

Learners' Use of Efferent, Aesthetic and Critical Stances When Reading a Novel

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have suggested that literature components benefit students in language acquisition and reading in general, yet reading for enjoyment is arguable since most of the students admit reading is done for examination purposes. Regardless of the reading purpose, adoption of efferent, aesthetic and critical stances is vital and believed to influence the reading process. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived and actual reading stances among learners when they read a novel. A total of 484 students from twelve non-residential secondary schools situated in Kuantan participated in this study. Employing a mixed method design, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were utilised. The instruments used to collect the data were a set of questionnaire and student's written responses. Although the findings from the questionnaire and written responses suggested that the learners employed all the three stances namely efferent, aesthetic and critical stances, there was the tendency for the students to adopt more of the efferent stance than the aesthetic and critical stances. Overall, the adoption of the efferent stance indicates that the students tend to closely and narrowly process the novel in terms of the story line narrated by the writer rather than adopting aesthetic and critical stances through interacting with the plot and characters and relating these elements with their experience and viewpoints.

Keywords: Literature, efferent, aesthetic and critical stances

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The integration of literature component in secondary schools begins in the year 2001. Among the chief aims in literature incorporation in schools other than to enhance language proficiency, are to inculcate the reading interest among the learners and to instil reading appreciation and enjoyment in reading experience (English Language Syllabus for Elective Subjects Literature for Form 4, 2006). In other words, teaching and learning of literature is considered important due to its contribution in aesthetic, affective and intellectual growth of the learners (Vethamani & Nair, 2007; Rosenblatt, 1995; Collie & Slater, 1990). The implementation which comes in a number of stages

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demonstrates the Ministry of Education's effort in emphasizing reading as a crucial skill in the teaching and learning of English language. Therefore, to respond to the aims and objectives laid out in the syllabus, a variety of genres has been introduced to learners which includes poems, short stories, novels and drama (Circular, Ministry of Education Malaysia, Number 4, Texts Conversion, 2015). The exposure of these genres to learners is aimed to inculcate interest in reading and to strengthen the English language proficiency (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2001; Mukundan, 2006).

Although novel reading in schools benefits learners, it is a very challenging activity despite the fact that it promotes an excellent access to language, content, cultural and referential elements. The tendency to perceive the readings of novels as challenging and difficult is high among learners and teachers (Nor Hashimah and Che Ton, 2012). Research findings revealed that among the drawbacks in literature teaching with respect to reading of a novel include 1) it is difficult to comprehend; 2) it is uninteresting 3) the story line does not match with students' interest, 4) the plots are slow paced 5) the themes are irrelevant, 6) the novel is lengthy, 7) the culture is unfamiliar to the learners and 8) the reading was forced upon them because reading is not a hobby (Tina *et al.*, 2007; Nor Hashimah and Che Ton, 2012). The problems listed are believed to cause the learners to remain passive, use their lower thinking skills, resort to their mother tongue, and choose less challenging learning strategies while becoming more dependent on their teacher's instruction. These drawbacks hinder the learners to immerse into the plots of the story and impede their creative and critical thinking which consequently make them unable to savour the power of literature in language teaching.

The difficulties in comprehending a text has also led teachers to use a simpler approach to facilitate learners' understanding while learners tend to be comfortable learning literary text by being dependent on the teacher's interpretation without producing any genuine response (Rashid, Vethamani, & Basree, 2010). Evidence has shown that rote learning and drilling took place very often without encouraging learners to produce reading stances (Tina *et al.*, 2007). Apparently, learners tend to produce stances which are at surface level without really immersing themselves in the text (Siti Norliana Ghazali *et al.*, 2009). The situation most likely drives the learners to become uninterested in learning literature, and in turn, the real purpose of teaching and reading literature is lost (Carter & Long, 1991) because reading does not match with their interest. Pellegrin & Galda (1993) in a similar grain, agrees that some teaching practices contribute to the 'distaste in readers' (p.106). Teaching literature in schools is too teacher-centred of which the teachers dictates what to be learned and remembered, while the learners considered the learning experience as a torturous and painstaking process of memorising for examination (Tina *et al.*, 2007; Siti Norliana *et al.*, 2009). The opportunities to improve reading and enhance language proficiency through literary text may become daunting if learners learn in resentment, discouragement and ignorance of the purpose of learning in the first place.

Past reports (Tina *et al.*, 2007; Siti Norliana *et al.*, 2009; Radzuwan *et al.*, 2010) have shown that teaching approaches employed in the classroom contradict to the aims of literature program. So the laid out objectives like promoting interest in reading and encouraging reading for enjoyment as well as promoting aesthetic appreciation of literature are unlikely to happen. Similarly, Vethamani and Nair (2009) and Vijayarajoo and Samuel (2013) mention that the most common responses received from learners relating to short stories are associations and interpretations of the characters and plot, of which these skills are closely linked to efferent stance. Thus, reading for enjoyment and pleasure is

neglected and this indirectly deters learners from developing critical and creative thinking which according to MELTA Roundtable (2012) is key in literature learning. Often, the instilling of aesthetic stance and appreciation of literary text are neglected while the effort to foster a lifetime reading habit and reading for pleasure are in vain.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers tend to believe that reading of literary works has long-term benefits and positive effects on the learners' linguistic ability, reading habits, thinking skills, and motivation (Erkaya, 2005; Clark & Rumbold, 2006; McKay, 1982). Evidence also supports that in relation to reading of novels, fictional literature facilitates the development of empathy (Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013) hence, the notion of literary text as fulfilling emotional outlet is testimonial (Rosenblatt, 1995). In line with that, reading of literary works is often viewed as an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension and understanding. From Rosenblatt's (1994) point of view, reading is a dynamic and fluid process, indicating a relationship between the readers, their background knowledge, the writer's creativity and the environment. This is sufficient to tell us the reason as to why in the meaning-making process, learners need to rely on their present experience, their background knowledge, their preoccupation and interests. Reading literary texts is thus much more than decoding and deciphering the text because it is not only about the information transfer but rather, it is regarded as a complex process whereby the reader has to become an active constructor of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1995). Reading, according to Pressley (2000), is a process of meaning construction or extraction. Readers need to extract the information and make meaning out of text they read. In the process of creating meaning, Rosenblatt (1994) believes that a transaction happens between the readers and the writer because readers need to work within the text and create meaning by blending the author's ideas with their background knowledge and experiences. A transaction takes place when learners generate their interpretation based on associations made from a text read to past elements of experience designated by the text.

One factor that affects readers' understanding and interpretation of a literary work is a focus of readers' attention on the text and their reading orientation when performing a reading activity (Galda & Liang, 2003). This readers' attention, also known as stance, refers to a mental process that readers adopt in order to make meaning out of what they read, no matter what reading ability they have achieved. Stances reflect the readers' position and opinion in relation to the text at any given point in reading. While in literacy events, Many (1994) and Many & Cox, (1992) believe that stance refers to readers' perspective and openness to respond to any indeterminacies and ambiguity in discourse and social relationship, which are commonly found in reading literary texts. In grain with that, Langer (1994), argues that stance refers to literary orientation, which is also known as the horizon of possibilities which explains that readers' understanding is changeable in line with the readers' focus and orientation in reading, either for information or for literary experience. The reading orientation differs significantly with their reading expectation and their reading experience (Langer, 2001).

Research examining students' responses when reading literary work has been documented in several works of scholars which suggest that the orientation of the reading activities plays a very

important part. For instance, Hunt and Huffman (2017) stipulate that if the learners immersed themselves imaginatively in the story world via the orientation of lived-through-experience (Rosenblatt, 1995), the responses elicited from them are most likely story-driven. On the other hand, if the responses from learners are based on the orientation of sharing and spotting of the plot, the responses elicited are most likely point-driven. It can be seen that through these different orientations, students' responses reveal rich and complex transaction rather than information shifting (Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Rastall, 2006).

A study conducted by Chi (2009) on the responses produced by readers suggests that they constantly adopt stances in their interpretation (Chi, 2009). For instance, it was revealed that both male and female respondents employed at least four stances in interpreting feminist's texts. The four stances are textual stance, evaluative stance, resistant stance, and reflective stance. The textual stance is produced when the learners focused their knowledge on discourse organization, knowledge about the author and textual information to make sense or meaning of texts. The resistant stance occurs when the learners struggle to accept new perspective, thus hindering their self-development and self-inquiry. For evaluative stance, the readers constantly re-visit, re-define texts, reframe their thoughts and beliefs, and re-construct their personal experiences and knowledge of the world while reflective stance occurs when learners are able to integrate their knowledge and experience as one entity. The four stances indicate that learners' experience, background knowledge and reading engagement are vital for them to reach the interpretations and make meanings of the story. By evaluating, resisting and reflecting, these stances seem to indicate that readers are generally critical in their interpretation of the literary work.

Mikkonen (2015), in a similar grain, argues that evidence for cognitive development lies in the practice of literature. In order to develop learners' cognition, the practice of literature learning should move from memorising to understanding of the story line, thus, signalling the importance of reader stance when approaching a text. The most common stances from Rosenblatt (1995) point of view are efferent, aesthetic and critical stances. According to Rosenblatt (1995), efferent stance occurs when the response produced by the learners is concerned with gathering of information and products of reading, while for the aesthetic stance to occur, the response must be based on live-through experience of the learners commonly associated with emotions and feelings. This stance portrays the readers with rich experience rather than information. The third stance is the critical stance which readers adopt when they ask questions or are critical of the story line and characters. Since reading a novel allows multiple interpretations, the adoption of critical stance indicates that the readers are immersed into the plot of the story.

Literary text enhances critical reading through the adoption of critical stance that allows learners to anticipate, emancipate, question, evaluate, give opinions, interpret and justify their stance. This in turn will equip learners with language skills and interpretation. Spires, Johnston & Huffman (1993) argue that critical stance occurs when learners are able to question the authority of the text and generate their own ideas as they construct meaning. Critical stance usually revolves around three thinking skills which include summarising, applying and evaluating. Works of Scherf (2012) noted that the adoption of critical stance allows learners to create a sense of the agency, understanding, self-believing and capability to generate change. By contrast, Valerio (2013) argues that critical stance, at linguistic and cognitive levels, allows learners to ponder and develop their reflective thinking skill,

while at the cultural level, allows them to share and promote the cultural perspective incorporated in the novel.

While reading literary works may have positive effect on students' overall proficiency level, it remains unclear as to whether they will also be positively affected in terms of immersing themselves into the story line of the novel by adopting the above mentioned stances while reading a novel. The interest to examine the types of stances commonly used by readers at secondary schools has led these researchers to conduct this study.

3.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & RESEARCH QUESTION

The objective of this study is to investigate the stances adopted by the students, either perceived or actual, when they read a novel. The following research question is therefore formulated.

RQ: What are the perceived and actual stances adopted by the students when reading a novel?

Data related to perceived stances was elicited from the students' response to a set of questionnaire before they read the novel, while the actual stances were traced from their written responses after they had read the novel. The idea here is to examine which stances are commonly used by the readers in trying to get themselves understand the novel they read.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

To obtain data for this study, form five students from 12 non-residential secondary schools located in Kuantan Pahang were chosen. The subjects were chosen based on purposive sampling due to their prior experience in learning literature and also since novel (as part of literature component) was only offered when they were in form five. The students were believed to be able to relate their experience with the text read.

This research employed a mixed-method design by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaire and a written response. A set of questionnaire, containing 17 questions representing reading stances, was developed (Rosenblatt, 1995; Bushman and Bushman, 1997). The questionnaire employed 5 Likert scales ranging from 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree to 5- Strongly Agree. This questionnaire was distributed to a total of 484 students. The data was entered into SPSS software version 23 and results were presented through descriptive analysis.

Besides the questionnaire, 20 students were selected randomly to provide their written responses about the novel they read. Data from the written responses provided a way to validate the data from the questionnaire. The written responses were analyzed through the coding technique using categorization of pattern and themes that emerged from the analysis. The main stances identified in the categorization scheme include efferent, aesthetic and critical stances. For each stance, there also

emerged some sub-stances that could further clarify the depth of the readers' processes when reading the novel assigned to them.

As part of the literature component, the students were assigned to read the novel entitled 'Captain Nobody' by Dean Pitchford. Briefly, it is a story about a meek 10 year old boy called Newt who lived with his busy parents and a brother who was a football hero. Due to the fact that he was being ignored by his family, Newt was trying his best to prove his worthiness. Thus, he aspired to become a hero and did some heroic actions despite the fact that he had a weakness of being afraid of height. The story ended with Newt becoming a hero when he led a parade as Captain Nobody.

5.0 RESULTS

Results of the questionnaire analysis are first discussed in terms of the percentage of agreement or disagreement. This is triangulated with the data analysis obtained from the written responses of the students. The description of the findings is arranged according to efferent, aesthetic and critical stances.

5.1 Efferent Stances Analysis

Based on the questionnaire, results from the responses of the learners are shown in Table 1. Six items from the questionnaire are identified as representing efferent stances adopted by them.

Table 1 Adoption of efferent stance

	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can describe the picture and the characters read in mind	484	2 (0.4%)	8 (1.7%)	63 (13%)	272 (56%)	139 (28.7%)
		10 (2.4%)			411 (84.7%)	
2. I can remember the important event or situation in the novel	484	2 (0.4%)	22 (4.5%)	107 (22.1%)	269 (55.6%)	84 (17.4%)
		24 (4.9%)			353 (72.9%)	
3. I read for information and to answer the questions	484	26 (5.4%)	107 (22.1%)	92 (19%)	179 (37%)	80 (16.5%)
		133 (27.5%)			259 (53.5%)	
4. I read because I want to know the story	484	10 (2.1%)	37 (7.6%)	73 (15.1%)	255 (52.7%)	109 (22.5%)
		47 (9.7%)			364 (75.2%)	

	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I read as part of school task and syllabus requirement	484	24 (5%)	59 (12.2%)	78 (16.1%)	211 (43.6%)	112 (23.1)
		83 (17.5%)			323 (66.7%)	
6. My understanding is achieved through teaching techniques used by teacher	484	7 (1.4%)	14 (2.9%)	73 (15.1%)	272 (56%)	118 (24.4%)
		23 (4.3%)			390 (80.6%)	

*shaded areas show combined scores

Table 1 demonstrates results that support the adoption of efferent stance among learners. The shaded areas show the distribution scores for each questionnaire item of which the scores for 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' are combined, likewise, the scores for 'agree' and 'strongly agree' are combined to show the tendency and direction of the results. The highest combined score that shows agreement is item 1- *I can describe the picture and characters read in my mind* with the score of 84.7%. This is followed by item 6- *My understanding is achieved through teaching techniques used by teacher* with a combined score of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' of 80.6%. Close to this is item 4- *I read because I want to know the story* with a combined score of 75.2% and item 2- *I can remember the important event or situation in the novel* with a combined score of 72.9%. Of lesser combined scores but equally significant are item 5- *I read as part of school task and syllabus requirement* and item 3- *I read for information and to answer the questions* with the scores of 66.7% and 53.5% respectively.

The results from the table clearly show the trend of adopting efferent stance when learners are keen to remember, describe and read for information. Efferent stance is adopted when learners are concerned about gathering the facts, answering the questions, with the intention of obtaining the information from the reading.

In support of the quantitative findings, the students were also required to produce a written response of the novel they had read. The respondents are given pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. The following excerpt shows some examples of how efferent stance was produced by the students. In general, it is discovered that the efferent stance can be categorized further into sub-efferent stances such as retelling and recalling, sequencing facts, and emphasizing on the elements of literature such as characters, plots, theme and values found in the novel.

Excerpt 1

Norman	Newt wake up in the morning help prepare breakfast for his busy parents. Newt loves both of them. He always helping the parents. <u>After that</u> , we should help each other. Example Newt help Cecil to get her a bass drum on the dumpster. Newt is a good boy. <u>Lastly</u> , Newt climbs up the Appleton for Reggie Ratner.	Retelling & Sequencing
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Excerpt 1 shows the written response of a student named Norman, in which the response exemplifies his tendency to *retell* or *sequence* the events found in the novel. Retelling is one of the sub-efferent stances commonly found in many of the students' written responses. In this excerpt, Norman explained about how helpful Newt was towards his parents and friends. He gave recounts of the incidents that exemplified Newt as a caring person who was willing to give his assistance whenever needed. In other words, through *retelling* and *sequencing* the events, Newt was portrayed as a selfless person who was willing to sacrifice his time and effort to help others. The use of transitional adverbs, such as 'after that' and 'lastly' shows that Norman was aware of the *sequence of events* that was narrated in the novel.

This evidence seems to be congruent with the questionnaire analysis of item 1- *I can describe the picture and the characters read in mind* and item 2- *I can remember the important event or situation in the novel* which obtained high percentages of agreement by the students.

Excerpt 2

Syazwan	For example, <u>Cecil</u> help Newt to make a costume for... <u>Newt</u> also help Cecil to climb the dumpster to get a drum eventhough Newt was very scared of height 'Achrophobia'. Newt very kind boy he help <u>Mr Clay</u> the senile neighbour to out from the dumpster and send Mr Clay to his house.	Emphasizing element – e.g. characters
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Excerpt 2 shows evidence produced by a student called Syazwan using the sub-efferent stance of *emphasizing the characters* in the novel. As can be seen, Newt, Cecil and Mr. Clay were among the characters of the novel which were mentioned by Syazwan. Interestingly, these characters were also noticeably and repeatedly mentioned in many other students' written responses. By emphasizing on the characters, Syazwan seemed to focus only on the things within the novel rather than outside the novel such as his own feelings or critical analysis of the story. In other words, staying as close as possible to the story line in order to understand the novel may have provided some sense of security to Syazwan that his interpretation was on the right track. As characters played a very important part in any story, these two characters in the novel remained imprinted in the readers' mind and were repeatedly mentioned by many other participants who wrote the written response.

Excerpt 3

Atiqah	The novel that I have read is Captain Nobody by Dean Pitchford. In the story, there is a character who show determination and the determination shown by the character affects the people in his life. The determined person in the story is Newton Newman, acting a small, skinny boy in the story as the main character. Newt who used to be full of fears and lacking of self-confidence was then slowly showing his inner strength and his determination to overcome his fears through the developing of the story.	Summarizing the plot
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In addition to emphasizing on the characters, the written responses also show evidence of the sub-efferent stance related to *summarizing the plot*. This is congruent with the questionnaire item 4- *I read because I want to know the story* which obtained 75.2% of combined agreement. Written by a student named Atiqah in excerpt 3, the summary seems to show that the student established the storyline first before she went on discussing other aspects of the story. This is a good strategy adopted by the student, that is, before she elaborated further she needed to form her own understanding of the novel so that she would not go astray in the task. It is interesting to note that this student seemed to think that 'determination' is the quality that kept Newt going. The word 'determination' came out four times in the excerpt indicating that this is Newt's positive character that caught her attention. This summary seems to be her psychological safety by recognizing and acknowledging the plot of the story.

Excerpt 4

Haziq	<p>The novel Captain Nobody by Dean Pitchford have a positive values. The positive values is a little brother Newman is very <u>caring</u> about his brother Chris at the hospital. However, the boy is finished breakfast for their family and the boy is very <u>hardworking</u>.</p> <p>Newt's greatest fear was his fear of heights, known as acrophobia. However, his <u>determination</u> allows him to overcome his fear of heights and to be brave.</p> <p>Among is we <u>must not give up</u> easily. For example Newt never give up to make costume for Halloween.</p>	Emphasizing element – e.g. values
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The written response by a student named Haziq in excerpt 4 exemplifies the sub-efferent stance related to recognition of *values*. It can be seen that the student was attempting to describe how Newt cared about his brother Chris who was injured and hospitalized after a football match. Also, in emphasizing Newt's determination, Haziq related it to Newt's fear of height and his eventual ability to overcome this fear. In this excerpt, Haziq seems to stay close to the story line with his explanation about the determination of the main character in the novel. Overall, in this sample, the values of caring, hardworking, determination and never give up were highlighted and also repeatedly emphasized in many of the students' responses. Even though these were among the values mentioned by the students, there were also other mentioned positive values such as love in family, friendship and loyalty.

Interestingly, although this evidence strongly indicates efferent stance, there seems to be a tinge of aesthetic stance embedded in the response. Haziq seems to relate to Newt's determination by using the inclusive pronoun 'we' when he stated 'we must not give up easily.' He seems to bring himself into the story, sharing the same value that Newt had displayed.

Aesthetic Stance

Based on the questionnaire, results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. Six items from the questionnaire are identified as representing aesthetic stance adopted by them. As mentioned earlier, aesthetic stance is the item that relates to the readers' emotion and feeling when they read the novel.

Table 2 Adoption of aesthetic stance

Item	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
7. Some chapters really moved me	484	11	44	109	231	89
		55 (11.4%)		(22.5%)	320 (66.1%)	
8. I can evoke my feelings and emotions	484	6	47	178	197	56
		53 (11%)		(36.8%)	253 (52.2%)	
9. The story invites my personal involvement	484	19	74	169	174	48
		93 (19.2%)		(34.9%)	222 (45.9%)	
10. The story reminds me of someone that I know	484	61	124	175	75	47
		187 (38.6%)		(36.2%)	122 (25.2%)	
11. The story is like a living-through experience	484	62	168	143	83	28
		230 (47.5%)		(29.5%)	111 (23%)	
12. I can engage deeply with the story	484	5	57	168	187	67
		62 (12.8%)		(34.7%)	254 (52.4%)	

In this table, the results show that the learners have mix perception about the adoption of aesthetic stance. The scores for 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' are combined into one score to indicate disagreement. The same is done for "agree" and strongly agree' scores to indicate agreement. Overall, three items seems to obtain scores indicating agreement while another three items obtained scores indicating disagreement. As can be seen, the highest combined score is item 7- *Some chapters really moved me* with 66.1% of the respondents tend to agree with the statement. This is followed by item 12- *I can engage deeply with the story* with 52.4% of the respondents tend to agree with the statement. Close to this score is item 8- *I can evoke my feelings and emotions* with 52.2% of the respondents tend to agree with the statement.

Three items which include item 9- *The story invites my personal involvement*, item 10- *The story reminds me of someone that I know* and item 11- *The story is like a living-through experience*, on the other hand, seem to indicate no clear agreement among the respondents.

Based on the students' written response, evidence of aesthetic stance can be seen, although, quite limited. The following excerpts show some examples of aesthetic stance produced by the students. Overall, it is discovered that the aesthetic stance can be categorized further into sub-

aesthetic stances such as relating to oneself, identifying, connecting, focusing on experience, evoking emotion. An example of the written response is provided for each sub-aesthetic stance.

Excerpt 5

Student	Written Response	Sub-aesthetic Stance
Cheng	<p>I am <u>touched</u> when I read this part of the story because not only it demonstrated a brotherly love but Newton's determination and persistence <u>shook me</u>.</p> <p>In the novel, <u>we</u> must help each other, <u>we</u> must love <u>our</u> family and <u>we</u> must help each other. Besides family is important in <u>my</u> life. Example Newt wake up in the morning help for prepare breakfast for his busy parents. Newt loves both family.</p>	Relating to oneself
Hasnita	<p>I certainly think that being determined to help our family is what I see through Newton's actions. That is why <u>I</u> feel the responsibility to help <u>my</u> parents.</p>	Connecting

In Excerpt 5, the aesthetic stance strongly emerged when the reader named Cheng attempted to relate to Newt's feeling of love to his parents. *Relating to oneself* is a common action adopted either consciously or unconsciously by many of the students especially when they found some resemblance of their own life to the story line. In this case, Cheng said that he is 'touched' by Newt's determination solely because of Newt's brotherly love for Chris. By using the words 'touched' and 'shook me', the reader seems to indicate strong elements of emotions and feelings for what Newt has gone through. Additionally, it is interesting that the reader focuses on the scenario of Newt preparing breakfast for his family due to the fact that Newt believed that family should help each other. Cheng's belief seems to align with Newt's belief too on this matter when he used the inclusive pronoun 'we' and 'our' in his response to reiterate the importance of family in terms of love and cooperation among family members.

Furthermore, the evidence from the student named Hasnita also illustrates a strong sub-aesthetic stance of *connecting*. Here, Hasnita seems to believe that she has the responsibility to help her parent, just like what Newt did to his parent. There is a strong sense of aesthetic stance when Hasnita brought herself into the story to emphasize her empathy for Newt. The pronouns 'I' and 'my' seem to indicate that Hasnita positioned herself in the scenario of the novel. She was as if an onlooker who observed Newt's actions with strong empathy.

Excerpt 6

Shatini	<p>It is absolutely normal to get angry when people (are) at their limit of tolerance. I certainly think that being determined to help <u>our</u> family is what <u>I</u> see through Newton's action and that is why <u>I</u>, the reader too feel the responsibility to help <u>my</u> parents.</p> <p>Newton's actions will later touch their parents when they realise their mistakes and they will pay more attention to little Newt.</p>	Focusing on experience
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In Excerpt 6, the student named Shatini attempted to rationalise about Newt's feeling of anger and frustrations after he tried so hard to please his family. Here, we can observe that Shatini seems to relate to Newt's feeling and experience, but at the same time she could see the sense of why he wanted to help his family even though the family members ignored him most of the time. When Shatini mentioned 'I too feel the responsibility to help my parents', it clearly demonstrates that she is *focusing on her experience* and that she shares the same sentiment and emotion as Newt. Later in the excerpt, Shatini seems hopeful that Newt's parents will later appreciate his assistance to them, almost as if the student is also hopeful for herself.

It is interesting to note that some of the phrases and clauses used by Shatini seem to indicate some elements of certainty and assurance. Phrases like 'absolutely normal', 'being determined', 'they will pay more attention to Newt' seem to bear positive tone. These phrases seemingly suggest that Shatini had experienced these before and was sure that it would turn out alright at the end.

Excerpt 7

Asyraf	<p>Newton often prepares breakfast for the family, <u>although he is still a little boy</u>. However, his parents and his brother were <u>often too busy with their work</u>. They <u>only took bites</u> or just drank the glass of milk before leaving for work. Newton understands that his family is busy, so he is still prepares breakfast every day until that one day, <u>the breakfast is left untouched</u>.</p>	Evoking emotion
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Excerpt 7 exhibits the written response by a student named Asyraf through the implicit sub-aesthetic stance *evoking emotion*. The written response started with a neutral rendition of the scene in which Newt prepared breakfast for his family, but the family, being busy, did not relish the breakfast as Newt was hoping they would. Asyraf's response seems to indicate that his emotion has been evoked by the scene. While he proceeds to narrate about Newt's continued preparation of the breakfast, he attempted to say that suddenly there was a sort of revelation or a realisation that the family perhaps

did not care much about Newt's effort. The clause 'so he is still prepares breakfast every day until that one day, the breakfast is left untouched' is rich with hidden messages which evoke one's emotion of sadness and regret. Readers could not help empathizing and feeling sorry for Newt who was trying his best to get the attention of his family, but was faced with the hard reality that perhaps they did not appreciate his effort at all.

Evidences from the phrases used by the student in his written response seem to suggest that there are a lot of hidden messages. The phrases 'although he is still a little boy', 'were often too busy with their work', 'they only took bites' and 'until that one day, the breakfast is left untouched' seem to evoke the sombre feeling of being unappreciated and dejected.

Critical Stance

Based on the questionnaire analysis, results from the responses of the learners are shown in Table 3. Five items from the questionnaire are identified as representing critical stance adopted by them. As mentioned earlier, the adoption of critical stance allows learners to evaluate, give opinions, interpret and develop reflective thinking. In other words, students are seen as displaying their point of view about the literary work.

Table 3 Adoption of critical stance

	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can make summarization, interpretations and reach the conclusion of the story	484	3	49	202	195	35
		52 (10.7%)		(41.7%)	230 (47.5%)	
2. My understanding is achieved through creative and critical thinking	484	11	68	183	169	53
		79 (16.3%)		(37.7%)	222 (45.9%)	
3. My understanding is achieved through justifying and making my own interpretation	484	9	48	196	176	55
		57 (11.8%)		(40.5%)	231 (47.7%)	
4. I can provide details even with first reading	484	37	149	195	84	19
		186 (38.4%)		(40.3%)	103 (21.3%)	
5. I read back and forth in order to understand the story	484	29	46	103	231	75
		75 (15.5%)		(21.3%)	306 (63.2%)	

Of the five items representing critical stance in Table 3, only item 17 has positive response from the students with 63.2% of them agreeing that they *read back and forth to understand the story*.

Results of other items tend to demonstrate learners' mixed perception about critical stance. The results for item 13 - *I can make summarization, interpretations and reach the conclusion of the story*, item 14- *My understanding is achieved through creative and critical thinking* and item 15- *My understanding is achieved through justifying and making my own interpretation* seem to be indistinct and spread widely across the likert scales. This indicates that students tend not to use critical stance as much as efferent and aesthetic stances. It is interesting to note that bigger percentages are found for neutral scale for all items, indicating that the students might be unsure of applying critical stance to their reading of novel. Furthermore, bigger percentages of disagreeing (38.4%) and neutral (40.3%) are obtained for item 16- *I can provide details even with first reading* as opposed to agreeing (21.3%).

Based on the students' written response, evidence of critical stance can be seen, although, quite limited. The following excerpt shows some examples of critical stance produced by the students.

Excerpt 8

Student	Written Response	Stance
Nazirah	To be honest, I do not think that I will be able to dash in the middle of a busy road to save an animal. We should always be determined to do the right thing and be brave because we will never know what may turn out at the end.	Evaluation and assessment Creating a sense of agency
Syamilah	One must believe in miracle for a miracle to happen in life. Not only Newton gave positive thinking and support to his parents, but to believe in Chris to wake up, I believe Newton was the key factor to waking his brother up.	Ponder and develop reflective thinking

Although not many, there were a few responses from the students which tend to represent their critical stance. Based on the questionnaire items, a number of sub-critical stances can be retrieved such as providing justification, interpretation and conclusion, displaying creative and critical thinking. Excerpt 8 exhibits the student's critical stance of the novel.

Excerpt 8 exhibits the written response from a student named Nazirah. In the first excerpt, Nazirah mentioned about Newt's behaviour when he spontaneously tried to help an animal. Here, it can be seen that Nazirah was *evaluating* the situation by equating her own potential action in such circumstance compared to Newt's. She shows some level of critical stance by embedding some admiration for what Newt has done. The critical aspect can be observed through the phrase 'To be honest, I do not think I will be able to...' wherein the student is critically making comparison between herself and Newt, with the latter being braver and possibly less selfish.

Furthermore, Nazirah emphasizes the importance of determination to do the right thing in life. Here, the sub-critical stance is that the student is *creating a sense of agency*. Interestingly, she extended further by stating '...because we will never know what may turn out at the end', indicating that she was thinking beyond the plot of the novel itself. The critical part about not knowing what will happen at the end allows the student to indirectly forecast or create her own ending through her own imagination.

In the following clause of excerpt 8 produced by a student named Syamilah, the student mentioned about the miracle of positive thinking that Newt adopted. She also seems to *develop reflective thinking* by believing that Newton is the reason that his brother Chris woke up. Newton's positive thinking seems to have the power of curing Chris from a state of coma. The phrase 'One must believe in miracle...' denotes the importance of positive thinking and believing the fact that things will turn out alright in the end.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the questionnaire and written analysis seem to complement each other. To a certain extent, the data obtained from both instruments indicated that the adoption of efferent stance seems to be predominant among the learners. The results of the questionnaire demonstrate that although the students perceived that they use all the stances, the efferent stance was more distinct than the aesthetic and critical stance. Similarly, the same trend of results is observed from the students' written responses which predominantly indicate that they actually used more efferent stance than the other two stances.

The findings signify that although reading of literary text provides space for learners to exercise their mental strategy, creativity and personal elements (McRae, 1991), it was found that students tend to view literature reading as an examination and academic task that led to shallow interpretation, limited in scope and direction, in which the interpretation evolves around literal meaning of the text. This seems to be supported by the findings which show that the majority of the students tend to adopt efferent stances and stay close to the text rather than adopting aesthetic and critical stance. The findings are consistent with the study by Khairul Husna *et al.* (2012), which indicate that efferent stance and literal recall are more significant than other types of stances. The literal recall indicates the overwhelming need of relating information in text, appraising the accuracy of the text, summarizing the text and expressing what was learned. Thus, the results lead the researchers to believe that the adoption of efferent stance is significant among learners in secondary schools.

What is interesting in this data is that evidence of critical and aesthetic stance applied by learners did emerge in their written response but in very minimal number. The students who adopt aesthetic and critical stance tend to have a wider view and perspective about the novel they read as their knowledge flow through their experience when they are able to make the connection, relate to their own experience, and respond based on their knowledge or previous experience. The adoption of aesthetic and critical stance enables the learners to exercise their readership power and encourage them to exercise some control over their lives and participate in free thoughts (Probst, 2004). The

presence of aesthetic and critical stance among learners proves that although reading is challenging and demanding, literature teaching and learning can be a platform to educate the students not only to develop their own opinions and critical thinking but also to be able to empathize and relate their emotions to the characters and plot of the novel.

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