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The Correlation Between Iraqi EFL University Students' Cognitive Motivation And Descriptive Writing

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Abstract

Writing plays an integral part in interactive communication, and learning its skills (non-verbal), is an essential focus in language teaching and learning. Learners are constantly encountered with new situations, whether in-or-outside the classroom, in which they need to be cognitively motivators to reconstruct their knowledge and control actions toward a desired goal in these situations. Accordingly, the current research is conducted to explore the relationship between Iraqi EFL university students' Cognitive Motivation and Descriptive Writing. It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' cognitive motivation and descriptive writing. Thus, it aims at finding out: 1) Iraqi EFL university students' level of cognitive

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motivation. 2) Iraqi EFL university students' performance level in descriptive writing. 3) The correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' cognitive motivation and performance in descriptive writing. A sample of (180 students) Iraqi EFL 3rd year students at the Departments of English-Colleges of Education for human Sciences at three universities; Tikrit (96 students), Baghdad (54 students) and Al-Muthana (30 students) respectively for the academic year (2024-2025) has been selected. The research design of the current research is a correlational in nature through which two main instruments are used, after being approved and validated by a jury of experts. These are; 1) Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire (41) item 2) Descriptive Writing Test which includes two questions they have been developed to collect data. The analysis of the collected data reveals specific results, which are showed as follows: 1) The Iraqi EFL university students have low level in cognitive motivation. 2) A higher level in descriptive writing by Iraqi EFL university students. 3) Regarding the cognitive motivation, Iraqi EFL university students have shown a positive correlation with descriptive writing. On the basis of the above results, conclusions, some pedagogical recommendations, and suggestions for further studies have been put forward.

Keywords: Cognitive Motivation, Descriptive Writing.

العلاقة بين الدافعية المعرفية والكتابة الوصفية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية

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الـمستخلـص

تلعب الكتابة دور أساسياً في التواصل التفاعلي، وبعد تعلم مهاراتها (غير اللفظية) تركيز اساسي في تعليم وتعلم اللغة. يواجه متعلمو اللغة الإنكليزية بإستمرار مواقف جديدة سواءً في الأنشطة داخل الصف او خارجه، يحتاجون فيها ان يكونوا متحفزين معرفياً لاستعادة المعرفة السابقة ولسيطرة الاحداث نحو الهدف المرغوب التي تحدث في هذه المواقف.

وعلى وفق ذلك، تم اجراء البحث الحالي لإيجاد العلاقة الارتباطية بين "الدافعية المعرفية والكتابة الوصفية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية". افترضت الدراسة

انه لا يوجد علاقة ذات دلالة أحصائية بين الدافعية المعرفية والكتابة الوصفية لدى طلاب الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية.

حيث يهدف البحث لإيجاد:

1- مستوى الدافعية المعرفية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية.

2- مستوى الأداء في الكتابة الوصفية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية.

3- الدلالة الاحصائية للعلاقة الارتباطية بين الدافعية المعرفية والأداء في الكتابة الوصفية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية.

تشتمل عينة هذه الدراسة (180 طالب و طالبة) من طلبة السنة الثالثة لأقسام اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة تكريت(96 طالب و طالبة) وجامعة بغداد (54 طالب و طالبة) وجامعة المثنى (30 طالب و طالبة) على التوالي للسنة الدراسية (2024-2025). أن منهجية البحث التي تم اعتمادها هو المنهج الارتباطي والذي تم من خلاله استعمال اداتين بعد ان تم عرضها على خبراء من ذوي الاختصاص، وهما 1) استبانة الدافعية المعرفية(41) فقرة. 2) اختبار مهارة الكتابة الوصفية الذي يتضمن سؤالين.

توصل البحث الحالي الى نتائج محددة، والتي تظهر على النحو التالي:

1- طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية عندهم مستوى منخفض في الدافعية المعرفية.

2- مستوى عالي في الكتابة الوصفية لدى طلبة جامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية.

3- وجود علاقة ارتباطية قوية بين أساليب التعلم المعرفية والكتابة الوصفية والإداء في الكتابة التفسيرية.

واعتماداً على ما جاء النتائج أعلاه، تم اعداد الاستنتاجات وبعض التوصيات التربوية والمقترحات لأجراء دراسات مستقبلية.

مفاتيح الكلمات: مبدأ الدافعية المعرفية، جوانب الدافعية المعرفية، الكتابة الوصفية، أنواع الكتابة الوصفية

1. INTRODUCTION

Cognitive motivation (CM) refers to the drive behind learners' thoughts and learning processes. It involves how learners process information, solve problems, and make decisions, often guided by curiosity, the willingness to acquire knowledge, and the intrinsic satisfaction of understanding or mastering a topic (Dunning, 1999). Furthermore, Zimmerman (2000) asserts that this type of motivation focuses on mental engagement and the pursuit of cognitive goals, such as acquiring new skills or deepening

comprehension as well as in psychology, the term of cognitive motivation is a theory that seeks to explain individual behavior in terms of the examination and consideration of received information. The idea of descriptive writing is to imagine the story or situation with rich detail in the learners' minds, who find that fine-tuning the writing skill is challenging. A mental image is the purpose of descriptive writing to describe people, places, things, or events. The best way to write a good description of anything is to be as elaborate and yet precise as possible. Descriptive writing enables learners to utilize sensory details to create a vivid image or picture in the reader's mind. It can inform, entertain, or persuade the reader (Hogue, 2003). Iraqi EFL learners lack sufficient knowledge or understanding of the basic text structure, and the strategies for mental thinking about and organizing informational text are anticipated to lead to poor descriptive text writing. They are not familiar with theoretical conventions and the structure used in descriptive level development and organization. (Khairi, 2011the current research aims at exploring the relationship between Iraqi EFL university students' Cognitive Motivation and Descriptive Writing. It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' cognitive motivation and descriptive writing. A sample of (180 students) Iraqi EFL 3rd year students at the Departments of English-Colleges of Education for human Sciences at three universities; Tikrit (96 students), Baghdad (54 students) and Al-Muthana (30 students) respectively for the academic year (2024-2025) has been selected. The research design of the current research is a correlational in nature through which two main instruments are used, after being approved and validated by a jury of experts. These are; 1) Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire (41) item 2) Descriptive Writing Test which includes two questions they have been developed to collect data. The analysis of the collected data reveals specific results, which are showed as follows: 1) The Iraqi EFL university students have low level in cognitive motivation. 2) A higher level in descriptive writing by Iraqi EFL university students. 3) Regarding the cognitive motivation, Iraqi EFL university students have shown a positive correlation with descriptive writing. On the basis of the above results, conclusions, some pedagogical recommendations, and suggestions for further studies have been put forward. The results indicate the following:

1) The learners have a low ability in writing Descriptive text. 2) They have poor thinking or difficulties in using grammar and vocabulary in expressing and organizing ideas, and in producing words, sentences, paragraphs, and arranging them into a good sequence. 3) They have few opportunities to support their self-motivation to occupy the largest space in the field of writing, utilizing their mental processes and previous experiences to create productive, effective, and purposeful texts. 4) EFL instructors' narrow view of the writing process. They look for errors, not for ideas; they, in fact, give their students the impression that writing is about grammatically correct sentences. Accordingly, this research aims to establish a strong relationship between cognitive motivation and its impact on descriptive writing, as writing skill is considered a complex activity undertaken by students. However, the research problem is best illustrated by answering the following question: 1) What cognitive motivation do Iraqi EFL University Students Employ? 2) What is the level of Iraqi University Students in Descriptive Writing skills?

2. THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Concept of Cognitive Motivation

Cognitive motivation is a psychological concept that expounds behavior as being driven by internal mental processes, such as expectations, decision-making, goals, and beliefs. Accordingly, the term "cognitive motivation" can be defined as "individuals' need for desire and knowledge to solve their problem, so that this need remains strong as long as the problem remains unresolved or the requirements needed to solve it abound" (Tubbs, 1986). Zimmerman (2000) notes that the concept of cognitive motivation can be reflected in the application of its two main sides.

a. The first side reviews various forms of cognitive motivation, including curiosity, achievement motivation, cognitive dissonance, and the search for intended meaning.
b. The second side examines the fundamental processes that underlie purposive meaning, such as attention and emotion, and working memory.

Furthermore, cognitive motivation emphasizes the role of thought processes in shaping individuals' motivation, as opposed to purely biological drives or external rewards. Additionally, it is grounded in the notion that individuals are energetic agents who analyze contexts, set objectives, and pursue results based on their personal goals and evaluations (Hazmi, 2015).

In sum, cognitive motivation is a dynamic and complex framework that provides insights into individual behavior. By understanding how internal thoughts and goals influence actions, this concept has become a foundational principle in psychology, with broad applications across personal development, education, and performance (Kool & Botvinick, 2014).

2.2 Cognitive Motivation Aspects

Cognitive motivation aspects are illustrated by Arnone and Grabowsky (1992) as part of an individual's motivational drives towards required information. These aspects are: curiosity, academic intrinsic motivation, and need for cognition.

1- Curiosity

Curiosity is defined as the recognition, pursuit, and willingness to learn, explore, or understand something. It drives individuals to seek out new information or knowledge, ask questions, investigate unknown or ambiguous events, and push the boundaries of what they already know. In other words, it motivates individuals to seek out more information and diverse experiences, to approach and engage with challenges and intellectual endeavors with an open mind. Additionally, it can be considered an element of individuals' development, learning process, and creativity, leading to innovation and greater insight into the world. Kashdan et al. (2018) illustrate the types of curiosity as follows:

a- Epistemic Curiosity: It is the desire to obtain new knowledge and understand complex concepts.

b- Divertive Curiosity: A more superficial kind of curiosity that can come from the willingness for stimulation or to relieve boredom, often satisfied by seeking variety or new experiences.

c- Perceptual Curiosity: It is stimulated by unexpected or novel stimuli. It is the type of curiosity that focuses on immediate sensory experiences.

d- Empathic Curiosity: It is the curiosity about the thoughts and feelings of others, characterized by the willingness to understand the emotions and experiences of others to build deeper connections or to grasp their perspectives in a specific domain.

2- Academic Intrinsic Motivation

Heckhausen (1991) defines intrinsic motivation as the complete emanation within individuals themselves to perform a task without external rewards. Several aspects contribute to intrinsic motivation:

a. Autonomy aspect: The feeling of autonomy will contribute to effectively arousing intrinsic motivation or control over one's actions and decisions, as it can be said that when individuals feel they have the freedom to select and direct their activities based on personal interests and values.

b. Knowledge desire aspect: The feeling of knowledge desire will contribute effectually to triggering internal motivation, it can be said that when learners feel they have an aspiration to acquire knowledge or information about a particular subject or topic.

c. Completion aspect: The feeling of completion will contribute to virtually evoking intrinsic motivation, as it can be said that when individuals feel they are able to effectively perform tasks and achieve desired outcomes.

3- Need for Cognition

Need for cognition refers to the dispositional tendency to enjoy and engage in thinking or seeking cognitive challenges. Individuals with a high need for cognition tend to be more positive toward contexts that demand logical thinking and problem-solving than those with a lower need for cognition. High NC individuals spontaneously engage in a variety of mentally effortful tasks, whereas low NC individuals will participate in such activities only when there is an external incentive to do so.

2.3 Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing uses sensory language (imagery language), or vivid language, to make the object described come alive; that is, words appeal to the five senses, describing how something sounds, looks, and tastes in detail. Additionally, it tends to employ precise language, illustrative language to show rather than tell readers what the writer's product means, and figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia, which add depth to the writer's descriptions. In descriptive writing, learners can describe everything that can be experienced by sight, smell, taste, sound, and feel in detail. Supplying detailed information about specific things enables readers to

comprehend what the writer means or understand the emotion or sensation conveyed by the writer (Lapoto & Potradinata, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that when considering the relation between students' descriptive writing and their emotions, it has been found that mastery of cognitive processes is associated with positive, intense emotions, which can have a positive influence on students' psychological well-being. Students' mental processes are used to respond to and organize their ideas in a written product, based on the features of language and the generic structure of descriptive writing, simultaneously (Toago & Usman, 2013).

It can be concluded that descriptive writing is a type of writing that consists of description, characteristics, definition of something, object or person, the writer of description, creates a word-picture of persons, places, objects, and emotions using a careful selection of detail to make an impression on the reader (Mark & Kathy, 2008).

2.4 Writing Descriptive Types

According to Tiur (2013), there are five types of descriptive writing:

1- Describing Process

Describing is the process of explaining how and why something will be done, as well as what is needed to complete the process. On the other hand, it not only describes how something is solved but also explains how process stages can be completed.

2- Describing an Event

For a clear description of the event, learners should memorize what happened during the event and explain all details connected to it, so that readers can imagine the genuine context and conditions of the event described.

3- Describing Personality

To describe an individual, one must realize the individual's characteristics. The description of persons encompasses physical attributes (eyes, hair), moral attributes (honest, worthy, greedy), intelligence (perception, cleverness), and emotional attributes (nervous, warm).

4- Describing a Place

The description of a setting will be presented in a concrete way (real-life situation). Learners should create the paragraphs in an interesting situation, control writing ideas, express expected attitudes and impressions about the place, and its conditions will be described. The organization of the details in the description relies on the subject and purpose.

5- Describing an Object or Thing

Accurately describing an object will be done by supplying the physical characteristics of the object (form, shape, color, and so on). For describing a thing, learners should have a good imagination about that thing being described. In addition to

making subjects as vivid and as interesting to readers, the learners can utilize suitable nouns and efficient verbs.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of the present research covers (1047 students) Iraqi EFL 3rd year university students who are studying in morning studies in the departments of English - Colleges of Education for Humanities in Iraq, except the Kurdistan region, during the academic year (2024-2025).

The sample for this research includes (180 students) Iraqi EFL 3rd year students who are randomly selected from the Departments of English - Colleges of Education for Human Sciences at three Universities: Tikrit (96 students), Baghdad (54 students), and Al-Muthana (30 students) respectively. Thus, the study sample size represents approximately (%17.19) of the study community, consisting of (1047) students, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample of the Study

University College	Sample (third Year)	Percentage
College of Education for Humanities / University of Tikrit	96	%53.33
College of Education for Humanities / Ibn Rushd. University of Baghdad	54	%30
College of Education for Humanities / University of Al-Muthana	30	%16.66
Total	180	%100

3.2 Instruments of the Research
Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire (CMQ)
The instruments used in the present research include (1) the Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire, which is constructed by the researcher depending on the theoretical background and previous studies. This Questionnaire consists of (41) items distributed into (7) cognitive motivations as follows:
Part 1 – intrinsic Goal Orientation (4 items).

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Part 2 – Extrinsic Goal Orientation (4 items).
Part 3 – Control of learning Beliefs (4 items).
Part 4 – Self – Efficacy (10 items).
Part 5 – Task Value (5 items).
Part 6 – Social Engagement (7 items).
Part 7 – Instructor Support (7 items).
     This questionnaire is also scored according to Five – Point Likert scale as Always (5). Often (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1).
    The Descriptive Writing Skill Test, which contains two questions:
Q1: "Describe Your Favorite Place to Relax."
Q2: Describe a Memorable Meal You've Had."

3.3 Face Validity

     According to Huges and Lavery (2003), face validity is the extent to which a test meets the expectations of those involved in its use, e.g., administrators, teachers, candidates, and test score users. Accordingly, the two instruments are exposed to a group of jurors specialized in the field of linguistics and the field of methods of teaching English to give their own viewpoints concerning both adequacy and appropriateness of the items or questions of each instrument or measure. Actually, after some minor or slight modifications, the experts show their approval of the appropriateness of the items and questions for the topic and sample concerned.

3.4 Construct Validity

     The other type of validity dealt with in the current research is construct validity. It refers to the extent to which an instrument measures whatever theoretical construct it is supposed to measure. Construct validity can be empirically assessed by investigating the correlations among test items (Salkind & Rasmussen, 2010).

3.5 Pilot Administration of the Instruments

     As a scientific procedure, before conducting the final version of the research instruments, it is necessary to conduct a pilot study to check the appropriateness of each instrument for the sample of the research. This administration has been conducted in order to: 1) Check whether there is any ambiguity in the test instructions so that appropriate alterations can be made, and
2) Estimate the time allocated for answering the instruments (Clark-Carter, 2004).
    Accordingly, a sample of (50) students has been chosen randomly from the third-year EFL students at the College of Education and the University of Samarra to represent the pilot sample. The findings of the pilot research reveal that there is no ambiguity in either the items or the instructions for the instruments. It is worth noting that pilot research is also used to estimate the reliability of research instruments. The pilot research is conducted on 12th November 2024. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the time required to complete the instruments is as follows: CMQ (15 minutes) and DWST (30 minutes).

3.6 Reliability of the Research Instruments

     One of the essential characteristics of a good instrument is reliability, which refers to the consistency or stability of score values that an instrument elicits (Franzen, 2002). Dunn (2009) claims that "reliability provides information on whether the collection procedure is consistent and accurate". As far as the current research is concerned, three types of reliability are addressed: test-retest, internal consistency, and inter-rater.

3.6.1 Test-Retest

The measurement of test-retest means that if the same respondents complete a test at two different points in time, the responses should be stable and the set of results should be reproducible (Sharma & Sharma, 2006). As far as the present research is concerned. The (CMQ) is administered to a sample of (40) participants (the research sample) chosen randomly. After two weeks, the same measures are applied to the same sample. Using Pearson Correlation Coefficient to estimate reliability between the two sets of response results shows that the reliability value for the (CMQ) is (0.814).

3.6.2 Internal Consistency

The other aspect of reliability examined in this research is the internal consistency of the measure items. One of the widely used methods for assessing the internal consistency of the test is Cronbach's Alpha (Franzen, 2002).

Cronbach Alpha Coefficient can range from 0.00 to 1.00 to indicate very low to very high internal consistency. In addition, an Alpha of (0.65-0.80) is often considered adequate for a measure used in human dimension research. Accordingly, the measure of the research (CMQ) was found to have high internal consistency with a reliability value of (0.826).

3.6.3 Inter-Rater

Dunn (2009) states that inter-rater reliability is a measure of the consistency and agreement between two or more raters or observers in their assessments, Judgments, or ratings of a particular phenomenon or behavior. To achieve the reliability of the writing skill test, a sample of (30) students is selected randomly from the main research sample, and another specialist corrector is asked to re-correct their answers according to the approved correction standard. Using Pearson Correlation Coefficient to estimate the reliability between the researcher's correction scores and the external corrector's correction scores, results show that reliability value for the first correction is (0.826) (researcher) and for the second correction is (0.827), which are indicators of good reliability since the agreement of the stability coefficient values.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Results Related to the First Aim.

In order to achieve this aim, "Finding out Iraqi EFL university students' level of cognitive motivation", a t-test for one – independent sample is used to find out the significance differences between the arithmetic mean of the sample individuals' scores and the hypothetical mean of the cognitive motivation scale as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-Test Values of Cognitive Motivations

The scale	No. of Sample	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Hypothetical Mean	T-value Computed	Critical	Level of significance	Judgment
Cognitive	180	110.855	12.271	123	-13.277	1.960	0.05	hypothetical

motivation							mean

As shown in Table 2, the sample is found to have a low level of cognitive motivation. This is because the statistically significant differences are found since the calculated t-value is upper than the critical t-value.

4.2 Results Related to the Second Aim.

The second aim, " Finding out Iraqi EFL university students' performance level in descriptive writing," is achieved through using a t-test for one independent sample to determine the significance differences between the arithmetic mean of the sample individuals' scores and the hypothetical mean of the descriptive writing, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Descriptive Writing.

The test	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Hypothetical Mean	T-value		Level of significance	Judgment
				Computed	Critical		
Descriptive writing	24.544	6.458	20	9.440	1.960	0.05	sample mean

As the table above shows, the following:

- There are statistically significant differences between the two means (the computed t-value is upper than the critical t-value), and this demonstrates that the sample has a higher level of descriptive writing.

4.3 Results Related to the Third Aim.

To achieve the third aim, which states "The correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' cognitive motivation and performance in descriptive writing", Pearson's correlation coefficient t-test has been employed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
The Correlation between Cognitive Motivation and Performance of Descriptive Writing

First Variable	Second Variable	Calculated Correlation Coefficient	T-value		Level of significance	Judgment
			Computed	Critical		
Cognitive motivation	Descriptive writing	0.203	2.780	1.960	0.05	Significant

F rom Table 4, it is clear that the values of the calculated correlation coefficient between cognitive motivation and performance in descriptive writing among EFL learners are statistically significant, since the computed t-values are higher than the critical t-values. This indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between cognitive motivation and performance in descriptive writing.

5. CONCLUSIONS
Based on the results obtained, the following conclusions are drawn:
1- Results provide evidence that EFL learners have low cognitive motivation and this suggests that they demand external motivations to improve their self-motivation.
2- EFL learners are at a higher level in performing descriptive writing.
2- Positive correlation between cognitive motivation and performance in descriptive writing.

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