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EFFECTIVENESS OF ACADEMIC DEGREE ON SUDANESE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' SUBJECT MATTER OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The study within the local context is limited. As such, this study examines the effects of academic qualifications on the subject matter. Previous studies in the West have shown teachers who are academically qualified in specific subjects are able to teach better than those with degrees in non-specific subjects (Goldhaber and Brewer, 1996). The analysis revealed that academic qualifications had significantly influenced the subject matter knowledge of literary devices and such knowledge differ significantly among the English major and English minor, Specifically, the English major language teachers had better subject matter knowledge of English devices than the non-English major language teachers. The subject matter knowledge of English devices amongst the other English language teachers was lower.

**Keywords:** Academic qualifications, subject matter knowledge, English major, English minor. Degree.

المستخلص

الدراسة في السياق المحلي محدودة. على هذا النحو ، تبحث هذه الدراسة في آثار المؤهلات الأكاديمية على الموضوع. أظهرت الدراسات السابقة في الغرب أن المدرسين المؤهلين أكاديميًا في موضوعات محددة قادرون على التدريس بشكل أفضل من أولئك الحاصلين على درجات علمية في مواد غير محددة (Goldhaber and Brewer ، 1996). كشف التحليل أن المؤهلات الأكاديمية قد أثرت بشكل كبير على المعرفة الموضوعية للأجهزة الأدبية وأن هذه المعرفة تختلف بشكل كبير بين تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية والفرع في اللغة الإنجليزية ، وعلى وجه التحديد ، كان لدى معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الرئيسيين معرفة أفضل بموضوع أجهزة اللغة الإنجليزية من التخصص غير الإنجليزية. لمدرسو اللغة. كانت معرفة موضوع أجهزة اللغة الإنجليزية بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية والآخرين أقل.

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**Introduction**

The introduction of the English Language Component is in accordance with the importance given to the study of English as a second language in other parts of the world. The renewed interest in the study of English language exposes learners to different linguistic varieties such as lexical, syntactical items, subtle and complex forms of grammar and idiomatic expressions (Coolie and Slater, 1987). In Bahri context where English is the second language, the English Component has a valuable place by virtue of its indisputable functions that explore the resources of the language. In order to enhance the language aspect, English language has been introduced “to acquaint learners with the manner in which literary works in English use language to convey special meanings” (Widdowson, 1975:78). The current emphasis on language in the English Component requires English language teachers to equip themselves with subject matter knowledge of literary devices and not just with pedagogical strategies (Wong, 2003). Therefore, “English language teachers need to have in-depth knowledge of their subject area to allow them to be convincing” in the explanation of the various literary texts (Fauziah Ahmad & Ura Pin, 2007:64). When language teachers are familiar with the different literary devices, they can understand and explain the text by not only focusing on “what the text means, but also how it comes to mean” (Short, 1996:6). This method of text analysis leads to the discovery of “layers of possible meanings and any irregular linguistic patterns within a text” that may not be detected if other approaches are used

(Clark & Zyngier, 2003:340). Presently, English is taught by two categories of English language teachers in Sudan. The first category has formal language qualifications and consists of three groups. The first group consists of single major English language teachers with degrees in English language and has studied the subject in-depth. The second group is the English minor language teachers who have majored in other subjects. The main emphasis in their degree programme is the pedagogical approach to teach the English language. The second category of English language teachers form the fourth group and have informal language qualifications. They have majored in other subjects but not English and have undergone a one-year Post-graduate Programme in the Teaching of English as a Second Language. The main objective of this programme is to provide sufficient pedagogical knowledge to teach the English language in secondary schools.

These programmes can be helpful as they can enhance the subject matter knowledge of teachers in their instructional practices (Little and McLaughlin, 1993; Varella, 2000). In Sudan, English Language teachers are graduates from public and private institutions of higher learning. These institutions have the academic freedom to select their courses in English, language and linguistics. Based on the educational background, these English language teachers have a diversity of academic qualifications. As such, it is difficult to assume they have equally comparable subject matter knowledge of literary devices to teach the different genres.

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Studies in the West have shown a lack of consensus in the subject matter knowledge among those who have a major or minor in a particular subject. Research conducted at the National Centre for Research on Teacher Learning at Michigan State University show that majoring in a subject is insufficient to be knowledgeable in it (1980). Kennedy (1991:14) further supports that “majoring in an academic subject in college does not guarantee teachers will have the kind of subject matter knowledge they need for teaching.” Research findings on graduates who had undergone the “alternative quick-entry” courses showed they were unable to compete with those who had completed the traditional programmes in specific subjects (Grossman, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 2000). It was pointed out that conceptual differences existed in the subject matter knowledge between the “alternative quick entry” and those who had followed the traditional programmes (Newton-Newton, 1999). Teachers had to be well equipped with their subject matter to make well informed decisions on what and how to teach and the types of materials that could be used in their lessons (Lempert, 1988). Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) and Hattie (2003) stressed that teachers with subject specific degrees had displayed better understanding of their subject matter than others. However, these claims were refuted by Martin et al. (2000) and Wenglinisky (2000) who found that majoring in a particular subject was not associated with teacher effectiveness.

Studies conducted locally by Samuel (1995), Diana Hwang and Mohammad Amin Embi (2007) have focused exclusively on the approaches used by English language teachers to teach the English components. Others like Fauziah Ahmad and Ura Pin, (2007), Wan Kamariah Baba (2008), Ashairi Sulaiman and Melor Mohd Yunus, (2014), and Fathen Suriati Jusuh (2015) have confined their research to English language teachers and the influence of presage variables. A review of the local records (Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education and local universities) shows there is still a lack of empirical research on the effects of academic qualifications on the subject matter knowledge of literary devices among English language teachers involved in teaching the English Components. Therefore, there exists a gap in the research on the subject matter knowledge of literary devices among English language teachers and the difficulty in using research evidence from abroad, provides the main impetus and thrust of this research.

Given the conspicuous importance in the implementation and teaching of English in the Sudan secondary schools, there is a need to expedite research on the subject matter knowledge of literary devices. Research findings from abroad are not generalizable to local situations as Boekaerts (1998:87) reminds that “method and practices are by definition culture bound and should be transplanted only with great caution”. Hence, there is now a compelling need for local research to be conducted to show whether there are

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differences or relationships between academic qualifications and subject matter knowledge of literary devices among the four groups of English language teachers.

**Literature Review**

The Literature Component in the English language paper at secondary school level was introduced in accordance with the universal changes in the teaching of English Language. It is more than a decade since the component was introduced as a tested section of the English language papers in two major public examinations. The Literature Component combines the conventional paradigms of literature which are language, resource and content (Carter and Long, 1991; Leech and Short, 1981). This renewed attempt makes the Literature Component different from the previous programmes like the English Language Reading Programme and Class Reader Programme.

The study of English language using authentic materials is fundamentally a study of the language as both are inseparable and “they create sharp awareness of the communicative potential of the language they are learning” (Widdowson, 1975:81). Coolie and Slater (1987) state English language provides situations where learners are exposed to the diverse uses of grammar and vocabulary. The research by Mahmud Husein Salih (1989) shows that literature helps ESL/EFL learners to acquire native-like competence in English and enhances their knowledge and understanding of linguistics especially literary devices and stylistics.

Therefore, literary texts have been recommended in language classes as they complement authentic materials that provide genuine language structures (Ibsen, 1990; Hill, 1986). Further, second language learners become aware of the subtle elements that go into the creation of good writing (Gwin, 1990). When literature is incorporated into language lessons, a new dimension is added because it challenges learners linguistically, intellectually, and emotionally as it involves different genres (Spack, 1985; Sage 1987). Throughout the 1980s there was a shift from prescriptive to descriptive research in teacher education (Grossman, 1991). It stressed on subject matter knowledge that emerged as a new research domain and led to the development of new frameworks on teacher knowledge. These new frameworks were divided into two groups. They were the various categories of teacher knowledge and the growth of teacher knowledge in a combined context, that included “what is teacher’s knowledge, how they develop that knowledge and for what it is used in relation to the classroom context” (Grossman, 1991:189).

Researchers have looked at teacher knowledge from diverse perspectives and new terms have emerged to provide an overview of its different aspects. The commonly used terms are “the wisdom of practice” (Schwab, 1971), “action orientated knowledge” (Carter, 1990), “content-related knowledge” (Shulman, 1986), “personal knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1991), “tacit knowledge” (Eraut, 1994; Claderhead & Robson, 1991), “knowledge based on

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experience and reflection” (Grimmett & Mackinnon, 1992; Gunstone, 1999), “content and context related knowledge” (Cochran, DeReite & King, 1993; Van Driel, Verloop & De Vos, 1998) and “professional craft knowledge” (Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Shinmahara, 1998). In this research “subject matter knowledge” consists of all knowledge that underlies teachers’ thoughts, practices and actions within the classroom. Shulman (1987) mentioned subject matter knowledge as the “missing paradigm” in teacher research and expressed teachers needed to know about the subject they taught and reiterated that it was an important factor in teacher development. Others like Darling-Hammond (2000) and the National Commission for Mathematics and Science Teaching for 21st Century (2000) had confirmed that the importance of “well-qualified” or those who majored in the subject they taught, were certified to teach and had greater impact on learners. However, there was tacit agreement among educators that “teachers must know in detail...the content they are responsible for teaching” and general knowledge about the subject was also considered essential (National Mathematics and Science Advisory Panel, 2008:37). Qualitative research on subject-specific knowledge of teachers revealed that high-quality instructions depended on specific knowledge acquired at university level and did not depend on general knowledge that was obtained casually (Grossman, 2008). Commenting on the same idea, Ojose (2012:151) mentioned that “common sense dictates that we cannot teach what we do not know: content knowledge is needed.”

He further reiterated that one cannot effectively teach content if they had a superficial and vague understanding of the subject (ibid.). Other researchers had also confirmed that subject specific knowledge of teachers was a decisive factor, which determined the achievement of learners (Hill, Rowan & Ball, 2005; Baumert et al., 2010; Sadler et al., 2013). In the postmodern period, the concept of teacher knowledge has been redefined, indicating a shift in the assumptions of knowledge and the relationship between the known and the knower. In teaching, this dichotomy is indicated in the difference between the “product” and “process” approaches. The “product” approach assumes that understanding is part of the knowledge gained and the teacher’s role is to guide learners towards self-discovery while the “process” approach assumes him to be a transmitter of knowledge to learners that has been acquired. It has also been revealed that subject matter knowledge included substantive and syntactic knowledge. Anderson and Clark (2012) have defined substantive knowledge as understanding of the body of knowledge generated by the discipline while syntactic knowledge is epistemic knowledge and is related to understanding how ideas are generated and become established norms of a discipline.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research paper intends to determine two objectives. The first objective is to determine whether there are differences in the subject matter knowledge of literary devices between English major and non-English major. The second objective is to investigate whether there are

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differences in the subject matter knowledge of literary devices among English major, English minor. The research questions proposed for this study are as follows:

1. What is relationship between English major and English minor?
2. Are there differences in the subject matter knowledge of literary devices?

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The issues in this study were addressed by using a quantitative method based on a questionnaire as the primary instrument of data collection.

**Location of the Study**

This study was conducted among secondary school English language teachers in a

district named Bahri in the state of Khartoum which is located in the north of Sudan.

**The Sample**

The targeted sample consisted of 100 English language teachers who taught the English language. The sampling procedure considered factors which included the geographical location of the schools and the academic qualifications of English language teachers. The teachers involved in this study were the English major, English minor; the respondents who were English language teachers in secondary schools had diverse academic qualifications. The number of teachers in each group was based on information obtained from the local District Education Office.

**Table 1: Number of English Language Teachers in Each Group Academic Qualifications**

<b>Academic qualifications</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>English major</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>English minor</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

English major      51  
 English minor      49  
 Total                    100

**Sampling Procedure**

Subsequently, a district was randomly chosen from the seven districts in one of the states of Sudan. The method of random selection was based on the

specifications of Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009).

After identifying the district, permission was sought from that particular District Education Department (DED) to conduct the study. The 100 English

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language teachers from this chosen district formed the sample of this study.

After selecting the sample, permission was sought from the various school principals to meet the English language teachers. The researcher met all English language

teachers from each school after school hours, explained the purpose of this study, then distributed the questionnaires and collected them immediately upon completion. This arrangement was not to disrupt the normal teaching procedure in schools.

**Research Instrument**

The research instrument for the study is based on the variables shown in Figure 1

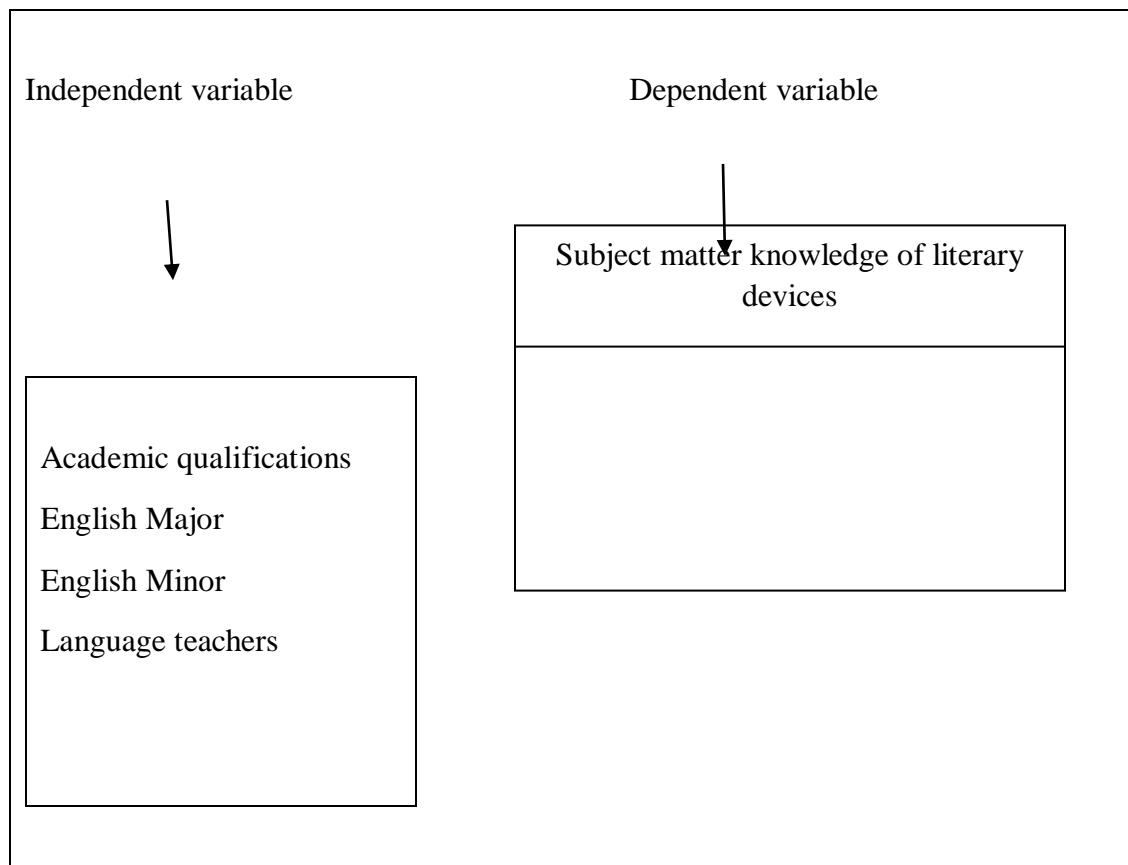


Figure 1: Variables influencing Literary Devices of English Language Teachers, adapted from McCrindle & Christensen (1995:168)

Figure 1 depicts the variables that influence the explanation of literary texts among English language teachers. The

independent variable (academic qualifications) interacts with the dependent variable (subject matter knowledge of literary devices) to influence the explanation of literary texts. Relevant statistical tests were conducted on the data collected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the interaction between

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academic qualifications and subject matter knowledge of literary devices. To prepare the questionnaire on literary devices, the following studies were referred to: Widdowson, (1992; 1996), Simpson (1992), Short (1996), Weber (1996), Manan (2000), Verdonk (2002) and Clark and Zyngier (2003). Other local research on literature by Rosli Talif, (1995), Subramanian (2003), Fauziah Ahmad (2007), and Che Tom Mahmud, (2005), and Wan Kamariah Baba (2008) were also used. Research on subject matter knowledge by Ball (1990), Nowlin (1991), Simon (1993), Chalarkid (1994) and Tirosh (2000) were used in the preparation of the questionnaire. *The Job analysis questionnaire on knowledge for English Teachers* (Wesley, 1993), *Designing and Constructing Instruments for Social Research and Evaluation* (Colton & Covert (2007) and *The Curriculum specifications for the literature component in the English language curriculum for secondary schools* (Ministry of Education, 1999) were used as guidelines.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The questionnaire contained two sections. Section A consisted of the demographic profile and Section B contained items related to the subject matter knowledge of literary devices. Subsequently, the questionnaires were validated by two English language experts to determine the clarity and content relevance of the items. The language experts found Section A pertaining to the demographic profile suitable and relevant. They suggested changes to Section B that contained the items related to subject matter

knowledge of literary devices. After the necessary amendments had been made, the questionnaire was pilot tested in a different district to establish the reliability and to reduce elements of bias. As suggested by Hertzorg (2008), 10% of the total population was involved in the pilot study. Out of the 100 English language teachers, 25 of them participated in the pilot test. The reliability index of the items in Section (B) was 0.781 indicating they were reliable and had measured the variable accurately. The entire questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete by the respondents. The discussion with the English language teachers did not reveal any major flaw in the questionnaire.

**Analysis and Results**

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A provided the demographic information and Section B gathered information on subject matter knowledge of literary devices. Data collected from Section A was analysed for frequency and percentages and Section B was analysed using SPSS version 21 for descriptive and inferential statistics.

The targeted sample was 100 English language teachers and the achieved sample size was 100 giving a return rate of 98%. From Section A of the questionnaire, out of the 100 respondents, 62 (24.7%) of the English language teachers were in the urban, 44 (45%) in the semi-urban and 56 (28.3%) in the rural areas. Professionally, all were trained English language teachers. The analysis revealed 119 (47.8 %) were exposed to literary devices while 125 (49.2%) were not in their undergraduate



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courses. A large number 100 (86.5%) had attended courses in the teaching of the literature component while 29 (11.5 %) had not.

The survey showed 156 (62.1%) agreed subject matter knowledge of literary devices provided insights into the language of the literary texts, 79 (31.5%) disagreed and 11 (4.4 %) were uncertain. However, a total of 164 (65.3%) of the English language teachers consented they needed knowledge of literary devices to explore literary texts better while 65 (25.9%) disagreed and 16 (6.4%) were unsure. Further, 155 (61.8%) agreed understanding of the functions and familiarity with the use of literary devices can influence in explaining literary texts, 60 (23.9%) disagreed and 30 (12%) were undecided.

**Questionnaire**

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the items in Section (B) of the questionnaire. The 5-point Likert scale provided the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation that were used to interpret the level of mean scores. The researcher used the aggregate mean scores to interpret the different levels of agreement of the items related to the subject matter knowledge of literary devices of English language teachers. The summary of the frequencies, percentages, aggregate mean scores, standard deviations and levels of interpretations of twenty items is shown in Table 2. The different levels of interpretations are shown in Table 3 Table 2: Summary Showing Frequency, Percentage and Aggregate Mean Scores of English Language Teachers' Subject Matter Knowledge of Literary Devices.

1- Provide linguistic analysis of literary texts	4 is 30.2% 76 30.6% 20 - 30.2%	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
2- Analyses literary texts from language, intermediate and communication levels	7. is 60.4% 73 is 29.3% 20.3%	<b>Agree</b>
3. Linguistic entity and is different from the traditional practical criticism	19 is 7.3% 60 35.5% 21 is 58.2%	<b>Moderately Agree</b>

From the analysis of the hundred items on the subject matter knowledge of literary devices, items 4, 67, 20 belong to the strongly agree group. 7. 37. 20 were in the agree category. The remaining numbers were classified under the moderately agree group. he different levels of demarcation of

the aggregate mean scores were done according to Table 3.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The study explicitly indicates there are differences in the subject matter knowledge of literary devices among

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English language teachers based on their academic qualifications. The English major language teachers who were numerically smaller (13%) than the non-English majors (87%) language teachers had revealed a higher level of subject matter knowledge of literary devices. Their academic courses were completely a combination of literature and language that provided the conceptual depth, and had enriched their subject matter knowledge of literary devices. These two groups had undergone fewer English literature and language courses in their undergraduate programme that could have contributed to their knowledge of literature and had influenced their subject matter knowledge of literary devices. The results corroborate with the findings of Martin et al. (2000) and Wenglinsky (2000) who found that those who had majored in specific subjects were better and more effective in their subject matter knowledge than non-major language teachers.

They were ‘out-of-field’ English language teachers who had undergone courses in the pedagogical aspects of teaching the language. However, the fewer literature courses in their programme provided the essential literary knowledge that enabled them to teach the literature component. Furthermore, the “quick entry” of this group contributed to their limited subject matter knowledge of literature and literary devices when compared to the traditional and ‘in-field’ group like the English major language teachers (Newton-Newton, 1999). The KPLI with their “alternative quick-entry” qualifications, were less effective in their subject matter knowledge (Wayne and Youngs, 2003) and

were unable to compete with teachers of traditional programmes (Grossman, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1991). Based on the analysis, it was evident that those who had majored in as single like English were better than the English minor. The results supported the evidence provided by Porter and Borphy (1988) and Norrel (1994) who had mentioned that those who had majored in single subjects had strong subject matter knowledge and were better prepared than who had followed the “alternative quick entry” courses like the English minor. The results of the analysis also refuted the evidence provided by Kennedy (1991), Martin et al. (2000) and Wenglinsky (2000) and who had mentioned that subject majors did not possess the right kind of subject matter knowledge they required to teach effectively.

The results confirmed the evidence put forward by Grossman, 1989, Newton-Newton (1999) Darling-Hammond (2000) and Wayne and Youngs (2003) who had indicated that there was little difference among the “out-of-field” teachers compared to the “in-field” teachers like the English majors. The present findings have revealed two distinct patterns of relations between academic qualifications and subject matter knowledge of literary devices among English language teachers. The first pattern showed the English major, English minor, TESL and KPLI language teachers had manifested significant differences in their subject matter knowledge of literary devices. Their differences can be attributed to the diverse literature courses they had studied that were offered by the various public and private tertiary institutions. The

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results2000, 2002), Goldhaber (2002) and Hattie (2003) who had mentioned that those with subject specific degrees had demonstrated a better grasp of knowledge than others.

The findings of this study provide useful insights regarding the importance of subject matter knowledge of literary devices in teaching the literature component. As it has been revealed by the analysis, there is a strong relationship between subject matter knowledge of literary devices and academic qualifications. The evidence obtained in this research can further enlighten the Ministry of Education generally and specifically the Teacher Education Division (TED) as to what needs to be included when providing assistance to English Language teachers. The TED can design new modules, teaching files and worksheets and a literature web page to compensate for the shortcomings that have been identified in the instructional practices of those who are involved in teaching the Literature Component. Subsequently, new literature programmes using literary devices and stylistics can be developed to ensure a language-based approach in line with the

objectives that have been mentioned in the literature component. The results of the study have indicated there is a disparity in the subject matter knowledge of literary devices among the four groups of English language teachers. Hence, there is a need for remedial measures to be introduced in order to offset the imbalance and reduce the disparity among the four groups. Both short and long term measures can be introduced to address the existing situation. As short term measures TED should conduct in-service courses in the teaching of literature using literary devices. These courses should be conducted by experts in the field of literature so as to upgrade the subject matter knowledge of literary devices, especially among the non-English major language teachers. As long term measures, public and private institutions of higher learning as well as teacher training institutions should incorporate more courses in literature that contain subject matter knowledge of literary devices. These courses can provide the necessary input that can be helpful when language teachers are required to teach the literature component. These measures can narrow the gap between the English major and non-English major language teachers.

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