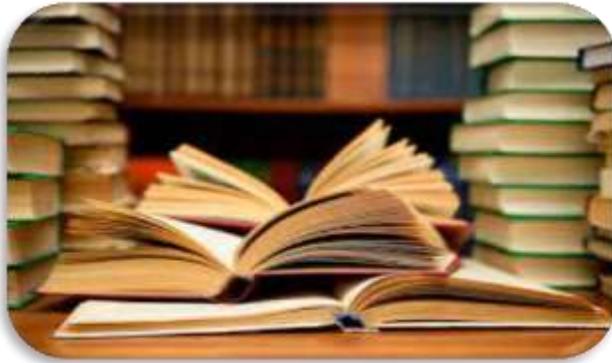## Research Paper

The Impact of Pragmatics Instruction on Speech Act Performance Among EFL Learners: A Comparison of Technology-Enhanced and Conventional Classrooms

Taif Abdulhussein Dakhil[1], Fatemeh Karimi[2]*, Riyadh Abbas Ubeid Al-Jashami[3], Zargham Ghabanchi[4]

[1]English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.
Taif55181@gmail.com

[2]English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.
fkarimi@khuisf.ac.ir

[3]Department of English language, College of Education, Sawa University, Almuthana, Iraq.
Dr.riyadh955@gmail.com

[4]Associate Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad
ghabanchi@um.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

This research explored how pragmatics instruction affected the performance of Iraqi EFL learners in producing directive and commissive speech acts, examining various age groups and learning settings (technology-enhanced versus conventional classrooms). Additionally, the study investigates the perceptions of both EFL students and teachers regarding this pedagogical approach. For this purpose, four groups, each consisting of 50 Iraqi EFL learners, were included in the study. Specifically, two experimental groups (technology-enhanced versus conventional instruction) received pragmatics instruction, and the two control groups did not receive any instruction. These participants were drawn from both a university and a private language institute. The data were collected by placement tests, multiple discourse completion tests (MDCTs), and assessment questionnaires. Qualitative data was collected by semi-structured interviews and subsequently analyzed thematically. The results indicated that learners who were provided with instruction in speech acts demonstrated a notably higher level of performance than those who did not receive any instruction. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the technology-enhanced group performed better than their peers in conventional classroom and adults outperformed teenagers despite no gender differences. Interviews revealed the various benefits and obstacles associated with speech act instruction.

Keywords: EFL learners, Pragmatics instruction, Speech acts, Technology-enhanced learning

تأثیر آموزش کاربردشناسی بر عملکرد اعمال گفتاری در میان زبان‌آموزان انگلیسی: مقایسه کلاس‌های سنتی و کلاس‌های فناوری محور

این پژوهش به بررسی تأثیر آموزش کاربرد شناسی بر عملکرد زبان‌آموزان عراقی در تولید اعمال گفتاری دستوری التزامی پرداخته و گروه‌های سنی و محیط‌های یادگیری مختلف (کلاس‌های فناوری‌محور در مقابل کلاس‌های سنتی) را مورد بررسی قرار داده است. علاوه بر این، مطالعه ادراک زبان‌آموزان و معلمان انگلیسی را در مورد این رویکرد آموزشی بررسی می‌کند. به این منظور، چهار گروه، هر کدام متشکل از ۵۰ زبان‌آموز عراقی، در این مطالعه گنجانده شدند. به‌طور خاص، دو گروه آزمایشی (آموزش فناوری‌محور در مقابل آموزش سنتی) آموزش کاربرد شناسی دریافت کردند و دو گروه کنترل هیچ آموزشی دریافت نکردند. این شرکت‌کنندگان از یک دانشگاه و یک مؤسسه زبان خصوصی انتخاب شدند. داده‌ها از طریق آزمون‌های تعیین سطح، چندین آزمون تکمیل گفتمان و پرسشنامه‌های ارزیابی جمع‌آوری شدند. داده‌های کیفی از طریق مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته جمع‌آوری و شدند و با روش تحلیل مضمون بررسی و تحلیل شدند. نتایج نشان داد زبان‌آموزانی که در زمینه اعمال گفتاری آموزش دریافت کرده بودند، سطح عملکرد به‌مراتب بالاتری نسبت به کسانی که هیچ آموزشی دریافت نکرده بودند، نشان دادند. علاوه بر این، یافته‌ها نشان داد که گروه فناوری‌محور بهتر از همتایان خود در کلاس‌های سنتی عمل کردند و بزرگسالان نسبت به نوجوانان عملکرد بهتری داشتند، با این حال هیچ تفاوتی از نظر جنسیتی مشاهده نشد. مصاحبه‌ها مزایا و موانع مختلف مرتبط با آموزش اعمال گفتاری را آشکار کرد

کلیدواژه‌ها: زبان‌آموزان انگلیسی، آموزش کاربرد شناسی، اعمال گفتاری، یادگیری فناوری‌محور

INTRODUCTION

The English language is widely recognized as a prominent and indispensable means of communication within non-native English-speaking communities in foreign nations, as well as in the context of global intercommunication (Balteiro, 2018). Employing English as an international language has led to an increasing number of individuals who learn and speak this language worldwide. This point has significant effects on the practices used in English language teaching, which must aim at improving the language learners' social and professional communication skills.

Effective communication may be considered the most vital of all life skills. This ability assists people in passing information to others and understanding what is said to them. Regarding English language learning, effective oral and written communication in English tops the list of requisite skills. Communicating effectively in a language requires abilities more than mastering the linguistic features of the language (Rubio-Fernandez, 2020). Since communicative ability includes acquiring knowledge more than that of vocabulary and grammar, it is necessary for language learners to possess an acceptable level of language proficiency in addition to cultural and pragmatic knowledge.

Currently, pragmatic competence is recognized as a critical component of communicative competence in the context of language acquisition (Félix-Brasdefer, 2021; Zand-Moghadam & Adeh, 2020). According to Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996), effective communication is contingent upon pragmatic competence. The significance of this particular skill has been a subject of debate in scholarly discourse on language education and acquisition, with scholars such as Bachman (1990), Bachman and Palmer (1996), and Esther and Martinez-Flor (2010) contributing to the literature on the topic. This demonstrates the importance of possessing practical knowledge in the instruction and acquisition of a second or third language (Zand-Moghadam & Adeh, 2020). Roever (2021) posit that the acquisition of pragmatic competence plays a vital role in developing language proficiency.

Pragmatic competence has gained significant recognition as an essential component of communicative competence within the field of language learning, as indicated by scholars such as Félix-Brasdefer (2021) and Zand-Moghadam and Adeh (2020). Academic discourse has underscored the significance of pragmatic competence in facilitating effective communication, emphasizing its pivotal role in language education and acquisition (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The significance of pragmatic knowledge in communicative competence has been highlighted by scholars, emphasizing its essential role in the acquisition of second or third languages (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Esther & Martinez-Flor, 2010). Roever (2021) has emphasized the paramount importance of cultivating pragmatic competence for effective language acquisition.

Numerous second language educators acknowledge that attaining proficient pragmatic competence poses a significant challenge in the process of acquiring a second language (Sk & Bacchu, 2023). The significance of pragmatics instruction is widely recognized; however, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators frequently exhibit reluctance to integrate it into their instructional approaches (Korkmaz & Karatepe, 2023). The hesitation to use pragmatic language in spoken communication may be attributed to the predominant emphasis in traditional grammar-focused education on the literal definitions of words rather than their practical application in conversation (Li, 2015).

The limited availability of learning opportunities for second language pragmatics in foreign language environments underscores the crucial need for formalized instruction in the cultivation of pragmatic abilities within language education settings (Shafee Nahrkhalaji, 2013). Furthermore, there is a growing need for additional scholarly investigation into improving pragmatic proficiency and cultivating strong pragmatic awareness among individuals learning the English language. This highlights the vital importance of instructional methods and feedback mechanisms in transmitting pragmatic knowledge, as emphasized by Shafee Nahrkhalaji (2013).

Many language learners, despite being exposed to the target language in various settings, do not effortlessly acquire second language pragmatics skills, as noted by Roever (2021). Schmidt (1993) emphasized that simply being exposed to the target language is not adequate, as certain pragmatic elements may not be salient and may escape the notice of learners even after an extended duration of exposure to the second language (L2) (Alsuhaibani, 2020). The integration of pragmatics instruction in language courses is essential, particularly in light of the extensive research highlighting the advantages of pragmatics education (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2015). The importance of providing instruction in pragmatics is heightened in classrooms for foreign language acquisition, as pedagogical intervention plays a crucial role in facilitating the learning process for many individuals in these contexts (Eslami & Liu, 2013).

The present study aimed to assess the efficacy of explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction on directives and commissives among Iraqi EFL students. The study objective was to ascertain the potential impact of pragmatics instruction on proficiency in producing and comprehending speech acts. One of the motivations for conducting this research stems from the insufficient number of studies investigating and contrasting the effects of pragmatics instruction in conventional and technology-enhanced classes on the development of pragmatic competence within the Iraqi EFL context.

One motivation for undertaking this research is the limited number of studies that have examined and compared the impact of pragmatics instruction in conventional and technology-enhanced classes on enhancing pragmatic competence in the EFL setting of Iraq. So, this study contributes to the existing knowledge by specifically looking at and comparing the effects of pragmatics instruction delivered through conventional classrooms versus technology-enhanced classrooms in the Iraqi EFL context. Previous studies may have focused on either conventional or technology-enhanced pragmatics instruction separately or examined different cultural/linguistic contexts. By directly comparing these two instructional modes within the Iraqi EFL environment, this study provides insights into the relative effectiveness and potential advantages/challenges of each approach tailored to that specific context. Additionally, the mixed-methods approach utilized, combining quantitative assessments with qualitative interviews and surveys, offers a more comprehensive understanding of learners' and teachers' perceptions and experiences alongside the measured performance outcomes. In summary, a key gap addressed by this research is the comparative analysis of face-to-face and technology-enhanced pragmatics instruction specifically for Iraqi EFL learners. This area appears to have received limited attention in prior studies.

Taguchi and Sykes (2013), and van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014) have highlighted that EFL teaching environments have not yet fully realized the potential of technology in enhancing L2 pragmatic

skills. Ton Nu and Murray (2020) and Taguchi (2015) have underscored the difficulty in identifying the optimal pragmatic instructional approach, stressing the importance of considering variables such as learner characteristics, pedagogical strategies, and assessment criteria when assessing instructional effectiveness. In light of the aforementioned, the present study examines the subsequent research inquiries.

1. Is there any significant difference in pragmatic competence (performance in two speech acts of directives and commissives) of the learners in the technology-enhanced classroom (in university and language institute) with instruction in pragmatics and the learners in face-to-face classroom (in university and language institute) where such instruction also exists?

2. Is there any significant difference in pragmatic competence (performance in two speech acts of directives and commissives) of the learners in the technology-enhanced classroom (in university and language institute) with instruction in pragmatics and the learners in the technology-enhanced classroom (in university and language institute) without such instruction?

3. Is there any significant difference in pragmatic competence (performance in two speech acts of directives and commissives) of the learners in conventional classroom (in university and language institute) with instruction in pragmatics and the learners in conventional classroom (in university and language institute) without such instruction?

4. Are there any significant differences in pragmatic competence (performance in two speech acts of directives and commissives) between the Iraqi EFL learners who experience instruction in using directives and commissive speech acts in technology-enhanced and conventional classrooms concerning their gender and age?

5. What are the perceptions of Iraqi EFL students regarding instruction in using and understanding directives and commissive speech acts?

6. What are the perceptions of Iraqi EFL teachers regarding instruction in using and understanding directives and commissive speech acts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, focuses on the practical application of meaning in language usage. Semantics, as a field of study, is dedicated to the formal examination of meaning. However, it is important to acknowledge that certain aspects of meaning fall outside the scope of semantics, particularly in how meaning is employed in specific situations. The linguistic gap is a result of the semantic discipline's emphasis on the isolated meaning of language, divorced from its pragmatic use and communicative functions within sentences. Arundale (2021) highlights that pragmatics is concerned with examining the pragmatic use and comprehension of meaning within particular contexts and communicative interactions.

Semantics focuses on the intrinsic structure and meaning of language, while pragmatics is primarily concerned with the practical application and interpretation of language in everyday situations, where meaning is influenced by factors beyond linguistic conventions (Clark, 2021). Kreidler (2002) asserts that the interplay between semantics and pragmatics is important in facilitating the effective conveyance of meaning in human communication. Semantics concerns a speaker's ability to construct

logical and cohesive statements, whereas pragmatics emphasizes an individual's capacity to interpret and understand meanings within specific conversational contexts.

The efficacy of conveying practical knowledge has been evidenced in the academic literature, as exemplified by the work of Ren (2022). However, a significant obstacle in this field is the insufficient knowledge of instructors themselves, as noted by Bardovi-Harlig (2020), who stresses that language educators often lack the necessary theoretical comprehension of pragmatics. Kasper (2022) identifies two principal factors that contribute to the difficulties encountered in the instruction of pragmatics. Initially, the pedagogy of pragmatics is a complex and nuanced endeavor, given its inherent capacity to pose risks to individual "face" or social positioning. Additionally, the lack of specialized educational resources pertaining to pragmatics exacerbates the problem. The observed hesitancy exhibited by educators may, in part, be attributed to the dearth of reliable techniques for assessing students' interlanguage pragmatic abilities.

In the integration of authentic language use in pedagogy, it is imperative to consider multiple dimensions of the students, including their linguistic aptitude, preferred learning styles, level of motivation, and enthusiasm for acquiring proficiency in a second language. In addition, it is essential to take into account the traits of the target language, such as the frequency, salience, and complexity of specific linguistic features, in the process of language acquisition. Moreover, Bialystok's (1993) theory on the acquisition of proficiency in a second language posits that learners are required not only to recognize language patterns but also to comprehend and consciously attend to them to a certain extent to acquire them effectively. In the pursuit of pragmatic knowledge, two primary phases emerge as essential: the deconstruction of information and the capacity to effectively regulate information processing. Ren (2022) posits that adult second language learners possess pre-existing pragmatic skills from their first language that serve as foundational elements for the acquisition of analogous strategies in their second language. The proposed model posits that adult learners tend to demonstrate competence in constructing cognitive representations of pragmatic knowledge. However, it is important to acknowledge that adults may encounter challenges in accurately communicating their intended meaning and regulating the flow of information in real-world communication situations.

Sadeghi and Foutooh (2012) researched teaching foreign-language students how to respond to compliments in a direct and clear manner. The results indicated that providing explicit instruction had a beneficial impact on enhancing students' understanding of language usage in social situations and minimizing the influence of their native language, which was demonstrated through the outcomes of a discourse completion test (DCT).

Muhartoyo (2013) delved into the realm of directive speech acts in the film "Sleeping Beauty," employing qualitative descriptive techniques to analyze communication strategies. Through methods like observing the movie, deciphering body language and conversations, scrutinizing the script, and diving into literature reviews, the study pinpointed 139 instances of directive speech acts. Ordering directives emerged as the predominant type among these acts, greatly outnumbering inviting directives, constituting only a minute fraction (0.7%) of the total (Muhartoyo, 2013).

Eslami and Liu (2013) conducted a study to explore how explicitly teaching the language functions used in making requests could improve college-level EFL learners' ability to communicate

effectively in Taiwan. The researchers aimed to assess the impact of targeted pragmatic instruction on the learners' overall competence in using language appropriately. They also set out to compare the effectiveness of two different teaching methods: traditional face-to-face activities and computer-mediated communication (CMC), including email and WebCT. The study involved 118 undergraduate students in Taiwan, with 40 students in a control group, 36 in a group receiving traditional teacher-led instruction, and 42 in a group receiving CMC-based instruction. The results indicated that explicit teaching of language functions related to requests positively influenced the EFL learners in both the teacher-led and CMC instruction groups. Students who received explicit pragmatic instruction performed better on a post-test evaluating their ability to complete discourse tasks than those who did not. Moreover, the study showed the potential benefits of using technology, particularly CMC, as an effective tool for delivering pragmatic language instruction.

Cheng and Liang (2015) examined how teaching Chinese EFL learners to respond to compliments through direct and indirect methods affected their understanding. The study showed that explicit and implicit teaching methods successfully improved students' awareness of how to respond to compliments in a culturally appropriate way based on the analysis of role-plays and conversations.

In a study by Alsuhaibani (2020), the impact of two different teaching approaches on the improvement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in responding to compliments was explored. The study involved 136 university students studying EFL, divided into a control group, a group focusing on increasing awareness of language use, and a group receiving instruction based on analyzing large language databases. A pre- and post-test using a discourse completion test (DCT) and a questionnaire with open-ended questions were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching methods and gather students' perceptions of pragmatic instruction related to compliment responses. The findings revealed that consciousness-raising and corpus-based teaching methods effectively enhanced students' pragmatic skills in responding to compliments.

Derakhshan and Shakki (2020) examined how teaching about the use of language in social contexts influences how well Iranian EFL students understand apologies and refusals. They divided 49 students into three groups based on their English proficiency levels and gave them different types of instruction: implicit, explicit, and no specific instruction. By using a well-accepted test, they evaluated the students' understanding of language in social situations. The results showed that students' understanding improved overall, with those in the explicit group showing greater improvement than those in the implicit group. In a study conducted by Davarzani and Talebzadeh (2021), researchers aimed to explore how teaching speech acts in virtual versus traditional classrooms impacted the pragmatic awareness and development of Iranian EFL learners. In this quasi-experimental study, 57 intermediate-level female EFL learners were randomly divided into virtual or traditional classroom groups. The research followed a pretest-intervention-posttest format, using a Preliminary English Test (PET), a pre-test on speech acts, and comparable post-tests on speech acts for data collection. The results revealed that teaching speech acts through virtual and traditional classroom methods improved pragmatic awareness in Iranian EFL learners. Nonetheless, traditional classroom instruction was shown to be more effective, significantly boosting pragmatic awareness among the learners. This highlights the importance of traditional classroom teaching methods in enhancing pragmatic awareness in EFL learners despite the growing influence of cyber pragmatics in our modern digital era.

González-Lloret (2022) conducted a study recently that highlights the value of employing technology-based tasks to improve the acquisition of pragmatic skills in second language (L2) learners. The research reviews various previous studies exploring how technology is used in teaching pragmatics and how tasks relate to L2 pragmatic development. The study concentrates on research that integrates tasks, technology, and L2 pragmatics, organizing them according to their main areas of focus: task characteristics, the influence of technology, and particular L2 pragmatic aspects.

METHODOLOGY

Design and Context of the Study

A concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was adopted for this study. This design type is applied where two data sets are collected at the same time. This is where a researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, deference, or a combination (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It is noteworthy that the study was conducted in Kufa, Iraq.

Participants

The research encompassed a cohort of 200 intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from Iraq who enrolled at the University of Kufa. This cohort comprised students aged between 18 and 22. The study also included students aged between 13 and 17 attending a private language institute in Kufa, Iraq. The study participants were allocated into four distinct groups, namely experimental group one (Exp1), experimental group two (Exp2), control group one (Cont1), and control group two (Cont2), using a randomized allocation process. In the experiment, participants in Exp1 received technology-enhanced instruction on the correct application of speech acts, while participants in Exp2 received conventional instruction. Additionally, participants in Cont1 received instruction through technology without specific guidance on speech acts, and participants in Cont2 received in-person instruction without specific guidance on speech acts. The sample size for each group was 50 participants, with the treatment phase comprising 20 sessions conducted over the course of one academic semester. Furthermore, five EFL teachers and 15 EFL learners were selected for interviews.

Instruments

In this study, the researcher employed a range of assessments to collect quantitative data and utilized an evaluation survey in conjunction with semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative information. To assess the proficiency levels of English language learners, the researcher utilized the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), a well-established instrument recognized for its reliability and expeditious administration. Furthermore, the researcher created and validated a context-sensitive multiple discourse completion test (MDCT) to assess learners' proficiency in two types of speech acts: directives and commissives. The developmental process encompassed multiple stages, including the generation of examples, examination of situational likelihood, scenario creation, initial test piloting, formulation of multiple-choice questions, and ultimate test piloting.

The Modified Direct Comparison Test (MDCT) was utilized to evaluate participants prior to and following interventions, with contextual variables being adjusted for each assessment. The participants' performances were assessed, and a combined MDCT score was calculated. Moreover, a survey instrument was employed to collect data on the efficacy of the session, the utility of online materials, and the influence on classroom dynamics. To explore the viewpoints of both students and educators concerning instructional methodologies and their impact on English speech act performance, a series of evaluation questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted. It is important to acknowledge that a variety of Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) tools, such as email, Skype, Adobe Connect Pro, and WhatsApp, were employed for instructional purposes in the technology-based instruction class.

Data Analysis

The quantitative section of the study employed descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests as the main statistical methods. The data entry process and the computation of descriptive statistics were conducted using SPSS24. Furthermore, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine any significant differences in the oral proficiency of Iraqi students learning English as a Foreign Language across various experimental groups concerning demographic variables such as gender and age.

Qualitative interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method. The researcher undertook the transcription, coding, and analysis of data obtained from interviews conducted with a cohort of 15 language learners and five language teachers. The methodology of choice for this study was thematic analysis. The analysis of interview transcripts involved the identification of major categories through coding units of meaning, including keywords, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Similarities within the data were identified, and categories and subcategories, which encapsulated developing themes and subthemes pertinent to the objectives and research inquiries of the study, were outlined. Subsequently, a survey was conducted with participants to assess the efficacy of each session and the instruction of speech acts in the courses.

An independent samples t-test was run to examine the potential differences in EFL speech act proficiency among students receiving pragmatics training in a technology-assisted instructional setting instead of those in a conventional classroom environment. The results are explicated in the following tables.

Findings

An independent samples t-test was employed to examine the potential difference in EFL speech act proficiency among students receiving pragmatics training in a technology-enhanced environment compared to those in a conventional classroom. The results are delineated in the following tables.

Table 1

Group Statistics for EXP1 and EXP 2

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Speech act	EXP1	50	17.60	1.70	.24
performance	EXP2	50	16.92	1.53	.21

The mean of speech act performance for participants in technology-enhanced classrooms was 17.60, with a standard deviation of 1.70. In conventional classrooms, the mean speech act performance was slightly lower at 16.98, with a standard deviation of 1.53 (Table 1).

Table 2

Independent samples t-test result for EXP1 and EXP 2

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
1.91	98	.05	.62	.32

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant difference in speech act performance between students in technology-enhanced classrooms and those in conventional classrooms, as denoted by the significance level of .05 (Table 2).

An independent samples t-test was employed to address the second research question and assess for any noticeable disparity in the speech act performance of students in a technology-enhanced instructional setting compared to their peers in a control group without any instructional intervention.

Table 3

Group statistics for EXP1 and Control 1

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speech act	EXP1	50	17.60	1.70	.24
performance	Control1	50	15.16	2.27	.32

The data in Table 3 indicates that the technology-enhanced group exhibited a mean score of 17.60 for speech act performance, whereas the control group demonstrated a mean score of 15.16.

Table 4

Independent samples t-test result for EXP1 and Control 1

t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
6.07	98	.000	2.44	.40

The findings indicate a notable difference in English pragmatic competence between students who underwent pragmatics instruction in a technology-enhanced course and those in the control group who did not receive instruction in this area, as demonstrated by the significance level (sig=0.000) (Table 4).

For the third research question, an independent samples t-test was run to investigate the presence of any significant difference in the speech act performance of students within conventional classroom settings as compared to those within a control group. The results are presented in the subsequent tables.
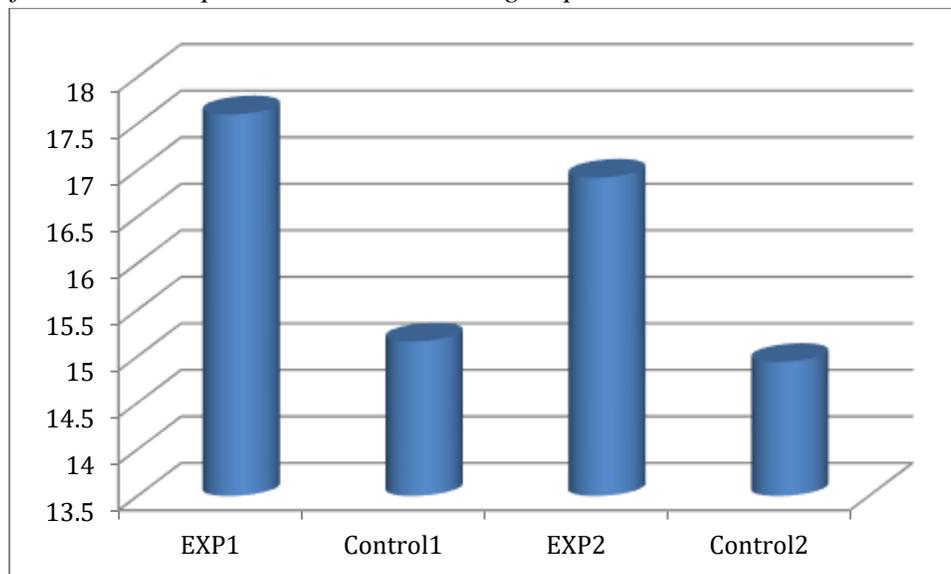
Table 5

Group statistics for EXP2 and Control 2

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speech act performance	EXP2	50	16.92	1.54	.21
	Control 2	50	14.94	1.31	.18

The data shows that the mean score for speech act performance in the conventional group was 17.60, while the control group had a mean score of 14.94 (Table 5).

Table 6

Independent samples t-test result for EXP2 and Control 2

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
6.88	98	.000	1.98	.28

Based on the specified significance level (sig=0.000), a statistically significant difference was found in the speech act performance of students in experimental group 2 (conventional classroom) and the control group (Table 6). The following figure represents Iraqi EFL learners' speech act performance in Experimental groups and their counterparts in Control groups (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Speech act performance in experimental and control groups

An independent samples t-tests were run to answer the fourth research question and find how the gender and age group of EFL learners affect their speech act performance in both conventional and technology-enhanced classrooms.

Table 7

Group statistics of male and female EFL learners in conventional and technology-enhanced classrooms

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
technology-enhanced class	Male	23	17.82	1.61	.33
	Female	27	17.40	1.78	.34
conventional class	Male	26	16.80	1.57	.30
	Female	24	17.04	1.54	.31

Table 8

Independent sample t-test result for gender in conventional and technology-enhanced classrooms

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Technology-enhanced class	.86	48	.39	.41	.48
Conventional class	-.52	48	.59	-.23	.44

The findings suggested that the gender of Iraqi EFL learners had no significant effect on their performance in speech acts (Table 7). In other words, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of speech acts performance (Table 8).

The present study sought to investigate the potential variation in the use of commisive and directive speech acts among Iraqi EFL learners, focusing on age as a determining factor. An independent samples t-test was run in this regard.

Table 9

Statistics for EFL learners' performance in terms of age group

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Technology-enhanced class	Teenager	26	16.61	1.62	.31
	Adult	24	18.66	1.00	.20
	Teenager	23	15.91	1.27	.26
conventional class	Adult	27	17.77	1.21	.23

Table 10

Independent samples t-test results for age groups

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Technology-enhanced class	-5.30	48	.00	-2.05	.38
Conventional class	-5.27	48	.00	-1.86	.35

The findings of the study demonstrated a statistically significant difference in speech act performance between teenagers and adults, as evidenced by the recorded significance levels (sig=0.00) (Table 10). The data indicates that adults outperformed teenagers, as evidenced by the mean scores (Table 9).
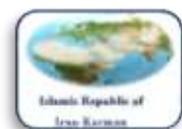
Interview Findings

In this investigation phase, the researchers sought to address the remaining set of inquiries. In so doing, 15 EFL learners and 5 EFL teachers were interviewed to explore the benefits and challenges associated with incorporating pragmatic instruction of speech acts, particularly commissives and directive acts, within both technology-enhanced and conventional classroom environments.

Three teachers mentioned that using implicit-explicit teaching methods can assist students in understanding the subtleties of speech acts that may be overlooked in conventional explicit teaching approaches. This approach encourages a deeper comprehension of language use within specific cultural and contextual frameworks. Students are exposed to real-life situations where speech acts are employed, enabling them to apply their knowledge in relevant settings. Consequently, this fosters the development of students' ability to adapt their speech acts based on specific social cues and situations.

Furthermore, one teacher emphasized that explicitly teaching speech acts can enhance students' pragmatic competence, which entails effectively and appropriately utilizing language in social interactions. This skill can facilitate the establishment of effective relationships, conflict resolution, and more successful negotiations of meaning.

In addition, two teachers believed that implicit-explicit teaching encourages students to analyze speech acts and their intended meanings critically. This prompts students to scrutinize different speech acts' social and cultural contexts, thus cultivating a more analytical approach to language learning. Ultimately, all five teachers agreed that implicit-explicit teaching methods foster an interactive and participatory classroom environment, engaging students in active learning. This approach promotes discussions, role-playing, and real-life scenarios, making learning more dynamic and enjoyable for students. They also stated that implicit-explicit teaching helps students recognize and adapt to speech acts used by different cultural groups. This enables them to engage in successful intercultural communication by avoiding potential misunderstandings or offences.

It is worth mentioning that some teachers stated that designing and implementing the related activities effectively can be a difficult task for teachers. They might need further training or assistance in order to comprehend the process of developing appropriate tasks and incorporating them into the curriculum. According to the findings of the student interviews, most students acknowledged the positive impact of explicit instruction on speech acts, as it enhanced their understanding of suitable language and behavior in different contexts. This, in turn, enabled them to communicate with greater efficacy. They also believed this explicit teaching helped them develop cultural sensitivity and understand how to interact appropriately in different contexts. Moreover, they believed that learning speech acts explicitly helped them become more aware of their own intentions and convey their messages more clearly. They also expressed that understanding speech acts enhanced their social skills, helping them build better relationships and navigate everyday life. Lastly, they appreciated that teaching speech acts expanded

their vocabulary as they learned and used specific vocabulary associated with different language functions.

Evaluation Questionnaire Findings

After a thorough examination and evaluation of the interviews, clear patterns emerged, leading to the identification of key themes. Based on these themes, ten targeted questions were designed to address them and ensure fairness and specificity directly. A pilot test was conducted to assess the questionnaire's effectiveness and make necessary modifications for clarity. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a result of 0. 87. Upon the completion of the final version of the questionnaire, it was disseminated to the participants, and subsequently, their responses were gathered and subjected to analysis. This comprehensive viewpoint complements the understanding acquired from the initial interviews. The findings of the survey are depicted in the subsequent table.

Table 11

The mean score and standard deviation for items of the evaluation questionnaire

Item	technology-enhanced classroom Mean (SD)	conventional classroom Mean (SD)
1. The resources used in class (realia, videos, short stories, etc.) were helpful for understanding speech acts.	4.24(.74)	3.90(.86)
2. The tasks used in class for practicing speech acts were relevant to real-life situations.	4.40(.67)	3.76(1.06)
3. The learning materials provided for learning speech acts were clear and organized.	4.62(.63)	4.02(.74)
4. The instructor provided useful feedback on my speech act performance.	3.82(.96)	3.58(1.10)
5. The tasks used in class were challenging enough to help me improve my speech act skills.	3.96(.88)	3.68(1.09)
6. I felt engaged and motivated while completing tasks related to speech acts.	3.94(.91)	4.14 (.92)
7. I received enough guidance and support from the teacher while working on speech acts.	4.14 (.67)	4.30(.81)
8. The lessons have improved my conversational skills.	4.08(.87)	3.80(.92)

| 9. The classroom environment was supportive and interactive.	3.76(1.00)	3.62(.87)
10. I felt more confident using speech acts in real-life situations after teaching sessions.	3.88(.96)	3.64(1.08)

In a technology-enhanced classroom, students reported higher mean ratings for various aspects related to speech-act learning compared to those in a conventional classroom. The resources used in the technology-enhanced classroom were perceived as more helpful for understanding speech acts, and the tasks used in class were considered more relevant to real-life situations. Additionally, the learning materials provided in the technology-based classroom were seen as clearer and more organized. Nevertheless, the technology-enhanced classroom showed a modestly lower average evaluation in speech act performance feedback than the conventional classroom. Moreover, the assignments presented in the technology-enhanced classroom were perceived to be sufficiently demanding to enhance speech act proficiency, albeit not as rigorous as those in the conventional, in-person classroom setting. Interestingly, although the students in the technology-enhanced classroom reported feeling less engaged and motivated while completing speech act tasks compared to their counterparts in the face-to-face conventional classroom, they still perceived receiving enough guidance and support from the teacher (Table 11).

In terms of the overall impact on conversational skills, both classrooms had relatively high mean ratings, with the technology-based classroom having a slightly higher mean rating. The classroom environment was perceived as supportive and interactive in both settings, with similar mean ratings. The technology-based classroom demonstrated a positive impact on students' confidence in utilizing speech acts in real-life scenarios following instructional sessions in comparison to the conventional classroom setting. In general, the utilization of technology in the classroom appeared to yield a favorable and efficient educational environment for developing speech act skills, with certain aspects demonstrating distinct advantages over the conventional instructional setting.

DISCUSSION

This research study, in conjunction with the existing body of literature, makes a significant contribution to the growing field of research centered on the importance of incorporating pragmatics instruction in the education of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Previous research has revealed a paucity of inquiry in this particular domain within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Equipping EFL learners with the ability to utilize pragmatic skills effectively stands to benefit them in academic pursuits, professional ventures, and interactions within international language communities. Enhancing communication skills can play a role in promoting global harmony and elevating overall well-being. To adeptly employ diverse speech acts in various social settings, EFL learners must grasp the social and cultural conventions of the target language. This study seeks to explore how educational interventions, combining explicit and implicit instructional approaches, can foster the development of pragmatic expertise among Iraqi EFL learners.

This study corroborates the findings of previous research conducted by Zand-Moghadam and Adeh (2014), Kim (2016), Derakhshan and Eslami (2015), Birjandi and Derakhshan (2014), Tan and Farashaiyan (2012), Martínez-Flor (2004), and Rose and Ren (2022), supporting the positive impact of
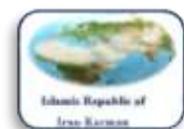
pragmatic instruction in improving learners' pragmatic competence. The research emphasizes the importance of incorporating pedagogical interventions in EFL environments to assist learners with difficulties in autonomously acquiring proficient language skills. The findings of the present study are consistent with prior research conducted by Taguchi (2015), Takahashi (2010), and Ton Nu and Murray (2020), indicating that both explicit and implicit instruction, as well as the promotion of learners' awareness, can significantly contribute to the enhancement of pragmatic skills in English as a Foreign Language environments.

The present study found that students who received instruction on pragmatic speech acts in technology-enhanced classrooms outperformed their counterparts in conventional classrooms who also received the same instruction. There are several potential explanations for this result. Students in technology-enhanced classrooms may be more satisfied with the instruction of speech acts than those in conventional classrooms due to the flexibility of accessing content and assignments at any time from any location. Personalized learning through individual feedback and guidance can enhance students' understanding and application of speech acts. The option to communicate through text-based discussions or multimedia presentations can reduce anxiety and increase participation. The diverse perspectives and cultural exposure in technology-enhanced classrooms can enhance students' understanding of speech acts. Additionally, the availability of multimedia resources can further engage students in the instruction.

Furthermore, this research revealed that the age of EFL learners played a significant role in the impact of teaching pragmatic skills and the overall performance of students in the classroom. As individuals grow into adulthood, their years of experience, exposure to diverse social situations, ongoing language development, higher emotional intelligence, and cognitive maturation contribute to their enhanced proficiency in using speech acts (Kim, 2016). Through years of practice, adults have had more opportunities to observe and learn from their interactions, allowing them to refine their communication skills based on feedback and experiences. This accumulated knowledge and practice enable adults to navigate various social settings and contexts with a more nuanced understanding of appropriate speech acts. Additionally, as language skills continue to develop into adulthood, individuals acquire a larger vocabulary, improve grammar, and gain a deeper understanding of language's subtleties. Alongside this linguistic growth, adults typically possess a higher level of emotional intelligence, enabling them to understand and respond more effectively to their own and others' emotions. This understanding helps them choose the right speech acts for different situations. Furthermore, the cognitive abilities of adults, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and perspective-taking, have further evolved compared to teenagers. This cognitive development allows adults to construct and express speech acts more thoughtfully and intentionally, considering the potential impact on others. Overall, the combination of experience, exposure, language development, emotional intelligence, and cognitive maturation may contribute to adults' greater proficiency in using speech acts.

This experimental study addresses the limitations of previous models and provides valuable insights into the processes of acquiring knowledge, problem-solving, and adaptation. It also explores how Arab learners utilize speech acts and their attitudes toward pragmatic acquisition experiences. This research highlights the significance of pragmatic education and the pragmatic proficiency of learners, along with the influence of education in molding significance and impacting actuality. The study

emphasizes the importance of integrating learners' perspectives to better understand their experiences in acquiring pragmatic language skills by examining the interaction between pragmatic competence, perception, production, and attitude.

Experimental studies on speech act performance in technology-enhanced and conventional classrooms have several limitations that should be considered. These include the small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of findings, and the lack of ecological validity due to the controlled nature of experimental settings. Participant bias may also affect speech act performance, and the differences in contextual factors between technology-enhanced and conventional classrooms make direct comparisons challenging. Additionally, ethical considerations, measurement challenges, and the focus on short-term effects rather than long-term outcomes should be acknowledged.

Further research can enhance the examination of speech act performance in technology-enhanced and conventional classrooms. Long-term studies would offer insights into the lasting impacts of speech act performance in different educational environments over an extended duration. Comparing performances across different educational levels would reveal discrepancies and issues specific to each setting, providing valuable information on the factors that affect speech act performance. Cross-cultural studies would aid in comprehending how cultural factors influence speech act performance, resulting in a more holistic understanding of its intricacies in various contexts.

Additionally, experimental studies with larger sample sizes would enhance the generalizability of findings, offering more robust insights into the factors that affect speech act performance. Furthermore, naturalistic observation studies conducted in real-life educational settings would provide valuable insights into speech act performance in authentic classroom environments. By employing these approaches, future studies can comprehensively examine the outcomes and potential challenges associated with speech act performance in various educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

The present study has significantly contributed to our understanding of the impact of pragmatics instruction on EFL learners' speech act performance, specifically focusing on directives and commissives. The findings have underscored the importance of incorporating explicit and implicit instruction in pragmatics within language classrooms, as students who received such instruction demonstrated superior performance compared to their counterparts who did not. Furthermore, the study has shed light on the potential benefits of utilizing technology-mediated instruction, with technology-enhanced class students exhibiting better performance than those in conventional face-to-face classrooms. Notably, the research has also revealed the influence of age on speech act performance, with adult learners demonstrating a notable advantage over their teenage counterparts. This finding highlights the need to consider learner characteristics and developmental factors in the design and delivery of pragmatics instruction. Overall, this study enriches the growing body of literature emphasizing the pivotal role of pragmatic competence in effective communication and language learning.

The implications of this study are multifaceted and extend to various aspects of language pedagogy and curriculum design. Primarily, educators and curriculum developers should strongly consider incorporating explicit and implicit instruction in pragmatics, particularly in EFL contexts where learners may have limited exposure to authentic language use. Additionally, the study underscores the

potential benefits of utilizing technology-mediated instruction to enhance pragmatic competence, emphasizing the importance of leveraging online platforms, multimedia resources, and computer-mediated communication tools to create engaging and interactive learning experiences tailored to pragmatics instruction. Moreover, the study highlights the significance of adopting learner-centered approaches that account for individual differences and needs, such as age and developmental stages, to optimize the effectiveness of pragmatic interventions.

Furthermore, this research underscores the need for comprehensive professional development programs and resources to equip language teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies for effectively teaching pragmatic aspects of language. Lastly, the study emphasizes the importance of incorporating pragmatics-focused assessments and providing targeted feedback mechanisms to evaluate and support learners' pragmatic development, thereby enhancing their awareness and application of pragmatic knowledge.

While this study has contributed valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted within a specific context involving Iraqi EFL learners in a university and a private language institute, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or linguistic contexts. Additionally, the relatively small sample size of 200 participants may restrict the statistical power and generalizability of the findings, highlighting the need for larger-scale studies.

Furthermore, the study focused on the immediate impact of pragmatics instruction over a single semester, necessitating longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term retention and development of pragmatic competence. The assessment method employed, the Multiple Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), while widely used, may not fully capture the complexities of real-life language use and pragmatic performance. Lastly, while the study included interviews and a questionnaire, a more in-depth qualitative exploration of learners' and teachers' experiences and perspectives could provide additional valuable insights. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the growing body of research on pragmatics instruction in EFL contexts and highlights the importance of fostering pragmatic competence for effective communication.

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Biodata

Taif Abdulhussein Dakhil, born in Diwanyia, Iraq, is a faculty member at Sawa University, Iraq. He received his M.A in TEFL from Imam Reza International University in 2021 and has been a PhD candidate of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, since 2021. His research interests are language teaching and research.

Fatemeh Karimi, born in Rasht, Iran, is a faculty member of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan branch. She received her M.A. in TEFL from Tarbiat Moallem University of Tabriz in 2006 and her PhD from Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch in 2018. She has been the Head of the English department at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan branch, since 2021 to present. Her research interests are language testing and research.

Riyadh Abbas Ubeid Al-Jashami, born in Baghdad, Iraq, is a faculty member of Sawa University, Iraq. He received his M.A. degree in English language and literature from Baghdad University and his Ph.D from Islamic Suleyman Demirel University, Turkey Branch. His research interests are linguistics and research.

Zargham Ghabanchi received his BA in English language and literature from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Then, he received his M.A. in TEFL from Tehran Tarbiayyet Moderres University, Iran. He started his Ph.D. at the University of Liverpool, the UK, in 1993. and Ph.D was conferred to him in 1998. He was the chancellor of Sabzevar Payam Noor University for around five years. Now, he has a chair at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. He has published over sixty articles, all published in highly ranked journals; in addition to the published articles, he has presented several papers at many conferences at a number of universities in different countries, such as the USA, Austria, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Greek, the UK, Iraq, and a few other places. Apart from this, he published two academic textbooks.