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Enhancing Iraqi EFL Students' Discourse Competence by Using Explicit Instruction

A B S T R A C T

Explicit instruction can be used in teaching English to involve a clearly explaining of linguistic concepts and the use of direct strategies that present to the students the direct instruction of a given subject. The current study aims at enhancing Iraqi EFL Students' Discourse Competence through the use of explicit instruction. It also aims at finding if there are any significant differences between experimental group and control group perform of discourse competence in the post test and finding out the differences among the students in the experimental group according recognition and production levels and according to gender. The sample of the study derived from 2nd year students in English department in the College of Education for Humanities at Tikrit University and it consists of 90 students. They were divided into two groups. The first group included 45 students for the experimental group and the other 45 students for the control group during the Academic year 2022/ 2023. In order to achieve the study's aims and testing the hypotheses, a discourse completion test is used as data collection tool and it is applied on a sample of the study. The obtained results show that Iraqi EFL students' discourse competence is enhanced by adopting explicit instruction and their discourse competence can be improved through explicit instruction. Also, their ability to communicate in different contexts can also be enhanced. In the light of the obtained results, some conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further researches are presented forward.

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تحسين كفاءة الخطاب لدى الطلبة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية باستخدام التعليم
 الصريح

نجوى ياسين اسماعيل / جامعة تكريت / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

الخلاصة:

يستخدم التعليم الصريح في تعليم اللغة الانجليزية ليقدم شرحا واضحا للمفاهيم اللغوية. كما يمكن استخدام الاستراتيجيات المباشرة والتي تقدم للطلبة التعليم المباشر في موضوع معين. تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى

تحسين كفاءة الخطاب لدى الطلبة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية باستخدام التعليمات الصريحة. كذلك تهدف الى ايجاد في ما اذا كان هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية بين اداء المجموعة التجريبية واداء المجموعة الضابطة في الاختبار البعدي. وايجاد ان كان هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية عند مستوي الاستيعاب والانتاج لطلبة المجموعة التجريبية في الاختبار البعدي بالإضافة الى معرفة اذا كانت هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية تبعا لمتغير الجنس لطلبة المجموعة التجريبية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من 90 طالبا وطالبة تم اختيارهم عشوائيا من طلبة المرحلة الثانية في قسم اللغة الانجليزية في كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية في جامعة تكريت للعام الدراسي 2022 / 2023 وبواقع 45 طالبا في كل مجموعة. تم استخدام اختبار الخطاب التكميلي كأداة لجمع المعلومات وتحقيق اهداف الدراسة واختبار فرضياتها. بينت النتائج التي تم التوصل لها ان استخدام التعليمات الصريحة ساعد في تحسين كفاءة الخطاب لدى الطلبة وعزز من قدراتهم على التواصل في السياقات المختلفة. وبناء على النتائج تم تقديم بعض الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات لمزيد من الدراسات المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة التواصلية, كفاءة الخطاب, التعليم الصريح, تحسين

1.0 Introduction

Explicit instruction is an instruction that can be used for teaching and helping EFL students for better learning and teachers can use different instruction to facilitate their teaching processes and present the aspect of language and linguistic concepts in a very structured and ordered way (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

According to Hui (2021) , explicit instruction involves by teachers to make teaching settings clear and specify the learning objectives to be sure that the learners understand in a good and clear way. So, it can be presented as a systematic an effective method for enhancing students learning especially in improving the outcomes in academic contexts and shaping a deeper understanding of material.

1.1 Problem of the Study and its Significant

Explicit instruction is a process used in teaching in an ordered way. The teachers use explicit instruction for making instructions easy and clear. They present students how to perform suitably in different tasks through giving students a lot of feedback and more chances to practice (Davies, 2004).

Students of EFL face many challenges in oral and written way of communication (Rababah, 2002). Iraqi students and in different stages of learning may take a place in classrooms without any communication and no additional instructional aids, which resulted at the end of the course of the study in the results of the exam which are not good. The teacher's lack of using suitable and direct instruction in language teaching and the pupils' lack their motivation according to the factors that contributed to the situation described above. Many students are unable to read or comprehend English texts and communicate suitably due to their lack in communicative competence and this lead to the lack in using English appropriately or suitably in different situations. Also, many schools lack the necessary equipment to present better instruction for students (Rashid, 2016). So, teachers need to use exact explicit instruction in teaching communicative competence components especially discourse competence and improve EFL students in using of discourse. To shed light on some of these instructions, the study attempted to select discourse competence and show if there is any relation between the use of explicit instruction and Iraqi EFL students' discourse competence.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The current study aims at enhancing Iraqi EFL students' discourse competence by using explicit instruction for second year students in the College of Education for Humanities at Tikrit University through the following:

1. Finding out if there are any statistically significant differences between experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction and control group who have been taught by using conventional method in the post test.
2. Finding out if there are any statistically significant differences of experimental group at recognition and production levels in the post test.
3. Finding out if there are any statistically significant differences between male and female students in experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction in the post- test.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the current study can be stated as the following :

1. There are statistically significant differences between experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction and control group who have been taught by using conventional method in the post test.
2. There are statistically significant differences at recognition level and production level of the experimental group in the post test.
3. There are statistically significant differences between male and female students in experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction in the post test.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The limits of the current study can be summarized to:

1. Iraqi EFL students' discourse competence by using explicit instruction.
2. Second year students from Department of English in the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit University.
4. Selected Reading Subject.
3. The Academic Year 2022/ 2023.

2.1 Concept of Discourse Competence

In language teaching, the procedures are presented by giving attention for two parts: "comprehension and meaning". When the meaning is not produced correctly and appropriately, speaker and the receiver may find challenges in understanding the intended meaning. So, interaction takes place in the sense when speaker has the ability for comprehending the meaning. In learning a language reproduces a variety ways can be used for purposes of communication and they can be also used for developing the components of communicative competence (Lee, 2012).

Hui (2021) believes that Chomsky's theory assists the idea that learning of language happens as processes in the learner's brain and according to situation, while Canale and Swain(1980) assist on necessity of process of learning the language in social parts. According to them four components of the communicative competence are presented these are: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (as shown in Figure 1). By discourse competence ability, EFL students are supposed to understand and interact texts by applying different

language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is linked with two characteristics of a text which are coherence and cohesion .

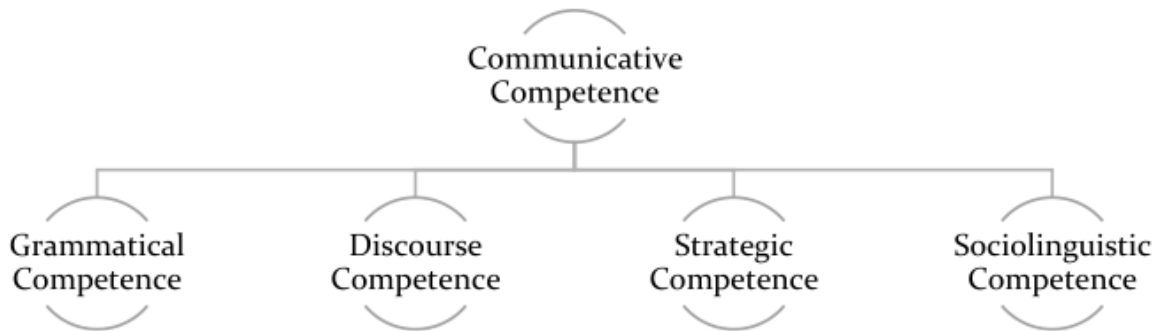


Figure 1. Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence.

As it mentioned above, discourse competence is one of communicative competence components and it can be considered a significant element of the language and speech development (Levinson, 2005). The language methodologies recently focus on discourse practice and, as a result, the discourse competence is a constitutive part of the curricula. In all language didactics, the discourse denotes the language in context or language in use (Chen, 2009).

2.2 The Components of Discourse Competence

Discourse competence contains of several components that have a role in enhancing effective communication and language use in various contexts.

These components include:

1. Coherence: it is “the quality of being meaningful and unified” (Cook, 1989: 4). It refers to the overall clarity and logical organization of ideas within a discourse. Coherent texts have a clear structure, with ideas logically connected and presented in a way that is easy for the receiver to follow (Halliday and Hassan, 1976).
2. Cohesion: it refers to the grammatical and lexical devices used to create connections within a text, ensuring its coherence and flow. The meaning of a specific utterance Cohesion occurs when the meaning of some element in the discourse depends on another element in the utterance, that

- is, it can only be related to reference. Cohesive devices include pronouns, conjunctions, lexical repetitions, and referencing expressions (Good and Douglas, 1976).
3. Contextualization cues: Refers to the ability to use linguistic and non-linguistic cues to situate communication within a specific context and make meaning clear to the interlocutor. This includes using appropriate vocabulary, tone, gestures, and cultural references.
 4. Pragmatic competence: Refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social and communicative contexts, considering factors such as politeness, turn-taking, and conversational implicature (Halliday and Hassan, 1976).
 5. Rhetorical strategies: Refers to the techniques used to persuade, inform, or entertain an audience within a discourse. This includes strategies such as argumentation, narration, description, and exposition.
 6. Discourse genre knowledge: Refers to the understanding of different types or genres of discourse, including their typical structures, language features, and purposes. Examples of discourse genres include narratives, conversations, academic essays, and business reports (Cook, 1989).
 7. Metacognitive awareness: Refers to the ability to reflect on and regulate one's own discourse production and comprehension processes. This includes monitoring one's understanding, clarifying ambiguities, and adjusting communication strategies as needed.
 8. Cross-cultural competence: Refers to the ability to navigate communication across different cultural backgrounds, recognizing and adapting to cultural norms, values, and communication styles (Hui,2021).

Overall, discourse competence involves not only linguistic knowledge but also strategic and socio-cultural competencies that enable effective communication in diverse contexts. So, cohesion occurs when the meaning of some element in the discourse depends on that of another, that is, it can only be decoded by reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) . Similar statements are made by Hui (2021) who states that cohesion, as a kind of textual prosody, refers to inter-sentential semantic relations that link current items with preceding or following ones by lexical and structural means. He further claims that cohesion is invariant property of a piece of discourse or text

which is independent of user and context. According to Cook (1989), cohesion is the grammatical and lexical relationships which tie a text together, which falls into the lowest level of discourse domain.

There are many ways to make texts cohesive. These cohesive devices or linking devices, which are also called “formal links” by Cook (1989), are put into different categories. The most traditional category is Halliday and Hassan’s(1976) five types of cohesion, which are reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Among those, reference, substitution, and ellipsis are grammatical cohesive devices, and conjunctions are logical cohesive devices. Following Halliday and Hasan’s proposal, much effort has been put into re-classifying and extending their itemization of cohesive means (Cook, 1989; Hui, 2021). Cook (1989) adds “parallelism” to the cohesion family, and Thornbury (2005) puts rhetorical cohesion into his three categories (the other two are lexical and grammatical cohesion).

2.3 Concept of Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction is a term in language used for describing the parts of direct and unclear teaching behaviors needed to support successful and suitable student learning with any curriculum. It is used to describe “how” the effective instruction can be presented (Archer and Hughes, 2011). Explicit instruction contrasts with less-explicit approaches that rely on partial teacher guidance or student discovery for acquiring new knowledge and skills. Intervention research supports the effectiveness of explicit instructional approaches for teaching a range of literacy skills and underscores the important role that explicit instructional delivery plays in teaching young learners basic skills (Hughes, et al, 2017).

Within the Direct Instruction model, explicit instructional strategies are but one element of an overall system designed to promote student learning. Scripted lessons guide teaching with an organized and carefully sequenced progression through curriculum content, thereby integrating curriculum design and effective teaching practices (Putman, et al, 2017). Thus, “Direct Instruction includes both curriculum (what to teach) and instruction (how to teach), whereas explicit instruction focuses primarily on how to teach”. So, it can be concluded that direct Instruction and explicit instruction are the same in which explicit teaching

strategies can be applied to any curricular content; Direct Instruction stands alone, however, as a comprehensive system of instruction intended to maximize generalization (Hughes et al., 2017: 144).

2.4 Teaching Discourse Competence by Using Explicit Instruction

English language teaching requires that teachers in teaching discourse competence explicitly must give attention to coherence, suitable ordering that can be presented with different lexical cohesive devices. By using cohesive devices in incorrect use may result an misunderstanding of meaning of context. So , EFL teachers must specify teaching problem and try to present the features of discourse explicitly (Hui , 2021).

In this regard, Lee (2012) adds that in English language learning process, the students should know how to learn and build the messages orally or in written way. These messages should include thoughts and ideas in coherent way. Additional to that , the thoughts and ideas may require grammatical knowledge and language aspect. Most of difficulties face students outside the classroom in variety of real life situations effect students' suitable understanding of the language.

In teaching discourse competence explicitly, Hughes (2017) shows that it should have to take the following points in considerations:

1. Using of variety types of devices then find how they impact on the text understanding.
2. Presenting the cultural aspects, “etiquettes”, besides “social values” in contexts of communication.
3. Modeling the forms of using opinions, beliefs, and assumptions.

4. Giving attention for social relation within language and the importance of cultural context.

The explicit teaching of discourse competence highlights relation between sender and receiver for making an a message that should be suitable in social use of language. It deals with process when the receiver perceive the language in specific context. It also contain parts of cohesion and textual coherence, as well as meaning deduction (Archer and Hughes, 2011).

3.0 Methodology

The procedures adopted in data collection are presented in this section and they include the following:

3.1 Design of the Study

Brown (2010: 83) states that "Selecting an appropriate design for a research work is one of the most important decisions that a researcher should make". Therefore, the current study is adopted the experimental design.

The experimental design is a method for applying experimental subject to different treatment levels, as well as the associated statistical analysis (Alderson, 1995).

While according to Heaton (1975: 135), experimental design is "the method by which an experimental group is selected and given treatments to measure their effect"

This study is applied by adopting "Post- test for Two Equivalent Groups Design".

3.2 Population of the Study

Population can be defined as a set or a group of all the participants on which the procedures of the study are to be applied. Population is presented by participants,

persons, groups, individuals, or organizations in order to know how the study findings can be generalized. So, is the represented group about the study (Ebel and Frisbee ,91).

In the present study, the population has involved the second- year students (128 male and 142 female) at English Department in College of Education for Humanities at Tikrit University during the Academic Year (2022-2023) which represents 270 students in the morning studies as shown in table (1).

3.3 Sample of the Study

Creswell (2012) says that a sample is a group of students that has been chosen from population and the researcher uses them to study for generalizing of the population. So, a sample is a set of individuals that is selected to be represented from a given population.

The sample of the present study represents 90 students from second- year students (45 as experimental group and 45 as control group) from Department of English/ College of Education for Humanities at University of Tikrit in the Academic Year 2022/ 2023 in morning studies. Also, another 25 students have been chosen to be the pilot students. The students in experimental group are divided into (21 male students and 24 female students) as shown in table 1.

Table 1

Population, Sample and Pilot Students of the Study

Population	Group	Sample		Pilot Students
270 Second Year Students in Morning Studies	Experimental Group	45		25
		21 Males	24 Females	

(Males and Females)	Control Group	45	
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3.4 Equivalence of Two Groups

Some of the variables are taken into consideration to ensure the equivalence of the study's sample including students' ages in months beside the scores of pre-test as follows:

3.4.1 Student's Age in Months

In order to find that the students' ages are equal in months, the collected data is collected from the sample in each experimental and control groups. By applying "t-test for two independent samples", the results show that the two groups are equal in age variable due to the computed t- value result which is less than the tabulated one with 88 degree of freedom. The obtained results can be seen clearly in Table 2.

Table 2

The Sample Age Variable

Groups	No. of students	Mean	S.D	Computed T-value	Tabulated T- value	DF
Experimental	45	75.2	19.15	1.48	2.00	88
Control	45	73.6	17.09			

3.4.2 Pretest Variable

According to Ebel (1991), the pre- test can be applied to equal the two groups due to the value of pretest results and data is an important learning factor

For that pre- test is applied on two groups for equalizing students in their previous year. The results indicate that the calculated t-test value is 1.72 which is lower than the tabulated t-test value which is (2.00) at 88 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. So, there is no statistically significant differences between the two groups. Table 3 shows the results clearly.

Table 3

Experimental and Control Groups Scores in Pretest

Groups	No. of students	Mean	S. D	Computed T-value	Tabulated T-value	D.F	L.S
Experimental	45	53.70	2.23	1.72	2.00	88	0.05
Control	45	55.47	8.64				

3.5 Instrument of The Study: Discourse Completion Test

Creswell (2012) shows that the choice of instrument for data collection depends on many factors such as the study aims, the questions, the hypotheses and sample. Each instrument has its strengths and properties. Therefore, the current study uses a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as a tool for collecting data. A DCT is a tool that can be used in pragmatic contexts to collect information about the student's ability to use a particular speech acts appropriately. It consists of a one-sided role play containing a given situation in which a participant will response to choose the appropriate responses from a list or they may ask to give their own response about a specific context(Kasper, 2000).

The used DCT in this study represents to the students by forming 10 real life situations from different daily life contexts. In the first 5 items, the students are asked to complete the presented discourse by choosing the suitable response and these items form the recognition level of the test, while in the followed 5 items, the students are asked to complete the conversation by presenting their suitable responses and these items form the production level of the test. Each correct item takes 2 marks ,so the total mark is 20. The tasks focus on the students' ability in discourse competence which makes them response to different contexts easily. Appendix 1 shows DCT clearly.

3.5.1 Analysis of Test Items

According to the results of the pilot administration of DCT on 25 Iraqi EFL 2nd stage students in College of Education for Humanities at Tikrit University, the items of the test are analyzed in term of reliability, difficulty level and discrimination power in order to estimate their suitability.

Reliability is one of the important characteristics of a good test . Alderson (1995:294) defines reliability as 'the extent to which test scores are consistent". By applying Alpha- Cronbach formula, the reliability of the post is found to be (0.82), which consider acceptable.

According to Healey (2012), the difficulty level of items is used as the level of the students who replied correctly to each item. The most appropriate test item are varying between 0.15 and 0.85 (Brown, 2010). The items of DCT are ranged from (0.63) to (0.82), as shown in table 4.

Alderson (1995: 56) mentions that discrimination power means "calculating the degree to which a particular item's results correspond with the results of the entire test". The most suitable item ,according to Brown (2010), is be close to 1.0. The results show that the test items range from (0.38) to (0.55) as shown in table 4.

Table 4

Difficulty Level and Discrimination Power of Test Items

Question	Item	Discrimination	Difficulty
Discourse Completion Test	1	0.55	0.72
	2	0.52	0.63
	3	0.39	0.75
	4	0.48	0.64
	5	0.53	0.73
	6	0.43	0.74
	7	0.51	0.81
	8	0.38	0.80
	9	0.43	0.68
	10	0.52	0.82

3.6 Administration of the Posttest

The researcher is used explicit instructions in teaching experimental group for eight weeks and with two hours peer a week, while the control group is taught by using conventional method. After applying the pilot administration in two weeks before the final administration of the test, the test reliability, difficulty level and discrimination power have been estimated, the test is finally applied on 8th of March 2023 on experimental and control groups of students. The students are asked to read the instructions carefully and give their responses. finally the test papers have been collected to be treated statistically.

4.0 Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

The students' responses to the DCT items have been analyzed statistically and the results show the following:

4.1 Results Related to The First Aim of The Study.

By applying t-test formula for two independent sample, the results show that the mean score of experimental group is found to be (25.42) with a standard deviation of (6.34) and (88) degree of freedom, while the mean score of control group is found to be (36.31) with a standard deviation of(5.26) and (88) degree of freedom. The calculated t-value is found to be (6.32) which is higher than the tabulated t-value which is (2.000) at (0.5) significant level. According to the results, it can be said that there is a statistically significant difference between the students' level of discourse competence between experimental and control groups and in favor of experimental group. So the first hypothesis which states that “there are statistically significant differences between experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction and control group who have been taught by using conventional method in the post test” is accepted. Table 5 shows the results clearly.

Table 5

The Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-value of students' of Both Groups in Post Test

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Experimental	45	52.42	6.34	6.32	2.000	88	0.05
Control	45	36.31	5.26				

4.2 Results Related to The Second Aim of The Study.

To find whether there is any statistically significant difference between recognition and production levels of the experimental group in the post test, t-test formula for

the two-related samples is used. The obtained mean scores of the students' in the experimental group at recognition level in the post-test is (41.05) with (3.67) SD. While that of production level is (44.09) with (4.06) SD . The computed t-value is (3.432) while the tabulated t-value is (2.000) at (44) degree of freedom and (0.05) level of significance. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between students' achievement at the recognition level and that of the production level in favor of Production level. Therefore the second hypothesis which stated that "there are statistically significant differences between recognition and production levels of the experimental group in the post test" is accepted. Table 6 shows the results clearly.

Table 6

The Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-value of students' of Experimental Group at Recognition and Production Levels in The Post Test

Level	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Computed	Tabulated		
Recognition	45	41.05	3.67	3.432	2.000	44	0.05
Production	45	44.09	4.06				

4.3 Results Related to The Third Aim of The Study.

The t-test formula for the two-related samples is used to determine whether there is any statistically significant difference between male and female students of the experimental group in the post test. The obtained mean scores of male students' of in the post-test is (63.47) with (8.43) standard deviation. While that of female students is (62.08) with (9.37) standard deviation. The computed t-value is (1.273) while tabulated t-value is (1.972) at (44) degree of freedom and (0.05) significance level. This means that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female students of the experimental group in the posttest. Therefore,

third hypothesis which is “there are statistically significant differences between male and female students in experimental group who have been taught by using explicit instruction in the post test” is rejected. Table 7 shows the results clearly.

Table 7

The Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-value between Male and Female Students in Experimental Group in The Post Test

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Computed	Tabulated		
Male	26	63.47	8.43	1.273	1.972	44	0.05
Female	19	62.08	9.37				

4.4 The Results Discussion

According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that the using of explicit instruction has a positive effect on Iraqi EFL students’ discourse competence, because the students interact positively and communicate their thoughts and ideas with other members of the group in a good way. So, they benefit from the explicit instruction provided by the teacher and each other. This shows the efficient use of explicit instruction in enhancing students' discourse competence. Based on the data analysis of the hypotheses of the study, it can be seen clearly that the students in experimental group which have been taught by using explicit instructions have a suitable and better discourse competence due to their performance in DCT and they were better than those students in control group who have been taught by adopting the conventional instructions. Also, the results show that Iraqi EFL university students response better at production level rather than at recognition one which proves that they have a discourse competence to produce and they can

give their own suitable answers according to specific situation. Additionally, the results indicate that the male students have the same level of discourse competence as the female ones according to their answers about the items of DCT. So, we can conclude that the current study agrees with most of the previous studied in which it shows the positive effect of using explicit instruction for enhancing EFL students' discourse competence.

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the obtained results from this study, the following points are presented:

- 1- The use of explicit instructions has an efficient effect on the students' discourse competence due to the results of DCT which show that there are significant differences between experimental group and control group in favor of experimental one.
- 2- By using explicit instruction, students' ability is increased and they acquire a suitable way to perform suitably in different contexts .
- 3- EFL teachers present the lesson in sufficient way when they apply explicit instructions.
- 4- Explicit instructions help the teacher to achieve the objectives of the lesson as it reduces effort and time, and keeps the information in the students' minds.

5.2 Recommendations

The current study recommend the following points:

- 1- Training EFL English language teachers to use explicit instruction because of its importance in developing university students' discourse competence.
- 2- Recommending EFL teachers to use explicit instructions that stimulate students' ability to participate in different language contexts due to their better discourse competence.
- 3- Encouraging EFL students to participate and communicate with other students and with teacher in EFL classes.

4- Curriculum designers are advised to design the syllabuses which based on explicit instructions in order to help the students to learn easily.

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