

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

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Abstract

Nowadays, Understanding learners' perceptions and their beliefs is important because the focus of education has shifted from a teacher-directed to learner-oriented classroom. Therefore; the current study is conducted to investigate the self-efficacy of EFL students at University of Basrah. More specifically, the aim is to explore the self-efficacy level of the students in relation to their achievement in English. Data on the learners' self-efficacy are collected from the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE). Despite the large body of self-efficacy research found in other academic disciplines, few studies have examined the self-efficacy of foreign language students and more precisely research has focused on the relationship between self-efficacy and the academic achievement of language learners. Sixty six students from Basra University participated in this experimental study. The results showed that there is a positive correlation between the dimensions of self- efficacy and academic achievement in the English language.

Key words: Foreign language learning, self-efficacy, learners' beliefs, achievement

استكشاف العلاقة بين الكفاءة الشخصية والإنجاز اللغوي

لتعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية العراقيين

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الخلاصة:

في هذه الأيام ،من المهم جدا فهم الادراك الحسي للمتعلمين واعتقاداتهم لان التركيز في العملية التربوية انتقل من ان تكون مدارة من قبل المدرس الى موجه من قبل الطالب . لذا صيغت الدراسة الحالية لاستكشاف الكفاءة الشخصية لطلاب اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في جامعة البصرة . وكان هدف البحث بصورة خاصة هو تحري مستوى الكفاءة الشخصية للطلبة وعلاقتها بمستوى الانجاز في اللغة الانكليزية . جمعت المعطيات عن الكفاءة الشخصية للمتعلمين من خلال استبيان الكفاءة الشخصية للغة الانكليزية . وعلى الرغم من وجود بحوث عديدة عن محتوى الكفاءة الشخصية في الانظمة الاكاديمية الاخرى، الا ان هنالك دراسات قليلة قد حاولت الفحص او التركيز على العلاقة بين الكفاءة الشخصية لتعلمي اللغة الاجنبية وانجازهم الاكاديمي. ستة وستون طالبا من طلبة جامعة البصرة شاركوا في هذه الدراسة التجريبية . اظهرت النتائج ان هنالك علاقة ايجابية بين ابعاد الكفاءة الشخصية والانجاز الاكاديمي في اللغة الانكليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تعلم اللغة الاجنبية ، الكفاءة الشخصية ، اعتقادات المتعلمين ، الانجاز

Introduction

Self-Efficacy & Social Cognitive Theory

Most if not all psycholinguists maintain that students' self-efficacy beliefs and the confidence they have in their academic capabilities, are related in one way or another to academic outcomes and then they influence their academic behaviors and performances. Thus, many different studies have been carried out on this concept of self efficacy in the academic settings like (Katz, 2006 ; Mills et al., 2007; Pajares, 2003; Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Graham, 2012- 2011).

To give a brief introduction about self- efficacy , it is necessary to mention that the concept of self-efficacy has its roots in the socio-cognitive theory and was first proposed by Bandura in 1977 in his widely cited article *Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change*. According to him, self-efficacy "is a judgement of capability to execute a given type of performance." (Malinen et al.,2012:526) .It is defined to obtain a measure of control over individual's thoughts, feelings and actions (Mahyuddin et al., 2006: 62). Moreover, Bandura(1994:2) affirms that self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. He further proposes in his studies that a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as *the self-system*. This system plays a major role in how a person perceives situations and how s/he behaves in response to demanding situations. A person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation is an essential part in this self-system. Accordingly, self-efficacy can have an impact on everything from psychological states to behavior to motivation . It is regarded as a key to understanding the students' actions (Tilfarlioğlu & Cinkara, 2009: 129-130) .

Bassi et al. (2007:302) note that Bandura's social-cognitive theory outlines the central role of people's self-efficacy beliefs, namely their perceived capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands. These beliefs influence cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. For example, self-efficacy beliefs affect what students do by influencing the choices they make, the effort they expend, the persistence and perseverance they exert in the face

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

of adversity, and the anxiety they experience. It is suggested that students with a strong sense of academic self-efficacy have been proven to willingly undertake challenging tasks and expend greater effort. Those with low self-efficacy, conversely, may choose to complete only the necessary and uncomplicated academic tasks to which they apply minimal effort and limited persistence or they may choose to entirely avoid the completion of an academic assignment and often show a lack of interest in learning (Mills et al, 2006:275).

Gavora (2011:80) states that " according to Bandura's theory, self-efficacy has two components: "efficacy expectation and outcome expectancy." The former is the conviction that one has the ability, knowledge, and skills to successfully perform actions required to produce desired outcome(s). The latter represents a person's estimate of the likely (potent) consequences (impact) of performing a task at the self-expected level of performance. That is, the outcome expectancy has to do the belief that a given behaviour or action will indeed lead to (an) expected outcome(s).

The Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1994:2) mentions that self-efficacy judgements are based on four principal sources of information: an individual's own past performance, vicarious experiences of observing the performances of others, verbal persuasion that one possesses certain capabilities, and physiological states (emotional cues) from which individuals judge their capability. These four sources of self-efficacy are shown in the following figure.

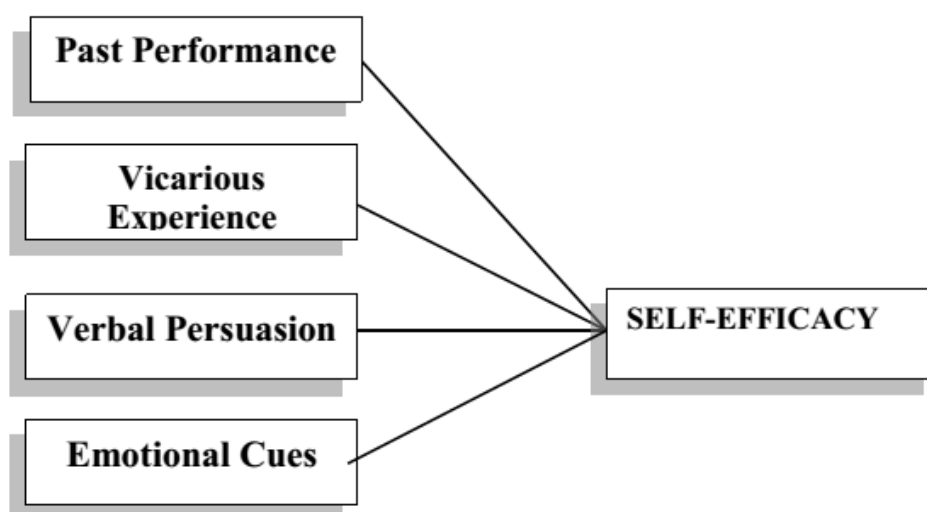


Figure 1 : Sources of self-efficacy adapted from Lunenburg , 2011:2

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement—

The experience of mastery is the most important factor determining a person's self-efficacy. Success raises self-efficacy, while failure lowers it. It is suggested that students become more highly efficacious when they feel able to understand and learn material, and less efficacious when they feel unable to do so. In the case of learners, the mastery of experiences is related to the way learners interpret the result of their own performance in the classroom. When the result of a performance is perceived as successful, the learners feel that they can carry out a specific task and feel confident about it and also extend this belief to related tasks in a successful manner. They interpret the results of their activities and use these interpretations to develop beliefs about their capability to perform in subsequent tasks or activities. These interpreted results of one's own performances create a sense of self-efficacy (van Dinther et al, 2011:97).

The second source of creating self-efficacy is through observational experiences provided by social models (Bandura, 1997), the so-called vicarious experiences. Students obtain information about their own capabilities by observing others, especially peers who offer suitable possibilities for comparison. A student would simply say "If they can do it, I can do it as well." As a result, efficacy beliefs can depend on the extent to which individuals see similarities between themselves and those whom they observe (Hutchison et al, 2006:40). Thus, this process could be applied to people who are uncertain about their capacities because they would be more sensitive to it.

Social persuasion is a third way of strengthening people's beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed. Essentially this involves convincing people that they have the ability to succeed at a particular task. So, the verbal judgments of others can also influence self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1994:2). Bong & Skaalvik (2003) mention that "Persuasive communication and evaluative feedback is most effective when people who provide the information are viewed by students as knowledgeable and reliable, and the information is realistic" (in Van Dinther et al, 2011: 98). So, what others say can influence our beliefs about our abilities.

Finally, Bandura(1977:198;1994:3) argues that emotional cues dictate self-

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement—

efficacy. There are certain actions such as anxiety, stress, fatigue, or other emotions, which can also have an effect on individuals' self-efficacy beliefs. So, the fourth source of self-efficacy is drawn from people's physiological, emotional and mood states. For example, learners with low self-efficacy may see situations (like discussing an idea in front of others or public speaking) more difficult, and more demanding than they really are. Such a situation for learners with low self- efficacy may cause changes in heart rate, increase in body temperature, and getting 'butterflies in the stomach'. These features are regarded as signs of inability. Thus, the fourth way of modifying self-beliefs of efficacy is to reduce people's stress reactions and alter their negative emotional proclivities and misinterpretations of their physical states.

Thus, according to Bandura's four hypothesized sources of self-efficacy, students' past experiences alone are not enough to form their self-efficacy beliefs. Rather, students cognitively evaluate their past experiences together with environmental and personal factors to establish beliefs about their capabilities. Accordingly, it is expected that socialization experiences may have an important role in the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Based on this view, many researchers like Hackett and Betz (1981) suggested that differential socialization and differential access of girls and boys to the four proposed sources of self-efficacy can lead to different levels of self-efficacy beliefs between boys and girls in a given domain.

Self –Efficacy and other types of Self-Beliefs

Many items often confused with self-efficacy, pertain to the individuals' self-perceptions regarding their personal qualities, characteristics, and/ or competencies. These items include self-concept, and self –esteem.

Self-concept is defined as an individual's belief in and evaluation of himself or herself. Included in this definition are one's beliefs in attributes (both physical and mental), likes and dislikes, and strengths and weaknesses (Zimmerman and Cleary, 2006 :48). Self-concept beliefs differ from self-efficacy beliefs in that self-concept includes judgments of self-value (Bandura, 1986 as cited in Zimmerman and Cleary, 2006), whereas self-efficacy is a cognitive judgment of ability. Self- concept also describes what a person knows and understands about himself in terms of his

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

thoughts and feelings (Choi, 2005) .

The other construct , self-esteem is used in psychology to “describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value” (Branden, 1969). It is often seen as" a personality trait, which means that it tends to be stable and enduring. Self-esteem can involve a variety of beliefs about the individual, for example, the appraisal of one's own appearance, beliefs, emotions, and behaviours."(Creaby, 2016:9). Moreover , self-esteem is often regarded as the evaluative component of self-concept (Pope, Mchale, & Craighead, 1988). Thus , it means the way one feels about oneself, or how one rates oneself. It has to do with accepting oneself, feeling confident, and liking oneself. The most specific point about self-esteem is that it is not fixed and it can and does change. Simply, self-esteem is how much one values oneself (Langroudi et al ,2014; Baumeister ,2005 and Augestad,2017)

In conclusion, self-efficacy is independent of other psychological constructs like self-esteem and self-concept which seem to be more general than self-efficacy. Self efficacy is only associated with individuals’ “beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994:14).

Self-Efficacy and language Achievement

The relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement is one regarded by many educators as a well-established fact. Many research findings (e.g. Pajares, 1996 ; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Millis, et al., 2007) indicate that self-efficacy beliefs influence overall actions of people in general, and students’ academic performance in particular.

Moreover most if not all of these studies have reached the conclusion that academic achievement and self-efficacy are positively correlated .One of them is the study of Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) , who suggest that academic achievement and self-efficacy reciprocally effect each other and insist on the idea that Self-efficacy is an important predictor of academic achievement. Also Stevick (1980) mentions that the language learning success is mostly depending on what goes on inside the individual learner rather than on the strategies and materials.

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

A review of previous studies shows that perceptions and beliefs regarding self-efficacy are good predictors of academic performance (i.e. basic cognitive skills, performance in academic course work, and standardized achievement tests). While there are ample reasons to view the learners' English self-efficacy as powerful enough to predict EFL performance, it seems that the area has not received the due attention in Iraq. Thus, this study was designed in the hope that its results could sensitize Iraqi students' internal feelings and beliefs about themselves and correlate the results with their achievement tests in different study materials.

Research Question

The major purpose of this study is to determine English language learning self-efficacy levels of third year students at the University of Basra and correlate the results with their language proficiency levels. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the level of self efficacy among students in the English language.
2. Is there any relationship between the students ' self-efficacy and their EFL achievements?

Data collection procedures, instrument identification and description, and statistical analyses will follow.

Method and Data Source

Participants and Procedures

A descriptive survey type of research was adopted. A total of (66) students from College of Education, University of Basra during the academic year 2017/ 2018 participated in the study. The participants' ages ranged between (19 and 24). The sample was selected using simple random sampling technique. The rationale of study was explained to the participants. Brief instructions about questionnaire were given to participants orally. It was made clear to them that all information would be kept confidential and would be utilized only for research purpose. They were requested to complete the questionnaire. Approximately all the participants completed the questionnaires in the presence of researcher.

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

Instruments

Two instruments were used in the current study. The first one was a measurable instrument: namely, The Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE). It has 32 items and is scored according to a 7-point Likert- type scale. The students were asked how sure they were that they could perform a specific task related to English. These items are scored from 1(“I cannot do it at all”) to 7(“I can do it very well”).The scale was designed to measure the following four areas: self-efficacy for listening (Items 1,3,9,10,15,22,24,and 27); self –efficacy for speaking (Items 4,6,8,17,19,20,23,and 30); self-efficacy for reading(Items 2, 12, 16, 21, 25, 26, 29, and 31); (d) self-efficacy for writing in English (Items 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 18,and 28). Only one item was deleted from the original copy (item 31) because its content does not fit the EFL Iraqi learners situation. For evaluating academic achievements, the researcher requested the examination board to give her permission to access to participants’ academic records (final marks in final exams for the academic year 2017-2018 for five main language subjects) . These subjects were (Grammar, Linguistics, Conversation, Essay Writing, and Curricula & Methods of Teaching English Language).The courses are taught 2-3 per week for nearly 8 months. These courses include a review and expansion of basic grammatical structures, extensive practice in speaking and writing, and reading and discussions of various literary and cultural texts. To investigate whether there was any relationship between the students’ level of self-efficacy and their performance on the achievement test, some statistical analyses , such as Pearson’s product moment correlation method, and some descriptive statistics (means and rank ordering) were performed using SPSS software V.16.

Findings and Data Analysis

The self- efficacy was checked for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha analysis. It was found that self- efficacy was highly reliable upon checking the 31 items for reliability ($\alpha = .932$) as it is shown in the table below:

Table (1) :The Reliability of the Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.932	31

One of the study aims is to find out the level of self efficacy of students in the English language. It is clear from the table below that the participants in the current study have high self-efficacy levels that range between (3.8485 and 6.2576) with a total mean =5.1535.

Table(2): The Mean and S.D of the scale Items Level

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 1	66	3.00	7.00	5.7727	1.01974
Item 2	66	3.00	7.00	6.2576	1.02748
Item 3	66	1.00	7.00	4.5000	1.29199
Item 4	66	1.00	7.00	4.1970	1.51119
Item 5	66	1.00	7.00	5.7273	1.50431
Item 6	66	1.00	7.00	5.5303	1.41660
Item 7	66	1.00	7.00	5.1515	1.38389
Item 8	66	1.00	7.00	4.7121	1.28620
Item 9	66	1.00	7.00	5.5303	1.32688
Item 10	66	1.00	7.00	4.4697	1.44882
Item 11	66	2.00	7.00	5.7121	1.32160
Item 12	66	1.00	7.00	5.5606	1.47938
Item 13	66	2.00	7.00	5.4697	1.21807
Item 14	66	2.00	7.00	5.0152	1.44107
Item 15	66	2.00	7.00	5.8485	1.11276
Item 16	66	1.00	7.00	4.7727	1.44430
Item 17	66	2.00	7.00	5.3788	1.21231

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

Item 18	66	2.00	7.00	5.1515	1.43840
Item 19	66	2.00	7.00	5.4242	1.25343
Item 20	66	3.00	7.00	4.9242	1.29271
Item 21	66	1.00	7.00	5.7121	1.34468
Item 22	66	1.00	7.00	3.8485	1.69381
Item 23	66	2.00	7.00	4.6061	1.47678
Item 24	66	2.00	7.00	5.0909	1.40030
Item 25	66	1.00	7.00	4.8636	1.49755
Item 26	66	1.00	7.00	5.1970	1.48033
Item 27	66	1.00	7.00	4.8182	1.65398
Item 28	66	2.00	7.00	5.3485	1.35297
Item 29	66	1.00	7.00	4.6061	1.49747
Item 30	66	1.00	7.00	5.0455	1.39705
Item 31	66	2.00	7.00	5.5152	1.08475

Results of the items are also presented in groups according to the four language areas as it is shown in the table below:

Table (3): The mean and std. of the four language areas

Items	mean	Std. Deviation
Reading (2, 12, 16, 21, 25, 26, 29, and 31)	5.3106	.55559
Listening (1,3,9,10,15,22,24,and 27)	4.9848	.70659
Speaking (4,6,8,17,19,20,23,and 30)	4.9773	.46155
Writing (5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 18,and 28)	5.3680	.28179
Overall Self-efficacy	5.1535	.53599

The means in the subscales suggest that participants judged themselves more efficacious in reading (M: 5.3106) and writing (M: 5.3680) than listening (M: 4.9848) and speaking (M: 4.9773), though the difference is not that great among the four language skills. The reason is that the students are practicing reading and writing

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

in the learning process more often than the other two skills (listening and speaking).That's because no listening materials are given to the students and most of the students feel too shy to speak or participate in conversation lectures or discussion groups. This fact is acknowledged by the learners as well as the teachers, therefore such results are expected.

As for the second major purpose of this study, a correlation was carried out between the participants' achievements and the self-efficacy questionnaire. The obtained results revealed that there was a significant correlation coefficient (r =- 0.421) (See Table 4).

Table 4 : The correlation between Self –Efficacy and Students' achievements

		Self –Efficacy	Achievements
Self –Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	66	66
Achievements	Pearson Correlation	.421**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	66	66

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A significant positive correlation was found, as it is shown above, between the dimensions of self- efficacy and academic achievement in the English language. The findings of the current study are consistent with a number of other studies (Ayoobiyan & Soleimani, 2015 ; Cinkara,2009; Ghorbandordinejad & Afshar, 2017; Mahyuddin et al., 2006,). In all these studies students who believed that they had the aptitude to learn a foreign language may have used this as a motivator to study the foreign language, thus they obtained better grades than those who doubted their ability. Or perhaps these students had positive past language learning experiences, and have believed that they had the aptitude to learn a foreign language, and therefore continued to receive good grades.

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement—

Most of the previous studies have proven that learner's self-efficacy and goal-setting are interrelated to each other. It is clear that the stronger the self efficacy, the more likely the students select challenging tasks, persist at them and perform them successfully. So it is the teachers' task to guide the unmotivated students to identify challenging, yet manageable goals related to their interests, and encourage them to work towards their goals. Doing this will cause to improve their self confidence, believing that they could learn English, which is referred to as perceived self-efficacy and give them a sense of success and achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The primary goal of this study was to investigate how Iraqi EFL learners attribute successes and failures in their language classes. We examined how well self-efficacy would predict learners' achievement levels in authentic EFL classes. As Bandura (1997) stated, self-efficacy, expectations of success, and achievement are related. Students who have high self-efficacy tend to have positive outcome expectations. Although many researchers suggest that self-efficacy alone is predictive of academic success (e.g., Bandura, 1986), this study has identified that language and emotion are two related systems in use, in that one system (emotions) impacts the performance of the other (language). So it is very necessary to illuminate the important role of self efficacy in enhancing learners' ability to learn English as a foreign language. And it is the EFL teacher's responsibilities to raise their learners' consciousness about self-efficacy throughout :

- 1- Helping the students to maintain relatively high but accurate self efficacy beliefs.
- 2- Insisting on challenging academic tasks that most learners can achieve like taking notes, class work, asking questions by using English only as well as other school activities' such as talking with schoolmates during lessons .

The results of this study are of great importance as they inform educators and researchers as to the significance of monitoring students' perception of themselves.

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

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Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

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Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

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Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

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QUESTIONNAIRE OF ENGLISH SELF-EFFICACY

Dear Students :

Below are 31 questions regarding the self-efficacy. Please read the following questions carefully and make an accurate evaluation of your current command of English no matter whether you are doing it or not. These questions are designed to measure your judgment of your capabilities, so there are no right or wrong answers.

1-I can't do it at all

2- I can't do it

3-Maybe I can't do it

4- Maybe I can do it

5- Basically I can do it

6- I can do it

7-I can do it well

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Can you understand stories told in English?							
2. Can you finish your homework of English reading independently?							
3. Can you understand American and British English TV programs?							
4. Can you introduce your university in English?							
5. Can you write diaries in English?							
6. Can you give directions from your classroom to your home in English?							
7. Can you write English compositions assigned by your teachers?							
8. Can you tell a story in English?							
9.Can you understand radio programs in English speaking countries?							
10. Can you understand English TV programs made in Iraq?							
11.Can you leave a message to your classmates in English?							
12.When you read English articles, can you guess the meaning of unknown words?							
13. Can you make new sentences with the words just learned?							
14. Can you write email messages in English?							
15. If your teacher gives you a tape-recorded English dialogue about school life, can you understand it?							
16. Can you understand the English news on the Internet?							
17. Can you ask questions to your teachers in English?							
18. Can you make sentences with English phrases?							

Exploring the Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Self Efficacy and their English Language Achievement

No. : 1 Vol. : 45 Yr. January 2020

19. Can you introduce your English teacher in English?							
20. Can you discuss in English with your classmates some topics in which all of you are interested?							
21. Can you read English short novels?							
22. Can you understand English movies without Arabic subtitles?							
23. Can you answer your teachers' questions in English?							
24. Can you understand English songs?							
25. Can you read English newspapers?							
26. Can you find the meaning of new words by using English-English dictionaries?							
27. Can you understand numbers spoken in English?							
28. If you have access to internet, can you release news on the Internet							
29. Can you understand English articles about Arabic culture?							
30. Can you introduce yourself in English?							
31. Can you understand new lessons in your English book?							

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences

Statistics

	Grammar	Curriculum	Essay writing	conversation	Linguistics
N Valid	66	66	66	66	66
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	62.0152	65.9394	73.1515	60.5152	54.0455
Std. Deviation	18.35755	15.70387	11.17448	20.04629	16.66081
Minimum	24.00	43.00	51.00	21.00	20.00
Maximum	100.00	100.00	98.00	99.00	94.00