Original Article

Developing Pragmatic Awareness of Requests in the EFL Classroom: A Focus on Instructional Effects

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Abstract

Explicit teaching of pragmatics to second language learners has been studied by a large number of researchers. However, the review of the related studies shows that while some researchers believe in the effectiveness of explicit instruction of pragmatics, others believe that explicit instruction is not effective and it does not contribute to the language learners' pragmatics awareness. The main goal of this study was to investigate the outcomes of teaching pragmatics- focusing on the concept of politeness through the speech act of request - by explicit intervention. The participants were Iranian intermediate 36 EFL students who were selected through convenience sampling. A quasi-experimental research method was used, and the participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group benefited from overt metapragmatic discussions and explanations, role plays and other pragmatically-oriented tasks. Different instruments were used: a written discourse completion test (DCT), a general English proficiency test to homogenize the participants, a pre-test of participant's initial pragmatic awareness and ability in politeness, and a post-test of pragmatic awareness and ability in the production of politeness features following the periods of instruction. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test). The results of data analyses revealed that students' speech act comprehension and production improved significantly in the explicit instruction group, but no change was made in students' speech act comprehension and production of the students who received no instruction. It is concluded that pragmatic competence can be taught to EFL learners explicitly.

Keywords: Explicit instruction, teaching pragmatics, EFL learners, Speech Acts, Politeness

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1. Introduction

Research on Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) has experienced significant growth since the 1960s, coinciding with the increasing attention given to the subfield of second language acquisition (SLA). Over several years, scholars in the field of linguistics have endeavored to describe and classify the various concepts of Pragmatics through multiple definitions. Additionally, there has been ongoing research into the question of whether or not Pragmatics can be effectively taught (e.g., Jalilifar, Hashemian, & Tabatabaee, 2011, Koç, 2011; Lee, 2010; Li, Raja, & Sazalie, 2015; Ngai, & Janusch, 2018; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012). Nguyen, et al., (2012) posits that pragmatics can be understood as the covert regulations of language, which serve to explicate the intricate nature and fundamental significance of this concept in both communication and the acquisition of language. Pragmatics encompasses various branches that exhibit distinct sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic characteristics to facilitate communication.

Pragmatic competence refers to the capacity to communicate proficiently, which encompasses both pragmatic and grammatical knowledge (Bachman, 1990; Canbolat, et al., 2021). Given the significance of linguistic appropriacy in the context of target language usage, it is imperative for individuals learning English as a foreign language (EFL) to possess pragmatic competence. Teaching pragmatic competence is an essential component of the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), resulting in various outcomes. Numerous research investigations on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have demonstrated that explicit instruction of pragmatic competence can be imparted in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. These studies include works by Alcon (2005), Alcon and Guzman (2010), Taguchi (2011), Xiao-Le (2011), and Bu (2012). In an EFL context, educators may experience uncertainty when attempting to incorporate pragmatic learning into their instructional practices due to the challenge of designing effective communicative activities that enhance learners' pragmatic competence. There exist certain pedagogical strategies that can be implemented to enhance the pragmatic competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These include but are not limited to, contextualized language practice in specific scenarios, peer dialogues that are constructed, and discussions that are metapragmatic in nature. Nevertheless, a protracted discourse has ensued among researchers in the field of

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) regarding the pedagogical methodologies employed in language instruction. Findings from previous research suggest that learners' pragmatic competence is subject to deficit despite their having a high level of grammatical competence or even having spent time in the target language community (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, 2018; Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga, 2015). Therefore, it has been argued that instruction in pragmatics is essential to develop learners' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in the target language, particularly in the foreign language context (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002). In contrast to a second language setting where learners have rich exposure to the target language and plentiful opportunities to use it in real-life situations, in a foreign language environment such as Iran, learners lack these opportunities. For these reasons, there is a need for further research to investigate the role of instruction in developing Iranian learners' pragmatic competence in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom.

Even though the literature is abundant in studies on speech acts and pragmatic instruction, there is a gap in the teachability of pragmatics to second language learners. Moreover, large classes, limited contact hours, lack of an updated methodology for teaching the English language in the classroom, teachers' inadequacy in pragmatic knowledge, and little opportunity for intercultural communication are some of the limitations of EFL contexts, especially in Iran, that hinder pragmatic learning. All these problems along with lack of sufficient research in the field of pragmatic instruction are the reasons why Iranian English language teachers ignore pragmatics instruction on the whole. Thus, this study sheds light on the effects of explicit instruction of teaching pragmatics, most particularly speech acts on Iranian EFL second language learners.

The current study aims at contributing to the increasing body of research in the field of applied linguistics, and more specifically dealing with the effects of pragmatic instruction in the EFL context. The main objectives of the study are to investigate the teachability of a particularly important pragmatic area, that is, requests as a key type of speech act in which EFL learners need to acquire competence, and to focus on learners' improvement in awareness and production of polite utterances of the speech act under the study. More specifically, the following research questions are raised:

1. Does explicit instruction in pragmatics contribute to the appropriate and polite production of the speech act of request measured by a DCT?

2. Is the range and frequency of the employment of (in)direct request categories the same for EFL learners who received explicit pragmatic instruction, and no pragmatic input instruction?

2. Literature Review

Pragmatics, has become one of the paramount branches of linguistics in recent years. Blum-Kulka (1997,p. 38) defines pragmatics in the broadest sense as '…the study of linguistic communication in context. Language is the chief means by which people communicate, yet simply knowing the words and grammar of a language does not ensure successful communication. Words can mean more – or something other – than what they say. Their interpretation depends on a multiplicity of factors, including familiarity with the context, intonational cues and cultural assumptions. The same phrase may have different meanings on different occasions, and the same intention may be expressed by different linguistic means. Phenomena like these are the concern of pragmatics.

The scope of pragmatics is not limited only to investigating different illocutions in different social and cultural settings: politeness theory is also considered one of the principal domains of pragmatics research. According to Kasper (1990), the question of what politeness is and what forms a polite utterance has been a focal point of pragmatic investigations since the 1970s, during the emergence of this young discipline in applied linguistics. Politeness is considered as an activity to maintain, enhance or protect face. The concept of face is closely related to the speech act of request which is the focal point of pragmatic investigation in this study.

The literature review indicates that certain pragmatic aspects cannot be acquired by learners without explicit instruction in pragmatics, as noted by Alcon (2005), Martinez-Flor and Alcon (2007), and Gholamia and Aghaib (2012). An example of a pragmatic aspect pertains to the employment of politeness strategies in the context of request acts. In addition to receiving metapragmatic information regarding the description of the speech act of request forms, learners will also receive an explanation of the appropriate manner in which these acts

should be addressed to ensure politeness. Subsequently, the students are anticipated to engage in a discourse regarding the structure of solicitations and subsequently apply them in a practical manner. Consequently, once learners receive explicit guidance on the target forms through instruction, they can proficiently utilize the language in accordance with the given contexts.

Despite the considerable attention given to the necessity of pragmatic instruction in language classrooms, a disparity remains between research findings and pedagogical implementation (Cohen, 2012). It is imperative to establish a correlation between contemporary discoveries in second language pragmatics and current methodologies employed in language acquisition courses. Numerous second language learning settings, programs for teacher education, and language teaching materials exhibit a deficiency in imparting pragmatic guidance and incorporating everyday interaction characteristics to students (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018). Bardovi-Harlig's findings suggest that providing instructional pragmatics is more beneficial than offering no guidance on the subject. This is due to the fact that learners require exposure to the target language through authentic materials in order to observe and hear the language being used in its natural context. Bardovi-Harlig's research highlights the inadequacies and shortcomings in pragmatic education, emphasizing the necessity of revising language instruction materials to incorporate pragmatic components. This is due to the insufficiencies present in current language teaching curricula and materials. The researcher posited that teachers ought to possess pragmatic awareness in order to facilitate the development of learners' pragmatic awareness through the provision of pragmatic instruction. The research carried out by Bardovi-Harlig, et al., (2015) investigated the effects of pragmatic education on the pragmatic abilities of learners. The study concentrated on particular language functions, including the expression of agreement, disagreement, and clarification. The findings corroborated the notion that pedagogy is a crucial factor in the enhancement of learners' pragmatic proficiency, as evidenced by the superior performance of the study's participants who received pragmatic instruction classes in utilizing the targeted expressions. The literature indicates that despite the evidence supporting the importance of incorporating speech acts, specific expressions, and related components into instruction, teachers exhibit reluctance to do

so. This reluctance persists despite ongoing research in the field. The research results indicate the necessity of incorporating pragmatic instruction in language classes. The researchers recommend that this study should assist teachers and educators in recognizing this particular aspect of language as an integral part of their instructional methods (Bardovi-Harlig, et al, 2015).

Rajabia , et al. (2015) investigated the effect of explicit instruction of the pragmatic level on the appropriate performance of request speech act across two proficiency levels with regard to two social variables of status and distance. To this end, they used a pre-posttest design. They used experimental and control groups and collected data using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). They reported that explicit instruction is a facilitative tool to develop L2 learners' pragmatic competence. Moreover, it was found that L2 proficiency influences on overall appropriateness of speech act production. In another study, Aufa (2011) has stated that while implicit instruction is reasonably applicable, explicit pragmatic instruction is more effective in facilitating EFL learners in developing their pragmatic competence.

Advocates of explicit pragmatic instruction contend that it can effectively guide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to focus on the desired speech act forms, thereby enhancing their pragmatic awareness (Aufa, 2011). The aforementioned statement corroborates Schmidt's (1993) hypothesis on the noticing phenomenon, which pertains to enhancing the acquisition of pragmatic elements by directing learners' attention towards the salient features of linguistic forms. Furthermore, scholarly investigations have demonstrated that certain pragmatic elements are not inherently assimilated by learners, but rather necessitate explicit pragmatic instruction to draw their attention to these aspects (Alcon, 2005; Martinez-Flor & Alcon, 2007; Gholamia, & Aghaib, 2012). One of the pragmatic considerations pertains to politeness strategies employed in request acts. In addition to receiving metapragmatic information through the provision of descriptions of speech act request forms, learners will also receive explanations regarding the appropriate addressees and polite methods of delivery. Subsequently, the learners are anticipated to engage in a discourse regarding the structure of requests and subsequently put them into practice firsthand. Consequently, once learners have received explicit instruction on the target forms, they are able to proficiently apply the language in accordance with the given contexts.

Canbolat, et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine the potential impact of explicit instruction of request strategies on the pragmatic awareness of young learners. They also tried to determine whether such instruction would result in an increase in the learners' awareness of social power, distance, and imposition factors. They used two groups, each consisting of 11 language learners. The experimental group was subjected to a treatment duration of four hours over a span of two weeks, whereas the control group was provided with conventional instructions without any metapragmatic teaching on requesting strategies. Quantitative data was collected through the administration of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as both the pre-test and the post-test. The utilization of the triangulation method is a common practice in research to enhance the dependability and accuracy of the findings. The teacher-researchers utilize triangulation by means of teacher observation utilizing a rubric, and conducting a semi-structured interview with students who have been purposefully selected. The findings obtained from the quantitative analysis indicate that there exists no statistically significant disparity among learners about their pragmatic awareness concerning second language (L2) requests. The qualitative findings indicate a discernible discrepancy in the pragmatic consciousness of learners about requests and pragmatic elements.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Context of the Study

The current study followed a quantitative research method. Among the experimental research methods, quasi-experimental was found to be the most appropriate research method. The researcher used a pretest-posttest research design consisting of two groups: Experimental group which received explicit instruction and control group which received no explicit instruction. the two groups' received the pretest at the onset of the study and results verified that they were homogenous . The setting of the study was Besat Language Academy in Marand in the province of East Azerbaijan. The study was carried out in 2021.

3.2 Participants

Participants of the study were 36 female intermediate EFL learners at Besat Language School where this research took place. Most of the participants were in the age range of 16-18.

Participants were divided into two groups: an experimental explicit group, and a control group. These two groups will henceforward be referred to as the Explicit Group (EG), and Control Group (CG) throughout this study. A careful allocation of the participants (18 students in the EG and another 18 in the CG) into equivalent experimental and control groups was observed, and an effort was made to take into account students' age, and general English knowledge attributes in order to have matching treatment groups. The homogeneity of the participants was verified after administering the Solutions Placement Test published by Oxford University Press (2007), (see Appendix 1). The researcher was in charge of the instructional treatment.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Two different data collection instruments were employed in this study. A discourse completion task questionnaire, and a proficiency-level placement test. The English proficiency level of the participants was measured by Solutions Placement Test published by Oxford University Press (2007) in which there were 50 grammar and vocabulary questions. This was administered to evaluate participants' level of proficiency to avoid any differences between the groups because of the disparity of their English knowledge of the target language; that is, ensuring a balance in proficiency levels of the participants in the target language though they have been learning English in Besat Language School for more than two years. Proficiency scores were collected at the time of the pre-test stage of data collection period. The result was that all students fell into the intermediate level. The reliability of the test was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, and the internal consistency was reported to be 0.82, indicating the test enjoyed acceptable level of reliability.

In order to examine participants' knowledge of pragmatics in the speech act under the study, in terms of production of appropriate uses of requests in different situations, a discourse completion test was distributed before and after the instructional sessions with the same layout in order to find out the instructional effects if any. This data gathering test was based on previous research in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper & Rose, 2002). With the contribution of an academic staff who is an expert in the course of pragmatics, ten DCT scenarios which centered on students' academic and social life were

selected for the production of requests. By doing this, participants were given the opportunity to make requests in their role as students, that is, they were asked to perform a speech act as they themselves would do under the similar circumstances. Other scenarios from other contexts such as shopping situations were chosen to investigate how participants would think, make requests or react to requests in those situations.

Below are two scenario samples from the DCT that illustrate how the scenarios were presented to the participants:

Scenario 1: You are a school student. You have an application form for an association membership and it needs to be signed by the school manager. You would like to ask her to do that for you. What would you say?

You   say:
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………….…………………
…….

Scenario 2: In your class at school, there is a new student whom you don't know that well yet, but you have seen that she has a new mobile phone of the latest design. You want to ask her to show you some of its new features, as you are thinking of getting one. What would you say?

You   say:
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………….…..…………
…….

Concerning the analysis of the appropriate production data (see RQ1), the participants' performance was assessed by employing a scaled-response technique or instrument to rate the degree of appropriateness of the requests employed in different situations. This scaled-response instrument was based on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 which was regarded as "completely inappropriate" to 5 which was considered as "highly appropriate or native speaker-like". Regarding the rating scale of appropriateness, we have the following 5-point scale:

5- highly appropriate (native speaker-like)

4- appropriate

3- neither appropriate nor inappropriate

2- inappropriate

1- completely inappropriate

In order to obtain the appropriate value of each script, two competent university staff with five years of residential experience in England and a familiarity with pragmatics were asked to rate the appropriate value of the elicited scripts. They were kindly asked what they were expected to do. They were suggested to judge or rate the responses (based on the assigned 5-point scale) based on their "appropriateness" level, i.e., how far the given response for that situation corresponds to what English native speakers might use if they were in the same situation. The reliability of the test was measured using Cronbach's alpha, and the results verified that the test has an acceptable level of reliability (r= 0.86)

.3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The study was undertaken in different stages. First, the participants were recruited and divided into two groups. They were informed about the purpose of the study. Next, the placement test was administered. I allowed each group the first forty-five minutes to read and complete the English proficiency test. The second forty-five minutes were allocated to the completion of the DCT. For the DCT test, the participants were occasionally provided with oral explanations of the given situations whenever necessary. The students were also allowed more time if they needed it. I was available to answer any queries related to these tasks' instructions and guidelines.

Having distributed and administered the pre-instruction set of data collection instruments, the results of the proficiency test were immediately analyses so that I could manage to re-distribute participants among the two different groups. As mentioned earlier, this task was carefully organized by considering all the cognitive and affective factors I attempted to distribute the participants equally well into experimental groups.

The instructional phase started in session 3, and the students in the explicit experimental group received pragmatic instruction over ten weeks, and each session was about thirty minutes. The control group received normal non-pragmatic input during these sessions. The post-instruction DCT instrument was then administered in session 14. In session 14, the students completed the DCT questionnaire they had previously taken at the onset of the treatment. In week 15, the students had their regular final oral interview session and in the last session, the final test was administered. An additional delayed post-test was initially planned

and intended to be performed to see if instruction had made any longer-term changes and improvements to students' pragmatic competence of requests as a result of explicit instruction, but this had to be abandoned because the participants were no longer in intact classes during the term following the treatment period.

In the instructional treatment sessions, I overtly explained the pragmatic rules to the participants. I taught them how to be polite and appropriate in the production of request strategies. Authentic materials such as film segments, e.g. film segments containing requests were shown to the students. Meantime, some handouts from some other conversational textbook materials (natural but not necessarily authentic) which had never been seen, experienced or used by any of the participants in the study, such as "Functions of English", "Exploring Spoken English", "Say it naturally", "Meanings into words" were employed and discussed in the treatment group.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in different ways. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of the groups' scores were estimated. In addition, independent samples-t-tests were employed to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

To observe the ethical considerations, the researcher obtained permission to enter language school and carry out the experiment. The researcher also informed the participants about the purpose of the study and obtained their agreement. They were assured that their performance on DCT does not affect their language achievement score.

4. Results

4.1 Investigating Participants' Production of Appropriate Requests

The first research question addresses the effects of instruction on the competence level of learners' appropriate pragmatic production of requests as taught during the treatment sessions. Data for the investigation of learners' productive pragmatic competence were elicited with a

discourse completion task. The requests produced by the individual learners were rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 was coded as completely inappropriate and 5 was coded as highly appropriate and native-speaker-like (see Section 3.3). the results of the pretest and posttest are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Results of t-test for comparing the group's scores on the pre-test

	Statistics		T-test		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p
Control	2.77	0.62	0.76	34	0.83
Experimental	2.70	0.56			

as seen in Table 1, the difference between the mean scores of the control (M=2.77, SD=0.62) and experimental group (M=2.70, SD=0.56) was not statistically significant (T=0.76, df=34, p=0.83>0.05), suggesting that the two groups were homogenous in terms of pragmatics knowledge.

To investigate the effectiveness of instruction, the groups' mean scores on the posttest were submitted to independent sample t-tests. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Results of t-test for comparing the group's scores on the post-test*

	Statistics		T-test		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p
Control	2.81	0.83	11.2	34	0.001
Experimental	3.56	0.75			

As seen in Table 2, the difference between the mean scores of the control (M=2.81, SD=0.83) and experimental group (M=3.86, SD=0.75) was not statistically significant (T=11.2, df=34, p=0.001<0.001), favoring the experimental group. Therefore, it could be

strongly argued that explicit instruction positively affected the pragmatic competence regarding the appropriate production of requests.

In light of the outcomes obtained by these paired samples-t-test analyses of the data, it can be concluded that the explicit instruction in pragmatics had a positive effect and significantly improved the scores of the participants' pragmatically appropriate production of the speech act of request in the treatment group while the control group did not. The findings are schematically illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Pre-test and post-test results: appropriateness judgments for the two Groups

	Explicit	Control
Pre-test	2.77	2.7
Post-test	3.58	2.76
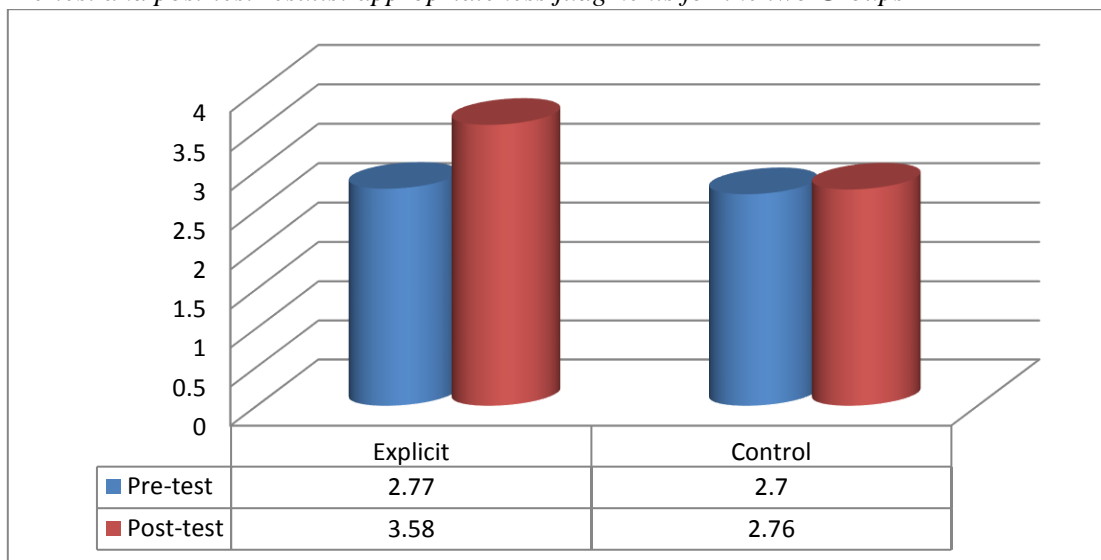
In the light of obtained outcomes, it can be claimed that the first hypothesis is confirmed since the participants in the explicit group significantly improved their mean scores of pragmatically appropriate productions of the speech act of requests in the post-test as compared with the pre-test but the control group did not.

4.2 Investigating the Range of Learners' Use of Major Request Categories

The second research question addresses the issue of how far distributions of major request categories (direct or indirect) in the explicit and control groups differ from one another. In answering this question, To answer this question, each group's frequency of employment of

request categories was compared in the pre-test and post-test by means of the DCT questionnaire that consisted of a request category sub-section with 10 scenarios. The classification of request categories employed in this study was based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) CCSARP request category classification. Results are presented as follows.

4.2.1 Overview of Major Categories in the Pre-test and the Post-test

The difference in the way learners used different categories in the production of the request speech act can be examined from a comparison of the pre-test with the post-test data from all 36 participants in all two groups. All in all, 720 requests were elicited from the 36 participants in both pre- and post-test sessions. As previously stated, there were 18 participants in the explicit group and 18 students in the control group and they were asked to complete 10 DCT request scenarios in the two pre-test and post-test sessions (36*10= 360; 360*2= 720). Table 3 below shows the raw scores (frequency) and percentage figures for the major request categories for the two groups in the pre-test and post-test. As in a few cases, it was impossible to identify which request category (direct request or indirect request) they belonged to; therefore, we decided to label them as "unclassifiables" and excluded them from the "count of category membership". Moreover, there were very few examples of non-conventionally indirect request categories in both the pre-test and post-test sessions in all two groups; therefore, Both conventional and non-conventional indirect request types as indirect requests are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Overall distribution of major Request Categories in the pre-test and post-test before and after instruction.

Treatment Groups		Request Categories					
		Direct Request		Indirect Request		Unclassifiable	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Explicit G.	Pre-test	30	% 16.7	113	% 62.8	37	% 20.5
(N= 18)	Post-test	11	% 6.2	163	% 90.5	6	% 3.3
Control G.	Pre-test	33	% 10.60	115	% 75.81	32	% 13.59
(N=18)	Post-test	30	% 16.7	123	% 68.3	27	% 15

Here are two examples from the two groups' performance showing why these request categories cannot be identified. The examples are extracted from students' responses to Situation 3 (DCT data) where the relationship between interlocutors is that of a distant customer addressing a shop assistant and the customer is asking for a discount.

1) **An example from the EG**: *"When it be in a sale, please call me."*
2) **An example from the CG**: *"According to my pocket I can give you (pay this price), sorry."*

As Table 3 above clearly demonstrates, the comparison of the two groups at the time of the pre-test shows little overall difference. The data in Table 3 show that, on average, the learners in the two groups performed almost similarly in the pre-test in the case of employment of direct and indirect categories. The larger number of unclassifiable items in the pre-test belonged to the EG (n=37, 20.5%). In sum, it can be concluded from the above table that in the pre-test the differences in the use of major request categories by the two groups in either direct or indirect request categories were rather identical. Figures 2 to 4 below display a similar distribution of request categories in the two (in raw numbers) and individual groups (in percentage figures) before the interventions (DR = direct requests; IR = indirect requests).

Figure 2
Comparison of pre-test distributions of request categories in the two groups
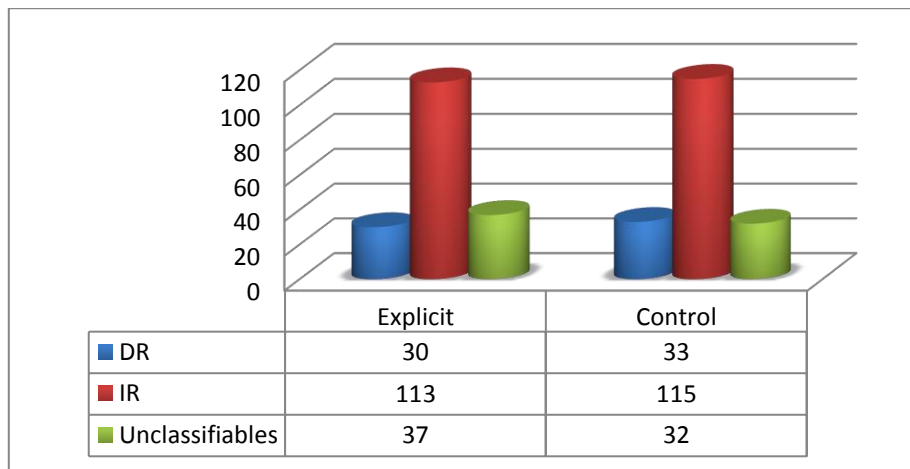

	Explicit	Control
DR	30	33
IR	113	115
Unclassifiables	37	32

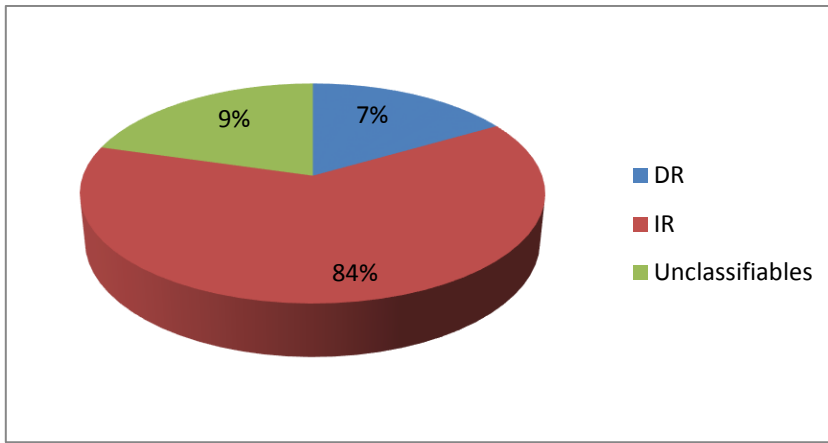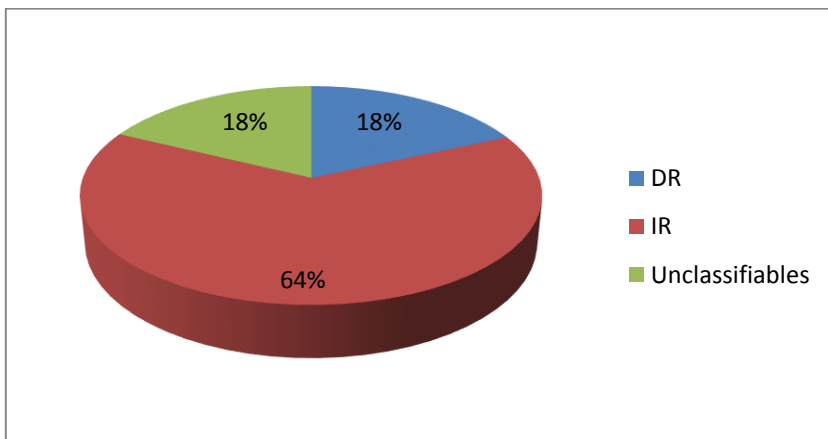*Figure 3 Explicit group pre-test distributions of request categories*

Figure 4
 Control group pre-test distributions of request categories

The analysis of the post-test data revealed greater differences between the two treatment groups in their use of request categories. However, the overall trend was a reduction in the frequency of the use of direct requests after the intervention in the treatment group, in particular. The results for the explicit group were impressive. In the case of direct requests, after the intervention, the explicit group (n=11, 6.2%) used very fewer numbers of direct requests. More specifically, the considerably lower use of direct requests by the explicit group in the post-test - almost three times less than the pre-test session provides strong evidence that the explicit intervention had a greater effect in decreasing learners' use of this form. In other words, the learners in the explicit group were motivated to use the higher number of indirect

request categories in the post-test which is the outcome of overt metapragmatic explanations to the learners in this group of instruction. No noticeable development could be observed for the learners in the control group who had no pragmatic instruction. Figures 5 to 7 below display the distribution of request categories in the two (in raw numbers) and individual groups (in percentage figures) following the interventions.

Figure 5

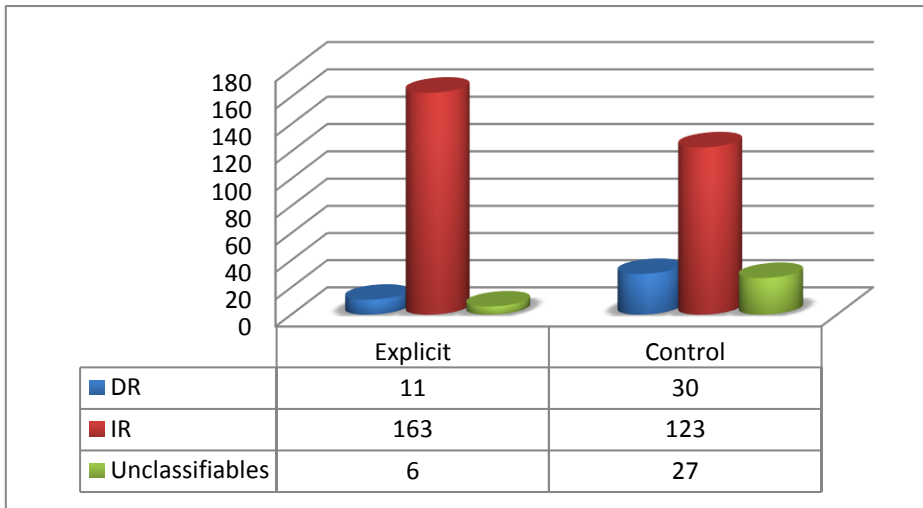*Comparison of post-test distributions of request categories in the two groups*

	Explicit	Control
DR	11	30
IR	163	123
Unclassifiables	6	27

Figure 6

Control group post-test distributions of request categories

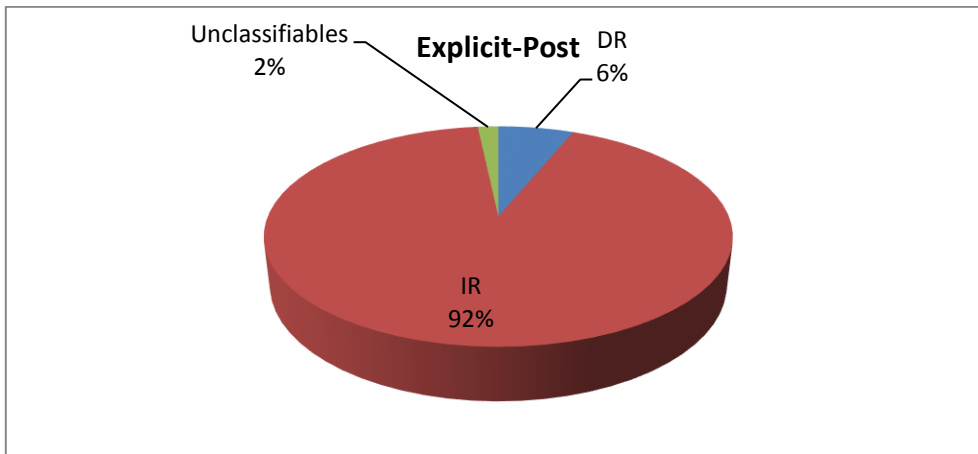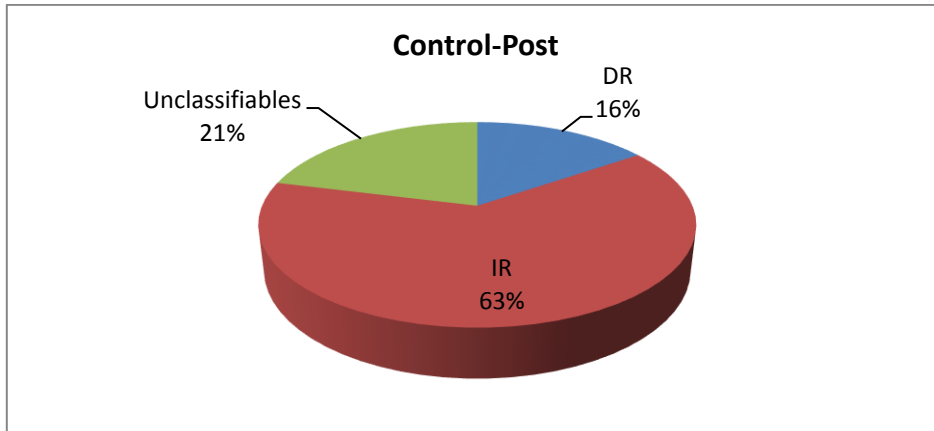Unclassifiables 2% **Explicit-Post** DR 6%

IR 92%

Figure 6

Explicit group post-test distributions of request categories

The results obtained lend support to the second hypothesis that the treatment group's performance in terms of the use of indirect request categories in the appropriate production of requests improved in the post-test over the pre-test. The idea behind the second hypothesis stating that the control group will not make any improvements is also verified in this research.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The present study aimed to contribute to the theory of interlanguage pragmatic development in an EFL context like Iran, by providing more insights into the effects of instruction on the acquisition of some specific features of pragmatics competence in a classroom setting and its incorporation into a model of communicative abilities. The learners in this setting are basically unable to pick up the target language norms both formally in the classroom and informally outside the classroom, as they are exposed to very poor knowledge of language use due to specific cultural and educational circumstances. In this educational context, therefore, it seems essential to investigate the effects of instructional approaches on learners' pragmatic development of specific speech acts, in the present case those of requests, to expand the range of learning targets in pragmatic interventional studies (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

The mean scores of the experimental group who received overt metapragmatic knowledge were compared to the mean score of the control group who were exposed to non-pragmatic input in the classroom. The aim of comparing these two groups was to decide if any

treatment was effective in developing learners' pragmatic competence regarding their awareness and production of requests in different situations.

Given the previous research results on the positive effect of instruction on the development of pragmatic competence.

To ascertain the instructional effects on learners' production of requests as mentioned in the first study, the participants' production of the speech act of requests in both the pre-test and the post-test were compared. The results obtained showed that the learners receiving explicit instruction in pragmatics significantly improved their scores of pragmatically appropriate productions of the speech act of request in the treatment group, while learners in the control group did not. Therefore, the first hypothesis was confirmed by my findings, which also supported previous research that focused on the effects of instruction of a particular speech act (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Taguchi, 2006; Safont, 2005). Results also support the findings of the studies carried out by a few researchers (e.g. Alcon, 2005; Canbolat, et al., 2021; Gholamia & Aghaib, 2012; Martinez-Flor & Alcon, 2007) who claimed language learners do not learn some features of pragmatics appropriately if they receive no explicit instruction.

In examining the second research question, concerning the explicit learners' employment of indirect request categories in the production of polite requests, the total raw figures (frequencies) and percentage scores for the two groups were compared. It was difficult to undertake any reliable statistical analyses on the production of major request categories and therefore it was necessary to rely on proportional analyses in this case. The Chi-square (X^2) statistic should typically have been used to examine whether or not the distributions of categorical variables differ from one another. Since the assumptions of a chi-square test concerning the minimum expected cell frequency were not met (i.e. it should be 5 or greater), Chi-square test was not used.

The proportional analysis of major request categories employed by the two groups showed that the intervention in the treatment group was effective: learners reduced the frequency of their use of direct request categories whereas there was a marked increase in learners' use of indirect polite request categories. Compared with the instructed group, the

control group did not make any noticeable changes in their employment of direct and indirect categories.

Teaching pragmatics is a highly complex and challenging issue, as pragmatic behavior varies to a large extent depending on social and cultural values. The learning of pragmatics, on the other hand, is viewed not only as a cognitive process but also as a social phenomenon, in alignment with a current understanding of language learning/teaching (Cohen & Ishihara, 2009). However, to sum up, the present study has attempted to provide some evidence that pragmatics competence does not seem resistant to metapragmatic instruction and actually can be taught even in an EFL context like Iran so that through instruction, learners become aware of pragmatic similarities and differences between their native language and the target language. This research has contributed to previous research on the positive effect of instruction on second and foreign language learning (Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2014; Doughty, 2003; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Norris & Ortega, 2000) and, more specifically, it has shown the benefits of instruction on the development of various pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features (Kasper & Rose, 2002). The findings, however, are not in line with the findings of some studies (e.g., Canbolat, et al., 2021; Derakhshan, & Eslami, 2015; Fukuya & Clark 2001; Sepehr, 2020) who stated that there is no significant difference or barely noticeable difference is found in the learners' pragmatic awareness on their understanding and production of appropriate language after an explicit pragmatic instruction.

The current study has attempted to contribute to the growing body of inter-language pragmatics research to investigate the effects of instruction on the development of pragmatics competence and has expanded the range of learning target features by focusing on the speech acts of requests. In addition, it has shed some more light on the effectiveness of an instructional approach in the development of learners' pragmatic competence in the EFL classroom. To sum up, it can be concluded that explicit pragmatic instruction is significantly effective in both raising EFL learners' pragmatic awareness and developing their pragmatic performance. Therefore, EFL teachers must provide some accessible potential instructional resources and materials for teaching pragmatics in the classroom. Teachers are also suggested to develop materials and activities to improve the learners' pragmatic performance.

Despite the merits of the study, it suffers from some limitations. First, the number of participants is small and the findings need to be generalized with great care, and replication of the study using a larger number of participants might yield different findings. Second, only one speech act was selected; therefore, the effects of explicit instruction on one more speech act are recommended. Finally, the data were selected based on the participants' mean scores on DCT, however, interviews with participants might enrich the quantitative findings.

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