

**The Impact of Deixis Expressions Misapplication in
Writing Performed by EFL Iraqi Students
Lect. Wafaa Naji Hammad (PhD)
Tikrit University- College of Islamic Sciences-
Department of Hadith and its Sciences**

Wafa.hamad@tu.edu.iq

أثر سوء استخدام تعابير الإشارة في الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الانكليزية

كلغة اجنبية العراقيين

م.د. وفاء ناجي حمد

جامعة تكريت- كلية العلوم الاسلامية- قسم الحديث وعلومه

Abstract

"Deixis expressions" are a subset of pragmatics that show how their references vary depending on the situation. They have relationship with some words or expressions that alter due to the circumstance. A shift in the context of a person, place, time, social standing, and discourse sign typically results in this kind of transformation. Nonetheless, the researcher will examine this study in the context of defining deixis and its varieties and demonstrating how this characteristic affects text interpretation. Regarding objectives, the connection between deixis and context is examined. In this study, the following procedures are carried out:

1. Providing a sufficient explanation of the term deixis.
2. Listing the primary deixis kinds and providing definitions with examples.
3. A brief summary of the study's primary findings is possible.

It is assumed that EFL students are to be incapable of recognizing and utilizing certain expressions. The data only includes (100) first-year English students from the English Department/ Tikrit University/ College of Education for Humanities/2025–2026 academic year. Cruse's (2006) model will be used in this investigation. The results show that a lack of cultural background makes it difficult for EFL students to identify the precise components of these expressions.

Keywords: culture, writing, deictic expressions, discourse, social, personal

1.1 Introduction

Deictic terms are crucial while writing papers in a variety of subjects since they give readers context and clarity. Deictic expressions make reference to something that is present in the immediate context. Students can create a more direct and interesting connection with readers in general and lecturers in particular by utilizing these terms in paragraphs, which makes their writing more approachable and relatable. This can improve the papers' overall effect and comprehensibility. In writing, deictic statements are essential for creating coherence and cohesiveness. In academic writing, where accuracy and clarity are crucial, they are especially crucial. Nevertheless, the frequency and distribution of deictic statements in academic publications have not received much attention, despite their importance. By offering a thorough examination of deictic expressions in students' writing, this study seeks to close this gap. Therefore, "deixis expression" refers to a subject that serves a crucial purpose in the field of pragmatics. They typically explain that their references vary depending on the situation. They have relationship with some words or expressions that alter due to the circumstance. This kind of transformation is frequently brought about by a shift in the context,

which includes discourse signs, people, places, times, and social status. The study's issue is that students struggle to identify who is doing the activities or the people or objects that are the subject of them.

Deictic expressions are commonly referred to as "indexical expressions" or "indexicals" within the domain of linguistic philosophy (Huang, 2007: 133). Deictics are terms that have a deictic usage as core or central; non-deictic words are expressions which do not convey such a usage as core or central. According to Huang (2007: 133), deictic words—such as "the sender of this utterance" or "the place where the sender is"—are expressions, phrases, and grammatical features that should be interpreted in light of the context in which they are used.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Deixis Expressions: Definitions

For Allot (2010), a word or phrase that indicates the time, location, or circumstance in which a speaker is speaking is known as a deictic expression, or deixis. Phrases like central or core that lack a deictic meaning are referred to as non-deictic terms. Words with a deictic usage, such core or central, are called deictics. According to Huang (2007: 133), "deictic words" are statements, phrases, and grammatical elements that must be understood in light of the context in which they are employed. For example, "the sender of this speech" or "the location where the sender is." Additionally, Levinson (1983:79) demonstrates that, despite having distinct histories and customs, both "deixis" and "indexicality" can be utilized in substitutable way to refer to contextual dependent reference. According to Lyons (1994: 636), "the term deixis belongs to the Greek word "deiktikos," which means "able to display"; that comes from the phrase "deiktos," that is a verbal of the phrase "deiknynai", denoting to reflect. Deixis word is interchangeable with "deitic," a term used in "linguistics and pragmatics" to refer to a method for figuring out whether words or phrases are totally context-dependent. In this respect, Hurford and Heasley (2007: 67) explain that deictic expressions are words that receive their meaning from the circumstance, i.e. the addressers, the addressee, the time, and the location of the speech in which it is used. In order to assist the listener in identifying the referent of referring statements in terms of temporal or spatial connections with utterance conditions, these deictic phrases are investigated (ibid: 64). That is, Allot (2010) argues that deictic is linked to context-sensitivity for the truth-condition. He continues by saying that although "deixis" is more frequently used in linguistics, "indexicality" is a preferable phrase for this broad philosophical topic. However, in terms of normal expression interpretation, deixis is a more general term than indexicality, because indexical is regarded as concepts that set as "the truth-conditions of an utterance context-sensitive." To sum up, Crystal (2011:241) concludes that the term "deictic" is used in linguistic theory to refer to elements of language that directly relate to the temporal, locational, and personal aspects of the situation in which an utterance occurs and whose sense is dealt with in that situation, such as "I/you, here/there, this/that, now/then."

2.2 Use of Deixis Expressions

Cummings (2010) states that two uses of deictic phrases can be observed:

- The majority of "gestural usage" relies on physical observation of interaction environment. For example, a phrase like "I don't agree with you but with you" is accepted (s) if the addressers concretely identify the concerned addressee. For instance, Culpeper & Haugh (2014) assert that deictic movements like signaling produce "gestural usages," like this foot.
- "Symbolic usage" requires knowledge of the main spatiotemporal elements of the speech context and the social constraints of its discourse, like "This room is dimly illuminated." It is necessary to perceive the speaker's overall location for interpreting such statements, and no explicit pointing is required, but it may entirely co-exist (Cummings, 2010). For Culpeper & Haugh (2014), "symbolic usages" depend on common spatiotemporal knowledge; they might be comprehended without gestures. For example, most UK-based Guardian reader can tell that "Let's make this country the best" refers to the UK without making any gestures. It is also acceptable to utilize "non-deictic terms" in a deictic manner. For example, he/she would not typically be regarded as deixis statement because they are often "anaphoric" senses that refer to something that was previously discussed rather than addressing the extralinguistic environment. In summary, Cummings (2010: 102) distinguishes "deictic from non-deictic usages of deictic terms." For example, a statement "Her mother entered the room. "Anaphorically alluding to "her mother," the speaker remarks, "This woman was the tallest female I'd ever seen." Therefore, there is no extralinguistic context to describe referents in the first phrase.

2.3 Typology of Deixis Expression

Cruse (2006) divides "deictic expressions" into two minor subkinds, "social and discourse deixis," and three fundamental sub-types of deixis, "spatial, temporal, and person deixis." However, these kinds shall be demonstrated as follows:

2.3.1 Individual Deictic

Allot (2010: 57) suggests that "personal deixis" may have two concentrates: the addressee and the addresser. "I" obviously chooses the first item, and "you" chooses the final. Third-person pronouns are frequently referred to as "non-deictic expressions" since they have no connection to emphasis. Nevertheless, these are often utilised deixis way. Take look at this example:

A: "He's going to drive," she said, gesturing to her husband.

One indication of the difference between the essentially deictic "I" and "you" and the non-deictic "he/she" is that using "you" and "I" anaphorically is significantly more difficult.

Pronouns can also be differentiated by number in a variety of languages: often "singular/plural (as in English) or singular/dual/plural (as in Arabic)" notwithstanding the existence of more intricate systems. There are several ways in which "number and person" emerge. An example is the first-individual plural "we" or "us," which raises from context a set including the addressers and sometimes, but not always, the addressees as well. Other languages refer to this linguistic distinction as inclusive-we vs. exclusive-we, either on the verbs or with different pronoun forms.

2.3.2 Spatial Deixis

Spatial deictics is described as "location in space relative to the speaker" by Cruse (2006: 166). The adverbs "here and there" are the most fundamental spatial deictics. According to Culpeper and Haugh (2014: 28), spatial deixis typically conveys a relationship regarding the separation between a referent and the addresser's deictic emphasis. Expressions of place deixis, such as that place, here, there, this city, and so forth, require contextual information regarding the utterance's location, according to Fromkin et al. (2014: 450).

Hudson (2003: 316) continues, "There are the demonstrative pronouns such as this, that, these, and those." Depending on the context, the word "this" in "I'll take this" could refer to a pen, a flower, or anything else. "Here" could refer to a location within "Chicago" when discussing "Chicago."

In terms of directional ideas, Fromkin et al. (2014) describe "before/behind, left/right, front/back" as deixis expressions when he/she necessities to indicate the orientations inside the conversational participant's space in order to recognise their own references.

2.3.3 Deixis Temporal

According to Huang (2007: 144), "temporal deixis" refers to encoding of temporal spaces and points in connection to the moment utterances are made in discourse contexts. The author provides an example of how "time is one-dimensional and unidirectional". In general, there are two distinct ways that time passes:

- To view time as constant and the "world" as evolving over time from the past to the future.
- To think of time as flowing via the "world" from future to past and the "world" as a table. One may discuss "the years ahead" in reference to the "moving world" exaggeration (i); conversely, one might discuss "the coming years" in relation to the "moving time" metaphor (ii).

2.3.4 Social Deixis

According to Huang (2007: 163), "social deixis" refers to the assertion of the addressers', addressees', and a third person or entity specified social positions, as well as the social ties that exist between them. "The information contained in social deixis may include social class, kin relationship, age, sex, occupation, and ethnic group. Consequently, social deixis is handled differently from individual deixis. Indeed, some linguists contend that "person deixis and social deixis cannot be studied separately. "Social deixis is regarded as "deictic terms which are context-sensitive in a different way from indexicals include socially deictic terms," according to Allot (2010: 59). Although using them in an incorrect setting would be impolite or inappropriate, the statement is still true.

2.3.5 Discoursal Deixis

Cruse (2006) states that "discourse deixis occurs when reference is made to discourse items which occur either before or after the current time of speaking". On this occasion, Cruse (2006: 51) claims that "discourse deictics" typically refer to something that has already happened and "this" to a thing that has yet to happen: - "That was the better story I have heard for a long time, Wait till you hear this..."

Discourse deictics occasionally involves expressions like "therefore, however, on the other hand," which deal with fragments of the prior discourse with fragments of the subsequent speech. Additionally,

Huang (2007: 72) states that discursial deixis is dealt with the use of linguistic items inside other utterance to indicate the present, prior, or subsequent utterance in the same written or spoken conversations. Nonetheless, the researcher will examine this study in the context of defining deixis and its varieties and demonstrating how this characteristic affects text interpretation. It seeks to explore the connection between context and deixis. The current study is essentially predicated on the idea that deixis and pragmatics are closely related fields.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methods used to accomplish the study's objectives and validate its hypotheses. It includes the experimental design, the population, the sample, the pretest and posttest ,the sample equivalence and statistical methods for data analysis.

3.1 Design of Research

Research design defines the arrangement of conditions for collecting and analyzing data. It aims to balance relevance to the research purpose with efficiency and established procedures (Akhtar, 2016).The research design is a plan ,structure strategy , and investigation concaved so as to ensure search questions and control variance (Thakur, 2021).This study uses a quantitative experimental design.

3.2 Participants

One hundred first-year undergraduate students from the Department of English at the University of Tikrit participated in the study. This criterion was used to choose the participants:

- Enrolled in an academic writing course.
- Intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency in English
- More experience, but not much more.

3.3 Design of Experiments

The steps that enable the researcher to test the hypotheses by obtaining pertinent findings on the link between independent and dependent variables are known as the experimental design (Best and Khan, 2006). According to Cook (1967), the experimental design is a crucial tool for the researcher to test the study's goals, methods, and hypotheses. Additionally, Creswell (2012) describes experimental design as a conventional method for guiding quantitative analysis or correcting a practice, concept and process to ascertain whether it influences a dependent variable or outcome. The following points are included in it:

1. Choosing two groups at random and allocating them to the experimental and control groups.
2. Equalize the two groups according to specific factors, like students' age and educational attainment.
3. Both groups use the same teaching resources.
4. Analyzing the gathered data and producing the findings using statistical methods.

3.4 Population and Sample of the Study

"Population is the sum of the research subject, while sample is the part of the population that is considered in the research," states Arikunto (2006: 130). Certainly, a population is all the persons relevant to the research subject. For Creswell (2012), a population refers to a group of people who have certain traits. Any group of people chosen to represent a population is referred to as a sample (Richards & Rodgers, 1992). A sample, according to Ary et al. (2018: 56), denotes group of people, events or things chosen for studies from populations, often such that they accurately reflect the sizable groups from which they were selected. Students enrolling in Tikrit University's English Department and first-year students in Tikrit University during the academic year 2025–2026 comprise the study's target group.

A tiny percentage of students are selected for study and observation to make up the sample (Best, 1981). The sample for this study was selected at random from 100 first-stage students in the English department at Tikrit University during the 2025–2026 academic year. Two groups (A and B) consist of the student body. Such groups were selected at random showing the experimental as well as control groups. Section (A) is the experimental group, which contains 50 students, and Section (B) is the control group, which likewise has 50 students. Take a look at the following table:

Table (1)
Number of Population and Sample

Population	No.	Sample of the Study	Groups	No.
EFL University students /all students in first stage	300	EFL University students/ first stage	EG	50
			CG	50
			Total	100

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Because students must be certain that the test is truly testing what it claims to measure, validity—which is defined as the exam's veracity—is crucial (Brown, 2010). Validity, based on Richards & Schmidt (2013), is the extent to which tests measure what they are intended to measure or can be effectively applied for the purpose for which it is designed. According to Messik (1989, p. 15), validity is an integrated evaluative evaluation of the extent to which theoretical justifications and experimental data support the appropriateness and sufficiency of conclusions and actions based on test results or other assessment procedures.

As for reliability, it is a crucial component of a good test. According to Veram and Beard (1981), a test is considered dependable if its level of accuracy is constant and steady when administered to the same sample of students under identical conditions. When determining whether a test is appropriate, dependability is undoubtedly a crucial consideration. The degree of consistency between two measurements of the same thing is known as reliability. According to Mehrens and Lehmann (1991), it is the consistency with which a collection of test results measures whatever they actually measure.

Reliability is a broad notion, according to Livingston, et al. (2018). It is used whenever we anticipate a particular behavior from something. One indicator used to assess quality is reliability. It is a quality factor related to system functioning that is focused on the user. It makes sense that a system is seen more dependable than one that malfunctions more frequently if its consumers experience failures infrequently.

3.6 Research Tool

A written test form was adopted as the tool of the study. To gauge learners' performance, pre- and post-tests were created.

3.6.1 Pre-test

The test's objectives were to gauge students' proficiency in the fundamentals of writing and to pinpoint the challenges that students in the Department of English, College of Education, and University of Tikrit had when composing suitable English paragraphs with an emphasis on the use of deictic terms. The researcher collected 30 marks from the pre-test results. It demonstrated that the students had trouble writing and were perplexed when utilizing the target deictic expressions. The results showed that the learners did not employ appropriate deictic language. Additionally, they showed that the learners were unable to present themselves and persuade the reader by properly organizing their views.

3.6.2 Post-test

The concerned expressions in the writing domain were explained throughout two courses. This term, the researcher concentrated on the sorts of deictic expressions, their meanings, and how to make their writing informative by avoiding the repetition of these expressions, particularly the personal ones. The students were required to work in groups during this time and provide examples and discuss them. The students were shown images by the researcher, who then asked them to use the concerned expressions to describe the images.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The following table reflects the frequencies and percentages of the deictic expressions:

Table (2)
Frequencies and Percentages of Deictic Expressions

Types of Deictic Expressions	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Deixis	67	33%
Spatial Deixis	29	14%
Temporal Deixis	44	21%
Social Deixis	17	8%
Discourse Deixis	45	22%
Total	202	100%

According to the above table, 67 students, or 33% of the total, use person deixis. With a percentage of 14%, the second kind receives a score of 29. 44 students, or 21% of the total, use the third type. The fourth type accounts (17) with the percentage of (8%). It enrolls 45 people with a rate of 22% for the fifth type. The purpose of the study was to determine the different kinds of deictic expressions and how frequently Tikrit University first-year English department students use them in their paragraphs. However, take a look at the following figure to see the results:

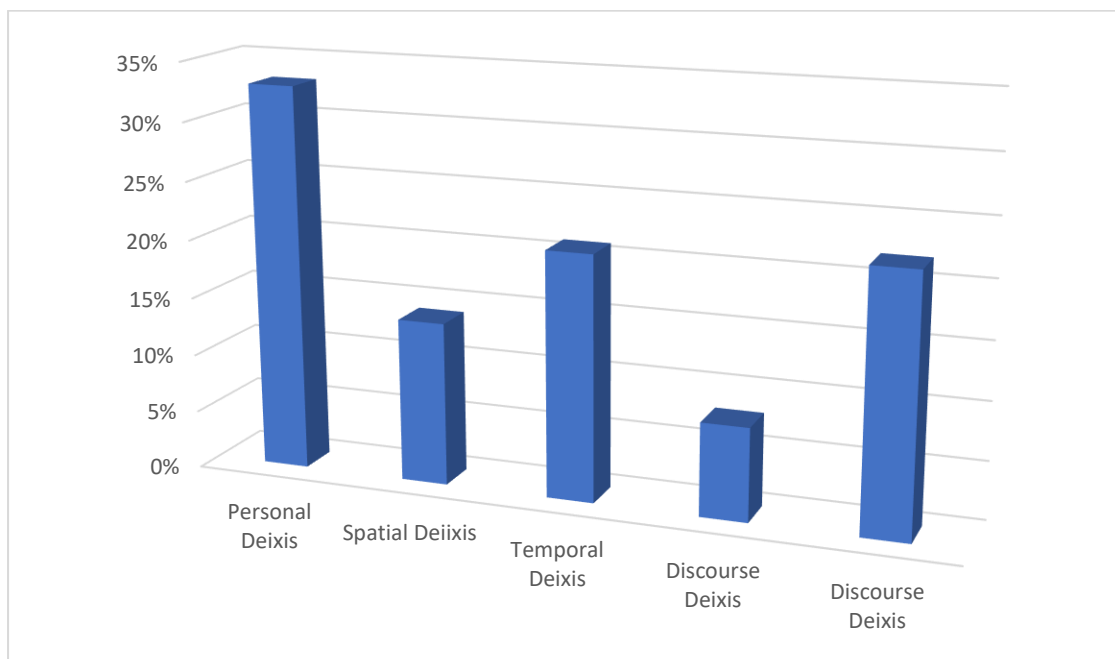


Figure (1)
Percentages of Deictic Expressions

5. Results

Based on the previously published data analysis, the researcher investigated the appropriate and inappropriate use of deictic terms in the problem's context. As a result, these subjects were covered in numerous earlier research. Take a look at these studies:

1. Abid Ali Nayif Husein is the author of *Discourse Analysis of Deictic Expressions in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot"* (2010). The purpose of this study is to examine the deictic phrases in the short novel "The Suppliant" by E.M. Forster, which is mostly written in a conversational style. One hypothesis is that temporal and spatial deixis are less frequently used than person deixis. Those who enjoy reading short stories may find the topic under examination useful as it provides some understanding of the deictic expressions and how they contribute to the short story's comprehensibility.
2. Bahaa A. Muslim Abdul-Ameea Al-Zobaidy wrote "Different Articles Used as Deictic Expressions in English & Arabic (A Contrastive Study)" (2016). It addresses the specific article "the comparative references study" in both Arabic and English. It looks into how such deictic terms are recognized in the two languages mentioned above. It is an attempt to highlight the syntactic and semantic similarities and contrasts between them. Based on the data analysis of the present study, it has been observed that many university students lack a comprehensive understanding of deixis and its significance in writing. This is particularly evident among those who may not have received formal training in linguistic concepts. Without this foundational knowledge, students often misuse or omit deictic expressions, resulting in ambiguous or confusing texts. Furthermore, deictic expressions inherently rely on context for their interpretation. Students may struggle to provide adequate contextual information in their writing, leading to statements that are unclear or misinterpreted by the reader. This challenge is exacerbated in complex arguments where multiple layers of meaning are involved. For non-native English speakers, challenges in using deictic expressions can be attributed to limited vocabulary and grammatical structures. They may directly translate expressions from their native language, leading to inaccuracies. Additionally, differences in how deixis functions in various languages can further complicate their usage in English writing. Finally, students may often resort to indefinite references (e.g.,

"this," "that," "these") without sufficient specification. This overuse can stem from uncertainty and a desire to appear formal, but it can lead to vagueness in their writing.

6. Conclusions

The following points should be taken into consideration:

1. Deictic phrases, such as "I/you, here/there, this/that, now/then," describe the situational, temporal, and personal aspects of an utterance that exists inside that scenario and whose sense is addressed with that context.
2. When referring to contextually dependent references, the expressions "deixis" and "indexicality" can be utilised interchangeably, although they encompass a variety of historical periods and customs.
3. Deictic expressions can be employed either symbolically, which entails understanding the speech setting's fundamental spatiotemporal characteristics as well as its social and discourse traits, or gesturally, which is predicated on a type of concrete monitoring of the speech environment.
4. There are two minor categories of deictic expressions: social and discourse deixis, and three basic types: spatial, temporal, and person deixis.
5. *The problems associated with writing deictic expressions among students are multifaceted and influenced by various factors including contextual understanding, cognitive load, linguistic competence, and curricular content. These problems can be overcome through various educational interventions aimed at improving the writing abilities of students. These interventions would help students in effective communication through writing. It would enable them to overcome the complexities of writing deictic expressions and would be beneficial in their academic success.*
6. Finally, EFL students are to be incapable of recognizing and utilizing certain expressions. Thus, the hypothesis of the present study is verified.

7. Recommendations

In order to deal with these challenges, a number of strategies can be employed by educators:

1. Contextual Teaching: Educators can emphasize the importance of context while dealing with deictic expressions by using real-life examples and situational writing exercises.
2. Cognitive Strategies: Educators can also employ cognitive strategies to deal with the complexity of deictic expressions by teaching students cognitive strategies that can help minimize the cognitive load.
3. Focused Instruction: Educators can provide focused instruction to students about deictic expressions that can help students deal better with deictic expressions.
4. Peer Review: Educators can also use peer review sessions as a strategy to deal with deictic expressions. In peer review sessions, students are more likely to think about others' perceptions of their writing.

References

- Akhtar, I. (2016). Research Design. In Research in Social Science: Interdisciplinary Perspectives (p. 17).
- Allott, N. (2010), Key terms in pragmatics, New York: MPG Book Group Ltd.
- Al-Zobaidy, B. (2016). Different Articles Used as Deictic Expressions in English & Arabic (A Contrastive Study). Journal.
- Arikunto, S. (2006). Research Procedure: A Practical Approach. PT Rineka Cipta, Jakarta, 129.
- Ary ,D., Jacobs ,L., Irvine ,C, and Walker, D. (2018).Introduction to Research in Education; Cengage Learning Canada ;Nelson Education Ltd Exotic Classic.
- Best, J. (1981). Research in Education .4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. (2006). Research in Education. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, Pvt, Ltd.
- Brown ,H. D. (2010).Language Assessment ,Principles and Classroom Practices. Pearson Education.
- Cook ,D . (1967).A Guide to Educational Research .3 ed ,United States
- Creswell, J. W.(2012). Educational Research.(4th ED), Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research.
- Cruse, A. (2006). A glossary of semantics and pragmatics, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Crystal, D. (2011). A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Culpeper, J. and Haugh, M. (2014).Pragmatics and the English Language. London: CPI Group (UK) Ltd.
- Cummings, L. (2010).The pragmatics encyclopedia. New York: Routledge
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R. and Hyams, N. (2014). An introduction to language, New York: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Huang, Y. (2007), Pragmatics, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hudson, G. (2003). Essential introductory linguistics. United States: Blackwell.

- Hurford, J. and Heasley, B. (2007). Semantics: A course book. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hussein, A. (2010). Discourse Analysis of Deictic Expressions in Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'. University of Al-Mustansiriyah, Journal of Arts.
- Levinson, S. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Livingston, S. A. Carlson, J., and Bridgeman, B. (2018). Test reliability basic concept. Research memorandum. No. RM. (18 10). Princeton, NJ; Educational Testing Service, 38.
- Lyons, J. (1994). Semantics. Vol. II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mehrens, W. A. and Lehmann, I. J. (1991). Measurement and Evaluation. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Messik, S. (1989). Validity. In R. L. Linn (Ed). Educational Measurement (3rd ed). New York: Macmillan, 13_104.
- Richard, J. C; and Schmidt, R. W. (2013). Longman Directory of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. Routledge.
- Richards, J. and Rodgers, C. (1992), Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thakur, N. (2021) Inclusive Growth by 'Design' Bamboo Product Success through I-CAN Design Process. IOSR Journal of Business and Management, 56-64. <https://www.iosrjournals.org/>
- Verma, G. and Beard, R. (1981). What is Educational Research?: Perspective on Techniques of Research. United Kingdom: Growers Publishing Company.