

Discourse Competence and English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students

Mae Ann M. Piorque, LPT and Randolph L. Asistido, LPT, Ph.D
Fellowship Baptist College, Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental
STI-West Negros University, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental
mpiorque221996@gmail.com
asistidor636@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the discourse competence and English academic performance of 89 graduating criminology students from a private university in a highly urbanized city in the central Philippines during the second semester of the Academic Year 2023–2024. A self-made questionnaire, validated with a mean score of 4.63 and a reliability index of 0.772, assessed four areas: textual cohesion, deixis, coherence, and conversational structure. Results showed an overall moderate level of discourse competence (mean = 4.58), with the lowest scores in deixis (mean = 4.33) and textual cohesion (mean = 4.49), while coherence (mean = 4.51) and conversational structure (mean = 5.01) were relatively stronger. Demographic factors—including sex, school origin, family income, and parents' educational attainment—did not significantly affect competence levels or English academic performance. A weak, statistically non-significant correlation ($\rho = 0.181$, $p = 0.089$) was found between discourse competence and academic performance. These findings suggest that while students possess moderate discourse abilities, focused interventions are needed to improve weaker areas like deixis and cohesion to better support their communication skills and professional preparedness.

Keywords: Discourse competence, english academic performance, criminology students, language proficiency

Bio-Profile

Mae Ann M. Piorque is a Licensed Professional Teacher and currently serves as a college instructor at Fellowship Baptist College. She is a dedicated faculty member of the College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences, where she brings her expertise in English language instruction. A holder of a Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English, she is passionate about nurturing future educators and communicators. Beyond the classroom, she is a research and language enthusiast with a strong interest in exploring innovative strategies to enhance language learning, academic writing, and communicative competence among students.

Randolf L. Asistido holds a degree in PhD-English and currently serves as Director, Research and Publications Office at STI-West Negros University. His research papers include pragmatic discourse analysis, classroom interaction, language alternation, syntactic analysis, linguistic



politeness, perceived teacher innovation and student engagement, corpus-assisted analysis of online hotel descriptions, foreign language anxiety among Korean students at Keimyung College University in Daegu, South Korea, influencing variables and implications in teacher-student relationships, assessing CICT students' perception of artificial intelligence and its influence on academic achievement; and student engagement in PBL approach in mathematics.

Introduction

Rationale

Effective communication is a fundamental goal of language education, especially in disciplines like criminology, where clear expression is essential. In the Philippines, the Department of Education emphasizes the role of English in fostering both academic and professional readiness (DepEd, 2016). Central to communicative competence is discourse competence, which refers to the ability to construct coherent and cohesive messages. According to Canale and Swain (1980) and further elaborated by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), discourse competence involves coherence, cohesion, deixis, and conversational structure—skills critical for conveying ideas clearly in oral and written communication.

Theoretical frameworks from Hymes' Communicative Competence Theory and Bachman and Palmer's Communicative Language Ability model suggest that language performance is influenced not only by grammar and vocabulary but also by the speaker's ability to adapt to various social contexts (Hymes, 1972; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). These competencies are crucial in criminology, where students are expected to engage in technical writing, analysis, and courtroom communication. Socioeconomic factors, school background, and family educational attainment may also shape a student's discourse abilities (Hoff, 2013; Rowe, 2008).

In light of the increasing need for professional communicators, this research sought to assess the degree of discourse competence in graduating criminology students and explore its correlation with their academic achievements in English. It also took into account demographic factors like gender, school of origin, family income, and parental education to identify trends that might inform instructional development. The results are anticipated to assist language teachers and curriculum designers in creating programs that improve students' discourse abilities, thus fostering their academic success and future career achievements.

Literature Review

This section explores both foreign and local studies on discourse competence, focusing on its core elements—coherence, cohesion, deixis, and conversational structure. It highlights how these aspects are essential for effective communication, particularly in academic and professional contexts. International research provides foundational theories, while local literature



discusses challenges faced by Filipino students, including issues related to instruction, linguistic confidence, and performance in English. The review also examines how discourse competence influences English academic performance and underscores the need for targeted instructional strategies to address these gaps.

Discourse competence plays a crucial role in language proficiency, particularly for learners in academic and professional settings. Canale and Swain's (1980) model emphasizes that effective communication involves not just grammar but the ability to construct coherent and contextually appropriate messages. Tuan (2017) observed that many learners, including Vietnamese students, struggle with coherence—the logical flow of ideas—which is fundamental in both spoken and written texts. Similarly, Halliday and Hasan (2014) underscored the role of cohesion in binding ideas together through grammatical and lexical devices. Meanwhile, deixis, which involves referencing time, place, and identity, is vital in maintaining contextual clarity, as shown by Diessel (2020) and Mahmudova (2023). Conversations also follow structured norms such as turn-taking and topic control, essential for meaningful interaction (Fairclough, 2001; Cook, 1989).

In the Philippine context, discourse competence remains a challenge despite the country's bilingual education system. Cabigon (2015) highlighted growing concerns about whether Filipinos' English proficiency remains globally competitive. Local scholars like Lavadia (2023) and Lasala (2014) emphasized that students often show difficulty in maintaining coherence and integrating cohesive elements into their writing. Additionally, Reyes et al. (2021) found that Indigenous and rural students often feel linguistically disadvantaged, a sentiment reflected in their limited vocabulary and low confidence in English use. Studies have also shown that instructional practices and access to resources significantly impact students' discourse skills (Morales, 2011)

English academic performance is widely regarded as both an indicator and outcome of language proficiency. Research consistently links English skills with academic achievement across content areas (Waluyo & Panmei, 2021). In the Philippines, where English is a medium of instruction, proficiency supports not only comprehension but also opportunities for higher education and employment (Maramag-Manalastas & Batang, 2018). Local researchers such as Asio and Quijano (2023) have advocated for stronger English instruction and consistent language support in universities. While some studies, like that of Morales and Alarcon (2011), found no direct correlation between the frequency of cohesive devices and essay quality, the consensus remains that enhancing discourse competence is essential for academic and professional success.

Objectives

This study aimed to determine the level of discourse competence among graduating criminology students and examine how it relates to their English academic performance at



private university in a highly urbanized city in the Central Philippines during the Second Semester, Academic Year 2023-2024. Specifically, this study aimed to determine 1) the level of discourse competence of graduating criminology students in terms of textual cohesion, deixis, coherence, and conversational structure, 2) the English academic performance of the same respondents, 3) if there is a significant difference in the discourse competence and English academic performance across the demographic variables, and 4) if there is a correlation between the students' discourse competence and their English academic performance.

Methodology

This section discusses the methods used to gather and analyze the data based on this paper's predetermined objectives. This section includes the research design, subject-respondents, research instrument, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis, and statistical treatment.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational design to describe the level of discourse competence among criminology students and to examine its relationship with their English academic performance. To Creswell and Creswell (2018), a descriptive-correlational research design is a quantitative method that aims to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon and examine the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. It does not establish causation, but it helps identify whether variables are statistically associated. Data is typically gathered using surveys, questionnaires, or existing records, and analyzed using correlation statistics.

Subject-Respondents

The respondents were 89 graduating Bachelor of Science in Criminology students enrolled during the second semester of Academic Year 2023–2024 at a private university in a highly urbanized city in the Philippines. They were selected via purposive sampling since all graduating students in the program were included. Purposive sampling (also called judgmental or selective sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher intentionally selects participants based on specific characteristics, knowledge, or experience relevant to the research purpose (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015).

Research Instrument

A self-made questionnaire composed of 40 items was developed to assess four components of discourse competence: textual cohesion, deixis, coherence, and conversational



structure. The instrument underwent content validation (mean = 4.63) and reliability testing using Kuder-Richardson Formula 20, yielding an index of 0.772.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the actual data collection, approval was sought from the university administration and the research adviser. The researcher personally administered the validated questionnaire to the respondents during a scheduled session. Instructions were clearly explained, and students were given sufficient time to answer the instrument. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to ensure a high response rate and data accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly followed ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality of the responses were ensured, and no identifying information was linked to any of the data collected. The information gathered was used solely for academic purposes and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used the descriptive analytical scheme and weighted mean to assess the level of discourse competence of graduating criminology students regarding textual cohesion, deixis, coherence, and conversational structure. Objective no. 2 likewise used the descriptive analytical scheme and mean as statistical tools to determine the respondents' English academic performance. Meanwhile, objective no. 3 used the comparative analytical scheme and Mann-Whitney U test to determine if there is a significant difference in the discourse competence across the demographic variable groupings. Finally, objective no. 4 used the relational analytical scheme and Spearman Rho as statistical tools to determine if there is a correlation between the students' discourse competence and their English academic performance.

Results and Discussions

This chapter provides a concise overview of the study's discoveries from thorough data collection, rigorous analysis, and insightful interpretation. Following this, key conclusions were drawn from the initial analytical phase, offering valuable insights.

Table 1

Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students in terms of Textual Cohesion, Deixis, Coherence, and Conversational Structure

Discourse Competence	Mean	Interpretation
Items		



Textual Cohesion	4.49	Low level
Deixis	4.33	Low level
Coherence	4.51	Moderate level
Conversational Structure	5.01	Moderate level
Overall mean	4.59	Moderate level

The overall discourse competence of the respondents was found to be at a moderate level ($M = 4.59$). The students performed best in conversational structure ($M = 5.01$) and coherence ($M = 4.51$), while they showed lower proficiency in textual cohesion ($M = 4.49$) and deixis ($M = 4.33$). These results are in line with Tuan (2017), who reported that learners of English often face challenges in maintaining coherence and applying contextual references like deixis.

Table 2

Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Sex at Birth

Discourse Competence Items	Sex at Birth			
	Mean	Male Interpretation	Mean	Female Interpretation
Textual Cohesion	4.41	Low level	4.72	Moderate level
Deixis	4.36	Low level	4.24	Low level
Coherence	4.48	Low level	4.56	Moderate level
Conversational Structure	5.09	Moderate level	4.80	Moderate level
Total Mean	4.59	Moderate level	4.58	Moderate level

When categorized by sex, both male and female students displayed similar levels of discourse competence, though males slightly outscored females in conversational structure. This observation is consistent with Muehlenhard and Peterson (2011), who noted that gender-related language differences often exist but tend not to produce significant gaps in performance.

Table 3

Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to School of Origin



Discourse Competence Items	School of Origin			
	Mean	Public Interpretation	Mean	Private Interpretation
Textual Cohesion	4.37	Low level	4.57	Moderate level
Deixis	4.00	Low level	4.54	Moderate level
Coherence	4.46	Low level	4.54	Moderate level
Conversational Structure	5.00	Moderate level	5.02	Moderate level
Overall Mean	4.46	Low level	4.67	Moderate level

Students from private schools slightly outperformed those from public schools across all areas of discourse competence. These results support Reyes et al. (2021), who emphasized that school environments—particularly the resources and language exposure available—can shape students’ communicative skills.

Table 4

Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Family Income

Discourse Competence Items	Family Income			
	Mean	Lower Interpretation	Mean	Higher Interpretation
Textual Cohesion	5.00	Moderate level	4.26	Low level
Deixis	4.43	Low level	4.28	Low level
Coherence	4.29	Low level	4.61	Moderate level
Conversational Structure	5.32	Moderate level	4.87	Moderate level
Overall Mean	4.76	Moderate level	4.50	Moderate level

Interestingly, students from lower-income families scored higher in textual cohesion compared to their wealthier counterparts. This runs contrary to findings by Ngangi et al. (2023), who associated better academic performance with higher family income. It may suggest that some students from low-income families develop compensatory skills or are more driven academically.

Table 5



Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

Discourse Competence Items	Parents Highest Educational Attainment.			
	Mean	Lower Interpretation	Mean	Higher Interpretation
Textual Cohesion	4.44	Low level	4.54	Moderate level
Deixis	4.05	Low level	4.56	Moderate level
Coherence	4.46	Low level	4.54	Moderate level
Conversational Structure	4.83	Moderate level	5.17	Moderate level
Overall Mean	4.45	Low level	4.70	Moderate level

Students whose parents had higher educational attainment tended to perform better in deixis and conversational structure. This supports the view of Hoff (2013), who argued that parents with higher education levels often provide more linguistically stimulating environments, which positively influence children's language development.

Table 6

Level of English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Demographic Variables

English Academic Performance			
Items	Categories	Mean	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	90.30	Very good
	Female	89.44	Very good
School of Origin	Public	90.43	Very good
	Private	89.81	Very good
Family Income	Lower	90.18	Very good
	Higher	90.00	Very good
Parents' Educational Attainment	Lower	90.56	Very good



Higher 90.06 Very good

Across all demographic groups—sex, school of origin, income level, and parental education—students performed consistently well in English. The lack of significant variation reflects a more uniform instructional outcome. This contrasts with studies like that of Shi (2023), who observed notable demographic differences in English proficiency in international contexts.

Table 7

Differences in the Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students in Textual Cohesion when Grouped and Compared According to Demographic Variables

Textual Cohesion

Variables	Categories	N	Mean	t-test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	64	4.41	0.810	0.420	0.420	Not Significant
	Female	25	4.72				
School of Origin	Public	35	4.37	0.568	0.05	0.572	Not Significant
	Private	54	4.57				
Family Income	Lower	28	5.00	2.006	0.048	0.048	Significant
	Higher	61	4.26				
Parents' Educational Attainment	Lower	41	4.44	-0.293	0.770	0.770	Not Significant
	Higher	48	4.54				

Table 7 summarizes the analysis on the difference in the level of discourse competence of study respondents based on textual cohesion when grouped according to demographic variables. The results showed no significant difference when respondents were grouped by sex at birth, school or origin, and parents' educational attainment. Contrastingly, a significant



difference was observed in the discourse competence of graduating criminology students when grouped by family income, still in the aspect of textual cohesion. This finding suggests that students from different socioeconomic backgrounds may exhibit varying levels of proficiency in organizing and connecting ideas in written academic discourse. Although no published study has specifically focused on the relationship between family income and discourse competence among criminology students, this result aligns with existing literature indicating that socioeconomic status can significantly influence students' academic writing abilities. Hyland (2009) emphasizes that access to academic discourse practices is often shaped by prior educational experiences, which are in turn affected by socioeconomic conditions. These insights underscore the importance of addressing equity in language instruction, especially for students from lower-income backgrounds who may face additional barriers to developing advanced writing skills.

Table 8

Differences in the Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students in Deixis, when Grouped according to Demographic Variables

Deixis							
Variables	Categories	N	Mean Rank	t-test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	64	4.36	0.331		0.741	Not Significant
	Female	25	4.24				
School of Origin	Public	35	4.00	1.643	0.05	0.104	Not Significant
	Private	54	4.54				
Family Income	Lower	28	4.43	0.430		0.668	Not Significant
	Higher	61	4.28				
	Lower	41	4.05				



Parents' Educational Attainment	Higher	48	4.56
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Although no significant differences were found, students from private schools and those whose parents had higher education performed better in deixis. This is in line with Mahmudova (2023), who stressed the importance of environmental exposure in mastering context-sensitive language features such as deixis.

Table 9

Differences in the Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students in Coherence when Grouped according to Demographic Variables

Coherence

Variables	Categories	N	Mean	t-test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	64	4.48	0.202	0.841	0.841	Not Significant
	Female	25	4.56				
School of Origin	Public	35	4.46	0.231	0.05	0.817	Not Significant
	Private	54	4.54				
Family Income	Lower	28	4.29	-0.887	0.377	0.377	Not Significant
	Higher	61	4.61				
Parents' Educational Attainment	Lower	41	4.46	-0.231	0.818	0.818	Not Significant
	Higher	48	4.54				



Students' coherence scores were uniform across demographic groups, with no statistically significant differences observed. This suggests that the ability to maintain logical flow in communication may develop similarly among students regardless of sex, school background, income, or parental education. Morales and Alarcon (2011) support this observation, noting that coherence in writing does not always correspond to demographic variables, implying that targeted instruction and practice can enhance coherence skills across diverse student populations.

Table 10

Difference in the Level of Discourse Competence of Graduating Criminology Students in Conversational Structure when Grouped According to Demographic Variables

Conversational Structure							
Variables	Categories	N	Mean	t-test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	64	5.09	0.733		0.466	Not Significant
	Female	25	4.80				
School of Origin	Public	35	5.00	0.050		0.960	Not Significant
	Private	54	5.02				
Family Income	Lower	28	5.32	1.062		0.294	Not Significant
	Higher	61	4.87				
Parents' Educational Attainment	Lower	41	4.83	-0.935		0.352	Not Significant
	Higher	48	5.17				

Although the differences were not statistically significant, students from lower-income and less-educated families showed slightly better performance in conversational structure. This finding is supported by Reyes et al. (2021), who observed that students from marginalized groups often adapt through informal language learning and self-driven strategies.



Comparative Analysis in the Level of English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Demographic Variables

Table 11

Differences in the Level of English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students when Grouped According to Demographic Variables

English Academic Performance							
Variables	Categories	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U- test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at Birth	Male	64	45.76	751.50	0.657	0.657	Not Significant
	Female	25	43.06				
School of Origin	Public	35	47.16	869.50	0.525	0.525	Not Significant
	Private	54	43.60				
Family Income	Lower	28	45.84	830.50	0.835	0.835	Not Significant
	Higher	61	44.61				
Parents' Educational Attainment	Lower	41	47.79	869.50	0.344	0.344	Not Significant
	Higher	48	42.61				

The Mann-Whitney U-test showed no significant difference in English academic performance across all demographic groups. These findings challenge common expectations, such as those noted by Rainwater and Smeeding (2003), which linked academic success to social and economic status.

Correlational Analysis Between the Levels of Discourse Competence and English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students

Table 12



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Relationship between the Levels of Discourse Competence and English Academic Performance of Graduating Criminology Students

Correlation	N	rho	Significant Level	p-value	Interpretation
Level of Discourse Competence	89	0.181	0.05	0.089	Not Significant
Level of English Academic Performance	89				

The statistical test revealed a weak and non-significant correlation ($\rho = 0.181$, $p = 0.089$) between discourse competence and English academic performance. This indicates that while there may be some connection, it is not strong enough to predict outcomes. These findings align with the view of Martirosyan et al. (2015), who cautioned that language proficiency does not always translate directly into academic success.

Conclusion

The study reveals that graduating BS Criminology students possess moderate discourse competence and very good English academic performance, reflecting their general preparedness for professional communication demands. While demographic factors like gender, family background, and access to resources influence students' academic experiences, the consistent discourse competence across these groups suggests that the learning environment fosters equitable skill development. However, the lack of a significant correlation between discourse competence and English academic performance indicates that these competencies may develop along separate trajectories. This highlights the importance of providing a special program to enhance specific aspects of discourse, such as textual cohesion and deixis, while also offering contextualized training in criminology-related communication. Leveraging parental education and economic support may further strengthen academic outcomes. Sharing these findings with the College of Criminal Justice Education could inform data-driven curriculum development and targeted interventions to better support student success.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Piorque: Concept and design, literature review, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. **Asistido:** Editing, reviewing, supervision, material support.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares no conflict of interest related to the conduct, authorship, or publication of this study. All procedures were carried out with academic integrity and without any financial, personal, or professional influence that could have affected the outcomes or interpretations of the research.

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