

An assessment of the Algerian EFL students' literary proficiency at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret

Ahmed Mehdaoui ¹, Ibn khaldoun university, 88P3+63H, N14, Tiaret, Algeria

Suggested Citation:

Mehdaoui, A. (2022). An assessment of the Algerian EFL students' literary proficiency at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 12(3), 132-146.
<https://doi.org/10.18844/gjft.v12i3.6610>

Received from April 13, 2022; revised from June 10, 2022; accepted from August 10, 2022.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc Prof Dr. Jesús García Laborda, University of Alcalá, Spain
©2022 by the authors. Licensee Birlesik Dunya Yenilik Arastırma ve Yayıncılık Merkezi, North Nicosia, Cyprus. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract

Countless research has spotlighted literature on foreign language's linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, and critical thinking benefits as well as the models and strategies in connection with its effective teaching. However, based on our experience/observation, the provision of the ways/processes the literary competence should be assessed seems to be scarce. The need to assess the foreign language learners' literary competence as a learning outcome is vital. Therefore, as a contribution to this area of study, the present study aims at assessing EFL students' literary competence. To do so, twenty-five randomly selected third-year English students at the University of Tiaret participated in the study, and O'Brien's *On the Rainy River* was used as a data tool to measure their literary competence. Given the skills that literary competence embraces, the findings of this research revealed that the participants of the EFL students at the University of Tiaret lacked some basic skills that are essential for literary competence. In response to this, the paper suggests some recommendations for both teachers and students.

Keywords: Assessment; Competence; EFL Students; Literature.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Ahmed Mehdaoui, Ibn khaldoun university, 88P3+63H, N14, Tiaret, Algeria
E-mail address: academictiaret@gmail.com

1. Introduction

It becomes truism today to talk about the role of literature in foreign language classrooms. Though there have been, from time to time, some comments about the difficulties associated with the use of literature, a plethora of specialists, scholars, and foreign language educators (MacKay, 1982; Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Duff, & Maley, 1990; Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993, among others) have found the benefit of literature teaching as a productive instructional instrument to the major possible language problems, including motivation and culture.

Concerning the Algerian context, the program of English literature at the Algerian EFL department is a vital subject (Rosli & Suib, 2020). Because of its advantageous richness and benefits, unlike many subjects, literature is offered to undergraduate students to equip them with various skills: equipping them with theoretical concepts and analytical tools in the field of literary studies, improving their English language vocabulary to use in communication, offering them with information on the main aspects of life (history, culture, society, institutions...) as well as developing their critical thinking.

Thus, due to the place and advantages of literature in the Algerian English departments, assessing English learners' literary competence as a learning outcome is crucial for lifelong learning (Mousavi & Heidari Darani, 2018). Researches showing the way of assessing literary competence are very rare. Research about literature has been largely on the advantages of teaching literature, challenges of teaching literature, or strategies for teaching literature.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. *Literary Competence: What Learners Need to Know*

Common sense is that any college student of literature needs to possess advanced language proficiency. However, does this indicate his/her ability to literature meaningfully? According to Culler (1975), linguistic proficiency alone is insufficient. In his words, he (1975, p. 114) maintains that the Knowledge of the language would enable him [the reader] to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature... because he lacks the complex "literary competence". He has not internalized the "grammar" of literature, which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings.

To state differently, anyone who knows the English language may easily read and understand Hemingway's 'the Old Man and the Sea', but this does not indicate that he/she can figure out its literary meanings – descanting the theme, for instance. This suggests that understanding literature requires having some literary knowledge and interpretive skills to competently understand the texts literary. This literary knowledge and interpretive skills constitute part of what Culler (1975) called "literary competence", to refer to the knowledge of the implicit understanding of the rules and conventions of the literary discourse.

Equally, one might also think that literary competence requires only some literary knowledge associated with a literary work like authors, periods, time, settings, etc. This is not enough, however. Pointing out such literary elements does necessarily mean the ability 'to take the words on a page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meaning' (Lazar 2000, p. 12). Thus, as Carter and Long (1991) argue, "Literary competence is...connected with different levels of linguistic competence" (p.10). In the line of this argument, Brumfit and Carter (1986, p.18) add that literary competence is "an interesting combination of linguistic, socio-cultural, historical, and semiotic awareness". Thus, as Carter and Long (1991) argue, "Literary competence is complex to define, but it is connected with different levels of linguistic competence" (p.10). This is another way to suggest that understanding and reading literature properly goes hand in hand with the mastery of the language.

Herein, it is then noteworthy to stress the fact that the problem of teaching and learning literature sometimes has to do with the learners' linguistic deficiency. That is, lack of literary competence has not only to do with teachers but also with the learners' linguistic deficiency. Within this situation, it is not surprising then for some teachers to argue that their learners' low proficiency level often undermines their efforts.

This suggests that there seems to be a shared responsibility between the learners and teachers. The learners' role in understanding literature is extremely important. Their role lies in their self-dependency and autonomy in reading. However, as Lazar (1994, pp. 115-116) points out, when 'students do not read literature, [they will always] remain mystified or intimidated by the formal properties of the literary text, without being able to suggest any interpretations of its meaning'. In a situation like this, where students avoid reading literary works, they often fail to understand literature accordingly.

Having said that, it seems that the role assigned to teachers of literature is exhaustive and crucial (Celik & Yavuz, 2018). A great deal of their responsibility lies in their ability to inculcate in their learners 'the ability to respond adequately to literature by using the most effective strategies of reading' (Khelladi, 2017, p. 36). This must be done by methods, which enable learners to interpret and identify literary procedures and stylistic devices.

This means that a teacher of literature needs to have not only some sufficient content knowledge about literature but also the instructional skills that help in enhancing the flow of information and thus ensuring their learners' access thereto. And herein raises two important pedagogical issues: What knowledge can be necessary to improve students' literary skills? ; What instructional strategies are appropriate for literature teaching? Here comes the importance of the teacher-how and what? This requires teachers to see themselves as more than simply instructors whose duties are to deliver the course.

In terms of literary knowledge, a good knowledge of the subject matter is necessary. Admittedly, the amount of knowledge associated with literature may seem so confusing for some novice teachers, especially non-specialized ones. However, this confusion, according to Lazar (2000, p. 12) should pose no problem if the reader possesses a minimum understanding of, and familiarity with certain conventions which allow them to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meaning' (Tavoosy, 2018). In reading fiction, for example, one has to be familiar with the plot, subplot, characters, theme, point of view, mood, tone, and other literary devices such as imagery and figure of speech, thereby decoding any literary text meaningfully.

Reading literature critically needs other literary aspects, however. In this vein, the reader, as Thomson (1992) suggests, should also be familiar with literary criticism to be able to examine, discuss, evaluate, and interpret literature from different critical lenses. One might also add that to observe how literary content, themes, and styles change and follow certain trends, teaching literary movements is also important (Kheladi, 2020).

Apparently, due to its broad content and skills, realizing all the skills that make literary competence is not an easy task to be accomplished in the classroom (Nazim, M., & Alzubi, 2022). Practically speaking, it is quite impossible to transmit all the literary works into a syllabus. Yet, as Lazar (1993, p. 13) suggests, teachers may at least stress some of the more important skills that make up literary competence. These skills include, as what Culler (1975, p.113) calls, "implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for". Broadly speaking, based on what has been outlined above, in terms of content, literature understanding requires some familiarity with the following literary aspects:

- Knowledge of the literary genres: poem, novel, short story, play, etc. ;
- Knowledge related to historical and cultural contexts: Author's time and setting;
- Knowledge of the literary form: theme, plot, conflict, characters, point of view, etc. ;

- Knowledge of Figures of speech: metaphor, simile, personification, imagery, irony, etc.
- Knowledge of literary style: tone and diction
- Knowledge of the literary movements: classicism, romanticism, realism, modernism, etc.
- Knowledge of the literary criticisms: Formalism, Marxism, Psychoanalytic, Feminism, etc.

Accordingly, in terms of competence, literary competence embraces a range of specific linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, interpretive, and critical skills. Thus, a reader or a student with literary competence possesses an ability of understanding literary conventions and rules, the ability to interpret and convert literary conventions and rules into literary meanings, and the ability to speak and write about such in a critical argument.

1.1.2. *Testing Literary Competence: What to Assess*

Concerning the goals and skills associated with teaching literature (linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, critical, and intellectual skills), it seems that assessing learners' literary competence is not an easy task. The great dilemma associated with testing literature is not on how to assess – whether formative, portfolio, or summative method (Khanahmadi & Sajadirad, 2019). The challenge usually lies in what to assess- the literary conventions and skills that should be assessed. Commenting on such dilemma, in his 'the dilemmas of testing language and literature, Paran (2010, p. 143) avers that literature teachers are forced to make uneasy choices.

Yet, it is essential to mention that literature assessment is closely bound by many criteria (Silva & Alves, 2019). Depending on the teaching/learning aims and objectives of the program, the teachers' expertise in the field, and the level of the learners, the teacher can decide upon the 'things that are centrally important for students to be able to do, to know and to understand in the course of their education in Literature' (Chambers and Gregory, 2006, p. 161). It is only then teachers can ensure that their assessment practices 'are valid: well-founded, sound and to the point' (Chambers and Gregory, 2006).

For instance, if teachers take into consideration their learners' limited language proficiency, they may avoid open-response questions. Achievement tests for literature are used by reading passages followed by comprehension questions and multiple-choice questions (Dehghani, 2021). This kind of test is suitable for lower-level learners, where literature is part of their curriculum. However, at the university level, which is, unfortunately, also characterized by a great number of students' poor language competence, such kinds of tests, may not meet the very few advanced or advanced students who expect to receive challenging tasks to further develop their skills.

Adopting the language model by teaching literature for boosting students' language proficiency, the achievement test may address the importance of assessment that elicits comprehension of the literary texts through classroom activities that deal with the language aspects of the literary texts (Lazar 1993). Practically, drawing on stylistic analysis, the achievement test used by reading passages consisted of a variety of comprehension language activities and meaning construction of the text (Abdi & Shariati, 2019).

Such kinds of tests reflect the way literature teaches. That is to say, it is often teacher-centered, and that is it does not engage the students with the text. In this vein, other educators like Carter and Long (1991, p.3), gearing away from the formal study of literature, call for enabling students to 'achieve an engagement with the reading of literary text...and helping them to grow as individuals. Thus, in terms of assessment, they address the importance of assessing learners' interpretive proficiency, which involves their personal experience (Legas & Mengistu, 2018). This is usually done through open-response questions to check the learners' textually substantiated arguments about the interpretation of the text meaningfully. However, if we consider the complexity of the latter, 'it [will] hard to see what sort of "meaning" one could test to say that a reader had understood a literary text', as Alderson (2000, p. 66) pointed out.

In brief, what is outlined hereinabove, suggests that assessing achievement for a literature subject, unlike other typical texts, is a bewildering task? Yet, aware of this, in the following section, which contextualizes the theoretical insights so far collected to serve the present research work, we strive to offer an assessment that provides a reasonable tradeoff between many possible skills.

1.2. Purpose of study

Therefore, concerning the research problem, outlined hereinabove, and as an educational contribution to this area of study, the purpose of this research is to provide an example of how to assess literary competence and to find out whether the Algerian EFL students at the University of Tiaret have the required skills needed for literary competence.

In this respect, the study was guided by the two following research questions:

RQ1. Do the third-year EFL students at the University of Tiaret acquire the required skills needed for literary competence?

RQ2. What literary skills do they need to develop their literary competence?

The findings and recommendations shared with other teachers and colleagues in the field will pinpoint the areas where teachers need to improve to exploit better the benefits that literature embodies and thus will further promote the teaching of literature.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

An initial sampling made up of 25 Third Year EFL students from the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret was selected for the study. The participants were a sample of 14 females and 11 males who had been learning literature for the last three years.

2.2. Data Collection instruments

Based on the skills that make up literary competence (linguistic, rhetorical, and critical), outlined, the assessment objectives of this study focus on the students' ability of:

- Knowledge: Understanding the literary conventions and rules (theme, plot, characters, point of view, figures of speech, literary devices, etc. (rhetorical skills).
- Understanding: Understanding the work's literary style and how the author's style shape meanings (interpretive skills).
- Communication: Ability to communicate (write) the knowledge in an independent and critical argument (linguistic and critical skills).

Thus, to measure the above skills, the test is divided into three parts: (1) multiple-choice questions (2) interpretive short open response-questions, and (3) an open-response question of essay writing task. O'Brien's *On the Rainy River* was used as a data tool to measure students' literary competence.

2.3. Procedure

Lazar (1993, p. 93) list some difficulties that students at advanced levels may encounter when dealing with a certain type of texts written centuries ago, which are:

- Understanding some individual words,
- Understanding the historical context which forms the background to the text,
- Understanding the poet's attitude to what he sees around him,
- Responding personally to the themes.

Hence, considering this, the choice falls to Tim O'Brien's 'On the Rainy River, because of its plain English and universal theme. In addition, due to the length of the story and the time constraints, the participants were asked a day before the test to read the story at home, and on the following day, during the day of the test, they were given 2 hours to attempt the questions. The results were then analyzed in terms of the skills that constituted literary competence using the following rating scale:

Part 1: The multiple-choice questions: It might be argued that multiple-choice questions are often easier to answer. This is not often the case with literature, however. As it is often associated with the construction of meanings rather than looking for what happened, the uses of multiple-choice questions usually enforce students to think critically in the process of selecting their proper response. In terms of scoring, 1 point is granted for each correct question. One selection was required only. 0 points for selecting more than one choice (see Appendix).

Part 2: Interpretive Short Open Response-questions: The short answer questions were used to check the participants' ability to interpret, in 2 or 3 sentences, some important selected quotes and explain their meaning and effect (see Appendix). Because short constructed questions require a concise and focused response, their answers were scored as seen in table1:

Table 1
Criteria for scoring

Score	Criteria
3	Complete and accurate explanation in a good language style (there are no errors).
2	Complete and accurate explanation, but with few language errors
1	The explanation may be incomplete due to the inability to communicate the idea clearly
0	Incorrect/Irrelevant response or there is no answer

Part 3: Critical Response Question: Perhaps there is no better way for checking literature learners' textually substantiated arguments about interpretations of the text than asking an open analytical question. That is, it is not meant to check the participant's ability to summarize or restate some information (plot, for instance). Instead, it is meant for the participants to prove their ability to communicate (speak or write) literature critically. This should not be challenging since the question was designed to meet those asked in the multiple-choice questions. The writing task was graded for its overall quality as follows: 1) High proficiency, 2) Proficiency, 3) Sufficient, 4) Non-scoreable, and it was evaluated in terms of the following as seen in Table 2:

Table 2
Grading the writing task

The item	High proficiency	Proficiency	Sufficient	Non-scoreable
The Purpose	The purpose of the assignment is fully achieved.	Partially achieved.	Barely achieved.	Not achieved.
Subject Matter Knowledge	The writing reflects a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.	Adequate knowledge	Limited knowledge	No knowledge
Intro Paragraph	The introduction and purpose are clear and match the writing task.	Fairly clear and match the writing task.	Barely clear and matching the writing task.	Neither clear nor match the writing task.
Organization and Development	Paragraphs are well-organized	Meed slight improvement	Need improvement	Unclear.

Supporting Details	Good supporting details.	Adequate	Limited	No relevance
Literary analysis	Writing reflects a critical and analytical understanding of the text.	Not enough	A little	No
Language style and mechanism	Error-free in terms of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.	Minor errors	Frequent errors	Numerous errors

3. Results

3.1. Students' Response to the Multiple-Choice Questions

As noted above, 1 point is granted for each correct question. Only one selection was required. 0 points for selecting more than one choice. To avoid any coincidence in selecting the right question, the participants were asked not to answer if they were not so sure. Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of indicators related to students' responses to the Multiple-Choice Questions.

Table 3
students' responses to the Multiple-Choice Questions

Items	Correct Responses	Frequency %
Q1:	17	68%
Q2:	19	76%
Q3:	23	92%
Q4:	16	64%
Q5:	07	28%
Q6:	05	20%
Q7:	21	84%
Q8:	15	60%

Data concerning students' responses to the multiple-choice questions show that, apart from Qs 5 and 6, a great number of the participants provided an ability of reading and understand the text – point of view Q1, conflict Q2, the discourse of the text Q3, simile Q4, tone Q7, and theme Q8. This has to do with the fact that during their first year of study, they are fundamentally exposed to the major elements of literature with an emphasis on developing skills for reading. However, based on their failure to identify the types of figures of speech in Q5 (28 %) and Q6 (20%), one may deduce that they still need more guidance and reading strategies to interpret and identify literary procedures and stylistic devices.

3.2. Students' Response to the Short Open Question

As noted earlier, the participants were asked, in 2 or 3 sentences, to interpret some important quotes explaining their meanings, and effects (see Appendix), and the results are seen in table 4:

Table 4
Student's response to the short response question

Quality Score	3.	2.	1.	0.
Items				
Q1:	1	6	5	13
Q2:	1	5	2	17
Q3:	1	9	5	10
Q4:	1	4	4	16
Q5:	1	6	5	13

Statistics about students' responses to the short response questions display that only 1 student scored 3 in all the questions, demonstrating accurate responses with a good language style. Those who scored 2 also provided a complete and accurate response, but there were minor errors, particularly in punctuation. The other participants scored 1 due to their vague explanations and the inability to communicate their ideas very clearly as well as to the language mechanism, particularly punctuation. Whereas, as can be seen from the data above, almost more than half of the participants scored 0 due to their irrelevant and incorrect responses.

Based on the findings, one can infer that many students need more practical guidance not only making the close reading of literary texts but also in writing, because some of the participants, who scored 1 and 0, showed difficulties in providing accurate or clear explanations due to their poor writing skills. Some fragments and run-on sentences make their writing grammatically incorrect and ambiguous. Most often, such problems can be fixed through punctuation revisions. However, as it is observed, it seems that using proper punctuation was one of the most challenging tasks, especially commas.

3.3. Students' Response to the Critical Question

As stated hereinabove, the participants' essay was graded for its overall quality, and the question was as follows: In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien explains that the only thing that kept him from listening to his convictions and running away from the war and across the border to Canada was that the people in his hometown would think him a coward. In a short essay, explain how the outside forces (family, society) affect our decisions". Table 5 presents students' Responses to the Critical Response Question.

Table 5
Students' Response to the Critical Response Question

Quality Score	Respondents	Frequency %
1. High proficiency	00	00%
2. Proficiency	03	12%
3. Sufficient	09	36%
4. Non-scoreable	13	52%

Data concerning students' responses to the open-response question shows that the majority of the respondents did not achieve the writing purpose. Only 3 participants (12%) demonstrated some kind of proficiency in achieving the assignment purpose. In terms of the subject matter knowledge, the 3 participants demonstrated an ability to appropriately apply the literary analysis and knowledge of "On the Rainy River" by providing a good explanation of the theme of the effect of the outside forces on O'Brien decision and how it relates to human life with well-reasoned arguments and relevant examples from the story in a good English that is almost free of mistakes.

36% (9 responses) were barely sufficient. They provided weak responses that barely achieved the purpose of the task with limited knowledge of the subject matter. The participants' explanation of how the outside forces affected O'Brien's decision, and how it was related to human life lacked an appropriate ability to apply literary skills and a full understanding of the subject matter along with the lack of providing convincing supporting details. Their writings need improvement as their paragraphs were not well organized and full of frequent grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. On the other hand, the 13 non-scoreable ones (52%) are examples of weak responses as the respondents provided too brief answers that were characterized by an incomplete understanding of the story in particular and the subject matter in general. Their writings were poorly structured with numerous grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes.

4. Discussion

To begin with, it should be noted again that literature, unlike many subjects, is a subject that stresses, among many other skills, the understanding of the linguistic and literary details such as style, characters, imagery, figures of speech, syntax, lexis, etc. together with their literary meanings (Ozaeta, Perez & Rekalde, 2022). In other words, as mentioned earlier, literary competence embraces many skills: having some literary knowledge and interpretive skills to competently understand the texts literary (Culler, 1975), the ability to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meaning (Lazar 2000, p. 12), and the ability to connect them with different levels of linguistic competence (Cater and Long, 1991, p.10). This means that besides understanding the rules and conventions of literature, one needs certain language skills to discuss and demonstrate their ideas and thoughts clearly and coherently.

Based on the presentation and the findings of the research, it is revealed that, due to the skills that literary competence encompasses, the participants of the EFL students at the University of Tiaret lacked some necessary skills required for literary competence due to their language deficiency.

This can be seen through their response to section 2 (the 5 short open questions) and section 3 (the critical essay question). Though approximately the majority of the respondents demonstrated an understanding of the literary conventions and rules (point of view, conflict, figures of speech, and theme (rhetorical skills), asked in the multiple-choice questions, this ability to define the literary elements does not signify, as noted earlier by Culler (1975), their literary competence. As seen through their answers to section 2 (the 5 short open questions) and section 3 (the critical essay question), a number of them failed to reach the level of proficiency due to their writing deficiency. Herein, it is worth mentioning again to keynote that literature is writing and without good writing skills, converting the literary work into meaningful communication will remain in vain. Thus, a great deal of the participants' literary skills deficiency has to do with their inability to express themselves and interpret literary conventions in complete and clear meaningful language. There might be various reasons behind such literary deficiency.

It might have to do with the fact that the students are not engaged enough in practical guidance that allows them to both understand the conventions of literature and write about them. However, as is highlighted hereinabove, due to the skills that literature embraces, it is not easy to transform all the literary works into the syllabus. Besides, the time devoted to literature is limited to only one session per week, which is seen by some colleagues as insufficient for such a teaching subject that concerns the study of language skills, literary skills, and other skills related to cultural knowledge and critical thinking. In lieu, dealing with the most literary aspects can be difficult if teachers are not armed enough with sufficient experience and pedagogical skills. Accordingly, if students do not have opportunities to examine literary texts through not only close reading but also intensive writing tasks, students will rarely acquire literary competence.

Herein, it is, additionally, worth a keynote that some EFL teachers' literary experience in some Algerian universities is poor. For instance, to overcome the shortage of specialized teachers in literature, ebbed by the problem of large classrooms, literature subject is sometimes assigned to other teachers whose areas of specialization are different. However, one should not only attribute the students' poor literary competence to their teachers' lack of experience. In education, there is always a shared responsibility between teachers and learners for acquiring a certain competence.

Literature among many subjects requires independent reading. As pointed out by Culler (1975) and Lazar (1994), if the learners avoid reading literature, they will fail neither to understand its literary conventions nor to critically suggest any interpretation, which, in return, leads them to not appreciate literature accordingly. This means that instead of being heavily dependent on teachers' lecture notes and

handouts, students also need to train themselves on how to interpret and evaluate what they read. Suffice it to say, plenty of essays, like the ones detected in this study, are very often weakly written and structured due to the learners' lack of learning autonomy.

Many Algerian secondary students enroll in the English department, where they are supposed to follow a set of the advanced syllabus, with poor language skills. Under this situation, some teachers of literature may find themselves compelled to down-to-earth the complete teaching/learning process (i.e. using simple or adapted texts, short passages, and activities). However, the peril in text simplification and the adverse effects thereof may lie in their lack of literary richness (i.e. literary devices and rhetorical speech). This pedagogical problem has always been a common concern among many Algerian teachers in higher education who often complain about their first-year students' lack of writing skills.

It seems that college students' writing deficiency is a global concern, and it takes place in English-speaking countries as well. A study examining the U.S educational programs, A Texas model, by Booth et al (2014) indicates that most college first-year students face the challenge of not sufficiently having the writing skills requirements that meet the standard of post-secondary education. Similarly, in a Ph.D. study conducted in the colleges of the Southwestern region of the United States, Lloyd (2018) found that many Southwestern students struggle with essential writing skills, and many of them are graduating and entering the workplace with an inability to write in a scholarly and professional manner, as observed by May, Thompson, & Hebblethwaite (2012). What is more, Simkin, Crews, & Groves (2012) adds that some students do not even believe that their writing skills are problematic.

Similarly, in our context, it is continuously observed that after every exam, student appeal for their bad marks. Still, even after checking their exam sheets, they do not believe that their writing is problematic. This is another way to suggest that many college students do not make sufficient efforts to improve their language skills. Unlike secondary school where the teacher, university education, assigns assignments it is the student's responsibility to increase their motivation and efforts and make more independent reading to get better analytical, critical thinking, and writing skills.

Finally, admittedly, the problem is so complex. Many efforts should be made at different levels, and avenues in this area of study would prove fruitful. Investigative research on the reason for poor English language skills at all different educational levels is urgently needed.

5. Conclusion

In an attempt to assess the third EFL learners' literary competence, the current study tried to cast light upon the subject of the teaching of literature at the EFL Department. It was found, whereof, based on the assessment results, which were collected through a set of questions about Tim O'Brien's "On the Rainy River", that the major deficiency that hinders learners' literary competence is their poor writing skills. Thus, based on such findings, a further question, which arises from such an exploration, is what should be done to develop learners' literary competence.

As explained in the previous section, there is a shared responsibility between the students and the teachers in acquiring literary competence. A university student is not supposed to rely on the teacher. Literature by large requires independent reading. That is, the learners' role lies in their self-dependency and autonomy in reading. However, when students do not read literature, they will not be able to critically suggest any interpretation or even understand the literary conventions and rules, which in turn leads them to appreciate literature accordingly. Nevertheless, teachers should try hard to apply some interactive and motivating activities that promote the student's ability to understand, analyze, interpret and infer meanings from literary texts independently.

The participant number and the tool used in the assessment are not enough to generalize or draw a conclusion about the findings.

References

- Abdi, M., & Sharyati, A. (2019). Comparing the training effects of problem-solving and coping skills with stress. *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends and Issues*, 9(1), 16–22. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjpr.v9i1.4110>
- Alderson, J. (2000) *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=XrhcbBr9gLwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR10&dq=Alderson,+J.+\(2000\)+Assessing+Reading.+Cambridge:+Cambridge+University+Press.++&ots=KKXWblV51E&sig=qs-toh3mF0Uw87lh8EsvNAoRALO](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=XrhcbBr9gLwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR10&dq=Alderson,+J.+(2000)+Assessing+Reading.+Cambridge:+Cambridge+University+Press.++&ots=KKXWblV51E&sig=qs-toh3mF0Uw87lh8EsvNAoRALO)
- Booth, E. A., Capraro, M. M., Capraro, R. M., Chaudhuri, N., Dyer, J., & Marchbanks, M. P., III. (2014). Innovative Developmental Education Programs: A Texas Model. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 38(1), 2-4, 6, 8, 10, 18. Retrieved from <http://ncde.appstate.edu/publications/journal-developmental-education-jde>
- Brumfit, C. & Carter, R. (1986). *Literature in the Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.academia.edu/download/11344977/90210045.pdf>
- Byram, M., Barrett, M., Lázár, L., Mompoin-Gaillard, P., & Philippou, S. (2013). *Developing Intercultural Competence through Education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. <https://www.academia.edu/download/31096123/DICE.pdf>
- Carter, R & Long. *Teaching Literature*. (1991). Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers. Longman. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203124659/vocabulary-ronald-carter>
- Celik, G. Y., & Yavuz, F. (2018). Integrating a process-based challenging lesson plan framework into the syllabus for gifted EFL learners. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Education*, 5(3), 62–73. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijire.v5i3.3951>
- Chambers, E & Gregory, M. (2006). *Teaching and Learning English Literature*. Sage: London. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Cr6cxOgfQ-UC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=Chambers,+E+%26+Gregory,+M.+\(2006\).+Teaching+and+Learning+English+Literature.+Sage:+London.&ots=EK2FWYcFk &sig=keOIUIWmp10Y5dDOVXrLySiZ7UY](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Cr6cxOgfQ-UC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=Chambers,+E+%26+Gregory,+M.+(2006).+Teaching+and+Learning+English+Literature.+Sage:+London.&ots=EK2FWYcFk &sig=keOIUIWmp10Y5dDOVXrLySiZ7UY)
- Collie, J, and Slater, S. (1987): *Literature in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NEuVc2AxDeoC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Collie,+J+and+Slater,+S.+\(1987\):+Literature+in+the+Language+Classroom.+Cambridge,+UK:+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=7ACFzySPgr&sig=r-NIDJlnYJinIDVCJre7hfB_bmo](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NEuVc2AxDeoC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Collie,+J+and+Slater,+S.+(1987):+Literature+in+the+Language+Classroom.+Cambridge,+UK:+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=7ACFzySPgr&sig=r-NIDJlnYJinIDVCJre7hfB_bmo)
- Culler, J. (1975). *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Poetics and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203449769&type=googlepdf>
- Dehghani, A. P. (2021). Learning styles and vocabulary learning by Iranian undergraduate EFL learners. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*, 11(4), 176–185. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cej.v11i4.5723>
- Duff, A & Maley, A. (1990). *Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/es>
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class?* London: Harvard University Press.

- Fleming, M. (2006). <https://www.dur.ac.uk/education/staff/profile/?mode=pdetail&id=620&sid=620&pdetail=45266> "Concept of Language Games. *Humanizing Language Teaching* 8(4), pp. 1-12.
- Harvey D. (2002). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, (2nd Ed.). Stenhouse. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hsiUp1-k5-8C&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Harvey+D.+\(2002\).+Literature+Circles:+Voice+and+Choice+in+Book+Clubs+and+Reading+Groups,++\(2nd+Ed.\).+Stenhouse.&ots=Q3mL16LtrG&sig=2AOFBLS3IWhZS6hBvTMdf6OS5Q](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hsiUp1-k5-8C&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Harvey+D.+(2002).+Literature+Circles:+Voice+and+Choice+in+Book+Clubs+and+Reading+Groups,++(2nd+Ed.).+Stenhouse.&ots=Q3mL16LtrG&sig=2AOFBLS3IWhZS6hBvTMdf6OS5Q)
- Khanahmadi, A., & Sajadirad, N. (2019). Impact of strategy-based instruction via web folio assessment on IELTS general reading of EFL learners. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(6), 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.18844/prosoc.v6i6.4471> (Original work published December 6, 2019)
- Khiladi, M. (2020). Engaging EFL students with literature: An Algerian perspective. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 10(2), 86–93. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjflt.v10i2.4633>
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=73rFnM6qlrwC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=Kramsch,+C.+\(1993\).+Context+and+Culture+in+Language+Teaching.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=oCJV4UVDX9&sig=pMyiAyKYSaZf4otOZsMm812xNls](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=73rFnM6qlrwC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=Kramsch,+C.+(1993).+Context+and+Culture+in+Language+Teaching.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=oCJV4UVDX9&sig=pMyiAyKYSaZf4otOZsMm812xNls)
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CaP_9LAXIC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=Lazar,+G.+\(1993\).+Literature+and+Language+Teaching:+A+Guide+for+Teachers+and+Trainers.Cambridge:+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=PywfxW2vZc&sig=j1kJRaqBUnADVdhgXNgEI9ByDUQ](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CaP_9LAXIC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=Lazar,+G.+(1993).+Literature+and+Language+Teaching:+A+Guide+for+Teachers+and+Trainers.Cambridge:+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=PywfxW2vZc&sig=j1kJRaqBUnADVdhgXNgEI9ByDUQ)
- Lazar, G. (2000). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694566>
- Legas, A. M., & Mengistu, A. A. (2018). The practice and guidance and counseling in Amhara region Ethiopia. *Global Journal of Guidance and Counseling in Schools: Current Perspectives*, 8(3), 119–127. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjgc.v8i3.3605>
- Lloyd, J. (2018). Perceptions on the Essential Writing Skills of Entering First-Year College Students. Doctorate Thesis. Walden University, USA. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/000cc39c96b747d1dbb2555d243894e2/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Mackay, S. (1982). Literature in the ESL Classroom." *TESOL Quarterly* 16 (4), pp. 529-536. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586470>
- May, G. L., Thompson, M. A., & Hebblethwaite, J. (2012). A Process for Assessing and Improving Business Writing at the MBA Level. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(3), 252-270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912441822>
- Mousavi, S. M., & Heidari Darani, L. (2018). Effect of collocations on Iranian EFL learners' writing: Attitude in focus: Attitude in Focus. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 8(4), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjflt.v8i4.3568>
- Nazim, M., & Alzubi, A. A. F. (2022). Evaluation of an online teacher-made test through blackboard in an English as a foreign language writing context. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, 14(4), 1025–1037. <https://doi.org/10.18844/wjet.v14i4.7614>

- Onwu, G. (1999). Inquiring into the Concept of Large Classes: Emerging Typologies in An African Context. In M. Savage & P. Naidoo (Eds). *Using the local resource base to teach Science and Technology: Lesson from Africa*. AFCLIST. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950069950170202>
- Ozaeta, L., Perez, I., & Rekalde, I. (2022). Interactive storytelling for the retelling of autobiographical memory in children: A social robotics approach. *Global Journal of Information Technology: Emerging Technologies*, 12(1), 43–50. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjit.v12i1.7111>
- Paran, A. (2010). between Scylla and Charybdis: The Dilemmas of Testing Language and Literature. In Paran, A and Sercu, L (Eds). *Testing the Untestable in Language Education*, (pp.143-164). *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847692672>
- Rosli, R., & Suib, A. F. (2020). Teachers' knowledge about teaching mathematics to learn disabilities students. *International Journal of Special Education and Information Technologies*, 6(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.18844/jeset.v6i1.5416>
- Silva, M. M., & Alves, D. R. (2019). State evolution and conception of the right to education as a fundamental right. *Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues*, 9(1), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjs.v9i1.3596>
- Simkin, M. G., Crews, J. M., & Groves, M. J. (2012). Student Perceptions of Their Writing Skills: Myth and Reality. *Journal of Business and Management*, 18(1), 81-95. Retrieved from <https://www.chapman.edu/business/faculty-research/journals-andessays/>
- Tattoos, Y. (2018). The effect of digital storytelling on EFL learners' productivity motivation. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 10(2), 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v10i2.3406>
- Thomson, J. (1992). The Significance and Uses of Contemporary Literary Theory for The Teaching of Literature. In *Reconstructing Literature Teaching: New Essays on The Teaching of Literature*, ed. J. Thomson, 3–39. *Norwood, Australia: Australian Association for the Teaching of English*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED374425>
- Widdowson, H. G. (1990). *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. Oxford: OUP. <https://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/ijcdse/published-papers/volume-7-2016/How-Literature-Circles-Support-EFL-College-Students-Literary-and-Literacy-Learning.pdf>
- Yi-Ching S., & Kun Huei, W. (2016). How Literature Circles Support EFL College Students' Literary and Literacy Learning in a Children's and Adolescent Literature Course.' *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education (IJCDSE)* 7 (3), pp. 2874-2879. <https://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/ijcdse/published-papers/volume-7-2016/How-Literature-Circles-Support-EFL-College-Students-Literary-and-Literacy-Learning.pdf>

Appendix

After Reading “OnThe Rainy River”, answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability.

PART I: Understanding the Literary Rules and Conventions

1. What is the story's point of view?

- Objective
- Omniscient
- First-person point of view
- Limited omniscient

2. This selection is an example of which form of discourse?

- Persuasion
- Interrogation
- Narration
- Exposition

3. Which of the following best demonstrates the narrator's internal struggle?

- He was afraid to die in the war
- Tim was afraid of the embarrassment and losing the respect of his family if he escaped the war
- Tim was afraid of losing his scholarship to study at Harvard if go to the war.

4. What literary device is found in the sentence: ‘Elroy Berdahl remained quiet... He was simply there, like the river and the late-summer sun.

- Personification b) Alliteration c) Analogy d) Metaphor e) Simile f) Imagery

5. What literary device is found in the sentence: ‘Some weird sporting event: everybody screaming from the sidelines, rooting me on—a loud stadium roar’?

- Personification b) Alliteration c) Hyperbole d) Metaphor e) Simile f) Imagery

6. When O'Brian refers to Elroy Berdahl as “eighty-one years old, skinny and shrunken and mostly bald... His eyes had the bluish gray color of a razor blade, the same polished shine, and as he peered at me I felt a strange sharpness, almost painful, a cutting sensation...”, **he uses the literary device of :**

- Personification b) Alliteration c) Analogy d) Metaphor e) Simile f) Imagery

7. Which of the following best describes the tone of the story?

- Suspenseful and frightening
- Cold but comforting
- Futuristic and spiritual
- Depressing and realistic

8. Generally speaking, what might be the most important theme in this story?

- We cannot always get what we wish.
- We should defend our principles

- The difficulty of making a decision
- Do not try to change fate, the consequences can be disastrous.

PART II: Interpreting Details

1. When Tim O'Brien received the draft notice; he believed "there was no happy way out." Explain what he means.

.....
.....

2. 'Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons' (line, 11). What does this quote suggest about Tim's political stance on the war?

.....
.....

3. O'Brien says: "At night when I couldn't sleep, I'd sometimes carry on fierce arguments with those people. I'd be screaming at them, telling them how much I detested their blind, thoughtless, automatic acquiescence to it all, their simple-minded patriotism, their prideful ignorance, and their love-it-or-leave-it platitudes, how they were sending me off to fight a war they didn't understand and didn't want to understand. I held them responsible. By God, yes, I *did*». Explain who did O'Brien blame for his situation?

.....
.....

4. At the end of the chapter, Tim O'Brien says "I survived, but it's not a happy ending, I was a coward. I went to war." In 2-3 sentences, explain what O'Brien means.

.....
.....

5. In 2-3 sentences, explain why O'Brien finally decide to go to the war.

.....
.....

PART III: Writing Critical Response

In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien explains that the only thing that kept him from listening to his convictions and running away from the war and across the border to Canada was that the people in his hometown would think him a coward. In a well-formed short essay, explain how the outside forces (family, society) affect our decisions. Do you think it is fair for society to ask its individuals to engage in behavior they consider morally wrong?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....