

Writing for Comprehension in Prose Fiction Analysis: The Students' Voices

Lestari Setyowati

English Education Study Program, STKIP PGRI Pasuruan,
Indonesia

Sony Sukmawan

Indonesian and Culture Education Faculty of Cultural Studies,
Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract:

Literary appreciation and language teaching have long been associated with two different constructs. However, with careful selection and planning, literary study and language teaching can be integrated for the benefits of language learning as well as for literary appreciation. This study is attempted to investigate (i) the students' opinion in relation to the effective way of understanding the intrinsic elements of prose fiction, (ii) their opinion in relation to analyzing fictions in the form of an essay, and (iii) what they learn in terms of the literary aspects and writing aspects. The design the study is content analysis design through document analysis. The participants of the study were 31 students of English Education Study program who took prose subject in College of Teacher Training and Education of Indonesian Teachers Association (STKIP PGRI) in Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia.. The data was taken from the students reflection writing which was collected in the end of the semester after they joined prose subject class. Thus, the instrument used was mainly documentation. To help the researchers categorized and analyzed the data, some codifications were used. The finding shows the majority of the students believe making an essay to analyze fictions is the effective way to understand the intrinsic elements of prose and help them in sharpening their ability to read and write. The result of the study also shows that writing essays to analyze fictions give some benefits for the students' knowledge in how to write well as well as in comprehending the literary aspects of a fictions.

Key words: essay, fictions, prose analysis, students' perception, writing for comprehension

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Introduction

In the past, the inclusion of literature in language teaching has not attracted many attentions from researchers and practitioners. However, despite of its controversies, since 1980 the inclusion of literature in language classes was already acceptable (Bottino, 1999). The use of literature in language classes began in the early 19th century when Britain and its colonies used literature to teach languages (Hall, 2005). Literature is considered appropriate for teaching a language since it has always been seen as authentic materials (Collie & Slater, 1987) and has become the means of transmitting wisdoms, understandings, and entertainments (Ahmad, 2012). It is authentic because the creation of literary work was not intended specifically for language teaching. The language used in the text is genuine and is intended for the native speaker of the target language (Collie & Slater, 1987).

Therefore, literature offers many benefits for language learners if it is used for learning a language. Firstly, literature offers cultural knowledge of the people written in the story (Lazar, 1993). Literature may act as the representation of the reality in the form of fiction. It reflects not only the life in the real world, but also the culture of the society as presented in the text. Secondly, literature also provide language enrichment for the learners (Collie & Slater, 1987; Floris, 2004). Learners would have many linguistics inputs in terms of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and style. The language used in the literature mostly is not a type of language commonly used in daily communication and textbooks. Thus, if literature is used for teaching a language, learners would learn the lexical and syntactical items in its context. And thirdly, the use of literature triggers personal involvement (Collie & Slater, 1987; Floris, 2004). If the learners are personally involved with the texts they read, their attention would be shifted from the mechanical aspect of the language to the engagement of the story (Collie & Slater, 1987) barely aware that they learn the language. When they are drawn to the development of the story, the learners could feel the personal attachment with particular characters they read and might share every emotion the characters think and feel.

Among the genres of literary text, prose fiction is a type of literary genre which is mostly available in any means of communication. With the advancement of technology, one can find fiction easily from internet. Many of the fictions from various genres are downloadable from the internet, ranging from novels, short stories, mini fictions, and micro fictions, either classic or modern. In recent decades, the use of prose fictions in language class is not something new. Many practitioners have exploited the use of prose fictions for teaching language skills, such as for teaching reading (Braz da Silva 2001, Ahmad, 2012; Khatib&Nasrollahi, 2012; Chen, 2014), for listening and reading skills (Rodriguez& Leonor, 2017), for teaching writing (Sukmawan, Setyowati, &Nurmansyah, 2015; Setyowati&Sukmawan, 2015; Setyowati&Samsu, 2015; Setyowati, 2016), and for teaching integrated skills (Erkaya, 2005). The teaching of prose is closely associated with the teaching of reading as the main goal is similar, that is comprehension. The techniques of teaching reading such as skimming, scanning, and silent reading can be applied to comprehend prose material (Aslam, 2003). He further states that since the goal of teaching prose is very close to the goal of teaching reading, the kind of activity involved is usually answering the comprehension questions in the end of the passage.

In relation to the teaching and learning of prose fictions in university level, it is very common for the instructors to present a set of comprehension questions to the students to be answered either in groups or individually, and either answered orally or in written form. Setyaningsih (2014) used collaborative group investigation to solve the students' problem in prose analysis. In collaborative group investigation, the students worked in groups to read, discuss, analyze the fictions based on the problems and questions given by the lecturer. After they have finished with the discussion, each group then presented the result of the discussion in front of the class. The research was conducted in two cycle which resulted in the increased scores from cycle 1 to cycle 2. She concluded that collaborative group investigation is effective to improve the students' ability in analyzing the intrinsic elements of fictions. Secondly, Novianti (2016) conducted a case study on the teaching of prose in a university in West Java, Indonesia. She found out that the strategies that the lecturer employed are individual reading assignment followed by a face to face comprehension question session conducted orally, and assigning group reading and group discussion with different level of English proficiency level students so that the high achiever can help the low achiever to understand the text.

Since most of prose fiction teaching and learning processes use comprehension questions at the end of the passage, it is very unusual to find a prose class that asks students to analyze a prose fiction in the form of an essay, especially in Indonesian context. The class being studied in this research applied the 'write' strategy to analyze the fictions. For one semester, the students were asked to analyze the a prose fiction individually in the form of an essay. The essay should be written in the accepted form and follow the general convention of essay writing, namely the occurrence of introductory paragraph, thesis statement, development of ideas in the body of essay, and conclusion. Thus, the present study is considered worth doing because of several reasons. Firstly, previous research mainly focuses on the methodology of teaching prose (Setyaningsih, 2014; Novianti, 2016) and did not really explore the students' views in relation to their learning of prose. Secondly, the strategies for teaching prose found in the previous research focus mainly on the utilization of comprehension questions in the end of the text, while in this present research, the students' comprehension was checked through their ability to analyze the fiction in the form of an essay. And thirdly, very scarce research is found investigating the students' perceptions and feeling about their learning of prose, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), except a study conducted by Zahra& Farah (2016) who particularly investigated the EFL students' attitude toward the use of short stories for language learning. Having the information in relation to the students' view and feelings about their analysis of prose fictions in the form of an essay can help the prose lecturer and writing lecturer to have insights and ideas of teaching innovation either in using prose fictions for teaching writing, or teaching essay writing by using prose. Therefore, the present study is intended to fill the gap and to enrich the body of knowledge in relation to the teaching of prose fictions in EFL context and essay writing. Thus, the research problems are posed as follows:

1. What are the students' opinion in relation to the effective way of understanding the intrinsic elements of prose fictions?
2. What are the students' opinion in analyzing fictions in the form of essay?
3. What do the students' learn in relation to the literary aspect and writing aspect?

Literary Review

Aspects of an Essay

To create a good essay, there are some aspects of writing need to be taken into account. As stated by Harvey (2009), there are twelve aspects of an academic essay. The first is the occurrence of a thesis. This thesis explain about the topic being discussed. Secondly, it is the motives. The motive should be clear and genuine and is usually placed in the introduction of the essay. Thirdly, it is the key terms. The key terms help the readers to see the important points of the essay. The fourth is the evidence. The evidence is the data that can be used to support the thesis. The data can be in the form of facts, examples and details. The fifth is the analysis. To analyze is not to quote or to summarize, but to do something with the data. Harvey (2009) states that logical thinking is the key aspect of analysis whether the reasoning is done implicitly or explicitly. The sixth is the structure. The essay structure deals with the logical order, whether the essay is ordered by using order of importance, sequence order, or complexity order. Seventh, it is *stitching*. The word *stitching* means connecting sentences and paragraphs by using transitions words to shape an intact, united, and coherent essay. The eight is sources. When writing academic writing it is important to have sources to backup the thesis and the argument. Ninth is reflecting. Reflecting means the writer's own reflection through the consideration of counter-argument. Next is orienting. Orienting is giving some information that might be needed by the readers to understand the whole text. The eleventh element is stance. Stance is the writer's attitude which can be shown by tone and dictions. And the final element is style. Style is the choice of words, sentence and structure. Style is what every piece of writing unique

Teaching Prose Fictions

The idea of using literature, especially prose fiction, in language classes has given birth to the models of how to apply them in the classroom. Scholars proposes some models for using literature in language classes. Lazar (1993) classifies the approach that can be used for applying literature in language teaching, namely language-base model, the content-based model, and personal enrichment model. The language-based model integrates the literature syllabus and linguistic components such as the use of grammar, diction, and discourse to describe the aesthetic side of the works. Meanwhile, the content-based model focuses on the analysis of literature in terms of the historical and cultural background, the genre, and the rhetorical devices. The personal enrichment model, on the other hand, emphasizes the self-reflection toward the works that is by relating the text with the learners' personal experiences, opinions, and feeling. Similarly, Bottino(1999) proposes three models for teaching languages by using literature, namely the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model. The cultural model focuses on the transmission of culture, feelings, ideas and the target language learnt. Whereas the language model focus on the use of literature as a means of learning vocabulary and structures to create literary meanings. The last model as proposed by Bottino (1999) is the personal growth model which puts emphasize on the personal involvement of the learners to read for enjoyment as well as to read for interpretation. Looking at the models proposed by Lazar (1993) and Bottino (1999) a similarity between the models can be drawn. They are on the agreement that literature can be used to teach language components, such as vocabulary and grammar, as well as to enhance learners personal experience and enrichments. Lazar's (1993) content based model seems to be similar to Bottino's (1999) cultural model since the purpose of this model is alike. However, Lazar(1993) suggests

prior applying any of the models, the learners' need should be identified so that an appropriate model can be chosen for them

Aside from the models of teaching literature as discussed above, there are some strategies specifically addressed to the teaching of prose fictions. According to Morris (2016), there are four effective strategies for teaching prose, namely read, write, discuss, and integrate technology. Since teaching prose means teaching reading with comprehension, the instructors usually ask about the intrinsic elements of the story. As students gain more maturity with their reading comprehension, the comprehension questions usually get heavier, such as the writer's purpose, the message, themes, and connecting the story with personal life experiences. Morris (2016) further states that the interpretation of prose can be done orally, or in written form through filling out graphic organizer, charts, or other outlining techniques.

Methodology

The study uses qualitative approach focusing on content analysis design. The main instrument used is documentation. In the study, the students were asked to write their opinion in short paragraph describing their views and feeling in relation to the use of essay for analyzing fictions. The participants of the study were thirty one students of English Education Study Program STKIP PGRI Pasuruan joining Prose subjects. During the teaching and learning process, the students were asked by their lecturer to analyze short fictions they read in the form of at least four paragraph essay which consist of introduction, body and conclusion. In the end of the semester, the students were asked to describe their feelings and opinion in relation to the teaching learning process, especially in the use of essay to analyze fictions in the forms of self-reflection writing. Before writing their opinion, the lecturers wrote the items the students need to explore, namely, the effective way of understanding the intrinsic elements, the use of essay for prose analysis, and what they learn from prose fiction analysis.

The data of the study is in the form of words and sentences, and was analyzed qualitatively. To help the researchers analyzed the data, codifications were used. The codification system consists of the student's name, aspects, and students' identity number. After the data was collected, the researchers omitted data which was not relevant with the purpose of the study. The data was reduced and classified based on the following criteria; the effective way of understanding intrinsic elements of prose fictions, their opinion of analyzing fictions in the form of essay, and what the students' learn in relation to the literary aspect and writing aspect.

Finding

The Effective way of Understanding the Elements of Fictions

In their self reflection writing, the students wrote three ways for understanding the intrinsic elements of prose fictions, namely analyzing it in the form of essay, making questions, and the combination of both.

Table 1. *Ways to understand the intrinsic elements*

<u>Ways to understand the intrinsic elements of Fictions</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number of students</u>
1. Analyzing it in the form of essay	81%	25

2. Making questions and answering them myself	16%	5
3. Making questions then writing the essay	3%	1
Total	100%	31

The students wrote in their self-reflection writing that making essay for analyzing prose fiction is the effective way for understanding the intrinsic elements of the narration (81%). In their writing, some of the students state,

“In my opinion, by writing an essay, I can understand the intrinsic elements of short fictions, and I can learn more about weird vocabulary” (Zaidatun/Q1/ 3026)

“In my opinion, the most effective way for understanding the intrinsic elements of a short story is by writing an essay about it. Because by writing an essay, I can understand the story easier.” (Lailatul/Q1/3014)

“By writing an essay, I can focus more on the intrinsic elements because I cannot just analyze a story without understanding it. If I make my own questions, I cannot understand the story in detail, because I will just answer the questions without analyzing it deeper.” (Cyndis/Q1/3004)

In contrast to the students who prefer to make an essay to comprehend a story, the students who are in favor of understanding intrinsic elements of prose fictions through making questions and answering them themselves (16%) believe that answering questions in the end of the passage is the most effective way to comprehend a fiction.

“In my opinion, the most effective way (for understanding the intrinsic elements of fictions) is by making questions. Before we make the questions, of course we have to understand the story.” (Nurul/Q2/ 3038)

“In my opinion, the most effective way is by making questions about the story. By making the questions, we will be able to understand the story, and look for every detail of the story to be questioned.” (Andika/Q2/3036)

Analyzing Fictions in the Form Essay

The students give various reasons about the benefits of understanding prose fictions through writing.

Table 2. *Benefits of Analyzing Fictions in Essay*

<u>Benefits</u>	<u>Number of students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Sharpen my ability to read and write	18	58%
2. Increase my critical thinking	4	13%
3. Increase my ability to express ideas in the form of essay	6	20%
4. I can analyze the intrinsic elements better	2	6%
5. Improve my vocabulary	1	3%
	31	100%

Table 2 shows that more than half percent of the students believe that analyzing fictions in the form of an essay helps them to sharpen their ability to read and write (58%). Some of them think that it helps them to learn to write in terms of expressing ideas (20%) and increase their critical thinking ability (13%). Although very few of the students think that analyzing fictions enable them to understand better about the intrinsic elements of prose (6%) and improve the vocabulary (3%), undeniably, this type of activity help the students a lot for their reading ability.

What the Students' Learn

The data was classified into two categories in terms of what they learn during a semester activity of analyzing fictions by writing them down in the form of essays. Those two categories are what they learn in terms of literary aspect, and what they learn in terms of writing aspect.

Literary Aspects

Most of the students' writing reflect that analyzing prose fiction in the form of an essay, helps them to understand the intrinsic elements of a story, namely characterization, plot, setting, point of view and theme.

Table 3. *Literary Aspects*

<u>Literary Aspect</u>	<u>Number of students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Intrinsic Elements	23	74%
2. Understanding the content of the story	6	19%
3. Moral Value	2	7%
Total	31	100%

Writing Aspects

Based on the data of the students' self reflection essay, there are several writing aspects that the students wrote. The writing aspects are giving details and evidences based on the fictions they read, how to open an essay, and how to make thesis statement for the essay.

Table 4. *Writing Aspects*

<u>Writing Aspect</u>	<u>Number of students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Giving details, examples and evidences related to the main idea	16	52%
2. Write introductory paragraph for an essay	8	26%
3. Make thesis statement for an essay	7	22%
Total	31	100%

In terms of the writing aspects, the students said that analyzing fictions in the form of an essay enable them to learn how to give examples and details to support their argument (52%). They also wrote that they learn how to open a an essay (26%), while the rest of them state that they learn how to make thesis statement for an essay (22%).

Discussion

The finding shows that the majority of the students consider an essay to comprehend a fiction is an effective way (81%) to understand a story as compared to answering comprehension questions (16%) just like what they usually do in a reading class. They believe this type of activity help them to sharpen their reading and writing skill. The students said that through writing, they are able to comprehend the content of the story better and are able to learn how to express their ideas in written form. The finding of this research suggests integrating reading and writing, or vise versa, helps comprehension. The students who analyze the intrinsic elements of prose fiction in the form of an essay confess that they get better understanding rather than just answer the comprehension question. This finding is supported by Knipper& Duggan (2006) who state that integrating writing and reading helps comprehension. Furthermore, Wallace, Pearman, Hail & Hurst (2007) argue that reading and writing are interconnected and these skills should not be treated as a separate construct.

Wallace et all (2007) further suggest the difference between writing to learn and learning to write are evident. When the goal is learning to write, the focus of the teaching and learning process would be on the construction of words, sentences, and paragraph organization to form a meaningful discourse through the process of writing in which this type of activity might or might not be linked to content knowledge (Wallace et al, 2007). They further state that writing to learn, on the other hand, emphasizes writing for comprehension, which means that the students would not be able to write if they do not understand the text they read. According to Knipper& Duggan (2006) in the activity of writing for comprehension, the students infer, clarify, and questions particular points in the text to satisfy the curiosity. Taken into the context of the present study, the students, would not be able to write an analysis of the intrinsic elements if they did not understand the content of the story. Thus, to write for comprehension, they had to questions and clarify meanings. Therefore, it is understandable when they said that making an essay to analyze a fiction is the most effective way to understand a story.

The finding of this research also shows that when the students analyze a fiction in the form of an essay, it helps their critical thinking ability (13%), and helps them express ideas in written form (20%). According to Knipper & Duggan (2006), writing to learn strategy extends thinking and sharpen understanding because the students continuously engage with the text to infer meaning. Li & Yang (2014) introduces the term reading-to write which is a model of integrating reading and writing course. The model puts great emphasize on student-centered learning atmosphere and authentic learning environment through making use of information resources, not only to construct meaning but also critical thinking.

In the prose fiction analysis, the students were assigned by the teacher to analyze a particular story, then put their analysis into an essay. To write the essay, sometimes, the students need additional information from other sources to strengthen their opinion. For example, when the students analyze the plot of the story, they might read additional information about plot, type of plot and type of conflicts to have a profound analysis of the story. This is in line to Li & Yang (2014) argument that in reading-to write activity, the students have freedom to select topics and materials of their interest to support their ideas for their writing.

As the data shows, it cannot be denied that there are several benefits of analyzing a prose fiction in the form of an essay, in other words, using the reading-to write model (Li & Yang, 2004) or writing to learn strategy or writing for comprehension (Wallace et al, 2007). Based on the data from the document analysis, some students said that they get new vocabulary from the stories they read. Seen from the theory of second language acquisition, as proposed by Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982), the language learners will be able to acquire the new language only if there is sufficient input which is comprehensible for them. When the students read the texts, in this case, the fictions, they will give their best effort to understand the content of the story. One of the challenges in comprehending literary texts as authentic materials is the vocabulary. If one or two important vocabulary are not understood, the students would not be able to understand the point of the story. Thus, whenever they found unfamiliar vocabulary, most likely, they would open their dictionary to find out its meaning or search for the meaning either online or using particular application in their gadget. Reading, undoubtedly, offers valuable input for the students in the target language. In relation to this, Krashen (1989) argues that mostly only by reading language learners may acquire their linguistic input, especially in vocabulary and spelling.

The second benefit of analyzing prose fictions in the form of an essay is the students can sharpen their critical thinking ability. To be able to make an analysis in the form of an essay, the students need to read critically, then to write critically. Critical thinking is a thinking skill to analyze and evaluate something which is self-directed, self-monitored, and self-disciplined (Paul & Elder, 2006). One way to promote the critical thinking skill is through writing. As stated by Schmidt (1999) writing is a tool to develop the critical thinking skill because when the students learn how to write, they also learn how to think. Because of that, writing and thinking are seen as interdependent process (Schmidt, 1999). And the third benefit is the students can learn how to write well based on the acceptable writing convention. As proposed by Schmidt (1999) writing and thinking is a synergetic process. Because it is interdependent, when the students learn to write, they have to learn how to make the writing intact and logical. To achieve this, the students need

to learn how to open the essay, how to present the thesis statement, how to organize their ideas, how to support evidence and details, and how to close their essay.

The exploration of students' feelings and opinion in this study gives valuable information on strategies to teach reading, prose and writing. Therefore, the implications of this study are addressed to the reading lecturer, prose lecturer, and writing lecturer. Firstly, since the goal of teaching reading and prose is basically similar, which is comprehension, it is suggested that literary texts, especially fictions, should be utilized in the language classroom. The use of prose fictions can trigger the students' critical thinking, enable the students to understand about themselves and others, to value differences, and to learn about one's and other culture. Secondly, the strategy of teaching and learning of prose should consider the use of the strategy to write for comprehension. The 'write' strategy does not mean answer the questions in the end of the passage in the full sentence with correct grammar, but to literary write what they understood about the story, either in the form of a journal diary, summary, or essay to check the students comprehension about the story they read. In short, to understand the fiction, they students need to write for comprehension. This strategy is considered to be beneficial for the students since they can learn two skills at the same time. And finally, the writing instructors are suggested to utilize literary texts as the teaching materials because literary texts, especially fictions, are rich in values and content to be applied either for the purpose of learning to write or writing to learn. The students can learn to compare and contrast, give opinion, classify, retell events, describe characters of the fictions. Moreover, with the advancement of technology nowadays, many prose fictions with various genres are freely downloadable from the internet.

Conclusion

Based on the data, it can be concluded that the students have positive views on the use of essay to analyze the fictions in the prose class. Prose fictions analysis in the form of an essay certainly offer many benefits for the students as described from the data. It is however, cannot be seen as the most effective way to teach prose subject because further study needs to be conducted to find its effectiveness. As stated by DiPiro (2010) the students' perception cannot be seen as the main evidence for learning effectiveness. Although it does provide a valuable information about particular strategies used in the classroom, it cannot be used as the main data to draw conclusion.

Thus, this research has some limitations. Firstly, the result of this present study cannot be used as generalization because the main goal is only to describe the phenomena based on document analysis. To make generalization, different research design should be used. Therefore, future research should find out the effectiveness of essay writing to improve the students comprehension as compared to other method, such answering comprehension questions. The second limitation of this study deals with the instruments of the study. This study used only documentation from students' self reflection writing to find out the students' perception. If this study should be replicated, future research needs to use more instruments to elicit an in-depth information about the students perceptions, such as by using interview. Thirdly, this study does not yield any results in terms of which aspects of writing that are affected by the use of fictions. Thus, future researchers need to investigate or explore which writing aspects are affected by the use of fictions seen from the content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanic. Future research needs

also to explore whether prose, either fiction or non fiction, benefits the language learners for learning to write.

All in all, the use of essay writing for prose analysis benefits language learners not only from the point of view of prose subjects, but also from the point of view writing course. The students can learn about fictions' intrinsic elements, as well as the writing skills. Learners would get a lot of advantages from the activity when writing to learn or writing for comprehension is used in the language classroom.

About the authors:

Lestari Setyowati is a fulltime lecturer of College of Teacher Training and Education (STKIP) PGRI Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia. She earned her Undergraduate degree (2000), Master degree (2005), and Doctoral degree (2016) in ELT from State University of Malang. She is interested in Teaching EFL Writing, Instructional media in EFL context, literature and ELT. Email: lestari.setyowati@yahoo.co.id/, ORCID 0000-0001-5814-0274

Sony Sukmawan is an Indonesian and Literature Education lecturer of Indonesian Study Program of Faculty of Cultural Studies in Brawijaya University Malang. He has been teaching in this institution from 2005 until present. He earned his Undergraduate degree (1999), Master degree (2007), and Doctoral degree (2013) in Indonesian and Literature Education from State University of Malang. E-mail: sony_sukmawan@ub.ac.id/ /ORCID 0000-0001-9444-8532

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