally	Sarcasm misread as sincerity	Propaganda framing accepted	Surveillance reframed as benevolence
Narrative function lost	Irony and oppression implied	Satirical critique lost	Oppression masked	Dystopian critique lost
Theoretical framework	Booth’s unreliable narrator theory	Martin & White’s mood–tone	Halliday’s transitivity analysis	Van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis
Pedagogical correction	Highlight lexical irony, contrast with eyewitness account	Annotate satirical markers in text	Analyze verbs that mask agency	Identify metaphors of control

Cultural Errors in Moral Judgement

This analysis found cultural misalignment in Indonesian students’ moral judgments of the Gollum–Frodo relationship in *The Lord of the Rings*. Using affective stylistics, results show students applied collectivist norms of group loyalty and risk aversion to an individualist narrative that values personal moral agency. Many saw Frodo’s pity as reckless. One said, “*Frodo’s pity was wrong because it endangered the group*,” another called his trust “*foolish*.” Cultural contrast theory explains this “overfitting,” where collectivist ethics override Western moral relativism, creating “readerly foreclosure” that flattens ethical nuance into binaries. Halliday’s appraisal analysis shows Tolkien’s cues (“pity,” “mercy,” “burden”) reframed as irresponsibility. Misreading was compounded by difficulty separating narrator empathy from character stance, echoing Qiufen et al. (2025) on East Asian struggles with moral relativism. Pedagogically, guided re-readings and comparative moral frameworks can build intercultural literary competence.

Figurative–Literal Shift in Descriptive Passages

Analysis revealed that Indonesian students often converted Rowling’s ornate figurative depictions of *the Yule Ball in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* into literal scene reconstructions, overlooking satire of wizarding aristocracy. Using Hayik’s (2025) transactional theory, this efferent stance

Table 7. Cultural Errors in Moral Judgement from The Lord of the Rings

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“Frodo looked at him with pity, not without horror.”	“Sam scowled but said nothing.”	“It would be the death of the Ring-bearer to trust him.”	“He was pitiful, and yet dangerous.”
Student’s initial interpretation	Frodo is weak for feeling pity to a dangerous enemy.	Sam is angry because Frodo betrayed the group.	Therefore Frodo’s trust is foolish.	Contradiction; cannot be both.
Cultural moral	Collectivist group protection norm.	Group loyalty priority.	Risk-aversion collectivist principle.	Binary moral coding.
Correct context	Western individualist ethic of compassion towards the ‘Other’.	Tension between personal mistrust and leader’s moral choice.	Ethical risk-taking in personal agency.	Moral ambiguity as literary device.
Students’ translation	<i>Frodo memandangnya dengan belas kasihan, tanpa rasa takut.</i>	<i>Sam mengerutkan dahi karena Frodo mengkhianati kelompok.</i>	<i>Itu akan membunuh Pembawa Cincin jika mempercayainya.</i>	<i>Dia menyedihkan tapi berbahaya.</i>
Translation revision	<i>Frodo memandangnya dengan rasa iba, meski disertai rasa ngeri.</i>	<i>Sam mengerutkan dahi tetapi diam saja.</i>	<i>Mempercayainya bisa membahayakan sang Pembawa Cincin.</i>	<i>Dia menyedihkan, namun tetap berbahaya.</i>
Error type	Attitude misinterpretation	Attribution bias	Modality overstatement	Binary collapse
Analytical note	Student removed “horror,” weakening moral complexity	Student misread silence as moral condemnation	Student absolutised hypothetical danger	Student saw moral states as mutually exclusive

reduced aesthetic engagement, interpreting festive vocabulary as “romantic” or “luxurious” instead of exaggerated mockery. Interviews confirmed: “*I saw the decorations as beautiful, not mocking,*” and “*I didn’t know the author was criticizing the clothes.*” Cultural contrast theory explains the reverence for opulence in Indonesian narratives, shaping schemas toward literal admiration. Translation analysis identified figurative flattening, omission of exaggeration, and tone dilution such as “*Tables groaned...*” rendered without personification. As in Annisafitri & Ekawati (2025), collectivist traditions obscured subtle critique. Pedagogically, inserting exaggeration markers and comparing Indonesian–English literary styles can help students toggle between literal and ironic readings, strengthening cross-cultural literary competence.

Mood–Tone Failures in Contextually Layered Dialogue

The analysis identified recurring challenges among Indonesian students in interpreting layered mood–tone in politically charged exchanges between Katniss Everdeen and President Snow in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. Using mood-tone framework (Dahhan et al., 2025), findings showed that students often equated formal politeness with goodwill, overlooking the pragmatic hostility in Snow’s diction. Politeness markers such as “please,” “I trust,” and “may” were read literally, disregarding contextual power asymmetry and paralinguistic cues. From affective stylistic standpoint, such literal decoding flattened tension into neutral formality. Interviews reinforced this gap: one student remarked, “*I thought Snow’s words were just polite political talk, not a threat,*” while another detected no danger in “*May the odds be ever in your favor.*” Cultural norms intensified this misreading, as Indonesian politeness usually conveys positive intent, unlike Anglo-American political civility, which may conceal coercion. This conflation of threat and politeness underscores the need for guided tone dissection and cross-cultural comparison to develop nuanced interpretive competence.

Tabel 8. Figurative–Literal Shift from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“Tables groaned under the weight of gleaming golden plates.”	“Ladies glided across the floor in gowns dripping with jewels.”	“Every candle blazed as though vying for attention.”	“The orchestra swelled, drowning the chatter in triumphant melody.”
Student translation	<i>Meja seolah mengeluh karena beratnya piring emas yang berkilau.</i>	<i>Para wanita meluncur di lantai dengan gaun seolah meneteskan permata.</i>	<i>Setiap lilin menyala seakan bersaing untuk menarik perhatian.</i>	<i>Orkestra membuncih, menenggelamkan percakapan dengan melodi yang penuh kemenangan.</i>
Back translation	Tables looked heavy with glittering gold plates.	Women glided across the floor in jewel-covered gowns.	Each candle shone brightly.	The orchestra played loud music.
Error type	Tone misinterpretation	Literal costume description	Omission of personification	Tone dilution
Affective cue missed	Overstatement for effect	Hyperbolic opulence	Competitive excess imagery	Triumph + overbearing mood
Suggested revision	Include ironic emphasis	Retain exaggeration	Retain anthropomorphism	Retain mood contrast
Revised translation	<i>Meja tampak berat dengan piring emas yang berkilau.</i>	<i>Para wanita meluncur di lantai dengan gaun penuh permata.</i>	<i>Setiap lilin menyala terang.</i>	<i>Orkestra memainkan musik yang keras.</i>

Cultural Contrast in Heroic Archetypes

The analysis shows that Indonesian students reinterpreted Aragorn’s coronation speech in *The Return of the King* through local leadership ideals, transforming chivalric humility into collectivist political rhetoric. Applying affective stylistics (Ativie et al., 2025), the speech’s pacing and ceremonial tone elicited strong emotional responses, yet interviews revealed students perceived Aragorn as a president promising national unity. Mood–tone analysis indicated his deference was interpreted as submission to “the people,” resonating with Raupova et al. (2025) collectivism and symbolic substitution (Sabohat, 2024), in which “I serve” became “I belong to the people.” Table evidence shows lexical and register shifts, such as “king” rendered as “pemimpin rakyat,” nationalizing and politicizing medieval imagery. These changes reflect interpretive substitution rather than mistranslation. Pedagogically, presenting heroic archetypes as culturally situated and contrasting Western chivalric and Indonesian leadership narratives can enhance students’ awareness, enabling cross-cultural interpretation and strengthening intercultural literary competence.

The findings demonstrate that Indonesian students’ difficulties in interpreting English literary texts are shaped by the interaction of affective stylistics, mood–tone perception, and cultural contrast, directly addressing the study’s research problems. Specifically, the data clarify how affective stylistics, mood–tone, and cultural contrast emerge in Indonesian EFL literary interpretation and to what extent limitations in stylistic decoding, cultural schema activation, and real-time emotional processing generate misreadings. This section therefore explicitly links each empirical finding to the research questions, demonstrating that interpretive errors arise not from isolated comprehension problems but from systematic cognitive–affective and sociocultural processes that shape literary interpretation.

Across all datasets, students tended to simplify emotional nuance, literalize figurative language, and reinterpret moral or symbolic meanings through familiar Indonesian cultural frameworks. From an affective stylistics perspective (Ativie et al., 2025), this produces what can be described as interpretive compression, where dynamic reader–text interaction collapses into simplified emotional labels. For instance, grief scenes in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* were often interpreted merely as “sadness,” overlooking metaphorical ruptures, sensory distortions,

and tonal complexity. This pattern directly answers Research Question 1 by demonstrating how affective stylistics operates in Indonesian EFL reading: students attend primarily to explicit emotional cues while overlooking sequential affective signals that construct the narrative’s emotional rhythm.

Table 9. Mood–Tone Errors in The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4
Original excerpt	“I believe we understand each other perfectly, Miss Everdeen, and I look forward to seeing you again, soon.”	“May the odds be ever in your favor, especially in these uncertain times.”	“I trust you’ll keep our little conversation just between us.”	“It would be most unfortunate if you were... distracted during the Games.”
Student translation	<i>“Saya percaya kita saling mengerti, Nona Everdeen, dan saya menantikan bertemu Anda lagi, segera.”</i>	<i>“Semoga keberuntungan selalu memihak Anda, terutama di masa yang tidak pasti ini.”</i>	<i>“Saya percaya Anda akan merahasiakan percakapan kita.”</i>	<i>“Akan sangat disayangkan jika Anda... terganggu saat Pertandingan.”</i>
Error type	Politeness–threat conflation	Contextual irony loss	Threat omission	Threat-as-sympathy error
Mood intended by author	Tense	Ironic reassurance	Suspicious	Concern
Tone intended by author	Threatening	Sinister	Coercive	Malicious warning
Mood perceived by student	Formal agreement	Hopeful wish	Trustful request	Caring suggestion
Tone perceived by student	Friendly anticipation	Neutral optimism	Neutral secrecy	Light advice
Corrected translation	<i>“Saya yakin kita sama-sama paham, Nona Everdeen, dan saya berharap kita akan bertemu lagi, dalam waktu dekat.” (nuansa ancaman tersirat)</i>	<i>“Semoga keberuntungan selalu di pihak Anda, apalagi di masa yang penuh ketidakpastian ini.” (nada sinis terselubung)</i>	<i>“Saya percaya Anda akan menyimpan percakapan kita hanya untuk kita berdua.” (nuansa memaksa dan mengancam)</i>	<i>“Akan sangat buruk jika Anda... terganggu selama Pertandingan.” (ancaman tersamar sebagai kepedulian)</i>

However, the findings also indicate that these misinterpretations cannot be explained solely by cultural mismatch. An alternative explanation lies in cognitive load during real-time reading.] Literary passages often present simultaneous affective, symbolic, and grammatical cues that require parallel processing. Students frequently processed these elements sequentially rather than concurrently, focusing first on plot meaning and only later attempting to interpret tone or symbolism. This sequential processing increases cognitive load and reduces sensitivity to subtle stylistic cues (Firdausi et al., 2025). Consequently, emotional ambiguity or tonal nuance is frequently collapsed into a single interpretive frame. This observation responds directly to Research Question 2 by demonstrating how limitations in real-time emotional and stylistic processing contribute to misreadings alongside cultural influences.

A central discovery emerging from the data is the phenomenon of interpretive compartmentalization, which represents one of the study’s most significant contributions. Interpretive compartmentalization refers to the tendency of readers to divide simultaneous emotional signals into separate sequential events, rather than recognizing them as coexisting layers within a single narrative moment. For example, in emotionally complex scenes students first identified fear,

Table 10. Cultural Contrast in The Lord of the Rings (The Return of the King)

Category	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Data 5
Original excerpt	“This day does not belong to one man, but to all.”	“I am your servant, but I shall not bow to fear.”	“The crownless again shall be king.”	“I bid you stand, Men of the West!”	“In the days to come, we will face many trials.”
Student translation	<i>“Hari ini bukan milik satu orang, tetapi milik rakyat.”</i>	<i>“Saya pelayan rakyat, tetapi saya tidak akan tunduk pada ketakutan.”</i>	<i>“Yang tak bermahkota akan menjadi pemimpin rakyat.”</i>	<i>“Saya minta kalian berdiri, rakyat barat!”</i>	<i>“Di masa depan, rakyat akan menghadapi banyak cobaan.”</i>
Error type	Cultural reframing	Semantic expansion	Metaphorical dilution	Register flattening	Agency shift
Corrected translation	<i>“Hari ini bukan hanya milik satu orang, tetapi milik semua.”</i>	<i>“Aku adalah pelayan kalian, tetapi aku tidak akan tunduk pada rasa takut.”</i>	<i>“Yang tak bermahkota akan menjadi raja kembali.”</i>	<i>“Aku meminta kalian berdiri, wahai orang-orang Barat!”</i>	<i>“Di hari-hari mendatang, kita akan menghadapi banyak cobaan.”</i>
Cultural note	‘Rakyat’ implies political populism; original tone is ceremonial universality.	‘Rakyat’ recasts audience as democratic citizenry, altering medieval fealty.	‘Pemimpin rakyat’ avoids monarchical imagery; loses prophecy tone.	‘Rakyat barat’ politicizes; original is epic-heroic address.	Shift from collective “we” to “rakyat” reduces speaker’s shared agency.
Theoretical lens	Collectivism dimension	Cultural schema theory	Mood–tone	Discourse–pragmatic analysis	Pragmatic frame theory
Pedagogical implication	Teach ceremonial register vs. political populist register.	Distinguish medieval fealty from modern democratic service.	Teach symbolic prophecy markers in fantasy literature.	Train recognition of vocative force in epic speech.	Emphasize speaker-inclusive pronouns in leadership rhetoric.

then compassion, or first trust, then suspicion, but rarely recognized these emotions as occurring simultaneously. This pattern appeared consistently in the *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* cave scene, where fear, urgency, and protective care were interpreted as isolated emotional states rather than as interwoven affective layers. The significance of this finding lies in demonstrating that Indonesian EFL readers often restructure narrative emotion to align with linear cognitive processing, which fundamentally alters the pacing and moral tension intended by the author.

Mood–tone analysis based on Halliday’s systemic functional framework (Dahhan et al., 2025) reveals a clear interpretive gap in students’ ability to recognize tone in literary texts, particularly irony and sarcasm. For instance, Katniss’s sarcastic remarks in *The Hunger Games* were often interpreted literally. This supports Hui’s (2024) finding that many East Asian EFL learners tend to read sarcasm as sincerity due to L1 politeness norms and discourse conventions that favor indirect expression. In Indonesian sociolinguistic practice, sarcasm is usually conveyed indirectly and softened by context to avoid offense. As a result, students may struggle to recognize the more explicit forms of sarcasm common in Anglo-American writing. This is also related to Indonesia’s multilingual and high-context communication environment, where meaning is often conveyed implicitly through situational cues rather than explicit tonal markers. Consequently, tone is frequently confused with mood, and the author’s layered tonal strategies are simplified into a single emotional interpretation. These findings indicate the need for targeted classroom strategies such as prosodic training, role-play contrasting literal and sarcastic readings, and comparative irony analysis. Importantly, these misinterpretations are not merely language errors but reflect sociolinguistic

transfer from Indonesian communicative habits into English literary interpretation. This phenomenon is described in this study as affective cultural overlay, where readers unconsciously reshape emotional and tonal cues to align with culturally familiar communication patterns.

Cultural contrast analysis, informed by Uzma et al. (2025), reveals another systematic barrier: symbolic and moral meanings are routinely reframed through collectivist ethical frameworks. The One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* was interpreted as a mere magical object rather than a moral allegory of corruption and power. Similarly, Frodo's pity for Gollum was deemed reckless, reflecting collectivist group-protection ethics rather than Tolkien's individualist ethic of moral agency. This tendency corresponds with binary moral classifications common in Indonesian traditional narratives such as *Serat Centhini*, where characters are typically framed as morally good ("baik") or evil ("jahat"). Consequently, ambiguous literary characters are often domesticated into clearer ethical categories, a process the present study terms moral domestication. This moral domestication illustrates how Indonesian cultural reading habits influence literary interpretation. Rather than maintaining narrative ambiguity, students frequently resolve ethical tension prematurely by applying familiar moral schemas. Such readerly closure simplifies narrative complexity and prevents engagement with moral ambivalence, which is a central feature of many Anglophone literary works. Comparable tendencies have been observed in broader East and Southeast Asian EFL contexts (Mandarani et al., 2024; Stevani, 2024), where collectivist norms shape literary interpretation, highlighting a regional tendency to prioritize communal ethics over individual moral reasoning.

Another notable pattern is the figurative–literal shift found in the Yule Ball descriptions in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* shows how students' interpretations can overlook the satirical tone of the text. In the results, many Indonesian students reconstructed Rowling's figurative descriptions as literal scenes of luxury rather than as exaggerated depictions of wizarding aristocracy. For example, the sentence "*Tables groaned under the weight of gleaming golden plates*" was translated in a way that simply described heavy tables filled with gold plates, and the personification ("groaned") lost its exaggerative effect. As a result, the scene was interpreted as elegant and luxurious instead of subtly mocking excessive grandeur. This interpretative pattern can be explained through Hayik's (2025) transactional theory. Students tended to adopt an efferent reading stance, focusing on the visible content of the scene rather than on the stylistic cues that signal satire. Cultural representation also plays a role. According to Annisafitri and Ekawati's (2025) representation theory, elaborate settings in many Indonesian narratives are often associated with beauty and prestige rather than critique. Because of this cultural schema, descriptions of opulence are more easily interpreted as admiration than parody. However, cultural factors may not be the only explanation. The cognitive load of processing unfamiliar vocabulary, narrative context, and figurative language at the same time may also reduce students' ability to recognize satire. Therefore, some misinterpretations likely result from a combination of cultural reading habits and cognitive processing demands during second-language literary interpretation.

Likewise, misperceptions of narrative distance in *The Hunger Games*' Capitol propaganda passages reveal the need for explicit critical discourse instruction. Students frequently accepted euphemistic or politically biased statements at face value, reflecting a cultural context where Indonesian media rarely employs overt satire. Applying Halliday's transitivity analysis alongside critical discourse framework can make ideological constructions visible and comparable, providing students with practical tools to interrogate subtle bias. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of developing discourse awareness alongside stylistic analysis, enabling students to recognize how narrative authority shapes reader perception.

The findings also indicate that mood–tone misinterpretations in high-stakes dialogue such as between Katniss and President Snow arise from conflating politeness with goodwill, reflecting a cultural politeness bias that masks underlying hostility in formal language. Without explicit guidance on the interaction between threat and politeness, students tend to read coercive discourse as cooperative or neutral. This pattern exemplifies the study's key theoretical discovery: *interpretive compartmentalization*. Students tend to process emotional cues sequentially rather than simultaneously, isolating politeness markers from the threatening context in which they occur. As a result, complex emotional layering such as "polite threat" or "hostile civility" becomes separated

into simplified interpretations. This aligns with Matkomilovich's (2024) observation of compartmentalized emotional processing, where multiple affective layers are reduced to sequential, single-affect interpretations.

Additionally, the reinterpretation of the heroic archetype in *The Return of the King* exemplifies symbolic substitution as a cultural translation strategy. Aragorn's chivalric humility is reframed into collectivist political rhetoric, transforming "I serve" into a statement of populist solidarity. Although this adaptation is not intrinsically incorrect, it represents a culturally resonant shift that simultaneously obscures the medieval European values Tolkien intended. Pedagogically, comparative analysis of leadership archetypes across cultures enables students to discern both the original symbolic meaning and their own culturally mediated reinterpretations.

Taken together, the findings confirm that Indonesian students' misinterpretations do not arise from isolated linguistic mistakes but from a systematic interaction between stylistic decoding difficulty, cultural schema transfer, and cognitive processing constraints. The study therefore contributes to the literature by demonstrating that affective cultural overlay and interpretive compartmentalization operate as central mechanisms shaping EFL literary interpretation in Indonesia's multilingual and high-context sociolinguistic environment. Absent explicit training in these areas, students remain confined to culturally familiar yet textually partial readings, limiting their engagement with the emotional, ideological, and symbolic complexity of English literary texts.

These insights highlight the importance of adopting a triadic pedagogical framework combining affective stylistics, mood–tone awareness, and cultural contrast analysis. Such an approach allows students to identify emotional cues, recognize tonal nuance, and critically compare cultural interpretive frameworks. Rather than suppressing local interpretive habits, this framework encourages students to become aware of how their cultural reading strategies interact with the stylistic structures of English literary texts. Through this process, students develop interpretive flexibility and intercultural literary competence, enabling them to engage more accurately and critically with complex literary narratives.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that integrating affective stylistics, mood–tone analysis, and cultural contrast in teaching English literature to Indonesian EFL students provides a multidimensional pedagogical framework that strengthens textual engagement, cultivates emotional literacy, and refines intercultural interpretive skills. Through this approach, students move beyond simply decoding plot or vocabulary and instead engage with the rhythmic pacing of meaning, tonal cues, and culturally embedded perspectives within literary texts. By recognizing how linguistic choices guide readers' emotional responses and how cultural assumptions shape interpretation, students develop deeper awareness of both textual form and cultural context.

The findings demonstrate that when students are guided to examine stylistic patterns, tonal shifts, and cultural contrasts simultaneously, their reading practices become more reflective and interpretive. For instance, students who initially interpreted sarcastic remarks or exaggerated descriptions literally were able to reconsider these passages once tonal cues and cultural context were explicitly discussed in class. This process encouraged students to question their first interpretations and to recognize how meaning is constructed through the interaction between language, emotion, and cultural perspective. In addition, the triadic framework helps bridge the gap between linguistic competence and literary appreciation. Rather than treating literature as a difficult linguistic artifact, the approach frames it as an interactive interpretive experience in which students actively negotiate meaning between their own cultural background and the cultural context of the text. This not only improves comprehension of literary devices such as irony, satire, and figurative language, but also strengthens students' ability to interpret emotional tone and narrative stance.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted within a controlled classroom context using a limited number of literary texts and a relatively homogeneous group of students. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the diversity of reading strategies among broader EFL populations. In addition, the study did not include longitudinal observation, which limits the ability to determine whether the interpretive skills developed through the framework

are sustained over time. Future research should therefore explore the applicability of this model across different literary genres, larger and more culturally diverse student populations, and varying levels of English proficiency. Further investigation could also examine how digital annotation tools, collaborative reading platforms, or AI-assisted mood–tone analysis might support the implementation of this framework in broader educational contexts. Overall, the triadic framework demonstrates that EFL literary pedagogy can move beyond passive comprehension toward culturally engaged and emotionally responsive reading practices. By combining stylistic awareness, tonal interpretation, and cultural reflection, this model enables educators to guide students in interpreting literature not only as language, but as a dynamic intercultural dialogue.

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