An enrichment program based on semiotic theory and its efficacy in improving argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking among gifted female students in the third-grade secondary school.

Thesis for PhD in curricula and teaching methods

Preparation

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Abstract

Title of Thesis: An enrichment program based on semiotic theory and its efficacy in improving argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking among gifted female students in the third-grade secondary school.

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The study aimed to design an enrichment program based on semiotic theory, and to investigate its efficacy in improving argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school. To achieve the objectives of the study, the descriptive analytical approach was applied, as well as the experimental approach with its quasi-experimental one-group design, with two pre- and post-tests. The study tools were a test of argumentative writing skills in the English language, and moral thinking skills' scale prepared by the researcher. The study sample consisted of (21). Linguistically gifted, female students in the third-grade secondary school in public education in government schools in the city of Al-Bada'i in the Qassim region. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the average scores of the gifted female students at the third secondary grade in the pre- and post-application of the argumentative writing test in English in favor of the post-application, and that there is a statistically significant difference at the level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the average scores of the gifted female students at the third secondary grade in the pre- and post-application of the moral thinking scale in favor of the post-application. In light of these results, the study recommended using applications of semiotic theory in teaching English language and organizing its activities and evaluation method.

Keywords: semiotic theory - argumentative writing skills - moral thinking skills - gifted female students.

Chapter One
Introduction to the study problem

Introduction

Language is considered a means of communication, acquaintance, and expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions, as well as a tool for transmitting human heritage and various sciences and knowledge throughout the ages. English represents one of the global languages that has developed rapidly and significantly in the twenty-first century. Based on this, English language curricula in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were designed in light of the communicative approach, so that students can practice the language through the core skills, which include listening and reading as receptive skills, while speaking and writing are considered productive skills. Writing, in particular, comes at the end of the hierarchy of language skills because it requires mastering both receptive and productive skills. (Harmer, 2015).

Writing plays a prominent role in language learning, as Language production skill, It is judged on the basis of the quality of the written linguistic performance in terms of language and thought. It is a tool for critique and persuasion, goes as directed. Its boundaries do not stop at linguistic and performance skills; rather, it is a tool for changing the world and directing it towards better (Al-Sufi, 2017). Shahata (2010) pointed out that the focus on teaching writing has become an educational necessity, as it is the ideal way to improve the learner's intellectual and linguistic competence. It is also a means to satisfy the spirit and express oneself, serving as a medium of communication and notification that cannot be overlooked, especially with technological advancements and the increase in communication methods.

With the multitude of knowledge sources and constant development in the current era, it is no longer sufficient for the recipient to merely understand the knowledge. Instead, it has become necessary for them to determine their stance on it, argue, and provide evidence for the correctness of their claims. This can be embodied in argumentative writing, which is considered a means of communication that presents conflicting and differing opinions with evidence. In this writing, problems are solved through constructive dialogue aimed at establishing peace. It represents a form of contemporary diplomacy by convincing others of the validity of the presented opinions (Balegh Ismail, 2022).

As Halmari and Virtanen (2005) mentioned, the use of argumentative writing skills contributes to improving students' learning levels and advancing the subject matter to levels that go beyond cognitive boundaries to metacognitive skills, enriching the educational process.

Argumentative writing is considered a key element in developing students' academic competence and is often regarded as an indicator of learners' proficiency in English in international exams, such as the TOEFL and IELTS. These exams include writing an essay where students are required to express their opinion on a particular issue and support it with evidence and proofs (Al-Mousa, 2013). As Johnson (2011/2014) pointed out, this high level of skills and abilities involved in argumentative writing represents an urgent need for linguistically gifted individuals; because the linguistically gifted have the ability to use many higher cognitive processes, communication skills, and organize ideas. Additionally, they have a sensitivity to social and ethical issues, which contributes to solving problems that challenge their abilities. In addition to their linguistic excellence and superiority in verbal abilities (Baska & Little, 2023).

Newell, Bloome, et al. (2015) mention that argumentative writing is one of the most important types of functional writing due to its ability to develop analytical, inferential, and critical thinking skills, as it helps individuals make decisions, issue judgments, and analyze and critique differing ideas. Here, moral thinking emerges as a cognitive skill linked to decision-making and its processes; this is because decision-making is a complex cognitive, psychological, and behavioral process that involves facing multiple options, seeking to gather as much information as possible related to these options, and then choosing the appropriate alternative to arrive at the right decision (Al-Masri and Amer, 2016b).

Brumberger and Northcut (2016) pointed out that teaching writing skills in the twenty-first century has imposed the introduction of new media texts into the field of language education, including the analysis of images as media texts, and live, realistic activities that express the culture of society. Teaching writing through the representation of media is based on analyzing them and re-representing the knowledge obtained from them, and it provides the learner with the skill of monitoring the culture of society and preparing him with mechanisms for questioning it. The goal is to highlight the learner's self as a critic, writer, and author who has mastered his skill and was able to present a new and sophisticated linguistic production.

The transformations that are taking place today, and what they have revealed of new media phenomena that vary between visual, audio, and spoken, have made reading and studying these phenomena require a new vision. To reveal their social and cultural contents, here comes the role of semiotic theory to guide the critical analysis of these signs and symbols, especially about non-verbal expressions in still and moving media images, spread in the media; semiotics from this aspect seeks to deconstruct symbols and icons, to reveal the values inherent in media products (Benkrad, 2006).

The semiotic theory relies in its methodological procedures on semiotic analysis, which represents a critical study that works to interrogate the meanings of the text and deconstruct its codes and ambiguous signs, while trying to link the text to reality, and what can be benefited from and learned from it. Where semiotic analysis

is greatly affected by the personality of the person conducting the analysis and the surrounding circumstances; therefore, the semiotic analysis of a specific text may differ from one person to another, from one region to another, and from one time period to another; and it is thus a fertile field for creativity (Ben Senoussi, 2018).

Study Problem

Despite the importance of argumentative writing skills for high school students in general, and particularly for those who are linguistically gifted, they do not receive adequate attention in high schools and are not taught at a level that meets their needs and abilities. This has been revealed by several studies, such as Al-Ardan's study (2018) and Al-Shammari's study (2016). It is appropriate to choose teaching methods and strategies that rely on their effectiveness and activity, stimulate their thinking, challenge their abilities, and unleash their energies. This is what was emphasized in the recommendations of the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education (PAGE, 2022), which calls for the necessity of respecting the needs of the gifted, focusing on providing support in their areas of strength, engaging them in higher-order thinking, offering content that challenges their abilities, and integrating their interests and experiences into learning.

Given the relationship between dialectical writing and ethical thinking, in which decision-making and judgments are the most prominent skills, it was necessary to point out the importance of this type of thinking and the need to take care of it in secondary school, which witnesses growth, social openness, and the discovery of ethical standards. Many studies, such as: Al-Shawiqi and Al-Abbasi (2021) and Al-Walani and Al-Ali (2019), recommended the importance of paying attention to and developing ethical thinking skills.

Based on the above, the idea of this study came to aim at: designing an enrichment program based on semiotic theory, which has been widely used for educational purposes, especially in research studies on English language teaching and acquisition, which confirmed the effectiveness of semiotics in English language classes. There are many conferences that have addressed semiotics as an effective means of meaning-making, which is used in formal and informal educational settings, especially bilingual ones; most notably: The 15th World Congress of Semiotics held in Greece (2022), and the Semiotics in Communication, Knowledge and Learning Conference held in Romania (National University of Political Sciences and Public Administration, 2016). The nature of language depends on signs, and with these signs it can be taught and learned better and faster, and the use of signs and symbols as aids can enhance the language teaching process. The most prominent of these studies are: Cimenli (2015), Kuzu (2016), Ollerhead (2019), Qadha & Mahdi (2019), Abu Jabal (2020), Ali Hussein (2020), and Faridah & Rukminingsih (2021).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, and according to what has been revealed by the research in the digital library, information databases, and King Fahd

Library, many Arabic and local studies have addressed the skills of argumentative writing and ethical thinking among students in Arabic. However, in the field of English, such studies are very rare in Saudi society. The research has only uncovered two studies: the study by Majed Al-Otaibi (2020) and the study by Al-shammari (2016), both limited to the variable of argumentative writing only. In addition to the absence of previous studies aimed at building an enrichment program based on semiotic theory to develop argumentative writing skills in English and ethical thinking among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

Study questions

The current study seeks to answer the following main question: "What is the effectiveness of an enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school?" The main question branches into the following sub-questions:

1- What is the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in teaching English to gifted female students in the third year of secondary school?
2- What is the effectiveness of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing argumentative writing skills in English among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school?
3- What is the effectiveness of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing moral thinking skills among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school?

Study hypotheses

1- There is a statistically significant difference at the level of $(0.05 \geq \alpha)$ between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre-test and post-test of the argumentative writing test in English for linguistically gifted students in the third secondary grade, favoring the post-test.
2- There is a statistically significant difference at the level of $(0.05 \geq \alpha)$ between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre-test and post-test of the moral thinking scale among gifted students in the third secondary grade, in favor of the post-test.

Study objectives:

1. Building an enrichment program based on semiotic theory in teaching English to gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.
2. Identifying the effectiveness of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing argumentative writing skills in English among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

3. Identifying the effectiveness of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing moral thinking skills among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

Importance of the study

Theoretical Scientific Importance:
1. The study is one of the first to seek to reveal the effectiveness of an enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking skills among gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.
2. Opening new horizons for researchers to investigate the effectiveness of semiotic theory in improving all linguistic skills, and understanding its overall effectiveness in education.
3. Providing a theoretical framework on semiotic theory, argumentative writing skills, and ethical thinking skills.

Practical (applicative) significance:
1. Providing an enrichment program that curriculum planners and developers can benefit from to develop argumentative writing skills in English and ethical thinking.
2. Providing teachers and educational supervisors with a practical guide to be used in applying semiotic theory to develop argumentative writing skills in English and ethical thinking for gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.
3. Providing a scale for the ethical thinking skills necessary for gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.
4. Providing a test for argumentative writing skills in English necessary for gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

Study boundaries

- Subjective boundaries: The researcher defines her study subjectively with an enrichment program based on both:
- The semiotic theory, using cultural media semiotics as visual discourses.
- Skills in argumentative writing in English, including: (identifying the topic (the argumentative issue), constructing an opinion and defending it, debating in two directions, supporting and opposing, creating a concise conclusion related to and consistent with the main issue, writing style)
- Moral thinking skills, including: (moral sensitivity - moral reasoning - moral judgment).
- Time boundaries: The study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 1445 AH / 2023-2024 AD.

- Spatial boundaries: The study was conducted in public secondary schools for girls in the city of Al-Badaya in the Al-Qassim region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Human boundaries: Gifted female students in the third year of secondary school in Al-Badiah city, and it was limited to linguistically gifted students due to the nature of the applications of semiotic theory and the nature of the variable (argumentative writing) in English.

Study terms

Enrichment program: Enrichment programs are defined as a form of providing students with additional educational experiences that complement regular classroom experiences. These programs are often directed towards outstanding and gifted students, who are able to complete regular classroom activities more quickly and efficiently than the majority of their peers (Shahata and Al-Najjar, 2003).

Semiotic Theory: The current study defines the enrichment program based on semiotic theory procedurally as a set of organized educational experiences, which include: (objectives, content, teaching methods, educational tools, activities, and evaluation methods), based on a set of principles, foundations, and assumptions, which are based on the nature of semiotics, its dimensions, and its methodological mechanisms, in reading and analyzing signs to capture implicit and hidden meanings and connotations, through the semiotic analysis model prepared for this study.

Argumentative Writing: The study defines argumentative writing skills operationally as the ability of a gifted third-year secondary student to address one of the argumentative issues in writing in English, which involves several skills, the most important of which are: identifying the topic (the argumentative issue), constructing an opinion and defending it, arguing in both supporting and opposing directions, creating a concise conclusion related to and consistent with the main issue, and writing style. And it is measured in the current study by the score the student receives in the argumentative writing skills test prepared for this purpose.

Moral Thinking: The researcher defines it procedurally as patterns of thinking related to the judgment or decision issued by gifted female students in the third year of secondary school, after conducting a sound moral evaluation of the situation and comparing its positive aspects. It is measured by the score the student obtains on the moral thinking skills scale, which expresses the level of thinking used in resolving controversial moral situations, in light of the following skills: (moral sensitivity - moral reasoning - moral judgment).

Chapter Two
The theoretical framework and previous studies

The first axis: Semiotic theory
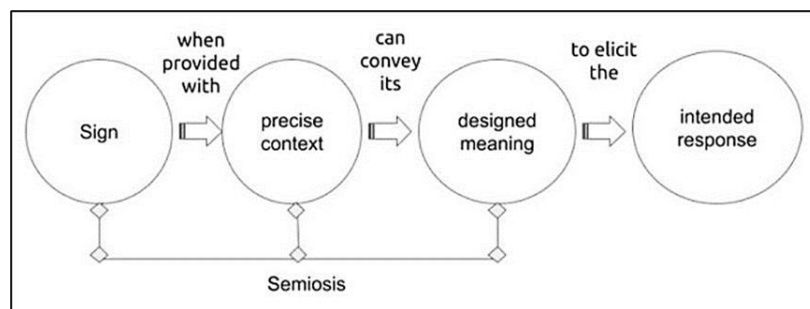**The concept of semiotic theory:**

Semiotics emerged as a science in the postmodern era; it is a reaction against modernist approaches, especially structuralism, which relied on the principle of independence and was characterized by closure, excluding everything outside the sign. This is what semiotics rejects, as it opens up to what lies beyond the sign (Al-Mahous, 2016).

The credit for highlighting this science goes to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who heralded the birth of a new science called semiology, whose task is "the study of the life of signs within social life." The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce also called on specialists to adopt a new logical perspective in dealing with human affairs, which he called (Semiotics), and which became the foundation for Semiotic Theory (Eco, 1992/2004; Benkrad, 2012; Copley and Jansz, 1993/2005).

Semiotics can generally be defined as viewing the sign as an indication that signifies more than one meaning, conceptually speaking. As a science, it is "the science that studies signs" (Kamel, 2003). In the same context, the Semiotic theory is known as an independent critical approach in which the critic is interested in the literary text to interrogate it and determine an appropriate critical reading of it, and this will only be achieved through continuous critical practices on the part of the critic (Hamad, 2017).

The Semiotic Theory model consists of three concepts: First: the sign, which consists of the form it takes in physical reality (the signifier) and how it is perceived or interpreted by its presenter (the signified); Second: the context, which refers to the aspects of interaction that provide a relevant and specific meaning; and Third: meaning, which is the relationship between the recipient of the sign and his personal experience with the world around him, which arises when the recipient understands the sign through communication and interaction with the reality surrounding him. Through the relationship between these three concepts, meaning arises (Riera, 2021) as in Figure (1):

Figure (1) Semiotic theory model

Principles of Semiotic Theory

The semiotic theory is based on a set of principles and foundations, most of which were considered in constructing the procedural model for semiotic analysis. These were mentioned by Hamdawi (2015) and Hussein and Ismail (2021). Here is a statement of them:

1. Immanent (essential) analysis, which means searching for the internal relationships that govern the formation of meaning and excluding everything external, such as the context of the text and the author. Accordingly, meaning should be viewed as an effect resulting from a network of relationships binding the elements together.
2. The arbitrariness of the sign, for the sign has an essential characteristic which is the arbitrary nature, this arbitrariness is what grants signs infinite meanings according to the culture and experience of the receiver.
3. The unlimited space of semiotics, especially in Peirce's semiotics, which views the sign as a tripartite entity, consisting of the image that corresponds to the signifier in Saussure, the interpretant that corresponds to the signified in Saussure, and the subject that has no equivalent in Saussure. This makes Peirce's semiotics more comprehensive and general than Saussure's.
4. One of the principles of semiotics is the meaning that makes the text a space for multiple meanings, as well as the distinction between two types of texts: the surface text and the deep text (surface and deep).
5. It is an approach to discourse analysis, where the focus is on how society represents signs through discourse, and clarifies the relationship between different verbal and non-verbal discourse patterns.
6. In semiotics, the term "text" includes all forms of social signification and representation, including writing, speech, technology, visual arts, advertising, clothing, and behavior.
7. The continuous discovery of the universality of meanings within texts examined through semiotic theory is considered to give a new life that contributes to the rebirth of the text and thus produces effective reading with clear results in the field of teaching and learning to read.
8. Semiotic theory relies on one of its methodological procedures on semiotic analysis, which represents critical textual readings that work to clarify the meanings of the text and decipher its ambiguous symbols and signals.

The importance of semiotic theory as a contemporary critical approach

"Discourses" lie at the heart of all social, commercial, and cultural communications. Discourse is that conceptual site where words, images, gestures, and objects become "signs" or "symbols" filled with rich conceptual meaning.

Literary studies have proven the merit and superiority of semiotic theory in interrogating texts, uncovering their hidden depths and meanings, and clarifying many of their ambiguous aspects. Semioticists describe the text as a system of signs and an

open world for various interpretations, making the process of interpretation infinite (Ibrahim, 2019; Muslim Hussein, 2015).

The importance of semiotic theory as one of the contemporary critical theories in studying and analyzing texts is evident in what Benkrad (2012) and Greimas et al. (2013) pointed out, and it can be clarified in the following points:

- The semiotic theory is considered the latest contemporary critical approach, and the science of signs encompasses all human and natural sciences.
- The semiotic theory contributes to revealing the aesthetics of the text, as the text from a semiotic perspective is a dynamic entity, and every reading of this text is a discovery. In the semiotic conception, the text is polysemous with the diversity of its readers and recipients; it is a semantic space and interpretive potential. Therefore, it is inseparable from its readers and cannot be realized without the reader's contribution, as each reading achieves a semantic potential that has not been discovered before.
- The semiotic theory aims for comprehensive analysis using procedural tools capable of achieving its intended purpose, away from impressionism, reflexivity, and simplified initial readings that do not keep pace with the currently popular critical studies.
- The methodological foundations of semiotics may help transform literary sciences from mere reflections into sciences in the precise sense of the word, through the abstract level that aims to uncover the deep structures inherent in the work and underlying the composition of the text.
- Semiotics has opened new horizons for researchers in various fields to study human production from new perspectives. It can even be said that semiotics has significantly contributed to renewing critical awareness by rethinking the approach to dealing with issues of meaning. Thus, it shifted critical reading from the direct description of textual facts to an analysis grounded in knowledge and aesthetics.

Semiotic trends and their schools

Through a thorough examination of the literature that addressed semiotic theory and semiotics, the most prominent semiotic trends followed in reading, analyzing, and critiquing discourses can be presented, according to what has been mentioned in the historical sequence of adopting this contemporary critical approach (Hamdawi, 2015; Chandler, 2022; Egbert & Roe, 2021):

Trend 1: Semiotics of de Saussure. Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist with a profound influence on semiotics and is considered the founder of modern linguistics, having coined the term linguistics. He was a contemporary of Peirce, but his work was not known in the United States until 1959 with the first English translation of his course in general linguistics, where the term "semiotics" replaced the term "semiology" (the study of the relationship between sign and meaning) in the 1970s to mean the science of signs.

Trend 2: Semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. Semiotics in Peirce's (1838-1914) theses occupied a broader space than the scope of the Saussurean theory, which

was founded on psychology, while Peirce's semiotics was based on his pragmatic philosophy, particularly logic. For Peirce, semiotics had applications in many disciplines. He considered it a theory whose effectiveness lies outside linguistics and gave it a broader and more general definition, as it is the science of signs that encompasses other human and natural sciences.

Trend 3: Roland Barthes' Semiotics: Barthes developed Saussure's ideas in 1967 to analyze media texts in relation to culture. He pointed out that our understanding of many media texts does not rely solely on what the texts depict, but rather on the relationship of the texts to the stories or myths that are repeatedly narrated in our culture. Many media texts convey or exploit common myths. His semiotic theory focuses on how signs and images represent different cultures and ideologies in various ways.

Fields of semiotics

Since linguistics studies everything verbal and linguistic, semiotics studies both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, extending to the visual (such as sign language, traffic signs, fashion studies, etc.). Semiotics is generally divided into two main sections based on its subject: linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs (Toussaint, 1994/2016; Chandler, 2007/2008):

- Section 1: Linguistic signs. Linguistic semiotics is called (linguistics) which developed after traditional studies of philology, and it is divided into speech signs and writing signs. The smallest phonetic units are called (phonemes) which are the units that make up speech, and they combine to form words. The smallest writing sign is called a letter, which are the linear signs defined by grammarians based on orthographic data such as phonetics (Phonology), syntax (Syntax), morphology (Morphology), and semantics. (Semantics).
- Section 2: Non-linguistic signs. It is the actual field of semiotics, and it is related to everything that has significance in human senses. It is also the inevitable means of media systems such as television, cinema, and modern social networks, which include visual images, paintings, comics, caricatures, film strips, and video clips.

In the present study, non-verbal semiotic signs of great importance were selected to enhance visual reading and motivate students to engage in a more efficient thinking process through semiotic analysis of media discourses rich in messages and content, which requires conducting accurate research at the surface and deep levels in these discourses in an impartial manner, and examining their psychological, social and cultural aspects.

Semiotic analysis

Semiotic analysis is considered one of the most important aspects of human daily existence, as it is used constantly without intention or planning. Laughter, crying, joy, clothing, the way guests are received, traffic signals, social rituals, and common

objects all require uncovering the rules that govern their way of producing meanings. The various expressive forms that humans use directly or indirectly in their dialogue with others, such as smell, touch, hearing, and taste, which originate from the senses, produce expressive forms that have an informative status for human communication (Benkrad, 2012). It is worth noting that the effectiveness of this communication is linked to the prior knowledge and information possessed by the recipient. (Jenjekwa, 2023).

Moreover, no text, discourse, or human activity can be interpreted scientifically and objectively except through the application of semiotic analysis, which deals with these given phenomena as signs, signals, symbols, icons, metaphors, and diagrams. Therefore, it is necessary to study these creative productions and human activities through analysis and interpretation, taking into account three semiotic methodological levels that can be summarized as: structure, meaning, and function (Hamdawi, 2015).

And the most important thing in semiotic analysis is not only reaching what the text carries in terms of sign or meaning but also the manner in which the text conveyed what it conveyed. This requires us to consider both the surface and deep levels of the text. The primary function of the sign is to convey a message or ideas through the message, and all of this requires a basis and communication tools. More importantly, it involves the reference, signs, sender, and receiver (Giroux, 1971/2016).

Models of semiotic analysis

The field of semiotics primarily consists of many different concepts and ideas that have been developed and applied in various contexts. Some experts have presented various models and methodologies for semiotic analysis in stages, in media, literature, and education. In light of reviewing these models and literature related to semiotic theory, its trends and principles, the researcher created a model to determine how the semiotic analysis system works procedurally. This model combines the beginning of the evocative information represented by semiotic signs through the visual discourses targeted for analysis, and the process of determining or changing the situation during the semiotic analysis process and then expressing the behavior.

The semiotic analysis model designed by the researcher was based on semiotic philosophy, levels of semiotic analysis, types of texts, thinking aloud and high level, deductive and inductive methods, brainstorming and multiple perspectives, active learning, and the nature of the English language course and its objectives. Which can be a framework for explaining how individual knowledge is constructed and expressed, and supports many future studies, Figure (2):

Figure (2) The semiotic analysis model in the current study
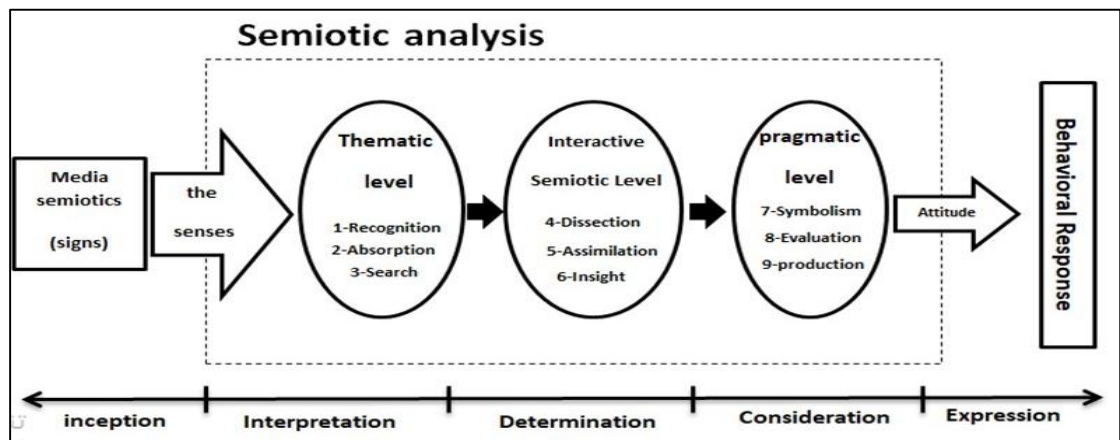
The model consists of several stages that can be summarized as follows:

• Inception stage: through semiotic inputs represented by various visual discourses.

• Interpretation stage: through the thematic level, the goal is to appreciate and understand   the subject, which includes:

   - Recognition (identifying the main ideas).

   - Comprehension (identifying the secondary ideas).

   - Research (gathering information).

• Identification stage: Through the interactive semiotic level, the goal is to access the message within the context, which includes:

   - Analysis (identification of the cognitive units included as signs).

   - Depth (formation of images and logical conclusions through identification of semiotic concepts).

   - Insight (formation of conclusions and hypotheses by students as intended meaning).

• Consideration stage: Through the pragmatic level, the goal is multidimensional evaluation and interpretation, which includes:

   - Coding (describing the phenomenon within contexts (links) and the reason behind its production).

- Evaluation (examining each element within and outside the context and re-integrating them to discover the different possible meanings, associations, and signals).

- Production (conclusion from the student's point of view).

• Expression stage: as output through behavioral responses (oral and written) in light of the decisions and judgments that have been made.

Requirements for semiotic analysis

The researcher or critic in the field of semiotics should possess good taste, beautiful critical performance, and originality through deducing and examining the hidden relationships that govern linguistic and non-linguistic structures; therefore, deconstruction, immanent analysis, composition, and structuralism are considered fundamental principles of this field. From here, semiotic reading requires the reader to be familiar with the symbolic heritage and its implications, and thus the following conditions must be met (Sulaiman, 2019):

1. It should not be limited to understanding the literary aspects of the utterance or the visual text only, but rather it should be engrossed in searching for hidden meanings.
2. He should be capable of reinterpreting the structural relationships in the text, understanding the subtleties of the sign systems as compositional elements designed to alert the recipient's perceptions.
3. He should not be tracking the author's or creator's intention, but rather focusing on the text's intention.
4. To be armed with historical, social, cultural, and doctrinal references.

The challenges facing the semiotic approach

Semiotics has not been free from flaws and criticisms, just like other critical approaches. Among those challenges is what Jad (2015) mentioned:

• At the level of methodology (theorization): The semiotic method currently faces the problem of multiple critical concepts, and thus "the diversity of methodological backgrounds and theoretical premises, especially among critics working in the field of semiotic methodology. These cognitive and conceptual disturbances inevitably obscure the correct and deep understanding from the recipient's mind, creating a gap between the reader and the semiotic theory. Consequently, approximately nineteen terms for semiotics alone have been counted, including semiotics and the science of semantic signs. However, the issue of terminology remains secondary in its critical importance, as regardless of the number of terms for a critical methodology, they remain original in encompassing a single concept.

- At the level of application: The absence of a pre-agreed mechanism for text criticism, and even if these theoretical concepts converge and unify, the application of these theories procedurally and subjecting texts to them remains surrounded by ambiguity and multiplicity.

Semiotics and Language Teaching:

Pedagogical semiotics is a recently developed trend in educational theory, which considers semiotics as a fundamental philosophy and explores the philosophical properties of semiotics in educational contexts (Stables & Semetsky, 2014). In terms of language, it is a combination of signs and symbols used for communication and used unconsciously by students and teachers. Thus, semiotics can be said to be a fundamental issue to be considered in pedagogy.

Basoz and Can (2016) pointed out that semiotics theory has been widely used for educational purposes, especially in research studies on English language teaching and acquisition, which confirmed the effectiveness of semiotics in English language classrooms. The nature of language is based on signs, and through signs it can be taught and learned better and faster, and the use of signs and symbols as aids can enhance the language teaching process.

The use of nonverbal communication tools alongside verbal communication is essential in teaching and understanding foreign languages, as both teachers and learners have relied on nonverbal communication to interpret and communicate their desires and feelings correctly and effectively in the target language (Altay & Karaazmak, 2018). This interpretation, as one of the foundations of semiotics and its analytical procedures, means understanding or interpretation that is concerned with what goes beyond the interpretation of texts, and dismantling masks in the light

of intentionality and understanding the self, the other and the world. Hence, the phenomenon of "understanding" extends beyond the interpretation of texts (Nasif, 2000).

Semiotics play a very vital role in the field of language learning and teaching. Semiotics provides a teaching/learning process using body language, images, visuals, film strips, videos, photography, etc. With the help of semiotics, language learning becomes more productive and interesting. It also enhances students' performance in all four skills and aspects of language learning (Cimenli, 2015; Hişmanoğlu, 2006; Mahdi & Gubeily, 2018; Ozmutlu, 2009; Ozsahin, 2009). Erton (2006) strongly advocated using semiotics in the language teaching/learning process. According to Zamani (2016) regarding the role of semiotics in language teaching, it helps learners to develop their cognitive abilities at all levels of perception. It is a multimodal stimulus and a dynamic social activity that requires observation and curiosity guided by the desire to discover relationships and implications (Louhema et al., 2020; Zlatev, 2019).

Most language learning methods contain semiotic elements, which are presented through many activities, the most important of which are the direct and communicative methods (Danesi, 2012). The application of the communicative method with semiotics depends on several foundations, the most important of which is that the activities include real communication to enhance learning. The activities should not be imaginary but should be based on realistic motives, and students should use language as a means to express their values and interests. In addition, there is a variety of activities such as interactive activities; conversation and discussion sessions, bilateral and group dialogues, and role-playing (Altay & Karaazmak, 2018).

Semiotics can also be used with the direct method (direct teaching), in which lessons consist of carefully graded exercises consisting of questions and answers. The basic idea behind the direct method is that language learning should be similar to learning the first language with an emphasis on oral interaction wherever possible, and there is no translation between the first and second (target) languages. The teacher's guidance and instructions play an important role in the direct method (Zamani, 2016).

It is noted that all of the previous methods invest in dialogue and authentic discussions, which allow learners to present different ideas, consider multiple ideas and different points of view, ask questions without predetermining answers, and consider the contributions of others as important to construct meaning, and explore different possible answers (Hadjioannou & Townsend, 2015).

In light of the above, these methods were effectively employed within the enrichment program through activities and tasks that included engaging students in a group discussion based on exploratory and dialogical talk, and sharing meaning-making in order to find practical solutions to controversial issues, carried by visual discourses as targeted connotations for analysis, interpretation and explanation, which differ from one student to another through a set of infinite connotations. In addition, dialogue maps were used as mind maps to organize ideas, which give the learner a visual way to detail and clarify his ideas; to know whether he has reached the best result. They are diagrams that illustrate logical thinking and visual evidence for and against the presented issue. A good map clarifies and organizes thinking by showing logical relationships between ideas that are expressed simply and accurately (Conklin, 2009). Therefore, it is a good way to illustrate the importance of having multiple reasons and evidence behind any argument presented by the learner. Drawing a map of each part of the argument and identifying it can help organize the different components of the argument and provide a blueprint for how to think about problems in speaking and writing (Teaching Channel, 2022).

The second axis: argumentative writing (Argumentative Writing)

Writing and Argument:

Writing is a central axis in learning and teaching a language; through writing, the communication process between the writer and the reader is completed. Cognitive processes are linked to the production processes inherent in the human self, including emotions and feelings, and translating them into tangible expression. Writing is also an important element in human life in general, and a key factor in cultural growth and communication between individuals; it conveys ideas and feelings, and proficiency in writing gives the learner strength in the other language skills. This is confirmed by what Shahata (2010) pointed out, that writing is a good indicator of the linguistic level of those who practice it, and that errors in writing are a negative indicator of the student's academic, cultural, and social level.

A written argument or discussion is a rhetorical strategy in which you persuade your reader by presenting strong, supported information that challenges other arguments and claims. In an argument, you are trying to persuade your readers to believe what you believe to be true and act accordingly. Argumentation, discussion, and persuasion depend on the success of how to write effectively (Pillay, 2012).

The difference between Argument and persuasion

Kurudayiglu and Yilmaz (2014) highlight the difference between argument and persuasion by identifying their main purpose; the main purpose of persuasive writing texts is to persuade rather than to use argument, i.e. to persuade without committing to the element of argument or counterclaim. However, this element can be used if there is a need to persuade the addressee, so persuasive writing requires different techniques and strategies than argumentative texts. It equips students with persuasive abilities, while argumentative writing improves their argumentative abilities (Hyler & Hicks, 2014).

Based on the above, the researcher believes that argumentation is a process, while persuasion is a result. Argumentation is a type of persuasive activity, in the form of an argument-based discourse that combines rational claims that are credible and reliable, and emotional claims to persuade people to accept the claim. The goal of argumentation is to establish the argument to ultimately reach the result of the argumentation process, which is persuasion, which may be the specific motive and goal of the writer. One or more supporting elements and one or more persuasive elements must be used to achieve this goal. The supporting element is the evidence that aims to prove and support the result. In contrast, the persuasive element is a psychological technique the arguer uses to increase the recipient's chances of accepting the result.

The concept of argumentative writing

Several literary works have addressed the concept of argumentative writing, and opinions on it have varied by focusing on the analysis and treatment of argumentative issues. One definition state that it is "the individual's ability to address an argumentative issue in writing, in light of adopting a specific idea, by presenting arguments and evidence that support it, linking these arguments to the idea, resulting in what is called justifications, then presenting the main idea and sub-ideas, presenting the opposing view, and then refuting the opposing views" (Baligh Ismail, 2022).

As Newell, Bloome, et al. (2015) mentioned, argumentative writing is a social form in which the writer presents the position they will defend by offering a series of interconnected claims, statements, and reasons related to it, with a logical arrangement of the assumptions or suggestions that build the position.

Methods of argumentation in argumentative writing

Among the argumentative writing techniques mentioned by Al-Muzawda (2010) and Wall (2016):

- Argument based on generalization, which is a common method of argument, assumes that what applies to a selected sample applies to a larger group of people, and thus conclusions can be drawn.
- The argument based on analogy and similarity, where the similarities are close and relevant.
- Argument based on indicators pointing to a broader principle or outcome, such as some people's belief that student test results are indicators of their intelligence.
- The argument based on causality, where the occurrence of something or a certain incident is a result of the cause or its influence. This type of argument is considered one of the most complex and difficult forms, as it often involves confusion between cause and effect.
- The authority-based argument, in which a person or text serves as an official source, such as the political, intellectual, or economic interests held by the authority figure.
- Argument based on principle, in which one of the correct principles is identified, and there is a case or problem that applies to this principle.

The method of principled argument has been adopted in the current study by presenting several media discourses with semiotic content, which invoke debate according to principles that define the student's stance towards them and showcase the reasons and facts that support and justify this direction and refute its opposite.

The importance of argumentative writing:

The importance of argumentative writing lies in seeing the problem from different angles, and developing higher-order thinking skills while writing (Al-Sufi, 2017). It also prepares the learner to be able to develop his opinions, stimulate his imagination, develop his ideas, and increase his abilities in expression, argument, analysis, criticism, disagreement, and providing evidence for the opinion from multiple points of view (Syamsuri et al., 2016). It also works to prepare a generation capable of practicing communication skills and increasing its efficiency in education; due to its impact on organizing ideas and supporting opinions (Mora-Gonzalez et al., 2018).

Characteristics of argumentative writing

Gabi (2022) identified several characteristics of argumentative writing, namely that it is a process that includes within it many higher intellectual mental processes, in addition to being a somewhat complex process; as it seeks to write, persuade and respond at the same time. Among its characteristics is that it seeks to present multiple points of view, and prove this through a set of facts and statistics, and it also relies on logical thinking processes such as analysis, deduction and induction.

Argumentative writing skills

Özdemir (2018) classified argumentative writing skills in English into the following skills:

- Presenting data, which includes: facts, knowledge, and statistics that both parties accept without discussion.
- Presenting the claim, which represents the main idea of the topic.
- Presenting the evidence that supports the claim.
- Presenting counterclaims.
- Presenting evidence and explanations that support (what?).
  And - Refuting and disproving counterclaims.
- Writing a conclusion that relates to the claim and summarizes the ideas.

Structure of the argumentative essay

Both Tawfik (2019), Shahata (2012), Coşkun& Tiryaki (2013), and Kurudayiglu and Yilmaz (2014) have identified the elements of the argumentative text (the organizational structure of the argumentative text) as follows:

1- The issue: It refers to the subject around which the text revolves, and it is usually debatable.
2- The claim: It refers to presenting the author's viewpoint on the issue.
3- Supporting data and evidence: These are collected by referring to various sources related to the case that support and endorse the main claim, convincing the reader.

4- Justifications: These are what are presented to link the claim with the data in a way that demonstrates the validity of the claim.

5- Counterclaims and opinions: These are the opinions and claims that contradict the writer's viewpoint.

6- Refuting opposing views: This means disproving the evidence on which the opposing views are based.

7- The final conclusion: This is the summary reached by the writer.

Challenges of teaching argumentative writing

The difficulty of teaching argumentative writing lies in enabling the student to understand the argument and support it with evidence and proof for persuasion. The argument is described as the structure of discourse for persuasion and the logical form as a clear outline for the debate. It requires culture and skill in crafting linguistic patterns that serve to build meaning for the reader (Shahata, 2012). Due to the difficulty of understanding arguments, McInerney and Liem (2008) see the necessity of providing them to students in education beforehand teachers; to make them more familiar with this type of writing, and to encourage them to justify their claims through a sequence of thought-provoking questions to organize writing, the student's stance on the claim and its reasons, their stance on issues, and the development of their ideas, and to encourage them to refute any evidence by clarifying the errors in their ideas.

Wekesa (2012) adds that an argument can be formed out of emotional motivation by drawing inspiration from visual discourse analysis and the writer's interaction with it during rewriting. Newell, Bloome, et al. (2015) also indicate that it is built through negotiation among learners by interacting between reading and writing activities, according to what the writer intends to express through ideas.

The relationship between semiotics and argumentative writing:

Argumentative writing is based on thinking skills, and the ideal field for learning it is the media and visual discourses as an important material in the age of technical communication. Discourses also stimulate the imagination to analyze the critical message, and then debate about it. Before starting the writing process, it helps the learner to sense the problem and his need for linguistic expression, and gives him an incentive to focus on analyzing the information and supporting it with arguments and evidence, linking it to previous experience, and presenting it in a logical sequence. During argumentative writing, it works as a visual stimulus to develop ideas and transform them into linguistic texts that are consistent with visual reality. It also works to develop the debate throughout the writing and thinking process to find solutions to the issue at hand (Klein & Whitehead, 2018; Mora et al., 2018; Syamsuri et al., 2016).

The third axis: Ethical thinking (Moral Thinking)

The concept of moral thinking

Morals are the cornerstone of any society, and they are the basis for the progress or backwardness of societies. Commitment to the rules of general conduct, principles and values leads to the progress, development and stability of society. Morals are the organizing forces of these rules, principles and values, which are reflected in the individual's personality and make him grow in a healthy way physically, mentally and psychologically, and thus affect his relationships with those around him. Given the utmost importance of morals, all heavenly religions have called for the necessity of adhering to them and made them the focus of their attention. As long as religion is the way of life, morals must be the distinguishing feature of society.

Badr (2019) defined moral thinking as "the mental or intellectual process that precedes the decision made by an individual when faced with a problem related to right and wrong, which is accompanied by a set of feelings and sensations of comfort or rejection of this decision."

The importance of moral thinking

1. Enabling the learner to understand their rights and responsibilities to be an active member of society.
2. Guiding learners on ways to obey the law and adapt to societal requirements.
3. Encouraging students to respect others, listen to them, and respond to them effectively.
4. Developing the spirit of democratic dialogue and critical thinking skills among learners.
5. Developing moral judgment about what is right and wrong, and establishing the foundations for choice, acceptance, and decision-making.
6. Training students to love work, serve the community, and develop themselves.
7. A good thinking student is characterized by his ability to understand the situation he faces, enjoy dealing with it, and always strive to deal with it rationally. (Al-Ajami ,2017 and Faleh ,2016).

General principles of Moral thinking

Razouki and Latif (2018) mentioned that the general principles of ethical thinking are as follows:

1. Moral development begins with moral situations and crises.
2. The initial stages of moral reasoning consist of a set of acquired partial habits and behaviors. Intellectual and experiential factors then begin to shape and

influence an individual's morality. Therefore, behavior must precede thinking, reasoning, and mental concepts.

3. Moral values refer to the judgment of right or wrong, while moral reasoning relates to the method and approach by which an individual arrives at this judgment.

Theories of moral thinking

Here is a presentation of the most important theoretical foundations that addressed moral development from the cognitive evolutionary perspective, as mentioned by Razouki and Latif (2018), and Narvaez and Lapsley(2005):

1- Jean Piaget's Theory of Moral Thinking (Jean Piaget, 1932): Jean Piaget's studies are among the fundamental scientific contributions that focused on the topic of moral thinking development.

2- Kohlberg's Theory: Kohlberg's theory was an extension of Piaget's theory on moral development. However, Kohlberg developed it by identifying the six stages of moral development and proposed a new method for measuring the ability to make moral judgments. Kohlberg emphasized the necessity of studying the cognitive processes that an individual employs in making decisions according to the ethical principles they believe in, that is, understanding the way an individual reasons to find solutions to the ethical issues they face.

3- James Rest's Theory: Rest is considered one of the most famous psychologists who focused on studying ethics and the way individuals think when faced with crises, harassment, and ethical problems. Rest was influenced by Kohlberg's theory of moral development, but he objected to the complexity of Kohlberg's method of measuring moral thinking. He and his colleagues made significant efforts to develop a new method for measuring it objectively and with less effort and time consumption, represented in the Defining Issues Test (D.I.T.).

Moral thinking skills:

Reviewing previous research and studies and looking at some books that focused on moral thinking and its skills (Asmaa Muhammad, 2018; Dahl & Killen, 2018; Morrow, 2018). It became clear to the researcher that moral thinking does not include specific agreed-upon skills for measuring moral thinking. Still, some skills can be derived and relied upon according to the desired goal, which is compatible with the nature of the content and the level of mental and moral development of the target group. The current study reached some moral thinking skills that it relied on in building the list of skills, which are (Moral Sensitivity, Moral Inference, and Moral Judgment).

The relationship between moral thinking and dialectical writing

The interest in argumentative writing has increased due to educators' conviction of its importance. In light of the demands of the modern era for supporting the expression of opinions and the ability to persuade, the necessity of focusing on this type of writing in various fields such as professional, ethical, social, and political areas becomes evident. It is a tool that every individual in society needs to master (Soula, 2013).

Dialectical writing contributes to the development of thinking skills that lead to the enhancement of decision-making ability, judgment issuance, and idea analysis (Tawfik, 2019). All of these abilities are closely related to ethical thinking, which represents a mental process through which different options are confronted and the appropriate one is chosen in light of studying the cognitive background and information related to those options. (Cottone et al., 2021).

The skills of argumentative writing and ethical thinking converge in several aspects, as both begin with recognizing and defining the subject (the issue under discussion), gathering relevant facts and information, analyzing the data, and reaching a decision and judgment, supported by reasons, evidence, and logical proofs. In addition, among the skills of argumentative writing, particularly in organizing the writing, is the consideration of the ethical and value-based aspects in presenting the claim, and refuting opposing claims (Tawfik, 2019).

Chapter Three
Study methodology and procedures

The researcher addressed the methodological procedures in the study in this chapter, which include the study's methodology, its community, its sample, the tools used, the procedures, and the methods of statistical data analysis and processing.

Study methodology

Due to the nature of the study's objectives and questions, both methodologies were used:
• The descriptive analytical method: The descriptive analytical method was used through:

1- Reviewing the previous literature that addressed Semiotic Theory to identify the foundations and components of the enrichment program based on Semiotic Theory for linguistically gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.
2- Reviewing the literature of previous studies that addressed Argumentative Writing skills and relying on them to construct a test for Argumentative Writing skills in English.
3- Reviewing the literature of previous studies that addressed Moral Thinking skills and relying on them to construct a scale for Moral Thinking skills.

- The quasi-experimental design: The quasi-experimental design based on a single group with pre-test and post-test measurements (One group Pre-Test, Post-Test Design) was used, as this design is suitable for the nature and objectives of the current study. Moreover, the content of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory is entirely new, and there are no existing units in the curriculum that can be compared with it, thus achieving pre-test equivalence between the two groups.

Study population

The study population consists of all the gifted female students in the third year of secondary school in the city of Al-Badiah in the Al-Qassim region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, numbering (46) gifted students, during the second semester of the 1445 AH academic year, as shown in Table (3-2) (Center for Gifted Students in Al-Badiah, 1445 AH).

Study Sample

The study sample was intentionally selected from the study population after identifying and determining the linguistically gifted female students in the third secondary grade at the Education Office in the city of Al-Badaya in the Al-Qassim region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Two students were unable to participate, one from the fourth secondary school and the other from the second secondary school, due to unsuitable temporal and spatial conditions for the application. The sample consisted of 21 linguistically gifted female students, all from the third secondary school in Al-Badaya, according to several study criteria.

Study variables

In light of the objectives of this study and the nature of the methodology used, the study variables were as follows:

- Independent Variable: The independent variable in this study is (an enrichment program based on semiotic theory).
- The dependent variable: The dependent variables in this study are argumentative writing and moral thinking among linguistically gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

Study tools and materials

To achieve the study's objective of determining the effectiveness of the enrichment program based on semiotic theory in developing argumentative writing skills in English and moral thinking skills among linguistically gifted female students in the third year of secondary school, the following was used:

1- The enrichment program based on semiotic theory

2- Test of argumentative writing skills in English prepared by the researcher.
3- Scale of Moral Thinking Skills in English prepared by the researcher.

Statistical processing methods

Due to the small size of the study sample of gifted female students in the third year of secondary school (n <30), non-parametric statistics were used in data processing; as Al-Dardir (2006) believes that non-parametric statistical tests are suitable for small samples and their results can be relied upon to a large extent (p. 37). Accordingly, the following statistical methods were used:

- Spearman correlation coefficient
- Alpha Cronbach's reliability coefficient
- Discrimination index
- Difficulty and ease coefficients
- The non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test:
- Equation (r) for calculating the effect size for the Wilcoxon test
- Modified Blake's Gain Ratio

Summary of the results

Results

The study reached the following results:

- The existence of a statistically significant difference at the level of $(0.05 \geq \alpha)$, between the average scores of the experimental group students in the pre- and post-application of the argumentative writing test in English, among linguistically gifted third-year secondary school students, in favor of the post-application.
- The study showed that the adjusted gain ratio for the sub-skills of the argumentative writing test in English: (topic identification, opinion construction and defense, two-way argumentation for and against, creating a concise conclusion related to and coherent with the main issue, writing style), and the test as a whole, reached (1.25-1.22-1.24-1.25-1.25-1.24), all of which are values greater than the ratio set by Black, which is (1.2). This indicates that teaching using an enrichment program based on semiotic theory is highly effective in developing argumentative writing skills in English among linguistically gifted third-year secondary school female students.
- The presence of a statistically significant difference at the level of $(0.05 \geq \alpha)$ between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre- and post-application of the moral thinking scale, among linguistically gifted third-year secondary school students, in favor of the post-application.
- The study found that the adjusted gain ratio for the sub-test skills: (moral sensitivity, moral reasoning, moral judgment), and the test as a whole, reached (1.24- 1.23 – 1.25 – 1.24), all of which are values greater than the ratio set by Black, which is (1.2). This indicates that teaching using an enrichment program based on semiotic theory is highly effective in developing moral thinking skills among linguistically gifted female students in the third year of secondary school.

Study suggestions:

In light of the results and recommendations of the current study; The researcher suggests conducting the following studies and research:

• Employing semiotic theory and its procedural applications in school curricula.

• Training English language teachers to employ semiotic theory to analyze visual discourse in teaching writing of all types and in teaching various language skills.

• Including argumentative writing with a two-way direction, as a writing style with its distinctive features in the secondary stage; due to its importance in preparing students to express opinions and defend them in an organized, logical, and convincing manner to the reader.
• Using the proposed program in the educational process; due to its effectiveness in developing argumentative writing skills in English and ethical thinking among third-year secondary school female students.

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