The Impact of English Language Proficiency on Writing Critical Literary Assessments

Mohammad Sedigh Javanmiri, Sahima Abdulsalam Bdaiwi

Department of English, College of Languages, University of Human Development, Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Abstract— **This research paper seeks to investigate the importance and impact of proficiency in English language, especially in contexts where English is a foreign language, in creating well-versed literary analyses produced by university students. This study theorizes that students who have not profoundly established proper proficiency in English and indispensable critical skills are most prone to demonstrate low-grade analytical quality in their literary critical evaluations. The mainstream in the field of language teaching utilizes literature only as one of the potential learning aids that offer demanding decoding challenges to the students. The overall quality, however, of language proficiency across the students' literary critical writings is less investigated, especially in contexts where English is a foreign language and specifically among the students who study at the Department of English at University of Human Development (UHD). The present study argues that different elements that shape language proficiency coalesce, in collaboration with developed literary and critical skills, in adequately written critical assessments of literary works. Moreover, Educational workers', at English departments, foremost priority, based on their mission —teaching either literature or language— is, accordingly to hone students' critical and language skills.**

Notwithstanding, the very title of the BA program in English language and literature predominantly considers the vital role of language proficiency.

Index Terms— **English language proficiency, literature, literary terminology, critical literary analyses, informed evaluation.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This research offers new findings that redound to different educational stakeholders' benefit, founding that having high levels of language proficiency is largely responsible for crafting flowing arguments in critical literary analyses. The growing influence of English as global language in contexts where English is a foreign language has created large demands for English language proficiency across a variety of different academic fields, especially English language and literature graduates. The latter can confidently use their language skills to secure future occupations in journalism, criticism, future studies, etc. Limitations in language proficiency can be irritating both for the instructors and the students because such limitations create impediments on the way of proper learning and creation as the final outcome of language programs. However, language proficiency demands for a recognition of the careful selection of the language structures and semantic fields. Language proficiency, coupled with analytical skills, helps effect sophisticated evaluation. In respect of this discussion, it is convenient to hypothesise that organic writing, for the purpose of its unity, requires an awareness of the structural rules and critical principles. An understanding of these facts rationalize the need for careful design of curricula, study material and life-changing learning-teaching approaches. Therefore, an understanding of the importance of language proficiency and its implications in crafting well-wrought analyses can, at large, help with seismic shifts in educational planning policies and facilitate the learning processes for the students. Lecturers will be advised to maintain high standards of proficiency at all levels; curriculum and syllabi designers will be guided on what to emphasize to harness students' performance in writing analytical evaluations.

This research assumes that students with better language proficiency are more able to produce sophisticated literary analysis. There are a number of courses (for example, literary criticism, a history of literary criticism, etc.) built into the BA programs in English language and literature. Moreover, the other literary subjects (i.e., poetry, novel, drama, etc.) provide real time opportunities for students to explore the literary texts with the hope of identifying underlying meanings through the lenses of critical approaches learned in criticism classes. The ability to understand, evaluate and appreciate texts from a range of literary and non-literary subjects is a target goal of almost any program that teaches literature. The nature of the inquiry integrates the qualitative and quantitative interpretations of the collected data. The implications can be available to the students and the lecturers as the following: first, the more able students, in terms of writing critical literary pieces, are the ones with better language proficiency; second, proficiency in English boosts students' confidence and provides opportunities (as it can facilitate proficient understanding of texts) to develop insightful visions that aid students in locating, identifying, and evaluating the target words (Target words are most helpful in analyses that heavily build on textual elements to disclose the

hidden meanings, mood and tone of the texts.) in the texts they read as well as informing their choice of critical techniques, rhetorical patterns, expression of ideas and critical inquiries.

For the purpose of inquiry, four sets of questions are written where the 1st , 2nd , 3rd, and 4th sets concern, respectively, language proficiency, literary terminology, a written critical evaluation, and a questionnaire that seeks students' critical and textual background information.

II. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Immense bodies of research are incredibly increasing in the field of teaching English. Learning English is commoditized and teaching English can be a justified professional occupation DEY (2021, p. 2); in line with the rapid demands of learning shaped by the rapid world we live in, teaching methods, therefore, manifest extreme malleability to accommodate a variety of required levels of proficiency in English. In the very general terms and for the ease of understanding, dimensions of language proficiency can be explained as "one's ability to use language for a variety of communicative purposes" Renandya, Hamied, and Nurkamto (2018). As such, language proficiency involves the learner's communicative competence, knowledge of the language, and language skills (Harsch, 2016). Despite all the different approaches that conceptualise language proficiency, the Council of Europe, "since 2001," has introduced a sophisticated framework "for language teaching, learning, and assessment" known as the Common European Framework of Reference" commonly referred to as CEFR with (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) as proficiency level descriptors (p. 252). Moreover, theories of academic success and beliefs that fall back on strong implications of time and exposure to the language are woven around the subject of proficiency National Academies of Sciences et al. (2017); more exposure and better proficiency also can catalyse the acquirement of target culture and traits Espenshade and Fu (1997). Moreover, proper proficiency in English is known to be among the elements that contribute to more academic success (Graham, 1987) as well as economic assimilation (McManus, Gould, & Welch, 1983). The mainstream is directed towards the discussions that amplify the importance of proficiency and promote proficiency boosters. The present study, however, substantiates the importance of signifying language proficiency in all the literary and non-literary subjects offered in the undergraduate (BA) program with constantly keeping an eye on the target outcome― the ability to understand, appreciate and evaluate oral or written texts across a variety of literary and non-literary genres. Language proficiency is set to be the ultimate goal of the language teaching programs. However, these goals might not be realised at all times. The status factual realities about the condition of language proficiency levels inform the researchers that the language programs, especially the undergraduate BA programs, might suffer from sharp discrepancies between the educational programmers' defined goals that target language proficiency and the "realities" that barely inform students about the "stated acquisition goals" that are meant to help students

attain higher levels of proficiency (Leaver & Campbell, 2014, p. 3).

Language proficiency core components, according to (Richards, 2018), are indicated by the language users' accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriacy and capacity. Accuracy signifies the learner's competence to use language correctly. This is indicated by learners' correct use of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Students' productive skills draw heavily on accuracy component. Fluency shows the learners' ability to maintain the fluent flow of expression of ideas, considering the learner's ability to employ their linguistic competence and useful communication strategies to overcome breakdowns in communication. In view of the other productive skill ―writing― it is appropriate to relate fluency to the matters of coherence, cohesion, semantic fields, punctuation, structure and style. This is the area that students mostly struggle in and the educators find challenging to invigorate in writing classes. Complexity implies the learners' ability to incorporate wide ranges of vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. The demanding writing tasks at university level require the students to demonstrate versatility and dexterity in using complex language. Appropriacy addresses the ability of the learners to recognise the requirements of appropriate language use in different situations. It is marked by the learner's ability of choosing appropriate lexical and structural choices. The last component on the list is capacity. It is basically an identification of the dimensions of language production: meaning, it is to know in what capacity (a revelation of the extents of expression) students should be developing their writings, considering the matters of register, word choice, and levels of insight they might choose to share with their readers. Students, thus, can choose to produce highly sophisticated writings which delve into their subject matters deeply or simply treat their subject matters lightly (ibid).

What is known to the researchers as language proficiency idealises situations where all these components are developed in an equilibrium. One of the limitations of this study can be providing information about what areas of language skills are mostly developed in learners and what core components of fluency are more important for the curricula designers. It is very common to see students who speak better English than they write it. Learner types (e.g., visual, auditory, etc.) along with epistemological viewpoints, of the educators', about language can all affect fluency. Limitations in language proficiency, the researchers of this study postulate, can make the students' rate of progress slower. Moreover, even the instructors epistemological understanding of what language proficiency is can contribute "to their effectiveness– that is their ability to effectively perform in their role as language teachers" (Richards, 2017, p. 11).

Proper and correct use of grammar is known to be one of the core components of language proficiency. However, the researchers of the present study suggest that grammar competence, which is mostly interpreted as language accuracy, be integrated into a more sophisticated writing program which recognizes a wider range of expectations. The politics of text production must be known to the students and needs to identify

and recognize sociolinguistic (appropriacy), generic (knowledge and ability to exploit known conventions of text production across a variety of genres), discourse (coherence and cohesion), and strategic (fluency and the ability to eliminate obstacles on the way of effective communication) competences.

III. CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS

The ability to develop critical literary assessments is a result of extensive readings and developing critical thinking skills. Students, when writing analytical literary evaluations, are expected to practically employ their acquired critical skills as well as their knowledge of literary terminology and techniques to understand, interpret and evaluate literary texts. A knowledge of literary schools and criticism alongside with honing critical skills can substantially boost students' confidence and extensively help with writing of well-organized analytical essays.

Criticism is famously defined by Arnold in Arnold and Pater (1895) as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (p. 81). The term is contemporarily used to imply the application of "the methods of literary analysis and close readings" to explore texts with the hope of increasing our understandings of texts and their hidden meanings (Kusch, 2016, p. 96). Personal pursuits and ambitions have given way to more evidence-based arguments that offer different ways of critical readings of texts. Undergraduate BA students at UHD deal with a variety of literary texts and are trained to construct interpretations of texts. Therefore, texts are the primary focus. The politics of how texts are produced should be known to the students; an understanding of the textual mechanisms has to be firmly established. In view of this, criticism is suggested to "dissociate art from mystery and concern itself with how literary texts actually worked" (Eagleton, 2008, p. 2). There are studies that examine the methods through which readers create significant meanings that emanate from their initial responses to the texts (Earthman, 1992). On the contrary, there are studies that refute understanding of texts through mere evaluation of "propositional" and "inferential" processes and, therefore, incorporate "stylistic features" which through "defamilirisation" draw on readers' "feelings" (Miall & Kuiken, 1994, p. 373). The list of questions for literary critics is always growing. However, for practical matters of analysis, it is a requirement for the students who study English language and literature for their BAs to have developed a sophisticated knowledge of literary theories and critical skills that serve as fundamental analytical toolkits in literary evaluations. Some of the most influential critical literary approaches include (not necessarily limited to) new criticism, structuralism, stylistics, reader-response, language-based, and critical literacy.

Pre-critical responses refer to the analytical writings students produce before they are exposed to literary theories. But this might not hold true in our times, for we are dealing with mass-educated students who have already shaped idiosyncratic preferences and tastes. Media and social networks scaffold different ways of thinking. However, students need not to idealise this view of having developed patterns of critical judgments, rejoicing in self-satisfactory viewpoints about texts and critical assessments. Critical responses to literature require students to discern the potential meanings and structures within texts.

Curriculum designers, students and lecturers need to have a number of considerations. Critical approaches are optimized for offering possible explorations of meaning and understanding. Only teaching them to curriculum within time limits can be counterproductive. The objectives need to include the study of approaches in relation to literary texts. Students need to understand how and why texts are produced. Regardless of the foci of literary approaches, students need to learn how to explore texts. There are classes where the lecturers provide loads of biographical, philosophical, and moral information which, by the end of the class, students never get a chance to come to grips with the text itself. (Guerin et al., 2005). The present study suggest that students, in contexts where English is a foreign language, need to develop two themes at the same time: language proficiency and skills for literary analysis. Critical skills have to be developed to understand the texts. Works of art will be more meaningful to the wiser people (p. 21). A prior knowledge of the elements, from a technical standpoint, includes narrative devise, character, rhetorical patterns, word choice, etc. (p.33).

New criticism, for example, disregards the biographical and philosophical information that concerns the biographical approaches and takes the text as the source of generating intrinsic textual value (Ransom, 1971). The purpose in here is not to promote certain approaches and refute the others. Students can of course choose to analyse the literary texts according to the approaches that best suit their purpose of reading. For example, they can manage to approach their text from psychological approach which regards literature as a means to express authors' ideas and feelings. Alternatively, students can employ reader-response critical approach for their reading evaluations. This approach assumes reading to be an experience of a combination of a process in the readers' mind and the features (i.e., narrators, plot, characters, etc.) of the text. Meaning is thus made in a complex interaction. It is basically a movement away from the approaches that are based on the assumptions that universal patterns and qualities exist in works of art and that close readings of texts can disclose such patterns─ structuralism. (Bertens, 2017), (Eagleton, 2008) and (Wood & Lodge, 2014).

This study thus pinpoints training students in the ways of doing literary analysis in practice and offers a working framework to create a toolbox for literary analysis is offered in the following:

Students need to master some technical vocabulary: text, author, discourse analysis, discourse, textual patterns, rhetorical patterns, etc. They also need to employ those terms in practice when asked to write critical literary analysis.

Students are encouraged to develop awareness of the existence of writing principles and acquire these skills to both

recognize and utilize them, respectively, in their reading and writing exercises. Students will, therefore, through reflecting on the ways writers craft their pieces, gain a recognition of their own careful choices and structures in writing. All of these will coalesce in analytical writings.

Language proficiency is already established as a prominent component in this paper. However, its implications are very important. University students are required to employ their knowledge of the parts of speech, grammar, punctuation, word choice, coherence and cohesion in their acts of reading. Moreover, students need to learn that any critical writing they produce has to back up arguments by providing quotations from the text. Finally, the students need to develop skills that help them analyse literary texts. That is, they need to identify the bigger meaning of the text (theme) first and use the elements from the text to help build their arguments. The arguments have to be focused and well-versed.

IV. OBJECTIVES

A. investigating the relationship between language proficiency and the quality of analytical writings produced by the BA students who study English language and literature,

B. identifying the problems that impede acquiring higher levels of English language proficiency among students in the Department of English at UHD

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How can language proficiency harness students' ability to create sophisticated literary analysis?

2. What strategies can be employed by the curriculum designers, and the instructors to help students acquire better language proficiency?

VI. METHODS

The study design in this research works from an analytical framework which treats language proficiency as a determining variable in the target outcome of creating quality critical analyses in literary studies. In fact, this research tests the formulated hypothesis ─there is a causal relationship between students' language proficiency, in contexts where English is a foreign language, and the quality of their critical literary analysis─ through a prospective study design. Although an observational study could seemingly serve the purpose of this study, it is difficult to create a natural link between the two variables of language proficiency and the quality of literary critical analysis. This is because students, despite equal number of hours of exposure to English language, at least on campus, have developed proficiency at different rates.

One limitation though concerns the interventional limitations, for the scope of the present study allows for a small scale experimentation with a limited number of participants. The researchers have written four sets of questions to gather required data for the purpose of inquiry. The first set, a total number of 44 questions, tests students' knowledge of English language with a strong focus on the following areas: proper tense use, word choice, punctuation, inference, coherence and cohesion (considering cataphoric, anaphoric and epiphoric references), subject-verb agreement, transitional adverbs, connectives, conjunctions, pronouns (relative, personal, etc.), paragraph development (addition of statements for coherence and emphasis, logical inferences, deduction) and data interpretation. The second set of questions, a total number of 22, test students' knowledge of literary schools, terminology and techniques (textual elements, simile, metaphor, alliteration, tone, mood, etc.) across a variety of literary genres (poetry, fiction and drama) in practice. The third type are the literary analysis questions, 3 questions: An excerpt from Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea is given to the students to write a critical analysis on. Students are encouraged to use the words from the text to support their answers, and finally show the steps of writing their analysis. The fourth and the final set of questions is a questionnaire, 11 questions, that documents UHD students' views about their knowledge of literary schools, toolkits for textual analysis, the relationship between their English language proficiency and their confidence, as well as the challenges of writing critical evaluations on literary texts.

The first three sets of questions are sent as email attachments to students and they have emailed the answers back via emails. The answers are numerically valued so that the percentages are achieved. The questionnaire is created using google forms (https://www.google.com/forms/about/). The results of the questionnaire are readily turned into percentages shown on pie charts.

The results of the first (language questions), two (literary questions) and the fourth (the questionnaire) sets of questions will be analysed descriptively; the results of the third set of questions (critical literary evaluation) will be analysed qualitatively through the content analysis lens. Finally, grounded theory will be used to account for the quality of literary analysis in relation to the language proficiency variable.

A descriptive study design working from a retrospective framework had to, perforce, resort to a draw-back design for data collection and analysis procedures. In this scenario, the researchers had to interpret the language proficiency variables in the analytical writing samples based on the students' grade results in the language courses they have already taken in the previous semesters. The results, then, could not reliably show the overall quality of language proficiency in the critical writings.

The rationale behind choosing the participants ─semester 6th and 8th students who study for the BA degrees at the Department of English at UHD─ is that these students have had language courses in the previous semester and, by far, are expected to show advanced levels of language proficiency. Moreover, these students have been exposed, in the literary classes, to the art of literary analysis across a number of courses ranging from Introduction to Literature, all way through drama and poetry to fiction. In addition, the researchers, based on the fact that courses in literary theory and criticism are offered in the last semester, and through their choice of semester 6 and 8 students, seek to understand the differences in students' critical

outcomes (the critical writings) based on their academic semesters. It is indeed to investigate the differences exposure to literary criticism can make in the writing of critical evaluations. The researchers have also chosen students from all the grade descriptors on UHD's defined table of academic grading system. Thus, inclusion of struggling, medium ability and high ability students. This helps to understand the relationship between language proficiency and the quality of critical analyses in light of valid ability in students' performance.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A number of 20 participants responded to the first two sets of questions (language and literary): 10 are semester 6 and 10 are semester 8 students. The questionnaire (the fourth set of questions), was replied by 32 students. The students are currently studying for their BA degrees at the Department of English at UHD.

TABLE 1
UHD'S LETTER AND NUMERICAL GRADING SYSTEM.

Letter grading	Numerical grading
AA	90-100
BA	85-89
BB	80-84
CB	75-79
CC	70-74
DC	60-69
DD	50-59

TABLE 2
SEMESTER 6 STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE LANGUAGE TEST.

Letter grading	Numerical grading	Sex	Number of participants	Results mean average in percentage
AA	90-100	M, F	2	75%
BA	85-89	M, F	2	52%
BB	80-84	M, F	2	60%
CB	75-79	M, F	1	60%
CC	70-74	M, F	2	57%
DC	60-69	F	1	48%
DD	50-59	M, F	1	36%

With regard to language proficiency as the main variable in the research questions researchers present the findings for semester 6 students as the following:

The students with better academic records showed better performance in language tests. This accords to the importance of proficiency and academic success (Graham, 1987). According to table 2, students who had previously obtained better SGPAs (semester grade point average) during the past semesters showed better performance in the language test.

Moreover, Table 3 shows semester 6 students' performance in the literary test. Students who had better academic records showed better performance in the literary test.

TABLE 3
SEMESTER 6 STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE LITERARY TEST.

Letter grading	Numerical grading	Sex	Number of participants	Results mean average in percentage
AA	90-100	M, F	2	72%
BA	85-89	M, F	2	72%
BB	80-84	M, F	2	60%
CB	75-79	M, F	1	58%
CC	70-74	M, F	2	59%
DC	60-69	F	1	57%
DD	50-59	M, F	1	40%

In the following, semester 8 students' performances in the language and literary tests are presented. Semester 8 students are about to graduate. They have been studying literary criticism too. Researchers' tentative estimations theorized that the 8th semester students might show better performance throughout.

In terms of language performance, according to Table 4, semester 8 students showed no better performance than semester 6 students. They were almost on the same line. It is probably because semester 6 students have recently finished their language courses and could have better memories of the grammar and writing lessons. It is also a significant indication of what (Leaver & Campbell, 2014) state about the discrepancy between the educational defined goals and the reality of proficiency levels.

TABLE 4
SEMESTER 8 STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE LANGUAGE TEST.

Letter grading	Numerical grading	Sex	Number of participants	Results mean average in percentage
AA	90-100	M, F	2	65%
BA	85-89	M, F	2	50%
BB	80-84	M, F	2	51%
CB	75-79	M, F	1	58%
CC	70-74	M, F	2	59%
DC	60-69	F	1	45%
DD	50-59	M, F	1	41%

In view of the research questions, semester 8 students have shown a better performance in questions that demand in-depth literary analysis.

TABLE 5
SEMESTER 8 STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE LITERARY TEST.

Letter grading	Numerical grading	Sex	Number of participants	Results mean average in percentage
AA	90-100	M, F	2	75%
BA	85-89	M, F	2	72%
BB	80-84	M, F	2	77%
CB	75-79	M, F	1	60%
CC	70-74	M, F	2	60%
DC	60-69	F	1	59%
DD	50-59	M, F	1	40%

A number of 10 students have responded to the third sets of questions: the analytical writing. The answers are written by 4 semester (6 students) and 6 semester (8 students).

The answers written by semester 6 students demonstrate random uses of literary techniques. The answers do not demonstrate the choice of any specific literary theory. The students' responses are mostly devoid of extrinsic elements and they mostly have focused on the internal textual elements.

On the other hands, the analytical responses produced by the 8 semester students have the names of the literary schools among them, for example, formalism. Moreover, the writings produced by students with better academic records and better language proficiency show better flow of arguments in the writing process.

TABLE 6
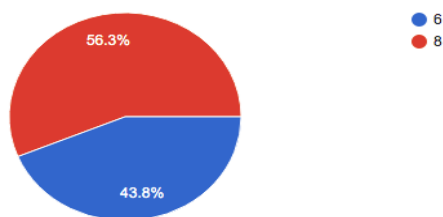**RESPONDENTS TO THE ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS.**

#	Rank	Semester	Gender
1	AA	6	F
2	AA	6	F
3	BA	6	M
4	DC	6	F
5	AA	8	M
6	BA	8	M
7	BB	8	F
8	CB	8	F
8	CC	8	M
9	DC	8	M

32 student participants (65.6 % female and 34.4% male students of which 56.3% are semester 8 and 43.7% are semester 6) responded to the questionnaire.

Gender
32 responses

- Male
- Femal

65.6%

34.4%
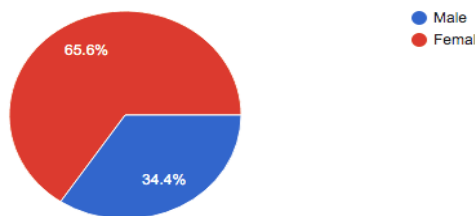
Semester
32 responses

- 6
- 8

56.3%

43.8%

The respondents generally (59.4%) feel comfortable when dealing with texts (literary or non-literary). The majority of the respondents (more than 94%) posit that having better language skills could make them feel more confident when analysing literary texts. More than 80% of the students wish only the courses that target language proficiency could be offered in the early semester. Moreover, more than 84% of the students find it difficult to write criticism on poetry, fiction and drama, while 65.6% state that they mostly read about literary criticism and literary terminology, and do not know how to use them in practice. However, more than 81% of the students state that they have no idea about the terms ethos, logos, pathos, and Kairos (Modes of persuasion introduced in Aristotle's Rhetoric.) that help students formulate ideas about theme, motifs, points of view, modes of address and rhetorical patterns. On the other hand, more than 85% of the students claim that they know the definitions of some of the literary schools (i.e., new criticism, structuralism, stylistics, reader-response, language based, and critical literacy) and 79.1% state that they know about textual criticism and what they should be looking for in texts when analysing them. More than 71% of the respondents imply that they know about the competences that concern language and language use. Half of the students have no idea about the rhetorical patterns and PEE and SQuEE (PEE and SQuEE are mnemonics to help students form hypotheses, make claims, provide examples from the texts and explain the effects created by the writers.)

Technics. Surprisingly, majority of the students, more than 91%, believe that they can write a poem or create a scene for a play.

Primary findings show that semester 6 students, on a par, demonstrated better performance in language proficiency test. Moreover, no significant difference was found in between semester 6 and students' performances in the literary test. Students with better academic records showed better performance, except for very few discrepancies, and showed better initiative to respond to the last question. Generally, students with better academic records and better performance in the language test were the ablest in dealing with the requirements of the critical writing parts.

The students mostly faced challenges when dealing with demanding questions in the language test: coherence, word choice, cohesion, punctuation, and questions about style and execution of ideas.

Secondary findings include the insignificance of differentiations based on sex (male or female). Students with lower academic records did not take the initiative to write the critical response.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show the impact of language proficiency on the overall quality of the critical writings across students' responses. The findings show that language proficiency is not very much emphasised, for semester 6 students were shown to have a better performance in the language test. Moreover, in view of the literary tests, the students from the two semesters (6 and 8) were almost on the same line with students from the BA and BB batches proving to show better performance.

In view of language proficiency, students were shown to perform almost on same lines. The researchers postulate that the students are offered language courses in the early semesters. Given the quality of the writings and the language test results, we can theorise that students have passive linguistic competence (knowledge of language). Therefore, when asked to produce texts, especially the ones that require critical thinking and the applications of certain textual techniques in writings, students show lower levels of proficiency. Moreover, students do not fully engage their potential discourse, generic, and strategic competencies when they most need them in their writings. Therefore, a discrepancy between students' performances in multiple choice questions and the way they structure their writing styles is visibly understood as passive accumulation of knowledge.

This study, through its methodology, has presented a novel way of looking at the relationship between language proficiency and the quality of analytical writings. A knowledge of literary terms and their application in literary analyses proves to be important in students' evaluations.

The researchers have observed that students show little to no use of the literary techniques and terminologies in their writings. For example, they do not specify words in the text to show the significance of the writer's choice of word. Students' writings, despite claims made in the questionnaire about knowing the literary theories and textual elements, show that they significantly fail to demonstrate specific elements. It is also very important to know that students have a passive knowledge of the literary elements and can only identify them when they have been given choices that describe the possibilities of the occurrence of the literary elements. Therefore, students' writings bear little proof of active involvement in textual interpretations. Even the very few students, a number of 2 from the 8th semester students, who state the literary theories as backbone frameworks to their writings, fail to employ the principles of the theories in practice.

These can lead us to one important conclusion about the students' knowledge of literary techniques and their application in practice. Students read literary theories in the criticism classes and the theories, later on, reside in vague memories in the students' minds. This calls for a serious reconsideration of the ways literary theories and techniques are taught. Very few students were shown to produce critical literary evaluations to some acceptable degrees. Students from the two different levels were shown to produce personal responses mostly. Students in their responses have made general claims (e.g., "the writer was very emotional when writing this passage") or use the technical terms wrongly in relation to the textual elements (e.g., "Hemingway, portrays the story with a simple and depressing tone that depicts the characters and sets the mood for the plot in The Old Man and the Sea."). Some of the writings refer to the simplicity of the words (e.g., "The story includes many simple words and expressions; that is why it doesn't require you to examine all the words."); however, they fail to recognise the importance of lexical choices made by the writer. Students' responses emanate mostly from their initial responses to the text they read. This complies with previous reports in the literature that show students to be widely relying on their initial responses to texts (Earthman, 1992). Students' responses bear proof to the emotional dimensions effected by the text (e.g., "sad" is used to talk about the tone; "the poor [the old man] is powerful") which complies with the elements the writers employ to affect the "feelings" of the reader (Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

With all of these in view, the researchers recommend that the policy makers who are responsible for the fashioning of the curricula need to consider the fact that English is a foreign language in Kurdistan and students at all levels of their studies in the undergraduate BA program in English language and literature need constant practice and exposure to the target language: English. Students need to be constantly reminded of the need for proficiency in their academic endeavour. More language courses need to be built into the structure of the undergraduate BA programs in English language and literature in Kurdistan and contexts where English is a foreign language to provide students with opportunities to put their linguistic competence in practice. Proficiency in writing has to be stressed all the times. Moreover, the literary classes have to first build a strong foundation of text, textual elements and politics of creating texts. Readers need to read from a variety of reading materials across different literary genres to develop proper analytical skills that mostly rely on the textual elements found in the texts.

Future research can launch investigations in the nature of the relationship between language proficiency and the quality of analytical writings through long term interventions. This has to be facilitated by long-term observation and provision of language and critical material.

A concerning issue would be that professors of literature could probably take language proficiency for granted and focus on teaching the literary material mostly, for the common assumption is that matriculated students show satisfactory proficiency levels. On the contrary, students face challenges when asked to create analytical pieces. One underlying fact is their inability to express their ideas proficiently. A critique could be, therefore, directed towards the structure of the BA program (The researchers are informed, however, that the BA program in English language and literature offered at UHD follows the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education and that the program entry requirements include acceptable levels of proficiency in English language.) in English: literary subjects are offered in the early semesters along with the courses that span the different language skills.

REFERENCES

Arnold, M., & Pater, W. (1895). The Function of Criticism at the Present Time: Macmillan.

Bertens, H. (2017). Literary Theory: The Basics: Taylor & Francis.

DEY, B. G. (2021). MORE THAN 100 WAYS OF MAKING MONEY- A Comprehensive and Practical Approach: Onlinegatha.

Eagleton, T. (2008). Literary Theory: An Introduction: University of Minnesota Press.

Earthman, E. A. (1992). Creating the Virtual Work: Readers' Processes in Understanding Literary Texts. Research in the Teaching of English, 26(4), 351-384.

Espenshade, T. J., & Fu, H. (1997). An Analysis of English-Language Proficiency among U.S. Immigrants. American Sociological Review, 62(2), 288-305. doi:10.2307/2657305

Graham, J. G. J. T. q. (1987). English language proficiency and the prediction of academic success. 21(3), 505-521.

Guerin, W. L., Labor, E., Labor, G. W. P. A. L. E., R, J., Morgan, L., Reesman, J. C., . . . Morgan, P. E. L. (2005). A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature: Oxford University Press.

Harsch, C. (2016). Proficiency. ELT Journal, 71(2), 250-253. doi:10.1093/elt/ccw067 %J ELT Journal

Kusch, C. (2016). Literary Analysis: The Basics: Taylor & Francis.

Leaver, B. L., & Campbell, C. (2014). Experience with Higher Levels of Proficiency. In T. Brown & J. Bown (Eds.), To Advanced Proficiency and Beyond (pp. 3-22): Georgetown University Press.

McManus, W., Gould, W., & Welch, F. J. J. o. l. E. (1983). Earnings of Hispanic men: The role of English language proficiency. 1(2), 101-130.

Miall, D. S., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Beyond text theory: Understanding literary response. Discourse Processes, 17(3), 337-352. doi:10.1080/01638539409544873

National Academies of Sciences, E. M., Division, H. M., Education, D. B. S. S., Education, B. S., Board on Children, Y. F., Committee on Fostering School Success for English Learners: Toward New Directions in Policy, P. R., . . . Takanishi, R. (2017). Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures: National Academies Press.

Ransom, J. C. (1971). The New Criticism: Folcroft Library Editions.

Renandya, W. A., Hamied, F. A., & Nurkamto, J. J. J. o. A. T. (2018). English language proficiency in Indonesia: Issues and prospects. 15(3), 618.

Richards, J. C. (2017). Teaching English through English: Proficiency, Pedagogy and Performance. 48(1), 7-30. doi:10.1177/0033688217690059

Richards, J. C. (Writer). (2018). Communicative Competence. In.

Wood, N., & Lodge, D. (2014). Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader: Taylor & Francis.

Earthman, E. A. (1992). Creating the Virtual Work: Readers' Processes in Understanding Literary Texts. Research in the Teaching of English, 26(4), 351-384.

Graham, J. G. J. T. q. (1987). English language proficiency and the prediction of academic success. 21(3), 505-521.

Leaver, B. L., & Campbell, C. (2014). Experience with Higher Levels of Proficiency. In T. Brown & J. Bown (Eds.), To Advanced Proficiency and Beyond (pp. 3-22): Georgetown University Press.

Miall, D. S., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Beyond text theory: Understanding literary response. Discourse Processes, 17(3), 337-352. doi:10.1080/01638539409544873