Research Paper

Effect of Explicit Separate and Explicit Integrated Pragmatic Learning Strategies-Based Instruction on EFL Learners' Speech Act Comprehension: Apology and Request in Focus

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Abstract

Despite the significance of comprehension of L2 pragmatic features, research into speech acts' comprehension is at a premium. The present study sought to examine the impact of explicit separate and explicit integrated strategies-based instruction (SBI) on Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' comprehension of apology and request speech acts. The participants consisted of 90 convenience-sampled intermediate EFL learners, who were randomly divided into 3 groups: an explicit separate SBI group (ESG; N = 30), an explicit integrated SBI group (EIG; N = 30), and a control group (CG; N = 30). Given the study's counterbalanced design, ESG and EIG both had two 15-member subgroups, differing in the order of presentation of implicit and explicit strategies. ESG received explicit instruction and modeling of the strategies by the teacher before practicing them. Conversely, EIG engaged in pragmatic learning strategy use practice during pragmatic learning tasks. Speech act-containing video vignettes and predicting tasks were deployed as the means of practicing and presenting pragmatic learning strategies. CG, on the other hand, did not receive any pragmatics-focused instruction. A 20-item multiple-choice discourse completion test was deployed as the pre-and post-test with all the groups. ANCOVA results indicated the significant gain of both ESG and EIG from the pre-treatment to the post-treatment phase, with EIG outperforming ESG. These findings contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic learning SBI, whether separate or integrated, in enhancing learners' pragmatic comprehension, and have implications for attempts at facilitating L2 learners' interlanguage pragmatic development.

Keywords: Apology, Pragmatic learning SBI, Request, Speech act comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) constitutes a prominent subfield within pragmatics, devoted to investigating the acquisition and utilization of pragmatic knowledge by non-native speakers in a second language context (Taguchi, 2015).

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This area of research examines the intricate processes through which language learners develop their ability to comprehend and produce appropriate speech acts, such as requests, apologies, or compliments, within a second language milieu (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Taguchi, 2019). The study of ILP holds considerable significance as it sheds light on the

formidable challenges faced by language learners in attaining communicative competence, while underscoring the pivotal role of pragmatic competence in second language acquisition (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). Scholarly investigations have explored diverse facets of ILP, including patterns of speech act realization, the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer, the developmental trajectory of interlanguage pragmatics, and the influence of sociocultural factors on pragmatic competence (Taguchi et al., 2019). Within this framework, strategies-based pragmatics instruction has developed as a crucial pedagogical approach, facilitating the effective development of learners' pragmatic skills by offering explicit instruction, fostering awareness of cultural differences, and providing opportunities for targeted practice and constructive feedback (Malmir, 2020; Prasatyo et al., 2023; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2022).

For more than three decades, the field of foreign language acquisition research has placed considerable emphasis on the examination of language learning strategies (LLS) (Oxford, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have found that the use of LLS promotes learner autonomy and enhances proficiency in the target language (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). Additionally, it has been widely acknowledged that the use of strategies is directly linked to success in language learning (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). Therefore, SBI has been considered as a learner-centered approach to encourage learners to rely less on their teachers and more on their own efforts to learn the language. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explored whether SBI should be taught using embedded instruction or explicit instruction. As for explicit SBI, recent research (Kasper, 2002) has endorsed incorporating a metacognitive element in teaching by informing students about the purpose and significance of the strategies being taught and instructing them on how to control and monitor these strategies, which has proven to be effective in maintaining the use of strategies in the long term and transferring them to new tasks.

The integration of explicit SBI into classroom instruction or its separate teaching has been a subject of ongoing debate (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Proponents of integrated SBI

contend that incorporating strategy training into students' learning facilitates their application of these strategies in authentic situations and their transferability to various activities and tasks (Oxford, 2017; Zhang, 2007). Additionally, Chamot (2004, 2016) proposes that language teachers should integrate SBI into their regular lessons rather than offering it as a separate course component. However, proponents of separate SBI have raised two concerns: first, the potential difficulty learners may encounter in transferring the strategies to novel tasks after the training period, and second, the insufficient readiness of all language teachers to incorporate integrated SBI in their instructional practices (Gu, 1996).

When it comes to teaching speech acts, researchers might have been rather hesitant concerning the teachability of these pragmatic features (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). However, there has been a remarkable consensus regarding the issue, directing the attention toward teachers' awareness of how speech acts can be taught in educational contexts (Bagherkazemi, 2018; Schauer, 2009). Teaching speech acts can lead to students' pragmatic achievements although its underlying methodology has been emphasized (LoCastro, 2003; Maleki et al., 2023), which demands the teacher's undeniable role in the learners' motivation and learning (Farahi & Mohseni, 20114). However, pragmatic needs of EFL and ESL learners seem to have not been adequately addressed by material developers (Webb, 2013), and speech act instruction might have been considered as a taken-for-granted area of research in EFL pedagogy (Bazaei et al., 2023; Bruce, 2017).

Research on speech acts, although dating back to the rich theory proposed by Austin (1975), seems to suffer from lack of a consensus of a reliable teaching methodology (Jernigan, 2007) and the most effective mode of pragmatic learning SBI (Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2022; Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015). As to teaching speech acts through SBI, it has been argued that previous research has not sufficiently addressed pragmatic SBI, demanding further research to integrate SBI into pragmatic instruction (Ebadi & Seidi, 2015; Fakher et al., 2016). There has

been research conducted on pragmatic learning strategies in a few studies including Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2022), as well as Malmir and Derakhshan (2020). These studies explored various strategies or approaches that learners use to acquire pragmatic competence, which refers to the ability to understand and use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. While pragmatic learning strategies have been investigated, there is a gap in research when it comes to pragmatic learning SBI. The dilemma is whether the training should be taught separately or integrated with classroom instruction (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), and particularly with respect to teaching speech acts. More importantly, EFL students in Iran have not sufficiently been provided with speech acts instruction in their syllabus.

One notable gap in the literature is the lack of research on the understanding of speech acts of apology and request in an EFL context in Iran, specifically within the context of explicit separated and integrated pragmatic learning SBI. Moreover, speech act production has received more attention in research compared to speech act comprehension. This can be attributed to the fact that speech act production is seen as the active process of generating and executing speech acts, while comprehension involves the passive decoding and interpretation of speech acts (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). However, it is crucial to note that both production (Chalak & Abbasi, 2015; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2014) and comprehension (Fakher et al., 2016) play integral roles in effective communication (Searle, 1969). In particular, the study of apologies and requests within speech act comprehension and production deserves more attention due to their demonstrated wide-ranging variation across different languages and cultures. Cross-cultural pragmatics research has highlighted the existence of language- and culture-specific norms that influence the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of apologies and requests (Cuza & Czerwionka, 2017; Eslami et al., 2022). Therefore, further investigation into these speech acts can provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and social interaction (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Hence, the present study aimed to investigate the learners' comprehension of speech acts affected by explicit separate and explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI.

LITERATURE REVIEW
ILP Development in EFL Context

ILP development plays a crucial role in EFL contexts as it focuses on how learners acquire and use pragmatic knowledge in their target language (Taguchi, 2019). Developing pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication, as it allows learners to understand and produce appropriate language in different social situations. One significant aspect of ILP is the acquisition of speech acts, which are utterances intended to perform a specific function (e.g., requests, apologies, compliments) (Culpeper et al., 2018). Research has shown that EFL learners often struggle with understanding and using speech acts appropriately due to differences in cultural and linguistic norms (Prasatyo et al., 2023). Furthermore, ILP also encompasses the development of pragmatic awareness, which involves learners' ability to reflect on and understand the pragmatic aspects of language use (Shakki et al., 2021). By developing pragmatic awareness, learners become more conscious of the sociocultural and contextual factors that influence communication. This awareness helps learners adapt their language use to different situations and become more flexible and effective communicators (Taguchi, 2019).

One compelling argument for the cultivation of ILP in EFL learners is rooted in the concept of communicative competence (Eslami et al., 2022). Language proficiency extends beyond mere grammar and vocabulary knowledge; it entails the capacity to convey meaning and engage in successful interactions with others. Without a solid grasp of pragmatics, EFL learners may encounter difficulties expressing themselves appropriately, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective communication (Azizi & Namaziandost, 2022). Moreover, the development of ILP assumes particular significance for EFL learners who anticipate employing English in international settings. English serves as a global lingua franca in numerous professional

and academic domains. Consequently, EFL learners must possess the requisite pragmatic skills to navigate these diverse contexts adeptly. Lacking a firm understanding of intercultural communication norms, EFL learners may inadvertently offend or confuse their interlocutors, impeding effective communication (Derakhshan et al., 2021).

A further rationale for ILP development lies in its impact on language learning motivation. When learners can employ language proficiently and effectively in real-life situations, they experience a sense of accomplishment and heightened confidence in their linguistic abilities (Prasatyo et al., 2023). This positive reinforcement can serve as a motivational catalyst, inspiring learners to persist in their language acquisition endeavors and strive for further improvement. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges and criticisms associated with ILP development in EFL contexts. One such challenge pertains to the inherent complexity of pragmatics itself. Pragmatic norms exhibit considerable cross-cultural variation and can be challenging to teach explicitly. Mastery of pragmatics necessitates a deep understanding of sociolinguistic factors, as well as exposure to authentic language use in diverse contexts.

Instructional Approaches in ILP Research
In recent years, there has been a notable surge in scholarly investigations concerning the teaching of pragmatics in language classrooms, alongside the traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Taguchi, 2015; Takahashi, 2010). This body of research can be broadly classified into two distinct categories: observational studies and interventional studies. Observational studies primarily aim to identify instances within the classroom where opportunities for pragmatics learning arise, while interventional studies involve the implementation of explicit instruction and the measurement of learning outcomes using a pre-post design. Previous research endeavors have examined classroom discourse to gain insights into the occurrence of pragmatics-related language use, such as polite interruptions, and the

ways in which students' engagement in classroom routines contributes to their pragmatic development (Tateyama, 2019). Other investigations have focused on the analysis of pragmatics-related information and practice included in textbooks (Tatsuki, 2019). These studies have shed light on the limitations of the classroom environment as an optimal setting for pragmatics learning. Namely, the language utilized within the classroom often fails to encompass a diverse range of communicative situations or registers. Additionally, learners have limited exposure to various social roles, resulting in a restricted array of pragmatic examples. Furthermore, learners seldom experience real-life consequences for their pragmatic behaviors or receive feedback on their behaviors within the confines of the classroom setting.

Due to the inherent difficulties in attaining naturalistic acquisition of pragmatics within the confines of a classroom, educators and scholars have increasingly shifted their focus towards employing direct instruction as a means to augment pragmatics learning. Numerous investigations have endeavored to evaluate the efficacy of various pedagogical approaches by means of comparative analyses of learning outcomes. Among these, considerable attention has been devoted to the explicit and implicit teaching methodologies (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2015). In the explicit instruction approach, learners are directly presented with metapragmatic information, such as explicitly teaching them which linguistic forms can influence the tone of refusal. In contrast, the implicit teaching approach avoids providing explicit details and instead emphasizes learning through exposure and raising learners' consciousness. A prevailing consensus in the field is that explicit teaching generally leads to better learning outcomes compared to implicit teaching. This consensus aligns with Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, which suggests that learners' attentive focus on the forms, functions, and contextual usage of language is crucial for assimilating pragmatic input and ultimately facilitating learning. By providing explicit metapragmatic information, learners become more aware of the

relationships between form, function, and context, making these associations more apparent to them.

As to the above-mentioned arguments, there has been lack of consensus on the most effective approach to teaching pragmatics, and accordingly directs the scholars' attention to highlight the significance of enhancing learners' autonomy in learning pragmatics through equipping them with strategies.

Pragmatic Learning SBI

Despite being limited in quantity, research has supported the use of pragmatic learning strategies for L2 speech act performance. Tajeddin and Malmir (2015) acknowledged the influence of instruction that incorporates strategies on learners' pragmatic performance. Their findings revealed that EFL learners commonly employed strategies related to memory, cognition, social interactions, emotions, metacognition, and compensation. Additionally, it was observed that individuals who performed well in pragmatics utilized a greater number of strategies compared to those who performed poorly. In a similar vein, Taguchi et al. (2019) examined the effectiveness of SBI in enhancing learners' pragmatic skills. The researchers specifically focused on teaching cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. The results indicated that participants were able to identify specific pragmatic features in the provided resources; however, there were variations in their ability to notice these features and the strategies they employed.

Along the same lines, Malmir and Derakhshan (2020) conducted a study to examine the impact of strategies-based instruction on the pragmatic comprehension of male and female learners. The analysis of the data revealed that SBI was particularly effective in enhancing learners' pragmatic comprehension. They identified three categories of strategies used for comprehending pragmatics. The first category consisted of socio-pragmatic strategies, which encompassed aspects such as politeness, formality, indirectness, and the influence of social power dynamics. The second category, i.e., lexico-pragmatic strategies, was found to be more prevalent than grammatical strategies.

Lastly, the third category comprised cognitive strategies, which involved both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies in the comprehension of pragmatics in a second language. Malmir's (2020) correlational study yielded significant results, indicating that social pragmatic learning strategies were the most influential in predicting learners' inclination towards their second language social identity compared to other types of instructional strategies. Affective and compensatory instructional strategies had moderate effects, while cognitive and metacognitive instructional strategies had weaker effects on L2 social identity. However, memory instructional strategies did not significantly contribute to L2 social identity among Iranian EFL learners.

In their study, Derakhshan et al. (2021) posited the efficacy of incorporating ILP learning strategies in enhancing EFL learners' understanding of prevalent L2 speech acts. The researchers discovered that metacognitive and memory ILP learning strategies did not exhibit substantial predictive capability in relation to L2 speech-act pragmatic knowledge. Similarly, compensatory and affective strategies demonstrated limited predictive power in this regard. In a more recent investigation, Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2022) developed and validated a pragmatic learning strategy inventory (PRALSI) and examined the association between EFL learners' utilization of these strategies and their performance in speech acts. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the overall use of strategies and the explicit employment of pragmatic learning strategies specifically in speech act production. PRALSI encompasses three categories of pragmatic learning strategies that are distinguished based on learners' preferred learning approach: implicit items, inductive explicit items, and deductive explicit items. The authors underscored the utility of PRALSI as an effective tool for teachers to assess and comprehend the frequency and selection of pragmatic learning strategies employed by learners. The administration of PRALSI can assist teachers in evaluating learners' awareness of pragmatic features and provide evidence for the efficacy of pragmatic instruction. The researchers concurred that the linkage between

pragmatic learning strategies and learners' knowledge of speech acts supports the implementation of SBI as a fruitful approach to enhance learners' pragmatic proficiency. PRALSI has three key features:

1. The primary focus of PRALSI is on the strategies employed by Persian EFL learners for the purpose of learning, rather than utilizing, the pragmatic aspects of English as a foreign language. This inventory includes a limited number of items that aim to enhance the learners' fluency in pragmatics.

2. PRALSI encompasses a wide range of pragmatic aspects that extend beyond speech acts. These aspects include the production and comprehension of speech acts, implicature (such as body language and tone of voice), and the use of pragmatic routine formulae (such as opening, maintaining, and closing English conversations). Furthermore, PRALSI takes into account the linguistic, social, and politeness rules that underlie the use of these aspects, as well as the potential cross-linguistic differences.

3. PRALSI incorporates three sets of pragmatic learning strategies based on learners' preferred learning approach: implicit items for learners focused on meaning and noticing linguistic features, inductive explicit items for learners inclined to discover linguistic and social principles based on input, and deductive explicit items for learners seeking explicit principles from reliable sources.

To summarize, previous studies have explored speech acts in various instructional contexts and examined the factors that influence their comprehension. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the facilitation of speech act comprehension through pragmatic learning SBI, with a specific focus on explicit separate and explicit integrated pragmatic learning strategies. Therefore, the present study aimed to address the following research questions:

RQ1. Does explicit separate pragmatic learning SBI have a significant effect on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of apology?

RQ2. Does explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI have a significant effect on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of apology?

RQ3. Is there a significant difference between the effects of explicit separate and integrated pragmatic learning SBIs on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of apology?

RQ4. Does explicit separate pragmatic learning SBI have a significant effect on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of request?

RQ5. Does explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI have a significant effect on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of request?

RQ6. Is there a significant difference between the effects of explicit separate and integrated pragmatic learning SBIs on EFL learners' comprehension of the speech act of request?

METHOD
Design
The current study used a quasi-experimental design to quantitatively examine the impact of explicit separate and explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI on speech act comprehension. More specifically, it involved a counterbalanced pre-test, post-test, control group design. Counterbalancing is a research technique that aims to control for potential biases and confounding factors in experimental studies (Pollatsek & Well, 1995). It involves systematically varying the order of presentation of different conditions or treatments across participants or within participants over multiple trials. In this study, the order effect of presenting implicit and explicit sets of strategies in PRALSI was controlled by providing the experimental groups of explicit separate SBI and explicit integrated SBI with pragmatic learning SBI in reverse order.

Participants
The study included adult learners from two private language institutes in Karaj. From an initial pool of 110 convenience-sampled intermediate EFL learners in five intact classes, 90 (50 female and 40 male, aged 18 to 25) were selected based on their Oxford Placement Test (OPT) scores (see Instruments). Their language learning experience ranged from five to 10 years, and none had ever resided in an English speaking country. Ethical considerations were

taken into account, with participants providing consent and their anonymity being protected. The study used a counterbalanced design, resulting in five groups of intermediate EFL learners. These groups were randomly assigned to a 30-memner control group and two 30-member experimental groups: explicit separate group (ESG) and explicit integrated group (EIG) (each with two 15-member sub-groups, differing in the order of presentation of explicit and implicit pragmatic learning strategies).

Instruments and Materials

Two instruments were employed in this study: OPT and a multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT). These are described in this section.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The participants in this study were selected using the OPT to ensure that they were at the intermediate proficiency level. Learners at this level were intended to ensure they had already acquired a basic level of linguistic competence and were able to engage in more complex communicative tasks and the pragmatic aspects of communication. The paper-and-pen version OPT, developed by Oxford University Press and ESOL Examinations Syndicate in 2000, was administered to 110 EFL learners from two private language institutes, and 90 learners were selected based on their scores. The test took approximately 30 minutes to complete, and consisted of 60 multiple-choice reading, grammar, and vocabulary sections. Those who scored between 30 and 39 on the test were considered intermediate learners based on the scoring rubric provided in Geranpayeh (2003). According to Geranpayeh, OPT enjoys construct validity, and the reliability of the scores was shown in a KR-21 of .87 in this study.

Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT)

The MDCT, used to assess learners' speech act comprehension, consisted of 20 items adopted from Birjandi and Rezaei (2010). In other words, a 20-item MDCT (10 on apology, 10 on request) for speech act comprehension as both the pre-test and the post-test was used. The

reason for the use of 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 (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Furthermore, in order to minimize test wiseness, both the items and the options in the post-test were reordered.

The reliability of MDCT was measured by conducting a pilot study with 30 intermediate EFL learners, making up an intact class at another language institute. The reliability coefficient was measured through KR-21, and proved to be .83. Each item included a speech act situation followed by three options. One of these three options is the most appropriate one considering all the pragmatic dimensions of the situational context and the given options. The situations ranged from very informal to extremely formal, and were sampled in a way to include variant combinations of power, distance and severity as the three social context variables determining the specific pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic contingencies of speech act performance in different situations. All the 20 situations in the MDCT involved teacher-learner interactions in the classroom. An example situation is provided here:

"Suppose you are late for an important class and the teacher is very punctual and principled. How would you express your apology in this situation?

The Teacher: This is the third time you're late for this class. Next time I won't let you in.

You

    a. I understand. I won't be late again.
    b. Sorry but the important thing is that I attend, right?
    c. Things happen in life, sorry"

According to the findings of Birjandi and Rezaei (2010), the utilized MDCT demonstrated validity as an assessment tool for Iranian EFL learners. This validity was established through a rigorous development process involving five sequential steps: exemplar generation, investigation of situation likelihood, scenario generation, and initial piloting. During the administration of the test, participants were allocated a time limit of 20 minutes. In terms of

scoring, each situation within the test was assigned a single credit.

Procedure

Initially, 110 EFL learners comprising five intact classes were convenience sampled, and given a research participation consent form to fill out. Subsequently, OPT was used to choose similar groups of participants at the intermediate proficiency level. Before the treatment sessions, learners completed the pre-test of MDCT to examine their speech act comprehension. To address the strategies used in PRALSI, both explicit and implicit pragmatic learning strategies needed to be taught. Since the study involved a counterbalanced design, the 90 participants were randomly assigned into two 15-member ESG subgroups based on the order of presentation of implicit and explicit pragmatic learning strategies contained in PRALSI (ESG1: implicit first, explicit second; ESG2: explicit first, implicit second) and two 15-member EIG subgroups (EIG1: implicit first, explicit second; EIG2: explicit first, implicit second) pragmatic learning SBI. In other words, in order to counter the validity threat posed by the order of presentation of implicit vs. explicit strategies, each of the ESG and EIG involved two 15-member subgroups, making up two 30-member wholes ($N_{ESG} = 30$; $N_{EIG} = 30$) for data analysis. Both experimental groups (i.e., the four ESG and EIG subgroups) received pragmatic learning SBI based on part of Chamot's (2005) SBI model. These three steps were implemented with both ESG and EIG:

1. Preparation: The teacher identified explicit and implicit strategies in PRALSI during each session.

2. Presentation (only for ESG): The teacher demonstrated, explained, and provided explicit information about the new strategies to be taught in each session.

3. Practice: The teacher gave learners opportunities to practice using the strategies in the midst of pragmatic comprehension tasks.

The experimental groups participated in ten weekly 40-minute sessions of pragmatic learning SBI, each of which treated two speech act strategies contained in PRALSI (Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2022). PRALSI (see Appendix

A) was deployed in both English and Persian versions, but the Persian version of the selected strategies was used in this study to reduce ambiguity during administration. Inclusion of the strategies contained in PRALSI in both ESG and EIG was determined by their suitability for instruction. To exemplify, the strategy of note taking was easily practicable in the classroom setting, but communicating with native speakers was literally not feasible in the limited class time. The chosen strategies focused specifically on apologizing and requesting and included 11 explicit and nine implicit strategies (see Appendix A). Examples of explicit and implicit strategies are provided here:

Explicit pragmatic learning strategy:
"Through communicating with more proficient learners, 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."

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.

Treatment to the four ESG and EIG subgroups had two constituents in common: video vignettes containing the speech acts of apology and request, and practice tasks including "predicting" and "learning together" tasks. This measure was taken to ensure ESG and EIG's treatment constituents' consistency so as to avoid any validity concerns that could otherwise be raised. In other words, the context of instruction for both ESG and EIG was identical, and they only differed in terms of whether SBI was separate or integrated. A total of 20 video vignettes containing 10 apology and 10 request situations from the television series "Lost" were adopted from Bagherkazemi (2013). These sampled a variant combination of power, distance, and severity social context variables in such relationships as friend-friend, wife-husband, and parent-child. They were also culturally appropriate for use with Iranian EFL learners given the sociocultural and religious context contingencies (see Bagherkazemi, 2013). Two

were presented in each treatment session to all the four experimental subgroups (at the onset of each session for EIG and after explicit strategy explanation for ESG). As for the second treatment commonality in both ESG and EIG, in order to provide a venue through which to practice the selected strategies, two tasks were presented in each session, though at different phases of instruction for ESG and EIG. As mentioned earlier, the tasks involved three variants of "predicting" tasks mentioned in Nunan (2004) (see Bagherkazemi & Harati Asl, 2022). There were three paired tasks: (a) judgment (involving the judgment of correct and appropriate speech act use in teacher-provided situations with responses, based on the three social context variables of power, distance, and severity), (b) decision making (involving the selection of the most appropriate speech act strategy among the ones provided by the teacher for various situations), and (c) predicting (involving the prediction of interlocutors' reaction following speech act performance, making reference to social context variables). This was followed by a whole class discussion with the teacher scaffolding the learners for both ESG and EIG. The rationale for choosing the above-mentioned tasks was two-fold. They facilitated speech at comprehension, rather than production, and they allowed the instructor to practice and present PRALSI strategies. This second capacity of predicting tasks was owing to their contingency on both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics aspects of the teacher-provided situations (Bagherkazemi & Harati Asl, 2022). Finally, all the tasks were carried out in pairs in both ESG and EIG for the significance of interaction in performing L2 pragmatic tasks (see Bagherkazemi & Harati Asl, 2022). Each ESG and EIG session involved the presentation of two video vignettes and two predicting tasks.

Each session for ESG involved the teacher-researcher's explanation of a PRALSI strategy an example situation in which the strategy was modelled by her. Take this explicit strategy for example: "I participate in discussions about the social norms and rules underlying English requests, apologies, complaints, etc. we come across in class." The teacher explained that speech act performance is contingent on the three social context variables of power, distance and severity. She also explained the pragmalinguistic features of the two speech acts of apology and request, which she presented as strategy sets adapted from Bagherkazemi (2014), depend on these variables' combination. She introduced "classroom discussion" as a strategy to grasp these relationships, and stated participating in such discussions can deepen knowledge of and adeptness with practicing cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in their use. Subsequent to this explicit explanation phase, she played a request-containing video vignette, and provided opportunities for discussion of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics features of the situation. All through the way, she tried to model "a discussion participant," which the strategy implied, gearing learners' attention at significant aspects of the situation to be discussed. Subsequently, a judgment task-mediated request/apology situation was provided to learners, which were then assigned to pairs and asked to practice the strategy through discussing its pragmalinguistic and sociapragmatic variable. The discussion was then performed as a whole class. The clear separation of strategy instruction allowed learners to focus intensively on one strategy at a time, promoting deeper cognitive processing and mastery. As for EIG, identical video vignettes and tasks were presented, devoid of the teacher's explicit explanation of the strategy and its associated concepts. This was then repeated with the second strategy selected for the session, exclusively focusing on the speech act not practiced in the first part of instruction. Each EIG session began with the teacher presenting the intended speech act-containing video vignette that showcased a specific combination of social context-variables along with its pragmalinguistic associations. Then, learners were directed to engage in a paired prediction task (judgment in this case) to practice the strategy. Regarding the strategy just explicated for ESG, i.e., discussion participation, learners were assigned into pairs to discuss why they thought the speech acts had been performed the way it was. This generally led to "critical moments" wherein learners noticed the gap in their ability to practice the strategy, discussing

the important aspects of the performance of the speech act at issue in language-related episodes in this case. The teacher seized the critical moment, and ushered learners in their discussion by referring to the specific social context variables' combination and their linguistic associations in the vignette. Then, the teacher named the strategy and brought it up to the learners' conscious attention. The experience involved teacher scaffolding and mediation, rather than mere explicit explanation. In other words, EIG participants were not initially aware that they were engaged in pragmatic learning SBI until the teacher mentioned the strategy explicitly following the critical moments. Throughout task performance, the teacher encouraged learners to actively identify and utilize the appropriate strategies. This was facilitated by prompting questions such as, "How can we politely express this request?" These prompts guided learners to apply the PRALSI strategies in real-time communication. Discussion was then carried out as a whole class, as was the case with ESG. This was then repeated with the second strategy intended for the session with a new video vignette and a new predicting task. For both groups, the teacher maintained close monitoring of all interactions, providing immediate support and feedback as needed. This included highlighting effective strategy use, addressing any misapplications, and offering suggestions for improvement.

The control group did not receive any instruction specifically targeting speech acts. Instead, they received traditional language instruction that did not include any focus on pragmatics. They participated in regular classroom lessons that focused on developing their language skills using a specific textbook (Solutions, intermediate, 3rd edition). After the treatment sessions, the participants took the MDCT post-test

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

In order to investigate the impact of explicit separate and integrated pragmatic learning SBI on apology comprehension, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed. ANCOVA is based on several assumptions, as outlined by Pallant (2020), including: no effect of treatment on covariate measurement, reliability of covariates, absence of strong correlations among covariates, a linear relationship between the dependent variable and covariate, and consistency of regression slopes. These assumptions were upheld in the present study. The covariates were measured before the treatment, ensuring that they were not influenced by it. Additionally, each ANCOVA analysis focused on only one covariate, eliminating the concern of correlations among covariates. The reliability of the covariates was ensured in a high Cronbach's Alpha index ($r = .84$). Furthermore, the assumptions of linearity between the dependent variable and covariate, as well as homogeneity of regression slopes, were thoroughly checked and confirmed prior to conducting the analysis.

Regarding the ANCOVA's assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes reported at the stringent .01 significance level, Table 1 shows that the interaction between group and the pre-test apology MDCT scores was not statistically significant [$F_{(2, 84)} = .18$, $p > .01$]. This indicated that the assumption was met.

Table 1

Homogeneity of Regression Slopes for Comprehension of the Speech Act of Apology

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	103.056a	5	20.611	17.841	.000	.515
Intercept	34.674	1	34.674	30.013	.000	.263
Group * Pre-test	.411	2	.205	.178	.837	.004
Error	97.044	84	1.155			
Total	3925.000	90				
Corrected Total	200.100	89				

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

* F is significant at .01

It should be noted that the subgroups' scores were pooled to obtain ESG and EIG scores for the 30 participants in each group. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test apology MDCT scores, separately for ESG, EIG, and CG. The mean scores for the three groups were relatively similar on the pre-test, with ESG group having a mean of 5.27 (SD = 1.23), EIG having a mean of 4.97 (SD = 1.33),

and CG having a mean of 5.13 (SD = 1.25). However, on the post-test, the mean score for the EIG (M = 7.03, SD = 1.45) was higher than both ESG (M = 6.53, SD = 1.31) and CG (M = 5.73, SD = 1.48). In addition, all the six score sets proved to enjoy distributional normality, with ratios of skewness and kurtosis to their associated standard errors falling within the range of $\pm$ 2 (see Pallant, 2020).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Comprehension of the Speech Act of Apology Scores on Pre-Test and Post-Test

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Pre-test	ESG	30	5.27	1.23	.22	1.12	.88	.96	.49
	EIG	30	4.97	1.32	.24	-.99	.88	.34	.49
	CG	30	5.13	1.25	.22	-.68	.88	-.88	.49
Post-test	ESG	30	6.53	1.30	.23	1.22	.88	-90	.49
	EIG	30	7.03	1.45	.26	-.98	.88	.57	.49
	CG	30	5.73	1.48	.27	-.77	.88	.67	.49

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

Table 3 shows ANCOVA results. These revealed a significant difference in the means of post-test apology MDCT scores among the three groups, after controlling for pre-test scores [$F_{(2, 86)}$ = 13.36, p < .05, partial eta squared = .23]. Furthermore, there was a

strong correlation between pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on apology MDCT ($F_{(1, 86)}$ = 67.81, p < .05, partial eta squared = .44), indicating that pre-test scores influenced post-test scores.

Table 3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on Comprehension of the Speech Act of Apology

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	102.64	3	34.21	30.19	.00	.51
Intercept	35.24	1	35.24	31.10	.00	.26
Pre-test	76.85	1	76.84	67.81	.00	.44
Group	30.29	2	15.15	13.36	.00	.23
Error	97.45	86	1.13			
Total	3925.00	90				
Corrected Total	200.10	89				

Pairwise comparisons, using Bonferroni adjustment, were conducted to examine potentially significant differences in the means of ESG, EIG, and CG with the significance level set at .01 to avoid Type I error induced by multiple comparisons. As shown in Table 4, there were significant differences in apology comprehension between ESG and CG. The mean difference was 0.70, indicating

ESG's significantly higher mean. Similarly, there were significant differences between EIG and CG, with a mean difference of 1.42 in favor of the former group. Additionally, there were significant differences between ESG and EIG, with a mean difference of 0.72 in favor of the EIG. In sum, both explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI proved to significantly affect the participants' apology

MDCT scores, with the former exerting a significantly greater influence. Accordingly, he first three questions were answered in the affirmative.

Table 4
Pairwise Comparisons for Comprehension of the Speech Act of Apology Means

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
ESG	CG	.701*	.275	.011
EIG	CG	1.423*	.275	.000
ESG	EIG	-.722*	.276	.009

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

*. The mean difference is significant at the .01 leve

Concerning the last three research questions, addressing the individual and differential effects of explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI on the comprehension of the request speech act, a second ANCOVA was conducted. The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was controlled for request MDCT scores. The results shown in Table 5 indicate that the interaction between group and the pre-test of total request MDCT scores was not statistically significant [$F_{(2, 84)} = .07$, $p = .87$, $p > .01$]. This means that the pre-test and post-test request MDCT scores had similar regression slopes for ESG, EIG, and CG.

Table 5
Homogeneity of Regression Slopes for Comprehension of the Speech act of Request

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	150.35	5	30.07	45.53	.00	.73
Intercept	13.12	1	13.12	19.88	.00	.19
Group*Pre-test	.10	2	.05	.07	.87	.00
Error	55.47	84	.66			
Total	3616.00	90				
Corrected Total	205.82	89				

Table 6 provides descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test request MDCT scores for ESG, EIG, and CG. The results indicate that pre-test request MDCT means scores were similar among ESG [$M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.19$], EIG [$M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.43$], and CG] $M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.29$] on the pre-test. However, on the post-test, request MDCT scores of EIG [$M = 6.60$, $SD = 1.54$] were significantly higher than both ESG's mean score [$M = 6.37$, $SD = 1.35$] and CG's mean score [$M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.48$].

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of Comprehension of the Speech Act of Request Scores on Pre-Test and Post-Test

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Pre-test	ESG	30	5.13	1.19	.21	-1.11	.74	1.01	.53
	EIG	30	4.73	1.43	.26	1.34	.74	.98	.53
	CG	30	4.97	1.29	.23	.98	.74	.99	.53
Post-test	ESG	30	6.37	1.35	.24	.85	.74	.87	.53
	EIG	30	6.60	1.54	.28	-.86	.74	.91	.53
	CG	30	5.50	1.48	.27	-.65	.74	.98	.53

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

Table 7 provides a summary of the ANCOVA results. Table 7 demonstrates a significant difference in the mean request MDCT scores among the three groups on the post-test [$F_{(2, 86)} = 20.08$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .31]. Furthermore, the results indicate a strong association between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores [$F_{(1, 86)} = 201.33$, $p < .05$]. This suggests that the scores obtained on the pre-test influenced the scores obtained on the post-test. Additionally, Table 7 reveals that the effect size, measured by partial eta squared, was as high as .70.

Table 7

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on Comprehension of the Speech act of Request

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	150.251	3	50.084	77.508	.000	.730
Intercept	13.923	1	13.923	21.547	.000	.200
Pre-test	130.096	1	130.096	201.332	.000	.701
Group	25.955	2	12.978	20.084	.000	.318
Error	55.571	86	.646			
Total	3616.000	90				
Corrected Total	205.822	89				

In order to examine any potential significant differences in the mean scores for the speech act of request among the three groups, pairwise comparisons were conducted using Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons, setting a stringent significance level (.01). The results are presented in Table 8. The results of the pairwise comparisons presented in Table 8 indicated that there were notable disparities in the request MDCT mean scores among ESG, EIG< and CG. Specifically, request comprehension was significantly higher in ESG compared to CG ($p < .01$), with a mean difference of .71. Similarly, the mean was significantly higher for EIG compared to CG ($p < .01$), with a mean difference of 1.31. Accordingly, the significant individual effect of explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI on request comprehension was shown. Lastly, there was a significant difference between ESG and EIG in terms of request MDCT mean scores, with a mean difference of .60 in favor of EIG.

Table 8

Pairwise Comparisons for Comprehension of the Speech Act of Request Means

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
ESG	CG	.712*	.208	.002
EIG	CG	1.317*	.208	.000
ESG	EIG	-.605*	.209	.006

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

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level

Overall, the results showed the individual significant effect of both explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI on the comprehension of apology and request speech acts. Explicit integrated SBI was, however, more effective than explicit separate SBI.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to investigate how explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI approaches affected Iranian EFL learners' apology and request comprehension. Data analysis showed both explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI had a notable impact on comprehension. Moreover, EIG performed significantly better than ESG.

Theoretically, the findings support the effectiveness of explicit SBI for second language acquisition (Psaltou-Joycey, 2015). Among the benefits of explicit SBI, the promotion of learning effectiveness and autonomy, awareness of the learning process, and reflection over learning

obstacles stand out (Oxford, 2017). This study, however, showed the greater benefit of integrating such instruction (i.e., explicit SBI) with L2 pragmatic tasks in a way that learners practice pragmatic learning strategies while they are engaged in such tasks. Compared with the presentation-practice cycle of instruction operationalized in explicit separate pragmatic learning SBI, such an integration is potentially more effective since learners tend to be trained in strategy use only after they have noticed gaps in their production or comprehension (speech act performance in this case). Following Schmidt's (1993) "noticing hypothesis" and Swain's (2005) "comprehensible output hypothesis," this noticing might lead to reflection over language in language-related episodes. This pertains specifically to the speech act situation's pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics contingencies of the provided speech act situations, which would result in a more effective outcome for strategy introduction. In other words, the strategy is inserted into the equation at the critical moment when learners feel the need for it. Critical moments of gap noticing could be optimized through collaborative predicting tasks, as deployed in this study, due to their potential for reflection and interaction (Bagherkazemi & Harati Asl, 2022).

Findings of the current study are also empirically supported by Malmir and Derakhshan (2020), who showed that explicit separate SBI helps students become more independent learners. This can lead to increased motivation and engagement, as students become more invested in their own learning process. Another benefit of explicit separate SBI is that it can be used to support students with diverse learning needs (Oxford, 2017). By providing students with a range of strategies that they can use to approach learning tasks, SBI allows students to select the strategies that work best for them. This can help to accommodate different learning styles and abilities, and can lead to improved academic performance in producing the target speech acts. In order to effectively implement explicit separate SBI, teachers must first identify the specific learning needs of their students. This may involve assessing students' existing knowledge and skills, as well as their learning preferences and styles (Oxford, 2017). Once these needs have been identified, teachers can select appropriate strategies to teach and provide explicit instruction in how to use them. Overall, explicit separate SBI is a powerful approach to teaching and learning that can help students become more effective and independent learners. By providing students with a set of strategies that they can use to approach new learning tasks, SBI empowers students to take ownership of their own learning process and can lead to improved academic performance (Chamot, 2016).

Explicit integrated SBI can be a valuable tool for improving speech act comprehension. The results were in agreement with Oxford (2017) and Zhang (2007) who concurred that explicit integrated SBI involves teaching learners strategies for interpreting and producing language in specific contexts. In the case of speech acts, this might involve teaching learners how to recognize different types of speech acts (such as requests, apologies, or compliments) and the linguistic cues that signal them (Taguchi et al., 2019). By providing learners with explicit integrated instruction and practice in using these strategies, SBI can help learners develop the skills they need to understand and produce speech acts more effectively. This can be particularly useful for learners who are not familiar with the cultural norms and conventions of the language they are learning.

Findings of the study were consistent with the results of Tajeddin and Malmir (2015), who demonstrated the positive effects of pragmatic learning SBI in paving the way for learners to improve their pragmatic performance. Furthermore, results confirmed Derakhshan et al.'s (2021) finding that by teaching learners specific strategies, such as identifying contextual cues or analyzing the illocutionary force of utterances, SBI can help learners navigate the complexities of speech acts more effectively. This can be particularly useful for learners who may struggle with understanding the intended meaning behind different speech acts.

Last but not least, the significance of Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi's (2022) PRALSI in helping learners develop speech acts comprehension cannot be overstated. By incorporating

PRALSI into an explicit pragmatic learning SBI, learners would have access to a comprehensive framework for improving their speech act comprehension. The combination of pragmatic awareness and strategy instruction allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of speech acts and enhance their ability to comprehend and produce them accurately. In terms of advantages for learners, PRALSI can serve as a means to raise awareness, potentially increasing learners' understanding of the importance of acquiring L2 pragmatic features. This heightened awareness can, in turn, enhance the effectiveness of instruction. Additionally, by exposing learners to a diverse range of pragmatic learning strategies, PRALSI can promote greater versatility in the use of these strategies (Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes empirical evidence for the effectiveness of both explicit separate and explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI approaches in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of apology and request speech acts. Notably, the explicit integrated pragmatic learning SBI approach demonstrates greater efficacy in improving comprehension compared to the explicit separate SBI approach. These findings hold important implications for EFL educators and curriculum designers seeking to enhance language instruction within communicative teaching contexts. Specifically, the results can inform language learners in developing a deeper understanding of the interplay between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge and their interconnectedness in facilitating socially appropriate interactions. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of L2 learners' comprehension and employment of speech acts in relation to L2 sociocultural norms, enabling them to reflect on the divergence between their pragmatic interlanguage development and native speaker norms. Learner training with the use of pragmatic learning strategies can boost their pragmatic learning autonomy, which is important given the lack of focus on L2 pragmatics in language teaching syllabi, materials, and practices.

Pedagogically, explicit separate and explicit integrated SBI has several contributions. It aims to empower students to take control of their learning by providing them with a range of strategies that they can use to tackle different pragmatic learning tasks. It can also help students to develop a better understanding of their own learning processes by engaging them in metacognitive activities such as self-reflection, self-evaluation, and self-regulation. Last but not least, It encourages students to work together to develop and share learning strategies, which can promote collaboration and peer learning.

This study on explicit separate and integrated SBI for Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of apology and request speech acts has several limitations. The narrow participant group, limited to 18-25-year-olds from private language institutes, restricts generalizability. Reliance on a single assessment tool, the MDCT, may not fully capture pragmatic abilities and could introduce test-wiseness. The focus on only apology and request speech acts overlooks other essential pragmatic skills, limiting the scope of the findings. Additionally, the cross-sectional design does not assess long-term retention of pragmatic gains. Finally, the study did not account for sociocultural factors like gender and socioeconomic status, which could influence pragmatic learning.

According to the above-mentioned constraints, future research on SBI for enhancing EFL learners' pragmatic competence should include diverse participants to improve generalizability, employ multiple assessments like role-plays for a comprehensive evaluation, and examine a broader range of speech acts in various communicative settings. Methodologically, studies should use robust longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causality. Additionally, assessing learner factors such as motivation and autonomy will enhance engagement and pragmatic skills.

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