

Ethnography of Communication as a Teaching Strategy for Enhancing EFL University Students' Written Discourse

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إثنوغرافية التواصل كاستراتيجية تعليمية لتحسين الخطاب المكتوب لدى طلبة اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية في الجامعة

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Abstract

Challenges in written discourse that EFL university students encounter might prevent their academic progress. Therefore, there is a need for a pedagogical approach that incorporates social, linguistic, and contextual dimensions of communication. Ethnography of communication as a teaching strategy provides a comprehensive strategy to apply the elements of communication. The current study aims to enhance the written discourse through ethnography of communication to EFL university students of Tikrit/ College of Education for women. Accordingly, the current study hypothesizes that ethnography of communication, as a teaching strategy, has a positive impact on the written discourse of EFL university students in general, and on the aspects of written discourse: (Relevance and adequacy of content, Compositional organization, Accuracy, Cohesion, Mechanical accuracy, and Mechanics). To fulfill this aim, 50 first-year EFL college students participated in the study and were randomly divided into experimental and control groups, with 25 students in each group. The experimental group received instruction in ethnography of communication for two hours per week over an eight-week period. While the control group received conventional teaching methods. This study uses a validated test, and diverse statistical means to examine the collected data. The findings showed that the students of experimental group notably progress in written discourse in contrast to the control group. Moreover, ethnography of communication provides clear framework for interaction which encourages an active participation and supports teaching practices. Depending on the findings, some conclusions and recommendations are offered.

Keywords: Ethnography of communication, enhancing, teaching strategy, written discourse, Hymes's Grid

المستخلص

التحديات في الخطاب المكتوب التي يواجهها طلبة اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية قد تعيق تقدمهم الأكاديمي. لذلك، هناك حاجة إلى منهج تعليمي يدمج الأبعاد الاجتماعية واللغوية والسياقية للتواصل. إثنوغرافيا التواصل، كاستراتيجية تعليمية، توفر استراتيجية شاملة لتطبيق عناصر التواصل. الدراسة الحالية تهدف إلى تحسين الخطاب المكتوب من خلال منهج إثنوغرافيا التواصل لطلبة اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية في كلية تكريت/كلية التربية للبنات. وبناءً على ذلك، تفترض الدراسة الحالية أن منهج إثنوغرافيا التواصل، كاستراتيجية تعليمية، له أثر إيجابي على الخطاب المكتوب لطلبة اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية بشكل عام، وعلى جوانب الخطاب المكتوب التالية: (ملاءمة المحتوى وكفايته، والتنظيم التركيبي، والدقة، والترابط، والدقة اللغوية، وقواعد الكتابة). ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، ٥٠ طالبة جامعية من السنة الأولى في اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية شاركت في الدراسة، وتم تقسيمهن عشوائياً إلى مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة، بواقع ٢٥ طالبة في كل مجموعة. تلقت المجموعة التجريبية تدريباً في إثنوغرافيا التواصل لمدة

ساعتين أسبوعيًا على مدار ثمانية أسابيع، بينما تلقت المجموعة الضابطة أساليب التدريس التقليدية. استخدمت هذه الدراسة اختبارًا مُعتمدًا ووسائل إحصائية متنوعة لتحليل البيانات المُجمعة. أظهرت النتائج تقدمًا ملحوظًا لطلاب المجموعة التجريبية في مهارات الكتابة مقارنةً بالمجموعة الضابطة. علاوةً على ذلك، وفّرت إثنوغرافيا التواصل إطارًا واضحًا للتفاعل، مما شجّع على المشاركة الفعّالة ودعم الممارسات التعليمية. وبناءً على هذه النتائج، تمّ تقديم بعض الاستنتاجات والتوصيات **الكلمات المفتاحية:** إثنوغرافيا التواصل، التحسين، استراتيجية التدريس، الخطاب المكتوب، شبكة هايمز

Introduction

The way that teachers follow to achieve a goal teaching and learning process in the class is teaching strategy. Therefore, teaching strategy can be defined as an organized sequence of instructional activities, representing generalized and systematic patterns of teacher activities prepared to organize learning tasks and lead students toward the achievement of preset educational aims (Riduawan and Santoso, 2022). Moreover, teaching strategies refer to behavior of the teacher which appears in the class as development of the teaching strategies, using different methods to increase responses, providing extra activities and so on (Issac, 2010). These strategies connect the various possible learning methods in order to construct the best plan for dealing with the targeted group (Sari et al., 2023). Essentially, teaching strategies aim to align content with learners' needs and foster meaningful interaction within the educational context (Saputra and Aziz 2014). Ethnography of communication (EC), as Noy described, is a multidisciplinary research approach that uses detailed ethnographic descriptions of communicative events, in order to understand distinct contextual and cultural dimensions of communication. EC provided a rich theoretical foundations and specific procedures to understand and analysis of discourse in interactions (Noy, 2017). Astuti (2013) mentioned that ethnography of communication is an approach of discourse analysis in linguistics, which draws on the anthropological field of ethnography and takes both language and culture to be constitutive as well as constructive. Hymes (1974) offered the mnemonic device of the SPEAKING model to help ethnographers of communications frame their investigation of speech acts and events. SPEAKING model is one of Hymes most significant contribution to sociolinguistics, it is the artefact associated with Hymes as his popular legacy which has been widely accepted in the ethnography of communication (Johnstone & Marcellino, 2010). Applying Hymes's model pedagogically has significant effects on the learning ability of EFL learners. Especially when EFL university students continue to struggle with producing effective written discourse that is coherent and contextually appropriate, despite the growing emphasis on communicative competence in EFL education. Therefore, it is importance to enhance students' written discourse competence to become able to produce more coherent and contextually appropriate written discourse. This model as a helpful technique can be implemented in English language classrooms as it is the best known model for analyzing texts. In order to comprehend a text correctly, student needs not only to learn its vocabularies and grammar, but also the context in which words are used. As a result, the learning through Hymes's model can be helpful for students. Since the components of Hymes's assist learners to be able to communicate appropriately in a cross-cultural situation (Farrokh, 2019). Therefore, the ethnography of communication is not just a method but a coherent theoretical approach to language, where Hymes had an enormous influence in sociolinguistics by assisting steer linguistic work toward human communication as it occurs in use socially (Johnstone & Marcellino 2010). Thus, with the use of Hymes's model, students were expected to activate their written discourse in an attempt to be taught. This study can be distinguished as one of the few studies that aims to start the application of the Hymes's model into the EFL educational environment. Although, there are literature concerning theoretical fundamentals of Hymes's model, there are hardly any studies regarding to practical implications of Hymes's model in classroom environment. Therefore, the current research complements the few existing studies and fills the research gap in relation to the Hymes's model. Thus, the aim of the current study is to enhance the written discourse of EFL university students of Tikrit/College of Education for Women through ethnography of communication as a strategy of teaching. Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following hypotheses:

1- There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught using Hymes's model and that of the control group which is taught using the conventional method in written discourse posttest.

2- There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the written discourse attributes: (Relevance and adequacy of content, Compositional organization, Accuracy, Cohesion, Mechanical accuracy, and Mechanics).

The current study addresses an important gap in present EFL instruction by demonstrating how the components of communication of Hymes's model can be effectively used in the classroom. It supposes to be valuable for

many stakeholders. The outcome of this study can inspire the curriculum designers as well as the teachers. Curriculum designers can benefit from this study by including real-life communicative situations that reflect different social contexts. Additionally, Hymes's model can be useful for teachers, since serves as an organized strategy to teach contextualized language use, helping students to produce well-structured written discourse.

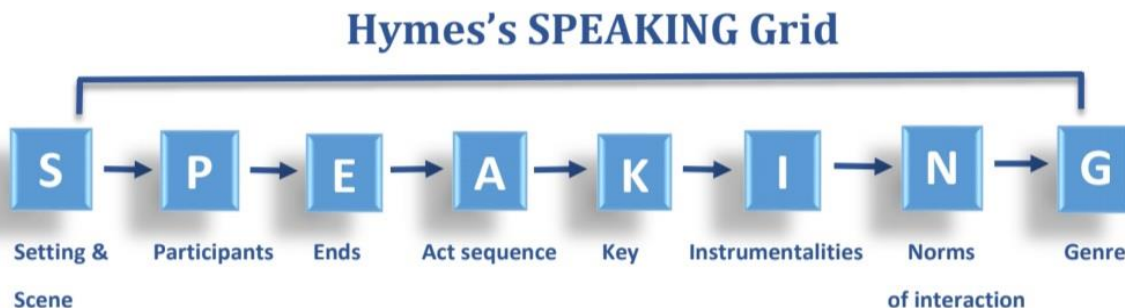
Literature Review

Ethnography of Communication

The term 'ethnography of communication' is suggested by Hymes to describe a new approach to understanding language in use. Hymes aimed through that to move away from considering language as an abstract system of rules and toward investigating the diversity of speech as it is encountered in ethnographic fieldwork. Thus Hymes offered a theoretical basis for language study that accounts for both linguistic variations among individuals and relative linguistic coherence across the social field. According to Hymes's SPEAKING model, the eight elements constitute the core of the ethnography of communicative events (Farrokh, 2019). Hymes developed a schema for analyzing context that has the "speech event" in which language occurs as its prime unit of analysis. Speech events include interactions such as a conversation at a party, any speech event comprises several components which are listed in the Hymes's model. With each letter acting as an abbreviation for a different component of communication. Hymes's model has become known as the 'SPEAKING grid'. The SPEAKING model provides a necessary reminder of the contextual dimensions that determine our use of language (Rodgers and Schmitt, 2021). Hymes's SPEAKING model of analysing the communication involved: (S) refers to the setting which means the time and place whereas scene refers to the environment of the situation. (P) refers to participants which means who is involved in the speech. (E) refers to ends which means the goals and purposes of the speech beside outcomes of the speech. (A) refers to act sequence which means the order of events that happened during the speech. (K) refers to key which means the manner or overall tone of the speech. (I) refers to instrumentalities which means the style and form of the speech. (N) refers to norms which identifies what is socially acceptable at the speech event. Lastely, (G) refers to genre which means a kind of speech that is being given (Carbaugh and Boromisza, 2015). As shown in the figure 2:

Figure 2

Hymes's SPEAKING Grid (designed by the researcher)



Ultimately, this list of components of SPEAKING model is meant to explore and explain human, social purposes in language, as well as a way of understanding how language works (Johnstone & Marcellino, 2010).

Written Discourse

Written discourse is the students' competence to organize, structure, and connect sentences and ideas to produce coherent and cohesive texts that effectively convey meaning. Written discourse is viewed not as sentence-level accuracy, but as a communicative act that requires logical sequencing of ideas, appropriate use of cohesive devices, and sensitivity to the purpose and genre of the text. (Reforsado & Raymundo, 2025). Gee (2014) clarified that "written discourse" is a socially situated form of language that goes beyond sentences to convey meaning within specific contexts, reflecting particular cultural and social practices. Gee emphasized that written discourse is how texts function as tools for communication, how they are interpreted by readers, and how they construct social identities and relationships. Written discourse, therefore, involves understanding both the linguistic features of a text and the social "Discourses" in which it participates. Paltridge (2012) added that "written discourse refers to the study of written texts, focusing on how writers structure language and organize information to achieve specific communicative purposes."

Previous studies

Ethnography of communication and SPEAKING model have been investigated in the research studies conducted by Marcellino (2010), Ray (2011), Qalyubi (2017), Wood (2018), and Umar (2024). These studies highlight the

effect of ethnography of communication and Hymes's model on various aspects of language areas. Marcellino presented a full description of the theoretical aspect of ethnography of communication. Ray et al. found that the study of ethnography played as a cognitive tool to clarify human social/cultural identity. Qalyubi demonstrated the applicability of Hymes' SPEAKING model to analyze sociolinguistic behaviors and communication norms across different cultural settings. Qalyubi also showed the effect of setting, participants, ends (goals), act sequences, key (tone or mood), instrumentalities, norms, and genres on communication events. Wood reported that understanding and identifying the SPEAKING model components can assist students gain communicative competence in the target language, thus stimulating them to be more proficient language users. Umar observed that the Hymes' Model Effectiveness, where SPEAKING components successfully analyzed workplace discourse and highlighted cultural and contextual nuances in communication. The current study contributes new insights into the role of SPEAKING model for enhancing EFL university student's written discourse. Unlike previous studies that highlighted on analyzing different discourses in many situations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative method, quasi-experimental design to investigate the effect of employing of ethnography of communication as a teaching strategy on EFL students' written discourse. The pre-test conducted for equalization where both the experimental and control groups submitted to the same pre-test. The independent variable is ethnography of communication, which was applied exclusively to the experimental group, while the control group did not receive this treatment. Subsequently, both groups were administered a posttest, and their achievement was analyzed to evaluate the effect of the independent variable.

Participants

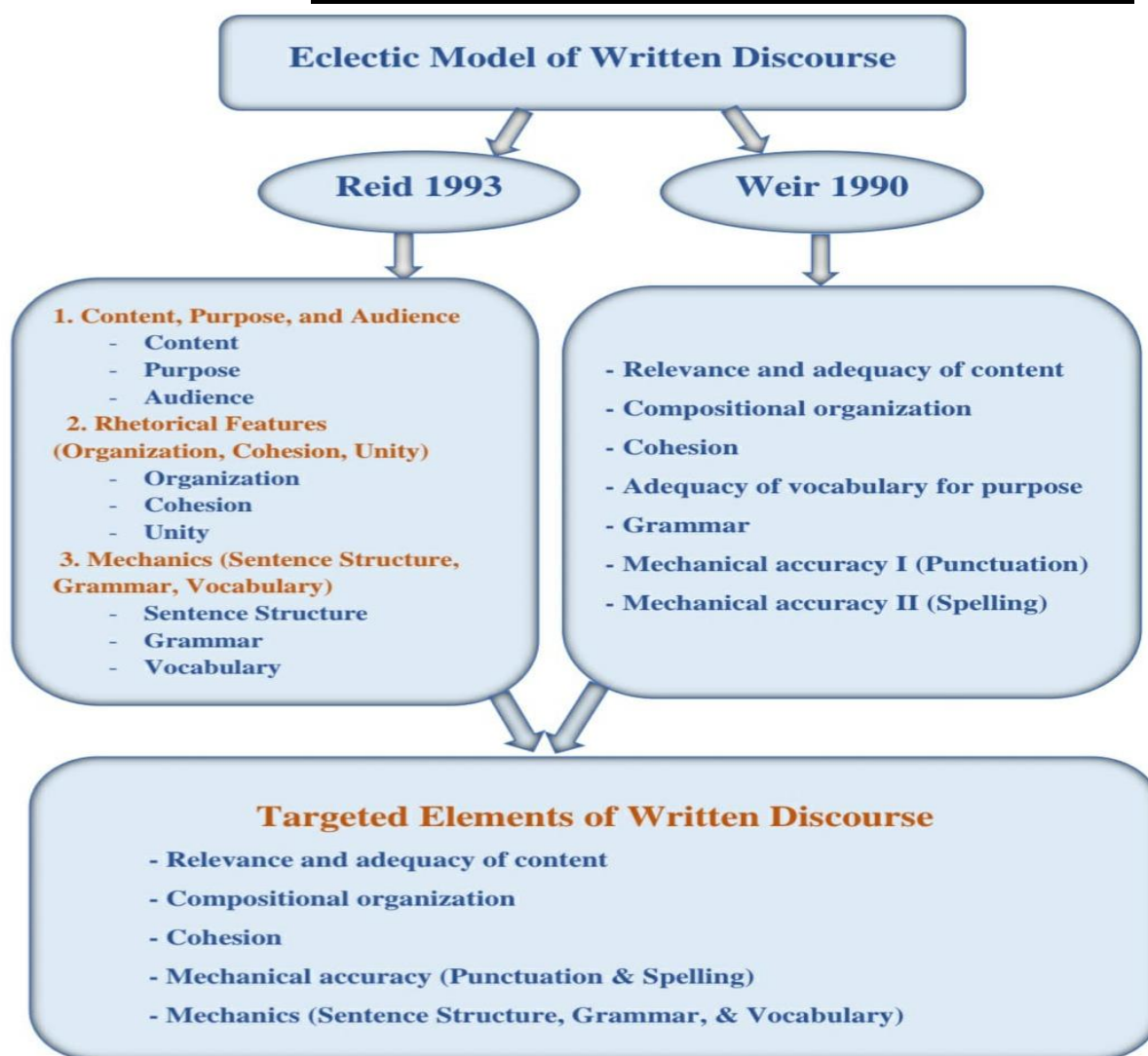
The participants in the present study included first year EFL students at the College of Education for Women at University of Tikrit during the academic year 2024-2025. The students were randomly separated into: Group (A) referred to the experimental group and Group (B) referred to the control group. The overall number of these two groups who engaged in the current study is 50 each group consists of 25. All participants presented informed consent to participate in the study, having been fully informed on the research goals and procedures. Participation was completely voluntary, and students were informed explicitly of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. In order to ensure the privacy of the participants, whole data gathered were addressed with firm confidentiality and directly de-identified by assigning a code number. The results are reported in total form to maintain the anonymity of all students. The researchers gained approval from the college by submitting a request for facilitation of the research study, and this request has been approved, as shown in appendix 1.

Instrument

The post-test has been constructed by the researchers which consists of four questions. Each question is given twenty-five marks. In order to confirm the face validity of the instrument, the researchers displayed the items of written posttest to evaluation by a panel of fifteen experts. To ensure content validity, the test has to address the intended objectives to show valid findings. Therefore, the analysis of written posttest is based on instructional objectives and to Bloom's Taxonomy. In order to confirm the construct validity, the items of written posttest are statistically analyzed by items discrimination and difficulty level. The Cronbach's alpha formula is used to acquire the reliability of internal consistency of the test items. The coefficient alpha Cronbach's found to be 0.92, which refer to a strong stability. An eclectic model has been used for the purposes of the study. The eclectic approach allows the researcher to integrate the most relevant elements from different models, providing a broader and balanced evaluation. Therefore, the criteria of targeted eclectic model of written discourse are identified from two models; Reid's model (1993) and Weir's model (1990) (as cited in Weigle, 2002) to involve: relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, accuracy, cohesion, mechanical accuracy, and mechanics. As presented in figure 2.

Figure 2

The Eclectic Model of Written Discourse (designed by the researcher)



Targeted elements have been involved within the scoring scheme in which each element has been allotted five scores and the answers of testees were corrected according to a rubric. As shown in table 1.

Table 1

The Rubric of the Written Discourse Posttest

Elements	Scores	Performance Discretion
Relevance and adequacy of content	4-5	Content is fully relevant, adequate, and well-developed; ideas are clear, focused, and support the topic effectively.
	2-3	Content is partially relevant; some ideas are developed but lack depth or clarity; minor digressions occur.
	0-1	Content is mostly irrelevant; ideas are unclear or off-topic; lacks development.
Compositional organization	4-5	Well-organized composition with logical flow; clear introduction, body, and conclusion; effective transitions.
	2-3	Some organization is evident; includes basic structure but with weak transitions or uneven paragraphing.
	0-1	No clear organization; ideas are randomly arranged; lacks introduction or conclusion.
Cohesion	4-5	Cohesive devices are used effectively and naturally; ideas connect smoothly and logically throughout.
	2-3	Some use of cohesive devices but sometimes inappropriate or repetitive; partial coherence between ideas.
	0-1	Sentences and ideas are disconnected; lacks cohesive devices; difficult to follow.

Mechanical accuracy	4-5	No mechanical errors; punctuation and spelling are accurate and consistent.
(Punctuation & Spelling)	2-3	Occasional errors in punctuation or spelling but meaning remains generally clear.
	0-1	Frequent spelling and punctuation errors that obscure meaning.
Mechanics	4-5	Grammar and sentence structures are accurate and varied; vocabulary is rich, appropriate, and enhances expression.
(Sentence Structure, Grammar, & Vocabulary)	2-3	Some grammatical or structural errors; vocabulary is adequate but sometimes imprecise or repetitive.
	0-1	Frequent grammatical errors; sentence structure is weak or incorrect; vocabulary is limited or inappropriate.

Procedure

The experiment was carried during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025. The experiment started on 5th of January, 2025, and lasted for eight weeks; the researcher herself has taught both groups, the control and the experimental. The lectures are allocated to be two hours per week for both groups. The experimental group was addressed by ethnography of communication as a teaching strategy while the control group is treated by the conventional method of teaching. The students in the two groups studied the same materials. The materials used in the treatment are the subjects and texts from the textbook. After choosing the two groups randomly, the pre-test was administered to both experimental and control groups which consisted of five questions related to the subjects in the textbook. The results of the pre-test indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test, as shown in table 2.

Table 2

The T- Test of the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the Pretest

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	25	14.12	4.49	0.032	2.011	48	0.05
CG.	25	14.16	4.38				

The researcher prepared daily teaching plans for teaching EFL students of the experimental and control groups. The experimental group is taught the topics by using ethnography of communication, whereas the control group is taught according to the conventional method. The study program was revised and confirmed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the College of Education for Women, University of Tikrit, before to the beginning of data gathering, to ensure that all procedures adhered with ethical guidelines.

Discussion

In order to fulfil the first aim of the current study, the following hypothesis is examined: “There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught using ethnography of communication and that of the control group which is taught using the conventional method in written discourse posttest”. The results of the statistical analysis by using a t- test for two independent groups have shown that the mean score of the EG of the students’ written discourse in the posttest is 88.76 and those of the control group is 50.84, with standard deviation 3.50 and 6.37 respectively. By using the t-test formula for two independent variables, the calculated t-value is found to be 26.065, compared to the tabulated t-value is found to be 2.011 at the degree of freedom 48 and level of significance 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the two groups, in favour of the experimental group. Thus, the first hypothesis, which states that “There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group which is taught using ethnography of communication and that of the control group which is taught using the conventional method in written discourse posttest,” is rejected, as shown in table 3.

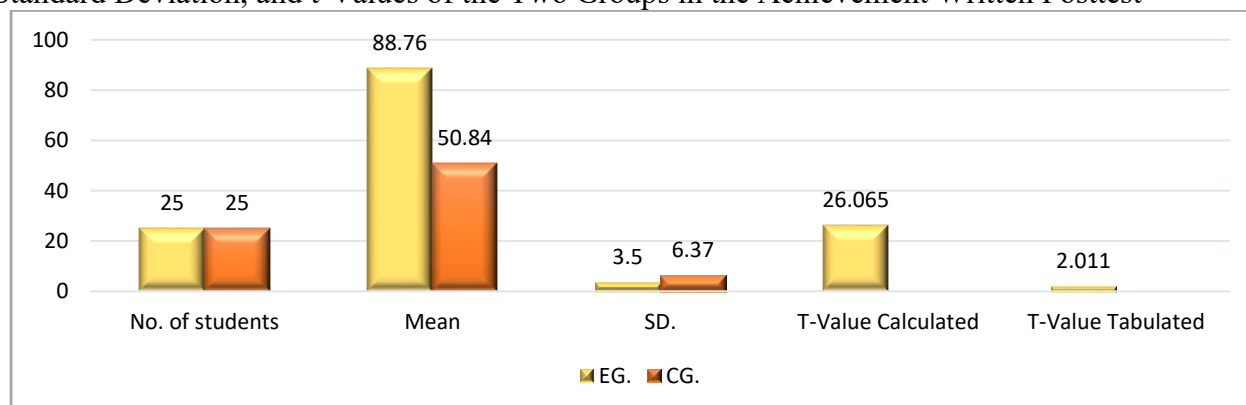
Table 3

Means, Standard Deviation, and T-Values of the Two Groups in the Written Discourse Posttest

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	25	88.76	3.50	26.065	2.011	48	0.05

Figure 3

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Two Groups in the Achievement Written Posttest



To test the second hypothesis of this study, which states that: “There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the written discourse attributes: (Relevance and adequacy of content, Compositional organization, Accuracy, Cohesion, Mechanical accuracy, and Mechanics).” a one-way ANOVA was used. As shown in Table 4, the calculated f-value value 63.428 is higher than the tabulated f-value 2.45 at the DF = 4, 120 and 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental group in the attributes of written discourse, leading to reject the hypothesis.

Table 4

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) among Attributes of Written Discourse

Variables	Sum Squares	of DF	Mean Square	F-value		Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated	
Between Groups	305.808	4	76.452	63.428	2.45	0.05
Within Groups	144.640	120	1.205			
Total	450.448	124				

According to the Table 5, the comparison of means indicates that the mean scores for the experimental group attributes of written discourse are 15.68 for relevance and adequacy of content, 17.36 for cohesion, 19.12 for compositional organization, 19.64 for mechanics (sentence structure, grammar, & vocabulary), and 19.72 for mechanical accuracy (punctuation & spelling), with a harmonic mean sample size of 25. The results show that there is a significant difference in the mean scores in the attributes of written discourse within the experimental group in the favour of mechanics and mechanical accuracy. Therefore, the second hypothesis which states “There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the written discourse attributes: (Relevance and adequacy of content, Compositional organization, Accuracy, Cohesion, Mechanical accuracy, and Mechanics),” is rejected.

Table 5

Comparisons of Means between Five Attributes of Written Discourse (Scheffe^a)

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Relevance and adequacy of content	25	15.68		
Cohesion	25		17.36	
Compositional organization	25			19.12
Mechanics (Sentence Structure, Grammar, & Vocabulary)	25			19.64
Mechanical accuracy (Punctuation & Spelling)	25			19.72
Sig.		1.000	1.000	0.447
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.				
a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 25.000.				

The significant differences between the experimental and control groups can be explained by the positive impact of ethnography of communication as a teaching strategy, which provides a structured and communicative framework that enhances students' understanding of how language functions in real contexts. Ethnography of communication trains students to think about how their message should be shaped to fit the situation. This awareness helps them produce writing that is purposeful and relevant. Additionally, it helps students analyse the situation behind each written task, considering the setting, scene, participants, purpose, context, and appropriate language choices thereby improving their coherence, organization, and relevance. Additionally, ethnography of communication explicitly guides students to structure their writing based on the communicative event's sequence "Act sequence". During instruction, students learn that effective writing follows a logical and social order; introduction, development, and conclusion, aligned with purpose and audience. This structured awareness helps them plan and arrange their ideas coherently, producing well-organized paragraphs. Students in the EG were likely trained to write content which is fully relevant, adequate, and well-developed as well as their ideas were clear, focused, and supported the topic effectively. Thus, ethnography of communication leads to highly significant differences in compositional organization compared to the control group. Also, ethnography of communication enhances strong improvement in mechanical and grammatical accuracy due to its emphasis on meaningful practice, revision, and feedback. Students become more attentive to how errors can affect meaning and audience understanding. The continuous use of authentic written tasks like letters, text, or dialogues, encourages them to correct and refine their work. This contextual learning builds language awareness, leading to noticeable progress in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and grammatical correctness. Furthermore, the "Instrumentalities" and "Norms" components highlight appropriate language use and style, assisting students choose accurate grammar and vocabulary that match social and linguistic contexts.

Conclusions

Conclusions are drawn in the light of the results of the study. The study affirms that ethnography of communication as a teaching strategy has an effective positive impact on EFL university students' written discourses, as the results indicate that the EG achieved higher post-test scores than the CG. Through ethnography of communication, students practiced to think about how their message should be shaped to fit the situation. This awareness assisted them produce writing that is purposeful and relevant. had a strong improvement on the attributes of students' written discourse. Through ethnography of communication, students learnt that effective writing follows a logical and social order. This structured awareness helped them plan and arrange their ideas coherently, producing well-organized paragraphs. Based on the findings of this study, the recommendations can be made. Ethnography of communication is advised be combined into university-level EFL teaching courses, as stated its positive impact on students' spoken and written discourses. Also ethnography of communication should be applied to different types of texts, such as novel, short story or poetry, to expose students to diverse discourse structures and enhance their analytical skills. Teachers must embed the SPEAKING grid within English language instruction, since it fosters students' use of speech events components effectively and recognize underlying textual messages. In addition, teachers should create various situations and tasks (e.g., role play, problem-solving task, and storytelling) to help students systematically account for the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions underlying any speech event.

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