

## Enhancing Students' Literacy Through Intellectual Diary: A Classroom Approach

Muh. Hasbi<sup>1</sup>, Fitriyani Bakri<sup>1</sup>, Abd. Halim<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [emhasby@unm.ac.id](mailto:emhasby@unm.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

*In higher education context, many students encounter considerable difficulties in improving their literacy skills, which limits their ability to fully engage with course material and reach their academic potential. This study aims to explore how the use of intellectual diaries have significant influence in enhancing the literacy skills of university students enrolled in an English prose course. This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach focusing on in-depth examination of a single class of students in their natural classroom setting. The participants in this study were 34 undergraduate students enrolled in an English prose course at a state university located in Makassar city, Indonesia. Data were collected through three primary instruments: intellectual diaries, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis with six steps implementation stages. The findings revealed four key themes in dealing with students' intellectual diary: enhanced critical thinking, improved reading comprehension and analytical abilities, increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness, and greater engagement with course material. These findings suggest that intellectual diaries can be a valuable tool for promoting literacy development in higher education. The study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on literacy education by providing empirical evidence of the benefits of intellectual diaries in an English prose course context.*

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English Prose Course; Intellectual Diaries; Literacy Skills; University Students.

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### 1. Introduction

Students' literacy is a vital aspect of their academic and future success. By acknowledging the challenges and implementing effective strategies, teacher or lecturer can promote students' literacy development and empower them to become proficient readers, writers, and communicators (Rahman, 2018; Suma et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2024). Literacy, encompassing reading comprehension, critical thinking, and effective written communication, forms the cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning in the 21st century (National Research Council, 2012).

In higher education context, students are increasingly expected to engage with complex texts, synthesize information from diverse sources, and articulate their ideas persuasively, both orally and in writing (Bean, 2011). They are usually provided with abundance of reading assignment to obtain the targeted skills determined by the lecturers. However, many students face significant challenges in developing these essential literacy skills, struggling with critical analysis, in-depth comprehension, and written expression, hindering their ability to fully engage with course content and achieve their academic potential (PISA, 2018).

Traditional teaching methods focus on memorization and passive learning, but they do not encourage active thinking and deep understanding. While various strategies have been employed to address these challenges, there remains a need for innovative, student-centred approaches that foster critical thinking, encourage self-reflection, and promote meaningful engagement with course material. Active learning strategies and approaches emphasize immersion in experience and the use of available discourses, including students' life experiences and simulations of workplace and public space relationships (Drewry et al., 2019; Yaumi et al., 2023; Youngsun et al., 2024; Ko et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant in disciplines like literature, where the ability to analyse and interpret complex literary works is paramount.

This study addresses the gap in our understanding of how intellectual diaries, a tool designed to promote active reading and reflective thinking, can be effectively utilized to enhance literacy skills in a university-level English prose course. The intellectual diary, which is well-known as a reflective journal, was utilized to gather opinions and perceptions from students (Hasbi & Bakri, 2024). While journaling and diary writing have been recognized for their potential to improve student learning and self-awareness (Pemberton, 2018), their specific impact on the multifaceted dimensions of literacy within the context of a prose course remains underexplored. This study posits that consistent engagement with intellectual diaries can foster critical thinking, deepen reading comprehension, and improve written expression by prompting students to actively process and reflect upon their interactions with course texts.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the use of intellectual diaries influences and enhances the literacy skills of university students enrolled in an English prose course. The findings of this study have the potential to contribute significantly to the field of literacy education, particularly in the context of English prose and higher education. By providing empirical evidence of the impact of intellectual diaries on student literacy, this research can inform pedagogical practices and offer practical strategies for educators seeking to promote deeper engagement with course material and enhance students' critical thinking and communication skills. Moreover, this study can empower students by demonstrating the value of self-reflection and active learning in developing their literacy abilities.

### **1.1 Literature Review**

This study draws primarily upon Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Constructivism (Piaget, 1970) to understand the process of literacy development through intellectual diaries. Sociocultural theory highlights how social interactions and cultural tools help people learn and develop their thinking. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others within a student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers should concentrate on three key components that will assist a student go through the zone of proximal development: scaffolding, more knowledgeable other (MKO), and student interactions (Bakri, Wello, & Dollah, 2022). In the context of intellectual diaries, students engage in a form of internal dialogue and self-scaffolding, processing their understanding of course texts through writing and reflection. Furthermore, the lecturer's feedback and classroom discussions related to diary entries provide opportunities for social interaction and collaborative meaning-making, further supporting students' literacy development (Cui & Pacheco, 2023).

Constructivism, on the other hand, posits that learners actively construct their own knowledge through experience and reflection (Piaget, 1970). Intellectual diaries or reflective journals provide a platform for students to actively engage with course content, construct their own interpretations, and integrate new information with their existing knowledge base (Asmare, Yimer, & Mesfin Molla, 2024). By reflecting on their reading and writing processes, students become more aware of their own cognitive strategies and develop metacognitive skills that are crucial for literacy development. Writing in an intellectual diary helps students express their thoughts, find gaps in their understanding, and improve their ideas by thinking and revising repeatedly.

Literacy, in its broadest sense, encompasses a range of skills and abilities, including reading comprehension, critical thinking, written communication, and information literacy. Research on literacy development has highlighted the importance of active reading strategies (Sharma, 2023), explicit instruction in critical thinking (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021), and opportunities for authentic writing practice (Childs, 2020; Sugiyartati et al., 2020). The research found that explicit instruction in critical reading techniques, such as identifying authorial bias and evaluating evidence, significantly improved students' ability to analyze complex texts. It also demonstrated the positive impact of providing students with opportunities to write for authentic audiences and purposes, leading to increased engagement and improved writing quality.

Specifically, in the context of English prose, literacy involves the students' ability to interpret literary devices, analyze themes, and understand the historical and cultural context of the works (Chen, 2022). By doing close reading students pay careful attention to the language and structure of a text, which is essential for developing students' understanding of a story. Furthermore, conducting class discussion engages students to foster their critical thinking and encourage diverse interpretations.

The use of diaries and journals as tools for promoting student learning has a long history in education. Research has shown that intellectual diaries or reflective journals can enhance self-reflection, promote critical thinking, and improve writing skills and that reflective journaling helped students to develop a deeper understanding of their own learning processes and identify areas for improvement (Ortlipp, 2008).

The existing literature highlights the potential of both theoretical frameworks, sociocultural theory and constructivism, as well as practical applications of journals and diaries in education to enhance students' learning. However, there is a noticeable gap in research that specifically investigates the use of intellectual diaries, with a clearly defined structure and purpose, to enhance literacy skills in English prose courses. While studies have explored the use of journals for self-reflection and language learning, fewer studies focus on the deliberate design of diaries to promote critical thinking, reading comprehension, and analytical writing skills in the context of literary analysis.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of intellectual diaries on students' literacy skills in an English Prose class at a state university located in Makassar, Indonesia. By employing a qualitative research design and gathering data from student diaries, interviews, and classroom observations, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how intellectual diaries can be effectively utilized as a tool for promoting literacy development in higher education. The findings of This study will enhance the existing knowledge base by offering empirical proof of the advantages of using intellectual diaries and offering practical recommendations for teachers or lecturers seeking to enhance students' literacy skills in English prose and related disciplines.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of intellectual diaries on enhancing the literacy skills of university students enrolled in an English prose course. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as the research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, and the nuanced ways in which intellectual diaries influenced their critical thinking, reading comprehension, and written expression (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Specifically, this study utilized a Case Study approach, focusing on the in-depth examination of a single class of students in their natural classroom setting (Yin, 2018). This is appropriate to detect the impact of the use of intellectual diaries to students' critical thinking skills, reading comprehension, analytical abilities as well as their literacy skills.

The participants in this study were 34 undergraduate students enrolled in an English Prose course at a state university located in Makassar, Indonesia. The course was a required course in the English Literature study program. The class was chosen due to the lecturer's willingness to implement the use of intellectual diaries as a pedagogical tool and their alignment with the research objectives. The student population consisted of predominantly female students (70%) with an age range of 19-22 years with diverse social and cultural background.

Data were collected through three primary instruments: intellectual diaries, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

- **Intellectual Diaries:** Students were required to maintain intellectual diaries throughout the duration of the 16-week semester. They were provided with guided questions as specific prompts to guide them in writing their diaries.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** At the end of the semester, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were designed to explore students' perceptions of using intellectual diaries as a tool for enhancing their literacy skills, their experiences with the diary prompts, and the perceived impact of the diaries on their critical thinking, reading comprehension, and writing abilities.
- **Classroom Observations:** Classroom observations were conducted once a week during the semester to document student engagement, classroom discussions, and the lecturer's use of the intellectual diaries as a pedagogical tool. Field notes were taken during each observation, focusing on student participation and the quality of classroom discussions.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved the following steps: familiarization, getting initial codes, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming, and report writing. According to Maguire & Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis is an appropriate method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes in qualitative data.

## 3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the analysis of students' intellectual diaries, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The analysis revealed 4 specific themes related to the impact of intellectual diaries on students' literacy skills in the English prose course. These themes are: (1) Enhanced Critical Thinking, (2) Improved Reading Comprehension and Analytical Abilities, (3) Increased Self-Reflection and Metacognitive Awareness, and (4)

Greater Engagement with Course Material. Each theme is described below, supported by illustrative quotes from student diary entries and interview transcripts, as well as excerpts from classroom observation notes.

### **3.1 Enhanced Critical Thinking**

A prominent theme emerging from the data was the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills through the use of intellectual diaries. Students demonstrated a deeper level of analysis of the course texts, moving beyond simple summaries to engage in critical evaluation and interpretation. The diary prompts encouraged students to question assumptions, identify biases, and consider alternative perspectives. For example, one student wrote in their diary:

#### **Data 1**

"Before using the intellectual diary, I would just read the texts and try to memorize the main points. Now, I find myself actively questioning the author's arguments and considering the implications of their ideas. The diary prompts have pushed me to think more deeply and critically about what I'm reading." (AN, Diary Entry, Week 3)

Another student wrote in her diary:

#### **Data 2**

"The intellectual diary made me read more focused and started to pay attention to some details regarding the themes discussed in the story." (MR, Diary Entry, Week 4)

During the interviews, students echoed these sentiments, highlighting the role of the diaries in fostering critical thinking. One student stated:

#### **Data 3**

"The diary really made me slow down and think about what I was reading. I had to really analyze the text and come up with my own interpretations. It wasn't just about understanding the plot or the characters; it was about understanding the deeper meaning and the author's intentions." (CJL, Interview)

Classroom observations also supported this theme, with students demonstrating more sophisticated critical thinking skills in their class discussions. For instance, during a discussion of *The Bet*, students were observed challenging the lecturer's interpretation of a key passage, citing evidence from their diary entries to support their alternative viewpoint. The observation notes state:

#### **Data 4**

"Some students questioned the bet and the lawyer's choice to stay in a solitary confinement for 15 years of his life. They thought that it was not worth the loss of 15 years of time." (Classroom Observation, Week 4)

#### **Data 5**

"Students engaged in a lively debate about the symbolism of books in *The Bet* story. Several students referenced their diary entries, using specific quotes from the text to support their arguments. The discussion demonstrated a high level of critical engagement with the material." (Classroom Observation, Week 5)

### **3.2 Improved Reading Comprehension and Analytical Abilities**

Another key finding was the improvement in students' reading comprehension and analytical abilities as a result of using intellectual diaries. The diary prompts encouraged students to actively engage with the text, identify key concepts, and analyze the author's writing style. One student noted in her diary:

#### **Data 6**

"I used to struggle with understanding complex texts. But the intellectual diary has helped me to break down the readings into smaller, more manageable parts. By writing about my understanding of each section, I'm able to identify areas where I need to focus my attention." (IC, Diary Entry, Week 3)

Another student also wrote in his diary:

#### **Data 7**

"Writing the diary helped me understand the story with more focused attention to certain themes and I felt easier to understand the main conflict as well as the plot of the assigned story." (MR, Diary Entry, Week 4)

In the interviews, students also reported that the act of writing in the diary helped them to clarify their understanding of the course material. A Student with initial name FD explained:

#### **Data 8**

"Writing in the diary forced me to really grapple with the text. I couldn't just skim through it and pretend I understood it. I had to actually put my thoughts down on paper, and that helped me to identify gaps in my understanding and to develop a more coherent interpretation." (FD, Interview)

Another student commented:

#### **Data 9**

"I felt very helped and guided in understanding the story as a whole. It was really, really impressive!" (GM, Interview)

Classroom observations revealed that students who consistently used their intellectual diaries were better prepared for class discussions and were more able to articulate their understanding of the course readings. The observation notes state:

#### **Data 10**

"Students who had completed their diary entries were more likely to participate in class discussions and to offer insightful comments about the text. They were also able to answer the lecturer's questions more accurately and confidently." (Classroom Observation, Week 6)

### **3.3 Increased Self-Reflection and Metacognitive Awareness**

The use of intellectual diaries also fostered increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness among students. The diary prompts encouraged students to reflect on their own learning processes, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies for improving their academic performance. A student wrote in their diary:

#### **Data 11**

"I've realized that I learn best when I'm able to connect the course material to my own experiences. The intellectual diary has given me a space to explore those connections and to think about how the readings relate to my life." (RE, Diary Entry, Week 7)

During the interviews, students described how the diaries helped them to become more aware of their own thinking processes. Student IF stated:

#### **Data 12**

"The diary has made me more aware of how I approach reading and writing. I've realized that I tend to focus on certain aspects of the text and ignore others. By reflecting on my own biases, I'm able to develop a more balanced and nuanced understanding." (IF, Interview)

Classroom observations indicated that students who engaged in self-reflection through their diaries were more likely to take ownership of their learning and to seek out additional resources to support their understanding. The observation notes state:

#### **Data 13**

"Several students approached the lecturer after class to ask for clarification on concepts they had struggled with in their diary entries. This demonstrated a willingness to take responsibility for their learning and to seek out help when needed." (Classroom Observation, Week 10)

### **3.4 Greater Engagement with Course Material**

Finally, the data revealed that the use of intellectual diaries led to greater engagement with the course material. Students reported feeling more connected to the readings and more invested in the learning process. One student explained in their diary:

#### **Data 14**

"The intellectual diary has made the course material feel more relevant and meaningful. I'm not just reading these texts because I have to; I'm reading them because I'm genuinely interested in what they have to say." (Student G, Diary Entry, Week 9)

Students also expressed that the diaries created a sense of personal connection to the material. To some students, writing personal diaries as a reading response to a literary story gave them a chance to express their personal expression related to their comprehension of the story. Student H said:

#### **Data 15**

"It's like having a conversation with the text. When I write in my diary, I feel like I'm really engaging with the author's ideas and responding to them in my own way. It's not just passive reading; it's an active dialogue." (Student HM, Interview)

Classroom observations confirmed that students who used intellectual diaries were more actively involved in class discussions and demonstrated a greater enthusiasm for the course material. The observation notes state:

#### **Data 16**

"Students who had completed their diary entries were more likely to raise their hands and participate in class discussions. They also seemed to be more genuinely interested in the topics being discussed." (Classroom Observation, Week 12)

### **3.5 Discussion**

This study explored the impact of intellectual diaries on enhancing the literacy skills of university students enrolled in an English prose course. The findings, presented in the previous section, revealed four key themes: enhanced critical thinking, improved reading comprehension and analytical abilities, increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness, and greater engagement with course material.

The finding that intellectual diaries enhance critical thinking aligns with previous research highlighting the benefits of journaling and reflective writing for promoting higher-order thinking skills (Walsh et al., 2024). By prompting students to actively question, evaluate, and interpret the assigned readings, most of the students confirmed during the interview session that the intellectual diaries encouraged them to move beyond surface-level comprehension and engage in deeper analysis. This supports the principles of constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of active engagement and self-construction of knowledge (Piaget, 1970). The diary prompts served as scaffolding, guiding students through the process of critical thinking and analysis.

The improvement in reading comprehension and analytical abilities observed in this study is consistent with research demonstrating the positive impact of active reading strategies on comprehension (Sharma, 2023) and explicit instruction in critical thinking (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021). By requiring students to summarize, paraphrase, and analyze the course texts in their own words, the intellectual diaries facilitated deeper processing and understanding of the material. This finding also supports the notion that writing can be a powerful tool for learning. The act of writing in the diary forced students to confront any gaps in their understanding and to develop more coherent interpretations of the text.

The increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness among students are in line with studies emphasizing the importance of metacognition for academic success (Gopinath, 2014). By encouraging students to reflect on their own learning processes, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies for improving their performance, the

intellectual diaries fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. This aligns with the role of social interaction and self-regulation in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). The diaries provided a space for students to engage in internal dialogue and to develop their own strategies for navigating the challenges of the course.

Finally, the greater engagement with course material observed in this study supports the idea that student engagement is a key predictor of academic achievement. By making the course material more relevant and meaningful to students' lives, the intellectual diaries fostered a sense of connection and investment in the learning process. This finding also aligns with research on intrinsic motivation, which suggests that students are more likely to be engaged and successful when they are intrinsically motivated to learn.

The findings of this study have several important implications for pedagogical practice. They suggest that intellectual diaries can be a valuable tool for enhancing students' literacy skills in English prose courses. This study also highlights the importance of providing students with clear and structured prompts for their diary entries. Moreover, the study suggests that instructors should provide students with feedback on their diary entries. This feedback should be constructive and supportive, focusing on the students' strengths and areas for improvement. This emphasizes the importance of creating a classroom environment that values self-reflection and critical thinking.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study investigated the impact of intellectual diaries on enhancing the literacy skills of university students enrolled in an English prose course. Through a qualitative analysis of student diaries, interviews, and classroom observations, the study identified four key themes: enhanced critical thinking, improved reading comprehension and analytical abilities, increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness, and greater engagement with course material. These findings suggest that intellectual diaries can be a valuable tool for promoting literacy development in higher education.

The study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on literacy education by providing empirical evidence of the benefits of intellectual diaries in a specific context: an English prose course. While previous research has explored the use of journals and reflective writing in various educational settings, this study specifically focused on the impact of structured intellectual diaries on the multifaceted dimensions of literacy, including critical thinking, reading comprehension, and written expression. The results demonstrate that intellectual diaries can foster deeper engagement with course material, encourage active learning, and promote the development of essential literacy skills.

This study provides compelling evidence of the potential of intellectual diaries as a tool for enhancing literacy skills and promoting student engagement in higher education. By incorporating intellectual diaries into their teaching, educators can empower students to become more effective and engaged learners, preparing them for success in their academic pursuits and beyond. The recommendations offered in this section provide a roadmap for future research and pedagogical practice, guiding the continued exploration of this promising approach to literacy education.

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