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Investigating the Textual Competence of Iraqi EFL University Students' Abilities in Essay Writing

A B S T R A C T

Textual competence is important for an efficient writer because it concerned with coherence and rhetorical organization. The present research aims to identify, Iraqi University students' textual competence in writing an essay at Tikrit university ; Iraqi University students' knowledge about cohesion and rhetorical organization in writing an essay at Tikrit university and finally the difficulty in using textual competence among Iraq university students according to gender variable at Tikrit university.

The sample consists of 160 Iraqi university students at forth stage in the department of English, College of Education for humanities at Tikrit University during the academic year 2023-2024. An achievement test is used to gather the data about students' textual competence in writing an essay. Results show that university students have high level textual competence than the theoretical mean score , also university students have a higher level in cohesion than the rhetorical organization finally, male students is better than female in their abilities in writing an essay.

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استقصاء الكفاءة النصية لقدرة طلبه الجامعة دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية في العراق في كتابة
المقال

أ.م.د دنيا طاهر حميد/ جامعه تكريت / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

الخلاصة:

تعتبر الكفاءة النصية مهمة للكاتب الكفو لأنها تهتم بالتماسك والتنظيم البلاغي. يهدف البحث الحالي إلى التعرف على الكفاءة النصية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين في كتابة المقال في جامعة تكريت. معرفة طلبة الجامعة العراقيين بالتماسك والتنظيم البلاغي في كتابة المقال في جامعة تكريت وأخيرا صعوبة استخدام الكفاءة النصية لدى طلبة جامعات العراق وفق متغير الجنس في جامعة تكريت

تتكون العينة من 160 طالباً جامعياً عراقياً في المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الانجليزية كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية في جامعة تكريت خلال العام الدراسي 2023-2024. يستخدم الاختبار التحصيلي لجمع البيانات حول كفاءة الطلاب النصية في كتابة المقال. أظهرت النتائج أن طلبة الجامعة لديهم مستوى كفاءة نصية أعلى من المتوسط النظري، كما أن مستوى طلبة الجامعة في التماسك أعلى من التنظيم البلاغي، وأخيراً تفوق الطلبة الذكور على الإناث في قدراتهم على كتابة المقال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استقصاء ، الكفاءة النصية، كتابة المقال.

Section One: Introduction

1.1 The Problem of the Research

Textual competence is sub classification from organizational competence. It includes the knowledge of conventions which implies joining and arranging the sentences in a paragraph in a correct way with the accurate use of cohesion and rhetorical organization (Halliday,1976).

Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives its meaning. To achieve cohesion students must be to select appropriate nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs which organize their ideas and follow a logical sequences. There are four types of sentences; statements, questions, commands and exclamations. Grammatical cohesion devices includes ; reference, conjunction, ellipsis and substitution. (Palmer,1977,p.4).

Rhetorical Organization is the strategic use of symbols by organization to influence the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of audiences important to the organization. There are five elements of rhetorical organization; the text, the author, the audience, the purpose(s) and the setting. Organization structure includes; line organization , functional organization. Organization in writing includes; chronological order, spatial order, order of importance, line and staff organization.

Rhetorical Organization theory, is a theory of a text organization which provides a framework for an analysis of text(ibid).

Textual competence involved in both written and conversational language use and it is important for an efficient writer because it concerned with coherence and rhetorical organization which is the two essential characteristics. It shows students' abilities in writing. Students are able to write effectively if they are proficient in textual abilities. (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975)

The cohesion is related directly to the meaning and the unity of the text quality and means that the sentences should follow a logical harmony for the message to be clear and understandable. Cohesion on the other hand relates to the organization of the text, the sequence of ideas in the text, and must observe the morphological and syntactic standards (Schwarz,N; Stiegelbauer,L and Husar,2016).

An essay is a group of paragraphs written about single topic and a central main idea. It must have at least three paragraphs, but a five paragraphs essay is common length for academic writing (Zemach,2005,p.56).

The word essay is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as a "literary composition (usually prose and short) on any subject". It is "a written composition giving expression to one's own personal ideas or opinions on some topics". The term usually covers any written composition , whether it expresses personal opinions, or gives information on any given subject , or details of narrative or description.

The basic textual problem of are due to the understanding of the source text, compared to intra-textual characteristics and extra-textual references, including the coherence and cohesion textual elements.

1.2Aims of the Research

This research aims to identify:

1-Iraqi EFL University students' textual competence in writing an essay at Tikrit university .

2-Iraqi EFL University students' knowledge about cohesion and rhetorical organization in writing an essay at Tikrit university.

3-The difficulty in using textual competence among Iraq EFL university students according to gender variable at Tikrit university.

1.3 Research Questions

This research tries to answer the following questions:

1-Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL University students in Textual Competence in writing an essay at Tikrit University?

2-Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' knowledge about cohesion and rhetorical organization in writing an essay at Tikrit university?

3- Are there statistically significant differences of textual competence among Iraqi EFL university students in writing an essay according to gender variable at Tikrit university?

Limitation 1.4 Research

The limitations are :

1-Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students at the departments of English College of Education for Humanities in Tikrit University.

2-During the first course of the academic year 2023-2024.

3-The Model of this research is Bachman (1990)model of language competence /organizational competence /textual competence.

1.5 Value of the Research

1-It gives the useful information about textual competence of foreign language learners.

2-Introducing valuable results to those interested in designing curriculum to provide a rich method for teaching textual abilities.

3-Assessing EFL students in the development and enhancement of their mental capacities, as well as the production of better writing in the target language on a variety of topics.

1.6 Plan of the Research

The research follows five steps in order to achieve the aims:

1-Construct a diagnostic test that is suitable to the aims and obtain its validity and reliability.

2-A number of 160 students from fourth year, college of education for humanities at Tikrit university has chosen as a sample.

3-The diagnostic test is applied to the sample.

4-The researcher obtained the results after analyzing them statistically by statistical means.

5-The final step is to explain the results and give conclusion, recommendation and suggestions.

Section Two: Theoretical Background

2.1 Language Competence

The first who used the word competence or linguistic competence is Chomsky (1965,p.102). The word competence refers to the knowledge of language where as performance is different from competence that means the actual use of language. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussur (1817-1913) notices that the dualism between knowledge and the use of language was not new. Also he distinguished *lingue*; which means the speakers' linguistic

competence a member of speech community and parol; which means the actual data or phenomena of linguistics (Robins,1997,p.225).

According to Bachman (190,p.87), language competence is divided into two categories organizational and pragmatic according to Bachman division. Organizational includes the formal structure of the language , ex., one's ability for producing grammatical correct sentences, understanding the content of the subject, and organizing thoughts and sentences into texts.

All these organizational abilities are classified as productive competences. Organizational abilities are also subdivision into two categories; grammatical and textual competence. The contents of grammatical are lexical, morphological, syntactic, phonological and graph logical competence , where as the content of textual competence includes the knowledge of conventions which join sentences, arranging them to make a text, then the correct use of cohesion and rhetorical organization(Bachman (190,p.87), cited in Abdulhameed &A-Azzawi (2022).

2.1.1 Organizational Competence

Organizational abilities consists of two types grammatical and textual. Those abilities involved in controlling the formal structure of language to produce and to recognize grammatically correct sentences , comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts. (Bachman,1990,p.88).

A-Grammatical Competence

Widdowson (1978,p.254) describes grammatical competence are those competencies involved in language usage. It consists of vocabulary knowledge , morphology, syntax, and phonology /graphology. These govern the choice of words to express specific significations, their forms, their arrangement in a sentence as a written symbols or sound.

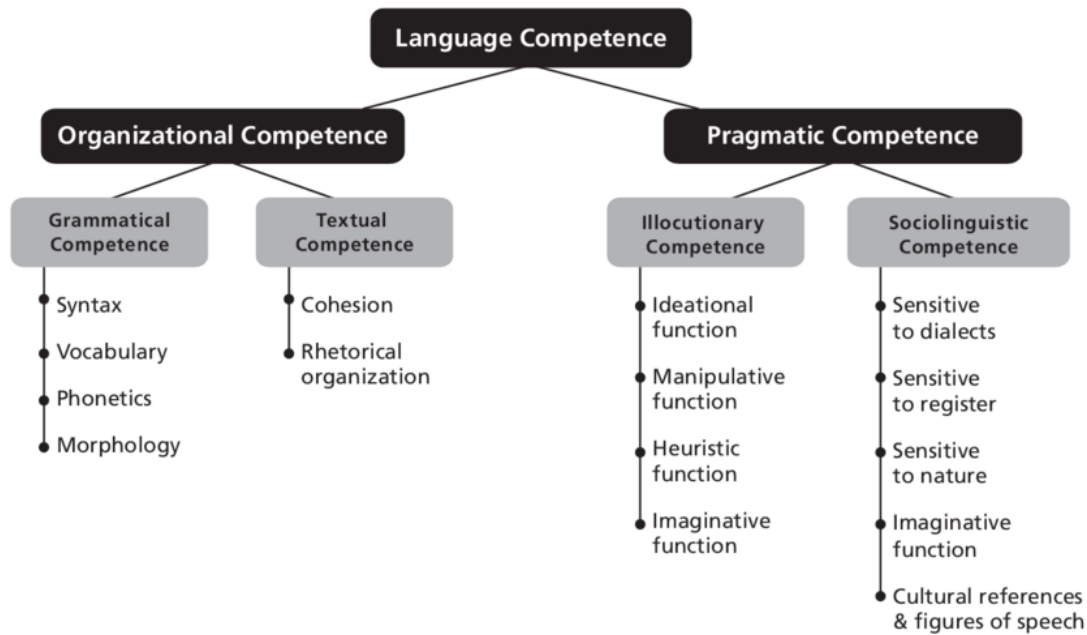
B-Textual Competence

According to the rules of cohesion and rhetorical organization , the knowledge of convention to join the utterances together in order to form a text is textual competence. It is basically a unit of language spoken or written which consists of two or more sentences. Cohesion means the semantic relationship such as such as reference, sub-situation, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976), as well as in any discourse it helps to arrange the old and new information.

Van Dijk (19977,p.4) rhetorical organization means the understanding the structure of a text. The text is related to its effect on language user. McCrimman (1984,p.11) convention include methods of development as narration, description, comparison, classification and process, analysis. In expository writing , some of these organizational convention are taught. This helps students to show how to order information in any paragraph; the topic the first then the support sentence , transition sentence and finally conclusion. Some convention may be complex to teach or they are not fully understood , so it might be taught formally.

Moreover, text convention is also involved in conversational language use as in written and it deals with components of textual competence (Richards and Schmidt,1983,p.117-154). The conventions of conversation includes "attention getting, topic nomination, topic development and conversation maintenance appear to be ways in which interlocutors organize and perform the turns in conversational discourse, and may be analogous to rhetorical patterns that have been observed in written discourse" . In a written discourse , the conversational interchange gives rise to o necessitates devices for organizing discourse . (Hatch,1978,p.401-35).

Bachman's Model of Language Competence (Bachman, 1990, p.87)



2.1.2 Lexical Cohesion and Grammatical Cohesion

The relationship between language and the context is discourse analysis. The different disciplines that includes linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. These disciplines grew out of work in the 1960s and early 1970s. Discourse analysis study language in use such as all kinds of written texts, and spoken data from conversation to highly institutionalized forms of talk (McCharty,1991).

Cohesion is one example of discourse analysis Halliday and Hasan (1976) say that Cohesion is divided into two aspects, grammatical and lexical cohesion. Cohesion is useful in writing and speaking because grammar is relates to speaking and writing and cohesion is one part of it (Syafryadin, et. al 2013)

The important division of grammatical cohesion are: reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunction. And, lexical cohesion are: repetition, collocation, meronymy , hyponymy, antonymy and synonymy. The sentence is good and accurate if it consists of all those devices to make the sentence meaningful one.

According to Salkie (2001), Cohesion is an important textual aspect to achieve qualified writing. Cited in Kirana et.al (2020).

2.2Definitions of An essay

Any written piece of work that describes or analyzes certain topic or idea is an essay. The order of any essay is introductory paragraph then body paragraphs (may be three or more) and finally a conclusion.([essay-types-https://www.Scribdr.com](https://www.Scribdr.com))

The French word *essayer* is the first word then it is derived from it to be an essay. This word *essayer* means to attempt or try. It is defined as a short form of literary composition based on a subject matter to give a personal opinion of the author. One of the well known essayist defines an essay Aldous Huxley says that it is a literary device to say everything about anything. While the Oxford Dictionary defines it as short piece of writing on a a particular subject. In other words the simplest definition is an essay as a scholarly work in writing that provide the personal arguments of an author.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/442249887/Definition-of-Essay>

2.2.1Types of Essays

There are four types of essays explained as follows:

1-Descriptive Essays

This type of an essay aims to describe and provide for the reader a vivid picture of a person, his/her location , the event and circumstances . These elements made the readers imagine every details. It also gives a description about a particular topic or describe a characteristic of a person or something in detail. It allows artistic freedom, and creates images in the minds of readers. (Donovan,2009,p.36).

From its name descriptive, it allow the reader to imagine these words as a picture as an example when the writer describe a man provide a text full of information about this character . He/she present a deeper description through this description. Here the writer not tell but show through the use of colorful words and sensory details. The most effective and important types of descriptive writing when the readers' emotion appeals with result that is highly evocative(Donovan,2009,p.36).

2- Narrative essays

Keraf (2001,p.33) mentions that this type of text tells a story may be an action to describe it in a clear way in the past.

Generally speaking in any story to tell it there is a sequence to follow, it means the events should be at the exact time of occurrence. We know that any story is a journey of imagination , but the writer described as a story. So it deals with situation not real ,but imaginary.

There is another type which is nonfiction which includes articles, newspapers, reports, etc. This type of story should include at least 4 people and situations (not always, but it prefer in this type of an essay to follow a person development through his experience in his life) to describe biographies about their life as a story. Finally, here the writer gives his/her point of view . (Sattayatham and Ratanapingowong ,2008,p.20).

3-Expository Essays

In an expository essay, the writer gives an explanation of an idea, theme, or issue to the audience by giving his personal opinions. This essay is presented through examples, definitions, comparisons and contrasts. The writer here gives direction, instruction, explain knowledge to the reader about how to complete any task. Also this type has a function to explain and clarify something to the

readers. It includes comparison or contrast and presenting facts. (Abdullah ,2015,p.54)

4-Persuasive essays

The fourth type which is a persuasive essay, in this types the writer tries to convince and persuade the reader about his opinions or to agree with him and accept his ideas. It is important to gain the readers' attention by giving details. This type should be written in a good style and it is also called argumentative essay. (Donovan,2009,p.48).

According to Abdullah (2015,p.55), the same in an expository essay, it presents facts. And also its aim to persuade or convince the reader to accept the points of view of the writer. The writer should present all the information related to the argument in all its sides.

2.2.2Criteria for Evaluating An essay

Any piece of writing can be evaluated by certain criteria. There are five important criteria, they are Focus, Development, Organization, Style, and Conventions.

Focus. The first criteria gives an idea about (What are the writer writing about?) then about (What claim are the writer defending?) It can be considered a broad criteria because it concerns with context, purpose and coherence of a piece of writing.

Development. In the second criteria, it focus on the details and evidence for example. Do the writer provide or prepare enough supporting to enrich the information and convince the reader? It may includes quotations and references related to the topic such as when someone wants to describe a painting, it

should include details about its appearance, the life of the artist who painted it and other related information.

Organization. It is also called arrangement . It means the order of a paper. Any paper includes introduction, body and conclusion. Generally all paragraphs are concerned on the main topic or idea, this achieves unity and going through the sentences and paragraphs should be in a smooth and logical way. Some paragraphs are poor because they don't include related sentences or topics or ideas, but they are organized in a haphazard way.

Style. It represents the elegance of writing and accuracy, precision and clarity. In any essay there is a style to follow, the one which is most effective is that it should please the audience not only able to write in a clear way. Then the language, metaphors, rhythm, figures of speech all of them should take into the writers' consideration.

Conventions. The most important point here is students' good use of grammar, mechanics, punctuation, formatting etc. Many students do not know or have a correct knowledge about these rules. For example, where they use a comma in a sentence , or how to start to write the first sentence to the last sentence.

(<https://pb.openlcc.net/expressionandinquiry/chapter/evaluation-criteria/>)

Section Three: Procedures

3.1 Research Design

Any research should follow a certain design. In this research the researcher used a descriptive quantitative type to collect the data from the sample (Ary et al.,2010).

3.2 Population and Sample

The meaning of population according to Creswell (2012), is a group of students , instructors or teachers in a university or school have the same characteristics, then the researcher chose a sample from this population for his/her research. While Ary et al, (2010) defines sample which is a group of students', teachers or events and objects are selected from the population, it should be a large group.

In this research the population consists of 200 while the sample is 160. The students (male and female) that are studying in fourth year in English department at Tikrit University. The period of applying the achievement test is during (2023-2024).

Table 1

The Research Population and Sample

Name of University	Number of Population	Number of pilot	Number of sample
Tikrit	200	30	160

3.3 Construction of the Diagnostic Test

The diagnostic test is applied in this research. So, it is very important step is to collect information from the students in a systematic way (Hughes,1989).

The researcher used a diagnostic test to achieve the aim of this research. At the beginning of this research the aims are mentioned which is to investigate textual competence in writing an essay for university students at the production level is consists of four questions and scored out of hundred, the test includes 4 subjective questions. Each question about one them which are of 4 types of writing essay descriptive, narrative, persuasive, and expository essay. These 4

English themes assess EFL students' performance in writing an essay and show their cohesive and rhetorical organization abilities. Question (1) is about advertising cigarette and its effect on societies, which is a descriptive essay, question (2) is about an event happened to you last year, which is a narrative essay. Question (3) is about what do you do when your friend at college need help, which is a persuasive essay and the fourth question is about what does the word mother mean to you, which is a expository essay. In the construction of the test a specification of the behavioral objectives is derived, as illustrated in table (2):

Table 2

The Specifications of the Contents and Behavioral Objectives of the Test

Levels	No. of Question	No. of Items	Content	Behavioral Objectives	Scores	Bloomfield's taxonomy
production	1	1	A composition about cigarette advertising	Students' ability to write a composition to show their cohesive and rhetorical organization abilities	25	Creating and Applying
	2	1	A composition about an event happened to you last year	Students' ability to write a composition to show their cohesive and rhetorical organization abilities	25	Creating and Applying
	3	1	A composition about friendship	Students' ability to write a composition to	25	Creating and Applying

			when need help	show their cohesive and rhetorical organization abilities		
	4	1	A composition about the word mother	Students' ability to write a composition to show their cohesive and rhetorical organization abilities	25	Creating and applying
Total	4	4			100	

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Test

Validity and reliability are important in any research. They are both about well a method measures something. Validity refers to the accuracy of measuring something. It means if the results really represent what they have supposed to measure. (Ary et al., 2018). While reliability refers to the consistency of a measure, if the results can be reproduced under the same conditions (Crocker and Algina, 1986).

The differences between them is that validity means that the test is a precise way of measuring what it is supposed to measure (Hughes, 1989). While reliability means that something is consistent time and time again (Harrison, 19983).

There are three types of validity; face, content and construct. Face validity, a test is said to have face validity if it looks as if it measures what it is supposed to measure (Hughes, 2003).

The jury that consists of a staff in our department specialist in teaching (ELT) Methodology and linguistics. This staff give the researcher some modification and their opinions about the test if it is appropriate or not, this achieve test validity.

Alpha Cronbach formula is "the most common statistical way that measures reliability" (Crocker and Algina, 1986).

Chronbach's Alpha, which statistically measures the internal consistency, has been used to find the reliability of the diagnostics test. Chronbach's for coefficient textual competence test is 0.82 which indicates that the test is reliable.

3.5 Pilot

The meaning of the word pilot is a small group of students that the researcher choose them to apply his/ her research instrument on them before applying the test to the sample. It is an important step in any research. The benefit of this step is to know the shortcoming of any test and if there is any difficulty for the students or if the time is enough for answering all the questions in order to do the modification before applying the final test to the sample (Madsen, 1983).

3.6 Scoring Scheme of the Diagnostic Test

Scoring means applying a numerical scale to measure responses. Scoring provides valuable feedback concerning students' achievement and teachers' attitudes (Genesee et al., 1996).

The test consists of four questions and scored out of 100 marks. Each question has 25 marks. These questions have been scored by a scoring committee and the researcher. After the students has finished answering the answering the questions, the answers are submitted to evaluating essay criteria which are; focus, development, organization, style, and conventions, as shown in table (3).

Table (3)

Scoring Scheme for the Diagnostic Test

Criteria of an essay	Qualities	Scores Q1,Q2,Q3 and Q4
Focus	Very Good	5
	Good	3
	Weak	0
Development	Very Good	5
	Good	3
	Weak	0
Organization	Very Good	5
	Good	3
	Weak	0
Style	Very Good	5
	Good	3
	Weak	0
Conventions	Very Good	5
	Good	3
	Weak	0

Section Four: Discussion of Results**4.1 Data Analysis****4.1.1 .Data Analysis for the First Question**

The first question "Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL University students in Textual Competence in writing an essay at Tikrit University?". And the aim is: "Iraqi EFL University students' textual competence in writing an essay at Tikrit university". The researcher used the T-test formula of one independent sample to obtain the following results:

a-the mean scores of students' performance in textual competence is (62.713) higher than the theoretical mean (50).

b-the standard deviation is (19.428) degrees.

c-the tabulated t-value is (1.66) while the calculated t-value (8.014) is higher than the tabulated t-value with.

d-the degree of freedom (149) at a level of significance (0.05).

That means, there is a significant difference between students' performance in textual competence and the theoretical mean of EFL university students' performance. The university students have a higher level in textual competence than the theoretical mean score.

Table (1): T-Test Value of the Student's Performance in Textual Competence

N.	Mean	SD.	Theoretical Mean Score	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
150	62.713	19.428	50	8.014	1.66	149	0.05

4.2 .Data Analysis for the Second Question

the second question : "Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' knowledge about cohesion and rhetorical organization in writing an essay at Tikrit university?". And the aim "Identifying Iraqi EFL University students' knowledge about cohesion and rhetorical organization in writing an essay at Tikrit university". The researcher used T-test formula of paired sample to obtain the following results:

a-the mean scores of students' performance in rhetorical organization is (29.606).

b-the mean scores of students' performance in cohesion is (32.140).

c-standard deviation is (11.539) and (9.6440) degrees.

d-the tabulated t-value which is (1.98), the calculated t-value (4.080) is higher than the tabulated t-value.

e- degree of freedom (148) at a level of significance (0.05).

That means, there is a significant difference between students' performance in rhetorical organization and cohesion of EFL university students' performance. The university students have a higher level in cohesion than the rhetorical organization.

Table (2): T-Test Value of the Student's Performance in cohesion and rhetorical organization

	N.	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
Rhetorical organization	150	29.606	11.539	Calculated	Tabulated	148	0.05
				4.080	1.98		
cohesion		32.140	9.644				

4.3 Result Related to Third Question

The third question : "Are there statistically significant differences of textual competence among Iraqi EFL university students in writing an essay according to gender variable at Tikrit university?". And the aim "The difficulty in using textual competence among Iraq EFL university students according to gender variable at Tikrit university" the independent samples T-test statistics have been used.

The obtained results show that

a-females mean scores in textual competence is found to be (59.93) and male mean scores in textual competence is found to be (66.62).

b- The t-test formula for independent samples is used to show that the calculated t-value is (2.101) and the tabulated t- value is (1.98).

c-at the degree of freedom (148) and level of significance (0.05).

The obtained results is that there is a significant difference between male and female university students' textual competence for the benefit of male.

Table (3) Mean Scores, S. D., and T-Value of Male and Female in textual competence

Gender	N.	Mean	S.D.	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Female	88	59.93	19.749	2.101	1.98	148	0.05
Male	62	66.62	18.441				

4.2 Discussion Of Results

1.The university students have a higher level in textual competence than the theoretical mean score. As show in figure (1) where the mean score is 62.713 and the theoretical mean score is 50.

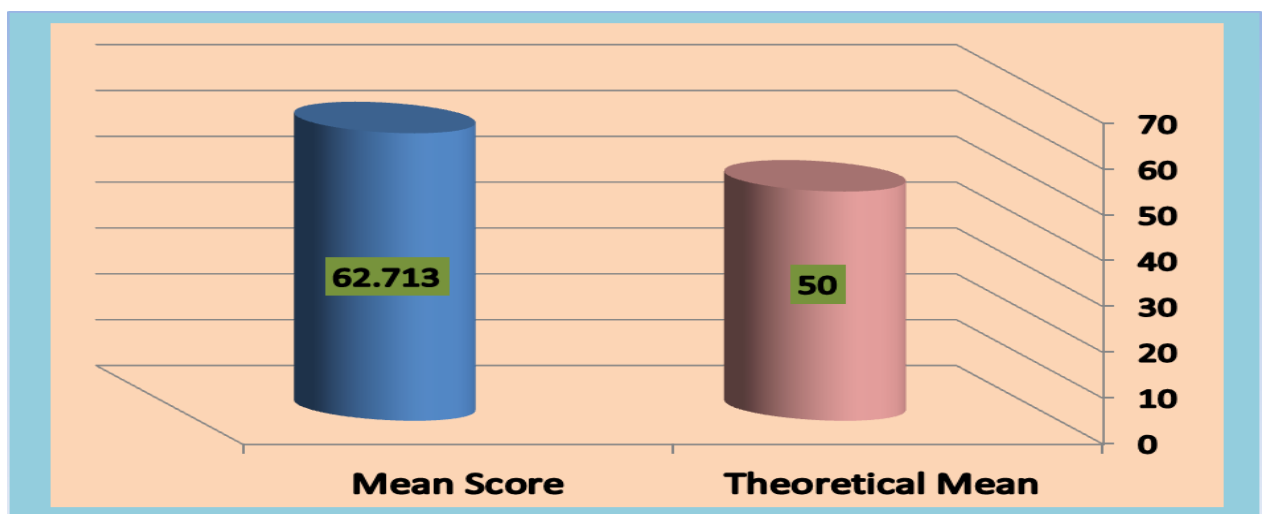


Figure (1) Mean score and the theoretical mean score in textual competence

2. The university students have a higher level in cohesion than the rhetorical organization. As show in figure (2) where the mean score in cohesion is 32.14 and in rhetorical organization is 29.606.

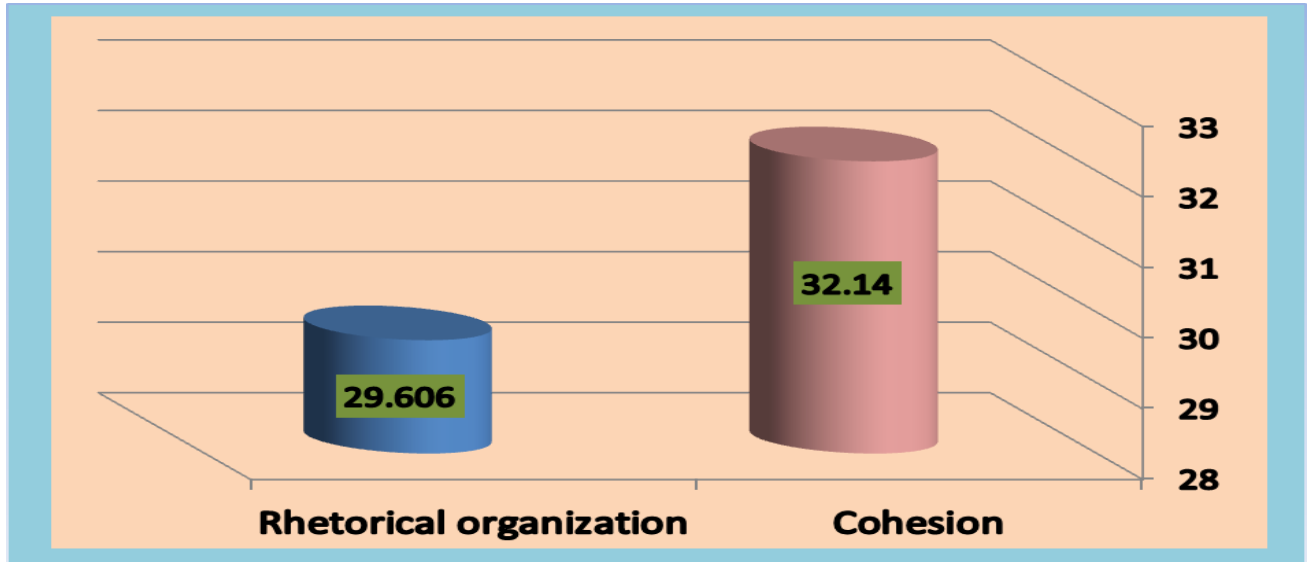


Figure (2) Mean score and the theoretical mean score in textual competence

3. There is a significant difference between male and female university students' textual competence for the benefit of male as show in the following figure where the mean score of the females is 59.93.8 and the mean score of males is 66.62.

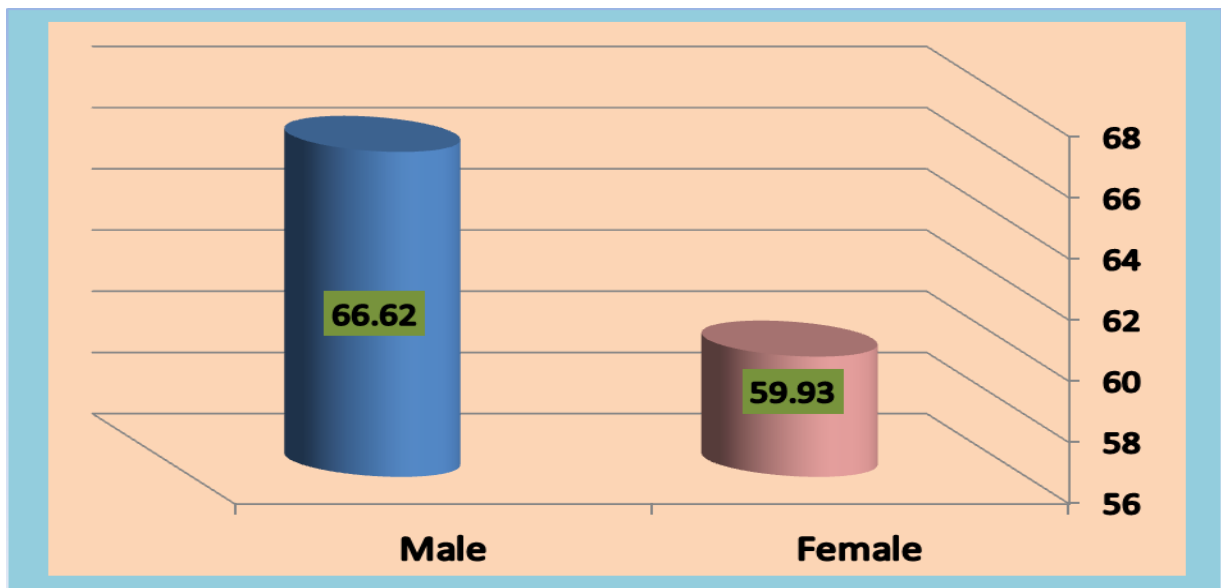


Figure (3) Mean score of male and female in textual competence

Section Five: Conclusion, Recommendation and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

1- Most of students are weak in textual competence and un able to use it in correct way to the given context. In other words they pay little or no attention to their use.

2- Not only in foreign language, but also in native language, most college students have no idea about how to organize their thoughts while writing an essay.

3-Instructors have little knowledge about textual organization since they follow the curricula and syllabuses that have been supplied for them to follow. They must develop their knowledge in this area.

5.2 Recommendation

1-Students' knowledge about textual abilities is essential for academic success, so it is important to take into account how to rise students' knowledge in this aspect.

2-Teachers should encourage collaborative writing activities to encourage and enhance their students' writing an essay in a correct way.

3-Students need to be encouraged to write cohesive compositions.

5.3 Suggestions

1-Assessing Grammatical competence of college students in writing short story.

2-Error analysis of students' pragmatic competence in speaking.

3-Investigating the translation competence of EFL preparatory school students in translating literary texts.

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The Diagnostic Test

Write a composition (100-150) words about the following themes.

1-Cigarette advertising and its effect on societies .(Descriptive)(25M)

2-An event happened to you last year. (Narrative)(25M)

3-What do you do when your friend at college needs help.(Persuasive) (25M)

4-What does the word mother mean to you? Write (100) words concerning this topic , use the following words (love, kindness, sacrificing, struggling....etc.) (Expository) (25M)