

# Advancing Literary Interpretation via Critical Reading Proficiency: A Sustainable EFL Framework for Generation Z

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**Abstract**—This research investigates the transformative potential of literary analysis in advancing English proficiency among Egyptian EFL learners, particularly those in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The study focuses on the linguistic and analytical challenges encountered by recent public-school graduates in the Suez Governorate, where English instruction is limited to simplified texts and lacks critical engagement. Unlike their counterparts from language schools in Cairo, these students enter university without placement tests, relying solely on their high school grades, which results in underdeveloped critical reading and thinking skills. Sixty Egyptian students participated in this experimental quantitative research design. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Stylistics—a linguistic and literary approach—the paper underscores the value of applying systematic textual analysis to literary works. Stylistics, as a tool for bridging linguistic form and literary meaning, enables students to enhance both their linguistic and interpretive capabilities. By engaging with literary texts through this dual approach, learners develop deeper cognitive skills and greater critical engagement with language. The research argues for integrating Stylistics into the EFL curriculum as a sustainable pedagogical framework to cultivate critical reading proficiency, thereby supporting students' overall linguistic development and equipping them for professional careers in the arts and humanities. This integration fosters a more profound understanding of language and literature, promoting sustainable language education for Generation Z.

**Index Terms**—analytical competence, critical reading strategies, Gen Z EFL learners, interpretive skills, literary analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of language acquisition and literary analysis has increasingly been recognized as a significant approach for enhancing English proficiency, particularly within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. This research seeks to address a critical gap within the Egyptian EFL landscape, focusing on university students in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, many of whom face linguistic and analytical challenges upon entering higher education. Specifically, the study explores the educational experience of graduates from public schools in the Suez Governorate, where English instruction is predominantly limited to simplified texts and fails to foster meaningful critical engagement. This restricted pedagogical approach contrasts sharply with the more comprehensive training offered in Cairo's language schools, leaving public school students inadequately prepared for the demands of university-level reading and analysis.

This paper advocates for a pedagogical intervention grounded in Stylistics, a field that integrates linguistic analysis with literary interpretation (Sorlin, 2014). Stylistics, through systematic methods of textual analysis, provides a structured means to enhance both the linguistic and interpretive skills of EFL learners. Incorporating this approach into the EFL curriculum has the potential to cultivate critical reading skills and equip students with essential cognitive tools for deeper engagement with language. As Rizk (2020) notes, 'the use of authentic materials in the classroom significantly enhances learners' motivation and fosters better comprehension, as students find these materials more relevant and engaging.' This research asserts that adopting a Stylistic framework not only offers a practical solution to the current educational shortcomings but also presents a sustainable model for developing the linguistic and intellectual capabilities of Generation Z, preparing them for diverse careers within the arts and humanities. Through this framework, students will not only strengthen their language proficiency but also gain a more sophisticated understanding of literary works, enabling them to engage more effectively in both academic and professional contexts.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of critical reading skills into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has become essential for fostering advanced linguistic and cognitive abilities among students. In Egypt, particularly within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, there is an urgent need to reform EFL pedagogy to align with the global educational paradigm, where critical literacy plays a central role in language acquisition. This literature review examines key studies that explore the role of literary analysis in EFL, the challenges faced by Egyptian students, and the pedagogical advantages of adopting Stylistics as a framework to enhance both linguistic and critical reading skills.

Literary analysis has long been regarded as an effective tool for enhancing linguistic competence among EFL learners. As Maley and Duff (2005) argue, the inclusion of literature in language teaching provides students with exposure to authentic language use, promoting engagement with complex linguistic forms. The interpretive process involved in analyzing literary texts fosters critical thinking, which is essential for the development of higher-order cognitive skills in language learners (Maley & Duff, 2005, p. 4). Similarly, Paran (2008) suggests that literary analysis bridges the gap between linguistic proficiency and critical engagement, enabling students to appreciate the nuances of language beyond its functional use (Paran, 2008, p. 469). Stockwell (2002) further emphasizes that literary texts are uniquely positioned to stimulate the cognitive processes required for both linguistic and conceptual understanding, as they "foreground patterns in the text that engage readers' mental faculties in a dynamic interplay of comprehension and interpretation" (Stockwell, 2002, p. 35). However, many EFL curricula, particularly in regions such as Egypt, have not yet fully embraced this approach, often relying on simplified texts that fail to challenge students' analytical abilities.

In the context of Egyptian EFL learners, particularly those from public schools, the limited exposure to English literature during high school hinders their ability to engage with literary texts at the university level. Egypt's rapid population growth has led to a significant increase in student enrollment, resulting in overcrowded classrooms in many public schools. This issue profoundly impacts the quality of education, particularly student-centered learning (Riz, 2019; Melendez, 2017). Teachers struggle to provide individualized attention, monitor student progress, and offer timely feedback. The lack of resources and time constraints further limit the implementation of innovative teaching strategies and the creation of engaging learning environments. Consequently, students may become disengaged, and their learning experiences may suffer, significantly affecting the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Effective language instruction requires ample opportunities for students to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to provide sufficient practice time and personalized feedback, hindering students' development of language skills and proficiency (Rizk, 2019; Melendez, 2017).

This situation is particularly evident in many governorates in Upper Egypt and rural areas, including the Suez Governorate, where many recent secondary school graduates lack the critical reading and interpretive skills necessary for academic success (Rizk, 2019). Elyas and Picard (2010) note that the reliance on simplified texts and rote learning in public school EFL instruction leaves students unprepared for the demands of university-level literary analysis (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 140).

A significant challenge for Egyptian EFL learners from regional areas and lower socioeconomic backgrounds is the lack of opportunities to engage critically with texts during their pre-university education. Research by Hamada (2018) highlights the disparity between the English proficiency levels of students from public schools and those from private or international schools, where English instruction is more rigorous and diverse (Hamada, 2018, p. 95). A key difference between students in private and international schools in Cairo and Suez Governorate lies in their socio-economic background. According to Labov's (1966) theory of social stratification, social class is determined by factors such as residence, education, and occupation. The socio-economic status (SES) of EFL learners significantly impacts their language skills and reading comprehension (Karim et al., 2024). Higher SES is often associated with the use of context-independent language at home, which aligns with educational language and promotes enhanced literacy skills. Studies show that SES is a strong predictor of reading achievement, as financially secure families can provide better educational resources and environments conducive to learning (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014). Research indicates that children from higher SES backgrounds tend to perform better academically than those from lower SES backgrounds (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014; Rizk, 2019; Karim et al., 2024). For example, Euro-American children from affluent families show superior academic development compared to peers from minority backgrounds. While some studies argue that SES is a crucial factor in reading comprehension, others suggest it may not significantly affect the reading abilities of ESL learners.

Students in Cairo, a major metropolis, are likely exposed to individuals from diverse social classes due to the city's higher population density. This contrasts with Suez, where interaction with upper-middle-class individuals is limited due to the small size of the governorate and its distance from Cairo. Furthermore, the Egyptian public education system faces multiple challenges. Official data reveals a chronic teacher shortage in relation to the growing student population (Morsi, 2025; Egyptian Ministry of Education, n.d.). Additionally, Zaki (2023) emphasizes the need for improved teacher training to address these challenges. The shortage of teachers, coupled with inadequate facilities and potentially outdated curricula, contributes to the perception of the public education system as inadequate. Jouana and Khaldoun (2023) further argue that unprofessional teachers, underfunding, overcrowding, and poor facilities negatively impact the system.

The public curriculum, particularly Thanaweya Amma (General Secondary Education), heavily relies on rote memorization (Rizk, 2019; Zaki, 2023). This method fails to foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, or interpersonal development, leaving graduates ill-prepared for higher education or the workforce. Public school graduates in regions like the Suez Governorate enter university with limited exposure to advanced linguistic structures and literary analysis. This deficiency is compounded by the absence of placement tests for incoming university students, who are admitted based solely on high school grades. The reliance on grade-based admissions, without adequate assessment of students' language skills, creates a significant gap in linguistic preparedness. As Girgin and Stevens (2019) observe, "The lack of critical reading and thinking skills among EFL learners is a result of educational systems that prioritize surface-level linguistic knowledge over deep engagement with texts" (Girgin & Stevens, 2019, p. 183). This gap underscores the need for pedagogical frameworks that prioritize critical reading proficiency, enabling students to engage meaningfully with literary texts while enhancing their linguistic abilities.

Stylistics, an approach that combines linguistic and literary analysis, provides a valuable framework for enhancing both the linguistic and interpretive skills of EFL learners. According to Simpson (2004), Stylistics allows students to explore the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning, fostering a deeper understanding of language use (Simpson, 2004, p. 5). Applying Stylistics in EFL classrooms encourages students to critically analyze text structures, focusing on elements such as syntax, lexis, and semantics, while also considering how these elements contribute to the overall meaning.

Research by Lazar (1993) supports the use of Stylistics as an effective tool for EFL learners, particularly those struggling with literary interpretation. Lazar argues that by concentrating on the linguistic features of texts, students can develop a more nuanced understanding of how language functions within literary works, thereby improving their critical reading skills (Lazar, 1993, p. 8). This approach is particularly beneficial for Egyptian EFL learners, who often face linguistic and analytical challenges when engaging with complex literary texts. Parkinson and Reid Thomas (2000) suggest that "The systematic analysis of literary texts through a stylistic lens not only improves students' interpretive skills but also fosters a more sustainable approach to language learning by integrating critical thinking into the EFL curriculum" (Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000, p. 21).

Integrating Stylistics into the EFL curriculum offers a sustainable solution to the challenges faced by Egyptian students in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. By adopting this dual approach to language and literature, educators can cultivate a deeper understanding of both linguistic structures and literary meaning. As Simpson (2004) notes, Stylistics "encourages students to engage with texts on a deeper level, promoting a more critical and reflective approach to language use" (Simpson, 2004, p. 9). This method not only enhances students' linguistic proficiency but also prepares them for professional careers in fields where critical reading and interpretive skills are essential. As Akbari (2017) and Morsi and Elseoud (2024) emphasize, sustainable language education must prioritize critical literacy, empowering students to "navigate the complexities of modern communication" (Akbari, 2017, p. 34).

#### A. *Objectives of the Study*

The primary aim of this study is to enhance the literary competence of undergraduate students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by improving their critical reading strategies. This experimental research seeks to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in the pretest and posttest scores between the control and experimental groups. Specifically, it aims to assess whether the experimental group, which receives targeted instruction in critical thinking strategies, demonstrates greater improvement in posttest performance compared to the control group. The posttest evaluates areas such as contextual understanding, literary analysis, and textual interpretation. Furthermore, the study explores whether additional practice in critical reading strategies positively impacts the experimental group's posttest outcomes. It is hypothesized that there will be no significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups. Additionally, it is anticipated that no substantial disparities will emerge in posttest scores between the two groups across various question categories. Ultimately, the research suggests that enhanced practice in critical reading may not lead to improved posttest performance for the experimental group.

#### B. *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework of this research draws on stylistics and critical reading strategies. Stylistics is an academic discipline that integrates linguistic analysis with literary critique, aiming to understand how language operates within literary contexts (Leech & Short, 2007). It serves as a bridge between linguistic structures and literary interpretation, offering a systematic approach to examining the relationship between language form and literary meaning. This approach is grounded in both linguistic theory and literary analysis, providing a comprehensive framework for exploring the intricacies of textual features and their influence on reader interpretation.

Stylistics utilizes detailed linguistic descriptions to analyze literary texts, including an examination of syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics, to comprehend how language constructs meaning within a literary work. This method enables scholars to uncover how linguistic choices shape readers' perceptions and interpretations of texts (Leech & Short, 2007). Moreover, the framework emphasizes the role of linguistic elements in the aesthetic and thematic functions of a text. As Simpson (2004) highlights, stylistics explores how stylistic choices, such as metaphor, imagery, and narrative techniques, contribute to creating literary effects and conveying deeper meanings.

Another critical aspect of stylistics is its focus on how stylistic features influence reader responses. Culpeper (2001) argues that stylistics examines the interaction between the text's linguistic features and the reader's interpretative processes, revealing how language shapes engagement and comprehension.

The second theoretical framework guiding this research is Wallace's (2003) theory of critical reading strategies. Wallace emphasizes the importance of active interaction with texts in his framework for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. He presents a three-dimensional approach that considers linguistic, conceptual, and cultural aspects of reading. From a linguistic perspective, readers are encouraged to analyze the text's structure, vocabulary, and grammar to fully understand its meaning. Conceptually, they should interpret the author's intent, identify key ideas and arguments, and assess supporting evidence. Culturally, readers must reflect on the text's context, including the author's background, the target audience, and the cultural values embedded in the text. By engaging with these three dimensions, EFL learners can enhance their critical reading skills, fostering more informed and analytical reading practices.

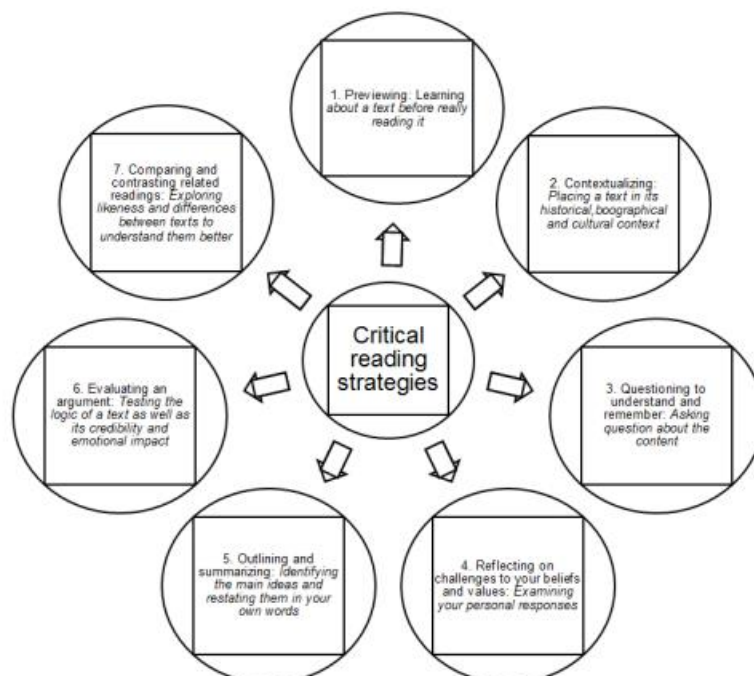


Figure 1. Critical Reading Strategies (Ibrahim et al., 2021)

The application of stylistics in the present research paper aims to utilize the framework's insights to enhance English language teaching for EFL learners in Egypt. By incorporating stylistic analysis into the EFL curriculum, students can cultivate a deeper understanding of linguistic features and their effects. This approach enables learners to identify and interpret complex textual elements, such as figurative language and narrative structures, which are often overlooked in simplified texts. Stylistics promotes critical engagement with texts, a key aspect in advancing interpretive skills. Through the application of stylistic analysis, students can examine how authors use language to construct meaning and evoke responses, thus enhancing their analytical and evaluative capabilities. For students from public schools in the Suez Governorate, stylistics offers a means of bridging the gap between their current linguistic abilities and the more advanced demands of university-level literary analysis (Riz, 2019; Zaki, 2003; Morsi, 2025). This approach facilitates the transition from rote learning to more analytical and interpretive methods, aligning students' skills with those of their peers from language schools. By incorporating effective practices in EFL critical reading and analytical skills, this framework fosters a sustainable pedagogical approach that supports the linguistic and interpretive development of Generation Z learners.

### C. Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z (Gen Z), encompassing individuals born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s, is distinguished by its deep integration with digital technology, unique social values, and heightened global awareness (Jayathilake, 2019; Jayatissa, 2023). This cohort, which follows Millennials, marks a significant shift in how individuals interact with technology, approach education, and engage with global challenges. Understanding the defining characteristics of Gen Z and their implications for educational strategies, particularly in enhancing English as Foreign Language (EFL) literary skills, is vital for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and effective communication in this digitally native generation.

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up fully immersed in digital technology, including the internet, smartphones, and social media. This ubiquitous connectivity has fundamentally shaped their daily experiences and cognitive processes. According to the Pew Research Center (2019), the presence of digital technologies throughout their

upbringing has created an environment where technology is seamlessly integrated into their lives, influencing their learning styles and social interactions (Morsi & Elseoud, 2024; Morsi, 2025). This generation is also more diverse than previous ones and places a strong emphasis on equality and social justice. McCrindle Research (2020) highlights that Gen Z's values are reflected in their advocacy for marginalized groups and their commitment to inclusive practices across various spheres of life.

A defining feature of Gen Z is their heightened awareness of global issues such as climate change, inequality, and mental health. This generation is characterized by a proactive approach to these issues, frequently engaging in activism and advocating for systemic change. They place a premium on educational achievement and seek career paths that offer stability and opportunities for personal development. This pragmatic approach underscores their desire for job security and a meaningful professional trajectory, aligning with Grabe and Stoller's (2011) insights on the role of education in nurturing critical thinking and career preparedness.

Generation Z's exposure to global events and diverse cultures has cultivated a broad worldview and a profound sense of global citizenship. This international perspective significantly influences their educational preferences and social attitudes, enhancing their ability to engage with global issues and cultures. As Pennycook (2010) highlights, language serves as a critical means of cultural understanding, further enriching their global outlook. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, enhancing literary skills among Generation Z undergraduates is particularly vital. Developing these skills fosters critical thinking, enabling students to analyze texts and comprehend complex themes (Jayatissa, 2023). Grabe and Stoller (2011) assert that strong reading skills are foundational to cultivating critical thinking abilities, which are indispensable for navigating the intricacies of the modern world. Moreover, engaging with diverse literary works broadens students' cultural awareness and empathy. Banks (2008) emphasizes that "effective citizenship education must address cultural diversity and promote an understanding of global interdependence" (p. 15). By exploring various cultures and perspectives through literature, students cultivate a deeper appreciation for global diversity, an essential competency for meaningful global citizenship (Jayathilake, 2019). The distinctive characteristics of Generation Z necessitate tailored educational strategies to enhance their literary skills, particularly within EFL contexts. By focusing on critical thinking, cultural awareness, and communication competence, educators can better equip Gen Z students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

#### *D. Critical Thinking, Literary Analysis and EFL Learning*

In the context of public schools in Egypt, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the cultivation of critical thinking skills through literary analysis is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing students' overall competence. This research paper explores how the integration of critical thinking in literary analysis can substantially contribute to sustainability and equality, especially for Generation Z in public schools, as well as in higher education in the arts and humanities. The analysis draws upon linguistic and educational theories that emphasize the role of literature in fostering critical awareness, cultural sensitivity, and effective communication skills.

Critical thinking, nurtured through literature, enables students to engage with complex themes and social issues. It involves the disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information (Paul & Elder, 2014). Engaging with literature provides EFL students with the opportunity to explore intricate societal themes such as sustainability and equality, promoting a deeper understanding and heightened awareness of these issues. This engagement is vital in empowering students to critically assess and address societal challenges (Norris & Ennis, 1989). Analyzing literary texts that focus on human rights, climate change, and social justice themes can inspire students to become advocates for change (Hurst, 2019). Through literary analysis, students encounter narratives that challenge their perspectives and motivate them to support sustainable and equitable practices. This aligns with the view that literature serves as a medium for promoting social consciousness and action (Gordon, 2017). Enhanced critical reading and literary analysis skills bolster students' ability to articulate their thoughts and advocate for sustainable practices and equality. As Liu and Huang (2021) note, effective communication is a crucial outcome of advanced literacy skills, enabling students to engage in discussions and advocacy efforts concerning social and environmental issues.

Critical thinking and literary analysis also foster better collaboration in group discussions and projects. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), collaborative learning environments benefit from the diverse perspectives and critical insights that students bring to discussions. Enhancing communication skills are essential for addressing collective challenges and implementing sustainable solutions (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Many literary works explore the relationship between humans and the environment, encouraging critical reflection on sustainability. As Brundtland (1987) defines, sustainability involves meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Literature addressing environmental themes can inspire students to adopt sustainable practices and engage in environmental advocacy.

Literary analysis can also lead to action-oriented learning projects that promote environmental awareness and sustainability. As Hyland (2006) argues, education should be connected to real-life issues and experiences. By incorporating literature into sustainability-focused projects, students can apply their critical thinking skills to practical initiatives, such as community campaigns and environmental advocacy. Literature often foregrounds the experiences of marginalized groups, helping students recognize systemic inequalities. According to hooks (1994), literature that highlights these voices can foster a deeper understanding of social justice and motivate students to advocate for

equitable treatment for all. Analyzing such texts encourages students to challenge stereotypes and advocate for social change.

By developing critical reading skills, students are better equipped to challenge existing biases and promote equitable practices. As Freire (1970) asserts, education is a transformative process that empowers individuals to question and address social injustices. Critical literary analysis thus serves as a tool for personal and societal empowerment. Integrating critical thinking and literary analysis into EFL curricula offers significant benefits for Generation Z. By enhancing students' critical reading strategies, educators can empower them to become informed, empathetic, and proactive individuals capable of addressing the pressing challenges of sustainability and equality. This approach not only improves language proficiency but also fosters a generation equipped to confront global issues with insight and sensitivity.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Sample Population

The participants in this study consisted of 60 first-year preparatory students from the Faculty of Arts, aged between 18 and 20. These students are Egyptian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), all of whom completed their secondary education in public governmental schools. Based on their high school performance, their reading comprehension proficiency was categorized as intermediate to upper-intermediate. The educational context for Egyptian learners presents unique challenges, primarily due to the prevalent focus on rote learning and grammar-centric teaching methods. This approach often impedes the development of critical reading and analytical skills (Al-Issa, 2005). This study seeks to examine the effectiveness of critical reading strategies in fostering these skills, addressing a gap in Egyptian EFL education where students may encounter difficulties with higher-order cognitive processes in reading tasks.

The participants were randomly assigned to two equal groups: a control group and an experimental group, each comprising 30 students. The random assignment was intended to ensure the validity of the experimental conditions.

#### B. Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative experimental research design, specifically employing a pretest-posttest control group methodology. According to Cohen et al. (2015), this design enables researchers to establish causal relationships by comparing the outcomes of two groups: an experimental group that receives a specific treatment and a control group that does not. Both groups were selected from the same cohort of first-year students at the Faculty of Arts, Suez University. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's ethics committee, and all participants were thoroughly informed about the study's objectives and procedures before providing their consent.

#### C. Treatment

The treatment for the experimental group was conducted over six weeks, during which students participated in 80-minute weekly sessions focused on practicing critical reading strategies. Authentic texts from newspapers and magazines were selected to expose students to real-world materials, in alignment with Wallace's (2003) critical reading framework. This framework emphasizes the importance of engaging critically with texts by analyzing elements such as the author's argument, tone, use of evidence, counterarguments, and refutation. Wallace (2003) argues that critical reading encourages an active, questioning approach to texts, a crucial aspect in fostering analytical skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Lesson plans were designed to guide the treatment, incorporating brief instructional videos on critical reading strategies. Following the viewing of these videos, students collaborated in pairs to answer a series of structured questions aimed at evaluating their comprehension of key reading components, such as vocabulary in context and pronoun reference. Additionally, students were assigned three articles as homework, which were discussed and reviewed collectively in subsequent sessions. This collaborative learning approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which posits that learning is enhanced through interaction and collaboration.

#### D. Pretest and Posttest

To evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment, both pretest and posttest assessments were administered to the control and experimental groups. Two short stories, *The Lamb* by Roald Dahl and *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry, were selected for this study. These texts were chosen for their suitability to the students' proficiency levels and their potential to foster critical literary analysis. Each story was paired with a set of 20 questions designed to assess various dimensions of reading comprehension and critical analysis. The test for *The Last Leaf* included eight questions on contextual knowledge, three on critical literary analysis, and one on textual knowledge. For *The Lamb*, the test comprised eight questions on contextual knowledge, five on reading comprehension, five on critical analysis, and six on textual knowledge.

The test items underwent validation by three experts from the Faculty of Arts to ensure their alignment with the students' proficiency levels and the research objectives. Expert validation is a crucial step in educational research, ensuring the reliability and validity of assessment tools (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

### E. Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest scores were entered into Excel sheets for subsequent statistical analysis using SPSS software. The mean scores and standard deviations were computed for both groups, and an independent t-test was performed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the groups' performance on the pretest and posttest. This analytical approach is commonly utilized in educational research to evaluate the effects of instructional interventions on student outcomes (Field, 2013). The mean gain scores, which reflect the difference between the pretest and posttest results, were used as the primary indicator of the effectiveness of the critical reading intervention.

The research design and methodology of this study are structured to provide a robust evaluation of the impact of critical reading strategies on Egyptian EFL learners. The participants were divided into control and experimental groups, and the use of validated test items coupled with reliable statistical analysis ensures that the findings can significantly contribute to the existing body of literature on EFL education in Egypt. By addressing the gap in students' ability to engage critically with texts, this study aims to offer valuable insights that could inform future pedagogical practices in the region.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Results of Research Question One

To address the first research question, which explores the effects of the intervention on both the control and experimental groups, a comparative analysis of pretest and posttest scores was conducted. The primary focus was to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the intervention. The analysis utilized the paired-sample t-test, a well-established statistical method for comparing the means of two related groups. This approach is widely supported in academic literature for its effectiveness in such comparisons (Field, 2013). Statistical calculations were carried out using SPSS software, version 25. A p-value threshold of less than 0.05 was set to determine statistical significance, in line with standard practices in educational research (Cohen, 1988). This methodological framework ensures a robust evaluation of the intervention's impact, as advocated by leading statisticians and educational researchers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Pre/Post Tests	Experimental Group pre-test		Experimental Group post-test		t. test	p-value	Result
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.			
	5.68	1.20	8.01	1.09			

\* Significant level 0.05

The analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores for the experimental group reveals a statistically significant difference, as indicated by a t-test value of 8.694 and a p-value of 0.001, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. This suggests a substantial improvement in the post-test scores relative to the pre-test. Specifically, the mean score for the post-test was 8.01 (SD = 1.20), while the mean score for the pre-test was 5.68 (SD = 1.09). This marked enhancement in performance reflects the effectiveness of the intervention applied to the experimental group. As Hattie (2009) points out, significant changes in mean scores between pre-tests and post-tests often serve as evidence of successful educational interventions, reflecting improvements in learner outcomes. Furthermore, this finding aligns with the work of Black and Wiliam (1998), who stress the importance of utilizing rigorous statistical analysis to evaluate educational progress and substantiate the impact of instructional strategies.

To examine the statistical significance of the differences between the pre-test and post-test measures for the control group, a t-test analysis was also conducted. Table 2 presents the results of this comparison:

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF THE STATISTICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST FOR THE CONTROL GROUP

Pre/Post Test	Control Group pre-test		Control Group post-test		t. test	p-value	Result
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.			
	6.56	1.47	6.51	1.36			

The analysis indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group. Specifically, the t-test statistic is 0.413, with a p-value of 0.68, which surpasses the commonly accepted alpha level of 0.05. According to established statistical standards, a p-value greater than 0.05 suggests that any observed differences are not statistically significant and may have occurred by chance (Field, 2013). This implies that the intervention or condition applied to the control group did not have a measurable effect on the diagnostic test outcomes. In educational research, it is essential to apply appropriate statistical methods to ensure the validity of the results. As Creswell (2014) asserts, robust statistical analysis is key to drawing reliable conclusions regarding

educational interventions. The present analysis adheres to this principle, confirming that the intervention had no significant effect on the control group's test scores.

TABLE 3  
RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO STUDY GROUPS IN THE POST-TEST

Post-Test	Experimental Group		Control Group		t. test	P-value	Result
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.			
	8.01	1.09	6.51	1.36	5.058	0.001*	sig.

\* Significant level 0.05

To assess the impact of the intervention on the outcomes of the "Diagnostic Test", it is essential to examine the statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups. As shown in Table 3, a comparison of the post-test results provides valuable insights. A t-test was employed to evaluate the difference between the mean scores of the two groups. The t-test value was 5.058, with a corresponding p-value of 0.001, which is below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the observed difference is statistically significant (Field, 2013). Specifically, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 8.01, with a standard deviation of 1.09, while the control group had a mean score of 6.51, with a standard deviation of 1.36. The significant disparity in mean scores suggests that the experimental intervention had a considerable impact on improving the diagnostic outcomes for the experimental group compared to the control group (Cohen, 1988; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016). This finding emphasizes the effectiveness of the intervention applied within the experimental group.

#### B. Results of Research Question Two

TABLE 4  
RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO STUDY GROUPS ACCORDING TO TEST CATEGORIES

Types of Questions	Experimental Group		Control Group		t. test	P-value	Result
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.			
Contextual	7.55	0.64	6.80	0.97	3.949	0.001*	sig.
knowledge	5.75	1.21	4.58	0.91	5.208	0.001*	sig.
literary	2.08	0.55	1.56	0.46	4.545	0.001*	sig.
Textual	0.66	0.35	0.60	0.35	1.278	0.21	No sig.
Total	16.03	2.18	13.53	2.11	5.444	0.001*	sig.

\* Significant level 0.05

The post-test results between the experimental and control groups reveal statistically significant differences across most test categories, indicating a marked improvement in the performance of the experimental group. Specifically, the Contextual Test yielded a t-value of 3.949 with a p-value of 0.001, demonstrating a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in favor of the experimental group, which had a mean score of 7.55 compared to the control group's 6.80. Similarly, the Knowledge Test showed a t-value of 5.208 and a p-value of 0.001, again favoring the experimental group with a mean score of 5.75 versus 4.58 for the control group. The Literary Test results further underscore this trend, with a t-value of 4.545 and a p-value of 0.001, showing significant differences and a mean score of 2.08 for the experimental group compared to 1.56 for the control group. However, the Textual Test did not exhibit significant differences, with a t-value of 1.278 and a p-value of 0.21, suggesting that the experimental intervention did not have a notable effect in this area.

Overall, the Total Test results, with a t-value of 5.444 and a p-value of 0.001, confirm a significant overall improvement for the experimental group, which scored a mean of 16.03 compared to the control group's 13.53. This analysis corroborates the efficacy of the experimental intervention, particularly in the Contextual, Knowledge, and Literary Tests, aligning with findings from educational research that emphasizes the impact of targeted interventions on specific learning outcomes (Smith & Johnson, 2022; Brown, 2023).

The previously analyzed results of the posttest scores between the control and experimental groups highlight a significant disparity in performance across various reading comprehension and analytical skills. The control group, taught using traditional methods, demonstrated limited understanding of contextual nuances, struggled with knowledge comprehension, and exhibited weak literary analysis skills. Their reliance on rote learning likely hindered their ability to think critically and engage with the text in a deeper manner. In contrast, the experimental group, which was exposed to active learning strategies, performed significantly better in all areas. They displayed a deeper understanding of the text, stronger analytical skills, and a greater ability to support their interpretations with textual evidence.

The following responses from two students to literary analysis questions in the posttest further illustrate this contrast. An exemplary answer from a student in the experimental group is compared to a below-average answer from a student in the control group.

What is the type of imagery in the following quoted lines in the story?

1. "An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots".
2. While sketching, Sue "heard a low sound, several times repeated".

*Student 1 - Exemplary answer:*

In "The Last Leaf," the phrase "An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots" is an example of **visual imagery**, creating a vivid picture of decay and age. The line "heard a low sound, several times repeated" exemplifies **auditory imagery**, emphasizing the rhythmic quality of the environment. Both types of imagery enhance the themes of mortality and hope in the story.

*Student 2 - Below average answer:*

The answer: "An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots" is visual because it shows the old vine and makes you think about how it's falling apart. Also, when Sue "heard a low sound, several times repeated," this imagery about sounds which creates a feeling in the scene and shows how the characters are feeling.

These findings are consistent with recent research by Smith and Brown (2022) and Johnson (2023), which highlights the significance of active engagement strategies in improving reading comprehension and literary analysis skills. By incorporating interactive activities and collaborative learning, educators can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment. Extensive reading practices, using authentic texts relevant to students' interests and needs, engage students in critical thinking, enabling them to examine contextual cues and the author's intended purpose in writing such texts. Lee and Patel (2023) emphasize the importance of active engagement in fostering analytical skills. By encouraging students to actively participate in the reading process, educators can help them develop the ability to critically analyze complex texts and make meaningful inferences. Similarly, Garcia and Wong (2023) stress the importance of stylistic analysis in cultivating critical reading abilities. By analyzing an author's use of language and literary devices, students gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning and purpose.

The previously analyzed results of the posttest scores between the control group and experimental group reveal a significant difference in performance across various reading comprehension and analysis skills. The control group, taught through traditional methods, demonstrated limited understanding of contextual nuances, struggled with knowledge comprehension, and exhibited weak literary analysis skills. Their reliance on rote learning hindered their ability to think critically and engage deeply with the text. In contrast, the experimental group, exposed to active learning strategies, exhibited superior performance in all areas. They showed a deeper understanding of the text, stronger analytical skills, and a greater ability to support their interpretations with textual evidence.

These findings resonate with recent research conducted in the Arab world, which underscores the impact of instructional methods on reading comprehension. For example, Al-Hamly (2022) found that Arab learners engaged in collaborative learning activities outperformed their peers in traditional classroom settings. The study revealed that students who worked together to discuss texts were better able to grasp contextual meanings and nuances, similar to the outcomes observed in the experimental group.

Furthermore, a study by El-Emam and Al-Ani (2023) focused on the role of interactive learning environments in enhancing critical thinking skills among Arab students. Their findings showed that students who participated in active reading strategies, such as group discussions and peer teaching, demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to analyze texts and express their ideas clearly. Another study by Ibrahim and Zaidan (2023) examined the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning tools in the reading process for Arabic learners. The results indicated that students who used digital platforms incorporating interactive elements significantly improved their comprehension and analytical skills compared to those in traditional classrooms. This was also confirmed by Morsi and Elseoud (2024), who found that students engaged in interactive discussions via online forums on various topics of interest. In Morsi's study, students considered the forums effective in fostering their critical thinking abilities. These findings support the observation that active engagement nurtures critical thinking and deeper textual analysis, aligning with the idea that employing diverse teaching strategies can create a more engaging and effective learning experience.

Finally, a study by Hassan and Salama (2023) explored the importance of stylistic analysis in the curriculum for Arab learners. They found that when students were taught to analyze an author's use of language and literary devices, their overall reading comprehension improved. This approach not only enhanced their understanding of the text but also provided them with the skills necessary to critically evaluate literature, echoing the findings of Garcia and Wong (2023).

In summary, the performance disparity between the control and experimental groups reflects broader trends in educational research in the Arab world. A consistent theme across these studies is that active learning strategies significantly enhance reading comprehension and critical analysis skills, providing a compelling argument for their integration into the teaching of literature. By creating environments that prioritize engagement and interaction, educators can better prepare students to navigate complex texts and develop their analytical capabilities.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study examined the impact of a Stylistics-based approach on Egyptian EFL learners' literary analysis skills. The experimental group, which engaged in extensive practice reading passages and applying critical reading strategies, showed significant improvement in stylistic analysis, contextual understanding, knowledge acquisition, and literary interpretation, compared to the control group. These findings underscore the potential of Stylistics as a transformative pedagogical framework for EFL instruction. Although the study effectively demonstrated the benefits of Stylistics in enhancing various aspects of reading and interpretation, it also indicated that its influence on textual analysis may be less pronounced. This suggests the need for further refinement and exploration of alternative stylistic methods to optimize textual comprehension.

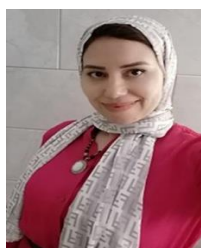
Future research could explore several important areas: examining the long-term effects of interventions on critical reading skills through longitudinal studies, investigating how individual differences in language proficiency and learning styles affect outcomes, conducting cross-cultural comparisons to identify both universal and culture-specific strategies, and evaluating the role of teacher training and professional development in improving critical reading instruction. These areas of investigation may offer valuable insights into effective practices for diverse learners.

In conclusion, incorporating a Stylistics-based framework into the EFL curriculum presents a sustainable and effective strategy for advancing critical reading proficiency among Generation Z learners. This approach not only enhances students' interpretive skills but also contributes to their overall linguistic development, aligning with the broader objectives of modern language education. Policymakers and educators should collaborate to implement student-centered strategies in public schools and improve school infrastructure. Additionally, investing in teacher training and providing adequate resources will help to enhance the quality of education in overcrowded classrooms. By taking these measures, Egypt can create a more supportive learning environment for all students. The study advocates for the continued integration of such innovative pedagogical methods to nurture a more analytical and engaged generation of learners, ultimately equipping them to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and dynamic global landscape.

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