An Analysis of the Competence in Literary Criticism among Kenyan Secondary School Students:
A Case Study of Wareng' District, Uasin Gishu County

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Abstract
This paper is based on a study that examined the level of competence in literary criticism among students in Forms Two, Three and Four, based on the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in Wareng District of Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The author argues that students' exposure to literary knowledge and the competent use of figurative language can enhance performance in literature in Kiswahili and the general performance of the Kiswahili subject. The pragmatic theory, which recognizes that practical approach is the core foundation for building competence in whichever field, which then puts students at the centre of the acquisition of competence's process, was used. The theory postulates that any system of education that is in place should be reviewed from time to time in order to be at par with the changes that are witnessed in everyday life. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Data from the questionnaires was analysed using a descriptive method and percentages. The findings showed that students had a lower ability in identifying and explaining the meaning and usage of terminologies that are commonly used during the criticism and analyzing of Kiswahili literature text books. This paper makes recommendations on the structures to mitigate the challenge of competency in literary criticism devices among Kenyan secondary school students. Bearing in mind that society thrives by communication, which is achieved by proper use of language, the study generates useful knowledge to teachers, students and scholars in the literary field on the need to come up with ways of improving competence in literary criticism.

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Keywords: acquisition, competence, literary criticism devices, kenyan secondary school students.
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INTRODUCTION
The acquisition of competence in literary criticism devices among secondary school students is given time in Form Three syllabus. Up to the time students are in Form Two, they have not been allocated time by the syllabus to learn Kiswahili literature texts that are the bases for the acquisition of literary criticism devices. Eshiwani (1993) and Barasa (2009), among other scholars, have faulted this type of syllabus. They argue that the main interest of such a syllabus is to attain good results at the end of the Form Four examinations. The irony here is that the syllabus, which has very high expectations, does not offer the way or the structures that can lead the teacher and the student to attain the expected results. The moment students are in Form Three, they come across challenges of a wider Kiswahili syllabus that requires them to read literature texts and, at the same time, get acquainted with literary criticism devices. The competence in and use of such devices, such as metaphors and similes among others, becomes a challenge. Students do not yet have the capacity and competence needed in identifying and explaining a metaphor, a simile or the other devices that have a hidden meaning from the Kiswahili literature texts. This is a handicap which reflects negatively in the

general performance in Kiswahili as a subject. This paper seeks to come up with a pragmatic approach to a solution and highlights structures that can mitigate and counter the challenges faced by students in their efforts to acquire competence in the literary criticism devices in the Kiswahili literature.

Theoretical Framework
Aggarwal (2003), Farrant (2005), Njogu and Chimera (1999) and Njoroge and Bennars (2004) argue that the type of a theory that shows a connection between literature, development and change is ideal to be associated with educational and basic research. Their school of thought is that if the themes and teachings of literature can have the effects of a revolution and change in any society, such literature has the ability to effect change in a society. Njoroge and Bennars (2004) explain that educational theories are a result of a wider educational research that is meant to mitigate challenges in the field of education. If such challenges are to be resolved, change is inevitable. Such change is bound to be accompanied by actions, revolutions and development. This paper follows the framework of the Theory of Actions which aims at showing development and change in the context of acquisition of competence and use of literary

criticism devices among the Kenyan Secondary School students.

The Theory of Actions

The basis of the Theory of Actions is in the concept of putting together ideas and turning them into actions; that is, an action is like a bridge between the thought and the exercise. Its main tenet is that an action(s) begets success. The theory engraves a system that enables an action or an exercise. The actor should, therefore, be fully involved in whatever action he/she undertakes in order to bring forth the expected success. Aggarwal (2003) explains that the origin of the Action theory is Greece. The underpinnings of the theory are to act, perform and/or accomplish. This approach enables one to concentrate more on performance than the thought, based on the fact that performance goes hand in hand with development. The Theory of Actions governed the study based on the concept that, for the student to be able to grasp the literary criticism devices, he/she must put into practice the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The Theory of Actions opposes the systems and syllabi that are put in place in the belief that no change can be effected in such systems. Therefore, students should involve themselves in actions that aim at building a competence in what they are doing. The action should further aim at building an experience that will enable the student to ascend towards more and new knowledge in what he/she is doing. Such action should be viewed as a bridge between the students' earlier experiences and what he/she aims at achieving. Such actions will thus build a competence in the student from one stage towards the next. Therefore, the Theory of Actions was most ideal for the study since it shows that it is through actions that a student, through his/her actions and that what they learn, builds in them competence in what they do.

The Place of Competence of Literary Criticism

This paper is centred on analyzing competence in the use of literary criticism devices among Kenyan secondary school students. The scope of this paper is in the use of figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, among form two and form three students. This paper has shown how figurative language which, in essence, forms the literary criticism devices, is embedded in the *Fasihi* (Literature) texts. This brings out the next section wherein the importance of competence in the use of such devices is explored. It has also been shown how the Kiswahili syllabus and the teaching timetable do not give enough time for the *Fasihi* section of the subject, which is the basis of the usage of literary criticism devices.

What is Literature?

Literature is an art that uses written language as the main medium of expression. The language of written literature text is artistic; it employs the usage of literary devices such as symbolism and imagery such that the reader is glued to the text until he or she finishes reading it. This is the kind of language that King'ei and Kisovi (2005) and Njogu and Nganje (2009) describe as 'especially artistic', in that it reaches out to the feelings of the audience, the reader. Many artists use figurative language that makes literature, as an art, different from other works of art that use tools, such as in the art of sculpture and drawing among others. Literature as an art uses words, which makes its language unique in the way it captures the readers' attention, making it be described as being live.

Literature students act as critics of the literature work that they read. Any piece of good criticism done by a competent and critical mind requires the critic to have competence of the language to be used in such a work. Such competence makes the critic's work standard and acceptable. Any critical analysis of a literary text would not be possible if the person doing it does not have the right tools at hand. These tools are the literary criticism devices, the artistic language used by authors, present in the figures of the written speech. Examples of such devices are symbolism, imagery and personification, among others.

Yule (1985) expounds on the importance of competence in the context of language use. According to Yule (ibid.), any person, including the student, has not heard or used or spoken in a particular language, then such a user cannot claim to know or to have competence in the said language. Competent use of a language is what makes communication a success. According to Yule (1985), communication is considered to be the main purpose of any language that is put to use. In the context of this paper, Form Two students in the Kenyan secondary school system have not yet been exposed to the reading of the set literary texts. The student is first introduced to the reading of set text in Form Three. The student experiences a sudden change of work load and expectations. A lot of work and responsibility is heaped on him/her within a short span of time. For example, the student is expected to read the literary text and grasp the themes, language use, get to know the figurative language that has been used by the authors, to identify figures of speech such as symbolism and imagery and identify and explain the theme conveyed by the same. The student is given the responsibility of critiquing without prior knowledge or training on how to go about it. The student is then challenged on how to identify the literary criticism devices and use them appropriately.

The bone of contention of this paper is that the introduction of the use of literary criticism devices

should begin in Form Two. Senkoro (1987) says that if such an introduction is done early enough, the student will have ample time to attain the required competence on how to identify and use such devices. The authors in this paper believe that if such an approach is adopted, it will assist the student do away with the kind of crash programme that is currently in use courtesy of the current syllabus that leaves most students as half-baked critiques of literary work. Enough competence will allow students to be surer of the work they are doing.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY
The study was conducted in Wareng' District. Bearing in mind that not all schools in Kenya are exposed to similar socio-economic factors that tend to precondition students' and teachers' competence – the same syllabus notwithstanding – the findings may not necessarily apply to all schools in the country. Nevertheless, the study provides a framework through which the relationship between students' competence in language tools and their overall performance in the literary criticism can be further analysed in the context of other factors such as availability of language teaching/learning facilities, teachers' and students' demographic characteristics, classroom teaching/learning approaches, attitudinal factors of student achievement in Kiswahili literature and head-teachers' leadership styles, among other factors.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
This study adopted a quantitative research design. This approach was seen as ideal for the research for various reasons. As Kothari (1984) explains, quantitative approach involves a technique wherein the researcher is provided with a systematic and powerful means of analysis and help, based on quantitative data, in exploration that will enable the achievement of the pre-determined goals. It is also explained by Cook and Richard (1979) as an approach best suited for strengthening comparisons. In the use of this approach, the research respondents are seen in the light of three groups. In this context, the study sought to investigate the competence in literary criticism devices among the Form Two, Form Three and Form Four student respondents. The study showed how these situations can affect performance.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure
At the time of the study, there were 39 registered public and private schools in the District. Among these, a third was randomly sampled for the study. Respondents in the study were drawn from three classes in each school: Form Two, Three and Form Four. A third of the randomly selected respondents in each of the Forms targeted by the authors constituted the questionnaire's respondents. The questionnaire, as a tool of data collection, adopted a design of discourse analysis which was deployed to examine the competence and function of literary criticism devices as the language used to critique the written Kiswahili literature text. Large chunks of the written literature language were focussed on.

Methods of Data Collection
Questionnaires were used as the main method of data collection. The respondents were given a similar questionnaire randomly and asked to fill and answer the questions in it. The respondents were spread in Forms Two, Three and Four and only a third of their total number was subjected to the questionnaire. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) recommend a third of the total population of respondents as ideal to represent the larger target group. The questions centred on literary criticism devices that are commonly found in use in Kiswahili literature texts that are set for the students according to the syllabus. The authors then marked the respondents' answers and awarded marks in terms of percentage. The percentages thus acquired by the respondents randomly selected for the purpose of the research were tabulated. The answers and percentages given were a direct reflection of the competence of literary criticism devices that the respondents had.

Data Analysis and Presentation
The percentages acquired from the responses to the questionnaires showed the competence levels that they had of the understanding and use of literary criticism devices. The authors gave a detailed explanation based on the outcome of the questionnaire percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The study examined students' level of competence in literary criticism by examining their ability to fully grasp and utilize the literary tools of analysis in accessing meaning of the figurative language used in the texts. According to the findings, 31.2% of all respondents were in Form Two, 31.9 in Form Three, and 30.4% in Form Four. It was first important to ascertain if students had read the Kiswahili literary texts being used in schools.

Level of Reading of Texts
Students were asked to state whether or not they had read the Kiswahili literary texts. Of respondents, 42.9% had read a novel and 40.9% had not read the set texts; 16.2% gave no response while 46.5% of them had begun to read plays, with 39.9% having not yet begun reading plays at all. Only 13.6% did not respond. With respect to the short stories, 49.5% had not started reading while 40.9% had started; 16.7% did not respond.

Table 1: Level of Reading of Kiswahili Literary Texts

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Kiswahili Novel		
Have read	85	42.9
Not Read	81	40.9
Non Responsive	32	16.2
Total	**198**	**100**
Kiswahili Plays		
Have read	92	46.5
Not Read	79	39.9
Non Responsive	27	13.6
Total	**198**	**100**
Kiswahili Short Stories		
Have read	67	33.8
Not Read	98	49.5
Non Responsive	33	16.7
Total	**198**	**100**

Challenges Encountered in Reading and Understanding the Literary Texts

It was speculated by the authors that students' competence in literary criticism relied on their ability to read and understand the Kiswahili texts in use. As such, the authors sought to find out what areas students found difficult to understand as they read the Kiswahili literary texts. Generally, 80.3% stated that they encountered difficulties in reading the texts while only a few, 19.7%, found no difficulties. This shows that there are certain mitigating factors that inhibit students' understanding of the texts they read. From the authors' experience, most students use the level of complexity of figurative language used as a basis to describe the literary texts as difficult or not. The respondents said they had problems with pronunciation (25.3%), vocabulary (41.4%) and figurative language (23.7%). Only 9.6% of them did not respond.

Table 2: Challenges Encountered in Reading and Understanding of Literary Texts

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Difficult to understand	159	80.3
Easy to understand	39	19.7
Total	**198**	**100**
Pronunciation	50	25.3
Vocabulary	82	41.4
Figurative Language	47	23.7
Non Responsive	19	9.6
Total	**198**	**100**

Students' Understanding of Themes

The authors wanted to know if students understood and effectively undertook literary criticism of the set texts in Kiswahili. Of the respondents, 98% did not seem to understand the meaning of literary criticism while 2% did not respond at all. Majority of them, 79.8%, did not understand what themes are. Nevertheless, 6.1% said that themes referred to the main aim of the author, 2% said it was the subject matter of the text, 1% thought that themes referred to the general issues being dealt with in the text, 3.5% said it referred to the important issues that are examined in the text, 2% said themes were important messages or moral lessons communicated through from the text, 3.5% said a theme is the main aim or lesson from the text. On the other hand, 2% said themes referred to the person most referred to in the text.

It is important that students understand what a theme is in order to be able to identify and explain in their literary appreciation of Kiswahili texts. From the above findings, it is clear that students interpret themes to mean various things. To enhance their competence in literary criticism, there is a need to make clear definitions and give clear examples and expose students on how to interpret themes from texts. This could be made easier if the syllabus could expose the Kiswahili literature texts to learners at lower forms in order to give them enough time to grasp the competence they so much require.

Table 3: Literary Criticism

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Criticism		
Those who responded	194	98.0
Did not respond	4	2.0
Total	**198**	**100**
Themes		
Main aim	158	79.8
Main theme	12	6.1
The general issues emerging in the text	4	2.0
What has been discussed in the text	7	3.5
The issues communicated in the text	4	2.0
Main aim or message/moral of the story	7	3.5
The person mostly involved in the story	4	2.0
Total	**198**	**100**

Students' Competence in Figurative Language

The table below gives an example of the students' responses on whether they understood and could use figurative language in the Kiswahili literary texts. The authors asked the students to give five examples from specific texts each and explain the meaning of metaphors. The table below shows that 2% explained that the metaphor in which a police officer was called 'hyena' meant the officer was greedy; 2.5% said that 'Zena's father is a lion', meaning that Zena's father is very harsh.

Table 5: Students' understanding of Figurative Language

Examples of Figurative Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	169	85.4
Askari wa pili aliitwa fisi (That second police officer is referred to as a hyena)	4	2.0
Babake zena alikuwa simba (Zena's father is a lion)	5	2.5
Bokono kusema aliumwa na nyoka (Bokono said he was bitten by a snake)	5	2.5
Bokono ni simba (Bokono is a lion)	4	2.0
Bw. Maksuudi kulinganisha musa na mbwa (Mr. Maksuudi likens Musa to a dog)	2	1.0
Maimuna kuitwa shetani (Maimuna being called Satan)	5	2.5
Maksuudi ni chui (Maksuudi is a leopard)	4	2.0
Total	198	100.0

Another 2.5% explained that 'Bokono was bitten by a snake' meant that Bokono used extreme force in his leadership. This explanation by students is wrong since the actual meaning of the metaphor was that Bokono's leadership will be taken over by others, and not that he was harsh. Moreover, 2.5% said that 'Bokono is a lion' meant that Bokono is greatly feared. Some, 1%, students said that Mr. 'Maksuudi likening Musa to a dog' showed that Musa was immoral hence Musa tended to quarrel with his father. A few, 2.5%, students said that Maimuna being called Satan meant Maimuna was possessed by evil. The metaphor 'Maksuudi is a leopard', according to 2% of students, meant that Maksuudi's leadership will be taken over by others.

The authors also noted that students were mixing up characters from different texts in their responses above. This means that they were not keen enough in their reading to know which metaphors were related to which characters and in which books. Some students seemed to refer to metaphors that were not found anywhere in the texts they cited. This could be attributed to the fact that students probably did not understand what figurative language is and hence were unable to identify and explain them correctly.

In the context of this paper, a comparison was made of the students' competence in literary criticism devices between the respondents from Form Two and those from Form Three. The quantitative approach ascertained that the Form Three respondents so far exposed to the reading of Kiswahili literary texts were more competent than the Form Two respondents who had not yet been exposed to the same. In light of this, it was clear that students who have been exposed to the reading of literature text books have a higher potential of answering questions related to the said texts better, as opposed to those who have not been exposed to the reading of the said text books.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The findings of this study showed that Form Two students had a lower ability in identifying and explaining the meaning and usage of terminologies that are commonly used during the criticism and analyzing of Kiswahili literature text books. It can, therefore, be firmly concluded that students who have been exposed to the reading of Kiswahili literature set text books have a better and high competence of understanding and use of the criticism devices. Students who have not been introduced to such reading have a low competence of understanding and use of figurative language.

After expounding on the findings and conclusions in this paper, we recommend that the Kiswahili literature syllabus be extended downwards to Form Two level. This will make the students better participants in the identification and use of literary criticism devices which are inevitable in as long as they are doing literature in Kiswahili. Furthermore, Literature in Kiswahili (Fasihi) should be a separate subject from Language (Lugha). This will enable the students to have better concentration while tackling literature in Kiswahili as a subject. This challenge goes to policy makers and those responsible for drawing the syllabus to take up the matter and make the necessary amendments.

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