



# Literary Competence of Pre-Service English Teachers

Melissa Lacaba-Loquere

College of Teacher Education, Bohol Island State University, Clarin Campus, Poblacion Norte, Clarin, Bohol  
Email : [melissa.loquere@bisu.edu.ph](mailto:melissa.loquere@bisu.edu.ph)

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**Abstract**— *English teachers are in demand today either in the field of education or other specializations. Literary competence gives paramount impact to be adept in English literature. The main purpose of this study was to determine the literary competence of Pre-Service English Teachers. Specifically, it sought to answer the respondents' level of literary competence and the respondents' literary competence in elements of poetry. Cross-sectional descriptive design was used with a 30-item literary competence test composing point of view, literary device, sound values, and structure. A researcher made questionnaire was administered to fifty respondents. The questionnaire underwent validation through pilot-testing. The results implied that most of the respondents were still in the developing level. It also revealed that they were least competent in structure as part of the elements of poetry. Therefore, the respondents lacked literary competence expected of a Pre-Service English teacher. It was recommended that an intervention scheme must be crafted and utilized to achieve literary competence.*

**Keywords**— *elements of poetry, level of competence, literary competence, Pre-Service English teachers*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of Bohol Island State University is to produce quality graduates who are equipped with necessary skills and competence especially when they would be in the real field of work. As English major, one must master literature. Thus, English teachers are encouraged to use approaches, methods, and techniques that would help students develop their literary competence.

For a certain individual to be called professional, he/she would undergo Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Questions about literature during the examinations for English majors are surprisingly inevitable. In the immediate past three years, results in the Licensure Examination for Teachers of Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English of School X revealed low scores in major and general education areas which contain English literature subject. Thus, the researcher was motivated to embark on this study which was to determine the literary competence of Pre-Service English Teachers. On this regard, the researcher focused on the elements of poetry which is one of the tools in developing literary

competence and that could enrich the understanding of a particular literary texts. These elements of poetry that were used in this study include point of view, literary devices, sound value, and structure.

The researcher believed that an effective reader with “achieved literary competence” could master certain skills and strategies which allow words to be connected on the page of a literary work into literary meanings. Reader must know certain conventions about how a literary text should be read and understood. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers and learners' curriculum, which is implemented by the Department of Education, teaching literature should be integrated in English, Filipino and even Social Studies to facilitate the holistic learning of students [17]. In the researcher's several years of teaching literature, she had observed that students find it difficult to comprehend and relate since most of the literary works contain several meanings which need critical interpretation.

This study is anchored on the Theory of Hermeneutics which differentiates between what is called poetics and hermeneutics in the study of literature and developing

literary competence [6]. Poetics starts with the meaning of literary work while hermeneutics starts with form. It is poetics and hermeneutics that describe literary competence which focuses on the conventions that make possible literary structure, point of view, literary device, and sound value.

The literary competence has become over time a key term in the discourse of literary education. Culler (2002), argued that reading literary text requires someone to have an “implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for”. He referred this ability as “literary competence” which makes someone convert the meaning beyond what is written in the text. He added that literary text needs an approach with certain preconception, thus; by relying merely on the reader's language competence and experience will not be sufficient [8]. As a consequence, in teaching literature , students must be introduced “some skills which make up literary competence.”

In congruence to the theory mentioned above, Lazar (1993), states that the recognition of the intrinsic elements which construct a literary work can be the starting point to sharpen these skills. He also stated that literary competence is an essential skill to develop if the study of literature becomes the aim; in contrast, in the case of using literature as a supporting material for language learning, literary competence is learned through the exposure of the text [12]. Students fail to realize that every text creates its own fictional world by a unique use of elements which consists of point of view, literary devices, sound value, structure, and other literary elements which together contribute to meaning.

Literary text is the ideal vehicle for developing communicative and literary competence and skills. They provide examples of authentic language, numerous opportunities for the expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs, as well as facilitating any writing activity. A good language course includes literary texts. The most common emphases when using literary texts are the focus on teaching language or teaching literature [1].

Widdowson (1975) suggests that literature and language teaching should be mutually reinforcing and not exclusive, if the students are to be taught to read literature meaningfully [20]. Literary competence is an important concept for the teaching of literature since it sets up a clear definition of what the student must possess in reading a literary work. A student should be trained to focus on the language of the text. He should begin at the very practical level of observing the objective features of the language in the artifact whose interpretation is open to observation by all. In addition, literary works enable the students to learn

about different points of view, structure, sound value and literary devices which enrich the students' perspective and indirectly teach them how to appreciate the differences in the real society. Literature needs to be interpreted.

To be competent one must not only “know” and “know how”, one must also “do” and “know what he did”. A truly competent person must manifest his competency through his actual day-to-day interaction with others, be it in speaking or in writing. He is aware of what he says and can readily explain what he means [18].

Furthermore, Isagani Cruz in his article in the Philippine Star said that in the Philippines, literature has been given more attention now than in the past and this is simply because literature has proven its worth in preparing what the Department of Education calls “holistically developed Filipinos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills” [15].

Several studies reveal the inadequacies committed towards literary competence. Hence, there were suggestions that were proposed in order to cope with the declining result. Maniwang (2004) cited the result of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. She reported that graduating education students were found weak in the use of English [14].

The study of Cabalquinto (1999), reported that graduate students of Cebu City had a below-average level of performance in most of the criteria in English Competence [2].

Based on the result of the study of Magulod (2018), it revealed that the students have a fair level of literary appreciation skills and a satisfactory level of performance in literary reading. The findings of the study generally imply that literary reading performance of students is dependent on their literary appreciation skills [13.] This study focused on how to enhance the literary appreciation skills of the students and they would manifest a higher level of knowledge in literature reading. This study would allow students to understand better the human emotions, insights, themes, and ideas, and significant human experiences conveyed in different literary texts.

Reading literary work is different from reading other types of discourse such as newspaper article, an academic journal or textbooks, in which the readers are exposed to certain information without any symbolism or rhythmical choice of words. Literature needs to be interpreted. Culler (2000, p.132) argues that reading literary text requires someone to have an “implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for”. He refers this ability as “literary competence” which makes someone converts the meaning beyond what it is written in the text [7]. As a result, the readers have to understand the semiotic signs and the culture which is

implicitly written in order to grasp the meaning of a literary work.

Finally, literary competence is an important concept for the teaching of literature since it sets up a clear definition of what the reader must possess in reading a literary work. This study ventured on determining the literary competence of Pre-Service English Teachers which may provide input to propose innovative intervention scheme or learning strategies in enhancing students' literary competence.

## II. OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to determine the literary competence of Pre-Service English Teachers.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' literary competence?
2. What is the respondents' literary competence in elements of poetry?

## III. METHODOLOGY

Cross-sectional descriptive design was used in conducting the study. It is a type of research design in which it collects data from many different individuals at a single point of time [19]. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to assess and measure the level of literary competence of the respondents. The questionnaire consists the elements of poetry which are point of view, literary devices, sound value, and structure. Respondents' answers were categorized into five levels adapted from Department of Education namely beginning competence (0-6), emerging competence (7-12), developing competence (13-18), approaching competence (19-24) and achieved competence (25-30) [17].

The respondents of this study were the 50 first year to third year students of BSED major in English enrolled during the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of academic year 2018-2019. A pilot-testing was done to measure the reliability and feasibility of the questionnaire. After which, the Pre-Service English teachers were given the questionnaire. After the conduct of the test, the respondents' test papers were collected and then analyzed. It was expected that they don't have the same level of competence since they differ in their year level. However, the main aim of the result of this study was to determine the literary competence of the Pre-Service English teachers that would be the basis for an intervention scheme.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data. The first part presents the literary competence of BSED Pre-service English teachers. The second part presents the respondents' literary competence in elements of poetry.

The literary competence of the respondents was measured through a 30-item questionnaire which consists of questions about the different elements of poetry namely, point of view, literary devices, sound values, and structure. Respondents' literary competence was categorized into five levels namely beginning competence, emerging competence, developing competence, approaching competence and achieved competence.

Table 1: Respondents' Literary Competence

Levels of Competence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Achieved</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Approaching</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Developing</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Emerging</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Beginning</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Legend: Achieved 25-30    Approaching 19-24  
Developing 13-18

Emerging 7-12    Beginning 0-6

Table 1 shows the respondents' literary competence. The zero result in achieved competence reveals that the respondents have not reached the scores between 25-30. The result is alarming because literary devices are supposed to be learned and mastered in high school. Former Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, in the Executive Order No. 210 series of 2013, decrees a policy to strengthen the use of English language in the educational system and give grammar and literature a major importance. Seventeen out of 50 (34%) of the respondents are in the approaching competence. It means that they were able to answer correctly 19-24 questions out of 30 items. The results suggest that the respondents started to pick up vicariously or explicitly some of these skills. Either some teachers started introducing the devices or students read about them since they started appearing in their text. With this result, the respondents were able to convert the meaning beyond what is written in the text [8].

Twenty-nine out of 50 (58%) of the respondents fall under developing competence. This means that respondents got a score of 13-18 out of 30. This data reveals that the takers still lack mastery of the literary devices. Students fail to realize that every text creates its own fictional world by a unique use of elements [12]. 4 (8%) of the respondents have emerging competence showing that 7-12 questions out of 30 items were correctly answered. The result shows that the respondents somehow have not done and applied vicarious reading techniques. In summary, the result reveals that most of the respondents are still in developing level of their literary competence. The results conveyed that the lessons on elements of poetry was not learned and appreciated with motivation and interest. Definitely, the learners need a strong literary foundation specially in dealing English literature.

Table 2: Respondents' Literary Competence in Elements of Poetry

Elements of Poetry	Mean Frequency	Percentage (%)
Point of View	44	88
Literary Devices	26	52
Sound Values	25	50
Structure	20	40

Table 2 presents the respondents' literary competence in elements of poetry. It reveals that 44 out of 50 (88%) respondents correctly answered the items pertaining to point of view. This means that the respondents found point of view as the easiest elements of poetry to determine. Point of view is easy to determine for it shows the mode of narration that an author employs to let the readers hear and see what takes place in a story, poem, or essay. From the data shown above, it divulge that point of view is the easiest to determine because students would just look into the pronouns such as I, us, you, him, her, it, them or a name.

In terms of literary devices, 26 out of 50 (52%) respondents correctly answered the items pertaining to literary devices. This means that half of the total number of respondents are competent. The literary devices that are used in this study are the tone and mood, figurative language, imagery, message and theme, symbolism, alliteration and assonance. Tone and mood is the most difficult literary device to identify as stated by Crews (1997), because it depends upon the personality of the writer and the effect the writer wants to create [4]. In addition, it is difficult to identify because the writer's attitude must be analyzed just like interpreting the attitude of someone speaking to you [16]. Thus, in order that the

respondents could easily figure out tone and mood of a poem, they must have empathetic feeling with the writer and nurture the same attitude.

Figurative language as part of the literary device is also difficult to identify. Gleason & Ratner (1988), state that readers fail to distinguish figurative language when they merely understand and interpret figurative language literally and put only literal interpretations on idioms and figurative expressions [10]. The literary device which is imagery is also difficult to distinguish as revealed in this study because it uses imaginative skills and it requires readers to use imagination to produce mental images. Kosslyn (1980), says that imagery proved to have powerful mnemonic effects and it appeared that an image could be smoothly rotated and scanned across. It also appeared that when inspecting their images, subjects could find subjectively large details more quickly than subjectively small ones and that imagery and perceptual tasks in the same mode would often mutually interfere with one another [11]. Thus, in order that the students would develop their skills in determining imagery, they must be trained in looking at the whole picture of the literary piece.

Message and theme as one of the literary devices is found average for less than half of the respondents are inadequate in identifying this literary device. Identifying themes requires close reading and interpretation of implied meanings and relationships within a text. Many of the respondents got mistakes in these items because there are literary pieces, short or long, which have more than one theme. Respondents then, are in the average level of determining symbolism. Symbolism is considered as important literary device.

It is assumed that respondents found it easier to identify the alliteration and assonance of a literary piece compared to other literary devices mentioned above. Gardner (2009), says that alliteration is easy to identify because it is a stylistic device in which a number of words, having the same first consonant sound, occur close together in a series [9]. It does not depend on letters but on sounds. On the other hand, in identifying assonance, students must just locate the repetition of vowel sounds within words. Both devices are used by poets to create rhythm. Thus, students would just merely look at the consonantal sound for alliteration and repetition of vowel sounds for assonance. More so, students must realize that alliteration and assonance create mood in poetry.

On the other element of poetry, 25 out of 50 (50%) respondents correctly answered the items pertaining to sound values which include rhythm and rhyme. This revelation is aligned with what Cuddon (1995) says that sound value specifically rhythm is difficult to distinguish since it has aesthetic satisfaction or echoing sounds and structural importance or intensifying meaning binding the verse together [5]. The data above implied that there is a need to arise in answering the majority of the problems one may face when analyzing a poetic text. Thus, teachers in literature must apply innovation in teaching this element and inculcate to the students that sound values are necessary to a poem for a poem must have a pattern of timing of syllables in some way similar to rhythmic patterns in music.

Lastly, only 20 out of 50 (40%) respondents correctly answered the items pertaining to structure which include foot and meter. This means that the respondents experienced difficulty in identifying the structure of the poetry. Structure refers to the lines instead of phrases/sentences, stanzas instead of paragraphs. The poetic structure is different from prose which is the normal mood of communication and conversation. The results implied that respondents have not mastered this device and they need to be exposed with innovative learning tasks that would develop their skills in determining and even using rhyme scheme in a literary piece.

## V. CONCLUSION

The literary competence of Pre-Service English teachers were in developing level in terms of their literary competence in elements of poetry. Further, the respondents were least competent in structure of poetry. Thus, the elements of poetry must be taken into consideration since this has great contribution in English literature. An intervention scheme may be crafted and utilized to address the inadequacies of the respondents.

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