

Investigating Diplomatic Employees' Level of English Language Writing Skill

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التحقق من مستوى أداء الموظفين الدبلوماسيين في استخدام وظائف اللغة الإنجليزية

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى قياس مستوى أداء موظفي وزارة الخارجية العراقية في استخدام وظائف اللغة الإنجليزية، مع التركيز على المهارات الإنتاجية التي يستخدمها الموظفون في النقاش والتفاوض والتواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. شارك في الدراسة ٧٥ موظفاً دبلوماسياً مسجلين في معهد الخدمة الدبلوماسية للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٤-٢٠٢٥. استُخدم اختبار تشخيصي موضوعي لجمع بيانات الدراسة، وتم التحقق من صدقه وثباته ومعايير التقييم. أظهرت النتائج أن مستوى أداء موظفي السلك الدبلوماسي في استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية يتراوح بين المتوسط والجيد، مما يعني قدرتهم على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في التواصل والتفاوض والنقاش. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن المهارات الإنتاجية لموظفي السلك الدبلوماسي جيدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الموظفين الدبلوماسيين، وظائف اللغة الانجليزية، المهارات الانتاجية.

Abstract

This study aims to measure the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic staff's level of the functions of the English language, The focus is on productive skills that the employee use in discussion, negotiation, and communication in English language. The participants were 75 diplomatic employees enrolled in the Diplomatic Service Institute for the year 2024-2025. A diagnostic objective test was used to collect the data of the study. The test's validity, reliability, and the rubric criteria were verified. The results revealed that the diplomatic employees' level in the functions of the English is ranged between medium and good. That means they have the ability to use English language in communication, negotiation and discussion. It is concluded that the diplomatic employees' productive skills are good.

Keywords: Diplomatic Employees, Functions of the English Language, productive skills.

1.1 Statement of the Problem and its Significance

The Ministry of Higher Education has opened a wide field for researchers, calling on ministries, executive institutions, local administrations, and all relevant parties to adopt procedural plans and implement them on the ground in support of the principle

of integration and cooperation, and in pursuit of achieving the goals of sustainable development (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2024). This has been an incentive for the realization of this research, which seeks to address some of the obstacles facing ministries in Iraq, work to overcome them, and find solutions using academic and scientific means. With the aim of activating the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in general and the University of Babylon in particular, and providing services that benefit Iraqi society, and based on the researcher's specialization in teaching English as a foreign language and her mastery of its teaching methods, and to identify the tangible obstacles that lead to misunderstanding or lack of comprehension of some discussions and deliberations conducted by those concerned with the English language during international negotiations, and after conducting an extensive research survey and reviewing previous literature to address the problem of misunderstanding or delayed understanding and interpretation of speech, and to contribute to the University of Babylon's service provision to state institutions, the researcher concluded that research centers and academic institutes not affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research include: the Higher Institute for Security and Administrative Development, the Judicial Institute, and the Foreign Service Institute. The Foreign Service Institute was the only institute that followed the academic approach to teaching English. To provide an academic service, the researcher visited the institute and met with the Dean of the Diplomatic Service Institute to assess the language level of the staff. The Dean responded positively by providing a service to develop the language proficiency of the staff. The researcher did not stop at this request, but rather conducted an academic diagnostic test that included productive speaking and writing skills, and included measuring the level of diplomatic personnel in the linguistic system (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, generating ideas, presenting and concluding topics, and other linguistic functions). The study aimed to reveal the level of diplomatic personnel in language functions (productive skills) and the extent of their knowledge of using these functions in negotiations, discussions, and communication in English.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the level of language functions (productive skills) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees.

1.3 Question of the Study

To achieve the aim of the study, the following question was set:

“What is the level of language functions (productive skills) among the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to Brown's criteria?”

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Literature Review

Language is a talent at its core, it is not a subject with a content-based concentration, such as science, social studies, commerce, mathematic, etc., which aim to spread knowledge and overload the mind with data. Since language is a skill, it naturally belongs in the psychomotor domain. A skill could be defined as the capacity to perform an action effectively (Husain, 2015).

English language consists of four skills that are very important, these skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and can be classified into two groups:

- ▶ Receptive or passive skills
- ▶ Productive or active skills

Spoken and written abilities are classified as productive skills since they demand students use language to create information rather than absorb it (Spratt, et al., 2005 ; and Harmer 2007).

According to Hossain (2015) productive skills are essential to building communicative competence in educational settings, even if all language skills are used in tandem during the majority of FL tasks. It is demonstrated in the classroom when students engage and cooperate in pairs or groups to accomplish a given goal, which guarantees a process of meaning negotiation and the innovative use of real language.

Roca (2019) since productive language abilities are the visible result of language acquisition, they are crucial. Evidence of the learner's language system growth increases with the speaker's or writer's use of suitable and coherent language.

Writing is a means of completing tasks (Hyland, 2004). According to Nur et al. (2016) writing is characterized as a unique skill that enable students to express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts through meaningful language and mental engagement through written texts or messages that are employed in blended learning strategies.

Brown (2015) mentioned that writing improves learning and fosters the development of reasoning. In actuality, it depicts the cognitive process in addition to representing speech through written symbols.

The formation of grammatically accurate sentences with the right word order is crucial. Students should also work on using linking words and phrases correctly so that the reader can understand how the content is organized (Gower et al., 1995).

Reid(2000) mentioned that writing can serve three general goals, all of which can be found in a single essay, though typically one of them takes precedence. Those are:

- A- To clarify (inform, educate).
- B- To amuse or provide pleasure.
- C- To influence, persuade, or alter the reader's opinion.

According to Gerot and Wignell (1995) cohesiveness is the relationship between a text's phrases. Cohesion is the term used to describe the linguistic resources that, in

addition to phrase structure and clause complexes, give a text continuity. Additionally, it is impacted by:

- ▶ Conjunctions
- ▶ Punctuations
- ▶ Dixies
- ▶ Textual Meaning

Conversely, coherence refers to the relationship between the text and its environment. Additionally, it impacted by:

- ▶ Grammar
- ▶ Generic
- ▶ Linguistic features

According to Brown (2004) there are four types of written performance:

A-Imitative: The learners must master the fundamental, basic skills of writing letters, words, punctuation, and very short sentences in order to engage in imitative performance. The ability to recognize phoneme-grapheme correspondence in the English spelling system and to spell correctly fall under this category. At this level, students are attempting to become proficient in writing mechanics.

B-Intensive: During intensive performance, students must develop the ability to produce context-appropriate vocabulary, idioms, and collocations, as well as accurate grammatical elements throughout.

C-Responsive: Students should be able to connect sentences to make paragraphs and construct a coherent sequence of two or three paragraphs at a limited discourse level. Under some circumstances, the student starts to have some autonomy in selecting from a variety of expression or concept formats.

D-Extensive: Writing extensively means effectively managing all writing procedures and techniques, up to the length of a thesis, term paper, essay, or report from a significant research project.

2.2 The Function of Writing

Harmer (2004) stated that, there are some important points regarding the function of writing:

A- Unlike conversations, writing is frequently not time-bound. It implies that people have more time to reflect when writing than when speaking. In this manner, individuals are able to select the most appropriate words to convey their thoughts and proofread their work for errors or typos.

B- Because writing requires thought, it encourages people to pay more attention to the proper usage of words. This may help them grow and find a solution to the issue that writing causes them to think about.

C- Writing is a tool used to reinforce learnt language. In order to get students to take notes on newly taught grammar during the learning process, teachers employ their writing skills.

- D- Writing is frequently helpful while getting ready for certain tasks. Students are given time to consider what they want to write, particularly when they are instructed to construct a sentence.
- E- Additionally, writing can be employed to finish the section of a huge work where attention is diverted.
- F- Writing can also be employed for questionnaire-like tasks, where students may be told to make a questionnaire-type question to ask their friends.
- G- Writing is often used to assist pupils with other tasks, such as watching a news broadcast on television and writing down the major points the presenter is making. To do this, students must be proficient writers.

Students' attitudes towards writing are discovered to be influenced by a wide range of factors. For instance, these can be inferred from a lack of drive and enthusiasm (Cumberworth& Hunt 1998).

Zainurrahman (2011) stated that before starting a writing assignment, authors need to decide what kind of writing they want to produce.

According to Heard and Tucker (1997) there are seven primary categories of essays:

Descriptive essays: Concentrates on providing a detailed description of a person, location, thing, or scenario.

Narrative essays: Provides details on an experience or event while telling a story.

Process essays: Provide readers with instructions on how a procedure is carried out.

Compare and Contrast Essays: Identify parallels and contrasts between two or more subjects.

Cause and Effect Essays: Analyze the causes and consequences of an event.

Problem Analysis and Solution Essays: Identify problems and suggest feasible solutions.

Persuasive essays: They are written with the intention of persuading the reader to adopt a specific position.

Syam & Sangkala (2014) noted that every kind of writing adheres to particular standards and guidelines. Writing facilitates communication, opinion expression, and thought transmission.

Every employment requires people to write, and when they join and continue in a professional career, they will need to write frequently and effectively. This priceless, easily accessible resource demonstrates that accuracy, clarity, readability, efficiency, usability, and persuasiveness build the ideal workplace document. Writing takes up most of a day's work, and without flawless execution, even the best ideas can fail (James, 2008).

According to Fareed et al. (2016), writing is a crucial talent that students should acquire since it enables them to think critically and comprehensively, which is necessary for producing quality work.

The function of language can be measured directly via the writing skill. According to Crystal (2006) learning to write requires the following three precise skill types:

A- Motor Skills

In order for a writing style to be deemed adequate, they embrace the exact configuration of letter shapes, sizes, word spaces, gaps between lines, margins, and other layout elements that must be consistent.

B- Functional Skills

These skills involve ways of formulating concepts reflective of what the learners have in mind. Here, writing is utilized for an indefinitely enormous number of purposes to convey feeling, tell stories, finalise forms, report events, and much more.

C- Linguistic Skills

It takes years for this capacity to evolve. The first stage in teaching young writers a writing system is to use it to express speech patterns. Speech and later writing start out differently. Editing, rewriting, and draughting are essential steps in achieving effective expression. When the writer reaches a point in the writing process where he has such an honest mastery of language, s/he will be able to change up his style choices and develop his own voice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Due to the nature of this study, a descriptive design has been adopted to evaluate the English language productive skills of diplomatic employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3.2 Population and Sample

A population is defined as any "set of items, individuals, etc., which share some common and observable characteristics from which a sample can be taken" by Richards & Schmidt (2010,443).

A sample, on the other hand, is any group of people chosen to represent a population. A random sample is one in which each person in the population has an equal and independent probability of being chosen (Ibid).

The population of this study consists of 150 diplomatic employees and the participants were 75 employees in Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Foreign Service Institute who agreed to participate in the study.

3.3 The Instrument

To verify the aim of the study, the researcher prepared a productive instrument consist of a subjective test which is in a form of an essay writing test.

3.4 Scoring Scheme for Writing Test

The scoring scheme for writing test has been adopted from Brown and Bailey's (1984:39-41), 25 points overall, distributed among the following components: organization, logical development of ideas, grammar, punctuation and spelling, style and quality of expression. Each of these five elements receive a score out of five, with

five being the highest score and one being the lowest score. A five-point rating system is used to evaluate the five elements: poor (1); fair (2); good (3); very good (4); excellent (5). As a result, 25 points is the highest score on the test, and 5 marks is the lowest one.

3.5 The Validity

The face validity of the test was verified when the test and Brown's correction criteria were presented to experts specialized in methods of teaching English as a foreign language.

3.6 Reliability of the Test

Reliability is a necessary measure with every new application of tests, along with validity. The value of test reliability appears in its ability to detect differences in performance among individuals. Therefore, reliability was calculated as follows:

Correction Stability: for the correction to be more effective and objective and to ensure fairness in correcting the test, the test was applied to (10) employees, and the researcher corrected the writing skill test according to the approved Brown standard. Then the researcher sought the help of another corrector. Using the COOPER equation, the results showed that the percentage of agreement between the two correctors on the productive writing skills is 0.84 which is considered high stability.

4. The Results

4.1 Result Related to the Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is evaluating the level of the language functions (productive writing skill) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees. To achieve this aim, the following question was set "What is the level of language functions (productive writing skill) among the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to Brown's criteria?" the arithmetic mean with standard deviation were used to collect the employees' level of the language functions: the ability to present Introduction and conclusion, generate logical developments of ideas, grammar, Punctuation marks, and style and quality of expression. Table 1 shows the results.

Table (1) Participants' Performance Results on the Brown's Writing Skill criteria.

No.	Standards	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Rank
1	Introduction and conclusion	3.61	1.025	Third
2	Logical developments of ideas	3.63	1.205	Second
3	grammar	3.13	1.527	Fourth
4	Punctuation marks	2.93	1.597	Fifth
5	Style and quality of expression	3.73	1.004	The first
	Writing skill as a whole	3.41	1.272	

Table 1 shows the following:

1. The criterion of style and quality of expression came in first place with an arithmetic mean of (3.73) a standard deviation of (1.004) and a quality percentage of (75).

2. The criterion of logical developments of ideas came in second place with an arithmetic mean of (3.63) a standard deviation of (1.205) and a quality percentage of (73).
3. The introduction and conclusion criterion came in the third place with an arithmetic mean of (3.61) and a standard deviation of (1.025) and a quality percentage of (72).
4. The grammar criterion came in the fourth place with an arithmetic mean of (3.13) a standard deviation of (1.527) and a quality percentage of (63).
5. The punctuation criterion came in the fifth place with an arithmetic mean of (2.93) and a standard deviation of (1.597) and a quality percentage of (59), which was poor quality.
6. As for level of quality of the writing skill as a whole for the study sample, it was average, as it obtained an arithmetic mean of (3.41) and a standard deviation of (1.272) and a quality percentage of (68).

4.2 Discussion of Results

According to the findings of the current study, the diplomatic employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are found to possess a good level of the language functions (productive skills). Their average in writing abilities grade suggests that they are more proficient in written English, which may be a reflection of their roles' emphasis on written communication. Although additional research might examine the variables influencing the disparity between speaking and writing ability levels, the overall good level of productive skills indicates that employees are able to use English effectively.

Based on writing competence standards a particular hierarchy of strengths among the employees was identified by the essay writing. The style and quality of expression category was the highest ranked, indicating a great capacity for engaging and effective idea communication. The logical evolution of ideas criterion was applied, demonstrating a strong ability to arrange and structure ideas in a logical way. The employees' ability to produce a clear opening and conclusion is demonstrated by the third-place ranking of the introduction and conclusion criterion. The fact that the grammar criterion came .at the fourth place indicates that the employees' grammatical precision is an area that needs improvement. The fact that the punctuation criterion came in the last place suggests that the staff members would have trouble with it.

Learning them improves communication skills, as their use is often formal and protects users from misunderstandings that may occur during speaking. According to Brown (2004), he identified five factors for producing meaningful writing: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and style. The results of the current study are consistent with the literature, which has confirmed that speaking skills are usually more highly developed than writing skills. This was confirmed by the studies of Bai, et al., 2021; Camping, et al., 2023; and Prayuda, 2023.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes the following:

1. The level of language functions (writing skill) was above average (Good) among the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. The level of productive skills as a whole was good among the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. The introduction and conclusion criterion followed in the writing skill evaluation.
4. The grammar criterion came next in the evaluation of writing skills.
5. The punctuation criterion was ranked lowest in the writing skill assessment and was considered poor in quality.
6. The quality level of writing skill as a whole for the study sample was considered average.

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