

ASSESSING IRAQI UNIVERSITY READERS' CRITICAL THINKING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE USE READER RESPONSE STRATEGY IN THE INSTRUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S LITERARY TEXT

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Abstract

Purpose: This study centers on the significant role of Reader Response theory in instruction literary text, this study also, affirms that there is a useful and progressive influence of the Reader-response strategy in the literary text to enhance and improve the level of EFL Iraqi learners' critical thinking. This study proves that teaching literature, without Reader response strategies, the level of development of critical thinking becomes very passive and slow.

Methodology: The researcher used one group "pre-post-test". The study was conducted at the English department, Faculty of Education in Iraq. This study was carried out for fifteen weeks. The researcher administered Cornell Class-Reasoning Test as a pre-test in week 4 while post-test in week 14. The researcher used non-probability convenient sampling because it was probably the most common of all sampling techniques in social sciences and the proximity of the samples to the researchers (Patton, 1990). This test was run twice with intensive interventions for five weeks implemented between the two tests.

Main Findings: Findings showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the EFL Iraqi learners' critical thinking skills between pre-test scores and post-test scores. There are statistically significant differences at the " $p \leq 0.05$ " level for the following item groups: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12. This study confirmed that participants significantly improved their level of critical thinking skills by implementing Reader-Response activities in teaching literary texts.

Implications: This study proposes applying the strategies of reader-response theory as an effective and encouraging concept or stimulating approach to enhance the level of recognition and appreciation of the texts in literature. This experiment could be a positive study and applicable to different educational centers to teach all the texts in English literature. This study helps instructors to change their old-style manners of instructions.

Novelty: The experiment focused on the vital and encouraging role of reader-response theory in fostering EFL Iraqi readers' capacity to generate multi-layers of versions and meanings during reading literature. The study presents a helpful and successful manner to all the persons who work as teachers in educational systems. The study directs the instructors to follow the modern approaches in explaining the literary text to their learners instead of the old-style manner. EFL tutors should practice these strategies in EFL English classes of literature so that they could make the lecture full of activity and enjoyment throughout the interesting themes of literature.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Cornell Class-Reasoning Test, EFL, Reader Response Strategy, Iraqi Readers, Literary Text.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking has recently become a more important and vital goal of education systems all over the world. According to Fisher, (2011), Robert Ennis (1985), McPeck, (1981), Sternberg, (1986), (Kennedy, (1991) and Anderson, (2001) critical thinking is reasonable and reflective thinking which focuses on deciding what we believe and what we do, and also, critical thinking is the ability of analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information during the learning process. This study highlights on assessing EFL Iraqi learners' level of critical thinking skills. "Cornell Class Reasoning Test, Form "X" ran to the learners of the third year at Thiqrar University in Iraq. The test was originally developed for use in research (Arter, 1987). Because of the vital and important role of critical thinking abilities for students' academic studies and qualified vacations, this study focuses on developing these skills and abilities.

Literature reading is the cornerstone to develop and enhance the level of critical thinking (Tung and Chang, 2009). According to Qamar (2016), Stefanova, (2017) and Ganiron, (2014), stressed on the importance of literature reading in stimulating and developing critical thinking skills among EFL learners. The process of reading literature foster and encourages the skills and talents of critical thinking such as remembering, regaining, and producing various interpretations of the texts in literature. According to Khatib & Shakouri, (2012) and Rahman, (2017) students should appear their potential to be insightful of numerous thoughts; to apply what is educated to the real world. Students learn better if they find sympathies between what they learn and their experiences.

The current study stressed the effectiveness and importance of developing critical thinking skills in Iraqi classes. EFL Iraqi learners need the ability to make critical thinking as a vital and essential element of the curriculum, whether by mixing approaches (RRT and literature) or teaching it as a separate activity to enhance their level of critical thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “critical thinking” is the capacity to think logically and clearly about what to believe and what to do (Ennis, 1985, Fisher, (2011)). Critical thinking is a high skill of rational thoughts that are more suitable and accepted decisions to overcome the hard situations in different fields of life (Arslan, 2012). People with critical thinking skills are capable of doing the following things. Firstly, they can understand the logical links between thoughts. Secondly, they can generate accepted decisions. These forms of dispositions can be presented by people as attitudes and habits of well-mindedness (Halpern, 1999). Thirdly, they can show the conflicts and common faults in reasoning. Fourthly, they can solve all kinds of problems in proper ways. Also, they can identify and differentiate bet important ideas (Lai, 2011). Critical thinking is not a case of collecting information and thoughts, but, a critical thinker should be able to infer and conclude consequences from what he knows, and how he makes use of this information to solve the problem (AlKhateeb, 2017). A critical thinker should use his cultural and intellectual background so that he can think deeply to display the best solutions and the most accepted decisions and ideas (Guo, 2013). The skills of critical thinking are not focusing one field or in one area, critical thinking should be large in scope and comprehensive in all the fields of life. According to Fisher, (2011), critical thinking is very essential in challenging consensus and following more popular attitudes. We need critical thinking for its great role in evaluating and developing our creative ideas and thoughts (Fahim, 2014). Reading literary texts has great advantages especially in the early years, which makes learners get benefited some new cultural information (Inan, 2018). Literary texts are viewed as cultural worlds since teaching foreign language .literature entails teaching the culture of that language (Bellour, 2013). A literary text has a special impact on developing students' critical thinking skills and they get a wide range of interaction more than any other texts such as scientific and historical topics. Many previous researchers used the activities of Reader-response theory to develop the level of critical thinking skills among their learners such as Tucker, (2000), Garzon and Castenda, (2015), Soiferman, (2016) and Spirovska, (2019). All these activities encourage the learners' reflection with the events of the literary text. These activities made them express their own and personal and social experiences and connecting them with the events of the text. In reading literature, students use their personal, historical and cultural background (Kohazadi, (2014). Literature is considered as a mirror for all the learners which reflects the events of life (Khatib, 2012). In the light of the plot of text, students are facing different points of view and situations through the struggles between the characters, after that learners should think, rethink and reflect their ideas with the actions of the text (Das,2014). Using literary works will gradually enhance the level of critical thinking skills of students' mental ability (Qamar 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This study was done at Thiqr University/ English department in Iraq 2018/2019. The researcher used one group, “pre-test and post-test” (intact class) because this design doesn't contradict an order of syllabus in faculty and also the participants (students) were already assigned as a regular intact group (Creswell,2012). A quasi-experimental design highlights the treatment of independent variables to notice and influence the level of the dependent variable (Dawson, 2007). The researcher can't select samples randomly in this design and also, all samples are predetermined or assigned already (Intact class) (Creswell, (2012).

Data collection

The author followed the following procedures for data collection. At the start, he took the administrators' permission to conduct his experiment. Also, he took learners' permission to take part in the experiment. Then, he used one group pre-test and post-test design. It was a quasi-experimental design, this design doesn't contradict with the system of the faculty (Campbell, 1969). After that, the researcher adopted a convenient sampling, accidental sampling because of the availability of the samples to the researcher. Finally, the researcher conducted the Cornell Class-Reasoning Test, Form X as “pre-test and post-test”. This test contains twelve item groups; each item group has six questions with different principles of critical thinking. The purpose of this test is not to get high or low scores, but to see if the learners master the principles of critical thinking or fail. (Ennis, 1967)

Implementing Reader response in EFL Literature classes

The researcher implemented several activities of the Reader-response theory in teaching the literary text. The researcher initially combined oral and written instructions to start implementing Reader response activities. Prediction: In this activity, the researcher started making students do predictions before and during the reading of the literary text. This activity made the learners ready to interact with new events of the play. Learners used information from the text and their own experiences to predict what comes next from events. Activating prior knowledge: The researcher practiced this activity by making his learners comprehend the new ideas from the literary text and connect them with the ideas they already have by activating their prior knowledge. Whole-class literature discussion and small class discussion in the literature. These two activities made learners take part in critical literature discussions, highlighting the conflict between the characters in the play and also, expanded the learners' understanding of the dramatic text by raising questions and challenging classmates themselves. The researcher also, used role-play activity to provide opportunities to assess knowledge mastery and breaking learning into smaller steps.

Data analysis

The data gathered from the “Cornell class-reasoning test, form X” were analyzed in terms of means, standard deviations and percentage using (SPSS). The researcher interpreted all the results by using descriptive analysis and made a comparison between the results of the two tests, “pre-test and post-test” by using “paired samples t-test” to understand if there is a statistically prominent difference between two tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Pre-test

Table 1: Pre-test total mean & Item Group Means (score range 0-6): Pre-test

ITEM GROUP	MEAN	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Item Group 1	3.29	1.25	0	6
Item Group 2	2.60	1.43	0	6
Item Group 3	1.62	.88	0	4
Item Group 4	2.36	1.08	1	5
Item Group 5	2.55	1.74	0	6
Item Group 6	2.98	1.44	0	6
Item Group 7	2.21	1.24	0	5
Item Group 8	2.17	1.32	0	5
Item Group 9	2.81	1.23	1	6
Item Group 10	3.86	1.26	1	6
Item Group 11	3.90	1.21	2	6
Item Group 12	3.14	1.03	1	5
PRE-TEST	33.5	6.31	20	52
TOTAL				

The table shows overall mean and standard deviation (from a possible low score of 0 to a high score of 6) for each of the 12 item groups in the pre-test. Minimum and maximum scores indicate the highest and lowest scores participants received across the 12 item groups. The pre-test total mean and the standard deviation is the overall test score (from a possible score ranging from 0-72) in addition to the highest and lowest scores.

B. Post-test

Like the pre-test table, this table shows the post-test total and the overall “mean and standard deviation” for each of the 12 item groups in the post-test, including the lowest and highest scores.

Table 2: Item Group Totals & Percentages: Post-test

ITEM GROUP	MEAN	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Item Group 1	4.38	1.03	2	6
Item Group 2	3.67	1.32	1	6
Item Group 3	3.21	1.14	1	6
Item Group 4	3.43	1.35	1	6
Item Group 5	3.98	1.26	2	6
Item Group 6	4.33	1.07	2	6
Item Group 7	3.31	1.35	1	6
Item Group 8	3.14	1.20	1	5
Item Group 9	4.02	1.02	2	6
Item Group 10	3.98	1.20	2	6
Item Group 11	4.31	1.12	2	6
Item Group 12	4.14	0.90	2	5
POST-TEST	45.9	5.38	35	61
TOTAL				

C. Paired Samples T-tests

The first table shows the “pre- and post-test” total means (score range 0-72). The second table shows the results of the paired samples t-test. The test reveals a statistically prominent increase at the “ $p \leq 0.05$ ” level between the pre- and post-test scores. The average score of all participants was around 12.4 points higher on the “post-test than on the pre-test” ($p = 0.00$).

Table 3: The average score of all participants was around 12.4 points higher on the “post-test than on the pre-test”

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	S.E. Mean
Pre-test total	33.48	42	6.31	.97
Post-test total	45.90	42	5.38	.83

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
“Pre-test Post-test “TOTAL	-12.43	3.86	.60	-13.63	-11.22	-20.84	42	.000*

The mixing of critical thinking teaching into the educational programs is a very effective and necessary approach not only in Iraq but also around the world. Fisher (1998) claimed that the educational systems should give more attention and consideration to critical thinking amid the educational processes. Taken with the overall test results, we can state that participants significantly improved on their critical thinking test results from the “pre-test to the post-test”. Critical thinking has a significantly positive impact to assist students to resolve their educational and social issues. Moreover, we can confirm that the level of critical thinking abilities can be improved by using the Reader-response strategy in teaching literary texts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

Results of the “per-item groups and post-item groups” revealed that there was a statistically prominent difference between them. Most of the “per-item groups” had failed to master the principle. While most of “post-item groups” had neither mastered nor failed the principle. (See the appendix A for pre and post as an example). Secondly, there were statistically significant differences at the “ $p \leq 0.05$ ” level for the following item groups: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Critical thinking is very essential for learners to appear in their potential abilities in educational and social issues. Moreover, it is one of the significant talents that students should be taught and acquired by studying at a higher level. Consequently, the researcher would like to give some recommendations. Firstly, instructors should make careful efforts to enrich their students' critical thinking capability. They should arrange such activities in literature classes that might enhance and develop critical thinking capacities among their students. Secondly, the students should pay full care to be more proficient in developing their critical thinking abilities so that they may overcome challenging concerns in instruction and social life as well.

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Appendix (A) (Pre-item groups)

Interpretation by (Mehta, 2018)

- Around 83.3% or higher correct = mastery of the principle
- Around 50.0% or lower correct = failure to master the principle
- Around 66.7% correct = neither mastery nor failure to master the principle

Item Group 1: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 8	73.8	26.2
Item 35	52.4	47.6
Item 29	47.6	52.4
Item 16	47.6	52.4
Item 22	61.9	38.1
Item 39	45.2	54.8
OVERALL	54.8	45.2

Item group 1 the overall correct percentage for this item group of 54.8% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 2: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 7	81.0	19.0
Item 40	38.1	61.9
Item 27	23.8	76.2
Item 14	40.5	59.5
Item 19	42.9	57.1
Item 31	33.3	66.7
OVERALL	43.3	56.7

Item group 2: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 43.3% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 3: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 11	40.5	59.5
Item 24	19.1	80.9
Item 32	26.2	73.8
Item 37	28.6	71.4
Item 30	21.4	78.6
Item 41	26.2	73.8
OVERALL	27.0	73.0

Item group 3: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 27.0% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 4: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 9	71.4	28.6
Item 13	42.9	57.1
Item 26	26.2	73.8
Item 18	28.6	71.4
Item 34	26.2	73.8
Item 23	40.5	59.5
OVERALL	39.3	60.7

Item group 4: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 39.3% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 5: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 10	19.1	80.9
Item 17	57.1	42.9
Item 20	38.1	61.9
Item 33	47.6	52.4
Item 38	61.9	38.1
Item 28	31.0	69.0

OVERALL	42.5	57.5
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Item group 5: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 42.5% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 6: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 12	52.4	47.6
Item 21	54.8	45.2
Item 42	61.9	38.1
Item 25	33.3	66.7
Item 15	42.9	57.1
Item 36	52.4	47.6
OVERALL	49.6	50.4

Item group 6: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 49.6% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)).

Item Group 7: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 44	21.4	78.6
Item 57	33.3	66.7
Item 77	54.8	45.2
Item 70	42.9	57.1
Item 59	33.3	66.7
Item 64	35.7	64.3
OVERALL	36.9	63.1

Item group 7: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 36.9% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 8: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 48	28.6	71.4
Item 53	40.5	59.5
Item 71	42.9	57.1
Item 68	33.3	66.7
Item 65	35.7	64.3
Item 75	35.7	64.3
OVERALL	36.1	63.9

Item group 8: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 36.1% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 9: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 45	52.4	47.6
Item 55	54.8	45.2
Item 66	50.0	50.0
Item 52	40.5	59.5
Item 49	40.5	59.5
Item 73	42.9	57.1
OVERALL	46.9	53.1

Item group 9: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 46.9% suggests that participants had failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 10: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 43	54.8	45.2
Item 51	59.5	40.5

Item 62	71.4	28.6
Item 72	69.1	30.9
Item 67	73.8	26.2
Item 76	57.1	42.9
OVERALL	64.3	35.7

Item group 10: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 64.3% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 11: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 47	47.6	52.4
Item 54	50.0	50.0
Item 63	66.7	33.3
Item 58	66.7	33.3
Item 78	97.6	2.4
Item 60	61.9	38.1
OVERALL	65.1	34.9

Item group 11: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 65.1% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 12: Pre-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 46	52.4	47.6
Item 69	61.9	38.1
Item 74	59.5	40.5
Item 56	50.0	50.0
Item 61	66.7	33.3
Item 50	23.8	76.2
OVERALL	52.4	47.6

Item group 12: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 52.4% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Appendix (B) Post - item group

Item Group 1: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 8	76.2	23.8
Item 35	71.4	28.6
Item 29	64.3	35.7
Item 16	76.2	23.8
Item 22	76.2	23.8
Item 39	73.8	26.2
OVERALL	73.0	27.0

Item group 1: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 73.0% suggests that participants had neither mastered nor failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 2: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 7	73.8	26.2
Item 40	81.0	19.0
Item 27	71.4	28.6
Item 14	38.1	61.9
Item 19	59.5	40.5
Item 31	42.9	57.1
OVERALL	61.1	38.9

Item group 2: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 61.1% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 3: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 11	57.1	42.9
Item 24	52.4	47.6
Item 32	42.9	57.1
Item 37	69.1	30.9
Item 30	47.6	52.4
Item 41	52.4	47.6
OVERALL	53.6	46.4

Item group 3: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 53.6% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 4: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 9	76.2	23.8
Item 13	50.0	50.0
Item 26	54.8	45.2
Item 18	52.4	47.6
Item 34	52.4	47.6
Item 23	57.1	42.9
OVERALL	57.2	42.8

Item group 4: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 57.2% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 5: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 10	42.9	57.1
Item 17	64.3	35.7
Item 20	81.0	19.0
Item 33	71.4	28.6
Item 38	66.7	33.3
Item 28	71.4	28.6
OVERALL	66.3	33.7

Item group 5: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 66.3% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 6: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 12	59.5	40.5
Item 21	76.2	23.8
Item 42	71.4	28.6
Item 25	64.3	35.7
Item 15	76.2	23.8
Item 36	85.7	14.3
OVERALL	72.2	27.8

Item group 6: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 72.2% suggests that participants had neither mastered nor failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 7: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 44	40.5	59.5
Item 57	42.9	57.1
Item 77	88.1	11.9
Item 70	47.6	52.4
Item 59	47.6	52.4
Item 64	64.3	35.7

OVERALL	55.2	44.8
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Item group 7: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 55.2% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 8: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 48	57.1	42.9
Item 53	52.4	47.6
Item 71	47.6	52.4
Item 68	35.7	64.3
Item 65	61.9	38.1
Item 75	59.5	40.5
OVERALL	52.4	47.6

Item group 8: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 52.4% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 9: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 45	73.8	26.2
Item 55	66.7	33.3
Item 66	66.7	33.3
Item 52	64.3	35.7
Item 49	54.8	45.2
Item 73	76.2	23.8
OVERALL	67.1	32.9

Item group 9: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 67.1% suggests that participants had neither mastered nor failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 10: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 43	59.5	40.5
Item 51	64.3	35.7
Item 62	69.1	30.9
Item 72	59.5	40.5
Item 67	57.1	42.9
Item 76	88.1	11.9
OVERALL	66.3	33.7

Item group 10: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 66.3% suggests that participants had not failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 11: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 47	64.3	35.7
Item 54	69.1	30.9
Item 63	78.6	21.4
Item 58	57.1	42.9
Item 78	85.7	14.3
Item 60	76.2	23.8
OVERALL	71.8	28.2

Item group 11: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 71.8% suggests that participants had neither mastered nor failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))

Item Group 12: Post-test

Item	% Correct	% Incorrect
Item 46	59.5	40.5
Item 69	57.1	42.9
Item 74	78.6	21.4



Item 56	57.1	42.9
Item 61	78.6	21.4
Item 50	83.3	16.7
OVERALL	69.0	31.0

Item group 12: The overall correct percentage for this item group of 69.0% suggests that participants had neither mastered nor failed to master the principle. ([Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2020](#)) and ([Mehta, 2018](#))