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EFL Students' Responses towards Rosen's 'Sad Book': An Attitudinal Occurrence and Aesthetic Stance

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Abstract

The vocabulary choice and language used in expressing sadness vary in different cultures, even in the smallest scale of cultural group, i.e., family. There have not been many studies done to explore Indonesian EFL students' word choices and expressions related to expressing sadness and empathy. The purpose of this study was to explore how the 11 EFL second-year university students in Basic Reading and Writing class expressed sadness as written in their personal reflective writings. The data was analyzed using mixed methods to obtain valid and reliable results. These second-year university students were assigned to read a picture book, 'Sad Book', or to watch and listen to the video version as a part of an activity in class. Their reflective writings were analyzed using content analysis to identify the corpus used by the students and using the appraisal framework to capture the variety of their attitudinal linguistic occurrence in expressing sadness and empathy. The findings illustrate that the highest attitudinal marker in expressing sadness is 'affect', followed by 'judgment' and 'appreciation'. The use of the picture book, 'Sad Book', assists the EFL students to be more engaged in their reflective writing and thus the highest marker of 'affect' exists due to their ability to project their aesthetic stance. Implications for English language learning for adult learners are addressed at the end of this article.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Grief has always been one of the accumulations of human emotions. The depth of the human emotion dynamics is like a black hole. Emotions are difficult to investigate because they are multifaceted and multi-layered (Alonso-Llácer et al., 2020). Speakers or writers have different ways of expressing emotions, especially sadness. Some describe their feelings clearly and eloquently, while others do not. These differences can occur in almost all areas of life due to differences in the way humans are raised, and in the way life values are taught in their society. Thus, to illustrate, the devastating impacts of COVID-19 over the past three years have caused a massive disruption to mankind. The immediate experience of loss and tragedy of losing loved ones in a very short time has caused a huge sense of grief to anyone, regardless of their age and socio-economic status. The effort to be positive and empathetic during this trying time is very challenging to be made.

Studies on mental health have been done in the past three years as a response to the psychological effects of COVID-19 eruption (Asanov et al., 2021; Lischer et al., 2022) including in Indonesia (Wiguna et al., 2020). The struggles to overcome grief and sadness were evident. The head of the Indonesian Psychiatrists Association mentioned that feeling sad and depressed should never be oppressed and ignored. Families, schools, and institutions had the capacity and opportunity to help students channel the emotional build-up to help maintain their well-being and mental health. Schools also have the responsibility to help their students navigate their emotions (News Desk, 2020). One technique to assist students to be in touch with their emotions is through reflective writing because students are given the opportunity to share their inner thoughts about the topic they are discussing through reflective writing (Avarzamani & Farahian, 2019; Sudirman et al., 2021).

The results of the students' reflective writing can give at least two important views. Firstly, the reflective writing done by EFL students can portray their word choices and attitudinal occurrences when using the target language, i.e., English. Secondly, the writing can give a detailed description of how students deal with the challenges and opportunities from their personal perspectives; and thus, provide a significant portrayal of the students' learning processes. In conclusion, teachers can use reflective writing to monitor the students' English language use and their psychological conditions.

However, studies suggest that EFL students face barriers in expressing their ideas, thoughts, and opinions in their reflective writing. Firstly, due to the abstract nature of reflective activities, one of the possible barriers refers to the teachers' inability to provide their EFL students with means to assist them in constructing the reflections (Salahi & Farahian, 2021). Secondly, writing reflections in the target language creates a multi-layered barrier for EFL students. Besides having to deal with the abstract nature of reflective activities, the EFL students have to make sure that the English sentences are well written, the word choices portray their feelings and emotions, and at the same time, they can demonstrate their higher-order thinking skills (Avarzamani & Farahian, 2019). For many EFL students, producing well-written and

well-composed reflective writing in English as well as expressing emotions in English is not an easy task, particularly if they are not facilitated with some kind of teaching tool, such as literary or reading text to trigger their vocabulary knowledge and writing ability in English. Stories from literary or reading texts relevant to the topic of reflection can help EFL students develop their metacognitive awareness (Shen, 2009). Carefully chosen reading texts can provide the students with appropriate vocabulary and expressions that they can use as examples in expressing their thoughts and emotions.

It is evident that there has been extensive research investigating how written reflections can provide a sufficient amount of information on the students' inner thoughts, ideas, and struggles. The complexities of emotions ranging from sadness to happiness, the understanding of self towards one's emotional turbulence, the cultural differences on how to view the act of expressing emotions, along with the vast number of English vocabularies that can be used to represent one's emotions influence the language users' ability to express themselves both in spoken form or written form (Dylman & Bjärtå, 2019; Tanaka et al., 2010). Due to these multi-layered conditions, investigations on how reflective writing can assist EFL students in expressing their sadness and the word choices that they use in expressing it are necessary to be done in order to see the EFL students' English language proficiency. However, there is a limited number of investigations on how a carefully chosen reading text can give inspiration to EFL students to express their thoughts about sadness in their reflective writing. Additionally, research on how the chosen reading texts that they read affect their attitudinal occurrences is still limited. Therefore, this research aims to investigate two problems:

1. What are the EFL students' attitudinal linguistic utterances that portray their ways of expressing sadness?
2. How do the EFL students perceive sadness seen from an aesthetic stance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Appraisal Analysis in EFL Reflective Writing

Appraisal theory, a part of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), has been around for more than decades. This theory believes that emotion plays a major role in the need to express emotion in the form of language. Interpersonal meaning becomes one of the key aspects of analyzing the meanings of the words spoken or written by the speakers or writers in the interactions and negotiations in social relations (Martin & White, 2005). Oteíza (2017) emphasized that appraisal "has to do with the negotiation of meanings among real or potential interlocutors" (p. 457). The negotiation of meaning and meaning-making are actions that are based upon the concept of solidarity (a sense of unity and mutual support from other people).

The framework of the appraisal analysis includes attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude refers to how people evaluate, judge, and appreciate their feelings. It involves the positive and negative emotions that the speaker or writer expresses in their speech or written work. Engagement focuses on how the individual posits himself or herself in the current situation. The individual's locutions can determine how much

engagement he or she is involved in. Graduation refers to how feelings are amplified and blurred (Wei et al., 2015).

The main purpose of the appraisal framework is to provide a sufficient amount of linguistics resources that have been systematically and comprehensively described and to provide a clear display of social experience values. Therefore, richer and more detailed descriptions of the emotional dynamics experienced by an individual can be obtained. These descriptions then can portray how subjective or internal notions (person) engage with the external notions (society). Ellsworth (2013) further described that appraisals can show "novelty, valence, certainty, goal conduciveness, agency, and control..." (p. 125). In other words, an appraisal framework can give a portrayal of an individual's emotional experiences in different situations.

SFL shows that language learning can be a very complex process because emotions play a major role in how EFL students use the target language both in their speech and writing. The quality of a writing composition regarding expressing personal ideas or opinions in reflective writing can be seen from the way the writers use word choices and expressions. Unfortunately, many EFL students lack of ability to appropriately choose words or expressions either in spoken or written form. These students, to some extent, face a barrier in their efforts to express feelings, judgments, and appreciation. They also face challenges in expressing their attitudes in various linguistic forms. However, this situation could partially be resolved through the mediation of a reading source read by the students while trying to revise their writing (Mori, 2017). Another study by Pasaribu and Dewi (2021) was done to find out the types of attitudinal occurrences in Indonesian EFL university students' reflective writing regarding their experience attending online learning during COVID-19. The study found that the students' reflections portrayed the affect marker as the dominant marker because the students were able to present the interpersonal connection between their feelings and their current situation.

2.2 EFL Reader Response

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory (RRT) describes that when reading, readers tend to experience emotional attachments to the stories. Rosenblatt (1978) stated that the "emphasis on feeling and creativity might especially have been expected to establish a unique role for the reader" (p. 4). Moreover, she adds that when reading, the "reader's attention turned toward a qualitative synthesis, cognitive and affective, that can be experienced conjointly" (p. 93). These quotes reveal the inner engagement between cognitive and affective aspects that occurred within the reader's mind and emotions. Therefore, there is a clear transaction between the author, the reader, and the text. These transactions appear from two different stances of reader response, i.e., aesthetic and efferent stances. In the aesthetic stance, readers are immersed in the story and thus can have a sense of connection with how the characters feel and think. In the efferent stance, readers are invited to engage with the words, the sentences, and other information found in the text. In other words, readers are "reading to study it, not to experience it" (Spiegel, 1998, p. 42).

Mart (2019) stated that literature discussions using reader response theory enable the readers to have in-depth conversations. These types of conversations can assist readers in finding meaning between the story and real-life situations. In the EFL context, the ongoing transactions of constructing, re-constructing, making meaning,

and re-making meaning among the readers or within the readers themselves can be evident during and post-reading activities (Iskhak et al., 2020). In their research, Rifqi et al. (2022) revealed that by implementing reader response activities in responding to the short story 'The Gift of Imagi', the EFL students were able to use their creative imagination to recreate the story. Thus, the reader response technique helped the students become more creative in their writing. A study done by Widiati et al. (2023) also provided a clear correlation between the quality of the readers' responses and the choice of reading texts. The research indicates that the pleasure of reading is somewhat influenced by the choice of reading texts. The more pleasurable and emotionally engaging the reading texts that the readers choose, the more emotionally engaging the responses will be.

2.3 EFL Learners' Expressing Sadness in Self-Reflective Writings

Sadness is one of the basic emotional aspects of human life, and with that in mind, it is one of the core emotions that is felt and experienced daily. Despite its common human nature, how humans express their sadness and other emotions can vary, depending on their cultures, life values, and family values (Chen et al., 2012; Losonczy, 2004; Tanaka et al., 2010). Due to the heterogenic ways of expressing sadness, there are several ways to explore deeper, particularly how speakers or writers express their emotions, such as through interviews (Langley & Meziani, 2020) and reflective journal writing (Avarzamani & Farahian, 2019). In the pedagogical context, expressing sadness can be evoked through literary activities such as literature discussions or activities and reflective writing.

Some studies show that expressing thoughts on different platforms can be challenging for EFL learners but not impossible. Chamcharatsri (2013) found that L2 learners in general may find expressing emotions a difficult task due to the complex emotions that need to be expressed in a different language. The study further concluded that despite the complexities of expressing emotions, L2 learners could use literary activities such as poetry writings to explore the target language and the mother tongue from the aspects of culture, language, and emotions. Liao (2018) investigated the EFL adult learners' experiences in a poetry class. Even though, in the end, adult learners have positive perceptions of poetry writing, expressing emotions became the biggest challenge due to the struggles in choosing the appropriate words that express their emotions. These two studies provided evidence of the benefit of using literature activities such as poetry writing to assist EFL students in expressing their emotions.

Lin et al. (2016) conducted a study to investigate the use of reflective writing to assist medical students in relating their experiences with their positive emotions and sadness. The result indicated that using reflective writing helped and encouraged the medical students to express their affective sides like sadness. Meanwhile, Spier (2022) conducted a study on how adult English Language Learners or ELLs narrative writing in the form of self-reflection as assignments in the classrooms can be sources of information to investigate the students' vocabulary knowledge, reading, and writing proficiency, as well as how these elements affect the students' sentimental expressions and word choices in their self-reflections. The researcher concluded that in writing their self-reflections, the ELLs used basic to complex emotions from time to time. Although the participants of these two studies were from different departments, the

results proved that reflective writing could become a means for students to evoke their affective sides and help them to express their emotions better.

3. METHODS

This mixed-method study used two types of data, i.e., quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were used to portray the rank of the attitudinal markers from the lowest to the highest percentage. The ranks were useful for the researchers to view the tendency of the attitudinal markers found in the EFL students' reflective writings. The detected tendency from the attitudinal marker rank was subsequently used as the base to analyze how the rank was influenced by the choice of topics and reading texts. Meanwhile, the qualitative data was obtained from the qualitative content analysis. This type of analysis enables the researcher to arrange the themes systemically (Schreier, 2012). The obtained data from the students' linguistic discourse were analyzed systematically by using qualitative content analysis, in which the researchers quantified the frequency of the investigated categories and used the result to make the descriptive analysis (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020).

3.1 Participants

The participants were 11 second-year EFL university students (nine females, two males) ranging from 18-20 years old. All of them were in one Basic Reading and Writing class and attended a virtual book club held by the university. As a part of the compulsory activity in the Basic Reading and Writing class, these students had read Rosen's 'Sad Book' many times and discussed the content with their friends in the discussion groups. The story evolved around the real experience of the author, Michael Rosen, who had to deal with the loss of his son and mother. They shared their inner thoughts about the story and what they felt about the story. The book reading and discussion were done in the course of two weeks and were done outside the class hours in the virtual book club session. These EFL students were purposively chosen to participate in this research. The researchers chose the participants based on the students' writing quality which fit the criteria of good grammar (minor mistakes) and good organization of ideas.

3.2 Source of Data

The source of data was the 11 reflections written by the 11 students who took one Basic Reading and Writing class and attended a virtual book club held by the university. In order to ensure the quality of the data, these students were given a set of guided questions that can be used to help them in organizing their ideas for their reflective writing. The guided questions/instructions were as follows:

- 1) Based on your personal experiences, define what sadness is. Feel free to make your own definition;
- 2) Which image/picture/sentence(s) that you can relate to? Why?

These 11 reflective writings were used to obtain information on the EFL students' attitudinal occurrences and aesthetic stances.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from the students' reflective writing. The writings were written after the students completed the two-week book discussions that were done outside the class hours in the virtual book club. Prior to the writing activity, the students were assigned to different groups to read 'Sad Book' together and/ or individually in one Basic Reading and Writing class. After reading, they were instructed to meet up with their group members to discuss the content of the book. Their main goal was to discuss what sadness means to each of them, how they would describe sadness, and how the author's story affected them.

They were allowed to quote the sentences from the book or to choose a picture from the book that represents their definition of sadness. The criteria of the chosen reflective writings were as follows:

- 1) the reflection should be written in good English (minimum grammatical mistakes);
- 2) the writing should provide a clear description of their definition of sadness; and
- 3) the writing portrays the EFL students' emotional connection with the story.

The reflections were submitted to the university's Learning Management System (LMS) two weeks after reading and discussion activities.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using content analysis to explore deeper about the students' attitudinal occurrences. Content analysis was chosen because by using content analysis, a researcher can find important missing links in human communication and the responses (Neuendorf, 2002). Both the obtained numerical and written data were collected. After the data were collected, the students' works were categorized, clustered, and analyzed using the Excel tool to code them based on the attitudinal occurrences of the appraisal framework, i.e., 'affect', 'judgment', and 'appreciation'. The data on the students' attitudinal occurrences were used as the base to discuss the EFL students' aesthetic stance.

4. RESULTS

This section displays two results for the two research questions. The first part of this section presents the calculation results of the identification of the attitudinal resources that consist of 'affect', 'judgment', and 'appreciation'. These results were used to answer the first research question. The second part of this section discusses the emerging themes and aesthetic stance from the students' descriptions. The data were used to answer the second research question.

4.1 Appraisal Analysis Result

The appraisal analysis results were used to discuss the first research question: 'What are the EFL students' attitudinal linguistic utterances that portray their ways of expressing sadness?' The result of the appraisal analysis was obtained from the 11 journals written by 11 EFL students who were purposively chosen. The EFL students used a total of 54 attitudinal resources from 11 selected journals. Table 1 portrays the

distribution of the three attitudinal resources. All of the EFL students were found to use all of the three attitudinal resources. From the 54 attitudinal resources, 'affect' placed the highest (63%), followed by 'appreciation' (20%), and 'judgment' (17%).

Table 1. Attitudinal resources.

Attitudinal resource	Percentage
Affect	63%
Appreciation	20%
Judgment	17%

4.1.1 Affect markers

The affect category placed the highest since the students were asked to describe what sadness was in their perspectives. Furthermore, the discussion on sadness triggered their emotion and revealed their innermost feelings toward sadness. Table 2 displays the number of occurrences in the 'affect' markers.

Table 2. Affect markers.

Resource	Category	Positive/negative	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Affect	Dis/inclination	Positive	5	15%
		Negative	17	50%
	Un/happiness	Positive	0	0%
		Negative	2	6%
	In/security	Positive	3	9%
		Negative	2	6%
	Dis/satisfaction	Positive	0	0%
		Negative	5	15%
Total			34	100%

Based on the calculation of the affect category, none of the 11 journals touched upon happiness and satisfaction. This was expected since the topic was about sadness. The highest percentage of occurrence was disinclination. Fifty percent of the total affect occurrences dealt with how the students expressed their ideas about sadness. They showed their reluctance and lack of enthusiasm when talking about sadness. However, there was a 15% inclination. Table 3 provided some samples of the EFL students' expressions that fell under the affect markers.

Table 3. Samples of the affect markers.

Resource	Category	Positive/negative	Narrative number	Sample
Affect	Dis/inclination	Positive	(1)	I like [+inclination] to live an honest life, don't pretend to be happy when not happy.
		Negative	(2)	I don't want to [-inclination] be sad. I can relate to the words I just want to think about it on my own. Because it is mine. And no one else's.
	Un/happiness	Positive		-
		Negative	(3)	For me, sadness is when you feel hated by rock, grass, air, water, animals, plants, and yourself for something that you cannot [-happiness] change.

Table 3 continued...

	In/security	Positive	(4)	I chose this picture because being sad is not always on the gray side. It is at the intersection between happiness and sadness [+security].
		Negative	(5)	This is the visualization of my backstage. Overload of information, the problem keeps coming, perfectionist keeps haunting [-security].
	Dis/satisfaction	Positive		-
		Negative	(6)	Sometimes being sad can make you like a crazy person and some people will not understand it [-satisfaction].

The EFL students described their concept of sadness by sharing their personal experiences in dealing with sadness. The positive inclination was found in the word 'like'. In the category un/happiness, there was no evidence of the positive aspect of sadness. In the in/security category, two poles of description were found. One participant shared her insecurity by describing her current situation where she was overwhelmed by the things that she experienced. On the contrary, one student tried to show the positive side of being sad, and it gave him a sense of security. The dissatisfaction category had only negative occurrences in which five occurrences showed dissatisfaction towards the students' personal experience when feeling sad.

4.1.2 Appreciation markers

The appreciation category was the second highest occurrence with 20% in total. The EFL students tended to show appreciation towards their experience which enabled them to have a better understanding of grief and sadness. Moreover, they showed their ability to give a positive valuation. This was evident from the number of occurrences under the appreciation markers found in Table 4.

Table 4. Appreciation markers.

Resource	Category	Subcategory	Positive/negative	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	Positive	0	0%
			Negative	2	18%
		Quality	Positive	0	0%
			Negative	0	0%
	Composition	Balance	Positive	0	0%
			Negative	0	0%
		Complexity	Positive	0	0%
			Negative	1	9%
	Valuation	-	Positive	8	73%
		-	Negative	0	0%
Total				11	100%

The highest percentage for the appreciation markers was the positive valuation category (73%). Positive valuation refers to the language occurrence in giving opinions towards a subject, situation, or condition. The reflective writings indicated that the positive valuation was a popular way for the EFL students to appreciate the existence of sadness. The samples of the EFL students' appreciation can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Samples of the appreciation markers.

Resource	Category	Subcategory	Positive/negative	Narrative number	Sample
Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	Positive		-
			Negative	(7)	I can feel his pain [-impact], the illustration, and the words in this book I can feel it (I can relate it).
		Quality	Positive	-	-
			Negative	-	-
	Composition	Balance	Positive	-	-
			Negative	-	-
		Complexity	Positive	-	-
			Negative	(8)	Being sad is not always on the gray side [-complexity]. It is at the intersection between happiness and sadness.
	Valuation		Positive	(9)	Do not get depressed with sadness and make all life unfocused or lose hope or enthusiasm to live. In this life, we should be grateful [+valuation]. Don't be depressed by sadness.
			Negative	-	-

A sample of the positive valuation could be seen in how one EFL student described how she felt about being sad. She described that being sad is a part of life, but it would be better if people would not focus too much on sadness. In other words, she highlighted how she felt about sadness. Her complex emotion towards sadness was portrayed in how she composed her sentence by comparing happiness and sadness.

4.1.3 Judgment markers

The judgment category placed the lowest rank with 17% of occurrences. In the discussion part, there would be some insights on why judgment had the lowest percentage. However, this indicates that the EFL students did not focus on judging the sadness itself. On the contrary, they were more focused on how they dealt with sadness, defined sadness, and searched for ways to understand and overcome sadness. The number of occurrences of judgment markers can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Judgment markers.

Resource	Category	Positive/negative	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Judgment	Normality	Positive	0	0%
		Negative	0	0%
	Capacity	Positive	1	8%
		Negative	2	17%
	Tenacity	Positive	1	8%
		Negative	1	8%
	Veracity	Positive	1	8%
		Negative	3	25%

Table 6 continued...

	Propriety	Positive	0	0%
		Negative	3	25%
Total			12	100%

Out of the 5 categories in the judgment markers, the negative propriety and negative veracity were the two highest (25% each). This indicated that the EFL students tended to compare and contrast between their personal judgment and others'. The samples in Table 7 provided a glimpse of how the students expressed their judgments.

Table 7. Samples of the judgment markers.

Resource	Category	Positive/ negative	Narrative number	Sample
Judgment	Normality	Positive		-
		Negative		-
	Capacity	Positive	(10)	Sadness is everywhere and anyone has it [+capacity].
		Negative	(11)	Because in my country, children shouldn't be sad, they have to live full of joy [-capacity].
	Tenacity	Positive	(12)	From this story too, I think that it's okay not to be okay [+tenacity]. We don't need to hide our feelings (just laugh if it's funny, cry if you are sad).
		Negative	(13)	It's not just me, but some people decide to hide their problems and fake a smile, rather than talk about it. So, for me, sadness is when you feel sad or have problems but cannot talk about it to anyone [-tenacity].
	Veracity	Positive	(14)	If you are scared to tell them, just remember that you have God who is always beside you.
		Negative	(15)	Basically, in Indonesia, it's not a taboo for women to cry, but it's still taboo for men to cry or be sad [-veracity].
	Propriety	Positive		-
		Negative	(16)	It's not just me, but some people decide to hide their problems and fake a smile [-propriety], rather than talk about it. I know it's bad. So bad.

What is interesting from the analysis result in the judgment markers was that the EFL students did not show extreme judgments. They did not show excessive anger towards the concept of sadness and their experiences when they felt sad. What was shown in the judgment markers was mainly how they positioned themselves when they had to deal with sadness. The big theme of this marker was the fact that the students felt trapped because they wanted to be free from the feeling of sadness, but felt afraid to share their problems with other people. It can be said that they had mixed feelings about their emotions. They wanted to feel better emotionally but were worried about sharing their personal problems. They wanted to feel better emotionally but were scared to talk about their feelings. This showed that they were dealing with a mix of complicated emotions when it came to sadness.

4.2 The Students' Aesthetic Stance Result

The students' responses towards the story in 'Sad Book' conveyed how the aesthetic stance exists in their written responses. The aesthetic stance was portrayed from the two main elements, i.e., the students' psychological projection and their text-to-world relationship. The obtained data on the EFL students' aesthetic stance were used to answer the second question, i.e., "How do the EFL students perceive sadness from the aesthetic stance?"

4.2.1 Psychological projection

The first result is related to the students' psychological projection. The students' different family and social backgrounds, family values, and life principles gave different yet interesting aesthetic stances. The psychological projection reveals how students vary in defining the concept of sadness based on their life principles and life values and the main character's way of coping with sadness. Some EFL students gave a more positive valuation on how to define sadness. Their positive psychological projection was seen from how Student 18 valued spirituality in defining the concept of sadness;

- (1) "God will accompany [+valuation] all of us. And if we are sad or happy, it should also be brought to prayer because God's miracles are real in our lives". (S18)

Student 19 gave a more realistic psychological projection by saying:

- (2) "If you are sad, you must move on [+valuation] and must be able to accept [-valuation] the reality". (S19)

She focused more on having the act of accepting fate and reality and moving on. Thus, she defines sadness by defining it from a positive perspective. Another student gave a different psychological projection on how to define sadness. He wrote that:

- (3) "Smile apparently can hide so many different emotions, including sadness. It's amazing [+valuation], really". (S20)

Even though he projected smiling to hide his sadness, he was more amazed at how he could use the action of smiling to give him comfort.

Some other students' aesthetic stances were psychologically projected from a negative point of view. In other words, they defined sadness by emphasizing the negative aspect of it. One EFL student said:

- (4) "I try to put on the best smile even though I feel pain [-inclination] and very sad". (S21)

Even though she stated that she was trying to put a smile on her face, she still emphasized the painful feeling that she endured whenever she felt sad. Student 22 projected and defined sadness from her feeling of being hated by another party for something that she cannot change:

- (5) "Sadness is when you feel hated [-inclination] by rock, grass, air, water, animals, plants, and yourself for something that you cannot change". (S22)

Another student defined sadness as how dissatisfied he felt about himself regardless of the positive support system that he had around him:

- (6) “I am dissatisfied [-satisfaction] with myself because I just want to think about sadness on my own even though I have friends and family”. (S23)

4.2.2 Text-to-world relationship

Aesthetic stance is also evident in how readers can connect the essence of a story that they read and the concept of sadness. The students used their personal experiences as the basis to describe what sadness is. In her effort to define sadness, Student 24 described how sadness was viewed in her surroundings. She said that:

- (7) “In my country, children shouldn’t be sad. They have to live full of joy. They are situated to see the world as a beautiful place. At that age, they should have fun, smile, and laugh. That is the most important thing to be experienced as a child”. (S24)

In other words, she felt that sadness was viewed as somewhat taboo because children were entitled to experience happiness, not sadness. Similar to Student 24, Student 26 showed sentiment toward the concept of sadness. She said that:

- (8) “It’s difficult for me to open up whenever I feel sad. I feel that sadness is mine and mine only”. (S26)

Student 26 felt that sadness was not supposed to be discussed in public since it was a private matter that needed to be resolved privately.

Contrary to Student 24, Student 25 argued that talking about sadness, especially to children was important. She believed that children were entitled to experience sadness. However, as an adult, she found it hard to explain what sadness was to children:

- (9) “This children’s book talks about sadness. But I find it difficult to explain sadness to children, although I agree that it’s okay for children to experience sadness”. (S25)

5. DISCUSSION

From the three attitudinal occurrences result, the highest percentage was the affect category (63%), followed by appreciation (20%), and judgment (17%). In the affect category, all affect markers (dis/inclination, un/happiness, in/security, and dis/satisfaction) were evident, with dis/inclination as the highest percentage. The EFL students’ definition of sadness and their feelings towards the story entitled ‘Sad Book’ produced a very high disinclination. It was found that the 17 disinclination expressions mainly projected the students’ reluctance in thinking, speaking, and conversing about sadness (e.g., “I don’t want to [-inclination] be sad. I can relate with the words I just want to think about it on my own. Because it is mine. And no one else’s”). These students felt that they were inclined to keep the sadness to themselves and tended to avoid talking about it. Even though these students came from various cultural backgrounds, the universal concept of sadness enabled them to have mutual understanding with one another (Tanaka et al., 2010). However, some other students

chose not to delve into the sadness. These students preferred to see sadness from a positive perspective. One student even wrote that she liked living an honest life, thus being pretentious is not a life choice (e.g., "I like [+inclination] to live an honest life, don't pretend to be happy when not happy"). The word choice 'like' somehow portrayed the students' "conscious desires for incentives or cognitive goals" (Barrett et al., 2016, p. 137). In other words, her conscience played a significant role in defining what sadness is. The unhappiness/security, and dissatisfaction markers also appeared in the students' written responses in their reflective writing, but not as high as dis/inclination.

The obtained data also portrayed how the EFL students tried their best to be positive regardless of the sad feeling that arose when reading the story or defining sadness. In the appreciation category, the students gave more appreciation to Michael, the main character of the book, in his effort to cope with the loss of his mother and son. Even though the students gave their appreciation to Michael's effort, they still tried to put themselves in his shoes by imagining how he would have felt. Thus, the language use analyzed based on the appreciation category was very rich and intimate. This result was in line with how Oteíza (2017) viewed appraisal, it "always involves the negotiation of solidarity" (p. 458). The non-existence of the sub-category 'quality and balance' indicated that in writing the responses, they did not give much attention to normalizing the feeling of sadness or Michael's grieving process. They also did not give much attention to the quality of their responses. The main reason for this to happen was that in writing the responses, the students wanted to show their genuine responses. Therefore, the students relied heavily on their intuition and their current feelings towards the concept of sadness, their version of sadness, and Michael's sadness during the writing. The 'here and now' mentality was very clearly seen when the responses were investigated from the aspect of the appreciation category. In other words, the immediate responses showed a tug and pull between the conscious and the unconscious state of mind (Scherer et al., 2001).

The lowest category was the judgment category. In this category, the subcategory of 'veracity and propriety' had an equal number of occurrences. The negative 'veracity' and negative 'propriety' that were found in the students' responses indicated how they positioned themselves in society. Some considered expressing or discussing sadness was not socially accepted, while some other students focused more on their right to speak up about sadness. The propriety category is a part of the social sanction type which refers to how ethical a human can be in society (Martin & White, 2005). The negative veracity, which is also a part of the social sanction type, refers to the level of truthfulness a human being can be. Therefore, because these students' judgments were highly influenced by their society, the way they expressed ideas and thoughts was affected by their psychological well-being and ability to adjust themselves to society (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015).

These results indicated that expressing opinions and defining concepts of a particular emotion can portray the EFL students' complex thoughts and considerations in their reflective writings. These students can explore the concept of sadness and have deep thoughts about it with the help of the reading text, 'Sad Book'. The way Rosen (2004) described his honest feelings on the loss of his son Eddie and his mother in the story awoken the EFL students' personal experiences in dealing with the sad moments in their lives. The attitudinal occurrences of the affect, appreciation, and judgment categories seen in their reflective writing were indications of the dynamicity of the

students' understanding of sadness, awareness of their social parameter of sadness, and ability to cope with sadness. In other words, these reflective writings can become the window to see each student's ecology of the learning process, i.e., how they try to express their thoughts and opinions about sadness from different contexts and socio-cultural backgrounds, implicitly describe their awareness of their environment, and do all of these while using the target language, that is English.

Besides portraying the EFL students' evaluative language, the attitudinal occurrences provided yet another interesting phenomenon, i.e., the ways the EFL students perceived sadness. The personal spaces to explore the meanings of sadness and connect it with their everyday life experiences gave a sense of liberation and ease in their writing, which was shown by how high the affect markers were (63%). The meaning-making of the context gave the EFL students room to have both personal and social spaces in their effort to understand their personal life journey (Jackson & Barnett, 2020). Besides the personal spaces, the story from 'Sad Book' assisted the EFL students in demonstrating the high affect markers in their reflective writing. The use of literature can provide an immense opportunity for the readers to increase their vocabulary knowledge provided that through reading, readers or students can absorb multiple language skills and language elements. However, it is a fact that reading can be a means to assist readers to delve into their inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions. All the while, readers unconsciously react and respond to the story that takes place in the literary work. The responses, be they verbal or written, can be used as a means to reflect how they view a certain topic discussed in the story (Abednia et al., 2013).

These responses are highly influenced by the EFL students' current psychological conditions. The psychological condition that the students were currently in while reading the book triggered many different responses. Many preferred to define what sadness was based on their personal experiences. They also shared the lessons learned on how to cope with sadness. The task of defining sadness was quite easy to do because the EFL students obtained some insights from the story in 'Sad Book'. Caracciolo and van Duuren (2015) stated that "the analysis of readers' life stories may offer important insights into how literary reading can have an impact on the readers" (p. 517). In other words, readers give different responses to the story in the reading due to their different life values and lifestyles.

In the appreciation category, the EFL students provided different reactions of sadness. Some other responses were more realistic and objective. These reactions were acceptable and predictable. dos Santos et al. (2018) described that readers engage with the stories through "the conflicts and problems they face in life or the plot" (p. 783). One student used her personal experiences in trying to understand the concept of sadness (e.g., "I can feel his pain [-impact], the illustration, and the word in this book I can feel it (I can relate it)"). The responses also provided a portrayal of the practical behaviors and solutions for coping with sadness. Thus, the responses were spontaneous yet honest (Magnet & Tremblay-Dion, 2018).

Some other students' responses provided a glimpse of their efforts to connect with how they understand the concept of sadness and how they were brought up in their cultures. This text-to-world relationship played a significant role in investigating the readers' emotional attachment to the theme of the story, i.e., sadness. Some students were able to have a deep connection with the author's sadness. Student 14 wrote that she could feel the author's pain and sadness from the words and the illustrations. This is clear evidence of the readers' ability to be emotionally connected

with the story that they read (Whiteley, 2011). They were also able to have a sense of self while reading; thus, there were emotional interactions between the readers and the story. This notion was evident in the EFL students' way of using a sense of self in describing and defining what sadness is.

From the discussion, it is evident that there is a strong connection between the EFL students' attitudinal occurrences, their aesthetic stance, and their quality of reflective writing. The students' lexical choices in discussing their concept of sadness and their emotional connection with the main character in 'Sad Book' were more intimate and honest because of their reference to how they feel, see, and experience sadness. Moreover, the openness and fluidity in expressing their opinions about sadness were mainly triggered by Michael's story from 'Sad Book'. Many of the EFL students mirrored some expressions from how Michael expressed his sadness and his opinion about sadness. Therefore, the students were able to practice how to express ideas using natural English expressions.

Finally, this study proposes some implications that can be applicable in the context of pedagogy. First, the appraisal analysis result was deemed to give a portrayal of the EFL students' lexical choices in defining and describing sadness. In other words, the lexical choices chosen by the students when expressing emotions can assist teachers/educators in assessing the EFL students' current level of English language proficiency, vocabulary level, and emotional connections with English adjective words (Perret, 2000). Second, the result of this research provided clear evidence of the benefits of using literary work to assist EFL students to be more engaged with reading. The students were able to produce richer, more intimate, and more in-depth reflective writing because the book triggered them to be more reflective (Caracciolo & Van Duuren, 2015).

6. CONCLUSION

The appraisal analysis provided a clear portrayal of how the EFL students defined what sadness is, how they had emotional interactions with Michael in 'Sad Book', the main character, and how they had a sense of self in the process of understanding the concept of sadness. The variety of definitions and responses to sadness revealed that the EFL students had different ways of viewing and responding to the concept of sadness. These different views and responses could provide a glimpse of how complex language use is. Despite the small number of participants, the research results indicated two main points. First, the lexical choices of the EFL students' reflective writings are highly influenced by the reading text. The students were able to use richer, more intimate, and dynamic expressions of emotions because they modeled them from the reading. Additionally, the levels of the affect, appreciation, and judgment markers can vary depending on the connectivity between the given reading text and the topic of reflection. Second, the use of picture books or novels in general provides the EFL students inspiration to create an aesthetic stance that is personal and intimate. The EFL students' effort to create the psychological projection and text-to-world relationship is supported by the provision of reading texts that are topic-appropriate.

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the small number of participants limited the researchers' effort to produce an overview of the attitudinal

occurrence in general. Secondly, the lack of knowledge on how to write reflective writing from both the students and teachers influenced the depth of the reflective writing. Hence, future researchers can do more research on the connection between attitudinal occurrences and literary works by employing a larger number of participants from different educational levels and by preparing the students with adequate knowledge and ability to write their reflections.

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