



High School Students' Interpretations of Bullying Themes in Gareth Emery's *Saving Light* Music Video: A Reader Response Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the interpretation of high school students in learning English as a foreign language towards the representation of bullying in Gareth Emery's music video *Saving Light* as a multimodal text through the Reader Response Theory and Expectancy Theory approaches. The study was conducted at MAN 1 Pekalongan City in the 2025/2026 academic year involving 32 grade XI students. Eight selected students then participated in semi-structured interviews to obtain more in-depth data. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews based on interview guidelines that were developed using objective and systematic procedures. Data on high school students' interpretations of bullying in Gareth Emery's music video *Saving Light* as a multimodal text were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the Braun and Clarke framework. The results showed that students interpreted bullying as a form of emotional and social violence represented through symbolic visual narratives in the music video. The presentation encouraged empathy, self-reflection, and critical responses influenced by students' personal experiences. In addition, students also expressed hopes for the importance of counseling support, teacher involvement, anti-bullying education, and the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment. These findings suggest that multimodal texts can be utilized as reflective learning media that support critical media literacy and student-centered meaning construction in English language learning.

Keywords: students' interpretations, bullying themes, music video, reader response study

Interpretasi Siswa Sekolah Menengah terhadap Tema Perundungan dalam Video Musik *Saving Light* Karya Gareth Emery: Kajian Respons Pembaca

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji interpretasi siswa sekolah menengah dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing terhadap representasi perundungan dalam video musik *Saving Light* karya Gareth Emery sebagai teks multimodal melalui pendekatan Teori Respons Pembaca dan Teori Harapan. Penelitian dilaksanakan di MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan pada tahun ajaran 2025/2026 dengan melibatkan 32 siswa kelas XI. Delapan siswa terpilih selanjutnya mengikuti wawancara semi terstruktur untuk memperoleh data yang lebih mendalam. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi terstruktur berdasarkan pedoman wawancara yang disusun menggunakan prosedur objektif dan sistematis. Data interpretasi siswa sekolah menengah dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing terhadap representasi perundungan dalam video musik *Saving Light* karya Gareth Emery sebagai teks multimodal dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik berdasarkan kerangka Braun dan Clarke. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memaknai perundungan sebagai bentuk kekerasan emosional dan sosial yang direpresentasikan melalui narasi visual simbolik dalam video musik. Tayangan tersebut mendorong munculnya empati, refleksi diri, dan respons kritis yang dipengaruhi oleh pengalaman personal siswa. Selain itu, siswa juga mengemukakan harapan terhadap pentingnya dukungan konseling, keterlibatan guru, pendidikan anti-perundungan, serta terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang aman dan suportif. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa teks multimodal dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai media pembelajaran reflektif yang mendukung literasi media kritis dan konstruksi makna yang berpusat pada siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: interpretasi siswa, tema perundungan, video musik, kajian respons pembaca

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains a significant issue within school environments and continues to influence students' social interaction, emotional safety, and classroom engagement. In the Indonesian context, national data indicate that peer victimization still affects a considerable number of adolescents. Statistics Indonesia reported that approximately 41.34% of eighth-grade students and 30.31% of eleventh-grade students experienced bullying in 2022, indicating that bullying has become a recurring social issue within students' everyday school experiences (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). In educational settings, discussions of bullying are not only related to behavioral concerns but also to how students interpret social experiences and construct meaning through reflection. However, many school-based approaches continue to emphasize regulation and disciplinary control while giving limited attention to students' interpretive responses and reflective perspectives toward bullying representation in learning contexts.

Bullying is widely recognized as a repeated form of aggressive behavior characterized by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. Olweus (1993) defines bullying as intentional and repeated actions that may cause physical, verbal, or psychological harm within school settings. Previous studies have shown that bullying may contribute to emotional distress, anxiety, insecurity, and social withdrawal among adolescents (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Longitudinal research further indicates that negative peer experiences during adolescence can influence students' self-perception and social interaction later in life (Arseneault et al., 2010; Copeland et al., 2013). Erikson (1968) also emphasizes that adolescence represents an important stage of identity formation in which social interaction strongly influences emotional and personal development. Nevertheless, many studies still position students merely as victims of harmful experiences rather than as individuals who actively interpret and respond to their social realities.

In contemporary youth culture, media play an important role in shaping reflective and interpretive experiences. Buckingham (2003) explains that audiences do not passively receive media messages but actively negotiate meaning based on their social background and lived experiences. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) argues that adolescents frequently connect media narratives with their personal and social realities. Through this process, media texts become reflective spaces where emotions, memories, and social understanding intersect. Among various forms of media, music videos occupy a distinctive position because they combine symbolic imagery, emotional expression, sound, and non-linear storytelling (Vernallis, 2013). Raiton and Watson (2011) further argue that music videos strongly resonate with youth culture, making them relevant media texts for discussing complex social issues, including bullying. From an educational perspective, Hobbs (2010) emphasizes that media literacy encourages critical awareness and reflective learning, while Kellner and Share (2007) explain that media texts may foster participatory classroom engagement and social reflection. Therefore, music videos may function not only as entertainment but also as meaningful multimodal texts that support student-centered learning in English language classrooms.

One music video that presents a strong symbolic narrative is *Saving Light* by Gareth Emery. The video portrays themes of isolation, emotional struggle, vulnerability, and recovery through metaphorical visual sequences rather than direct storytelling. Although bullying is not explicitly represented, the depiction of social exclusion and emotional conflict allows viewers to relate the narrative to their own experiences and perspectives. This interpretive openness aligns with Reader-Response Theory proposed by Rosenblatt (1978), which explains that meaning emerges through a transactional process between the text and the reader. According to this perspective, audiences actively construct meaning based on their personal experiences, emotions, and social contexts. Consequently, the same text may



produce different interpretations among different viewers. In relation to media interpretation, Buckingham (2003) and Jenkins (2006) further explain that young audiences actively connect media narratives with their own lived experiences. Within this framework, *Saving Light* functions not merely as a visual text to be observed, but also as a symbolic interpretive space that encourages emotional engagement, reflection, and meaning construction related to bullying and social relationships.

Several previous studies have explored audience interpretation toward media texts related to bullying and social issues. Hawker and Boulton (2000) demonstrated that bullying contributes significantly to psychosocial maladjustment among adolescents, including anxiety and social withdrawal. Similarly, Arseneault et al. (2010) and Copeland et al. (2013) revealed that bullying victimization may influence psychological well-being and mental health over a long period of time. Although these studies successfully highlight the seriousness of bullying, they mainly focus on psychological impact rather than on how students interpret bullying representation through media texts.

Research focusing on audience interpretation was conducted by Haryanti and Ratna Sari (2018), who found that audiences actively interpreted bullying messages in campaign videos based on their own experiences and social background. Agusta and Wahyuni (2023) also revealed that viewers often connected bullying narratives in television series with personal experiences and contextual understanding. More recently, Wong et al. (2024) demonstrated that viewers actively constructed meaning from music videos by relating visual narratives and emotional representation to their own realities. These studies confirm that audiences are active meaning-makers rather than passive media consumers. However, previous studies still primarily emphasize emotional reactions and audience reception without examining how students transform symbolic

interpretation into reflective expectations regarding school responses to bullying.

This limitation is important because students' engagement with symbolic media texts does not stop at emotional response alone. Through reflective interpretation, students may develop expectations, social awareness, and perspectives regarding safer educational environments. Such responses demonstrate that media interpretation may encourage reflective meaning construction and future-oriented thinking within classroom contexts. In this study, future-oriented expectations are understood through Hope Theory proposed by Snyder (2002), which conceptualizes hope as a cognitive process consisting of goals, agency thinking, and pathways thinking. Goals refer to desired outcomes individuals wish to achieve, agency thinking reflects motivational determination, and pathways thinking refers to strategies individuals perceive as possible for reaching those goals. Within the context of this study, students' expectations regarding counseling support, teacher involvement, anti-bullying education, and supportive school environments reflect future-oriented thinking shaped by their experiences and reflections toward bullying representation.

Based on the background above, this study addresses two research questions. First, how do high school students interpret bullying themes in Gareth Emery's *Saving Light* music video and what expectations do they express toward bullying issues after watching the video? Second, how do students' personal experiences influence their interpretations and expectations of the bullying themes presented in the video? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze students' interpretations of bullying themes in *Saving Light* and to identify the expectations they express toward bullying issues after watching the video. In addition, this study examines how students' personal experiences influence their interpretations and expectations regarding bullying themes represented in the music video.

Through the integration of Reader-Response Theory and Hope Theory, this study positions students not only as audiences of media texts but also as active meaning-makers who construct reflective understanding and future-oriented expectations regarding bullying and school environments. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the discussion of Reader-Response Theory and Hope Theory in multimodal media interpretation, as well as practically to the development of reflective, student-centered, and media-based approaches in English language learning contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to investigate how high school students interpreted bullying representation and constructed reflective and future-oriented expectations after watching Gareth Emery's *Saving Light* music video as a multimodal text. The study integrated Reader-Response Theory and Hope Theory to examine students' interpretive engagement, reflective responses, and meaning construction within educational contexts. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on students' perspectives, interpretive experiences, and reflective responses toward symbolic representation rather than numerical measurement (Creswell, 2014).

The research procedure consisted of several stages. First, the researcher selected *Saving Light* as the multimodal text used in the study because of its symbolic representation of isolation, vulnerability, and social conflict. Second, the participants watched the music video during the research activity. Third, students completed open-ended questionnaires to express their interpretations, emotional responses, and expectations related to bullying representation in the video. Fourth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain deeper responses regarding personal experiences, reflective interpretation, and expectations toward school environments. Finally, all collected data

were transcribed, coded, categorized, and interpreted using thematic analysis.

This study was conducted at MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan from February to March 2026. The participants consisted of 32 eleventh-grade students selected purposively based on several criteria: they were enrolled in the eleventh grade, had watched *Saving Light* as part of the research activity, and were willing to participate voluntarily in the study. From these participants, eight students who indicated prior experiences related to bullying were further selected for semi-structured interviews to obtain more contextualized and in-depth responses.

The instruments used in this study were open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 19 open-ended items related to students' experiences with bullying, interpretations of the music video, emotional engagement, and expectations regarding school responses. Open-ended questions were used to encourage reflective and interpretive responses toward the multimodal text. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight selected participants to explore their interpretations, personal experiences, and reflective expectations in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 8–10 minutes, with a total duration of approximately 53 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The use of questionnaires and interviews enabled methodological triangulation to strengthen the credibility and consistency of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Reader-Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) guided the analysis of how students constructed meaning from the symbolic narrative and multimodal elements represented in the music video. Meanwhile, Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002) was used to examine how



students expressed reflective and future-oriented expectations related to school responses and educational environments.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985). Credibility was strengthened through participant quotations, methodological triangulation, and repeated examination of the data. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

RESULT

Data were collected from 32 eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan through open-ended questionnaires and from 8 selected participants through semi-structured interviews. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, two major findings emerged related to students' interpretations of bullying themes in Gareth Emery's *Saving Light* music video and the expectations they expressed toward bullying issues after watching the video. The findings are presented based on students' interpretations and expectations related to bullying themes in the music video.

1. Interpretive Responses toward Bullying Representation in the Music Video

Most participants interpreted *Saving Light* as a representation of bullying, isolation, emotional struggle, and social exclusion. Students considered the group bullying scene at 0:00–0:28 and the isolated bullying scene at 2:15–2:35 as the most realistic scenes because the visual representations resembled bullying situations they had experienced or witnessed in school environments. Through visual narration, gestures, emotional atmosphere, and symbolic scenes, students connected the music video with their own social experiences related to bullying.

Several students expressed empathetic and reflective responses toward the bullying representation presented in the music video.

"It strongly reminded me of the time when I was bullied in the seventh grade of junior high school." (S2)

"It was emotionally disturbing because the *Saving Light* music video portrays bullying, and I have experienced the same thing myself." (S6)

"I felt sad and uncomfortable when I saw that kind of situation because I think it is unfair, and I feel sorry for the victim." (S11)

Some participants also interpreted the ending scenes of the music video as representations of emotional support, friendship, recovery, and social acceptance.

"I feel that it has already passed. Now, I no longer dwell on it too much because I have truly made peace with myself." (S10)

Table-1
Students' Interpretive Responses toward *Saving Light*

Category	Number of Student	Student Code
Empathetic interpretation toward bullying representation	25	S2, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S16, S18, S20, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S26, S27, S28, S29, S30, S31
Personal connection with bullying scenes	6	S2, S6, S11, S17, S23, S25
Hopeful interpretation inspired by the MV ending	18	S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S14, S15, S16, S19, S21, S23, S25, S26, S27, S28, S29, S31, S32

2. Personal Experience and Meaning Construction through Media Interpretation

Students' personal experiences strongly influenced how they interpreted the symbolic representation of bullying in the music video. Participants who had experienced verbal bullying, exclusion, intimidation, or social rejection tended to connect the visual narrative with their own memories and social realities. Through this interpretive process, students constructed reflective meanings regarding

victimization, social insecurity, and interpersonal relationships within school environments.

“I was once hit by eggs thrown from the third floor while I was on the second floor. In the dormitory, my locker was messed up. I was also hurt by unpleasant words and verbal insults.” (S2)
“I was often called ‘black’ by a group of boys when I was in elementary school. Every time we met, they kept mocking me, and it made me feel insecure.” (S6)

Students who witnessed bullying also reflected on feelings of hesitation and fear when responding to bullying situations.

“I wanted to help, but I could not, because the person who tries to help could become the next target.” (S17)

These responses demonstrate that bullying representation in the music video encouraged students to reflect on broader social realities within school environments. The findings also show that students’ interpretations were shaped by both direct and indirect experiences related to bullying practices and social interaction.

Table-2
Personal Experiences Influencing Students’ Interpretation

Category	Number of Student	Student Code
Students with direct bullying experiences	10	S2, S6, S10, S11, S12, S17, S18, S19, S23, S25
Students who observed bullying situations	21	S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S9, S10, S11, S14, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S23, S25, S27, S28, S29, S31, S32
Students connecting the MV with personal and social experiences	8	S2, S6, S10, S11, S17, S19, S23, S25

3. Students’ Reflective Perspectives on School Responses to Bullying

Participants interpreted school responses to bullying as an important aspect of the social reality represented through the music video. Through reflective evaluation, students positioned schools, teachers, and counseling services as important institutions responsible for creating supportive and emotionally safe learning environments.

Many participants criticized teachers who minimized bullying as “just a joke” because such responses discouraged students from reporting bullying experiences and normalized emotional harm.

“Sometimes, students have already reported the bullying, but teachers still consider it only a minor problem.” (S6)

Students also expressed expectations for stronger intervention, clear disciplinary policies, and counseling support.

“Students who engage in bullying should be referred to the counseling teacher and receive firm and clear disciplinary action.” (S2)

“There should be firm action, not just advice.” (S25)

However, several participants described MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan as relatively supportive because of active counseling teachers and responsive class guardians.

“I once heard, during a counseling session at my current school, about a student who felt excluded by their classmates. After the school found out about the situation, they immediately took action to resolve the problem.” (S2)

“In my opinion, everyone, both students and teachers, has supported one another well.” (S17)
“At this school, I have never witnessed any bullying. Perhaps it is because the students are more mature, so bullying is no longer considered relevant, or because the school policies strongly discourage such behavior.” (S23)

These findings indicate that students not only interpreted bullying representation emotionally, but also evaluated institutional responses and educational responsibilities through reflective perspectives.

Table-3
Students' Reflective Perspectives on School Responses

Category	Number of Student	Student Code
Expectations for stronger school intervention	24	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S17, S18, S19, S22, S24, S25, S26, S27, S28, S30, S32
Critical perspectives toward school responses	8	S2, S6, S10, S11, S17, S19, S23, S25
Positive perceptions toward supportive school environments	22	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S11, S12, S13, S16, S17, S18, S21, S23, S24, S26, S27, S28, S29, S30, S31

4. Future-Oriented Expectations toward Supportive School Environments

Students emphasized that schools should not only respond to bullying after incidents occur, but also establish preventive systems and supportive educational environments. The most frequently expressed expectations included clear disciplinary policies, counseling services, active teacher involvement, and anti-bullying education through reflective learning activities.

"Schools should be stricter and impose clear sanctions on those who engage in bullying." (S11)

"There should be active counseling services and education about the impact of bullying." (S2)

"A school counselor or mediator is needed to help resolve the problem." (S17)

Beyond formal intervention, students also highlighted the importance of emotional support from friends, teachers, and family members. Participants explained that victims of bullying need to feel heard, understood, and emotionally supported during recovery.

"Support from family and close friends is definitely important because we need to feel

embraced, listened to, and understood emotionally." (S10)

"What I need most is a friend, someone who is willing to listen to me and stay by my side." (S25)

Several participants also viewed music videos and multimodal media texts as meaningful educational media that could encourage reflective discussion and social awareness regarding bullying issues in classroom contexts.

These responses show that students viewed bullying prevention not only as institutional responsibility, but also as a relational and educational process that requires emotional safety, peer support, reflective communication, and participatory learning environments.

Table-4
Future-Oriented Expectations toward Supportive School Environments

Category	Number of Student	Student Code
Expectations for anti-bullying policies and counseling support	24	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S17, S18, S19, S22, S24, S25, S26, S27, S28, S30, S32
Importance of teacher, peer, and family support	10	S2, S6, S10, S11, S17, S19, S23, S25, S29, S30
Use of music videos for reflective anti-bullying learning	28	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S16, S18, S19, S20, S21, S23, S24, S25, S26, S27, S28, S29, S31, S32

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that students interpreted *Saving Light* not merely as entertainment, but as a meaningful multimodal text that encouraged reflective interpretation, emotional understanding, and future-oriented perspectives regarding bullying within school environments.

Through symbolic visual representation, emotional atmosphere, gestures, and narrative progression, students connected the music video with their personal and social experiences. The discussion of the findings is presented based on the four major themes identified in the analysis.

Interpretive Responses toward Bullying Representation in the Music Video

The findings reveal that students interpreted *Saving Light* as a symbolic representation of bullying, isolation, emotional struggle, and social exclusion. Most participants expressed empathetic and reflective responses because the scenes closely resembled social realities they had experienced or observed within school environments. The group bullying scene at 0:00–0:28 and the isolated bullying scene at 2:15–2:35 were interpreted as the most realistic representations because students considered these scenes visually similar to actual bullying situations occurring in educational contexts.

These findings support Reader-Response Theory proposed by Rosenblatt (1978), which explains that meaning emerges through interaction between the text and the reader's lived experience. In this study, students actively constructed meaning by relating symbolic visual elements in the music video to their own understanding of bullying and social relationships. The emotional atmosphere, gestures, and visual symbolism within the music video encouraged students to interpret the narrative beyond literal representation.

Previous studies have shown that audiences frequently relate media representation to personal emotions and experiences (Haryanti & Ratna Sari, 2018; Agusta & Wahyuni, 2023). Similarly, the present study confirms that students interpreted bullying representation through empathetic and reflective engagement shaped by their social experiences. However, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that students did not merely respond emotionally to bullying representation, but also interpreted visual symbolism, emotional atmosphere, and narrative progression as reflective representations of social

realities within school environments. This finding suggests that multimodal texts such as music videos may encourage deeper interpretive engagement and reflective meaning construction in EFL learning contexts.

Interestingly, several students also interpreted the ending scenes of the music video as representations of emotional support, friendship, recovery, and social acceptance. This indicates that students' responses were not limited to sadness or emotional discomfort, but also involved reflective interpretation regarding hope and social support. Such interpretive complexity demonstrates that students functioned as active meaning-makers who negotiated personal understanding through symbolic media narratives rather than passively consuming visual texts.

From an educational perspective, the findings suggest that multimodal texts may support reflective classroom discussion and critical literacy development. Music videos containing symbolic narratives and emotional representation can encourage students to interpret social issues critically while simultaneously connecting learning materials with lived experiences and social awareness.

Personal Experience and Meaning Construction through Media Interpretation

The findings indicate that students' personal experiences strongly influenced how they interpreted bullying representation in the music video. Participants who had experienced verbal bullying, intimidation, exclusion, or social rejection tended to connect the symbolic narrative with their own memories and interpersonal experiences. Students who witnessed bullying situations also interpreted the music video through feelings of fear, hesitation, and social insecurity. These findings reinforce Buckingham's (2003) argument that audiences actively negotiate media meaning based on personal background and lived experience. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) explains that adolescents frequently connect media narratives with social realities surrounding them. In the present study, students interpreted the symbolic



representation of bullying not as distant fiction, but as meaningful reflections of experiences occurring within school environments.

The findings are also consistent with Wong et al. (2024), who explain that viewers actively connect multimodal narratives with emotional realities and lived experiences. In this study, students related scenes of isolation, intimidation, and exclusion to their own social memories and observations regarding bullying practices. Nevertheless, the present study broadens previous research by revealing that personal experiences not only influenced emotional interpretation, but also shaped reflective meaning construction regarding interpersonal relationships and social interaction within educational contexts. This means that students were positioned not simply as emotional audiences, but as active interpreters who reconstructed social understanding through media interpretation.

Another important finding is that students who were not direct victims of bullying still interpreted the narrative reflectively because they had witnessed bullying situations around them. This demonstrates that bullying representation affects broader social understanding within school communities rather than only individual victims. Through multimodal interpretation, students reflected on social insecurity, peer relationships, and emotional vulnerability represented in the music video.

Compared to previous audience reception studies that primarily emphasized emotional engagement, the present study further reveals the role of lived experience in shaping reflective interpretation and social awareness. Thus, the study contributes to the growing discussion of multimodal literacy by showing how students construct personal and social meaning simultaneously through symbolic media narratives.

Students' Reflective Perspectives on School Responses to Bullying

The findings reveal that students interpreted school responses to bullying as an important aspect of the social reality represented through the music video. Through reflective evaluation, students

positioned schools, teachers, counseling services, and classroom environments as institutions responsible for creating emotional safety and supportive learning spaces.

Many participants criticized school responses that minimized bullying as "just a joke," because such attitudes discouraged victims from reporting harmful experiences and normalized emotional violence within educational settings. At the same time, students expressed expectations regarding stronger disciplinary policies, counseling support, and active teacher involvement in handling bullying situations.

These findings support Kellner and Share's (2007) argument that media texts may encourage critical awareness and social reflection regarding issues represented in society. Similarly, Hobbs (2010) explains that media literacy may foster reflective learning and participatory engagement within educational contexts. In this study, students did not simply interpret bullying representation emotionally, but also critically evaluated institutional responsibilities within school environments.

Previous audience reception studies mainly focused on emotional reactions toward media representation and bullying narratives (Haryanti & Ratna Sari, 2018; Wong et al., 2024). The present study supports these findings by showing that students responded emotionally to symbolic bullying representation. However, this study further reveals that students also critically examined educational institutions and school responses through reflective interpretation. Participants positioned bullying not only as an interpersonal issue, but also as a social and educational problem requiring institutional awareness and participatory intervention.

Interestingly, several participants described MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan as relatively supportive because of responsive counseling teachers and classroom guardians. This finding demonstrates that students were capable of evaluating school environments critically while simultaneously recognizing positive educational support systems already present in their learning context.

From a literature and language education perspective, these findings suggest that multimodal media interpretation may encourage reflective classroom discussion regarding social responsibility, emotional awareness, and institutional roles in educational settings. Thus, symbolic media texts may contribute not only to interpretive learning but also to reflective educational discourse and participatory classroom engagement.

Future-Oriented Expectations toward Supportive School Environments

One of the most significant findings of this study is that students transformed media interpretation into future-oriented expectations regarding supportive school environments. Participants emphasized that schools should not only respond to bullying after incidents occur, but also establish preventive systems, emotional support mechanisms, and reflective educational practices.

Students frequently expressed expectations regarding clear anti-bullying policies, counseling services, active teacher involvement, and reflective anti-bullying education through music videos and classroom discussion. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of emotional support from peers, teachers, and family members as part of students' recovery and emotional safety.

These findings are closely related to Hope Theory proposed by Snyder (2002), which explains that individuals construct future-oriented thinking through goals, agency, and pathways. In the present study, students demonstrated future-oriented perspectives by expressing expectations regarding safer educational environments and supportive institutional responses. Their responses indicate that interpretation of symbolic media narratives may encourage constructive social awareness and reflective educational thinking.

This finding differs from earlier audience reception studies that primarily focused on interpretation and emotional engagement with media texts. While previous studies mainly

emphasized emotional audience responses toward bullying representation, the present study further demonstrates how students transformed multimodal interpretation into future-oriented expectations regarding supportive school environments. Therefore, the study extends Reader-Response Theory beyond emotional interpretation by integrating Hope Theory to explain how students developed constructive expectations through multimodal engagement.

Another important contribution of this study is the finding that students viewed music videos as meaningful educational media capable of encouraging reflective discussion and social awareness in classroom contexts. This suggests that multimodal texts may support EFL learning not only through language exposure, but also through reflective literacy practices and participatory discussion regarding social issues relevant to students' lived experiences.

Therefore, the present study contributes to the growing discussion of multimodal literacy by demonstrating that students' engagement with symbolic music video narratives may encourage reflective interpretation, institutional awareness, and future-oriented educational perspectives within EFL learning contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that students interpreted *Saving Light* as a reflective multimodal text that encouraged empathy, symbolic interpretation, social awareness, and future-oriented thinking regarding bullying prevention and supportive educational environments.

One important strength of this study is its integration of Reader-Response Theory and Hope Theory to examine students' interpretation of multimodal media texts within educational contexts. Unlike previous studies that mainly emphasized emotional reactions toward bullying representation, the present study explored how students transformed symbolic interpretation into reflective and future-oriented perspectives regarding school environments. In addition, the use of open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to capture more



contextualized and nuanced student responses regarding reflective meaning construction through music video interpretation in EFL learning contexts.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved participants from only one school context, which may limit the broader transferability of the findings to different educational settings. In addition, the study focused primarily on students' self-reported interpretations after a single viewing session of the music video, meaning that longer-term interpretive development and classroom interaction were not explored in depth. Future studies may investigate how repeated engagement with multimodal texts influences reflective interpretation, classroom discussion, and students' critical literacy development over time.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Kota Pekalongan interpreted bullying representation in Gareth Emery's *Saving Light* and how these interpretations developed into reflective and future-oriented perspectives regarding school environments. The findings show that students interpreted the music video as a symbolic representation of bullying, isolation, emotional struggle, and social exclusion through its visual narrative, emotional atmosphere, and symbolic scenes. Students connected the multimodal representation with their own personal experiences, social observations, and understanding of bullying practices within school contexts. This finding indicates that meaning construction emerged through interaction between the symbolic media text and students' lived experiences.

The study also found that students did not respond to the music video emotionally alone, but also reflected critically on school responses toward bullying. Participants emphasized the importance of counseling services, teacher involvement, disciplinary policies, and emotionally supportive educational environments. In addition, students

developed future-oriented expectations regarding safer and more supportive school environments through anti-bullying education, reflective communication, and participatory learning practices. These findings demonstrate that students transformed multimodal interpretation into reflective perspectives and constructive expectations regarding educational contexts.

This study contributes to literature and EFL learning research by showing that music videos may function as meaningful multimodal learning resources that support reflective literacy, social awareness, and participatory discussion within classroom contexts. Through the integration of Reader-Response Theory and Hope Theory, the study reveals that students functioned not only as audiences of media texts, but also as active meaning-makers who constructed reflective understanding and future-oriented perspectives regarding bullying prevention and supportive educational environments.

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