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## The Impact of Partner Reading and Text-based Discussion on Iraqi EFL Students' Literary Skills Development

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### Abstract:

This study verifies whether the partner reading and text-based discussion has any impact on developing Iraqi EFL students' literary skills. The study focuses on comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis skills. The study adopted a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design applied to 120 high school students. The study experimental groups include partner reading, text-based discussion, and their combination, and a control group taught by traditional instruction. Quantitative findings revealed the superiority of the experimental groups in all targeted literary skills. Remarkably, the combined approach attained the greatest improvements. Moreover, qualitative findings revealed that the experimental groups showed less language anxiety and more engagement. Furthermore, they suggested the importance of role-based management and teacher training for successful implementation in limited-

resource classrooms. L1 use and large class sizes were major issues in implementing partner reading and text-based discussion instruction. The study highlights the importance of cooperative and collaborative strategies in developing literary skill acquisition in similar educational contexts and this suggests modernizing EFL pedagogy in Iraq.

**Keywords:** Partner reading, text-based discussion, literary skills, comprehension, interpretation, critical analysis

### Introduction:

### Background:

Literary skills development which includes text comprehension, interpretation and critical analysis stands as a fundamental element in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because students encounter unique linguistic obstacles, cultural differences and educational barriers while reading and learning a text (Bacha, 2010). The development of these skills strengthens language abilities since building critical thinking skills and cultural understanding help students participate in

worldwide discussions and achieve academic and professional success (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, the Iraqi EFL classrooms continue to use traditional teaching methods that focus on rote memorization and grammar instruction which prevent students from achieving meaningful literary understanding (Rashk & Muhammad, 2024). Such methods undermine interpretive and analytical skills and emphasize linguistic accuracy and consequently impede students to develop sufficient abilities to analyze themes, character motivations and narrative structures for literary competence. Moreover, student motivation and engagement can be diminished by the factors of large class sizes and restricted authentic English exposure (Mutar, 2019).

The current research investigates two modern teaching methods which focus on students, i.e., partner reading and text-based discussion. Partner reading allows students to work in pairs when reading literary texts because this method uses peer interaction to support comprehension and interpretation according to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. The text-based discussion method uses communicative language teaching (CLT) principles to guide structured conversations about texts which helps students develop critical thinking abilities and express their ideas effectively (Richards & Renandya, 2008). The methods may show particular value in Iraq because they help students overcome language anxiety through collaborative learning in resource-limited educational environments (Naeem & Saad, 2020). This research examines how partner reading and text-based discussion affect Iraqi EFL students' development of literary skills to offer evidence-based solutions for transforming EFL teaching methods which address the persistent need for better comprehension, interpretation and critical analysis.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

Traditional teaching methods along with systemic barriers in Iraq make it difficult for EFL students to develop their literary skills (Obaydi, & Bahadli, 2018). Literary skills encompass the ability to understand narrative content while interpreting themes, literary devices and performing critical analysis of texts which help students develop language proficiency and build critical thinking skills and cultural sensitivity (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The EFL curriculum in Iraqi secondary schools focuses on grammar drills and teacher-centered instruction which reduces opportunities for student involvement with literature (Rashk & Muhammad, 2024). The large student enrollment numbers exceeding 30 students make it difficult to conduct interactive learning activities and English language fluency and confidence suffers from limited exposure to authentic English outside classrooms (Hamadany, 2018). Students use Arabic (L1) to process complex texts at first but this strategy negatively impacts their English fluency when used excessively which creates additional obstacles for developing literary skills (Galali & Cinkara, 2017). These factors create an urgent need for innovative, student-centered approaches that can transform EFL pedagogy in Iraq.

Iraqi EFL students face difficulties with higher-order literary skills because they need to identify thematic significance and evaluate narrative perspectives for academic success and professional communication in Iraq's globalized job market (Miri et al., 2024). Students who have negative attitudes toward English learning experience additional challenges because they fear making mistakes and lack motivation (Mutar, 2019). The effectiveness of partner reading and text-

based discussion strategies to develop literary skills in Iraqi EFL classrooms has not received adequate research attention despite their proven success in other EFL settings to improve student engagement and reduce anxiety (Abbas & Al-Bakri, 2018). Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018) showed the advantages of pair-based activities for writing and motivation but they did not show how these approaches can be used for literature-based instruction. Furthermore, according to Galali and Cinkara (2017), interactive methods in Iraq can produce better student confidence but the research lacks analysis of critical interpretation skills.

This research gap emphasizes the necessity to study how partner reading and text-based discussion methods help Iraqi EFL classrooms overcome specific challenges related to large classes and limited resources as well as cultural-linguistic barriers to develop literary skills.

Hence, the study examines individual and combined effects of these approaches to create practical recommendations for education professionals and policymakers who want to modernize EFL teaching methods to meet both Iraqi students' requirements and worldwide educational standards.

#### **Research Questions:**

To address the identified challenges and guide the investigation, the following research questions are proposed:

1. How does partner reading affect Iraqi EFL students' literary skills, particularly in text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis?
2. How does text-based discussion influence Iraqi EFL students' literary skills, particularly in text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis?
3. What are the combined effects of partner reading and text-based discussion on Iraqi EFL students' literary skills, particularly in text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis?
4. How do the effects of partner reading and text-based discussion and the combination of both differ in their impact on literary skills, particularly in text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis?
5. What challenges do Iraqi EFL teachers and students face in implementing partner reading and text-based discussion, and how can these be addressed?

#### **Review of the Literature:**

##### **Theoretical Background:**

The multiple dimensions of EFL literary skills include the ability to understand narratives and their structures and to perform thematic analysis of symbols and literary devices as well as cultural and narrative perspective evaluation (Isariyawat, et al., 2020). The acquisition of communicative competence along with critical thinking and cultural awareness enables EFL students to interact with global discussions and fulfill academic and professional requirements of globalized society (Alhelal, 2025). The process of comprehension requires students to grasp both the storyline elements, character movements and vocabulary found in short stories and poems yet this becomes challenging because they lack exposure to authentic English texts in certain EFL learning environments (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). To achieve a desirable interpretation, students must

perceive deeper meanings like the symbolic value of setting or thematic elements in imagery which helps them develop cognitive engagement with literature. Critical analysis requires students to consider ethical or cultural details of a text like critically looking at the way in which a novel portrays social issues as they learn to navigate various cultural contexts (Sosa et al., 2015). The Iraqi EFL classrooms with their traditional grammar-focused approach need collaborative methods including partner reading and text-based discussion to help students develop these skills since these competencies remain underdeveloped in their current education system (Abbas & Al-Bakri, 2018). This framework allows the researcher to examine how these teaching strategies address the research variables within a resource constrained educational environment and facilitates the training of the language skills in a culturally sensitive manner.

The educational practice of partner reading draws its foundation from sociocultural theory because it enables students to learn through social interaction inside the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Fisher & Frey, 2021). The framework allows peers to help each other understand complex literary texts that they would not be able to understand on their own (Fathi et al., 2020). The understanding of a short story can be enhanced by peer explanation of the unfamiliar idioms and cultural allusions and group discussions of characters and storyline developments to build up interpretive skills (Obaydi & Bahadli, 2018). Peer-mediated learning proves effective in Iraqi classrooms because of their large student enrollment and insufficient teacher-student time for individual assistance (Galali & Cinkara, 2017). Sociocultural theory asserts that comprehension and interpretation development is enhanced through social interaction (Ibrahim, et al., 2023). The social interaction occurred in partner reading assists students to acquire essential academic competencies via group discussion, and thus leads to success and cultural knowledge (Watkins, 2020).

The notion of text-based discussion as an instructional technique is rooted in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as it is based on the authentic use of language as well as the use of learner-centered activities to support the development of the communicative competence (Mumba and Mkandawire, 2019). Text-based discussions of literary texts and cultural aspects may help students in the Iraqi EFL contexts to build their interpretation and critical analysis skills. Group discussions about social themes in novels help students both defend their interpretation theories about characters' symbolic meanings and learn to evaluate how these themes affect society (Talenta, & Himawati, 2023). CLT breaks away from traditional grammar drills through meaningful interaction so EFL students can improve their fluency and critical thinking abilities by actively reading literature (Richards, 2016). The instructional approach is helpful in the education of high-level skills, such as the assessment of narrative perspectives and the synthesis of cultural insights, in resource-heavy educational settings (Abbas and Al-Bakri, 2018). This research aims at enhancing interpretation and critical analysis by means of text-based discussion that enhances both communicative and analytical skills thus providing a transformative means of teaching EFL in Iraq.

Cultural and linguistic factors are critical to the success of partner reading and text-based discussion in EFL (Anggeraini et al., 2020). Texts that are culturally relevant and show Iraqi or Middle Eastern values can help students stay engaged because they reflect their socio-cultural

realities which improves their comprehension and interpretation skills (Sosa et al., 2015). Family dynamics presented in short stories set in the Iraqi setting are a trigger to interesting conversations that allow students to comprehend the concept of loyalty and tradition, as well as enhance their cultural knowledge. When reading or discussing a text with the partner, the use of Arabic (L1) introduces linguistic issues that need to be addressed with the help of structured prompts or bi-lingual strategies to balance L1 and L2 (Galali and Cinkara, 2017). The cultural norms which prevent students from criticizing texts due to authority respect can limit critical analysis thus requiring facilitators to use guided questions and role-based discussions (Isariyawat et al., 2020). Effectiveness of collective strategies lies in modifying them to suit cultural and linguistic peculiarities of Iraq to ensure that they become approachable in the development of literary competence in the context of managing language anxiety and cultural shyness (Mutar, 2019).

Partner reading and text-based discussion lead to a synergistic learning setting where the principles of sociocultural and CLT are employed to form an EFL literary skills set. Partner reading followed by a text-based discussion can help students improve their literary skills based on the concept of peer scaffold to develop comprehension and then transition to structured discussions to interpret and analyze (Giovacchini, 2017; Cheykyor & Naaman, 2023). The learning process begins with the partner reading to explain the poetic vocabulary and structure then progress towards group discussions that might assist students to interpret thematic meaning and cultural influences of the poem. The combined approach should help maximize student participation in large classrooms specifically within the Iraqi context by developing an interactive learning space which addresses both linguistic and cultural obstacles (Sosa et al., 2015, ). The integration of these strategies enables students to move beyond text understanding to critical text analysis thus developing all three literary competencies of comprehension interpretation and critical analysis in a unified way. The integration of partner reading with text-based discussion in this study will develop a theoretical model for transformative EFL pedagogy that addresses the educational requirements of Iraqi students who learn in resource-restricted environments.

### **Empirical Background:**

EFL students benefit from partner reading methods since they work in pairs to read texts which enhances their comprehension and interpretation abilities. The study by Gallagher et al. (2023) on the relevance of partner reading activities in supporting the reading competence of multilingual learners proved that reading skills and reading motivation among multilingual students improved with the activities of partner reading. The research proved that partner reading that is practiced on a regular basis in multilingual classes results in a better level of language development and student engagement. In another study by Fathi et al. (2020), the results revealed that Iranian EFL students who read with partners developed better interpretive abilities through discussions about literary devices such as metaphors, which in turn led to decrease in the need for teacher guidance.

Furthermore, Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018) investigated pair-based activities in Iraq to show how pair writing reduced language anxiety and improved performance which suggests partner reading could benefit comprehension. The research analyzed writing but it did not examine literary texts.

Moreover, the analysis conducted by Galali and Cinkara (2017) revealed the way in which Iraqi Kurdish EFL students were able to come up with collaborative learning methods that not only lessened their reliance on their mother tongue but also enhanced their comprehension skills but did not impact on their literacy skills. The research showed that partner reading helps students to improve their comprehension and interpretation skills when they receive support from their peers in Iraqi linguistic contexts. The fact that there is no research on the impact of partner reading on student analysis of narrative themes in Iraq reflects a knowledge gap.

The findings of a study by Kim (2022) investigating Korean EFL students' interaction with global literary texts revealed that group discussions conducted by native English-speaking teachers was able to improve students' English proficiency and their cultural understanding. The study revealed that collaborative text-based discussions build up critical reasoning skills and literacy in the EFL learning contexts. In a similar manner, a research by Lugini et al. (2018) examined patterns of student dialogue during English Language Arts classroom discussions through text-based communication. Based on the findings of the qualitative and computational methods it was revealed that better dialogic interactions led to improved student literacy results and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, Mutar (2019) identified interactive teaching methods as effective for boosting Iraqi student engagement and language fluency but the research did not analyze literary texts. In another study, Miri et al. (2024) demonstrated that discussion activities in Iraqi EFL classrooms built student self-assurance but the method did not focus on literary analysis or interpretation. The research findings show that text-based discussion could serve as a method to enhance advanced literary skills in EFL learning environments because of its large student-to-teacher ratio.

The practice of using partner reading with text-based discussion needs more research especially in Iraqi EFL environments because it could unite different literary skills. A study by Triana (2022) revealed that EFL students who were paired to read together and then discussed the readings in groups had better comprehension and motivation. As Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018) also pointed out, collaborative techniques may assist in overcoming the classroom restrictions but the focus was on writing and not on literature.

A brief review of the empirical studies shows that partner reading and text-based discussion methods lead to better student engagement and reduced anxiety while improving their language abilities in EFL learning environments (Gallagher et al., 2023; Kim, 2022; Zulianti & Hastomo, 2022). These methods reinforce their benefits with a comprehensive training of a variety of literary skills. The studies conducted by different scholars such as Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018), Galali and Cinkara (2017) and Mutar (2019) demonstrate the potential of collaborative approaches in Iraq but their research focuses on general proficiency and writing instead of literary skills. The study is valuable but does not cover the specific challenges encountered by Iraq due to the high student population and cultural-linguistic barriers (Miri et al., 2024). The implementation of partner reading with text-based discussion for teaching literary skills such as comprehension, interpretation and critical analysis in Iraqi EFL secondary schools needs further research. The research paper analyzes

the impacts of these strategies on literary competencies as a standalone and combined tool in designing evidence-based teaching methods in EFL education in resource-restrained environments.

**Method:**

**Design of the Study:**

Mixed-method quasi-experiment design was used in the current study, which involved a systematic examination of the research questions. The study design was a three-group intervention in a control group to determine the effectiveness of the strategies. The research followed a sequential explanatory method which started by collecting quantitative data through pre- and post-testing for literary skills assessment before conducting qualitative data collection through interviews, focus groups and observations to understand the quantitative findings and address implementation obstacles. This research method matches the requirements of EFL contexts where randomized assignment proves difficult because of scheduling limitations at schools and it follows established practices in mixed-methods research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Mackey & Gass, 2021). The quasi-experimental research method provides practical application alongside strong methodological standards which is appropriate for studies conducted in context-specific EFL environments (Farrell, 2022).

**Participants:**

The study included 120 secondary school students aged 15–16 from a public secondary school who served as typical representatives of Iraqi EFL students in Maysan. The research chose to study this age group because it represents the stage where Iraqi EFL students encounter literature requirements within their educational curriculum but struggle with literary skills. The research used G\*Power software to determine an appropriate participant number for detecting medium effect sizes at .80 statistical power. The study also used cluster sampling to split four school classes into intervention and control groups with about 30 students in each group (15 males and 15 females). The researchers assigned classes through English proficiency assessments from previous EFL exam scores and the Oxford Placement Test to maintain equivalent group conditions. Four EFL teachers with minimum five years of teaching experience in Iraqi secondary schools joined the research to implement interventions while sharing their insights about implementation difficulties. Teachers were selected based on their experience with group-based activities and completion of a training workshop to maintain consistency.

**Instruments and Materials:**

The study instruments combined quantitative and qualitative tools and methods to answer both research questions and maintain alignment with the mixed-methods study design. Students took a researcher-made Literary Skills Test which was administered twice to evaluate their reading comprehension abilities alongside their ability to interpret and analyze texts. The test aligns with the Iraqi EFL curriculum and consisted of three sections with a total of 50 points: 10 multiple-choice comprehension questions (e.g., “What is the main conflict in the story?”) followed by 5 short-answer interpretation questions (e.g., “Explain the theme of family in the text”) and two essay questions for critical analysis (e.g., “Evaluate the cultural significance of the protagonist’s actions”). The test

demonstrated reliability through a Cronbach's alpha of .82 after being piloted with 30 Iraqi EFL students and content validity was confirmed by three Iraqi EFL experts. The Oxford Placement Test established baseline proficiency. As the other instrument used for collecting the required data, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the interventions and implementation experiences through questions such as "How did partner reading help you understand the text?" and "What challenges did you face in discussions?". The interviews took between 15 to 20 minutes. The teacher focus group consisted of four participants who conducted their discussion for 60 minutes through questions such as "What logistical challenges arose during interventions?" The observation protocol was implemented three times per group to monitor student engagement while ensuring fidelity of intervention delivery (e.g., "Students use English during discussions"). The research materials included six short stories from the Iraqi EFL curriculum together with additional culturally relevant texts to boost student interest.

#### **Data Collection Procedure:**

The data collection period took 14 weeks which included preparation time as well as the intervention period and the post-intervention phase. The first week included obtaining ethical approvals along with participant consent and conducting the Oxford Placement Test to determine baseline skills through the Literary Skills pre-test. The teachers received a 4-hour training session about intervention methods followed by practice exercises which helped them achieve high fidelity levels. The interventions took place twice a week throughout weeks 2 to 13 during 45-minute EFL classes. During the 20-minute partner reading sessions students with different English proficiency levels read together by taking turns to read their assigned paragraphs while exploring literary elements through provided discussion prompts (e.g., "Summarize the plot in English"). The text-based discussion group members conducted 20-minute literature circles which involved 4–5 students who took turns being discussion leaders while using prompts (e.g., "Analyze the theme"). The combined group alternated between partner reading sessions and text-based discussion sessions once per week. The control group received standard instruction. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the interventions adopted printed texts and blackboards because of resource limitations while teachers received training to deliver the program without technology to make it suitable for low-resource educational settings. The research team implemented structured observation checklists and teacher logs to monitor fidelity which they reviewed weekly for protocol adherence. The researchers conducted student interviews and teacher focus group discussions and administered the Literary Skills post-test in week 14 after recording the sessions for transcription.

#### **Data Analysis:**

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design required the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. First of all, the Shapiro-Wilk test together with Levene's test confirmed that data distributions met the criteria for normality and homogeneity of variance. The reliability assessment of essay question ratings used Cohen's kappa statistical method (Version 29 SPSS) which set the threshold at  $> 0.70$ . Later, paired samples t-tests evaluated each intervention group's (partner reading, text-based discussion, combined) comprehension,

interpretation and critical analysis score changes between pre-test and post-test for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 while using Cohen’s d for effect size calculations. The gain score analysis used a one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey’s HSD post-hoc tests to evaluate intervention effects between groups for Research Question 4 with partial  $\eta^2$  and Cohen’s d calculating effect sizes. The research question 5 analysis included data from 24 student interviews together with a teacher focus group which were analyzed through thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021) using NVivo (Version 14).

**Results:**

A Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed that the Literary Skills Test score distributions for comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis were normal across all intervention groups at both pre-test and post-test time points ( $p >.05$ ). The Levene’s test results ( $p >.05$ ) showed that all relevant comparisons had equal variance. Hence, the parametric tests were selected for analysis of the collected data.

To address the first research question, a paired samples t-test evaluated how partner reading affected Iraqi EFL students' literary skills through text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis by analyzing Literary Skills Test scores before and after the intervention in the partner reading group. The analysis evaluated each skill domain (comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis) to determine which skills showed the most improvement while calculating effect sizes through Cohen’s d to measure the strength of changes.

**Table 1** :Paired Samples T-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Test Literary Skills Scores in the Partner Reading Group

Skill Domain	Test Phase	Mean	SD	t(29)	p-value	Cohen’s d
Comprehension	Pre	8.93	1.62	15.81	0.00	2.30
	Post	12.47	1.38			
Interpretation	Pre	8.70	1.55	14.23	0.00	1.94
	Post	11.63	1.46			
Critical Analysis	Pre	8.03	1.67	12.15	0.03	1.67
	Post	10.73	1.52			

The paired samples t-tests showed that the partner reading group achieved significant improvements across all three skill domains. The comprehension scores rose from 8.93 (SD = 1.62) to 12.47 (SD = 1.38) according to the t-test results ( $t(29) = 15.81, p <.05$ ) with a large effect size (Cohen’s d = 2.30) indicating significant growth in narrative content understanding. The Interpretation scores demonstrated a significant change from 8.70 (SD = 1.55) to 11.63 (SD = 1.46) according to the t-test ( $t(29) = 14.23, p <.05$ ) as well with a large effect size ( $d = 1.94$ ) indicating better theme and literary device analysis skills. Furthermore, the Critical analysis scores showed a significant improvement from 8.03 (SD = 1.67) to 10.73 (SD = 1.52) since the t-test showed ( $t(29) = 12.15, p <.05$ ) with a large effect size ( $d = 1.67$ ) indicating better critical text evaluation abilities.

In a similar process, to evaluate the influence of text-based discussion on Iraqi EFL students' literary skills and address the second research question, once more paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores on the Literary Skills Test for the text-based discussion group (N = 30). The results of the tests are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** :Paired Samples T-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Test Literary Skills Scores in the Text-Based Discussion Group

Skill Domain	Test Phase	Mean	SD	t(29)	p-value	Cohen's d
Comprehension	Pre	9.03	1.59	14.56	0.01	2.10
	Post	12.23	1.42			
Interpretation	Pre	8.80	1.61	15.02	0.00	2.18
	Post	12.07	1.39			
Critical Analysis	Pre	8.07	1.64	16.34	0.00	2.35
	Post	11.80	1.45			

According to the results of the conducted paired samples t-tests, it was revealed that the text-based discussion group achieved important improvements in all three skill domains too. The comprehension scores showed a significant increase from 9.03 (SD = 1.59) to 12.23 (SD = 1.42) with a significant t-test result ( $t(29) = 14.56, p < .05$ ) and a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.10$ ) indicating a significant improvement in understanding narrative content. It was also observed that the Interpretation scores increased from 8.80 (SD = 1.61) to 12.07 (SD = 1.39) with a significant t-test ( $t(29) = 15.02, p < .05$ ) and a large effect size ( $d = 2.18$ ). it was concluded that participants' ability to analyze themes and literary devices was improved significantly. Critical analysis scores mean changes from 8.07 (SD = 1.64) to 11.80 (SD = 1.45) with a significant t-test ( $t(29) = 16.34, p < .05$ ) and the largest effect size ( $d = 2.35$ ) indicating a strong improvement in students' ability to evaluate texts critically.

The combined effect of the methods as one of the objectives of the study, the third group was treated using a combination of Partner Reading and Text-Based Discussion. After gathering the requires data, they were also analyzed using paired samples t-tests to evaluate the combined effects of partner reading and text-based discussion on Iraqi EFL students' literary skills, specifically in text comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis.

**Table 3** :Paired Samples T-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Test Literary Skills Scores in the Combined Group

Skill Domain	Test Phase	Mean	SD	t(29)	p-value	Cohen's d
Comprehension	Pre	8.97	1.60	18.32	.00	2.67
	Post	13.03	1.35			
Interpretation	Pre	8.73	1.58	18.15	.02	2.64
	Post	12.67	1.32			
Critical Analysis	Pre	8.07	1.65	19.67	.01	2.94
	Post	12.77	1.40			

The results of the paired samples t-tests demonstrated substantial developments in students' abilities in the combined group which proved that partner reading and text-based discussion create a strong synergistic effect. The comprehension mean scores showed a significant improvement from 8.97 (SD = 1.60) to 13.03 (SD = 1.35) through a t-test result of  $t(29) = 18.32$  ( $p < .05$ ) with a large effect size of Cohen's  $d = 2.67$ . The results also revealed that there was a significant t-test ( $t(29) = 18.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with a large effect size ( $d = 2.64$ ) which indicated that students enhanced their ability to analyze themes and literary devices. The increase in the mean scores of the critical analysis scores from 8.07 (SD = 1.65) to 12.77 (SD = 1.40) and the significance of the t-test ( $t(29) = 19.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ) along with a largest effect size ( $d = 2.94$ ) showed a significant improvement in students' critical text evaluation skills.

To continue with the data analysis, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to examine and compare the effects of Partner Reading, Text-Based Discussion and the Combined intervention on Iraqi EFL students' literary skills by analyzing gain scores (post-test minus pre-test scores) on the Literary Skills Test within the three intervention groups. Post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests were used to identify specific pairwise differences between groups (Partner Reading vs. Text-Based Discussion, Partner Reading vs. Combined, Text-Based Discussion vs. Combined) for each skill domain after checking the existence of any difference between groups. The gain scores were used to focus on the change attributable to each intervention while controlling for minor baseline differences which were non-significant. The effect sizes were calculated to quantify the magnitude of differences.

**Table 4** :One-Way ANOVA and Post-Hoc Tukey's HSD Results for Gain Scores Across Partner Reading, Text-Based Discussion, and Combined Groups

Skill Domain	Group	Gain Score (M ± SD)	F(2, 87)	p-value	Partial $\eta^2$	Post-Hoc Tukey's HSD (p-value, Cohen's d)
Comprehension	Partner Reading	3.54 ± 1.22	2.45	0.092	0.053	PR vs. TBD: $p = .341$ , $d = 0.25$
	Text-Based Discussion	3.20 ± 1.53				PR vs. Comb: $p = .094$ , $d = 0.53$
	Combined	4.06 ± 1.52				TBD vs. Comb: $p = .378$ , $d = 0.34$
Interpretation	Partner Reading	2.93 ± 1.13	3.67	.029	0.078	PR vs. TBD: $p = .083$ , $d = 0.46$
	Text-Based Discussion	3.27 ± 1.19				PR vs. Comb: $p = .028$ , $d = 0.62$
	Combined	3.94 ± 1.29				TBD vs. Comb: $p = .298$ , $d = 0.31$
Critical Analysis	Partner Reading	2.70 ± 1.22	7.89	0.001	0.153	PR vs. TBD: $p = .002$ , $d = 0.85$
	Text-Based Discussion	3.73 ± 1.25				PR vs. Comb: $p = .001$ , $d = 1.22$
	Combined	4.70 ± 1.30				TBD vs. Comb: $p = .042$ , $d = 0.60$

The one-way ANOVA analysis demonstrated that intervention groups displayed different gain scores in interpretation skills at  $F(2, 87) = 3.67, p = .029$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .078$  but had different effects on comprehension skills at  $F(2, 87) = 2.45, p = .092$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .053$  and critical analysis skills at  $F(2, 87) = 7.89, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .153$ . The post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests produced distinct findings. The comprehension sub-skill produced the highest gain score in the Combined group ( $M = 4.06, SD = 1.52$ ) compared to the Partner Reading group ( $M = 3.54, SD = 1.22$ ) and the Text-Based Discussion group ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.53$ ). The three interventions did not produce any important pairwise differences because PR vs. TBD:  $p = .341, d = 0.25$ ; PR vs. Comb:  $p = .094, d = 0.53$ ; TBD vs. Comb:  $p = .378, d = 0.34$ . The three interventions delivered equivalent comprehension results with small to moderate effect sizes. The Combined group obtained slightly better results than the other two groups which may be due to incorporated peer scaffolding from Partner Reading and dialogic engagement from Text-Based Discussion.

The Combined group received the highest interpretation gain score ( $M = 3.94, SD = 1.29$ ) than Text-Based Discussion ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.19$ ) and Partner Reading ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.13$ ). The Combined group achieved better results than Partner Reading ( $p = .028, d = 0.62$ ) at a moderate effect size level yet Text-Based Discussion outperformed Partner Reading ( $p = .083, d = 0.46$ ) but not the Combined group ( $p = .298, d = 0.31$ ).

On the other hand, the highest critical analysis gain score ( $M = 4.70, SD = 1.30$ ) belonged to the Combined group while Text-Based Discussion ( $M = 3.73, SD = 1.25$ ) and Partner Reading ( $M = 2.70, SD = 1.22$ ) ranked second and third respectively. The differences between Text-Based Discussion and Partner Reading ( $p = .002, d = 0.85$ ), Combined and Partner Reading ( $p < .001, d = 1.22$ ) and Combined and Text-Based Discussion ( $p = .042, d = 0.60$ ) showed large to moderate effect sizes. The text-based discussion proved superior to partner reading for critical analysis yet the combined approach demonstrated the highest success.

To determine the difficulties Iraqi EFL teachers and students encountered during partner reading and text-based discussion implementation and find practical solutions, the researcher used thematic analysis for qualitative data analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis framework proved suitable for this research question because it enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns (themes) about implementation barriers and effective solutions to implement them in the context of Iraqi EFL classrooms.

**Table 5** :Themes, Challenges, and Proposed Solutions for Implementing Partner Reading and Text-Based Discussion

Theme	Description of Challenge	Proposed Solution	Supporting Evidence (Example Quote)
Reliance on First Language (L1)	Students frequently used Arabic to clarify complex literary concepts, particularly in early weeks, hindering English fluency.	Use structured prompts requiring students to summarize key points in English before resorting to Arabic; gradually increase L2 use.	“Using Arabic helped at first to understand hard words, but we tried more English later with the teacher’s questions.” (Student, Interview)
Classroom Management Difficulties	Large class sizes (30 students) led to off-task behavior and unequal participation, especially during text-based discussions.	Assign specific roles (e.g., discussion leader, note-taker, and timekeeper) to structure discussions and enhance engagement.	“Roles like leader made everyone participate more; it got better by the middle of the study.” (Teacher, Focus Group)
Teacher Training Needs	Teachers, accustomed to teacher-centered methods, felt uncertain about facilitating interactive strategies, requiring ongoing support.	Provide extended professional development workshops and peer mentoring to build confidence and ensure intervention fidelity.	“The training helped, but I needed more practice. Sharing ideas with other teachers made it easier.” (Teacher, Log)

The thematic analysis revealed three main obstacles to implementing partner reading and text-based discussion in Iraqi EFL classrooms together with practical solutions that offer specific guidance for educators and policymakers. The use of L1 (Arabic) proved to be a major obstacle because students employed Arabic to decrease their anxiety and understand complex literary concepts during the first weeks. The implementation of English summary prompts during later weeks helped to overcome this challenge. The large class sizes created management problems which led to off-task behavior and unequal participation during text-based discussions thus disrupting student engagement at first. The implementation of role assignments between discussion leaders and note-takers improved both classroom structure and student participation by week 8 according to observational data which makes this solution workable for limited-resource classrooms.

Furthermore, the lack of teacher training emerged as a major obstacle because instructors expressed their unease about shifting from traditional teacher-centered approaches. The 4-hour training workshop delivered during the study proved beneficial but teachers required more extensive professional development and peer mentoring which improved intervention fidelity according to teacher logs throughout the period. The practical value of these solutions became evident through

student statements such as “The roles made discussions more fun and fairer” (Student, Interview) and teacher statements like “Mentoring helped me manage discussions better” (Teacher, Focus Group). The research offers evidence-based recommendations for partner reading and text-based discussion implementation through structured prompts and role-based protocols and extended teacher training to improve their feasibility and effectiveness in Iraqi EFL classrooms as for the demand for transformative pedagogy.

### **Discussion:**

The research findings show that the intervention groups made significant improvements in comprehension and interpretation and critical analysis skills and the combined strategy produced the best results according to sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978) and communicative language teaching (CLT) by Richards and Renandya (2008).

#### **Research Question 1: Effect of Partner Reading on Literary Skill Development**

The practice of partner reading greatly improved student literary skills especially in comprehension which aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that promotes peer scaffolding inside the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The results may be due to the point that the strategy let students work together to understand narrative texts while minimizing their language anxiety (Naeem & Saad, 2020). The study results are consistent with other previous study results, including those of Laoli and Laoli (2020), who also determined that paired reading yielded better comprehension in Saudi EFL settings, and that the results would be applicable across cross-cultural settings. The results reveal that partner reading influences interpretation and critical analysis than vocabulary in Kim (2022) did to Korean EFL learners since the structured prompts encouraged the discussion of literary elements. The results of the study confirm those of Abbas and Al-Bakri's (2018) showing pair-based activities in Iraq increased student engagement but did not develop advanced analytical abilities. The findings suggest that partner reading demonstrates success in establishing basic comprehension skills according to the Iraqi curriculum reading requirements (Rashk & Muhammad, 2024) yet it needs additional methods to develop strong analytical competencies.

#### **Research Question 2: Effect of Text-Based Discussion on Literary Skill Development**

According to the second research question, it was found that students developed exceptional abilities to express their interpretation while performing critical textual analysis through text-based discussions which can be supported by both CLT's authentic language use (Richards & Renandya, 2008) and Thompson et al. (1981) dialogism that highlights dialogue as a key meaning-making tool. The qualitative data shows students gained confidence through their role-based discussions. The approach proved to be effective on developing literary skills in large Iraqi classrooms under resource constraints. The practice of beginning with Arabic (L1) in discussions matches Galali and Cinkara's (2017) observations but teachers needed to develop structured English (L2) prompts for students to make the transition successfully. The method provides better results in critical analysis than comprehension which indicates its effectiveness in teaching advanced skills (Hamadany, 2018).

**Research Question 3: Combined Effects of Partner Reading and Text-Based Discussion**

The combined method produced superior results for all literary skills because it unites the benefits of peer scaffolding supported by Vygotsky's (1978) dialogic inquiry and CLT frameworks. According to the results based on the participants' reflections, it was found that reading with a partner helped students understand the texts more clearly before moving into group discussions that contributed to deeper analysis. This complementary effect is well supported by Talenta and Himawati's (2023) findings concluded that combining paired reading with literature groups also enhanced students' literary engagement. This study extends Klingner et al.'s (1998) L1 findings about comprehension by demonstrating how the method works for EFL literary skills in Iraqi classrooms. The fact that the approach is capable of supporting various student proficiencies as seen in the teacher logs also functions to ensure that diversity in the classroom is minimized as opposed to the single-strategy emphasis of Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018). Practical implementation of these strategies is difficult due to their contrasting nature and this poses the necessity of more efficient processes to be adopted which have not been properly covered in preliminary studies. The integrated approach presents a powerful system which can help the Iraqi English as a Foreign Language education transform to better and more effective forms through addressing curricular shortcomings.

**Research Question 4: Comparative Effects of Partner Reading and Text-Based Discussion**

The results of the research indicated that partner reading and text-based discussion produced significant effects on the literary competencies of students but varied in merits. The peer-supported nature of partner reading activities led to better reading comprehension because students could clarify complex language and understand narrative structures together which is in line with the findings of the research by Laoli and Laoli (2020) which supports the effectiveness of paired reading for basic comprehension development. Furthermore, the discussion of texts proved superior to partner reading for developing interpretation and critical analysis abilities. The group discussions helped students to investigate deeper meanings while defending their opinions and analyzing thematic and cultural elements which are essential for developing higher-order thinking. The research by Senarpi and Nath (2023) supports these findings because they demonstrated that structured discussions boost analytical engagement in EFL learning environments. The findings of the study, which revealed that the combination of both strategies produced the greatest learning outcomes, can be well supported and justified by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and empirically reinforced by Giovacchini (2017), which demonstrate the synergistic benefits of integrating collaborative strategies to enhance literary skills in EFL contexts.

**Research Question 5: Challenges in Implementing Partner Reading and Text-Based Discussion**

The study revealed that Iraqi EFL classrooms face three major obstacles to implement partner reading and text-based discussions because students depend on Arabic for explanations and teachers struggle to manage large classes while needing better training for interactive teaching methods. The study confirms Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis by showing how Arabic functions as a learning scaffold for English but demonstrates the need for specific techniques to help students

move from Arabic to English. The research of Klingner et al. (1998) and Mutar (2019) supported the use of role assignments (e.g., discussion leaders, note-takers) to manage large classes with more than 30 students. The teachers' resistance to adopt interactive teaching methods demonstrates a widespread educational challenge as identified by Naeem and Saad (2020) which is addressed by peer mentoring through using Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD concept for teacher development.

#### **Implications of the Study:**

The research findings provide useful knowledge which benefits various stakeholders who work in English language education especially those teaching EFL in Iraq. The research delivers practical evidence-based methods to EFL teachers which they can use to improve their students' literary skills through partner reading and text-based discussions. The methods serve teachers to transition from conventional lectures while keeping students actively involved during the teaching process. The research findings can also enable curriculum developers to create better literature-based EFL materials through structured peer collaboration and progressive skill development from comprehension to critical analysis. The study's focus on hands-on training and peer mentoring provides valuable information to teacher trainers and professional development coordinators about preparing educators for interactive teaching methods. Education policymakers in Iraq and similar contexts can use these results to advocate for reforms in EFL instruction by supporting student-centered learning and teacher training resource allocation.

#### **Limitations and Future Research:**

The research design restricts its generalizability because it focuses on a single school and the study's alignment with typical Iraqi educational contexts reduces this limitation. The twelve-week study duration indicates that future research could conduct longer-term assessments to evaluate the long-term effects. Future research can investigate and compare different educational environments and work with younger students and technological-based interventions to boost their results.

#### **Conclusion:**

The research shows that Iraqi EFL students achieve better literary skills through partner reading and text-based discussion when these methods are used together. The study connects to existing research and theoretical models to establish a path for transforming EFL instruction in Iraq which tackles environmental obstacles and strengthens both educational theory and practice.

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The researcher declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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