

# Fiction vs. Reality: How Students Discover Real-Life Representations in Prose Using Engaged Reading

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The reading of fiction texts requires intense effort to integrate mind, emotion, and intrinsic reading motivation, in order to discover real-life representations. There is limited research in this area.

**Purpose:** This study employs the engaged reading strategy combined with discovery learning, in order to investigate improvements in students' competence in prose appreciation.

**Method:** This study used a mixed-method design. Thirty-two Indonesian Language Education students participated in the study. Data was collected using student worksheets, observation, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted by identifying and interpreting the results of prose appreciation for each reading activity.

**Results:** This study found that while explaining the theme and through description students were able to activate prior knowledge. The students' reading motivation mainly focused on the intrinsic element of stories. They clearly understood the plot, characterizations, and messages, but supporting details varied because of the differences in students' knowledge, experience, and social background related to short stories. In the post-reading stage, students revealed new knowledge and mental imagery. Based on our findings, engaged reading combined with discovery learning can enrich students' experience and ability to elaborate information, as well as to discover new knowledge about real-life representation in prose.

**Conclusion:** Based on the research findings, teachers and lecturers are able to utilize the engaged reading strategy combined with discovery learning to promote students' ability to read literature. Further research should involve more diverse participants. Experimental research could also examine the advantages and disadvantages of engaged reading and discovery learning.

## KEYWORDS

discovery learning, engaged reading, literary appreciation, prose, reading literature

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature is not easily understood, since it uses figurative language the meaning of which does not always coincide with the literal meaning (Burke, 2015; Pollio et al., 2023). Therefore, students' ability to use their imaginative and sympathetic capacity as part of the engagement process with any textual stimulus is more complex than imagining the characters and events of the story (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Troscianko, 2013). Imaginative capacities mean that students may imagine pictorial detail and form mental pictures about the fictional character, setting, and plot (Kuzmičová, 2012;

Magulod, 2018; Troscianko, 2013). For example, students can visualize the physical characteristics, perspectives, and emotions of the fictional characters in the story (Gasser et al., 2022).

Based on prior observations and interviews conducted with Indonesian Language and Literature Education students in Malang, Indonesia, it was found that students experienced obstacles in literature reading, especially when it came to prose. Discovering real-life representations of prose was difficult, since they needed help integrating their mind, emotion, and self-motivation. Therefore, students should be trained to read and

appreciate literature by increasing critical thinking skills (Winarni et al., 2020). In the 21st century, students also need to master a variety of literacy skills<sup>1</sup>, especially fiction text literacy.

Previous studies have investigated reading comprehension based on text type. In scientific texts, the reader's prior knowledge has a positive relationship with the process of understanding (Bensalah & Gueroudj, 2020; Khataee & Davoudi, 2018; Ozuru et al., 2009). Researchers have also found certain benefits in narrative fiction texts for reading comprehension. These narrative texts have been found: to (1) improve verbal abilities better than non-literary and expository fiction texts (Mar & Rain, 2015); (2) improve mental abilities (Pino & Mazza, 2016); (3) form inference in the mental state by utilizing social context; (4) improve theory of mind ability (Dodell-Feder et al., 2013); (5) enhance imagination and critical thinking about the story (Magulod, 2018); as well as (6) promote sympathy and empathy capacities (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Koopman, 2016). These benefits exist because of the relation between the reader's emotions based on knowledge and life experiences (Silva et al., 2012). In these studies, reading narrative fiction contributes positively to readers' knowledge and emotion. However, these contributions have not been explained rigidly in a series of reading activity processes in developing readers' knowledge and emotion: ranging from activating prior knowledge - to discovering new knowledge and mental imagery in the fiction text.

Therefore, reading processes must be implemented with appropriate learning models and strategies, in order to develop readers' knowledge and emotion through innovative and interesting learning (Magulod, 2018). Several studies have used different learning models in reading activities such as contextual learning using a lexical decision experiment (Silva et al., 2012) and transformative learning through fiction reading (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). Discovery learning is also used in literature learning. However, the study by Cahyani and Yulindaria (2018) focused on fiction writing activities. Some researchers also utilized reading strategies in literature reading. These include: inquiry learning in fiction reading (Nico et al., 2016); scaffolded reading experience (Massey & Heafner, 2004); and visualization (Koning & van Der Schoot, 2014). Reading comprehension has been found to improve by connecting text with the students' prior knowledge through scaffolded reading (Massey & Heafner, 2004) and inquiry learning (Nico et al., 2016). Prior knowledge interventions increased reading comprehension through group work (Bensalah & Gueroudj, 2020; Khataee & Davoudi, 2018; Tarchi, 2015). Studies have also confirmed that classroom group discussions increase students' motivation and

promote reading comprehension (Murphy et al., 2009) and critical thinking skills (Handayani et al., 2019). Thus, reading comprehension of fiction can be increased by optimizing students' knowledge and group work through learning models and reading strategies. However, earlier studies have not investigated the role of knowledge, emotions, and self-motivation in prose appreciation.

Previous research findings suggest a gap between learning models and reading strategies. This may be related to integrating mind (knowledge), heart (emotions), and flow (intrinsic motivation) so that students can find real-life representations in prose. The aim of this study is to describe prose appreciation competence using the engaged reading and the discovery learning model in a series of reading processes. This includes: (1) the pre-reading process; (2) the reading process; and (3) the post-reading process. The engaged reading strategy was selected to facilitate the reading process by integrating thought, feeling, and intrinsic motivation (Van de Weghe, 2009). The discovery learning model was selected, since it emphasizes the connection of real-life contexts to learning (Satriani et al., 2012). Discovery learning can facilitate prose appreciation and help find a holistic understanding of prose related to real life. The results of this study could describe students' ability profile in the activation, modification, and reformation of prior knowledge to generate new knowledge and mental imagery, in such a way that it develops cognition based on literature reading. Teachers can utilize these results, in order to determine the effectiveness of engaged reading and discovery learning in literature reading for their designed language learning activities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Engaged Reading Strategy

Learning strategies may improve intellectual and emotional skills and determine reading purposes in the reading process because there is a sufficiently strong relationship between emotion and cognition. The optimal learning environment involves intellectual and emotional aspects as explicit learning targets (Ben-Eliyahu, 2019; Shernoff, 2010; Van de Weghe, 2009). The balance between emotion and cognition positively impacts students' intellectual modification and character. Character is a psychological aspect which causes individuals to act based on moral values and virtues (Berkowitz, 2011; Kristjánsson, 2015). Therefore, to improve students' learning outcomes, learning needs to be directed at the cognitive and emotional skills and the attitudes which

<sup>1</sup> National Council of Teachers of English. (2014). The NCTE definition of 21-st century literacies. <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentdefinition>.

students need in the learning and real-world context (Kranzler et al., 2014; Lotulung et al., 2018).

Based on these thoughts, engaged reading is proposed as a relevant learning strategy because it integrates mind, heart, and flow as it trains students to become skilled readers. The mind aspect refers to the development of thoughts and logic. The heart aspect sharpens inner sensitivity, while the flow aspect implies the clarity of reading processes and goals. Therefore, engaged reading strategies not only teach the appropriate strategies for reading but also guide students. Skilled readers can elaborate all text information by involving thought, feeling, and intrinsic reading motivation. Van de Weghe (2009) emphasizes that engaged reading strategies integrate the intellectual and emotional aspects needed by skilled readers in the reading comprehension process. Skilled readers are active readers. Galda (2010) states that a person can be an active reader if he or she can construct the meaning of the text transactionally and dynamically by utilizing the readers' tendencies, experiences, beliefs, value system, ability, behaviour, and knowledge through self-study (Edge & Olan, 2020). In addition, skilled readers can cultivate the flow aspect as a form of intrinsic reading motivation to become avid readers, as Burke (2015) stated. A reader who likes literature has a passion for literature and needs literature, even loves literature. Avid readers often experience a semi-conscious state in the processing of literary discourse. Therefore, reading interest is a solid motivational variable involving students' prior knowledge and experience related to texts. The absence of interest causes students to hesitate to read the text (Nordin & Eng, 2017).

In order to become skilled readers, students need to carry out a series of continuous reading processes. Engaged reading consists of three stages of reading activities: (a) pre-reading; (b) during reading; and (c) post-reading. The three stages are the Trinal Approach to Reading (Van de Weghe, 2009). The reader activates prior knowledge in the before-reading process which contains previous knowledge regarding the reading material. The reader will integrate the information collected during the reading, as well as their prior knowledge to gain new knowledge. In the after-reading process, information which has not been understood during the reading process is identified, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding and conclusions from the text.

Teaching college courses is essential to enhance students' reading comprehension. The challenges consist of completing the readings and engaging in deep reading (Parrott & Cherry, 2011). Thus, an optimal learning environment requires various contextual, instructional, developmental, and interpersonal factors (Shernoff et al., 2014). The learning environment can achieve its optimal degree by utilizing engaged reading which can aid students in mastering the expected competencies.

In this study, students analyzed real-life representations in a short story using their knowledge and real-life experiences. The stories are fictitious, but students can learn from events experienced by the characters as messages for a real-life context. Students are trained to acquire literature reading competence through engaged reading strategies using their minds, hearts, and flow.

## Discovery Learning

Discovery learning emphasizes discovery activities carried out by students, in such a way that their knowledge increases along with each learning process. Discovery learning is a heuristic model based on these learning processes because the method is student-centred. Students can initiate, discover, and reflect during learning activities (In'am & Hajar, 2017).

Since these activities focus on students, the teacher can facilitate student activities to implement the learning process and objectives. The teacher does not transfer knowledge directly to students but instead provides a stimulus to students to discover and understand the learning material. Therefore, discovery learning can help students enhance their intellectual potential, develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, facilitate the process of discovery, and strengthen their memory (Winarni et al., 2020).

The discovery learning process involves several stages. During the first stage, the educator offers incentives to the students for initiating their prior knowledge. During the second stage, students recognize issues identified in the learning material. In the third, students collect data related to intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the story. The intrinsic elements are: setting, plot, characterization, theme, point of view, and so on (Koopman, 2016; Yudar et al., 2019). Extrinsic elements refer to the relationship between text and context in fiction texts (Fradj, 2020), such as social, cultural, and political contexts. During the fourth stage, students conduct data analysis. In the fifth, students verify their analysis, in order to obtain advice and feedback from the other students and teachers. In the sixth, the students can draw conclusions based on the previous steps in this discovery learning (Winarni et al., 2020). Furthermore, discovery learning has potential core elements to identify students' learning outcomes (Prince, 2004).

## METHOD

### Design and Data Collection

Researchers in this study employed a mixed-method research design. The analysis focused on the frequency of occurrences of the engaged reading strategy used by the students. Quantitative analysis involving simple descriptive statistics was conducted using MS Excel. For the qual-

itative analysis, Atlas.ti version 9 was used, in order to interpret prose appreciation and identify students' reading competence. Student worksheets were used to collect data about students' prose appreciation results starting from the pre-reading stage, during reading, and post-reading stages. Observations and interviews were conducted to collect data about the processes experienced by students during the prose appreciation.

## Participants

This research used a purposive sampling technique with several criteria. The participants were: (1) students taking the Prose course; (2) students who have received and mastered the prose appreciation theory; and (3) students who have had experience in reading literary texts. Based on these criteria, 32 students of Indonesian Language Education participated in this study because they met all of these criteria. The selected sample consisted of 6 males and 26 females ranging from 19-21 years old.

## Materials

Six short stories were read and analysed by the students: (1) *Tangan-tangan Buntung* by Budi Darma, (2) *Orang-orang Larenjang* by Damhuri Muhammad, (3) *15 Hari Bulan* by Hasan Al Banna, (4) *Pakiah dari Pariangan* by Gus Tf Sakai, (5) *Requiem Kunang-kunang* by Agus Noor, and (6) *Langgam Urbana* by Beni Setia. The short stories were selected based on the following criteria. First, the prose text has intrinsic and extrinsic elements that contain moral values. Second, the prose texts are not young adult literature but literary texts with language richness, intrinsic elements, and complex extrinsic elements that could trigger appreciation.

## Procedure

Every student had to read and appreciate the selected short stories. Appreciating stories comprises several processes:

reading the story; understanding the story; analyzing the story; and appreciating the story. Students were divided into groups consisting of 4-5 students who completed the reading process. Each group member was given a different short story text, so they were each responsible for understanding and appreciating their text. The integration between discovery learning and engaged reading consisted of the following elements: stimulation, problem identification, data collection, data analysis, verification, and conclusion - spread over three days of learning activity. Students were classified as having good prior knowledge, if they can clearly show the theme in the short story and explain the relationship between the theme and real life. They also have poor prior knowledge, if they can only mention themes without a comprehensive explanation.

## Instruments

The questions listed in Table 1 were used as an instrument in this study, in order to obtain data about students' appreciation of the short stories based on their reading experiences.

Two other instruments were also used. One was a guideline for the semi-structured interview, which consisted of questions defined to obtain more information about students' knowledge and experiences related to these short stories. The other was an observation guideline used to describe the components and the steps to be observed.

## Data Analysis

The elicited data was analyzed in several stages of prose appreciation. Data analysis was based on students' worksheet documents, interview data, and observation data. The data analysis consists of the nine stages defined in Table 1: (1) identifying the suitability and clarity of prior knowledge related to the short story theme; (2) identifying the characteristics of the readers' motivation based on the elements in the short story the readers are curious about; (3) identi-

**Table 1.**

*Appreciation Stages of Prose in Reading Short Stories with Engaged Reading Strategies*

Stages	Questions	Purpose
1 Pre-reading	What do you know about the theme of the short story?	Prior knowledge activation
	What do you want to learn from the short story?	Reading motivation identification
2 During Reading	What is the plot of the short story that has been read?	Plot analysis
	How do you describe each character in the short story?	Characterization analysis
	Please mention interesting supporting detail in the short story?	Supporting detail analysis
	What if you were one of the characters from the short story?	Visualization
	What is the real-life message represented in the short story?	Meaning interpretation
3 Post-reading	What have you learned from the short story?	New knowledge identification
	What do you think after reading the short story?	Mental imagery identification

ifying the story's plot; (4) categorizing the characterization analysis based on the character description pattern and its clarity; (5) determining the supporting detail pattern based on the intrinsic and extrinsic elements chosen by the student; (6) determining the students' visualization pattern in positioning themselves in the short story; (7) determining the pattern of meaning interpretation based on the characteristics of the content and sentence structure; (8) interpreting new knowledge; and (9) interpreting mental imagery.

## RESULTS

### Prose Appreciation in the Pre-Reading Stage

Prose appreciation activities can be facilitated by using engaged reading and discovery learning that emphasizes the process. In this way students can elaborate on the information and find new understandings about real-life representation. Therefore these two processes were used in the present study. The research findings obtained during the pre-reading stage are presented in Table 2.

The results shown in Table 2 suggest that students' activation of their prior knowledge about the themes and their descriptions is sufficient (94%). Only 6% of the students did not express their prior knowledge specifically. In the short story *Tangan-tangan Buntung*, students revealed that politics is everything related to government and power. Students with sufficient prior knowledge already knew that leaders who violate the law should be punished according to the rule of law, even though they have power. The political law in the short story did not reveal justice. On the contrary, in the short story *Tangan-Tangan Buntung*, students with less sufficient prior knowledge only mentioned that the themes were politics or leadership in government.

Table 2 also shows that students have the reading motivation to understand the intrinsic elements in short stories (78%). They are interested in understanding the message of the stories, characterization, plot, language style, and so on. Meanwhile, students were also motivated to understand ex-

trinsic elements (22%), such as Minang culture, West Sumatra, Indonesia, in order to understand the short story *Pakiah*.

### Prose Appreciation During Reading Stage

The research findings obtained during the reading stage are presented in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 suggest that the students' ability to analyze the plot can be categorized as good, since they can correctly identify the plot type and any associated events. From the data obtained, 25% of students mentioned the plot types and details of events in the short stories, while 75% only mentioned the plot types. There were few students who could connect information from each event in the plot analysis.

During characterisation analysis, students identified evidence of each character's traits, behavior, or description. Most students tended to mention character traits (44%). For example, in the short story *Langgam Urbana*, Lik War is described as wise because he shared his experiences with the young people as insight, warning, or suggestion. Using the available data, students were able to analyze characterization (81%). Meanwhile, 19% of students needed help to perform characterization analysis well.

Students produced the same analysis based on plot and characterization. However, in determining interesting supporting details, students chose different quotes influenced by the richness of prior knowledge. Most students (59%) chose supporting details in the form of figurative language quotes containing the story's message, since it was more attractive than the other intrinsic elements. The writer controls the plot and characterization with the use of an interesting story and language. However, the author cannot fully control the reader's interest in supporting details because they are very personal and based on their attention, background, and experience.

Furthermore, when asked to visualize themselves as characters in the story, most students saw themselves as doing something useful (94%). In the short story *Orang-orang Larenjang*, if the characters violate a custom, they are expelled

**Table 2**

*Research Findings on the Appreciation Ability of Prose during the Pre-Reading Stage*

	Purpose	Findings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Prior knowledge activation	Theme and its description	30	94
		Theme	2	6
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Reading motivation identification	Intrinsic element	25	78
		Extrinsic element	7	22
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

from their tribe and lose their inheritance and descendants rights. Students visualized the misery of Julfahri's family life after defying tribal restrictions and prohibitions. In comparison, 6% of the students chose not to become the character but to become an observer watching the story. We discovered that students might fully immerse themselves in visualizing themselves as a story character through engaged reading and discovery learning.

In the message interpretation process, students might find the message as a reflection of life. However, the interpretation varied for each student. We found that most students interpreted the message of life in the short stories as an order or a prohibition in the form of an imperative sentence (40%). The imperative was more substantial than contradiction, suggestion, and causal sentences based on the degree of urgency. Order and prohibition were more direct in delivering the message than the others. This proved that

**Table 3**

*Research Findings on the Appreciation Ability of Prose During the Reading Stage*

Purpose		Findings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Plot Analysis	Plot type	24	75
		Plot type and details of events	8	25
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Characterization Analysis	State the traits of the characters	14	44
		State the names of the characters and the type of characterization	8	25
		State the names of the characters		
		State the types of characterizations and traits	6	19
			4	12
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Supporting Detail Analysis	Messages conveyed in a figurative language	19	59
		Description of characters/events	5	16
		Language style (figurative language)	5	16
		Message	3	9
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Visualization	Visualize the events from the point of view of one of the characters	30	94
		Visualize the events from the point of view of one of the observers	2	6
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
5	Message Interpretation	Imperative sentence	13	40
		Contradiction sentence	7	22
		Suggestion sentence	7	22
		Causal sentence	5	16
		<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4**

*Research Findings on the Appreciation Ability of Prose during the Post-Reading Stage*

Purpose		Finding Answer	Frequency	Percentage (%)
New knowledge identification	Message		18	59
	Other intrinsic elements		13	41
Total			32	100
Mental imagery identification	Message		23	72
	Other intrinsic elements		9	28
Total			32	100



students could transform message interpretation from the fictional context to the real-life context through engaged reading and discovery learning.

Prose Appreciation in The Post-Reading Stage

The findings obtained for the post-reading stage are presented as follows.

The results shown in Table 4 suggest that new knowledge and mental imagery identification were more in the form of a message element rather than other intrinsic elements. It showed that the new knowledge reflected the short story’s message as a guide or advice in everyday life. Based on the objectives of the message written by students, there were two types of messages: personal and universal.

All research findings are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 demonstrates how engaged reading combined with discovery learning can strengthen students’ capacity for prose appreciation. Each stage of the discovery learning process aligns to a step in the engaged reading method. In pre-reading, students receive questions identifying their prior knowledge and reading motivation. The reading stage, intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the story comprised the data collected and analyzed. Students visualized themselves as characters or as an observer. Thus, they could discover real-life representations and interpret the story’s message. In the post-reading stage, the students’ reading experiences were evaluated, in order to generate new knowledge and

mental imagery. We discovered that engaged reading in collaboration with discovery learning facilitates students’ reading experiences in a structured way. Thus, students knew what they wanted to read, learned what they had read, and thought about what they had read.

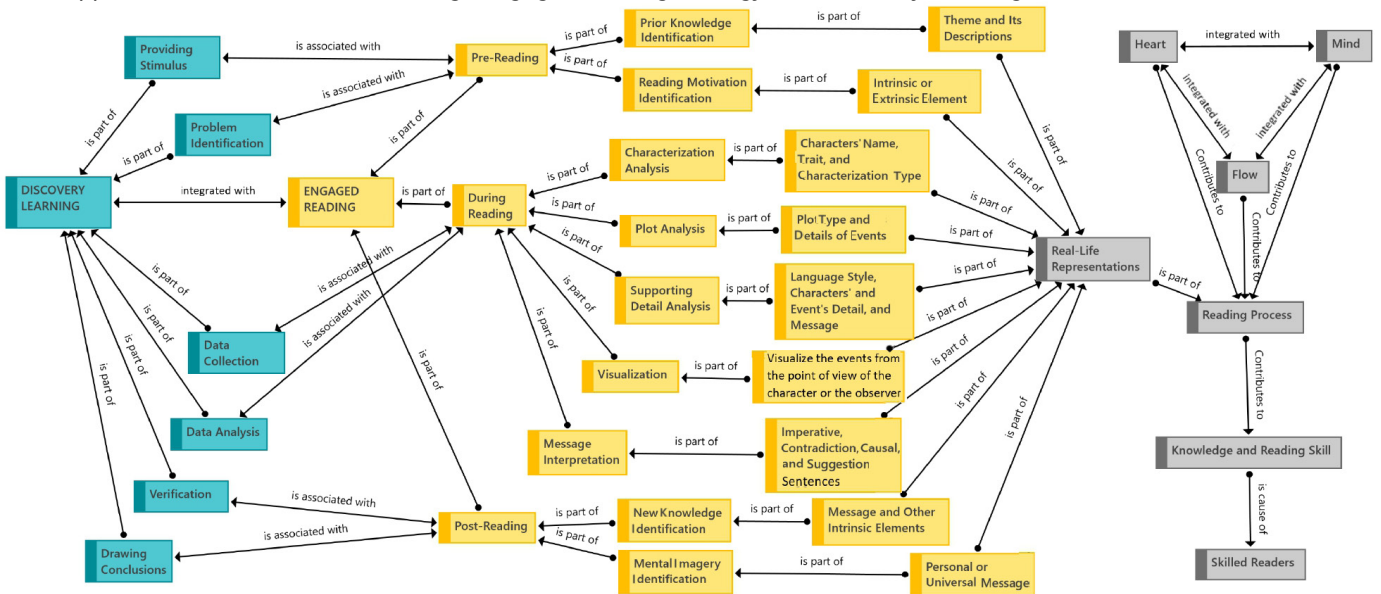
All the reading processes were part of real-life representation. Integrating the students’ minds, hearts, and flow was the key to increasing the quality of literature reading. As literature reading requires reading abilities and readers’ knowledge, students need to interpret messages and discover representations of real-life contexts in fictional texts to become skilled readers.

DISCUSSION

Prose Appreciation in the Pre-Reading Stage

Research findings show that prior knowledge combined with new knowledge from the short story produces a more sophisticated knowledge structure. Previous research also found that the suitability of prior knowledge with the text themes can promote the process of knowledge activation and reading comprehension (Bensalah & Gueroudj, 2020; Khataee & Davoudi, 2018; Rapp et al., 2014). The suitability of prior knowledge may positively impact the reading process, considerably increase reading fluency, and reduce reading errors (Chen et al., 2014; Priebe et al., 2012).

Figure 1  
Prose Appreciation Results obtained through Engaged Reading Strategy with Discovery Learning



According to research by Marsh et al. (2012); Sua (2021), prior knowledge is essential for reducing reading errors and improving understanding of the content. Readers are required to comprehend the writer's intended meaning by connecting their previous knowledge with the text they read (Bensalah & Gueroudj, 2020; Khataee & Davoudi, 2018). Therefore, the reader's interpretation and motivation for cognitive story processing will determine whether they have the necessary knowledge to critically assess a fiction text or read it critically (Van Laer et al., 2014). We conclude that the suitability of prior knowledge and reading strategy can minimize reading errors in a fiction text supported by critical thinking skills.

Thus, students were highly motivated to understand intrinsic elements instead of extrinsic elements. Previous research found that the different dimensions of reading motivation triggered differences in reading speed, comprehension, and conclusion skills (McGeown et al., 2015). A previous study also found that certain readers pay attention to plot structure or read, in order to be intellectually challenged (Riddell & Van Dalen-Oskam, 2018). This study also confirms the result obtained by Riddell & Van Dalen-Oskam (2018) and McGeown et al. (2015). Students are motivated to understand intrinsic elements that contribute to reading comprehension. However, students still paid attention to the extratextual aspects of literature.

Students understood that reading and literature appreciation were essential activities before the pre-reading process. Predetermined purposes are essential in reading activity for the purpose of entertainment and knowledge enhancement (Burke, 2015) and language competence enrichment (Dehaene et al., 2010). However, among the various text types, only fictional texts could consistently predict the variation in reading skills based on the measurement of reading ability (McGeown et al., 2015).

## Prose Appreciation During Reading Stage

The study found that students were able to understand intrinsic elements based on the text. Meanwhile, the readers' point of view influences the supporting details of the story which they have chosen. This research finding supports the findings reported by Van Laer et al. (2014) that the writer controls intrinsic elements. There are two antecedents in the process of reading fiction, namely: (1) the control of the storyteller or writer; and (2) the story acceptance from the readers' point of view. The storyteller or writer controls the intrinsic elements of the text. It was confirmed by the accuracy of students' analysis of the intrinsic elements. Meanwhile, story acceptance from the readers' point of view may include readers' familiarity with the text, attention, education, and gender. These elements tend to have a less significant effect on the reading process of the fictional text (Van Laer et al., 2014).

We found that students conducted a more detailed analysis of characterization elements instead of the plot in this study. Students' reading performance and ability to appreciate literature are positively correlated (Magulod, 2018). Students' comprehension of literature may improve their capacity for acquiring novel perspectives from unique characters (Hodges et al., 2018). This does not mean that the plot is unnecessary because it is constructed by the characters' interactions with each event they encounter (Magulod, 2018). As Koopman (2016); Mar & Oatley (2008) found, readers can feel the characters' emotions and experience events through the characters in the story, such as painful, ambivalent, and pleasant emotions. Previous studies have also found that narrative text evokes and changes readers' emotions through events or characters depicted and shown emotionally (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Mar et al., 2011) through clear or implied depictions of emotional conditions (Nikolajeva, 2013).

Visualization was confirmed to engage students' emotions in the story. It activates their minds and heart due to the nature of the short story as a work of fiction aimed at building knowledge and the reader's feelings. Silva et al. (2012) found that individual sensitivity to specific emotions is required, in order to understand the natural effects of emotions in reading thoroughly based on background knowledge of the readers (Sua, 2021). In the visualization, students established themselves as characters capable of resolving the problems or conflicts in the short stories. This was related to previous research findings that visualization is not an obscure picture (Starr, 2015). However, it contains a strong picture of subjective events involving emotions toward fictional characters in the story (Brosch, 2018) in the form of a movie or a photo (Sua, 2021). It creates a similarly clear picture of the readers' actual perception of the characters in the story (Brosch, 2017). Therefore, readers carry out constructive simulations about what will and might happen in the story, manifested in the form of thought by imagining themselves into the feelings and actions experienced by the characters (Altmann et al., 2014). Imagination immerses the reader personally in the story (Auyoung, 2018; Djikic & Oatley, 2014) through a reflection of stories based on the readers' personal traits (Koopman, 2016).

In addition, students also tend to visualize events from the observer's point of view rather than the characters' point of view in the story. Djikic and Oatley (2014) also found that readers can involve themselves in the story as actors or observers. Visualization has different intensities and impacts. It can improve the readers' cognitive and emotional experience influenced by how strong the visualization is (Brosch, 2017). Thus, we found that students who imagined themselves as the characters had more intense cognitive and emotional responses to the characters and events than students who just imagined themselves as observers of the story. This could be due to the reader's involvement in the story's fictional world.



In the visualization process, student participation in the fictional world can be identified from the differences of each student in imagining him or herself as the character and providing alternative actions. In this regard, Cheetham et al. (2014) found that identifying characters indicates matching and comparing representations of aspects related to the reader with aspects of the fictional world reflected in the characters and characterizations. During fiction reading, the psychological process may enable an understanding of the subjective experiences of the characters in the story (Kidd & Castano, 2013). It may also enable an understanding of complex social life through the process of meaning abstraction, inference, and prediction of plot development, as well as the interpersonal relationships between characters in the story (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Sua, 2021). We concluded that readers connected their real-life experiences with the story in the visualization process, which was confirmed by the student's point of view in the visualization process. For example, students assess character actions or propose actions which characters should take in dealing with an event based on the moral values they have encountered in real life.

By considering the character's motives, the reader can find the moral message in the story (Tamir et al., 2016). Students developed the character's behaviour and thoughts concerning themselves as members of society who needed to strengthen their social roles. Based on these findings, short stories encouraged students to appreciate human nature and improve their lives based on the moral messages contained therein. Fiction presents fundamental aspects of human needs which have a substantial long-term effect on the reader's life (Panero et al., 2016). Students are able to develop empathy for the events experienced by the characters. In previous studies, readers developed a sense of empathy and sympathy by exploring the social interactions and struggles of the characters (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Mar & Oatley, 2008) through the reader's awareness of interpersonal relationships. Thus, it affects the reader's sensitivity to interpersonal relationships in his or her life (Fong et al., 2013) and enables them to rehearse various resolutions to interpersonal problems (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2016).

Most students compiled the messages in imperative sentences: both orders and prohibitions. The remaining students employed contradiction, suggestion, and causal sentences. Students were able to affirm the moral messages in the short stories since imperative sentences have a more substantial direct effect than contradiction, suggestion, and causal sentences. Previous research also found that imperative sentences have a more substantial directive effect (Garcia-Carpintero, 2013).

## Prose Appreciation in The Post-Reading Stage

By looking at their social reality, we found that students' new knowledge and mental imagery demonstrated empathy for the people and situations they encountered. It was

confirmed from students' interpretations that they respond to the events in the story based on the virtues they know in real life. This tendency was also found in previous studies: readers' comprehension of reality contributes to interpreting virtues of stories related to the real-life context (Friend, 2017). Fictional texts enhance readers' empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Djikic & Oatley, 2014) and sympathy (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Koopman, 2016) by forming awareness about social life knowledge and experiences (Oatley, 2016).

Specifically, the emergence of empathy in reading fictional texts was dualistic: engaging the reader in the story and feeling the characters' experiences. Story interpretation could be personal, social, and critical-adaptive to events in the story (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2016). Students are able to recognize and assess their value (Magulod, 2018) as personal growth (Sua, 2021). This study also found that the message of the short story was personal and universal. The message involved emotions and contained alternative actions, if students became a character. Other research also found that fictional imagination when reading a story had implications on a generalization process affecting the emotions and actions of readers (Van Leeuwen, 2013).

This study found that students visualize themselves in a fictional world, in order to discover real-life representations by identifying the personal and universal messages of the story. Vocabulary with unique semantic features represented a personal message, such as the first-person pronoun *saya* (I). Readers' reflection underlined the narrative effect on readers' belief built into the story (De Graaf, 2014). This was done through emotions which encourage transformation desire, critical self-reflection, and other processes which contribute to students' learning transformation (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). In the personal message, self-reflection occurred by identifying characters with narrative persuasion elements (message). Thus, they contributed to empathy enhancement and character awareness (Hoeken et al., 2016) in the form of: self-transformation; new perspectives; critical reflection; correlation with personal experiences; emotional responses; and character modelling in the story (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Magulod, 2018; Sua, 2021). In addition, character descriptions can also generate negative responses from readers. In particular, a description of the pain or pressure and sickness of the protagonist characters increases readers' fear. Readers expressed empathy with the character by feeling the fear of the character (Hsu et al., 2014). Also the description of the unpleasant, feeble-minded, criminal, immoral, and inhuman nature of the protagonist creates a sense of alienation (Nikolajeva, 2013). Reading fiction is associated with marking inappropriate actions in a pessimistic scenario (harm scenario) (Tamir et al., 2016).

We argued that formulated universal messages are related to a broad social life. This study confirmed that universal messages relate to moral values which apply to human life. Previous research also found that the simulation of social

content in fiction improves the reader's social cognition (Tamir et al., 2016) because fiction expresses values prevailing in the community (Caracciolo, 2012; Magulod, 2018). The values promoted readers' transformation to apply these values in real life. Although these values have been known and believed beforehand, the reader recalls their importance (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). The values recall process occurs by finding the story's meaning, which is transformed into real life through interpretation, activation, and restructuring of the reader's background knowledge (Caracciolo, 2012).

New knowledge formulated by students, both personal and universal, contributed to the continuous formation of mental imagery. Tamir et al. (2016) found that mental imagery has precise or abstract characteristics. The clarity of mental imagery is emotional for the readers (Richardson, 2011). The emotional effect tends to exaggerate the story's details (Troscianko, 2013). Readers with solid mental imagery tend to be dissolved in the story and have a significantly higher level of empathy for the characters (Johnson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013). Therefore, we concluded that students (readers) who formulate personal new knowledge tend to have sharper mental imagery than students who formulate universal new knowledge. Readers who involve themselves personally and emotionally tend to interpret in-depth messages based on real-life contexts. If the characters and events are personally reflected, then the mental imagery appears more straightforward and intense. According to research findings of Jajdelska et al. (2010), mental imagery clarity contains two fundamental aspects, namely the level of accuracy and intensity.

## Implications for Education

The results and discussion suggest that the engaged reading strategy is suitable for prose appreciation, since it involves students' minds, hearts, and flow, as proposed by Van de Weghe (2009). Thus, students use their intellectual and emotional abilities to explore the message of the prose and flow as the highest level of their intrinsic motivation (D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; Shernoff et al., 2014). This is related to the essence of literary appreciation which requires thought, appreciation, and emotions conveyed by the writer to the reader. In addition, we argue that the engaged reading strategy is able to guide students to become immersed in the story's emotions. It may also train students to become intelligent readers who can define reading goals and promote new knowledge.

The three engaged reading stages were carried out continuously, in order to obtain comprehensive information which impacts students' character. Literature may contribute operationally to human intelligence in three dimensions: cognitive; psychomotor; and affective (Sugiarti & Prihatini, 2019). Therefore, students can increase their interaction and learning interest through the engaged reading strategy and discovery learning. The learning process can be carried

out in groups using this model and engaged reading. Trasmundi and Cowley (2020) state that a reader is a person and part of a social organization. Thus, reading activities emerge because of these readers' role as individuals or social members. Furthermore, teachers can utilize discovery learning and engaged reading, in order to lead the students to participate in prose appreciation as personal and social readers.

In addition, the engaged reading strategy can promote an active learning situation, increasing students' motivation. The research findings also confirmed that such motivation is able to foster students' positive character, such as curiosity and hard work, thus positively impacting academic performance. The results of students' worksheets prove students' ability to appreciate prose. Students with a high level of motivation tend to be curious and work hard, in order to complete prose appreciation tasks. According to Hattie (2011), students' motivation generated several positive impacts: more optimal academic activities; behavioural improvisation; and enhanced self-esteem in classroom learning. A high level of achievement motivates the learning from reading fiction through the critical literacy approach (Nico et al., 2016).

Apart from the results and discussion, the limitations of this study need to be considered. Although several criteria for research subjects were defined (i.e. (1) students who are taking the Prose course, (2) students who have received and mastered the prose appreciation theory, and (3) students who have experience in reading literary texts), the sample of participants was limited to second-year students at a university in Indonesia. Therefore, further research is recommended involving participants from various universities in Indonesia or even from several countries with students from different years of study. The sample should also include a similar number of male and female participants: this would further contribute to the heterogeneity of the sample. The scope of generalization could then also be extended.

## CONCLUSION

This study collected data on students' literary appreciation abilities to discover real-life representations in short stories. Prose appreciation ability in the pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading stages, is manifested in the students' readiness to carry out reading activities, and to appreciate human nature in delivering messages through short stories. In this case, readers were able to accumulate new knowledge on a universal basis. The readers' involvement with emotional intensity was also strengthened. Social sensitivity increased through empathy for characters and events interpretation as real-life guidance.

The application of engaged reading combined with discovery learning contributes to students' experiences of becoming skilled readers, since they are able to apply prior knowledge

while processing new knowledge. Furthermore, teachers and lecturers can utilize the engaged reading strategy and discovery learning, in order to train students to think critically when dealing with existing problems. It encourages the development of human intelligence operationally in three dimensions: mind, heart, and flow.

Further research must examine literary appreciation competencies between engaged reading and discovery learning with other learning models. Compared to other learning models, this research will provide information about the advantages and disadvantages of engaged reading and discovery learning. In addition, research examining the effect of engaged reading and discovery learning on the ability to appreciate other literary works with various genres can also be conducted, in such a way that educators can understand the various benefits of implementing engaged reading and discovery learning.

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## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

**Sugiarti:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

**Arti Prihatini:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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