Research in English Language Pedagogy (2025) 13(3): 130303

 DOI: 10.71673/relp.2025.1197379

Original Research

Explicit Strategies-Based Instruction for L2 Apology and Request Production: Should It Be Separate or Integrated?

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Submission date: 23-01-2025 Acceptance date: 16-03-2025

Abstract

Pragmatic learning strategies have been recently addressed in descriptive studies; however, research into their instruction is scarce. This study compared the effects of explicit separate and explicit integrated pragmatic learning strategies-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' production of the speech acts of apology and request. Participants included 60 convenience-sampled intermediate EFL learners, randomly divided into an explicit separate instruction group (ESG; N = 30) and an explicit integrated instruction group (EIG; N = 30). ESG and EIG were both comprised of two 15-member subgroups, differing in the order of instruction of implicit and explicit strategies (N = 20) adopted from Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi's (2021) Pragmatic Learning Strategy Inventory. Strategy-based instruction was offered as a separate course to ESG, and an L2 speech act course component was integrated into the while-task phase for EIG. A 16-item written discourse completion test, comprised of eight apology and eight request items, was used to measure the participants' pre-treatment and post-treatment speech act production ability. Two separate analyses of covariance on apology and request scores showed explicit integrated pragmatic learning strategies-based instruction to be more effective than separate instruction. The findings indicate the greater effect of the integrated approach, which could be attributed to its embedded gap noticing and metapragmatic reflection opportunities. They have implications for speech act instruction aimed at enhancing learners' interlanguage pragmatic development autonomy.

Keywords: Apology, Explicit Integrated Instruction, Explicit Separate Instruction, Pragmatic Learning Strategies-Based Instruction, Request, Speech Act Production

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1. Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is a prominent subfield within the discipline of pragmatics that focuses on the study of how non-native speakers acquire and use pragmatic knowledge in a second language setting (Taguchi, 2015). This area of research examines the complex processes through which language learners develop their ability to understand and produce appropriate speech acts, such as requests, apologies, or compliments, in a second language environment (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Taguchi, 2019). The study of ILP is highly significant as it provides insights into the significant challenges faced by language learners in achieving communicative competence, while emphasizing the crucial role of pragmatic competence in second language acquisition (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). Investigations in this field have explored various aspects of ILP, including patterns of speech act realization, the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer, the developmental trajectory of interlanguage pragmatics, the impact of sociocultural factors on pragmatic competence, and the effect of various instructional approaches, including implicit and explicit instruction, on the learning of speech acts, implicature facets, and pragmatic routines (Taguchi et al., 2019). Within this framework, strategy-based pragmatics instruction has emerged as an essential pedagogical approach that facilitates the effective development of learners' pragmatic skills through the cultivation of awareness regarding cultural differences and the provision of opportunities for targeted practice and constructive feedback (Malmir, 2020; Prasatyo et al., 2023).

Pragmatic learning strategies-based instruction (PLSBI) finds relevance in the whole array of ILP development studies for three reasons: lack of focused attention to L2 pragmatic features in mainstream English language teaching (ELT) materials, low probability of ILP development as an offshoot of natural EFL classroom's discourse, and EFL teachers' lack of training on L2 pragmatics (see Bagherkazemi & Harati-Asl, 2022). These bring to the forefront learner autonomy in the learning of L2 pragmatic features as a must-have for ILP development. Among L2 pragmatic features, speech acts, including apology and request, stand out as potential targets of PLSBI since research has substantiated their cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation (Chalak & Abbasi, 2015; Cuza & Czerwionka, 2017; Eslami et al., 2022; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; Taguchi, 2011; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2014), and no definitive research evidence exists as to the most effective instructional approach for their learning. Searle (1969, cited in

Bagherkazemi, 2013) stated that both the production and comprehension of speech acts are essential for effective communication. Consequently, further exploration of these speech acts can offer valuable insights into the intricate interplay between language, culture, and social interaction (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Research into ILP strategies has only recently undergone an upsurge, though it has mostly been descriptive, rather than interventionist (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Fakher et al., 2016; Malmir, 2020). More than a decade ago, Cohen (2010) stated that strategy-based instruction (SBI) targeting speech act performance helps learners "be more effective pragmatically in L2" (p. 227). Tajeddin and Malmir (2015) and Taguchi et al. (2019) encouraged researchers to focus on PLSBI in order to help students be self-regulated in speech act production and comprehension. Along the same lines, Derakhshan et al. (2021) pointed out that SBI can pave the way for the learners' comprehension of speech acts and compensate for their probable failure in understanding pragmatic features. Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2021) showed that the use of strategies, particularly those that are explicit, is positively linked to L2 speech act knowledge.

Given the dearth of research into PLSBI, the question is how best to implement it. Referring to general SBI research in language education, a distinction is drawn between explicit SBI that provides learners with metastrategic awareness and blind SBI that involves the implicit instruction of strategies. Each could be offered as a study skills course (as a separate SBI) or integrated into a content course (as an integrated SBI) (Chamot, 2005). While research has substantiated the greater effectiveness of explicit SBI and the integrated approach, whether this general conclusion holds for ILP development begs the question. The present study investigated how explicit separate and explicit integrated PLSBI approaches compare with each other in terms of their effects on the production of the two speech acts of apology and request.

2. Literature Review

2.1. ILP and Instructed Pragmatics

The development of ILP assumes a crucial role within the domain of EFL contexts, as it centers on the processes by which learners acquire and employ pragmatic knowledge in their target language (Taguchi, 2019). The cultivation of pragmatic competence is of utmost importance for effective communication, as it enables learners to comprehend and produce appropriate linguistic forms in diverse social settings. A notable facet of ILP

pertains to the acquisition of speech acts, which encompass utterances intended to fulfill specific communicative functions, such as requests, apologies, and compliments (Culpeper et al., 2018). Research indicates that EFL learners frequently encounter challenges in comprehending and utilizing speech acts appropriately, primarily due to disparities in cultural and linguistic norms (Prasatyo et al., 2023). Additionally, ILP encompasses the fostering of pragmatic awareness, which entails learners' capacity to reflect upon and comprehend the pragmatic dimensions of language usage (Shakki et al., 2021). By cultivating pragmatic awareness, learners become more cognizant of the sociocultural and contextual factors that influence communication. This heightened awareness facilitates learners in adapting their language use to varying situations, thereby enhancing their flexibility and efficacy as communicators (Taguchi, 2019).

One compelling rationale for the cultivation of ILP in EFL learners is grounded in the concept of communicative competence (Eslami et al., 2022). Proficiency in a language extends beyond mere knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; it encompasses the ability to convey meaning and engage in successful interactions with others. In the absence of a solid grasp of pragmatics, EFL learners may encounter difficulties in expressing themselves appropriately, resulting in misunderstandings and ineffective communication (Azizi & Namaziandost, 2022). Furthermore, the development of ILP assumes particular significance for EFL learners who anticipate utilizing English in international settings. English serves as a global lingua franca in numerous professional and academic domains. As such, EFL learners must possess the necessary pragmatic skills to navigate these diverse contexts adeptly. Without a firm understanding of intercultural communication norms, EFL learners may unintentionally offend or confuse their interlocutors, thereby impeding effective communication (Derakhshan et al., 2021). Among all aspects of ILP, speech acts have received the most interventionist attention owing to (a) their culturally different realization across cultures and languages (Taguchi, 2015) and (b) the ease with which they can be instructed given their clear strategy sets in the English language, as yielded in descriptive research (see Bagherkazemi, 2016). Interventionist research has mostly tried out and compared various instructional approaches, e.g., implicit and explicit instruction, dynamic assessment-based instruction, and task-based instruction (see Derakhshan et al., 2021); however, despite the evidenced greater benefits of explicit instruction, there exists no conclusive evidence as to the best instructional approach in the

context of not only cognitive, but also social second language acquisition (SLA) theories. For example, in a study done by Chalak and Abbasi (2015) in the EFL context, it was found that the learning environment can be a determining factor in the effectiveness of various modes of instruction, and the combination of explicit and implicit instruction resulted in the learners' significant improvement in using suggestive speech acts in comparison with single explicit or implicit instructional modes. Given this background, the cultivation of EFL learners' autonomy with the task of ILP development seems to be essential. This gains even greater salience considering the lack of focused treatment of L2 pragmatic features, particularly speech acts, in language teaching syllabi and materials and teacher education programs (Taguchi, 2015). Accordingly, it might be high time for instructed pragmatics research to place a premium on PLSBI.

2.2. Pragmatic Learning Strategies: Descriptive and Interventionist Research

Research into pragmatic learning strategies (PLSs) has been mainly descriptive, aiming to ferret out strategies on the basis of existing LLS models developed for language learning in general (e.g., Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015), or SLA theories (e.g., Bagherkazemi & Harati-Asl, 2022). In other words, research into the instruction of such strategies is minimal. Regarding descriptive research evidence, Tajeddin and Malmir's (2015) findings are worth mentioning. They categorized interlanguage PLSs into memory-related, cognitive, social, affective, metacognitive, and compensatory classes, borrowing from Oxford (1990). The study also revealed that high pragmatic performers used more strategies compared to low pragmatic performers, which rationalizes PLSBI research and practice; however, the study did not involve SBI intervention. Drawing on the same strategy classification, Malmir's (2020) correlational study showed social PLSs were more effective in predicting learners' L2 social identity as compared to other types of strategies. This is while affective and compensatory strategies made only moderate contributions, and cognitive and metacognitive strategies made weak contributions to L2 social identity. However, memory IPLS did not have a significant contribution towards L2 social identity in Iranian EFL learners. Focusing on speech act comprehension, Malmir and Derakhshan (2020) delineated three categories of speech act comprehension strategies: cognitive, socio-pragmatic, and lexico-grammatical. They found out that EFL learners' pragmatic comprehension strategy use was not mediated by their gender. They suggested that explicit

teaching of pragmatic comprehension strategies helps learners promote their L2 pragmatic comprehension. This statement provides support for the significance of explicit PLSBI, as one of the main facets of the present study. Along the same lines, Derakhshan et al. (2021) suggested that PLSs, as sketched in the classification put forth by Tajeddin and Malmir (2015), can greatly enhance EFL learners' speech act comprehension. Metacognitive and memory strategies, partly mapping onto explicit and implicit strategies in the present study, respectively, were found to be inadequate predictors of L2 speech act knowledge, while compensatory and affective strategies were very weak predictors.

Additionally, the study revealed that higher proficiency in the second language was linked to greater employment of PLSs. Taguchi (2018) divided ILP strategies into cognitive and metacognitive categories and emphasized explicit instruction of PLSs in her model. In a more recent study, Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2021) reported a study designed to develop and validate a pragmatic learning strategy inventory, namely PRALSI, relying on Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis. The relationship between pragmatic learning strategy and the learners' knowledge of speech acts was also revealed as a main aim of the study. "PRALSI measures three kinds of PLSs reliably: implicit, inductive, explicit, and deductive explicit pragmatic learning strategies" (Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2021, p. 13). Implicit learning strategies are stated to be meaning-focused and involve noticing linguistic and social rules underlying L2 pragmatic features upon exposure. On the other hand, explicit learning strategies pertain to seeking explicit pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics norms in the input and various related sources. The authors acknowledged the application of PRALSI as an effective instrument for PLSBI. They concurred that the existence of a significant positive relationship between pragmatic learning strategy use frequency and speech act production, as measured by a written discourse completion test (WDCT), would indicate SBI as a productive approach to assist learners in developing their pragmatic proficiency.

There are only a few PLSBI studies. Shively (2010) offered a PLSBI model for ESL learners, involving a strategic awareness-raising phase followed by learners' ethnographic attempts at strategic ILP development in the L2 context. PLSBI was implemented as an explicit separate approach in Taguchi et al.'s (2019) study, which was designed around cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies used for learning conversational interaction. It was found that participants "noticed targeted pragmatic features in available resources, but

there was an imbalance in the degree of noticing and types of strategies used" (p. 11). In other words, PLSBI aided learners in their effort to notice L2 pragmatic features, but whether this instruction could enhance speech act production was not among the study's foci. The findings can be taken as evidence for the effectiveness of this approach for noticing L2 pragmatic features.

2.3. Explicit Separate and Integrated SBI

For over three decades, the field of research on foreign language acquisition has dedicated significant attention to the investigation of language learning strategies (LLSs) (Oxford, 2017). Furthermore, scholars have also found that the utilization of LLS fosters learner autonomy and enhances proficiency in the target language (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). As Cohen (1998) stated, "strategies-based instruction is a learner-centered approach to teaching that extends classroom strategy training to include both explicit and implicit integration of strategies into the course content" (P. 81). Additionally, it has been widely recognized that the employment of strategies is directly associated with success in language learning (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Chamot (2005) examined whether SBI should be delivered through embedded or explicit instruction, with the former providing implicit strategy use and practice opportunities, and the latter offering explicit explanation of targeted strategies along with use and pragmatic opportunities. Brown et al. (1986) and Oxford (2017) advocated incorporating a metacognitive component in SBI, as is the case with explicit SBI, by informing students about the purpose and significance of the strategies being taught and providing instruction on how to control and monitor these strategies. This has proven effective in sustaining the utilization of strategies in the long term and transferring them to new tasks (Chamot, 2005). On the other hand, embedding strategies in instruction with no attempt at bringing them to the learners' conscious attention has proved to lower the chance of strategy transfer across tasks (Brown et al. 1986; Nguyan Thi Bich, 2020). Explicit SBI finds theoretical support in the meta-strategies component of Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model (S2R), which is assigned an executive control function.

It is a question whether explicit SBI, which informs students of the value and purpose of L2 learning and communication strategies, and teaches them how to use those strategies in different contexts consciously, should be taught separately or integrated into

task performance (Chamot, 2004, 2005). The former involves SBI as a distinct syllabus component followed by practice opportunities, while the latter involves explicit SBI as an add-in to L2 instruction offered in the midst of task performance (Chamot, 2004). Proponents of explicit integrated SBI suggest that it (a) facilitates strategy use in real-world contexts as strategies are introduced in the context of task performance, and (b) offers opportunities for long-term strategy use and strategy retention, given that SBI intervention is implemented when learners feel the need for it (Chamot, 2005; Zhang, 2007). This is supported by research evidence, which indicates that learners who practice strategies on real language and academic tasks are better able to transfer those strategies to similar tasks encountered in other contexts (Campione & Armbruster, 1985; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987).On the other hand, advocates of explicit separate SBI have raised two issues with explicit integrated SBI: First, it fails to equip learners with the ability to transfer strategies to new tasks since they have been exposed to it while engaged in the performance of a single task with its peculiar features. Second, not all language teachers can be taught to include integrated strategies in their classes since it requires intuition as to where best to mediate task performance with SBI (Gu, 2007). The potential for facilitating strategy transfer has been put forward as an argument in favor of having separate training programs (Derry & Murphy, 1986; Jones et al., 1987). Furthermore, it has been suggested that students will be able to learn strategies more effectively if they are solely focused on developing strategic processing skills, rather than trying to learn content at the same time (Jones et al., 1987).

This literature review shows the comparatively small number of interventionist studies into PLSs for the learning of L2 pragmatic features. To address this gap, this study relied on the implicit/explicit PLSs' classification in PRALSI and tried out two common SBI approaches: explicit separate and explicit integrated (Chamot, 2005), targeting speech act production. The rationale for the selection of these two SBI approaches is two-fold: firstly, general SBI research has shown that explicit instruction of strategies, whereby the functions and uses of specific LLSs are explicated, pertains to significantly more language learning success (Nguyan Thi Bich, 2020). Secondly, since most ELT syllabi in the Iranian EFL context are devoid of focused pragmatics instruction, PLSBI should be incorporated as an extension to regular syllabi. This would be most practicable in the form of an exclusive PLSBI program offered outside regular syllabi, or as an add-in undertaking while learners are engaged in L2 pragmatics-related task completion. Accordingly, the explicit

separate/explicit integrated distinction would be most suitable for the findings to be applicable in this context. Finally, the study practiced PRALSI strategies since, unlike other existing ILP strategy inventories, it consists merely of learning, rather than communication, strategies. These stated, the study was designed to answer two questions:

1. Do explicit separate and explicit integrated PLSBI approaches significantly differ in terms of their effects on EFL learners' production of the speech act of apology?
2. Do explicit separate and explicit integrated PLSBI approaches significantly differ in terms of their effects on EFL learners' production of the speech act of request?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study employed a counterbalanced comparison group design. The two experimental conditions (i.e., explicit separate and explicit integrated PLSBI) were implemented in four intact intermediate classes in two private English language institutes in Karaj, with two classes for each condition, differing in the order of presentation of PRALSI's implicit and explicit PLSs (explicit-then-implicit or implicit-then-explicit). This yielded a counterbalanced design, verbalized to cancel out the validity threat of strategy type presentation order. In other words, ESG and EIG each comprised two subgroups: ESG_1 (explicit-then-implicit), ESG_2 (implicit-then-explicit), EIG_1 (explicit-then-implicit), EIG_2 (implicit-then-explicit). ESG and EIG were pre- and post-tested on a WDCT.

3.2. Participants

This study was carried out with adult EFL learners in four intact intermediate classes at two private language institutes located in Karaj. From the initial 78 convenience-sampled learners, 60 (comprising 36 females and 24 males, aged between 18 and 25) were selected based on their scores on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (see Instruments). Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information. They had varying language learning experiences, ranging from five to ten years, and none had lived in an English-speaking country. Ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring that participants provided informed consent and that their anonymity was maintained. The classes were randomly allocated into four 15-member ESG and EIG subgroups. The two subgroups for each experimental condition differed in the sequence of presenting explicit and implicit PLSs. This step was taken to obtain a counterbalanced design.

Table 1.

Demographic Background of the Participants

No. of Students	60 (N_{EIG} = 30; N_{ESG} = 30)
Gender	36 Females and 24 Males
Age Range	18-25
Native Language	Persian
Majors	Psychology, Law, Engineering, Management, Accounting, …
Academic Years	2023-2024

3.3. Instruments

Two data collection instruments, namely OPT and a WDCT, were used in the present study. These are described in this section.

3.3.1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To make sure the participants were at the intermediate proficiency level, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used at the pre-treatment test with the initial convenience sample of 78 learners in the four intact classes (of whom 60 participated in the study). This proficiency level was intended to ensure that the participants had already developed a basic level of linguistic competence, enabling them to participate in more intricate communicative tasks and understand the pragmatic dimensions of communication. This study employed the paper-and-pencil version of OPT, created by Oxford University Press and the ESOL Examinations Syndicate in 2000. The test required approximately 30 minutes to complete and included 60 multiple-choice items covering reading, grammar, and vocabulary. Learners who achieved scores between 30 and 39 were classified as intermediate according to the scoring criteria outlined by Geranpayeh in 2003. As noted by Geranpayeh (2003), OPT possesses construct validity. The reliability of the scores was demonstrated through a KR-21 coefficient of .79 in this study.

3.3.2. Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)

The participants' production of speech acts was examined through a 16-item WDCT (eight on apology, eight on request) adapted from Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2014), as both the pre-test and the post-test. The reason for using the same test as the pre-test and the post-test was to maintain the parallelness of the situations in terms of the three social context

variables of power, distance, and imposition (see Brown & Levinson, 1987). It should, however, be admitted that this could have created some test-wise wiseness threatening the validity of the findings. WDCT involved various situations targeting friend-friend, parent-child, and teacher-student relationships. The participants were required to read each situation and then produce their response in written form. The following is an example situation contained in this test:

> A close friend asks you for $ 500; you have the money, but you are unwilling to lend it to her since you know she will not pay it back. How would you refuse her request?

In order to investigate the learners' responses, an assistant professor of applied linguistics, specializing in ILP research, rated the responses of all 90 participants' pre- and post-test WDCT responses on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (no performance) to 5 (excellent), proposed by Taguchi (2006). Table 2 shows Taguchi's WDCT scale.

Table 2.

WDCT Rating Scale (adapted from Taguchi, 2006, p.520)

Ratings	**Descriptors**
5 = Excellent	Expressions are fully appropriate for the situation. No or almost no grammatical and discourse errors.
4 = Good	Expressions are mostly appropriate. Very few grammatical and discourse errors.
3 = Fair	Expressions are only somewhat appropriate. Grammatical and discourse errors are noticeable, but they do not interfere with appropriateness.
2 = Poor	Due to the interference from grammatical and discourse errors, appropriateness is difficult to determine.
1 = Very poor	Expressions are difficult or too little to understand. There is no evidence that the intended speech acts are performed.
0 = No performance	No performance

Concerning the inter-rater reliability of the ratings, pre-test WDCT responses of 25 learners were rated by a native English speaker, teaching English in Iran. The ratings were then shown to be correlated at the .87 correlation coefficient level with those of the assistant professor who rated all the pre-and post-test WDCT responses. As to the validity of WDCT, Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2014) reported expert and learner review results showing: (a) the language used in the items was suitable for intermediate learners, (b) each scenario could effectively prompt the intended speech act, (c) the situations were representative of those encountered in an EFL context, and (d) the situations sampled a

sufficient variation of possible power, distance, and severity combinations. The test took an average of 38 minutes to complete.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

A total of 78 EFL learners from four intact classes were selected through convenience sampling and asked to complete a research participation consent form. Following this, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to identify comparable groups of participants at the intermediate proficiency level. Prior to the treatment sessions, the learners undertook the pre-test WDCT. The study employed a counterbalanced design, with the participants randomly divided into two 15-member ESG subgroups and two 15-member EIG subgroups. ESG and EIG subgroups differed in the sequence of presentation of implicit and explicit PRALSI strategies. This was intended to mitigate the validity threat associated with the order of strategy presentation, resulting in two 30-member groups for data analysis (ESG = 30; EIG = 30). All four subgroups were taught by one of the researchers. Both ESG and EIG treatments involved three components, based on Chamot's (2005) SBI model, through in different orders: (a) preparation, wherein the instructor identified PRALSI strategies to be covered, (b) explicit strategies presentation, wherein the instructor demonstrated, elucidated, and provided explicit information regarding the new strategies, and (c) practice, wherein the instructor offered learners opportunities to apply the strategies in L2 pragmatics tasks. While ESG was explained in practice, EIG received an explanation during task completion. The experimental groups participated in ten weekly sessions of 40 minutes each, focusing on two strategies from PRALSI, making up for 20 (11 explicit and nine implicit) in total (Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2021). The selection criterion for these strategies was their suitability for instruction, as jointly probed by the researchers, and they were identical in both ESG and EIG treatments. To exemplify, note-taking was more amenable to instruction than communication with native speakers in the classroom context. Accordingly, the implicit pragmatic learning strategy: "I note frequent structures and sentences used by more proficient learners and native speakers to make and/or respond to requests, apologies, compliments, etc. in English," was opted for. However, the explicit learning strategy: "Through communicating with native speakers, I try to find out how different social roles and positions may influence the way one makes and/or responds to requests, apologies, compliments, etc.," was adapted in the sense that

"native speakers" was replaced with "more proficient learners." Moreover, while PRALSI targets implicature and pragmatic routines besides speech acts in most of its items, instruction only targeted the two speech acts of apology and request. Accordingly, some adaptation was applied to make the strategies directly related to speech acts (see Appendix for the list of PRALSI strategies practiced in this study).

Both ESG and EIG were presented with 20 video vignettes containing 10 apology and 10 request situations, extracted from the series *Lost* by Bagherkazemi (2013). Both treatments also involved paired performance of three identical variants of "predicting" tasks (two in each session) based on Nunan (2004): (a) judgment, wherein learners judged a speech act presented in the video vignettes or other input in terms of its pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics associations; (b) decision making, wherein learners decided which of the choices provided by the instructor on a speech act situation was the best, regarding social context variables' combinations, and (c) predicting, in which learners predicted the speech act strategy performed by interlocutors in given situations. Both EIG and ESG received explicit PLSBI, differing in whether instruction was separate or integrated. Whole class discussions of task contingencies followed task performance for both ESG and EIG. Predicting tasks were selected owing mainly to their potential for inducing interaction regarding the appropriateness of speech act strategies in various situations.

In each ESG session, the teacher-researcher explained a PRALSI strategy, illustrating it with a modeled example. For instance, she stated, "I participate in discussions about the social norms and rules underlying English requests, apologies, complaints, etc., that we come across in class." The teacher emphasized that the performance of speech acts is influenced by three social context variables: power, distance, and severity. She also detailed the pragmalinguistic characteristics of the speech acts of apology and request, which she presented as strategy sets adapted from Bagherkazemi (2013), highlighting their dependence on the interplay of these variables. To facilitate understanding of these relationships, she introduced "classroom discussion" as a strategy, asserting that participation in such discussions enhances knowledge and proficiency in navigating cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in speech act performance. Following this explicit explanation, she presented a video vignette containing a request and offered opportunities for discussion regarding the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of the scenario. Throughout the process, she aimed to exemplify the role of "a discussion participant,"

directing learners' focus to critical elements of the situation under consideration. Subsequently, learners were given a judgment task involving a request/apology scenario, which they discussed in pairs while practicing the strategy and examining its pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic variables. This discussion was later conducted as a whole class. All this enabled learners to concentrate intensively on one strategy at a time, fostering deeper cognitive engagement and mastery. In contrast, for EIG, the same video vignettes and tasks were utilized, but without the teacher's explicit explanation of the strategy and its related concepts. This was then repeated with the second strategy selected for the session.

Each EIG session commenced with the instructor presenting a video vignette that illustrated a specific speech act within a defined social context. Subsequently, learners were instructed to participate in a paired prediction task to practice the identified strategy. In relation to the strategy discussed for ESG, which involved participation in discussions, learners were paired to deliberate on their perceptions of the video-contained speech act and the rationale behind its execution. This often resulted in "critical moments," where learners recognized their lack of knowledge and adeptness in discussing the essential components of the speech act in question during language-related episodes. The instructor capitalized on these "critical moments," guiding the learners' discussions by explicating the specific combination of social context variables and their linguistic implications presented in the vignette. The instructor then explicitly identified the strategy, bringing it to the learners' conscious awareness. The process emphasized teacher scaffolding and mediation rather than simple explicit instruction. In essence, EIG participants were initially unaware that they were engaging in PLSBI until the instructor explicitly articulated the strategy following these critical moments. Throughout the task, the instructor encouraged learners to actively recognize and employ suitable strategies through prompting questions such as, "How can we express this request politely?" These prompts directed learners to implement PRALSI strategies in real-time interactions. A whole-class discussion followed, similar to the approach practiced with ESG. This process was then repeated with a second strategy, utilizing a new video vignette and a different prediction task. For both groups, the instructor closely monitored all interactions, providing immediate support and feedback as necessary. Following the treatment sessions, the participants completed the WDCT post-test.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

In order to answer the research questions, two separate analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted on EIG and ESG's pretest and posttest apology and request scores. Following Pallant (2013), ANCOVA's assumptions, i.e., absence of treatment impact on covariate measurement, reliability of covariates, absence of strong correlations among covariates, linear association between the dependent variable and covariate, and homogeneity of regression slopes, were checked. It should be noted that scores on the two 15-member subgroups of each of the two main groups (i.e., ESG and EIG) were pooled for each to obtain 30-member samples.

4. Results

4.1. Comparing Apology WDCT Scores for ESG and EIG

The first ANCOVA was conducted on pre-test and post-test apology WDCT scores for ESG and EIG. Given that the covariates were assessed prior to the treatment, they could not have been influenced by the treatment, thereby ensuring compliance with this assumption. Moreover, each ANCOVA analysis involved only one covariate, rendering the assumption regarding correlations among covariates inapplicable. To verify the reliability of the covariates, Cronbach's Alpha was examined. The obtained results indicated that the covariate demonstrated satisfactory reliability (r = .84). It was also necessary to ensure the homogeneity of regression slopes. The results of ANCOVA, as shown in Table 3, indicated an insignificant interaction value between group and pretest apology WDCT scores [$F_{(1, 56)}$ = .07, p > .05]. This means pre-test and post-test apology WDCT scores of ESG and EIG enjoyed homogeneous regression slopes.

Table 3.
Homogeneity of Regression Slopes for the Production of the Speech Act of Apology

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1238.02	3	247.60	39.71	.00	.70
Intercept	206.77	1	206.77	33.16	.00	.28
Group * Pre-test	.77	1	.38	.07	.88	.00
Error	523.76	56	6.23			
Total	159097.00	60				
Corrected Total	1761.78	59				

Descriptive statistics for ESG and EIG's pre-test and post-test apology WDCT scores are presented in Table 4. The mean pre-test apology WDCT scores for ESG [*M* = 36.00, *SD* = 3.76] and EIG [*M* = 34.90, *SD* = 3.80] were not noticeably different; however, the mean post-test score for EIG [*M* = 44.03, *SD* = 3.86] was much higher than that of ESG [*M* = 42.97, *SD* = 3.95]. Moreover, all four score sets enjoyed distributional normality as the ratios of skewness and kurtosis to their standard errors fell within the range of +2 (see Field, 2009).

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Apology WDCT Scores

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Pre-test	ESG	30	36.00	3.76	.70	.12	.81	.99	.47
	EIG	30	34.90	3.80	.69	-.79	.81	.54	.47
Post-test	ESG	30	42.97	3.95	.72	1.02	.81	-.98	.47
	EIG	30	44.03	3.86	.70	.88	.81	.87	.47

Note. ESG: explicit separate group; EIG: explicit integrated group.

Table 5 shows the main ANCOVA results. After adjusting for pre-test apology WDCT scores, a significant difference was detected among ESG and EIG's post-test apology WDCT scores for the stringent significance level of .01 [$F_{(1, 56)} = 47.10$, $p < .01$, partial eta squared = .52]. Besides, there was a strong relationship between pre-test and post-test scores [$F_{(1, 56)} = 115.87$, $p < .01$, partial eta squared = .57]. This indicates that post-test apology WDCT scores were affected by their pre-test parallel, justifying the use of ANCOVA. Overall, EIG improved significantly more than ESG in terms of apology production.

Table 5.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Apology WDCT Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1237.25	3	412.41	67.61	.00	.70
Intercept	206.87	1	206.87	33.91	.00	.28
Pre-test	706.76	1	706.76	115.87	.00	.57
Group	574.62	1	287.31	45.10	.00	.42
Error	524.53	56	6.09			
Total	159097.00	60				
Corrected Total	1761.78	59				

4.2. Comparing Request WDCT Scores for ESG and EIG

The second ANCOVA was conducted on request WDCT scores to compare ESG and EIG in this regard. In addition to meeting the assumptions mentioned at the beginning of this section, the assumption of the homogeneity of regression slopes was tested separately for request WDCT scores, as illustrated in Table 6. The results indicated that the significance level of the interaction between group and request WDCT pre-test scores was above .05, indicating the two groups' pre-test and post-test request scores had homogenous regression slopes [$F_{(1, 56)} = .29$, $p > .05$].

Table 6.

Homogeneity of Regression Slopes for Request WDCT Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1129.44	3	225.88	45.64	.00	.73
Intercept	170.50	1	170.50	34.45	.00	.29
Group*Pre-test	2.79	1	1.39	.29	.75	.06
Error	415.67	56	4.94			
Total	129763.00	60				
Corrected Total	1545.12	59				

Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test request WDCT scores for ESG and EIG are presented in Table 7. All the score sets enjoyed normality, given that ratios of skewness and kurtosis to their associated standard errors fell within the range of -2 to +2. In addition, the mean of request WDCT pre-test scores for ESG [$M = 32.73$, $SD = 3.78$] and EIG [$M = 31.43$, $SD = 3.86$] were close; however, EIG's post-test scores [$M = 39.37$, $SD = 3.79$] was higher than the that of ESG [$M = 38.63$, $SD = 3.86$].

Table 7.

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Request WDCT Scores

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Pre-test	ESG	30	32.73	3.79	.69	.62	.81	.79	.47
	EIG	30	31.43	3.86	.70	-1.29	.81	.86	.47
Post-test	ESG	30	38.63	3.86	.70	1.00	.81	-.78	.47
	EIG	30	39.37	3.79	.69	.45	.81	.67	.47

Note. ESG: explicit separate group; EIG: explicit integrated group.

ANCOVA results, as shown in Table 8, indicated that there was a significant difference among the two groups' request WDCT scores [$F_{(1, 56)} = 38.66$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .47], after controlling for pre-test scores. Besides, there was a strong relationship between pre-test and post-test request WDCT scores, justifying the use of ANCOVA [$F_{(1, 56)} = 160.56$, $p < .05$]. In sum, EIG's improvement was greater than ESG's in terms of request production.

Table 8.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Request WDCT Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1126.65	3	375.55	77.17	.00	.72
Intercept	171.98	1	171.98	35.34	.00	.29
Pre-test	834.82	1	834.82	160.56	.00	.66
Group	376.27	1	188.13	38.66	.00	.47
Error	418.47	56	4.86			
Total	129763.00	60				
Corrected Total	1545.12	59				

5. Discussion

This study was conducted to examine how explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI impacted Iranian EFL learners' ability to produce apology and request speech acts. The results showed that EIG performed significantly better than ESG in terms of both apology and request production.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings echo the long-held belief in the potential of SBI for aiding language learners with their L2 learning and communication endeavors through individualization of the language learning experience and learning autonomy and motivation promotion (Cohen et al., 1998). The results lend support to the significance of (a) raising learners' awareness of what is implied in L2 pragmatic performance and (b) providing them with resolution strategies. The former finds theoretical justification in Swain's (2005) notions of "collaborative dialoguing" and "language-related episodes." PLSBI, in its integrated version, offered opportunities for learners to reflect on video-contained and task-embedded situations and engage in meta-talk regarding how best to find ways for learning to perform the targeted speech acts. Oxford (2017) mentioned the

capacity of explicit SBI for enhancing language learners' autonomy, motivation, and task engagement.

That EIG offered greater benefits for speech act production could be theoretically attributed to its additional "critical moments-then-resolution" component. More specifically, EIG was first led to notice gaps in performing judgment, decision-making, and predicting tasks, and felt the need for teacher mediation. Only then were they instructed on situation-appropriate learning strategies, rather than directly on how to perform the speech act in question. This additional gap noticing opportunity, which Swain (1996) referred to as a main advantage of production and dialoguing, might have led to a deeper engagement with the strategies and their deployment in subsequent similar tasks; however, it remains to be seen if the observed EIG improvement was also owing to the awareness-raising function of the integrated variant of PLSBI concerning pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of speech act performance. This stated, the findings reflect the positive relationship between pragmatic learning strategy use, including explicit learning strategies, and success in producing and comprehending L2 pragmatic features (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2021; Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020; Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015). Derakhshan et al. (2021) found that L2 PLSs can enhance learners' ability to navigate the intricacies of speech act performance more effectively, such as identifying contextual cues or analyzing the illocutionary force of utterances.

The significance of Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi's (2021) PRALSI in facilitating learners' development of speech act production should also be noted. Through the integration of PRALSI within an explicit strategy-based instruction (SBI) approach, learners were afforded a comprehensive framework for enhancing their production of speech acts. The amalgamation of pragmatic awareness and strategy instruction likely enabled learners to cultivate a deeper understanding of speech acts and improve their proficiency in producing them accurately and appropriately. Regarding the benefits for learners, PRALSI can function as a tool for raising awareness, potentially heightening learners' recognition of the significance of acquiring second language (L2) pragmatic features. This heightened awareness can, in turn, augment the efficacy of instruction.

Furthermore, by exposing learners to a diverse array of PLSs, PRALSI can foster greater adaptability in the utilization of these strategies (Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2021). That this study involved the introduction of both implicit and explicit PLSs could also

partly explain the effectiveness of PLSBI. The participants likely found it easier to individualize their speech act production learning path in alignment with their own learning preference (either implicit or explicit).

It is noteworthy that the only empirical investigation into explicit PLSBI within ILP research was conducted by Taguchi et al. (2019), which focused on cognitive and metacognitive PLSs. Aligning with the findings of the present study, their research highlighted the significance of enhancing the metapragmatic awareness of L2 learners in PLSBI. Unlike the separate condition, the integrated approach commenced with the presentation of authentic input and subsequently paired task performance before the element of "explicitness" was introduced. Instances of knowledge gap noticing (or realization) during the task phase (i.e., critical moments) likely prompted learners to concentrate more intently on PLSs and cultivate a greater level of metapragmatic awareness. The findings of the study concerning the advantages of the integrated approach resonate with those from general SBI research and the limited PLSBI studies conducted thus far. The general SBI literature presents more evidence supporting integrated instruction (see Chamot, 2005). In the realm of ILP research, Shively (2010) proposed a PLSBI model as a component of a pragmatics course, without conducting comparisons between separate and integrated PLSBI methods. The researcher asserted that the integrated approach holds promise for the advancement of ILP; however, no research within ILP has compared integrated and separate PLSBIs. Due to this gap in research, any comparison between the findings of existing studies and those of the current study should be approached with caution.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the explicit integrated approach potentially yields superior results for EFL learners' apology and request production when compared with separate PLSBI, indicating that integrating pragmatic learning with task performance may lead to better outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of considering strategy-based instructional approaches in the teaching of pragmatic skills and provide valuable insights for language educators seeking to enhance learners' proficiency in speech acts.

When examining the greater effectiveness of explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI on speech act production, several factors should be considered. Firstly, explicit

instruction provides learners with clear explanations and examples of speech acts, their underlying intentions, and the appropriate linguistic forms and strategies to use in different situations (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Secondly, by incorporating explicit integrated SBI into language teaching, students can become more aware of the strategies they use when producing speech acts and learn to use them more effectively following gap noticing. This can lead to more successful communication and greater language proficiency. By learning to use different strategies, learners become more conscious of the cognitive processes involved in speech act production, which can in turn lead to more effective learning outcomes (Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015).

Pedagogically, the findings can inform instructed pragmatics in EFL contexts. Teachers can engage learners in explicit PLS-focused strategic practice while they are engaged in L2 pragmatic tasks. This variant of PLSBI seems to be more effective than a separate course since it first entertains learners' attention to the contingencies of L2 speech act performance before introducing strategies for thriving in them. ELT syllabi can also benefit from this study's findings. Strategies can be inserted in pragmatics-focused lessons or tasks to guide learners along their ILP development path. Teacher education programs can also raise pre-service or in-service teachers' awareness of the significance of PLSs and the benefits and implementation properties of integrated PLSBI, enabling them to practice these in their classes.

As for limitations, speech act production was measured through a 16-item WDCT at both the pre-test and post-test phases. This might have created some test wiseness. WDCT has been questioned for the authenticity of the speech acts it produces (Malmir, 2020). Had the study triangulated WDCT scores with some more authentic measure of speech act production, like role plays, the findings would have been more dependable; however, this step was not taken by the researchers owing to administrative limitations at the study's data collection sites. Further research, investigating (a) the effectiveness of explicit separate and explicit integrated PLSBI with other speech acts, (b) the potential of other PLSBI approaches with speech acts and other L2 pragmatic features like implicature and pragmatic routines, and (c) triangulating WDCT scores with other speech act production measures in studies of the impact of PLSBI on speech act production, could shed more light on how SBI can be brought to bear on ILP development.

Authors' Contributions

Mina Akhavan Tavakoli was responsible for project administration, and data collection and analysis. Marzieh Bagherkazemi supervised the methodology and writing (review and editing). Alireza Ameri contributed to the study's validation and resources. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix

Implicit and Explicit PRALSI Strategies Adopted and/or Adapted in the Order Presented to ESG and EIG

	Strategy	Strategy Type
1	I keep repeating to myself important and frequent sentences and phrases such as "Apologies," which will make me sound fluent and native-like in English conversations.	implicit
2	I note frequent structures and sentences used by more proficient learners and native speakers to make and/or respond to requests, apologies, compliments, etc. in English.	implicit
3	I take notes when someone (e.g., my English teacher) gives me the corrected version of the erroneous apologies, requests, refusals that I make, and try to improve what I have said.	implicit
4	I take note of such polite expressions as "It was my fault" which seem to be important, and which are frequently used.	implicit
5	I pay attention to the way different people (of different ages, social positions and different degrees of familiarity) make and respond to apologies, requests, and refusals, and then imitate.	implicit
6	I notice (and remember) the way people with different social roles and positions make polite requests, refusals, complaints, etc.	implicit
7	I notice (and remember) how more proficient learners and native speakers begin and end apology and request episodes with pre- and post-sequences.	implicit
8	I notice when an English routine like "I was wondering if I could …" or "I happened to …" differs from or is nonexistent in Persian.	implicit
9	I compare my requests, refusals, apologies, etc. in English with those of more proficient learners and native speakers to see how I can improve what I say.	implicit
10	When I see the vocabulary and grammar rules and social norms underlying apologies, requests, refusals, etc., I record them somewhere, e.g., in my notebook.	explicit (deductive)
11	I look for rules relating to the relationship between vocabulary and grammar choices and the expression of implied meanings and intentions in relevant sources (e.g., when someone says "My bad" to mean they are to blame.).	explicit (deductive)
12	When I create a hypothesis about the social norms and rules underlying requests, apologies, complaints, etc., I check it with my English teacher or more proficient learners.	explicit (deductive)
13	I ask my English teacher and/or other informative sources for differences in the rules of making apologies, requests, refusals, etc. with people of different ages and social positions.	explicit (deductive)
14	I refer to informative sources (e.g., my teacher, the textbook, the Internet, etc.) for the rules underlying the use of body language and tone of voice by English native speakers to convey what is meant when making apologies and requests.	explicit (deductive)

15	I refer to the Internet and other informative sources to find interesting examples of indirect talk in English, and discussions of its related linguistic and social rules.	explicit (deductive)
16	I listen carefully for any feedback (linguistic and/or social) my English teacher provides on the politeness of my apologies, requests, refusals, etc., or those of my classmates, and try to form rules in my mind.	explicit (deductive)
17	I participate in discussions about the social norms and rules underlying English requests, apologies, complaints, etc. we come across in class	explicit (deductive)
18	I try to discover the politeness rules and considerations underlying the use of such expressions as "Would you mind?", "please", etc. based on examples of their use.	explicit (inductive)
19	I pay attention to frequent routines such as "I'm sorry to bother." or "I wonder if …" in conversations, trying to discover the grammatical rules and social norms underlying their use.	explicit (inductive)
20	When I come across apologies, requests, refusals, etc. in English, I try to infer how the speaker and hearer's age, social positions and degree of familiarity with each other might have influenced how they are expressed.	explicit (inductive)