

Iraqi University EFL Students' Academic Stress and Language Proficiency:

**الضغط الأكاديمي والكفاءة اللغوية لطلبة
الجامعة العراقية دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية:**

**(A correlational Study)
(دراسة ارتباطية)**

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Abstract

This research aims at finding out the correlation between students' academic stress and language proficiency. The sample of the present research is 300 third and fourth-year college students who are randomly selected from the departments of English at the college of education of the universities of Baghdad, Diyala, and Babel.

The research instruments includes one questionnaire of academic stress and a Language proficiency test. It is found that academic stress has a negative effect on language proficiency. That is, the higher the level of academic stress in the research sample, the lower their language proficiency.

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are put forward.

Key words: (academic stress, language proficiency, students)

الملخص

ان البحث الحالي يهدف الى معرفة العلاقة بين الضغط الاكاديمي للطلبة وكفاءتهم اللغوية . ان عينة البحث هي 300 طالب جامعي في السنة الثالثة والرابعة تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من قسم اللغة الانكليزية في كلية التربية في جامعات بغداد وبابل وديالى .

تتضمن ادوات البحث استبيان عن الضغط الاكاديمي واختبار كفاءة اللغة . ولقد وجد ان الضغط الاكاديمي له تأثير سلبي على الكفاءة اللغوية اي انه كلما ارتفع مستوى الضغط الاكاديمي انخفضت الكفاءة اللغوية لدى الطلبة .

وبناء على نتائج الدراسة المستحصلة اتم طرح العديد من التوصيات .

الكلمات المفتاحية : (الضغط الاكاديمي الكفاءة اللغوية الطلاب)

Section One **(Introduction)**

The Problem of the Study

In higher “education, online courses have high rates of academic failure and see students struggling, particularly in the transition from entry-level to advance”. Many “reasons behind this : teaching approaches, lack of motivation/involvement of students in study and the attitudes/strategies used by students” (Gomes & Mendes, 2015,p.54).Also, “after graduation, most students come to the job market lacking necessary skills to meet the expectations of employers such as: teamwork and cooperation skills” (Sancho et al., 2009,p.45, Kumar & Khurana, 2012, p.23).

As “the world becomes increasingly globalized, English is considered the most wildly used international language of the world”. Therefore, “with the efficiency and benefit of communication in English increased, attention has been drawn to the development of learners’ English capability and proficiency” .The “term proficiency may be defined” as “the degree of competence and capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method” (Biere, 1972, p.332). In other words, “Language proficiency is a measurement of how well an individual has mastered a language”.

Aims

The present research aims at identifying the :

- 1) The level of academic stress and language proficiency among Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language.
- 2) Correlational “relationship between academic stress and language proficiency among Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language”.

Hypothesis

There is no statistically significant correlation between EFL students' academic stress and language proficiency,

Limits

The research is limited to:

- 1) Iraqi EFL university 3rd and 4th year students in the departments of English, University of Baghdad, Babel, and Dyjala.
- 2) the academic year 2020-2021

Value

This research is likely to be beneficial for Iraqi EFL “students to help them reduce their stress levels as this can enhance their performance. Examination stress and academic achievement may affect student psychologically, which hinder their expressions and their communication skills that is most important for proceeding their life”.

Also, teachers, “educators, and administrators should think of ways and means to reduce any kind of stress and helping students in finding a solution to their problems and enjoy their schooling stress-free and tension-free”.

Finding “ways to remove unnecessary academic stress by using various techniques”. This “will help students to enhance the level of academic. Also students are consoled for stress factor by trained guidance worker/counselor”. Further, “teachers should try to remove academic stress generating factors from learning environment by taking necessary steps”.

The study Highlight “the effective use of social support that reduces stress and its influence on psychological well-being”. It “will also encourage families, and friends to provide adequate social support to reduce the effect of stress and boost the academic performance of students”.

Section Two

(Theoretical Background)

Educational Stress

Educational “stress is the final step of a combination of the educational related demands that exceed the resources available to an individual that he/she adapt” (Wilks, 2008,106). It is a “mental and emotional pressure, tension, or stress that occurs due to the specific demands or difficulties of the student life”.

Being “exposed to new educational concepts, adjusting to new social settings, and taking on the larger workload are the possible resources of it”. Educational” stress may “come from the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of inadequate time to develop it” (Carveth, Geese, & Moss, 1996. 51). When “students feel that they have to learn all those things which are related to or prescribed by the educational institution, this brings educational stress for them”.

Verma and Gupta (1990,7) defined educational stress as “a mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with educational failure, anticipation of such failure or even an awareness of the possibility of failure”. Students “probably experiencing educational stress, that is being found in taking and studying for exams and with respect to grade competition and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time” (Abouserie, 1994,323).

Some “educational stress is normal for all students, but too much educational stress can lead to depression and serious emotional health consequences (Tennant, 2002,173), which in turn can negatively affect educational performance”. Zaleski, Levey-Thors, and Schiaffino (1998,127) found that “as the number of stressful life events increased for students, physical symptoms also increased”.

There “is evidence that some students experience significant levels of stress (Brown, & Ralph, 1999,11) and that they are increasingly suffering mental health problems in the universities”(Andrews & Wilding, 2004,510; Stanley & Manthorpe, 2001,41). Students “who experience mental and physical health problems are then at greater risk for poor educational performance, thus increasing educational stress and maintaining a cycle of stress, less coping, and finally health problems” (Struthers et al., 2000, in Wilks, 2008,106).

Definition and Parameters of educational Stress

Monat & Lazarus (1991a.3) suggests “three domains of stress - physiological, psychological and social”. Stress “is what taxes or exceeds the resources of the body, mind or social system. There are some concepts relates to it which include frustration, threat, and conflict, all part of living”.

Another definition “of stress is as a disturbance of homeostasis, from either an internal or external source” (Lazarus 1992.21). Emotional “stress has been defined as a state of autonomic imbalance, in response to a perception of threat, pain or discomfort” (Nuernberger 1981.62).

This reaction “is based on cognitive structures and past experiences, includes an expectation that the pain will occur in the future, and is consistent by the inability to resolve the threat”.

Stress “can be defined either as a set of feelings and reactions, or in relation to a situation of high demand and limited resources (Cox 1978.21), or as a description of the total process” (Lazarus & Folkman 1984.770).

Factors responsible for educational stress

A number of “demands reportedly comprise educational stress which includes meeting deadlines, course requirements, time management issues, financial burdens, interactions with faculty, personal goals, social activities, adjustment to the campus environment, lack of support networks, and career choices” (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000.41; Von Ah, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2004.463).

Meeting deadlines: Struggling “to meet assignment deadlines is a major source of stress for many students (Misra et al., 2000.238), and many individuals report that they feel overwhelmed by their workload” (Reisberg 2000, as cited in Robotham, 2008.735).

Assignments and home work: Warwick (2006.6) stated that “students did not have enough time to relax because of reading many textbooks though they really want to spend time to make friends or engage in outdoor activities”. Working “on assignments not only cut their time to pursue leisure activities but in many cases did not give them any time to participate in such activities”.

Time related pressures: Time management “issues are also an important source of student stress”. Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips (1990.760) suggested that “it is not the management of time itself that causes stress, but the individual’s perception of control over time that is the source of student stress”.

Examinations: The degree “of success attained in the educational system is measured largely by examinations which are the most significant source of stress for many students” (Abouserie 1994.323). Gadzella, Masten, and Stacks (1998, as cited in Robotham, 2008.755) concluded from “a study of undergraduate psychology students that it is the anxiety associated with tests, rather than the test itself, which creates physiological and emotional reactions to stress”.

Competitive educational atmosphere: The competition for “grades and the need to perform well is a significant source of educational stress”. Li, Lin, Bray, and Kehle (2005.315) found when “comparing American and Chinese universities , that the general pattern to be quite similar, but Chinese students ranked competition as top stressors while American students ranked examinations”. Likewise “Iraqi students also ranked grades and competition, and career and future success before educational demands and deadlines”. This was “attributed to the social pressure exerted on Iraqi students in general to perform well educationally and to succeed in their career”.

Financial concerns: A significant “stressor for students is living with limited financial resources”. To struggle “against their lack of money, increasing numbers of students have to take part-time paid employment during their studies” (Robotham, 2008.236). Consequently, “they have to invest their time and energy carefully to meet educational requirements”.

Transition to the university: The “transition to university is thought to be stressful for many students, particularly if this involves leaving home” (Fisher 1994.12). Some “students move away from home (probably for the first-time), and need to adjust to a new social environment, and maintain a high level of educational performance” (Ross et al., 1999.316). It has also been argued that “stress is a necessary part of what it means to be at university” (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1985.86).

In a study “Ross et al. (1999.317) reviewed the major sources of stress among university 100 undergraduate”. The “major sources of stress on the scale ranged from daily stressors to major life events”. Overall, “results showed that daily stressors were reported with greater frequency than major life events and that the intrapersonal issues were often the greatest stressors”. The “top five sources of stress reported by this sample were changes in sleeping habits, taking vacations and breaks, changes in eating habits, increased work load, and new responsibilities”.

Language Proficiency Definitions

Language “Proficiency has been defined as the ability to use a language accurately and appropriately in its oral and written forms in a variety of settings” (Cloud et al., 2000:60). The “four aspects of language namely listening, speaking, reading and writing are incorporated in this definition”. The “first two aspects represent oral language while the last two aspects represent written language”.

These “four aspects can develop independently of one another although the four aspects of language are highly related, especially when it is a second language not the learner's first language”. Oral “proficiency can be developed outside the school environment without any exposure to written language”. On the other hand, “learners can learn a foreign language without having much exposure to spoken language”.

Through “listening and reading as receptive skills, learners can learn easily because receiving information is easier than giving it by expressive skills, speaking and writing” (Cummins, 2003:15).

Cummins “claims that proficiency in all aspect of language in two languages that has bilingual uses is rarely occurred”. Balanced “bilingualism in which all aspects of both native and second language are proficiently mastered by persons, is an exception not a rule”. Moreover, “most bilinguals have more proficiency in some aspects of one language than the other, and the native speaker is not always the more proficient one” (Cummins, 2001:36).

Proficiency “levels vary depending on the function, context of communication and the conceptualization of language”. The “highly conceptualized language is easier to use and learn than language that is experienced in a reduced context” (Lamberger, 1997:176). Language “used in informal and social settings about concrete topics is easier to learn than abstract and cognitively demanding contents used in formal settings” (Cummins, 2001:68).

Canales (1994: 60) offers “a practical definition of English language proficiency”. She bases “her definition of language usage (proficiency) on a socio-theoretical foundation”. Within “such a definition, language is more than just the sum of discrete parts (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar)”. As a dynamic “process, language is developed within a culture for the purpose of conveying the beliefs and customs of that culture”. Canales asserts that language usage (proficiency) is:

- 1) Dynamic “and contextually-based (it is variable depending upon the situation, the speakers' status, and the topic)”;
- 2) is “discursive (requires connected speech)”;
- 3) Requires “the use of integrative skills to achieve communicative competence”.

Stern (1983: 341) defines proficiency as "the actual performance of given individual or group of learners", he argues that it involves:

- 1) The “intuitive mastery of the form of the language and the linguistic, cognitive, affective and socio- cultural meanings, expressed by language forms”.
- 2) The “capacity to use the language with high attention to communication and minimal attention to form”

3) The creative use of language.

In the “Applied Linguistics literature, the word ‘proficient’ is often used interchangeably with words such as ‘good’, ‘fluent’, ‘knowledgeable’, ‘bilingual’, ‘competent’, and so on, the term may be used quite differently from researcher to researcher” (Galloway, 1987:25).

Components of Language Proficiency

As far as “ELT is concerned, studies have revealed that language proficiency involves all language areas”. Lee and Schallert (1997,p.714) “believed that language proficiency relates to learners ability to use language skills accurately in different contexts and situations”. Otherwise, “it refers to an individual's general knowledge of a given language involving grammar, vocabulary and discourse conventions which may be called upon during any instance of oral or written language use” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008).

Teachers “tend to talk about the way we use language in terms of four skills-Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. These are often divided into two types”. They are as follows:

- 1) “Receptive Skills is a term used for reading and listening, skills where meaning is extracted from the discourse”.
- 2) “Productive skills is the term for speaking and writing, skills where students have to produce language themselves”.

1) Receptive Skills

a) Reading skill

Hornby (2005 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.17) “states that a person reads when he/she looks at and understands” “the meaning of written or printed words or symbols.” According to Hadfield (2008 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.18), “reading in the own language is very different from reading in a foreign language, because the mother tongue has different ways of reading depending on what is being read and why”. To use students “background knowledge of certain topic could help to predict the content of a text and also to understand it easily because students already know how different texts are structured”.

Harmer (2007,p.45) “states that there are two types of reading: extensive and intensive reading”. The “first term refers to the reading that students often do for pleasure”. This is “better when students have the opportunity to choose what they want to read”.

As “extensive reading is very important, teachers need to have a program which includes materials, guidance, tasks and libraries”. On the other hand, “intensive reading is the detailed focus of reading text, complemented with study activities, such as, uses of grammar and vocabulary”. This “kind of reading, teachers have to motivate students to read intensively, engaging them with the topics and tasks”.

b) Listening Skill

The act of listening means “to pay attention to somebody/ something that you can hear” (Hornby, 2005 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.22). This “implies the idea of understanding the message that one hear so that he/she can respond to it and interact with the person he/she hear”.

It is “perhaps the most challenging of the skills to master in a second language” because spoken language is different from written text”. In “English, speakers may miss a subject or verb, or may break off their sentence in the middle, or hesitate to think about what he is going to say next, or include words, phrases, or ideas that are not strictly necessary”. (Hadfield, 2008 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.25) According to Penny Ur (1996,p.15), “it is important to work on the development of listening comprehension”, since “students should learn to function successfully in real-life listening situations.”

Harmer (2007,p.44) “mentions two different kinds of listening”. On one hand, Extensive Listening “refers to listening which the students often do for pleasure or some other reason”. The “audio material they consume in this way – often on CDs in their cars, on MP3 players, DVDs, videos or on the internet—should consist of texts that they can enjoy listening to because they more or less understand them without the intervention of a teacher or course materials to help them.” This “kind of listening is very important from the motivational point of view”, because it “increases dramatically when students make their own choices about what they are going to listen to”

On the other hand, “Intensive Listening is the one in which” “students listen specifically in order to study the way in which English is spoken”. It usually “takes place in classrooms or language laboratories, and typically occurs when teachers are present to guide students through any listening difficulties, and point them to areas of interest.”

2) Productive Skills

a) Writing Skill

According to Hornby (2005 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.29), writing means “to make letters or numbers on a surface, especially using a pen or a pencil.” Richards & Renandya (2002,p.65) “mention that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners, since they need to generate ideas, organize them and translate these ideas into readable text which can be very difficult for students”. Harmer (2007,p.56) “mentions some important aspects that are considered in writing such as Handwriting, even though communication takes place electronically nowadays”. However, there “are instances in which students write by hand, for example in language exams”. Spelling “is also a main issue in writing and in literacy”.

One of “the reasons why spelling is difficult for students of English is that the correspondence between the sound of a word and the way it is spelt is not always obvious”. A “single sound may have many different spellings and the same spelling may have many different sounds”. A “third aspect is Layout and Punctuation which are essential in writing”. They “are different in writing communities and, frequently, non-transferable from one community or language to another”.

In fact, “to success in writing, in teachers’ own language or another language, it is necessary for students to be aware of layout and punctuation rules, in order to produce the written message as clearly as they can”.

b) Speaking Skill

Hornby (2005 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.31) “defines speaking as the act of talking to or having a conversation with somebody”. According to Hadfield (2008 as cited in Bastial M. et al 2011,p.32), “this presents the necessity of interaction among people”, which is not only “putting a message together” but also “the response that the listener can give to the speaker”. However, “this interaction presents a difficulty for learner of English as a foreign language”, since “they need to think of something to say and feel confident enough to try to express it”. Then, “they have to use what they have learned in terms of vocabulary and grammar to produce a message that other people can understand”.

Section Three

(Procedures)

Population and Sample

Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996,p.167) point out that “Quantitative researchers attempts to discover something about a large group of individuals by studying a much smaller group that they wish to learn about is called a population ”. While Fraenkel et al. (2009,p.90) “state that the larger group to which one hopes to apply the results is called the population”.

The “population in the present study represent the college students who are studying in morning studies in the Department of English at Iraqi college of education during the academic year 2020-2021”.

The “sample is a subset of the target population that the researchers are intending to evaluate in order to generalize the target population”. Ideally, “a survey is selected to represent the population as a whole” (Fraenkel et al, 2009,p.90).

According to Ary et al (2010,p.148), “a sample is a number of individuals, objects or events selected for a study from a population, usually in such a way that they represent the large group from which they were selected”.

The sample “of the present study is 300 third and fourth-year college students who are randomly selected from the departments of English at the college of education of the universities of Baghdad, Diyala, and Babel” (See table 1).

Table (1)
Population and sample of the Study

College		3 rd stage	4 th stage	total
College of Education Ibin Rushed for Human Sciences /University of Baghdad	Percentage	192	172	364
	30%	58	52	110
College of Education for Humanities / Diyala University	Percentage	186	170	356
	30%	56	51	107
College of Education for Humanities Babel University	Percentage	153	122	275
	30%	46	37	83

Note. The present study uses third and fourth year students because they are mature and proficient enough to collect the data from them

Instruments of the Study

Academic “stress questionnaire is adopted from Bedewy D and Gabriel A (2013)”. And “in its final form consists of (30) items, and each item has five scale, and it is scored according to a five likert scale of five points , (never, almost never, sometimes, often, very often), which are given the score of (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectively for the positive items and vice versa for the negative items”.

A “total score for the questionnaire is calculated by summing the scores obtained by the respondent for each score chosen”. Therefore, “the highest score that the respondent can obtain is (150).The lowest score he gets is (30), and thus the theoretical average of the questionnaire is (90) degrees”.

And the language proficiency test that is constructed by the researcher”. The “test covers the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in addition to grammar and vocabulary”.

Table (2)
Specification of the Proficiency test

Question number	Type	Number of Items	Category	Skill covered	Total score
1	Multiple- choice	10	Objective	Listening	20
2	Multiple- choice	5	Objective	Reading	20
3	Multiple- choice	10	Objective	Grammar and vocabulary	10
4	Multiple- choice	10	Objective	Grammar and vocabulary	10
5	Essay writing	1	Subjective	Writing	20
6	Answer the questions	2	Subjective	Speaking	20
Total					100

Face validity

In “order to ensure the face validity of the two study instruments, they have been exposed to a jury of specialist in the fields of ELT and Linguistics”. The jury “members are asked to decide on the appropriateness of the scales in measuring the investigated variables in the Iraqi educational setting”. The “jury includes 16 professors and assistant professors from different Iraqi universities (see appendix G)”. The “jury members (100%) show their agreement on the suitability of the two scales and the scoring scheme for achieving the aims of the study”.

Pilot Administration

A sample of 30 “students from the Department of English of /College of Education Ibin Rushed for Human Sciences is selected to conduct the pilot administration of the four scales”. This “procedure aims at checking the clarity of items and estimating the time to finish responding to the scale”.

Construct Validity

Construct validity of a scale can be evaluated through checking the patterns of correlations within the scores achieved by subjects responding to the scale items. This can be achieved through statistical analysis of the scale items (Trochim et al., 2015:159).

Statistical Analysis

The instruments of the “study are conducted on 100 students (not included in the sample) who are randomly selected from the Department of English - College of Education/Ibn Rushd for Human Sciences to form the statistical analysis sample”. This is “done to check item discrimination power and item-total correlation of the scales both of which are indicators of construct validity”.

Item Discrimination Power of Academic Stress Questionnaire

After “applying the questionnaire to the participant and correcting the answer forms, and in order to extract the discriminatory power of the questionnaire’s items, the scores are arranged from the highest to the lowest one”. The “number of participant in each group is (81) in the upper group, and (81) in the lower group”.

“t-test for two independent samples is used in calculating the significance of the differences between the averages of the two groups in the scores of each item of the questionnaire, on the basis that the calculated t-value represents the discriminatory power of the item” (Edwards, 1957,pp.153-154), and “it becomes clear that all items are distinguished because their calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value of (1.96) with a degree of freedom (160) and at the level of significance (0.05)”. Table (3) show the results of calculating the discriminatory power of the items.

Table (3)
of the discriminatory power of the
items of the academic stress questionnaire

Item no.	Higher group		Lower group		Calculated T-value	Indication level 0.05
	arithmetic average	Standard deviation	arithmetic average	Standard deviation		
1	3,62	1,134	2,40	1,092	6,984	valid
2	3,95	0,960	2,72	1,172	7,257	valid
3	2,97	1,203	2,19	1,144	4,214	valid
4	3,16	1,279	2,00	0,987	6,463	valid
5	3,92	1,104	2,34	1,026	9,432	valid
6	3,13	1,126	2,30	1,488	3,988	valid
7	4,20	0,904	2,55	0,987	11,119	valid
8	3,77	1,193	2,41	1,192	7,244	valid
9	4,51	0,726	2,81	1,256	10,567	valid
10	3,01	0,487	2,35	1,016	3,269	valid
11	4,24	0,982	2,60	0,970	10,923	valid
12	3,62	1,030	2,45	0,988	7,395	valid
13	4,19	0,797	2,74	1,069	9,827	valid
14	4,46	0,881	2,64	1,075	11,822	valid
15	4,32	0,959	2,66	1,095	10,224	valid
16	3,98	1,089	2,45	1,013	9,260	valid
17	3,32	1,233	2,29	1,122	5,529	valid
18	4,14	0,807	2,50	0,963	11,753	valid
19	3,88	1,118	2,17	1,022	10,195	valid
20	3,81	1,152	2,33	1,048	8,557	valid
21	4,39	0,846	2,46	1,194	11,837	valid
22	3,77	0,961	2,35	0,978	9,312	valid
23	3,80	1,155	2,29	0,914	9,199	valid
24	4,46	0,822	2,49	1,026	13,515	valid
25	3,97	1,182	2,51	1,194	7,798	valid
26	2,91	1,352	2,06	0,940	4,654	valid
27	3,23	1,132	2,56	1,106	3,791	valid
28	4,30	0,831	2,86	1,137	9,227	valid
29	4,14	1,073	2,60	1,190	8,664	valid
30	4,34	0,868	2,59	1,159	10,892	valid

Item Total Correlation of Academic Stress Questionnaire

In “calculating the validity of the items, the researcher relied on the Pearson correlation coefficient is used to know the relation between the scores of each item and the total degree, since the scores of items are related and gradual” (Dbois, 1962: 144), “noting that the item validity sample consists of (300) students in the current research”.

It “is found that all the correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the level of significance (0.05), as the values of their correlation coefficients in the total degree are greater than the critical value of (0,113) with a degree of freedom (298) and at a significance level of (0.05)”. See table (4) .

Table (4)

Correlation coefficient
Between the score of each paragraph
and the total score of the questionnaire

Item no	Pearson correlation coefficient	Item no	Pearson correlation coefficient	Item no	Pearson correlation coefficient
1	0,418	11	0,590	21	0,634
2	0,485	12	0,431	22	0,475
3	0,269	13	0,581	23	0,491
4	0,382	14	0,569	24	0,703
5	0,536	15	0,571	25	0,502
6	0,234	16	0,496	26	0,332
7	0,541	17	0,353	27	0,320
8	0,436	18	0,634	28	0,570
9	0,622	19	0,531	29	0,498
10	0,212	20	0,484	30	0,589

Construct Validity of the Language proficiency test:

Construct validity can be calculated as follows :

Items difficulty: The “coefficient of difficulty means” "the ratio of students who did not answer the items to the total number of students participating in the test" (Sulaiman and Raja', 2010,p.313).

The “difficulty coefficient for each of the items of the language proficiency test with the difficulty equation of the items for the objective and subjective questions are calculated and it is found that it is ranging between (0.32) and (0.69) all of which are valid , as the test items are considered acceptable if their difficulty rate is between (0.20-0) , 0.80-0)” (Al-Fiqi, 2014: 198) , See table (5) .

Table (5)

Difficulty and discriminatory
power coefficients for the objective
questions of the language proficiency test

Item no.	Correct answers for the upper group	correct answers are for the lower group	The number of correct answers for the two groups	The number of wrong answers for the two groups	Ease coefficient	Difficulty coefficient	discrimination power
Listening skill							
1	72	19	91	71	0.56	0.44	0.65
2	77	25	102	60	0.623	0.37	0.64
3	75	17	92	70	0.57	0.43	0.72
4	73	19	92	70	0.57	0.43	0.67
5	74	23	97	65	0.60	0.40	0.63
6	77	28	105	57	0.65	0.35	0.60
7	76	27	103	59	0.64	0.36	0.60
8	72	32	104	58	0.64	0.36	0.49
9	52	14	66	96	0.41	0.59	0.47
10	59	29	88	74	0.54	0.46	0.37
Reading skill							
11	61	14	75	87	0.46	0.54	0.58
12	72	22	94	68	0.58	0.42	0.62
13	61	20	81	81	0.50	0.50	0.51
14	70	9	79	83	0.49	0.51	0.75
15	70	32	102	60	0.63	0.37	0.47
Vocabulary and grammar							
16	53	23	76	86	0.47	0.53	0.37
17	65	18	83	79	0.51	0.49	0.58
18	57	16	73	89	0.45	0.55	0.51
19	64	30	94	68	0.58	0.42	0.42
20	69	32	101	61	0.62	0.38	0.46
21	50	23	73	89	0.45	0.55	0.33
22	65	15	80	82	0.49	0.51	0.62
23	64	28	92	70	0.57	0.43	0.44
24	62	26	88	74	0.54	0.46	0.44
25	61	14	75	87	0.46	0.54	0.58
26	67	13	80	82	0.49	0.51	0.67
27	57	14	71	91	0.44	0.56	0.53
28	67	19	86	76	0.53	0.47	0.59
29	61	11	72	90	0.44	0.56	0.62
30	61	5	66	96	0.41	0.59	0.69
31	50	13	63	99	0.39	0.61	0.46
32	71	27	98	64	0.60	0.40	0.54
33	74	34	108	54	0.67	0.33	0.49
34	68	32	100	62	0.62	0.38	0.44
35	65	29	94	68	0.58	0.42	0.44

Item Analysis

Bachman and Palmer (1996,p.92) “note that the analysis of items is a method that involves different statistical techniques to examine the quality of test items provided to students”. Alderson (1995,p.80) “suggests that there are two measures to be calculated for objective test items, the facility value (FV) and the discrimination index (DI), the former measures the difficulty level of the item, while the latter measures the degree to which the results of the individual item correspond with the results of the whole test”.

Discrimination Power (DP)

According to Fulcher & Davidson (2007,p.103), “discrimination power is the ability of the test's items to discriminate between higher and lower ability of test takers”.

Assuming “that getting more correct answers is directly related to the ability to answer the question, and getting fewer correct answers is directly related to the ability to answer the question, and the ability to differentiate” . As shown in the table (6) for the objective items varies from 0.65 to 0.44, for the subjective items (writing skill) varies from 0.34 to 0.36 , and for (speaking skill)varies from 0.38 to 0.39.

Table (6)
The Discrimination Power
and the Difficulty Level of the Test Items

No. of Question	No. of Item	Difficulty Level	Discrimination Power
Q1	1	0.44	0.65
	2	0.37	0.64
	3	0.43	0.72
	4	0.43	0.67
	5	0.40	0.63
	6	0.35	0.60
	7	0.36	0.60
	8	0.36	0.49
	9	0.59	0.47
	10	0.46	0.37
Q2	1	0.54	0.58
	2	0.42	0.62
	3	0.50	0.51
	4	0.51	0.75
	5	0.37	0.47
Q3	1	0.53	0.37
	2	0.49	0.58
	3	0.55	0.51
	4	0.42	0.42
	5	0.38	0.46
	6	0.55	0.33
	7	0.51	0.62
	8	0.43	0.44
	9	0.46	0.44
	10	0.54	0.58
Q4	1	0.51	0.67
	2	0.56	0.53
	3	0.47	0.59
	4	0.56	0.62
	5	0.59	0.69
	6	0.61	0.46
	7	0.40	0.54
	8	0.33	0.49
	9	0.38	0.44
	10	0.42	0.44
Q5		0.40	0.34
		0.46	0.31
		0.43	0.36
		0.43	0.30

		0.44	0.36
Q6		0.44	0.38
		0.39	0.43
		0.39	0.43
		0.41	0.39

Reliability

The reliability of self-regulation questionnaire.

The reliability “was extracted from the degrees of the whole sample of (300) students , using the Cronbach equation, the alpha coefficient reached (0.83).

Test – Retest

For the “purpose of extracting reliability in this way, the questionnaires are re-applied to the reliability sample that consists of (30) students, with an interval of (14) days from the first application”.

The “correlation coefficient between the scores of the first application of the questionnaires and the second application is the reliability coefficient of the test and the reliability coefficient in this case is called the coefficient of reliability over time” (Ebel, 1972,p.132).

Pearson “correlation coefficient is calculated between the degrees of the first and second application and the correlation coefficient is found (0.86) and this is considered highly acceptable as a reliability index according to” (Carroll and Hall 1985,p.118).

Reliability of the Test

For “the purpose of finding the reliability of the language proficiency test, Cronbach Alpha Equation (internal consistency)” is used :

This “method is based on calculating the correlations between all items and dividing it into a number of parts equal to the number of its all items. , and each item considered a partial test”. So “this equation is used to extract the alpha stability coefficient to language proficiency test of (300) students, and the value of the stability coefficient is found (0.84) and this gives good evidence for the consistency and homogeneity of the items” (Anastasi, 1976, p.126).

Section Four

(Results of the Study)

Results Related to the First Aim

To “achieve this aim, academic stress questionnaire is administered to the research sample” . The “results are statistically manipulated and show that the arithmetic mean of the scores is (96,693) and with a standard deviation of (16,852)”. for “the purpose of knowing the significance of the difference between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical average, which amounted to (90)”.

T-test “for one sample is used and it is found that the difference is statistically significant at the level of significance (0.05), as the calculated t-value amounted to (6,879), which is greater than the critical t-value (1.96), with a degree of freedom (299), which means that the sample possesses a medium level of self-regulation” , see table (7)

Table (7)

Arithmetic mean, standard deviation,
and t-value of the academic stress questionnaire

variable	sample	Arithmetic average	Standard deviation	hypothetical mean	T value *		indication (0.05)
					calculated	Tabular	
Academic stress	300	96,693	16,852	90	6,879	1,96	valid

The level of language proficiency among Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language.

To “achieve this aim, language proficiency test is administered to the research sample” . The “results are statistically manipulated and show that the arithmetic mean of the scores is (55,103) and with a standard deviation of (7,416)”.

For the “purpose of knowing the significance of the difference between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical average, which amounted to (54,5) at the level of significance (0.05), which is greater than the critical t-value (1.96), with a degree of freedom (299), which means that the language proficiency of the research sample has a medium level”, see table (8)

Table (8)

Arithmetic mean, standard deviation,
and T-value of the language proficiency test

variable	sample	Arithmetic average	Standard deviation	hypothetical mean	T value *		indication (0.05)
					calculated	Critical	
Language proficiency	300	55,103	7,416	54,5	1,409	1,96	Not valid

Results Related to the Second aim

To “extract this result, it is necessary to verify the null hypothesis which states that (there is no statistically significant correlation between academic stress and language proficiency among Iraqi university students studying English as a foreign language)”. To “verify this hypothesis, the answers of the research sample on the academic stress questionnaire and their answers on the language proficiency test is taken , then Pearson correlation coefficient is used, and the results” are as shown in table (8).

Table (8)
the correlation between
academic stress and language proficiency

Sample no.	The correlational coefficient value between academic stress and language proficiency	T value		indication (0.05)
		calculated	Critical	
300	-0,310	-5,636	1,96	valid

Discussion of Results

Concerning the first aim which is finding the level of academic stress and language proficiency, the current research results show that our students suffer from high academic stress and do not use specific strategies to reduce such kind of stress. Concerning “language proficiency’ level it is found that the research students sample has a medium level”. This result is in consistence with other studies Kabir, et al (2021), in which the level of students is investigated.

Concerning the second aim that relates to the relationship between academic stress and language proficiency , it is found that the relationship is a statistically significant inverse relationship, meaning that the higher the level of academic stress in the research sample, the lower their language proficiency”.

This “result is in consistence with Alias and Rashid (2018) which reveals that stress show a significant relationship with students’ language proficiency”. From “the questions of academic stress questionnaire, it seems that Iraqi EFL students complained of feeling stressed academically when it comes to facing exams and grade competition and having too much information to study yet insufficient time to master the knowledge”.

Conclusions

- 1) The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study:
- 2) It is concluded that “students suffer from high level of academic stress and should use specific strategies to reduce such kind of stress”.

It “is found that academic stress has a negative effect on language proficiency, that is, the higher the level of academic stress in the research sample, the lower their language proficiency.

Recommendations

After surveying and discussing the results of the study, it is recommended:

- 1) It “is strongly recommend to give a minimal decrease in the academic works of the students like no assignments at the weekend, encourages to have their academic works in a pair or a group”. Also “encourage the faculty members to have a consultation with their students regarding their stress level, so that the students can verbalize their feelings”.
- 2) Time “management skills and effective ways to handle examination anxiety should be an integral part of the stress management training”. All “counselling programs are needed to be evaluated on regular basis in order to make sure those are fulfilling their purpose and making significant improvement”.
- 3) Students “should be taught how to recognize, analyze, and cope with stressful events”. This “could be done by introducing courses with elements of psycho-social support”.

- 4) Students “should be informed about support systems available in the communities where they can go and receive assistance”.
- 5) Orientation “programs, seminars and workshops should be organized by the universities in collaboration with the counselling and human development centers to enlighten the students on the stressor that they are likely to experience in the course of their academic search”. Effect “of these stressors on the students should be emphasized.
- 6) Organizers “at all levels should introduce coping strategies which would help students to overcome whatever stress they might experience”. As “ability to cope with this stress is what will help them to achieve success in their academics”.

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Appendix (I)

Academic stress questionnaire

1= Never 2 = Almost Never 3 = Sometimes 4 = often 5 = Very often

No	Stress indicators (stressors)	1	2	3	4	5
1	Competition “with my peers for grades is quite strong”					
2	My “teachers are serious about my academic performance”					
3	“Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me”					
4	The unrealistic expectations of my parents stress me out					
5	Receiving criticism about my performance from my teachers make me stressed.					
6	I have lack of communication skills					
7	I feel stressed when I do not live up to my own standards					
8	My “parents care about my academic grades too much which gives me a lot of pressure”					
9	I feel stressed when there is too much homework					
10	The time allocated to classes and academic work is enough					
11	I “believe that the amount of work assignment is too much”					
12	A “am unable to catch up if I get behind my work”					
13	The examination questions are usually difficult					
14	Examination times are very stressful to me					
15	I feel that I do not have time for personal hobbies and sports					
16	I am unable to cope with great amount of knowledge					
17	Teachers have indifferent biased behavior					
18	I have too many internal assessment exams					
19	There is too much competition among classmates which brings me a lot of academic pressure					
20	I feel “that I have disappointed my teacher when my test/exam results are not ideal”					
21	I usually cannot sleep because of worry when I cannot meet the goals I set for myself					
22	I always lack confidence with my academic scores					

23	Future education and employment bring me a lot of academic pressure					
24	I feel stressed when I do not live up to my own standards					
25	Even if I pass my exams, I am worried about getting a job					
26	I think that my worry about examinations is weakness of character					
27	I can make academic decisions easily					
28	I am confident that I will be a successful student					
29	There is a generation gap between teachers and students					
30	Academic scores are very important to my future and even can determine my whole life					

Appendix (II)

Language proficiency Test

Q1/ listening comprehension

(Students will listen to a woman narrating some event)

Listen to the following audio then answer the questions below: 10 score

1) The Bell Jar was

- a. about her father
- b. her first novel
- c. a very successful collection of poems
- d. her last poem

2) Sylvia Plath's 'Collected poems'

- a. won "the Pulitzer Prize twenty years after it was published"
- b. were written during the last year of her life
- c. won "the Pulitzer Prize in 1982"
- d. were never published

3) Sylvia's husband

- a. made movies
- b. died in 2003
- c. was also a poet
- d. had a movie made about him

4) Susan Bassnett thought Sylvia's work

- a. was about her husband
- b. wasn't very good
- c. was about work life
- d. was of great interest to women

5) Sylvia's brother

- a. was "two years older than her"
- b. was born two years after her
- c. was a professor at Boston University
- d. was a highly educated academic

6) Sylvia Plath's time at college was difficult because

- a. she got bad grades
- b. she won a scholarship
- c. boys didn't like her
- d. she was short of money

7) In 1953 Sylvia

- a. left New York to get a job as an editor
- b. rejected an offer to teach creative writing
- c. worked as a guest editor in New York
- d. returned to new York because she was depressed

8) What does the lecturer imply when she says "Very few modern poets have captured the popular imagination as much as Plath"

- a. Plath was able to understand the hopes of ordinary people.
- b. Plath has become very popular
- c. It is unusual for a modern poet to become popular with ordinary people.
- d. Plath's writing was about modern people and their imagination.

9) What “does the lecturer imply when she” says “This domineering father figure became a common theme that recurred throughout Plath’s writing.”

- a. The image of her father appears in many of her poems.
- b. Plath often wrote of her love for her father.
- c. Plath writings were dominated by the image of her father.
- d. Plath’s father often told her what to write about.

10) Which THREE sentences best summaries the passage?

- a. What's “remarkable about Plath's work is that it addresses many women's issues that were ahead of her time”.
- b. Plath's “father was one of her guiding influences and he supported and mentored her until he died in 1940”.
- c. Plath's “early life was spent living happily by the sea with her mother who had a part time job to support the family”.
- d. The “real significance and the greatness of work was never recognized within in her lifetime”.
- e. Plath's “academic path to success was secured by winning an early scholarship. After this she never looked back”.
- f. Plath's “work reflects the many of the personal difficulties that she had whilst growing up and later as a wife and mother”.

Q2/ Speaking / in the form of interview: 20 score

- 1) Where do you see yourself five years from now ?
- 2) What are your strengths?
- 3) Are you courage enough to tell me something about a bad habit you have?
- 4) Do you like to study alone or in groups?
- 5) What is important, completing a job in time or doing it right?
- 6) Do you like to work under pressure ?
- 7) Have you ever been a team leader?
- 8) What makes you unique ?
- 9) What are your goals about the future?
- 10) Tell us about a challenge you've faced in your life and how you handled it ?

Q3/ Reading comprehension

Read the following paragraph then answer the questions below: 20 score

The “term 'virus is derived from the Latin word for poison, or slime. It was originally applied to the noxious stench emanating from swamps that was thought to cause a variety of diseases in the centuries before microbes were discovered and specifically linked to illness”. But “it was not until almost the end of the nineteenth century that a true virus was proven to be the cause of a disease”.

The “nature of viruses made them impossible to detect for many years even after bacteria had been discovered and studied. Not only are viruses too small to be seen with a light microscope, they also cannot be detected through their biological activity, except as it occurs in conjunction with

other organisms". In fact, "viruses show no traces of biological activity by themselves. Unlike bacteria, they are not living agents in the strictest sense. Viruses are very simple pieces of organic material composed only of nucleic acid, either DNA(the acid that is found in human atom cell) or" RNA(Ribonucleic acid), enclosed in a coat of protein made up of simple structural units.(Some viruses also contain carbohydrates and lipids.) They "are parasites, requiring human, animal, or plant cells to live. The virus replicates by attaching to a cell and injecting its nucleic acid.' once inside the cell, the DNA or RNA that contains the virus' genetic information takes over the cell's biological machinery, and the cell begins to manufacture viral proteins rather than its own".

1) Before microbes were discovered ,it was believed that some diseases were caused by

- (A) germ-carrying insects
- (B) certain strains of bacteria
- (C) foul odors released from swamps
- (D) slimy creatures living near swamps

2) The word "proven" underlined is closest in meaning to one of the following words:

- (A) Shown
- (B) Feared
- (C) Imagined
- (D) Considered

- 3) The word "nature" that is underlined in the second paragraph is closest in meaning to which of the following:
- (A) Self-sufficiency
 - (B) Shapes
 - (C) Characteristics
 - (D) Speed
- 4) The author implies that bacteria were investigated earlier than viruses because
- (A) bacteria are easier to detect
 - (B) bacteria are harder to eradicate
 - (C) viruses are extremely poisonous
 - (D) viruses are found only in hot climates
- 5) All of the following may be components of a virus EXCEPT
- (A) RNA
 - (B) plant cells
 - (C) carbohydrates
 - (D) a coat of protein

Q4/ Choose the appropriate word or word phrase to complete the sentences:10 score

- 1) Skepticism "is a belief that all beliefs can be proved false; thus, to avoid" the ---- of being wrong, it is best to believe nothing.
- a. satisfaction
 - b. confidence
 - c. frustration
 - d. unification

- 2) It is “commonly thought that a tree standing alone is more ---- struck, though in some forest areas, lightning scars can be seen on almost every tree”.
- a. deliberately
 - b. astonishingly
 - c. predictably
 - d. frequently
- 3) Eagles “locate and catch dead fish much more rapidly and efficiently than live fish, because dead fish ---- with their light underside up, making them easier to see”.
- a. float
 - b. depict
 - c. sink
 - d. strand
- 4) Born in “Great Barrington, Massachusetts, W.E.B. Du Bois became the most ---- and effective spokesperson for the full rights of African Americans before World War II”.
- a. respected
 - b. unbearable
 - c. insignificant
 - d. manipulated
- 5) Contrary “to popular belief, present-day historians see the Renaissance as an economic ---- and argue that a lot of peasants and urban poor, the majority of the population, worsened during this period”.
- a. progression
 - b. evolution
 - c. regression

- d. legend
- 6) Egypt, “the Arab world's most populous country, has gone on high alert after a warning from the UN that the ---- bird flu could hit North Africa and the Middle East”.
- a. elaborate
 - b. confident
 - c. deadly
 - d. determined
- 7) Great “earthquakes usually begin with slight tremors but ---- take the form of one or more violent shocks, and end in vibrations of gradually diminishing force called aftershocks”.
- a. rapidly
 - b. abundantly
 - c. considerately
 - d. furiously
- 8) The “rebels ---- the police station killing twenty-three police officers and freeing about fifty prisoners”.
- a. took over
 - b. looked after
 - c. ran over
 - d. came across

9) At “least 2,000 domestic and international flights were disrupted by the storm, when it knocked out electricity and ---- roofs, towers, fences and other equipment”.

- a. destroyed
- b. declared
- c. contributed
- d. eliminated

Over “the past decade the energy ---- of America has increased by more than 12 percent, while its production has increased by less than 1 percent”.

- a. evaporation
- b. evolution
- c. consumption
- d. reputation

Q5/ Choose the letter of the word or group of words that best completes the sentences: 10 score

1) ____tea plant are small and white.

- (A) The
- (B) On the
- (C) Having flowers the
- (D) The flowers of the

2) The major cause____the pull of the Moon on the Earth.

- (A) the ocean tides are
- (B) of ocean tides is
- (C) of the tides in the ocean
- (D) the oceans’ tides

3) The prisoners were prevented from speaking to reporters because_____

- (A) not wanting the story in the papers.
- (B) the story in the papers the superintendent did not want
- (C) the public to hear the story
- (D) the superintendent did not want the story in the papers

4) Case studies are the target of much skepticism in the scientific community, _____used extensively by numerous researchers.

- (A) they are
- (B) are
- (C) yet they
- (D) yet they are

5) _____discussed by the board of directors when it was proposed again by the supervisors.

- (A) The problem had already
- (B) The problem is already
- (C) The problem had already been
- (D) The problem has already

6) The X-ray treatments_____up to the time that he was dismissed from the hospital.

- (A) gave daily
- (B) were given daily
- (C) basically have given
- (D) daily had been given

7) Studies of carcinogenesis in animals can provide data on ____ in human susceptibility.

- (A) differences are
- (B) that differences are
- (C) differences have
- (D) differences

8) Those who favor the new law say that the present law does not set spending limits on lobbyists' gifts to politicians, nor ____ statewide funds.

- (A) it limits
- (B) limits it
- (C) does it limit
- (D) does it

9) The population of the earth is increasing at a tremendous rate and ____ out of control.

- (A) they have become
- (B) are soon going to be
- (C) soon will be
- (D) why it will be

10) Among the most revealing aspects of mining towns ____ their paucity of public open space.

- (A) was
- (B) were
- (C) it was
- (D) so

Q7/Write a paragraph of about 250 words to talk about one of the following topics: 20 score

- 1) Choose a piece of food to eat; then, write a description of it that includes the way it looks, smells and tastes.
- 2) Compare and contrast between E-learning vs classroom learning.