

Research Article

Teaching and Learning of Queer Representation in Sri Lankan English Fiction: A Reception Study within Higher Education Institutions of Sri Lanka

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Research related to reception studies on queer representation in fiction within higher education institutions (HEIs) is a vastly unexplored area in Sri Lanka. This study intends to fill the gap in existing research by prioritising the need to factor in receptors' positions and practices in teaching and learning these works. This research aims to understand, deconstruct, and explore the varied positions and practices of receptors (lecturers and students) in the teaching and learning of a selected Sri Lankan English fiction, *Funny Boy* (1994) by Shyam Selvadurai at local universities. The contextual and pedagogical site selected includes three universities in the Western and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The methodology of the study incorporates a qualitative research design to conduct a reception analysis. The primary data collection methods are in-depth interviews with three lecturers and two students and a focus group discussion with three students. The findings of this research identify and analyse the frames of reference, pedagogies, approaches, and strategies involved in the teaching and learning of the selected fictional work. These enable the analysis of varied reception positions and practices to explore their possibilities of incorporating critical and queer pedagogies to ensure a transformative learning experience within HEIs.

1. Introduction

This research explores the reception of queer representation in Sri Lankan English fiction at higher educational institutions (HEIs). A reception study of the proposed nature offers a sufficient platform to analyse the diverse interpretations of readers as they respond to textual media. This, in turn, opens a study of how such receptors negotiate with the meanings of literature “encountered within specific social, cultural and discursive contexts [1].” A study of reception in Sri Lankan textual media is significant as it complements Zhen’s [2] definition of such media as being cultural productions that are “mass produced” and “disseminated through the mass media” to the society. As different receivers consume such productions, the existing readings, discussions, analyses, and research based on such singular

and multiple cultural productions can be espoused, contradicted, and altogether negated by their readers and audiences.

Doty [3] confronts this complexity by proposing “queerness” as a “mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity.” By the term “queerness [he refers to] queer positions, queer readers, queer readings, and queer discourses [3].” Through such a wide-ranging understanding, this research engages with the reception positions of lecturers and students in the HEIs of Sri Lanka. To interpret the reception of lecturers and students at universities, the concept “horizons of expectations [4]” which Hans Robert Jauss introduces in his reception theory (*rezeptionsästhetik*) has been incorporated.

There has been an increase in research based on queer studies in Sri Lankan fiction in English in the past two decades. These studies have been based on exploring queer identities, aspects, sexualities, expressions, and representations in fiction in relation to writing such as Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Punyakante Wijenaike's *Giraya* and *Blue: Stories for Adults* edited by Ameena Hussein [5–11]. However, these researches are predominantly done on a textual basis and have not particularly factored in the receptor's positions and practices on such productions. A reception study of queer representation in literature is highly significant within the Sri Lankan context. Moreover, it can be noted that the reception positions and practices of lecturers and students in the teaching and learning of queer representation in Sri Lankan English literature are a vastly unexplored area in extant research.

This particular research focuses on the positions and practices of the receptor within the pedagogical context of the higher education institution (HEI). This context has been selected as the fiction is incorporated into the curriculums at universities chosen for this study. Thus, this research explores how the teaching and learning process of queer representation in the selected fiction takes place in the classroom and how lecturers and students discuss, interpret, and respond to it.

The teaching and learning of queer productions within the classroom comprise critical and queer pedagogies. A critical pedagogy inclusive of queer identity is identified as a queer pedagogy. A queer pedagogy, or a queer-inclusive critical pedagogy, involves "studying the definition of how normalcy is constructed within a given society [12]." According to Bach [13], queer pedagogy is "one way of disrupting the normalising processes that can come through course curriculum, texts, and activities." Incorporating critical and queer pedagogies within the classroom would also ensure a transformative learning experience. Transformative learning refers "to a perspective transformation or change in worldview [14]." In order to achieve a learning transformation or change, it is beneficial to establish a foundation to challenge social inequalities and promote a deeper understanding of sociocultural realities. This type of learning is examined in research as a pedagogy which "empowers students to examine critically their beliefs, values, and knowledge with the goal of developing a reflective knowledge base [15]."

Based on this understanding, the reception positions and practices incorporated by the receptors (lecturers and students) of the HEIs that come within the scope of this study are explored. These are discovered with regard to the teaching and learning of the selected Sri Lankan English fiction with queer representation.

As the university is a place where the selected fiction is taught and discussed in the classroom, this research inquires to what extent it is possible to incorporate critical and queer pedagogies to teach and discuss these productions. As such, it explores whether incorporating these pedagogies would lead to a transformative learning experience and whether the reception positions and practices of the lecturers and students foster those possibilities.

Exploring these possibilities of incorporating critical and queer pedagogies to ensure a transformative learning experience would enable realising the aim of this research as well. Thus, the research objective is to understand, examine, and deconstruct the varied positions and practices of receptors in the teaching and learning of the selected fiction at local universities. For the purposes of exploring this reception, this research appraises the diverse pedagogical approaches, concepts, positions, and strategies incorporated in the teaching and learning process.

This study aims to fill the gap in research on queer representation in Sri Lankan English fiction by exploring the significance of prioritising the receptor's positions and practices in teaching and learning the selected fiction. This research enhances the understanding of possibilities, issues, difficulties, and challenges encountered in the teaching and learning process of queer literature in the Sri Lankan higher educational context.

This study is concerned with two main research questions:

What frames of reference are involved in teaching and learning the selected fictional work?

What are the pedagogies, approaches, and strategies involved in the teaching and learning process of the selected production at Sri Lankan universities?

In this research, the term queer is referred to within a broad mapping of queer identity, queer individuals, queer representations, queer visibility, queer expressions, and queer sexualities. All these terms are employed to refer to the various conceptualisations of queer in the selected fiction to which the receptors respond. This usage of the term in the field of reception studies draws from the pivotal work of Alexander Doty [3] who identifies queer or queerness as associated with any "expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or antistaight [which] includes specifically gay, lesbian, and bisexual expressions; but [. . .] also includes all other potential (and potentially unclassifiable) non-straight positions." This utilisation allows a flexible space in this research to analyse the varied reception positions of lecturers and students in responding to the queer representations in the selected work.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teaching and Learning Practices in Sri Lanka. Ample research has been conducted on teaching and learning practices in schools and HEIs in Sri Lanka. Such studies include research on university facilities and student satisfaction in the country [16]. Furthermore, in the present context, there has been considerable research based on online and distance education within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, Gamage & Zaber [17] survey the accessibility to Internet or TV and good practices of distance education at schools. Furthermore, Haththotuwa & Rupasingha [18] identify the devices students use to access online learning and discuss the popularity of the University Learning Management System (LMS) and Zoom at private and public universities in the

country. Ilankoon, Kisokanth & Warnakulasuriya [19] have studied the challenges faced by the nursing undergraduate students of Sri Lanka due to the pandemic. Apart from the studies mentioned above, which identify and examine the challenges and impact of Covid-19 in teaching and learning practice at schools and universities in Sri Lanka, there have also been studies which explore the challenges of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools in the country [20].

Although the above studies give evidence on research which explores the challenges faced by students and teachers in Sri Lanka, there is a lack of sufficient research conducted within the scope of teaching and learning literature at schools and universities. The available research is by Premawardhena [21] on the challenges and perspectives of introducing literature into foreign language studies at universities in Sri Lanka. This research is particularly significant as it identifies the strategies used in introducing literature in foreign language teaching. These include ones like designing the curriculum to incorporate literature “familiar to Sri Lankan audiences, such as Brecht’s *Mother Courage* or *Chalk Circle* [21]” in the German studies classroom, making audio-visual material and translations of literary work readily available for the students and integrating simplified texts in the Chinese and Japanese studies classroom.

As Premawardhena [21] states, this study also identifies strategies in teaching and learning practice. However, it is within the scope of studying the reception of teaching and learning Sri Lankan English literature with queer representation, an area that has not been specifically studied in extant research.

2.2. Queer Representation in Sri Lankan English Fiction. Several researchers in previous research have explored queer representation in Sri Lankan English fiction. In the Sri Lankan English writing field, Jazeel [6] examines the queer identity in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* concerning the concept of “sexualised geographies.” On the other hand, Prateek [22] refers to the representation of queer sexualities in the novel to elaborate on how the author “debunk [s] pre-conceived notions of a heterosexual literary text.” Gairola [23] reads *Funny Boy* as a “counter-bildungsroman narrative.” Bakshi [8] shifts the emphasis from queer spaces and stereotypes.

Wijewardene [10] also represents queer sexualities in Sri Lankan English writing in her study based on the short story collection *Blue: Stories for Adults* edited by Ameena Hussein. Siriwardena [9] also examines Sri Lankan writing in English to analyse the representation of queer identity based on five novels, including Punyakante Wijenaike’s *Giraya* and *Amulet*, Romesh Gunasekara’s *Reef*, Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, and Susunaga Weeraperuma’s *Sunil, The Struggling Student*. The relevance of Wijewardene’s paper to this particular research is that Wijewardene’s paper was delivered as a part of the Faculty of Arts’ research conference at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Siriwardena presented her paper at a Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences conference at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

At both conferences, students and lecturers were a part of the audience. Although the papers are not directly related to the teaching and learning process of Sri Lankan English literature, they are part of disseminating knowledge. Moreover, although their reception was not directly studied in both papers, they were within the academic context of the local HEI.

2.3. The Study of Reception. It is imperative to trace the theoretical strands and empirical studies on reception studies within the context of this research, as they are intrinsically interwoven and interlinked together.

Presently, empirical studies of queer representation in literature include those by Wallace [24] who explores the reception histories of the mid-twentieth century queer novels *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes, *Two Serious Ladies* by Jane Bowles, and *Giovanni’s Room* by James Baldwin. She refers to scholarly analyses, reviews from newspapers and magazines, and online discussions on Goodreads and Amazon.

This research predominantly draws from the phenomenological reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss to explore the reception positions and practices of receptors. In ascertaining the pedagogical significance of reception theory, Jauss [4] establishes that a literary work is never completely new and never appears in an “informational vacuum.” He says that it constantly responds and relates to cultural and historical concepts. The way in which a literary work was first received by its readers creates “historical horizons of expectations [4].” There is a dialogue created between these historical horizons of expectations and the diverse “horizons of expectations [4]” of readers within different temporal and spatial contexts and these dialogues impact changes in terms of the interpretation of a literary text.

Horizons of expectations refer to the criteria readers apply to understand and evaluate literary texts during any given period. The horizons’ dimensions include historical, cultural, and social contexts [25]. According to Jauss [26], a dialogue is created when the readers expand, change, and modify their own expectations through the lens and experience of the unfamiliar past horizons of the text. The reader receives prior knowledge in terms of understanding the historical horizons of expectations and this determines his ability “to converse with the remote, unfamiliar voice of the ‘historical horizons of expectations’, [which] influences and mediates the process of making meaning [27].”

This research analyses Jauss’s concept of the horizons of expectations in relation to the reception positions and practices of lecturers and students within the higher education context. This is feasible considering how Yael Poyas [27] extends this theoretical concept to situate it in “the cultural context of classroom discourse [which is the] starting point to classroom discussion.” Based on this premise, Poyas [27] further establishes that the psychological and cultural meanings of these horizons can be explored as “interpretation is situational and as such is shaped and constrained by the historically relative criteria of a particular

culture, society and period, as well as by the psychological, social and cultural worlds of individual readers” within the classroom. This interpretation of Poyas [27] is applied to the current study to critically analyse how the perceptions of receptors based on classroom discussions at Sri Lankan HEIs on the selected fiction can be motivated and influenced by their sociocultural and psychological contexts.

Furthermore, this research particularly engages with the horizons of expectations of lecturers. It refers to the “horizons of pedagogical expectations [27]” which Poyas terms to denote the educator’s pedagogical approaches and strategies to teach literary work. Poyas [27] uses these to examine the dilemma and conflicts faced by receptors, particularly when the students’ horizons of expectations encounter the teachers’ horizons of pedagogical expectations. The current study draws from them to interpret such situations where conflicts can occur in the teaching-learning process.

2.4. Frames of References, Pedagogy of Discomfort, Difficult Knowledge, and Queer Pedagogy. This research explores the receptors’ encounters with the selected fiction. In analysing it, this study focuses on the frames of reference of lecturers and students to examine their reception. Moreover, as the research setting is based on the pedagogical site of HEIs, theoretical and empirical research on pedagogy is reviewed to study the reception.

In engaging with the horizons of expectations, this research refers to how the students’ and lecturers’ horizons of expectations are shaped according to their “frames of references [28]” through which they perceive and engage with the selected fiction with queer representations. This research explores how these frames impact and conflict with the prior knowledge, horizons of expectations, and horizons of pedagogical expectations of lecturers and students and thereby conflict with the realisation of a transformative teaching and learning experience. This can be particularly seen in making the university syllabus queer-inclusive and teaching fiction with queer representations in the university classroom. According to Mezirow [29], frames of reference can include “fixed interpersonal relationships, political orientations, cultural bias, ideologies, schemata, stereotyped attitudes and practices, occupational habits of mind, religious doctrine, moral-ethical norms, psychological preferences and schema [and] aesthetic values and standards.” The current study observes that the classroom becomes a pedagogical site of discomfort when analysing such frames of reference of lecturers and students via their horizons of expectations of queer representation in the selected work. This research contends this phenomenon considering the pedagogical possibilities of difficult knowledge and emotionality in education.

A concept related to emotionality in education is the pedagogy of discomfort which was put forward by Megan Boler [30]. It refers to educational efforts to disrupt the deeply rooted and often unspoken biases, prejudices, ideologies, and essentialist understandings of students and educators on perceiving the world, to produce different and alternate modes of perception. This process of changing and disrupting ideological assumptions of learners can uproot

them from their “comfort zone [and they will be required to inhabit] a space of discomfort [which subverts dominant social narratives and practices and are thus] fraught with emotional landmines [30].”

The construct of “difficult knowledge [31]” refers to social and historical content which can be cognitively and emotionally destabilising for the learner. According to Britzman [31], although university students are adults and despite being subjected to a “proliferation of sexual images and meanings in everyday life”, many students and university educators find sexuality as difficult knowledge to talk openly out in public. “Open discussion is [usually] inhibited by a multitude of discourses in which sexuality is socially constituted as private, embarrassing, taboo and danger filled [32].” The present study observed that Sri Lankan universities become a site of pedagogical discomfort due to discussions of sexuality, mainly when teaching about queer sexualities in the classroom. These are discussed in this study under the various frames of reference which are drawn from the students’ and lecturers’ horizons of expectations.

Furthermore, as this research involves the teaching of queer representation in the selected fiction, it draws from a theoretical concept involved in the framework of queer pedagogy, the usage of the victim trope.

Extant research perceives the representation of the queer youth as framed “overwhelmingly in terms of oppression and victimisation [33].” Within the hegemonic discourse, queer identities would be framed as “victims-in need-of-tolerance-and-inclusion [or as] just like everyone else [33].” This is a “defensive, standardising response to the victim troupe” which would lead to actively undermining, devaluing and deemphasising “queer agency [34].” This fosters an essentialist understanding and an “iterative labour [35]” in producing queer sexualities within a framework that neutralises and naturalises victimhood. Previous research [33, 34] refers to Judith Butler [35] to explain how this is realised in terms of “the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigidly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being.” The current study also draws from this usage of the victim trope to analyse the reception of the research participants.

Thus, it is evident that research related to reception studies on queer representation in fiction within the local university setting is a vastly unexplored area in Sri Lanka. This study intends to fill the gap in existing research by prioritising the need to factor in receptors’ positions and practices in teaching and learning the selected work within the pedagogical context of the HEI of Sri Lanka. This research draws from theoretical and empirical research on reception studies, knowledge, and pedagogy to realise the above-stated intention.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overall Research Design. This study applies a qualitative research design to conduct a reception analysis. Scholarly work of literature based on reception is also called reader-response criticism. However, considering that it is the reception of readers and viewers that is studied in the fields of

reader-response criticism and reception theory, researchers such as Newton [36] use the terms interchangeably in his work. That is the practice that has been employed in the present study as well.

The methodologies incorporated in previous research on reception studies vary, such as qualitative, mixed-method, and quantitative studies. Dhaenens [37], in his reception study, justifies his methodology on the basis that the qualitative design allows selecting a focus group method to explore and compare how groups articulate opinions and experiences. On the other hand, Dhoest [38] asserts how incorporating “in-depth interviews [in Dhoest’s reception study allowed a] deep, holistic, contextualised view on a broad range of media uses which are interconnected and related to the person’s life and context.”

This particular research has also employed a qualitative research design as qualitative reception studies would enable an in-depth conceptualisation of how receptors “embrace, negotiate and resist [39]” texts by engaging in an examination of their “thoughts, perceptions, influences and feelings [39].” Thus, the qualitative research design has enabled studying such subjective reception positions and practices of lecturers and students within local universities.

This qualitative research design has been applied to the reception analysis conducted for the present study by utilising qualitative data collection methods such as in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. These are explored in-depth under the subtitle data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, a diagram of the conceptual framework down below depicts how the reception analysis of lecturers and students has been conducted (see Figure 1).

As mentioned in the diagram, three factors were considered to determine the reception of the receptors (lecturers and students): the horizons of expectations and horizons of pedagogical expectations, frames of reference, and the pedagogical context of the HEIs. This research identified similarities and patterns between the horizons of students and lecturers at HEIs and instances where they conflict with each other. The reception was also determined based on variables such as the frames of reference of the receptors, the palatability of the victim trope and queer within an overarching religious ideology. Furthermore, as the reception is based on the pedagogical context of HEIs, the variables such as the pedagogies, approaches, and strategies incorporated in the teaching-learning process were analysed.

3.2. Selected Fiction, Research Setting, and Research Participants. The fiction selected for this research includes *Funny Boy*, published in 1994 by Shyam Selvadurai. It is largely viewed as a canonical literary work in Sri Lankan writing in English [40]. It is also a novel included in the curriculum of several English degrees offered by HEIs in Sri Lanka.

It is a story set around the coming of age of Arjie Chelvaratnam, a Sri Lankan Tamil boy from an upper-middle class Colombo family, set against escalating political tensions in Sri Lanka during the seven years leading up to the 1983 riots. Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* engages with the

expression of queer sexuality and desire, such as Arjie’s sexual awakening and the complexities of the relationship between Arjie and Shehan: the school peer with whom Arjie falls in love. The novel has been internationally acknowledged by winning the Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Lambda Literary Award in the US (Refer to <https://shyamselvadurai.com/>). A Canadian drama film version of the book directed by Deepa Mehta was released in December 2020 and won three Canadian Screen Awards in 2021 (Refer to: <https://www.themorning.lk/funny-boy-wins-three-canadian-screen-awards/>). (Anthony, V. (May 27, 2021). “Funny Boy wins three Canadian Screen Awards.” *The Sunday Morning*. Retrieved June 22, 2022).

The purposive sampling method was employed. Among the categories of purposive sampling, homogenous sampling was used to specifically focus on a subgroup from the pedagogical context in the HEIs. The members of this subgroup, lecturers and students have been particularly selected based on the criteria that they teach and study Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* in the degree programmes of their universities.

Accordingly, three HEIs in the Western and Eastern provinces in Sri Lanka were selected to cover the research setting. The HEIs chosen from the Western province are referred to as university A and university B. The university from the country’s Eastern province is denoted as university C. All universities offer Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* in their degree programmes.

By incorporating homogenous sampling, three lecturers and five students were selected from the pedagogical context of the three HEIs in Sri Lanka. A table with their identification, pseudonym, gender, university and degree, and interview type is given below (see Table 1).

This reception study refers to its research participants as receptors to indicate both lecturers and students. This is considering that this research identifies both these groups as readers who respond, perceive, and interpret the selected fiction in diverse and varied manners. The receptors are also recognised as lecturers and students when explicitly referring to their particular receptive positions and practices in analysing the data.

The lecturers teach units in English literature offered by undergraduate degree programmes at universities A, B, and C. All five students from universities A and B pursue an undergraduate degree in English in the Western province.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis. Engaging in qualitative data analysis methods such as in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion offered this research the possibility of engaging in a profound, reflective, and critical analysis of the positions and practices of the receptors.

According to Given [41], incorporating qualitative research design into reception analysis became widespread during the 1980s within the scope of media studies. Researchers developed an interest in investigating the “processes for the reception and mediation of information that both duplicated and reconstructed social structures [41].” At present, the field has rapidly expanded to incorporate research based on literary studies, movies, television series, theatre studies, educational contexts, and many more.

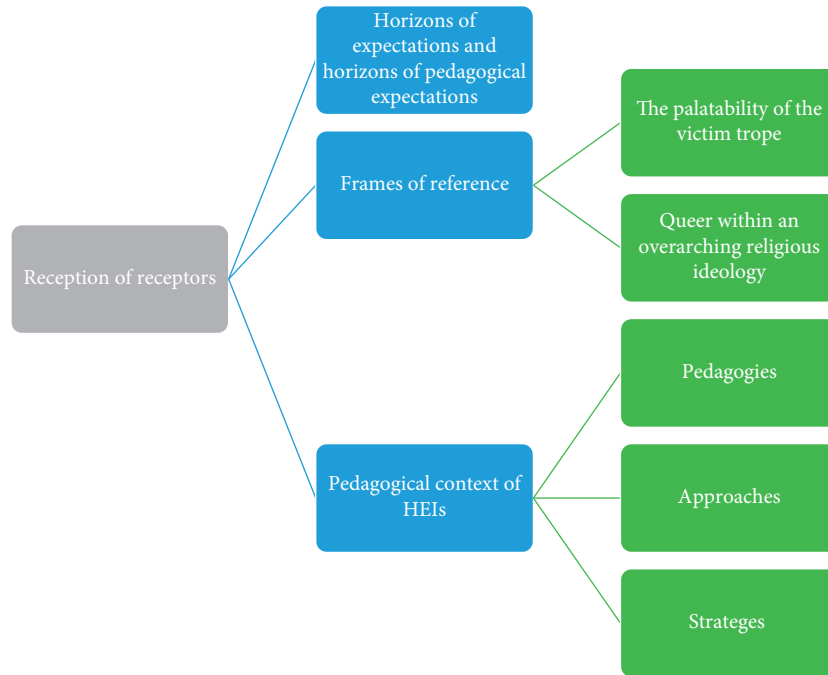


FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

TABLE 1: Information on research participants.

Identification	Pseudonym	Gender	University and degree (teaching/following)	Interview type
Lecturer	Waruni	Female	University A Teaching: Internal undergraduate degree in English and an external undergraduate degree in English at university A	In-depth interview
Lecturer	Nadee	Female	University B Teaching: Internal undergraduate degree in English at university B	In-depth interview
Lecturer	Richard	Male	University C Teaching: Internal undergraduate degree with English literature course units at university C	In-depth interview
Student	Umedha	Female	University A Following: Internal undergraduate degree in English	Focus group discussion
Student	Sanduni	Female	University A Following: Internal undergraduate degree in English	Focus group discussion
Student	Amanda	Female	University A Following: Internal undergraduate degree in English	Focus group discussion
Student	Reverend Timothy (Buddhist clergy)	Male	University B Following: Internal undergraduate degree in English	In-depth interview
Student	Reverend Soma (Buddhist clergy)	Male	University B Following: Internal undergraduate degree in English	In-depth interview

Qualitative data collection methods in reception studies include “ethnography, interviewing, focus groups, and observational methods [42].” This study also uses in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion as data collection methods. This research focuses on the subjective reception of research participants, incorporating in-depth interviews with three lecturers and two students as a data collection method, and has allowed the possibility of building an effective interconnection between the researcher and research participants. This made the participants feel comfortable sharing insightful responses and openly discussing their views, attitudes, and biases regarding “difficult knowledge [31]” such as the representation of sexuality in literature.

This method also aided the researcher in paying attention to the minute details such as the tone, use of vocabulary, and nonverbal expressions of the research participants. The focus group discussion is another data collection method in this study. The difference between the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions used in this research is that, unlike in-depth interviews, which allow engaging in a profound discussion with one participant, focus group discussions enable the identification of key people to have a productive discussion. In this case, the key participants were undergraduates from university A who had studied Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* together in one class. Accordingly, the researcher played the role of the moderator of the discussion to gather

information on diverse reception positions and practices of the receptors while developing an insightful discussion in-between the respondents.

The interviews were conducted in the year 2020. The majority of interviews lasted fifty minutes. The interviews with the three lecturers and three students in the focus group discussion were conducted in English. One interview with a student at university B in the Western province was conducted in his native language Sinhala as he preferred to use his native language to express his thoughts clearly. As all interviews were done in English and Sinhala, two interview guides were used as a research tool for data gathering purposes. One interview guide was prepared in English and translated into Sinhala for lecturers. The other guide was also prepared in English and translated into Sinhala for university students.

Data analysis took the form of a thematic analysis. Thus, the data obtained from the interviews were coded and the themes were generated based on their patterns. These themes and subthemes are explored in this research's results, discussion, and analysis.

In analysing these themes and subthemes, this research mainly draws from the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss. At the heart of Jauss's [4] reception theory is the reader/receptor to whom he gives substantial significance in terms of "how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work." Although Jauss refers to the contemporary reader, his concepts have been used by scholars within the pedagogical site of educational institutions in examining the study of literature in the classroom. Scholars like Zhang [43] incorporate these to interpret the reception positions and practices of the educator and students in teaching and learning classical Chinese poetry in the US and Canada. Poyas [27] also incorporates Jauss's concepts to interpret the reception of the educator and students in terms of teaching literature in the Israeli context. The present study also engages with Jauss's concepts to refer to diverse perceptions of lecturers and students within the academic context of Sri Lanka.

3.4. Ethical Concerns and Considerations. This research negotiated with the ethical implications of interviewing certain students who were reluctant and uncomfortable with learning about queer sexualities in literature in the classroom due to their varying frames of reference to assure reliability and validity. However, this research minimised any harm and emotional distress by encouraging them to openly discuss their problems, biases, and experiences. This study further offered them assurance in ensuring privacy under the basis of its ethical considerations.

This researcher critically analyses the respondents' biases within the HEIs of Sri Lanka. In doing so, the current study has assured reliability and validity in circumventing researcher bias. This has been done by avoiding analysis bias by exploring diverse subjective perceptions of receptors which are similar and conflicting. Furthermore, participant bias was avoided as much as possible within the context of HEIs in Sri Lanka. This was realised by selecting two data

collection methods (in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion), interviews with lecturers and students, and the selection of two provinces in Sri Lanka.

This is a part of the MA study that this researcher has completed at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research has obtained permission from the responsible ethics committee, the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo in Sri Lanka, to conduct the study. This research also assured all the participants that it was entirely based on voluntary participation and obtained their informed consent to participate. The participants were allowed to withdraw their consent at any given time, as mentioned in both English and Sinhala languages in the informed consent sheets of this research. All interviewees gave their consent to record the interviews. They were also offered sufficient time to read the information sheets which were prepared in both English and Sinhala languages for this research. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were assured as pseudonyms were used instead of the actual names, and specific university affiliations were not mentioned.

The management of data was also properly executed. The data collected through interviews were properly managed in a password-protected document and will be kept in a computer for five years before being permanently deleted. Any paper-based information will be destroyed after five years. This study will not be using the data in a way that the interview participants will be identified in public presentations and publications without their permission.

4. Results, Discussion, and Analysis

Under this subtitle, this research discusses the results of the data obtained via interviews with lecturers and students to analyse their reception based on the teaching and learning of the selected Sri Lankan English fiction with queer representation at HEIs. These are explored by deconstructing biases, preconceived notions, ideologies, sociocultural beliefs, and diverse subject positions of receptors.

In investigating this context, this study appraises the diverse pedagogical approaches, concepts, positions, and strategies within the teaching and learning process of the selected fiction.

It has drawn the following frames of reference to analyse the responses obtained from the receptors within those frames. The two predominant frames of reference this study has drawn include the palatability of the victim trope and queer within an overarching religious ideology.

4.1. The Palatability of the Victim Trope. Based on the reception of the research participants, this research observes a pattern in terms of validating and understanding victimhood. I identify these notions within the theoretical concept of "victim trope [33, 34]," which is widely used as a framework to foster understanding and consideration of queer sexualities. This conceptualisation can be observed in teaching and discussing Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* at universities A and B in the Western province.

Although university A has a strong basis of Buddhist ideology, within the department which offers an undergraduate degree in English, the dissemination of knowledge is not limited or restricted to a Buddhist ideological framework. Through the interviews with the lecturers and students who were interviewed for this study, it can be observed that, despite certain biases and expectations discussed in-depth in this research, there are several attempts to teach literature in an open, unbiased, and progressive manner.

Waruni is a lecturer attached to university A who has several years of experience teaching Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* for the internal batches at the university. Through the data obtained from her interview, this research analyses her frames of reference based on her prior experiences, biases, and interpersonal negotiations with her students. These have led her to believe that the students at university A would not find queer sexualities and desires palatable. She said, "In my classroom discussions, I have noted there is extreme sympathy directed at Arjie in terms of his positioning and dilemma and disdain against Arjie's father. My students always seem to perceive Arjie as a victim and understand his victimhood. They would understand homosexuality if it is projected in an external manner and if it is projected in terms of the character's victimhood. However, I do not think they would just understand the expression of queer sexuality if it is depicted as an act of desire. They would not be able to stomach it."

This research perceives that Waruni discerns her students would only be receptive to learning about queer representation in this novel, given that it is studied within certain boundaries. In terms of identifying such parameters, this study draws from the theoretical concept of the victim trope. This is because Waruni believes her students will be able to find queer representation in *Funny Boy* palatable if it is studied in relation to the state of victimhood. This is because she considers that this state has the capability to arouse pity and sympathy in her students toward the character. This research explores Waruni's reception position as an indication that she regards her students will not be receptive to knowledge on queer representation if it is studied outside the parameters of victimhood, such as in terms of the expression of queer desire in class. This study contends this to her understanding of lecturing on the expression of queer desire within the undergraduate classroom as "difficult knowledge [31]" which would involve a "pedagogy of discomfort [30]."

Moreover, Waruni's horizons of expectations mirror those of her students from university A. This was evident in the focus group discussion conducted for this research with three undergraduates based on their reception of *Funny Boy*, which was discussed in Waruni's class. The students' reception practices implied a level of comfort when talking about queer sexualities. However, the discussion regarding Arjie's sexuality emphasised a tendency to associate the victim trope with the representation of queer identity in the novel.

The participants observed the following concerning the reception of the expression of queer desire between Shehan and Arjie in *Funny Boy*.

Umedha (student) from university A: "I felt very sad about Arjie. He was suppressed by his family and he suffered a lot. We felt sympathetic towards his suppression and how the society viewed him."

Sanduni (student) from university A: "I particularly sympathised with how Arjie was restricted during his childhood, like when he was not allowed to play with the girls and was forced to play cricket, a game that is identified as a stereotypically masculinised sport."

Amanda (student) from university A: "a child should have the freedom to play whatever he wants, but Arjie's agency is suppressed in the novel. Selvadurai depicts his family and also the Tamil culture in a very rigid and oppressive light."

The students' reception positions convey their sympathy towards Arjie's dilemma and crisis in coming to terms with his sexuality. They were also very willing to openly discuss Arjie's circumstances in the focus group discussion with the researcher. Considering the students' easy acceptance and emotive language used in discussing these topics, it can be observed that they did not express any hesitancy or reluctance to converse about topics on queer identities related to victimhood. Thus, this research argues that these students do not associate discussions about queer identity in the novel with the pedagogy of discomfort and difficult knowledge.

The students' tendency to emphasise victimhood concerning the queer representation in *Funny Boy* can also be due to their understanding of the novel in relation to its past horizons. This study engages with Jauss's [4] historical horizons of expectations to posit that the students' horizons are motivated by the prior knowledge based on the novel. These can incorporate scholarly work which refers to the state of victimhood concerning Arjie's queer identity. For instance, Gopinath [5] engages with homophobia in *Funny Boy*. Jazeel [6] identifies that Arjie is subjected to a process of "double marginalisation" considering the racial discrimination he faces in "public spaces" due to his Tamil identity and because of his "emerging sexuality [in the] home space." Lo [7] identifies how geographical spaces such as home and school normalise carnal desires in a society that operates with anti-homosexual legislation.

Thus, the students' horizons of expectations can be motivated by the prior knowledge and the knowledge they received within "the cultural context of the classroom discourse [27]" at Waruni's classroom discussions based on *Funny Boy*.

4.1.1. The Victim Trope as a Teaching Strategy. This research observes that the victim trope is also used as a teaching strategy to develop sensitivity and a positive understanding of queer sexualities. This is discussed in relation to the pedagogical context of university C in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka.

The internal undergraduate degree at University C offers the students several English literature course units. Richard, a lecturer at this university, shared his experiences on the challenges he has encountered in engaging in classroom discussions involving themes related to sexuality. In

exploring his horizons of expectations and frames of reference, this research argues that his deliberations are based on his perceptions, prior experiences, and exposure to the students' cultural contexts. He shared, "Our students are usually girls (40 girls and perhaps 1 or 2 boys) and it is a big challenge for me to teach them literary work which engages in discussions related to queer sexuality as their level of English is not good and they are from families where these kinds of topics are never openly spoken."

Richard perceives that the students' frames of reference are based on their conventional upbringings and the difficulties they have faced in terms of their level of English proficiency. This research perceives that his reception position can be interpreted within the understanding that discussions regarding queer sexualities would involve a pedagogy of discomfort and the dissemination of difficult knowledge.

At university C, the only book with overt queer representation studied in the syllabus (among international and national literary work) is Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. The only other book which engages with covert queer visibility in the entire syllabus is Carl Muller's *The Jam Fruit Tree*. In this interview, Richard elaborated on a teaching strategy he incorporates in the classroom as a point of initiation to discuss gender and sexuality in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. When he started talking about queer identities, he said that the students nonverbally indicated their discomfort by refusing to hold eye contact with the lecturer and focused on only looking at their books, suggesting a refusal to look up. Richard faced this challenge in the classroom by sharing third-hand accounts of lived experiences. He said, "I started to share a personal story about my friend who was rejected from his family as a result of his sexual orientation to make my students respond in a sympathetic way towards sexual minorities in Sri Lanka."

This researcher interprets this as a teaching strategy that incorporates the narration of stories within the classroom to build sympathy and understanding among the students about queer individuals. Cavanaugh [44] recognises this strategy as "a great tool for educators to initiate conversations about gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms [and one which will aid in promoting] sustained inclusivity." Through this strategy of sharing stories and lived experiences, Richard attempts to provoke critical thinking by making students aware and understand social inequalities and the marginalisation of queer identities in Sri Lankan society. Although this research perceives that this strategy emphasises the usage of the victim trope, it also recognises the merits of Richard's objective; which is to challenge heteronormativity and to develop a comfortable and conducive space for learning in the classroom so that the students will be able to engage in a queer reading of the novel. This research observes that Richard emphasises the need to look at gender and sexuality flexibly and fluidly to achieve this. It perceives his horizons of pedagogical expectations as an attempt to challenge his students to look beyond their own frames of reference.

Richard further said that this strategy was effective as though the students did not verbally ask questions, they started to indicate a sense of comfort and security

nonverbally. His frames of reference and horizons of expectations show his priority given to the importance of interpreting eye contact within the pedagogical space of the classroom in the HEI. He relies on it as a standard measurement to observe student interaction and engagement with classroom discussions involving difficult knowledge. He said, "The moment I started sharing personal narratives and lived experiences I noticed that they began to make eye contact again. They did not look uncomfortable in the classroom; instead, they looked interested and this gave me the confidence to continue the lecture. I always believe that sharing these stories helps make the students feel normal about queer, welcoming them to not look at it as a taboo subject and an anomaly."

Within the pedagogical context of the classroom, eye contact is given significance as a "powerful tool [to build] positive relationships [45]" between teachers and students. Extant Research [46] observes that in the classroom "[w]ith friendly eye-contacts, the teachers, can convey communion and give the agency to the engaged students" and that "students' eye contact initiatives and gaze aversion" can provide vital information for the educator. Thus, this research argues that Richard specifically relies on direct eye contact to convey student engagement, participation, and interest. It believes that the educator's interpretations of the students' eye contact and gaze aversion are essential in the classroom. However, this study also perceives that the students' reasons for eye contact and averting their gaze can also be due to numerous reasons which might not be immediately transparent to the educator as they do not verbally articulate them.

In further elaborating on his views on this strategy Richard said, "I believe this is a friendly approach to making students understand queer sexualities. I share these stories with them and ask them to consider the possibility that there might be sexual minorities around us who might not be willing to openly come out in the society and be confident enough to tell it out aloud. Appealing to their sympathy helps me to enable them to perceive queer as something normal because otherwise, this entire discussion of gender and sexuality would be difficult in the classroom."

Thus, this research interprets Richard's use of this strategy as an attempt to foster a safe space to alleviate the discomfort created by disseminating difficult knowledge. It perceives the challenge on the part of Richard in creating a sense of safety and security in the classroom at university C to circumvent the possibility of it becoming "a space of discomfort [30]." This study observes that to create such a space, he integrates personal narratives as a strategy to promote visibility for queer identities to make learners respect and understand differences and nonnormativity.

This research further interprets Richard's strategy as referring to unconscious habits and practices framed by hegemonic myths and cultural discourses that validate and rationalise inequality and oppression. Thus, Richard's frames of reference and horizons of expectations indicate his positive motivation to incorporate this teaching strategy to sensitise students to queer identities in the classroom. However, despite his attempts, he unconsciously emphasises

and validates the dominant and hegemonic victim trope that is stereotypically associated with queer sexualities. Thus, there is a risk in incorporating this strategy as it can create an essentialist perception and understanding by neutralising and naturalising victimhood with regard to queer individuals. This would conflict with the realisation of a transformative learning experience. This is because this teaching strategy has the possibility of promoting a problematic understanding of the “queer [individual] subject as one entirely made knowable through their vulnerability to victimisation [34].” Furthermore, this research returns to Boler [30] to interpret Richard’s objectives. It contends that Richard’s intentions are motivated by concerns about establishing a comfortable pedagogical context to engage with difficult knowledge such as queer sexualities in the classroom. However, his strategy is problematic to a certain extent as it is framed by a validation of stereotypes associated with queer identities.

Moreover, this research critiques Richard’s way of incorporating personal narratives by drawing from the theoretical concept of a “queer-safe approach [44]”, which offers the danger of endorsing a perception of the queer individual as a victim. According to Cavanaugh [44], “[w]hile intervention is crucial to stop behaviour that harms [queer] people, queer-safe spaces do not necessarily disrupt the thinking that informs discriminatory behaviour. It is a behaviour-curbing approach.” Thus, rather than emphasising victimhood, it is also essential to offer stories or personal narratives which deviate from such stereotypes to promote a “queer(ed) space [that] disrupts privileging normalcy over difference [44].” Thus, this research believes Richard has achieved positive changes in his classroom via using personal narratives as a teaching strategy. Nevertheless, using the victim trope to teach and discuss queer sexualities in literature can potentially lead to a reaffirmation of fixed identities and privileging normalcy and heteronormativity. This can conflict with the realisation of a transformative learning experience.

4.2. Queer within an Overarching Religious Ideology. University B also has a Buddhist ideological framework. Based on these interviews conducted with the receptors of this university, a few factors can be observed considering the dissemination of knowledge within the HEI. At this university, the religious ideological expectations and promotion of Buddhist culture and philosophy are appropriated to the teaching and learning process of literary work.

In her interview, the lecturer Nadee shared her perceptions and experiences of teaching Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* at university B. In analysing her horizons of pedagogical expectations of the students, this research asserts that Nadee is meticulous considering how she delivers her lectures based on the discussion of sexuality in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*. She points out that, “The students in this university are very conservative and I have reverends who attend my classes. So I have to be very careful with how I deliver the lecture. When I was teaching *Funny Boy*, I tried to make the students sympathise with Arjie by explaining how he suffers

in the society due to not espousing the standard of heteronormativity. I have to confess that I did not dedicate much time to this discussion of sexuality. I took more time to explain about the political and ethnic issues in the book.”

Through Nadee’s reception positions and practices, this research identifies her frames of reference and horizons of expectations. These have been influenced by the ideological framework of university B, which promotes the dissemination of Buddhist philosophy in teaching literature. They have also been based on her prior experiences as an educator who has familiarised herself with the contextual factors of university B. She has determined the reception positions and practices of her students at university B (such as being “conservative” and having “reverends who attend [her] classes”) based on the students’ backgrounds and identities. To a certain extent, this research perceives that these can come across as a projection of Nadee’s biases, preconceived notions and generalised understandings of the students at university B. This is because she identifies that her students are conservative and thus unable to engage with the emotional labour that comes with the critical engagement with difficult knowledge. However, this research also believes that it is crucial to acknowledge the validity of her views and perceptions as an educator. This is in terms of the sensitivity and consideration she has developed due to her prior experiences of teaching, interacting, and observing the students at her university.

Nevertheless, this research certainly identifies that by explaining these reasons, Nadee is attempting to justify her rationale for carefully controlling the themes discussed in the classroom. This is because knowledge about queer sexualities can be categorised as difficult knowledge which would involve a pedagogy of discomfort. Thus, her teaching strategy to mitigate this conundrum is making the discussions on queer sexualities palatable by validating and emphasising the victim trope with relation to the queer representation in Selvadurai’s novel.

This study shares the perceptions of Reverend Timothy, Buddhist clergy and student from university B to interpret the students’ reception at the HEI towards learning about queer representation in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*. He said that, though he is originally not from Sri Lanka, he understood when the lecturer explained the difficulties of queer individuals and how they can be reflected in Arjie’s “struggles, suffering, how he was rejected from his family and society for being gay, his marginalisation and his otherness.” Thus, it can be observed that the horizons of expectations of the student (Reverend Timothy) and the horizons of pedagogical expectations of his lecturer, Nadee from university B do not seem to conflict in this case. This is because Reverend Timothy does not demonstrate resistance to learning about queer identities, and his reception position is an attempt to understand the situational circumstances of Arjie. However, Reverend Timothy’s opinion is also framed based on the dominant Buddhist ideological assumption of suffering due to *karma*. He shared, “I don’t think being a homosexual is wrong according to Buddhist philosophy, but the reason why queer people suffer like Arjie does in the book is because of their past karma. It is because of the bad deeds they committed in their past lives that they are born like this in this life.”

Thus, it can be observed that Reverend Timothy's horizons of expectations are located in a Buddhist ideological perspective. His understanding is based on the idea that the rejection Arjie undergoes as a queer individual is perceived as suffering, resulting from the Buddhist ideological assumption of past *karma*.

In Sri Lanka, there have been incidents where Buddhist reverends have given homophobic statements to the press, openly demonstrating their resistance against queer individuals (See: <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-homophobia-our-silence/>). There has also been a controversial incident that sparked many debates when a writer called Shakthika Sathkumara, who published a short story called "Ardha" on 15 February 2019 publicly on social media was arrested by the police. This story is based on the life of a former monk and engages with "themes of homosexuality and alludes to an instance of possible sexual abuse [47]." A Buddhist organisation alleged before the Inspector General of Police in Colombo that "the work was defamatory to Buddhism [47]." "lodged a complaint concerning the short story before the Inspector-General of Police in Colombo [alleging that] the work was defamatory to Buddhism [47]." The organisation stated that Sathkumara was in violation of "the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act of Sri Lanka [47]."

Thus, it is evident that such incidents of overt resistance take place based on a Buddhist ideological justification within the mainstream society of Sri Lanka. However, according to research based on the Theravada Buddhist doctrine followed and practised in Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, Buddhist teachings do not convey any "homo-negative language or condemnation of gay or lesbian homosexual behaviour [48]." In monastic discipline, *vinaya* (monastic rules) apply to monks and nuns who are expected to be celibate and queer desire and sexuality are categorised within a wide range of sexual practices which are prohibited. However, these rules do not extend to lay Buddhists [48].

The practitioners of Buddhism are explicitly told to refrain from the misuse of senses and sexual misconduct which is the third precept out of the five precepts. However, "this precept itself is insufficient a guide as it makes no distinction in relation to sexual orientation and practice [49]." According to Vermeulen [48], Buddhist teachings do not explicitly posit that lay Buddhists should lead a heterosexual life; instead, "there is silence." Although Vermeulen [48] states that it is possible to interpret this silence as "neutral or negative [a majority of Buddhist scholars] consider this to be a positive accepting silence" as tolerance is promoted and emphasised in Buddhist teaching.

Reverend Timothy's horizons of expectations reveal an understanding of queer sexualities from a Buddhist philosophical perspective. It can be perceived that he does not demonstrate resistance towards learning about queer representation in literature but still attempts to interpret the suffering and marginalisation of Arjie in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* based on the Buddhist ideological assumption of past *karma*. "Buddhist karma tells us that positive action results in beneficial reaction, whereas negative action results in unwanted reaction. This is why it is often said that karma follows

a person like a shadow [50]." This research draws from this understanding to analyse Reverend Timothy's reception position.

Reverend Timothy's perception of Arjie's suffering can be seen as a justification for the suffering every individual undergoes in their life within the Buddhist philosophical discourse of *karma*. This understanding can be further emphasised within a context where an individual is perceived and deemed as undeserving of a particular type of suffering or cruel fate he is enduring in his life. The protagonist of Selvadurai's novel is the child Arjie who is struggling with coming to terms with his sexuality. Furthermore, Reverend Timothy's lecturer from university B Nadee also used the victim trope in relation to queer identity to teach about queer representation in the novel. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, university B promotes a Buddhist philosophical viewpoint in disseminating knowledge. Thus, this research interprets that all these factors largely contribute to Reverend Timothy's reception position of considering the difficulties Arjie faces in coming to terms with his sexuality within the Buddhist ideological assumption of *karma*.

4.2.1. Queer as a Samaja Assammathayak. In the interview, Reverend Soma (Reverend Soma's interview was conducted in his native language Sinhala due to his preference and has been translated to English in this study.), a student and Buddhist clergy from university B, shared his understanding based on how Selvadurai engages with sexuality in *Funny Boy*. Reverend Soma's horizons of expectations can be observed based on the prior knowledge he has received from the lessons in the classroom and the educator's horizons of pedagogical expectations. These are because he conveyed that Arjie's struggles and needs conflict with the conventional expectations of the heteronormative and heteropatriarchal society. He shared, "Arjie wants to be like a girl and he wants to play like a girl, but the society does not let him do that. He is told that it can never happen just like "pigs can't fly." But what he desires and likes is to pursue playing and dressing like a girl and all that. So, there are a lot of challenges he meets and barriers he faces in terms of achieving those in life. He tries to go against social beliefs."

Through this quotation, Reverend Soma demonstrates that he understands the representation of queer identity. However, throughout the rest of his interview, his frames of reference and horizons of expectations indicated resistance to learning about queer sexualities in the novel. He conveys his resistance and reluctance by justifying and rationalising it within a Buddhist ideological framework. He shared, "I feel uncomfortable with learning about queer in this text. So, I am taking a middle stance when it comes to queer identity. The reason I am taking a middle stance is because homosexuality is a samaja assammathayak (social anomaly) and not suitable for our Sinhala Buddhist culture. Our lecturer said that this is something which is in our own culture, not only in Western culture. But I think this is a Westernised concept so if we look at queer from their perspective, it is perhaps correct, but in our culture, I personally think learning about it is not suitable for us."

Throughout his interview, Reverend Soma from university B repetitively voiced his resistance to learning about the queer representation in the novel. Furthermore, this student claimed he was taking “a middle stance in interpreting queer identity.” According to Bajželj [51], in Buddhism the middle stance is considered the “ideal Buddhist philosophical position.” This is because it involves “avoiding the two extremes of permanence and nonexistence [or] self-indulgence and self-denial [and] thereby occupying a philosophical middle [51].” Reverend’s Soma’s claim of taking a middle stance in interpreting the queer representation in *Funny Boy* conflicts with his strong perception of queer identity being a “*samaja assammathayak*” (social anomaly). This is considering that Reverend Soma’s perception of the queer identity being a “social anomaly” indicates an absolute or extreme stance which is actually in opposition to his claim of following the middle stance of Buddhist philosophy in reading the novel. This is because in applying a Buddhist philosophical framework to explore queer identities, it should be posited that Buddhism does not explicitly reject queer sexualities and “preaches tolerance and pacifism [52].”

Moreover, this research observes that there is a reason for Reverend Soma’s identification regarding the study of queer identities in the novel as a “social anomaly” that is “not suitable for our Sinhala Buddhist culture.” Reverend Soma establishes a binary between Westernisation and localisation. He posits that queer sexualities are not acceptable within the local Sri Lankan context as they can only be accepted and embraced within the Western cultural context. This research analyses this perception by drawing from the theoretical observations of Boler [30] in examining the theory of emotions within the educational context to examine how “structures and experiences of race, class and gender [are] shaped by the social control of emotions.” Boler [30] observes this by referring to how emotions allow the reinforcing of binary oppositions such as “us vs. them, emotion vs. reason, private vs. public, bad vs. good-as well as understanding the gendered dimensions of these divisions.” The present study draws from this conceptualisation of binaries in interpreting the reception of the student Reverend Soma. Reverend Soma’s tone indicated pride, importance, and reverence through which he self-associated the Sinhala Buddhist culture and his reluctance to associate queer identities within that construct. Thus, Reverend Soma perceives the study of queer identities in literature as a Westernised context by establishing a binary opposition between “us vs. them [30]” in terms of localisation vs. Westernisation. The student views the study of queer identities as having a corrupting influence on the local context. This is perhaps another reason he states that the field of queer studies is unsuitable for learning within the local context of Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, this research interprets Reverend Soma’s response to learning about queer identities in the classroom with regard to Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* by engaging with the theoretical notions of Schulman [53]. Schulman [53] who has experienced a hostile reception from her students who find studying queer sexualities in the classroom to be

“emotionally upsetting [says that it] makes them feel disloyal to their parents and their church and their government. They would rather not know that what is said on television is often not true.” This research draws from these observations to analyse the verbally denoted negative reception of Reverend Soma as he projects hostility and reluctance towards learning about queer identities in the classroom. Thus, it analyses his reception position as a way of establishing distance, demonstrating an unwillingness to learn, perpetuating denial and reinforcing dominant ideological beliefs. In analysing his frames of reference, this study observes that he uses justifications based on culture and religion to project his hostility, reluctance, and hesitancy towards learning about queer identity in literature. Thus the study of queer sexualities in the classroom can be perceived as difficult knowledge which involves the pedagogy of discomfort. This can conflict with the process of realising a transformative learning experience in the classroom of the HEI.

4.2.2. The Buddhist Ideological Framework as a Teaching Strategy. Nadee uses a Buddhist ideological framework as a teaching strategy to teach about queer visibility and representation in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* in the undergraduate classroom of university B. Throughout her years of experience teaching at this university, Nadee has observed students’ nonverbal cues regarding how they have reacted and responded to her lectures and discussions based on *Funny Boy*.

In visually decoding the nonverbal cues of students of university B, Nadee says that her students “openly display uncomfortable and disgusted facial expressions” when she engages in classroom discussions on sexuality in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*. She said that the students are only positively receptive when studying the expression of heterosexual desire in the literature classroom. She perceives the students’ positive reception when discussing heterosexual desire, considering how they look very interested and engaged in the subject matter. She further said that, though the students do not express their disgust openly within the classroom, there have been times when they have “rolled their eyes”, found such discussions “funny,” and have “laughed out aloud in the classroom in a mocking way.”

Nadee further said that some students have personally approached her to discuss their discomfort in studying the queer expression of sexuality in their native language Sinhala. The lecturer conveyed that the students have frequently told her that queer representation in literature is “*eeya*” (an expression to indicate disgust in Sinhala), *mehema deyak wenna baa* (this cannot happen, to express their shock and reluctance about the possibilities of the queer expression of desire) and “*vikarayak wage*” (like nonsense).

In interpreting Nadee’s perceptions of her students’ nonverbal reception, this research engages with the theoretical observations of researchers [54] to posit that nonverbal communication is a “constant subtext to everything we do; we cannot stop showing facial expressions, posture or tone that conceals our talk [54].” This is particularly important within the classroom as the “teacher and pupils often

have more confidence in the nonverbal than in the verbal message [54].” Nadee also has confidence in decoding her students’ negative and positive reception in discussing the queer and heterosexual expression of desire in the classroom, respectively. This is considering that she has read the students’ nonverbal cues of interaction, emotional engagement, resistance, and hostility in responding to literary texts studied in class. Furthermore, Nadee says she has observed her students’ positive attention in classroom discussions when learning about heterosexual love.

My students are excited to learn about the theme of love if it is heterosexual love. We have “Love letters” by Kate Walker in the syllabus and they were very excited to learn about it in class. Even when we were studying William Shakespeare’s plays, they insisted they wanted to study *Romeo and Juliet*.

However, these feelings of excitement and positivity Nadee has observed and experienced (nonverbal and verbal) in her classroom contrast entirely with the discomfort when her students learn about queer desire in her class. As an educator in a university classroom, her interpretation of the students’ emotions and feelings, such as their discomfort and disgust in discussing queer representation in literature, is important. This is due to the fact that it offers her an underlying subtext to decode their sentiments and emotions, which they do not verbally voice in the classroom (apart from the instances they have personally approached her). This awareness is significant for educators to deliberate upon countering such challenges by using effective approaches and strategies in the university classroom.

Furthermore, this study observes that in Nadee’s class, the students feel disturbed by knowledge that is disseminated about queer sexualities. It draws from Kumashiro [55] and Alexander [56] to interpret this. Kumashiro [55] proposes that “education involves learning something that disrupts our common-sense view of the world.” Kumashiro [55] observes that though disturbing “normalcy” can “leave students ill at ease, the aim of learning should be “disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction.” Alexander [56] explains that discussions about queer sexualities within the classroom “might deny students a sense of satisfaction, prompting polite disagreement, eye-rolling, or outright hostility from students confronted by critical perspectives that seek to trouble rather than reassure.” Thus, this research interprets the emotions and feelings that Nadee has read in her students’ faces and experienced regarding these observations. The nonverbal cues and the verbally projected hostility that she has observed and experienced can be a projection of the students’ resistance and reluctance to learn about queer identities in the classroom. This study interprets these as the dissemination of difficult knowledge involved with the pedagogy of discomfort that conflicts with the realisation of a transformative learning experience. It further contends that these negative nonverbal reception practices can indicate external manifestations of the students’ dissatisfaction. This is when they are confronted with knowledge which disrupts their sense of normalcy and heteronormativity, such as studying queer representation in literature.

Moreover, Nadee said that she relies on a Buddhist ideological framework whenever she experiences such nonverbally communicated negative messages in the classroom. This research interprets how this framework is used as a teaching strategy and approach in the classroom of university B. This is with regard to how Nadee uses it to make the students more receptive to discussing queer representation in literature. She shared, “I tell them that in Buddhism, it is not mentioned anywhere that being queer is wrong and unacceptable and that there is nothing which says that if you are gay, you are banned from observing religion. Then, the students seem to accept it; with these students, religion always provides an answer.”

Thus, this research observes that Nadee incorporates a Buddhist ideological framework as a teaching strategy to alleviate the pedagogy of discomfort associated with the expression of queer identities, desire, and pleasure. However, this strategy can also be problematic as it is catered toward what Britzman [57] identifies as for the sake of “teaching tolerance” to accept queer individuals. Britzman [57] states that this concept of teaching tolerance would involve desexualising homosexuality, “corralling of queerness into a fenced area [as] “too much information” might disrupt the façade of tolerance. Thus, Nadee’s strategy might help alleviate the discomfort of difficult knowledge in learning about queer sexualities and avoid making the classroom of university B a pedagogical site of discomfort. However, it is problematic as Nadee foregrounds her justification within a larger ideological framework of Buddhist philosophy. This research interprets this as her attempts to desexualise homosexuality and situate the queer identity within Buddhist philosophy’s boundaries, limitations, and margins for teaching and validating tolerance for queer identities to her students.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This research aims at exploring, analysing, and interpreting the diverse reception positions and practices of receptors (lecturers and students) within the pedagogical context of HEIs in Sri Lanka. To realise this, it engages with the diverse contexts, perceptions, ideological beliefs, preconceived notions, expectations, and biases of receptors in teaching and learning the selected Sri Lankan English fiction. The data primarily focus on interpreting the reception of the Sri Lankan English fiction, *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai.

This study incorporates the methodology of a qualitative research design to a reception study based on qualitative in-depth interviews with three lecturers and two students and a focus group discussion with three students from three universities in the Western and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

Limiting the research participants to three lecturers and five students is a limitation of this study. However, interviewing more than the selected number of receptors from universities A, B, and C and from universities of other provinces in the country would not have allowed the researcher to engage in a thorough, rigorous, and focused

analysis. Another limitation of this research is the selection of fiction which is limited to Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. This is because the choice is purely foregrounded on an academic-oriented basis and all the universities selected for the study have incorporated *Funny Boy* as a Sri Lankan English novel in their curriculum.

Several frames of reference have been drawn based on the results, discussion, and data analysis of all the interviews conducted for this research. Within these frames, this research explores the patterns, similarities, and differences in terms of how the receptors of this study respond to the selected fiction. In analysing these reception positions and practices, it predominantly engages with the theoretical concept of horizons of expectations by Hans Robert Jauss to critically interpret the problems, dilemmas, and concerns within the teaching and learning process of the selected fiction with queer representation. In exploring these, this study identifies and discusses the pedagogies, approaches, and strategies used in the teaching and learning process of the selected fiction.

This research contributes to the development of reception studies by emphasising the importance of the receptor within the pedagogical context of HEIs in teaching and learning Sri Lankan English fiction with queer representation. It identifies and elaborates on the approaches, pedagogical concepts, and strategies incorporated by educators within the university context to teach queer sexualities in literature. It also explores and deconstructs the students' difficulties, challenges, biases, and expectations in understanding and analysing the selected fiction. Furthermore, this research offers possibilities for educators to understand the diverse perspectives of learners and educators. This understanding is crucial to identify what factors conflict with the realisation of a transformative learning experience in the university classroom and the strategies that can be incorporated to ensure this realisation.

Data Availability

As this research involves human research participant data, there are ethical restrictions against sharing data sets. As the data sets can include information that can potentially identify the participant, making them publicly available would go against the ethical considerations observed throughout this research. Under confidentiality in the information sheet provided for all participants, the participants are ensured that all records are guaranteed privacy and no information by which the participant can be identified will be released or published. It is on this basis that this study obtained ethics clearance to be conducted by the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo (erc@fgs.cmb.ac.lk).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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