

The Influence of Vocabulary Proficiency on Literature in English Performance in Lesotho: Content Analysis of the Examiner's Reports

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Abstract—*In Literature in English, where learners must read intricate texts, analyse subtle meanings, and express their comprehension, the richness of their vocabulary profoundly impacts their capacity to connect with literary works. The paper aims to enhance the broader discourse on the advancement of language and literary education by looking at the impact of vocabulary proficiency on performance in Literature in English in Lesotho. This study was conducted qualitatively, analysing the content of the examiner's reports for the years 2021 and 2022. The findings revealed that vocabulary proficiency significantly impacts learners' performance in Literature in English in Lesotho. While learners exhibited strengths in certain sections like drama, novels, and short stories, they consistently underperformed in poetry, a trend closely linked to their limited vocabulary. Furthermore, their struggles with expressing ideas in authentic, clear, and evaluative responses point to a direct correlation between insufficient vocabulary and underdeveloped writing skills. To address these issues and improve overall Literature in English performance, it is essential to prioritize vocabulary development as a foundational element of literary studies. Teachers should integrate vocabulary enhancement into daily instruction, focusing on terms related to literary analysis and genre-specific language.*

Keywords— *Literature in English, Lesotho, Vocabulary proficiency, performance, Grade 11, education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a significant field of study as it conveys extensive knowledge, fosters ethical principles, and provides enjoyment. All the same, language and literature are distinct fields that share a similar meaning. These two are not only interconnected but also interdependent due to their symbiotic interaction. Literature presupposes language, as the value of literature is sculpted, produced, and solidified inside the realm of language (Alwaqaa, 2020). Moreover, to assess the value of a literary work, one must possess proficiency in the language (Singh, et al., 2020). To engage in the exploration of literature's value, knowledge and linguistic proficiency must be fundamental (Benzie, 2010). Similarly, vocabulary proficiency (VP) is crucial for acquiring any language, especially for academic accomplishment in English Literature. Vocabulary serves as a fundamental element of linguistic proficiency, underpinning successful reading, writing, and analytical reasoning.

In Literature in English, where learners must read intricate texts, analyse subtle meanings, and express their comprehension, the richness of their vocabulary profoundly

impacts their capacity to connect with literary works. Notwithstanding its significance, the correlation between vocabulary proficiency and performance in Literature is frequently insufficiently examined in various educational settings. The examination of literature frequently highlights creativity, thematic analysis, and cultural comprehension, all of which are inherently connected to a learner's vocabulary range. Inadequate vocabulary may hinder learners' ability to comprehend the subtleties of literary texts, so restricting their potential for critical engagement and textual analysis.

A person is linguistically adept if they can spontaneously utilise the rules and elements of language in real-world situations without prior preparation (Rubio & Hacking, 2019). This proficiency further illustrates the depth of the language user's understanding of the context, timing, and methods of language application and acquisition (Ocampo, 2021). Reading is an essential ability with significant consequences for academic achievement and continuous education. Reading proficiency significantly influences an individual's academic achievement and is essential for navigating and thriving in today's information-dense environment.

The relationship between vocabulary proficiency and literary ability is an increasingly significant subject of academic inquiry. Although research highlights the significance of vocabulary in reading comprehension and language learning, its particular relevance in the analysis of literary texts is sometimes neglected. In this environment, learners with inadequate vocabulary skills face disadvantages, since they may find it challenging to interpret intricate texts, discern nuanced implications, and articulate their thoughts effectively (Afzal, 2019; Nxumalo, 2016). This gap highlights the necessity of deliberately including vocabulary instruction into literature education to improve learners' academic performance and cultivate a greater appreciation for literary works.

Vocabulary proficiency has long been recognized as a foundational component of language learning, directly influencing comprehension, interpretation, and expression (Nation, 2001). In the context of literature studies, a robust vocabulary enables learners to navigate complex texts, engage with nuanced literary devices, and articulate critical analyses effectively. Research by Afzal (2019) highlights that learners with an expansive vocabulary are better equipped to grasp the subtleties of language, which is particularly crucial in literary

studies where metaphor, symbolism, and thematic depth play central roles. In the African context, studies such as those by Zano (2018) and Nxumalo (2016) underscore the challenges faced by learners learning English as a second language, where limited vocabulary often hinders their ability to engage meaningfully with prescribed literary texts. These challenges in Lesotho are exacerbated by systemic factors such as curriculum design and teacher preparedness. Despite the centrality of vocabulary to literary performance, there remains a paucity of localized research exploring its impact, particularly through qualitative approaches such as the analysis of examiner's reports.

English is both a medium of instruction and an examinable subject in Lesotho and vocabulary proficiency plays a pivotal role in learners' academic success. Nonetheless, the persistent poor performance in Literature in English among learners in Lesotho has raised significant concerns among teachers and policymakers. Examiners' reports frequently highlight challenges such as learners' inadequate comprehension of literary texts, and inability to critically analyse and interpret themes and stylistic devices. It is against this backdrop that the paper aims to enhance the broader discourse on the advancement of language and literary education by addressing these challenges, looking at the impact of vocabulary proficiency on performance in Literature in English.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of Literature in English

The examination of English literature necessitates advanced language ability; however, numerous learners lack the requisite vocabulary competency to succeed in this field. A restricted vocabulary hinders learners' capacity to understand literary texts, analyse their theme and stylistic components, and express critical opinions (Nation, 2001). This weakness frequently leads to subpar academic performance, reduced self-esteem, and disengagement from literature as a discipline. Although the significance of vocabulary in reading comprehension and academic achievement is acknowledged, its precise function in literature instruction is insufficiently explored in both study and practice.

Current curricula frequently neglect to prioritise the systematic enhancement of vocabulary suited to the requirements of literary studies. As a result, learners are inadequately prepared to manage the intricacies of literary texts, which intensifies performance gaps and undermines the overarching objectives of literature instruction (Moea, 2022). This discrepancy in comprehension and application necessitates a targeted examination of the correlation between vocabulary proficiency and literary achievement. Resolving this issue is essential for enhancing learners' academic performance and promoting a profound engagement with literature, which is vital in cultivating critical thinking, cultural awareness, and creative expression.

Background of LGCSE Literature in English

The Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) is a globally acknowledged qualification that supplanted the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate

(COSC) in Lesotho in 2013. The LGCSE curriculum, administered by the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL), is crafted to conform to international educational standards while catering to local educational need. English literature is a fundamental component of this framework, designed to enhance learners' understanding of literary works, critical thinking abilities, and English competence.

The LGCSE Literature in English curriculum emphasises the examination of diverse literary genres, encompassing prose, poetry, and theatre. The curriculum prioritises learners' capacity to interpret literary works, analyse themes and stylistic elements, and express coherent, critical replies. The primary aims are to cultivate an awareness of cultural and historical settings, enhance analytical and evaluative abilities, and stimulate personal involvement with literature. This method not only prepares learners for academic achievement but also provides them with skills relevant to further education and beyond.

The Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) Literature in English syllabus seeks to enhance learners' capacity to appreciate literature and recognise its role in aesthetic, creative, and intellectual development. It also seeks to empower learners to investigate domains of universal human significance, so fostering a deeper comprehension of themselves and others (MOET, 2018, P.1). Similarly, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) (2020) states that it seeks to enhance learners' enjoyment of reading, thereby fostering a lifelong appreciation of literature. The criteria enhance learners' comprehension and insight into many forms of poetry, prose, and theatre, encompassing works by both African and English authors. Learners examine the influence of language, structure, and form in the works. Integrating the books' concepts, themes, and issues is another primary emphasis. Learners additionally acquire the ability to elucidate places, characters, and themes imaginatively within social, cultural, and historical contexts. They enhance their capacity to study, strategise, and formulate replies by utilising their own concepts and interests, alongside critical reading skills (Moea, 2023). Given that literary texts positively influence English language learning, teachers of Literature in English are anticipated to integrate English language instruction within their curriculum to promote learners' enhancement of English language skills and performance.

Importance of teaching Literature in English

Literature is essential for the comprehensive maturation of a human being. Akinmusire (2023) contends that literature connects us with the thoughts of prominent intellects from both our era and earlier periods. It aids individuals in understanding historical events, however some are merely fabrications. Literature elucidates specific myths or phenomena that typically lack explanation. Moea (2023) avers that literature offers authentic language, hence enhancing individuals' communicative skills. Readers observe language in application, comprehend it within context, and thereby enhance their active vocabulary. Alvi and Alvi (2019) assert that literature encapsulates the intricacies of the human condition, vividly portraying the foundations and significance

of values, as well as the subtleties of our experiences. Literature enables individuals to imaginatively engage with the lives, experiences, and significances of others. Through diverse exposure to literature, one gains a deeper comprehension of life's meaning and experiences, subsequently fostering constructive resolutions. The significance of literature to comprehensive development and transformation is crucial. Literature offers both amusement and enlightenment. Exposure to a diverse array of literary works cultivates the appropriate mind-set, enabling readers to make judgements and draw inferences from their circumstances at any given moment. Literature is included into every language learning curriculum, as each enhances the proficiency of the other. According to Thread (2008), the primary objective of studying literature in a second language is to enhance language proficiency, foster awareness and comprehension of content, issues, and cultures, and cultivate creative and critical thinking abilities.

Vocabulary for academic performance

Vocabulary proficiency is widely recognized as a foundational component of academic success, as it facilitates comprehension and effective communication across various disciplines. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is a key predictor of reading comprehension, which, in turn, is critical for understanding and engaging with academic texts. Limited vocabulary can create significant barriers to academic achievement, as learners struggle to decode meaning and integrate new concepts. Research by Nation (2006) and Mustafa (2019) support this view, demonstrating that learners with a rich vocabulary base exhibit stronger cognitive and interpretive abilities, which are essential for navigating complex academic tasks. In the context of second language learning, vocabulary deficits often hinder students' ability to grasp nuanced meanings and infer relationships in texts, ultimately affecting their overall academic performance.

The influence of vocabulary proficiency on literature-related subjects, such as Literature in English, is particularly profound. A study by Schmitt (2008) reveals that students with robust vocabulary knowledge are better equipped to analyse and appreciate literary texts, as they can engage with diverse genres and thematic elements. Moreover, Moon (2018) highlights the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary and academic performance, noting that exposure to advanced vocabulary through literary study enhances critical thinking and expressive skills. In the context of Lesotho, vocabulary challenges may disproportionately impact students' ability to excel in Literature in English, as the subject demands an in-depth understanding of language and cultural expressions. Addressing these challenges through targeted vocabulary instruction is essential for improving academic outcomes in this field.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative research approach to examine the influence of vocabulary proficiency on learners' performance in English Literature in Lesotho. The study

employed content analysis as its principal method to investigate the Literature in English examiner's reports for 2021 and 2022. This research employed content analysis to systematically examine and evaluate textual data, revealing patterns, themes, and meanings pertinent to the influence of vocabulary competency on academic performance. These reports provide comprehensive analyses of candidates' overall performance, prevalent errors, strengths, and persistent issues. They also provided evaluative feedback on learners' capacity to interpret, analyse, and articulate ideas in response to diverse literary texts. The data gathering approach entailed acquiring and analysing the official examiner's reports for the years 2021 and 2022. The reports were examined to pinpoint areas that specifically address learners' comprehension, interpretation, and written expression. Special emphasis was placed on examiner comments that underscored language-related difficulties, including restricted vocabulary, failure to comprehend literary methods, and inadequate expression of ideas. The reports were meticulously examined to achieve a thorough comprehension of the content, emphasising recurring themes associated with vocabulary and performance in English Literature. Relevant excerpts were categorised using both established and emergent classifications. The established categories encompassed "vocabulary challenges," "writing proficiency," "interpretation skills," and "textual analysis." Emergent codes identified further themes, including particular genre-specific challenges (e.g., poetry) and difficulty with evaluative writing.

Data analysis and interpretation

The table below shows the questions asked in the years 2021 and 2022 as stated in the reports. Below the table is the analysis of data found in the ERs.

2021 questions	2022 questions
1 (a) To what extent does Shakespeare lead you to admire Portia? (b) How does Shakespeare make Launcelot Gobbo such an entertaining character in the play?	1 (a) How does Shakespeare make this such a memorable moment in the play? 1 (b) How does Shakespeare make this such an important moment in the play?
2 (a) To what extent does Miller portray Beatrice as a likeable character? (b) In what ways does Miller make Catherine's attitude towards Eddie change as the play develops?	2 (a) How does Miller make this extract so dramatic? 2(b) How does Miller make this such a memorable moment in the play?
3 (a) In what ways does Orwell make this passage a dramatic moment in the novel? (b) Explore the ways in which the author has successfully evoked your varying emotions in this passage.	3 (a) You are Benjamin towards the end of the story. Life on the farm is becoming harder than ever before. Write your thoughts. 3 (b) You are Squealer. The knacker's van has just carried Boxer to the hospital in Willingdon. Write your thoughts.
4 (a) What do you think makes this moment fascinating? (b) In what ways does Dangarembga make this extract such a dramatic moment in the novel?	4 (a) You are Tambu just before your departure to the mission. Write your thoughts. 4 (b) You are Ma'Shingayi. Lucia has just gone back to the mission after spending a few days with you. Write your thoughts.
5 (a) You are the boy in 'Secrets'.	5 (a) To what extent does Anita Desai portray Rai as an unhappy

Your aunt just died. Write your thoughts. (b) You are the boy at the end of 'The Enemy'. Write your thoughts.	child in "Games at Twilight" 5 (b) In what ways does Bernard MacLaverly make Aunt Mary such a memorable character in 'secrets'?
6 (a) You are Neil at the end of 'More than Just the Disease'. Write your thoughts. (b) You are Miz Ruby in 'The Escape'. You have just learnt that Patsy hit her husband with a brick. Write your thoughts.	6 (a) Explore how E.B Dongala makes 'The man' such a dramatic story. 6 (b) In what ways does Anita Desai make Anna such a memorable character in 'Circus Cat Alley Cat'?
NOT STATED	7 (a) In what ways does Hardy make this such an interesting poem? 7 (b) Explore how Hardy makes this such a dramatic poem.
NOT STATED	8 (a) In what ways does Millay vividly convey a belief that happiness in love does not last in this poem? 8 (b) Explore the ways in which Morris arouses your sympathy for both the child and the parent in this poem.

dramatic moment in the novel?" required candidates to explore dramatic elements immediately after Mr. Jones was expelled. While the passage was provided, learners failed to identify or analyse specific dramatic actions, such as the animals' unity or the tension between them and the humans. Instead, many lifted content verbatim from the passage, bypassing the interpretive demands of the question. Another question asked candidates to explore how the author evoked varying emotions. Words like "tension," "elation," or "foreboding" were necessary to capture the emotional shifts in the passage. However, most candidates lacked the vocabulary to articulate these subtleties and resorted to paraphrasing or copying the text. The inability to understand or apply descriptive terms like "evoking" or "varying emotions" reveals how vocabulary gaps restrict critical engagement and limit learners' analytical depth.

In the short story section, candidates faced empathetic writing prompts requiring them to adopt the voices of characters. For instance, in Question 5(a), "You are the boy in 'Secrets.' Your aunt just died. Write your thoughts," the key word "just" signalled a focus on immediate emotions like shock, grief, or disbelief. Many candidates, however, extended their narratives beyond the specified scope, delving into events such as the burial. This misinterpretation demonstrates a lack of precise vocabulary understanding, as learners could not confine their responses to the temporal framework indicated by "just." Similarly, in Question 6(b), candidates wrote from the perspective of Miz Ruby in *The Escape*. While the question required them to reflect on Patsy's defiance against her abusive husband, some candidates mischaracterized Miz Ruby, sympathizing with Alton instead. This error suggests an inability to grasp the question's emotional tone and intent, likely due to insufficient vocabulary to differentiate between sympathy and empathy or articulate the empowerment reflected in Patsy's actions.

Vocabulary deficiencies were most evident in the poetry section. Candidates were required to analyse poems by Thomas Hardy and others, identifying poetic devices and their thematic significance. Many learners adopted a stanza-by-stanza or line-by-line summary approach, reflecting a lack of analytical vocabulary. For instance, while questions demanded exploration of themes like mortality or nature's indifference, candidates' responses were devoid of critical terms such as "melancholic," "ironic," or "sublime." This limited vocabulary not only constrained their analyses but also their ability to interpret and articulate the emotional and intellectual responses evoked by the poems. The overuse of generic descriptors like "good," "bad," and "nice," as noted in the report, further exemplifies how limited lexical resources impede learners from crafting sophisticated arguments. Additionally, their inability to integrate poetic devices meaningfully into their responses—despite recognizing them—underscores how vocabulary limitations hinder deeper textual engagement.

The 2022 ER findings revealed that vocabulary proficiency directly affects learners' ability to interpret and respond to literary texts effectively. In this report, the observations indicate that candidates struggle with areas

The 2021 Literature in English Examiners' Report for Lesotho reveals significant insights into how vocabulary proficiency impacts learners' performance across various sections of the exam. The challenges observed highlight systemic deficiencies in linguistic and analytical skills, which underpin learners' struggles with comprehension, interpretation, and effective articulation. This analysis expands on the provided data, highlighting specific examples where vocabulary proficiency—or the lack thereof—directly influenced performance outcomes. In the drama section, candidates analysed texts like *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. Question 1(a), "To what extent does Shakespeare lead you to admire Portia?" required learners to focus on her character traits. However, most responses devolved into narrating events involving Portia rather than addressing the question's demands. This misstep reveals a lack of understanding of key terms such as "admire" and "extent." Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggled to express nuanced evaluations of Portia's qualities, such as her intelligence, wit, and compassion. For example, rather than discussing her courtroom strategy as evidence of her brilliance, candidates listed events without connecting them to her admirable traits. Similarly, Question 1(b), which asked about the humour in Launcelot Gobbo's character, was poorly handled. Instead of identifying specific comic devices like puns or humorous actions, candidates summarised Gobbo's actions indiscriminately, many of which were not entertaining. This highlights a limited lexical range, as learners could not distinguish between general actions and those intended to evoke humour. Words like "comic," "satirical," or "absurd" were absent from their analyses, demonstrating a critical gap in vocabulary that hindered their ability to fully engage with the text.

The impact of vocabulary deficiencies was even more pronounced in Section B, where candidates analysed passages from *Animal Farm* and *Nervous Conditions*. For instance, Question 3(a), "In what ways does Orwell make this passage a

requiring detailed textual analysis and thematic interpretation. The report indicates that sections A (Drama), B (Novels), and C (Short Stories) recorded performance ranging from good to average, with good performance linked to questions that allowed for easier adaptation of the narrative voice (e.g., Benjamin in Section B) or questions that focused on dramatic aspects (e.g., Anna in Section C). Conversely, weaker performance was observed in questions requiring a deeper analytical or comparative approach. In Section B, Question 3(b), candidates struggled to adapt Squealer's voice authentically, reflecting limitations in vocabulary necessary to mirror the character's manipulative and persuasive tone. This highlights how vocabulary gaps hinder the ability to engage effectively with character analysis.

Candidates' difficulty in analysing extracts or characters suggests limited vocabulary for expressing complex relationships, emotions, and motivations. While rote reproduction of extracts may indicate some level of comprehension, it falls short in demonstrating higher-order thinking required for analysis. In Section A, Question 1(a) and 1(b), candidates "uplifted" extracts without analysing the significance of Shakespeare's portrayal of memorable or important moments. Without a robust vocabulary to articulate abstract concepts or interpret themes, candidates defaulted to summarization rather than exploration. Character-driven questions such as Tambu's thoughts in Section B (Question 4(a)) or Aunt Mary's memorable qualities in Section C (Question 5(b)) demand nuanced vocabulary to describe emotions, motivations, and underlying themes. Average and below-average performances in these areas further emphasize the impact of limited vocabulary proficiency. In Section C, Question 5(b), candidates struggled to convey Aunt Mary's complexity, such as her mysterious nature and enduring love for a distant man. Limited descriptive and analytical vocabulary likely contributed to the inability to present a detailed and layered response. Section D recorded the weakest performance, with most candidates failing to articulate poetic elements or thematic interpretations effectively. This section demands a specific vocabulary set for literary analysis, including terms for discussing form, structure, tone, and imagery. In Question 8(a), candidates failed to convey how Millay portrays the transient nature of love, highlighting an inability to use analogies or metaphors effectively. Similarly, in Question 7(b), the dramatic linguistic techniques in Hardy's poem were often overlooked, suggesting limited exposure to or understanding of critical poetic terms.

These challenges often stem from an insufficient command of language, which hinders their ability to understand nuanced meanings, appreciate stylistic elements, and articulate responses coherently. For instance, poor performance in sections requiring critical commentary can be linked to limited lexical resources that constrain candidates from identifying and discussing literary devices. Additionally, the lack of vocabulary proficiency undermines learners' confidence and engagement with literature. Learners with inadequate vocabulary are less likely to comprehend complex texts fully, leading to superficial or incorrect interpretations. This, in turn, affects their ability to meet assessment expectations, such as

explaining thematic significance, character motivations, or the use of figurative language. By improving vocabulary instruction, learners can be better equipped to handle the demands of literature studies, as they develop the language skills necessary for in-depth analysis and effective communication.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the 2021 and 2022 reports reveal that vocabulary proficiency significantly impacts learners' performance in Literature in English in Lesotho. While learners exhibited strengths in certain sections like drama, novels, and short stories, they consistently underperformed in poetry, a trend closely linked to their limited vocabulary. This limitation hinders their ability to interpret literary devices, analyse themes, and comprehend nuanced meanings within texts. Furthermore, their struggles with expressing ideas in authentic, clear, and evaluative responses point to a direct correlation between insufficient vocabulary and underdeveloped writing skills.

The challenges observed in candidates' performance—such as character misinterpretations, shallow plot analyses, and poor engagement with literary contexts—are exacerbated by a lack of sufficient vocabulary to articulate complex thoughts and ideas. In poetry, where precision in language and interpretation is critical, the vocabulary deficit becomes even more apparent, as learners struggle to decode figurative language, tone, and thematic depth. Similarly, their inability to write cohesive and well-structured responses reflects the broader issue of limited vocabulary, which hampers creativity and clarity in written expression.

To address these issues and improve overall Literature in English performance, it is essential to prioritize vocabulary development as a foundational element of literary studies. Teachers should integrate vocabulary enhancement into daily instruction, focusing on terms related to literary analysis and genre-specific language. This can be achieved through targeted exercises, such as contextual vocabulary lessons based on prescribed texts, as well as activities that encourage active use of new words in writing and discussion.

In poetry teaching, the emphasis should be on demystifying complex literary devices and themes by providing learners with the vocabulary needed to decode and analyse poetic texts effectively. Structured exercises that guide learners in identifying and interpreting figurative language, tone, and mood will build confidence and deepen understanding. Writing tasks should also incorporate vocabulary-building strategies, enabling learners to articulate their ideas with greater precision and fluency.

To strengthen engagement with drama and novels, teachers should employ interactive strategies such as dramatization and debates, which allow learners to internalize vocabulary through active use. Encouraging learners to summarize texts, analyse characters, and explore themes in their own words can further reinforce their vocabulary while enhancing comprehension. Feedback should emphasize clarity and richness of language, guiding learners to expand their lexical repertoire.

Finally, integrating vocabulary into examination preparation is critical. Mock assessments, guided practice questions, and vocabulary quizzes should align with the demands of Literature in English, ensuring that learners are equipped to analyse, interpret, and write with confidence. By fostering a strong vocabulary base, learners will be better positioned to engage critically with texts, express nuanced interpretations, and achieve higher levels of performance in Literature in English in Lesotho.

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