Explicit and Implicit Instruction of Requestive Strategies: A Comparison of the Effects on Upper -intermediate English Learners' Email Writing Development

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Abstract

This study compared the efficacy of explicit and implicit instruction of requestive strategies on upper-intermediate female English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' email writing development. Sixty-two participants in four intact classes were randomly assigned to two explicit and implicit groups. In this quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design study two email evaluation tests and two written discourse completion tests (WDCT) were used to collect the data. In the pretest phase, an email evaluation test and a WDCT were administered to the participants in two sessions. Next, the two groups were provided with ten treatment sessions. The explicit group received direct instruction and metapragmatic explanation on the use of appropriate requestive strategies in writing emails. The implicit group, however, received instruction on writing requestive emails without any explicit explanation about the requestive strategies in emailing. Then, the participants took the posttest of email evaluation test and WDCT in two successive sessions. The results indicated that both modes of instruction exerted significant effects on the learners' production of requestive strategies in English. The comparison of the two modes of instruction, nonetheless, indicated that the participants who underwent explicit instruction significantly surpassed those in the implicit group. The findings have implications for materials developers and instructors.

Keywords: email writing, explicit instruction, implicit instruction, pragmatics instruction, requestive strategies

Introduction

Pragmatics, as a constituent of linguistics, examines the meaning of utterances in context and pragmatic competence refers to the person's ability to use the language in context. Pragmatic competence is important for second language (L2) learners, and the study of L2 learners' pragmatic competence falls into the realm of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) introduced specifically from the efforts of Selinker and Tarone (as cited in LoCastro, 2013). Kasper and Dahl (1991) defined ILP as "nonnative speakers' comprehension and production of speech acts and how their L2 related speech act knowledge is acquired" (p. 1). ILP deals with two essential areas of language, that is, language performance and language understanding. Thus, it requires L2 learners to have the competence to interpret L2 contexts appropriately and to have the knowledge of what constitutes adequate linguistic means to communicate in each social setting.

Research in the area of ILP comprises two groups of studies: interventionist studies and non-interventionist/descriptive studies. According to Rose (2005), interventionist ILP research as a subset of instructed second language acquisition (SLA) research is known by three important domains of exploration: the teachability of pragmatics (e.g., Taguchi, 2011), the effect of instruction versus exposure on pragmatic competence (e.g., Taguchi, 2011), and the influence of various pedagogical methods on pragmatic development (e.g., Kasper & Rose, 2002). Non-interventionist studies, on the other hand, explore the role of pragmatic motivation (e.g., Tajeddin & Zand Moghadam, 2012), grammatical proficiency (e.g., Rose, 2000), and learner variables, such as language learning motivation (e.g., Takahashi, 2005), in L2 pragmatic performance and development and also pragmatic transfer and its relation to grammatical proficiency (e.g., Takahashi, 1996). Based on the results of non-interventionist studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001), even those EFL learners who are linguistically advanced, have pragmatic norms different from those of NSs. This means that a learner of high linguistic proficiency may not necessarily have accompanying pragmatic competence.

In fact, to avoid misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication, language learners must develop their overall proficiency in using a language

and work hard to improve pragmatic understanding in that language (Hymes, 2005). Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds (1991) stated that "teaching pragmatics empowers students to experience and experiment with the language at a deeper level, and thereby to participate in the purpose of language communication, rather than just words" (pp. 13-14). However, according to Bardovi-Harling (2001), many facets of L2 pragmatics are not acquired without instruction, or in the best condition, take more time to be learned. Therefore, many instructional suggestions (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) have been made for integrating pragmatic instruction as a major component of L2 syllabi since the late 1980s. The instructional recommendations have been supported by few language scholars like Kasper and Schmidt (1996) and Bardovi-Harlig (2001) who insisted on the necessity of exploring the function of instruction in ILP.

The role of teaching pragmatic aspects of language, specifically the speech acts, has been examined in some interventionist ILP studies (e.g., Alcon Soler, 2005; Chen, 2009; Lingli & Wannaruk, 2010; Nguyen, Pham, & Pham, 2012). Alcon Soler surveyed the influence of explicit and implicit modes of teaching requestive strategies on the improvement of learners' pragmatic understanding by exposing them to extracts containing requests taken from different divisions of the TV series Stargate. The result revealed that the explicit group was superior to the implicit one. Takimoto (2009) investigated the impact of three different models of input-based tasks for learning English polite request pattern. The results of comparing the four groups showed that all the treatment groups working on the input-based tasks significantly outperformed the control group. Chen (2009) demonstrated how pragmatic instruction could be combined into an advanced-level language classroom by employing an explicit approach for teaching complaint behaviors. The outcomes affirmed that instruction of L2 pragmatics was beneficial because approximately all of the participants reacted positively toward the instruction. Lingli and Wannaruk (2010) examined the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of English speech act of refusal on students' attainment of this speech act. The researchers reported that explicit instruction had more outstanding influence on the development of the refusal speech act. Nguyen et al. (2012) investigated the

effect of explicit and implicit instruction of delivering the speech act set of constructive criticism. The results suggested that explicit instruction tends to have a greater influence on learners' pragmatic development. Shark (2018) explored the effects of explicit and implicit instruction of the apology speech act on advanced EFL learners' pragmatic development. The results indicated a remarkable difference between the effects of the two instructional modes in favor of the explicit group.

In the Iranian context, Vahid Dastjerdi and Rezvani (2010) examined the consequences of explicit and implicit teaching on English learners' ability to use the request speech act. The outcomes reported that both explicit and implicit teaching methods had critical impacts on the learners' employment of request strategies in English and that there was no significant difference between the two groups. Chalak and Abbasi (2015) inspected the impact of diverse methods of pragmatic teaching on the learners' awareness of the suggestion speech act in an e-learning environment. It was signified that the combination group's performance tended to be better than that of the other groups. Rajabi, Azizfar, and Gowhary (2015) investigated the effect of explicit instruction of the apology speech act on the advancement of Iranian EFL learners. The researchers noted that explicit teaching was a useful means through which students made progress in applying appropriate apology strategies in various circumstances. Gharibeh Gharibeh, Mirzaee, and Yaghoubi Notash (2016) studied the impact of explicit teaching of the refusal speech act on the improvement of EFL learners. The analysis of the data gathered through WDCTs at two stages of the study indicated the predominance of explicit instruction over no instruction in the learners' development of the refusal speech act. Ariana, Ahmadi Shirazi, and Mousavi Nadoushani (2016) in a study investigated the comparative effects of explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction on learners' perception and production of requestive strategies. The findings of the study showed that both ways of pragmatic instruction impacted learners' perception. However, considering the production of request making, the explicit group appeared to be superior to the implicit one. Iraji, Enayat, and Momeni (2018) explored the impacts of explicit and implicit instruction on Iranian EFL students' production of two speech acts of apology and request. The outcomes

showed that teaching pragmalinguistic features explicitly improved the interlanguage pragmatic knowledge of the participants.

The studies mentioned in this part indicate the significance of pragmatics instruction in different settings for various speech acts. Considering the importance of pragmatic instruction in an EFL setting like Iran, this study attempted to evaluate how two different modes of teaching requestive strategies, namely explicit and implicit teaching, could help learners' email writing development as reflected in their performance on WDCTs and their email evaluation ability. This study, therefore sought to find answer to the following questions:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference between the effects of explicit and implicit teaching of requestive strategies on upper-intermediate female EFL learners' performance on discourse completion tests of email writing?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between the effects of explicit and implicit teaching of requestive strategies on upper-intermediate female EFL learners' email evaluation ability?

Method

Participants

Sixty-two female upper-intermediate level Iranian EFL learners from Zabankadeh Language Institute participated in this study. None of them had been abroad or had any experiences in direct contacts with NSs of English. They were aged between 19 and 32 years. The participants were selected based on their availability in the language institute. Since reaching more than 20 participants in Zabankadeh English Language institute classes at the upper-intermediate level was not feasible, the researchers were obliged to select participants from four intact classes. Then two of these classes were randomly selected as the implicit group and two as the explicit group. In addition to the main participants of the study, 16 EFL learners representing the sample described here were asked to attend the instrumentation stage of this study. Each of them was asked to write two emails for the situations which had been defined for them and then four of the delivered emails were used in preparing the email evaluation tests. In addition, they were asked to take the two WDCTs and their responses were analyzed for checking the reliability of these two tests.

Instruments

Four instruments were devised and utilized at the two phases of the study to obtain the needed data. The instruments included two email evaluation tests (as pretest and posttest) and two WDCTs (as pretest and posttest). The evaluation in both of the instruments was based on the consideration of social distance, power, and rank of imposition.

Email Evaluation Tests

To prepare email evaluation tests, initially 16 EFL learners representing the population of this study were asked to write two requestive emails in two predefined situations. The two situations were randomly selected from eight various situations differing from each other with regard to social distance, power, and rank of imposition. Thus, each situation was written on by four of the participating learners. The eight situations which the participating learners were supposed to write emails about are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of Situations

Situation	To	Asking for	Power	Distance	Imposition
1	your professor	an extension of submitting a paper	+	+	+
2	your professor	a leave because of an illness	+	+	-
3	your boss whom you are friendly with	a raise because you think you deserve a higher payment	+	-	+
4	your boss whom you are friendly with	a leave because of illness	+	-	-
5	a relative whom you are not friendly with	hosting you a few days in another city	-	+	+
6	a relative whom you are not friendly with	sending you some photos of you he/she has taken in a recent party	-	+	-
7	a colleague who is your friend	accepting to do your job the next day because you cannot go to work	-	-	+
8	a colleague who is your friend	sending you a manual related to your job	-	-	-

After the 32 emails were received from the 16 learners, eight of them (4 to be used in the pretest and 4 in the posttest) were selected based on purposeful sampling to be included in the two email evaluation tests. The selected emails for each of the two tests consisted of both appropriate and inappropriate emails and the inappropriateness of the emails was with regard to the three factors of power, distance, and imposition. The related situation was clearly described for each email and then the email was given. The test required the participants to rate on a 5-point Likert scale each given email based on its in/appropriateness with regard to the defined situation. After preparing two tests, each consisting of four emails, one of them was randomly chosen as the pretest and the other one as the posttest.

Written Discourse Completion Tests

Each WDCT included eight different scenarios on which the participants were demanded to write related emails. The 16 scenarios for the two tests were selected among 25 scenarios defined based on the review of the literature and consulting DCTs in other SA-related studies. The selection was done after consulting two authorities in the field and also analyzing the remaining situations to ensure that the possible combinations of the power, distance, and imposition factors are reflected in the scenarios composing each of the two tests. Each situation given in the WDCTs included all the necessary contextual clues, such as setting, participant relations, and degree of imposition in order to give a clear picture of the situation to the learners. The selected situations compiled some common everyday contexts, ranging from a formal context to a very informal one. For piloting the two tests, they were both given to the 16 participants attending the preparation of the email evaluation test to complete them. Then their scores on any of the tests were analyzed for checking the reliability of the tests. The values of Cronbach alpha for the pretest and the posttest (.83 and .87, respectively) indicated the high reliability of both tests.

Procedure

Initially 62 female upper-intermediate EFL learners from Zabankadeh Language Institute accepted to attend this study. These participants were in four intact classes two of whom were randomly selected as the explicit group and two as the implicit group. Then, the instruments of the study comprising of two email evaluations tests and two WDCTs were prepared.

The WDCTs were piloted with 16 upper-intermediate EFL learners with the same characteristics as those of the study participants and the reliability of the two tests were computed. Next, both of the groups took the pretests in two separate sessions; first they took the email evaluation test and then the WDCT. After that, both groups underwent 10 sessions of treatment twice a week. The ten 30-minute lessons had been developed by the researchers around the general topic of writing requestive emails. The lessons targeted areas such as parts of an email, formal and informal emails, requestive strategies, positive and negative politeness, and consideration of power, distance, and imposition in making requests, downgrades, external modifications and upgrades. Although each group received instruction in a different mode, for both groups the treatment was provided at five different phases which included strategy recognition, metapragmatic information transmission, metapragmatic judgment, discussion, and production phases. For the explicit group the treatment provided in each of these phases was as follows:

Phase 1. Strategy recognition

Samples of emails scripts were given to the learners and they were demanded to recognize the requestive strategies that email writers had utilized to make requests in particular situations.

Phase 2. Metapragmatic information transmission

Metapragmatic rules for requestive strategies were taught. The group received explicit description about the speech act of requesting and the relevance between the context and the strategies used for requesting in the context of email writing. They also compared Iranian and American English requestive strategies and discussed target speech act realization.

Phase 3. Metapragmatic judgment

The learners were asked to examine different forms employed with different scenarios and judge the appropriateness of the strategies and patterns used in a given scenario.

Phase 4. Discussion

The participant EFL learners discussed the given pragmalinguistic formulas in their order of directness and parameters such as power, social distance, and degree of imposition which affect the selection of these

formulas and strategies. They further talked about the way parameters in various situations affect the strategy choices in Persian and English speaking cultures.

Phase 5. Production

The learners were given a situation and assigned to write an email as homework. The explicit group received explicit description about speech act of requesting and the relevance between the context and the strategies used for requesting in the context of email writing.

However, the treatment for the implicit group in each of the phases was different and was as follows:

Phase 1. Strategy recognition

As a warm up activity, the participant EFL learners investigated actual requests examples and discussed the reasons for pragmatic success and deficiency in an initial consciousness-raising task.

Phase 2. Metapragmatic information transmission

The participants were given the same two emails given to the explicit group with the requestive strategies highlighted and were asked to read the two email messages and examine the layout of the messages on paper. The EFL learners in the implicit group were given the scripts which contained the target request forms in highlighted format. That was not similar to the explicit group EFL learners for whom the target request patterns were not sown differently from the rest of the text.

Phase 3. Metapragmatic judgment

The --EFL learners dissected each email message into its constituents and examined the standard elements.

Phase 4. Discussion

They focused on the actual request language and how it differed regarding the degree of imposition, power, and distance.

Phase 5. Production

Similar to the explicit group, they were required to write an email on a certain situation after the class. However, they did not receive any explicit explanation about the requestive strategies in emailing. After the treatment, the two groups took the email evaluation test in one session and the WDCT in the next session as their posttests. Finally, the WDCTs and the email evaluation tests were each scored by two raters and then interrater reliability

was computed for each set of scores. Moreover, the average of the scores by the two rates was taken as the score for each learner. For the email evaluation test, the rating criteria on a 5-point Likert scale ranged from totally inappropriate to totally appropriate. The scale appraised the learners' performance according to the aspects they were instructed.

In analyzing the data, descriptive statistics and two independent samples *t*-tests were carried out to examine the significance of the difference between the mean scores of the two groups' gain scores on each of the two test types. Following the *t*-tests, *Cohen's d effect size* was computed to examine the magnitude of the differences found between the means in each case. However, in order to examine the effectiveness of any of the two ways of teaching the requestive speech act, four paired samples *t*-tests were run before conducting the independent samples *t*-tests. It should be mentioned that the students' performance in each testing time was rated by two raters, and in all cases interrater reliability was estimated.

Results

To answer the research questions, initially for each set of scores, the normality of the distribution of the scores was checked and the interrater reliability was calculated for the scores by the two rates. Skewness measures for all the four sets of scores were between -2 and +2, so the assumption of normality was satisfied. The interrater reliability for the scores of explicit group on WDCT, implicit group on WDCT, explicit group on email evaluation, and implicit group on email evaluation on pretests and posttests were .81 and .88; 1 and .78; .93 and .91; and 1 and .83, respectively.

Comparative Impacts of Modes of Instruction on Learners' DCT Email Writing

To answer the first question, first, two paired samples *t*-tests were run to examine the effectiveness of the explicit and implicit modes of instruction on the learners' progress in DCT email writing. To avoid complicating the results section, the results of this section are presented without giving the related tables. The results of the first *t*-test which compared the mean scores of the explicit group on the pretest and posttest of the DCT email writing showed a significant difference between the pretest (*M* = 2.45, *SD* = .34)

and the posttest ($M = 9.11$, $SD = .40$), t (30) = 14.34, $p = .00$, equal variance assumed. It was, therefore, concluded that explicit instruction was significantly effective in increasing the learners' performance on the DCT of email writing. The results of similar analysis for the implicit group, also, indicated a statistically significant difference between the pretest ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .39$) and the posttest ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 2.21$), t (30) = 1.45, $p = .00$, equal variance assumed. The results, thus, showed a significant effect of the implicit instruction on the learners' DCT email writing progress.

Then, to compare the effect of instruction type on the learners' DCT email writing across time, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the gain scores of the two groups from the pretest to the posttest. The descriptive statistics of DCT email writing gain scores of the two explicit and implicit groups from the pretest to posttest are given in Table 2 and the results of the t-test of gain scores are depicted in Table 3.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of WDCT Gain Scores of the Two Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gain Score	Explicit	31	6.66	2.59	0.46
	Implicit	31	2.63	3.20	0.57

Table 3
Independent Samples t-test of DCT Gain Scores of the Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Gain Score	Equal variances assumed	1.23	0.27	5.46	60.00	0.00	4.05		2.55	5.50
	Equal variances not assumed			5.46	57.49	0.56	4.05		2.55	5.51

The results of the *t*-test on gain scores of DCT email writing in Table 2 and 3 showed a significant difference between the gains of explicit group (*M* = 6.66, *SD* = 2.59) and implicit group (*M* = 2.63, *SD* = 3.20), *t* (60) = 5.46, *p* = .00, equal variance assumed with Cohen's d effect size of 1.36 which was indicative of a big difference. Therefore, it was found that explicit teaching of requestive strategies was significantly more effective than implicit teaching of these strategies concerning impacts on the upper-intermediate female EFL learners' DCT email writing development.

Comparative Impacts of Modes of Instruction on Learners' Email Evaluation Ability

To answer the second question, similar to the previous part, first, two paired samples *t*-tests were run to examine the effectiveness of any of the two modes of instruction on the learners' development of email evaluation ability. The results of these tests are presented without giving the related tables in order to avoid complicating the results section. The results of the first *t*-test which compared the mean scores of the explicit group on the pretest and posttest of the email evaluation test indicated a significant difference between the pretest (*M* = 3.38, *SD* = .49) and the posttest (*M* = 6.01, *SD* = .39), *t* (30) = 6.50, *p* = .00, equal variance assumed. It was, therefore, concluded that explicit instruction was significantly effective in increasing the learners' performance on the email evaluation test. The results of similar analysis for the implicit group showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest (*M* = 4.37, *SD* = 2.40) and the posttest (*M* = 5.46, *SD* = 2.30), *t* (30) = 3.70, *p* = .00, equal variance assumed. The results, thus, showed a statistically significant effect of implicit instruction on the email writing development of the participants.

Next, to compare the effects of the explicit and implicit instruction on the upper-intermediate female EFL learners' email evaluation ability across time an independent samples t-test was run on the gain scores of the students in the explicit and implicit groups on the email evaluation tests. The descriptive statistics of the email evaluation gain scores of the two groups from the pretest to posttest are given in Table 4 and the results of the *t*-test of gain scores are presented in Table 5.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Email Evaluation Gain Scores of the Two Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gain Score	Explicit	31.00	2.62	2.25	0.40
	Implicit	31.00	1.01	1.60	0.27

Table 5

Independent Samples t-test of Email Evaluation Gain Scores of the Two Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Gain Score	Equal variances assumed	.63	0.43	3.08	60.00	0.00	.49		.53	2.52
	Equal variances not assumed			5.46	54.32	0.00	.49		.53	2.52

The results of the *t*-test on gain scores of email evaluation test revealed a significant difference between the gains of the explicit group (*M* = 2.62, SD = 2.25) and the implicit group (*M* = 1.01, *SD* = 1.60), *t* (60) = 3.08, *p* = .00, equal variance assumed (See Table 4 & Table 5) with *Cohen's d effect size* of .8 which indicates a big difference. It was indicated that the students in the explicit group had far more progress from the pretest to the posttest than their counterparts in the implicit group. It was, therefore, concluded that explicit instruction was significantly more effective in developing the upper-intermediate female EFL learners' email evaluation ability than implicit instruction.

Discussion

This study investigated the impacts of explicit and implicit modes of pragmatic instruction on EFL learners' perception and production of the request speech act. The results indicated that both explicit and implicit modes of instruction have significant effects on the learners' development of the request speech act, but that the positive influence of explicit metapragmatic instruction is greater than that of implicit instruction in the outgrowth of the students' speech act perception and production.

A bulk of studies in the area have comparatively investigated the explicit and implicit instruction of pragmatics (e.g., Alcon Soler, 2005; Lingli & Wannaruk, 2010; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001) ; some of these interventionist studies (e.g., Taguchi, 2015; Takahashi, 2010) have shown that both modes of instruction can influence pragmatic development although explicit pragmatic instruction has mainly led to better accomplishments.

Regarding the effectiveness of explicit pragmatics instruction, many researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Nguyen et al., 2012; Shark, 2018) have provided evidence in favor of the efficacy of explicit instruction in improving L2 learners' pragmatic competence. In addition, in the Iranian context many researchers (e.g., Ariana et al, 2016; Gharibeh Gharibeh et al., 2016; Iraji et al, 2018; Vahid Dastjerdi & Rezvani, 2010) have supported the usefulness of explicit instruction in promoting L2 learners' pragmatic understanding. Explicit teaching directs learners' attention to particular linguistic forms and the knowledge of how these elements are affected by contextual features. Explicit teaching can provide learners with the knowledge of factors such as social parameters, social and mental distance, and rank of imposition and how these factors affect the appropriateness of the language employed for communication in each particular context. The significance of using explicit instruction for teaching pragmatics is harmonious with the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 2001) which emphasizes the superior role of conscious attention to L2 pragmatic features in the classroom over mere exposure of the learners to L2 input.

Concerning the role of implicit instruction in increasing learners' pragmatic ability, the results of the present study conform to Kim and Hall's

(2002) study. They found implicit instruction an effective way of teaching pragmatics. They reported the positive impact of an interactive program for book reading which was held in the framework of pragmatic instruction on the advancement of L2 pragmatic understanding by eight Korean children and figured out that Korean children had outstanding development in speech management strategies and pragmatic specifications without any explicit instruction. However, some other previous studies (e.g., Fukuya & Clark, 2001; Rose, 2005) have shown that only exposing the L2 learners to input (which is done in implicit teaching) may not promote learners' pragmatic understanding, or otherwise, the learning may take place at a low pace. In other words, as Bardovi-Harlig (2001, 2013) has pointed out, mere exposure of the learners to L2 pragmatic features does not guarantee their pragmatic progress. This has also been stressed by Cohen (2008) who believed mere exposure and submersion in target contexts cannot lead to native-like proficiency in pragmatics.

Consistent with the results of the current study, an explicit method which supplies a clear explanation of the use of language with regard to the context properties has appeared to be typically more useful than implicit teaching in some studies (e.g., Alcon Soler, 2005; Koike & Pearson, 2005). The predominance of explicit instruction over implicit teaching of L2 pragmatics has been confirmed by many other researchers (e.g., Lingli & Wannaruk, 2010; Martinez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; Takahashi, 2001). The results of the comparative analysis of the data in the present study have further been confirmed by Fukuya, Reeve, Gisi, and Christianson (1998). They demonstrated that implicit instruction of pragmatics, including exposing learners to different input in a way that they could comprehend speech acts and their functions throughout communication, was not as efficient as explicit instruction. Among the studies on the implicit/ explicit teaching of pragmatics are those studies (e.g., Takahashi, 2001) which have interestingly concluded that explicit and implicit instruction can be employed beside each other, rather than viewed as two detached methods. In the same vein, Kaburise's (2014) study outcomes confirmed that the promotion of pragmatic understanding did not come from actions which were arranged as either explicit or implicit instruction; a better suggestion was to consider these two ways of instruction as complimentary to each

other. Probably this suggestion can be an implication of many of the studies approving and suggesting the efficacy of both explicit and implicit modes of pragmatics instruction (e.g., Chalak & Abbasi, 2015).

According to Alcon Soler and Martinez-Flor (2008), language instruction must develop learners' understanding of L2 pragmatics by improving the connection between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic criteria of language. The findings of this study suggest that this understanding can be achieved by means of both explicit and implicit teaching of pragmatics although explicit instruction seems more beneficial in facilitating the achievement of L2 pragmatic competence. The finding that learners in the explicit group showed far more advance in observing the appropriate level of formality, directness, and politeness in writing requestive emails revealed the prevailing impact of explicit instruction in the pragmatic consciousness-raising of the learners. This is particularly informative to EFL curriculum developers and authorities in the Iranian instructional context in which "the likelihood of learners getting any specific explicit instruction on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic realization of requestive speech acts is slim" (Eslami-Rasekh & Noora, 2008, p. 324). As the Iranian learners normally do not have access to NSs, it is vital to include pragmatic explicit instruction in language learning and teaching curriculum.

It is worth mentioning that some shortcomings must be regarded about the present study. The first limitation was the limited number of the subjects of the study which confides the generalizability of the outcomes. So, other research studies with more participants are strongly suggested. Second, the participants were only female EFL learners; therefore, further investigation of the study of request speech acts in males or juxtaposing male and female learners in their taking advantage of instruction of the request speech act is needed to prospect the effects. Another important issue is that the EFL learners participating in this study were upper-intermediate level; thus, studies on other levels of language proficiency or in other educational settings and conditions are required. Additionally, this study covered the speech act of request. Hence, other studies are recommended to focus on the effectiveness of instruction on other speech acts, such as suggestion, apology, or thanking. Furthermore, the results might be affected by other

variables, including age and personality. Therefore, further studies must be done in this area taking these variables into account. In addition, this study employed written tests to collect the data, but ideally, the data should be gleaned through other sources or ordinary interactions where requestive strategies are likely to be more naturalistic. The data collected in this study through WDCT was helpful in assessing the participants' pragmatic understanding and production, but it did not reveal whether the students could actually produce the forms they wrote in response to the WDCT in a real interaction. Therefore, to assess the learners' pragmatic improvement more realistically, it would be useful to conduct other studies to examine the learners' use of requestive strategies before and after the treatment through other instruments which can produce more realistic data, for example, through analyzing the emails they have written for realist purposes.

To conclude, the current study was carried out to examine whether explicit and implicit pragmatics instruction could be effective in developing Iranian EFL learners' realization and production of requestive strategies in the sphere of email writing. Consistent with some earlier studies, this study confirmed the effectiveness of both modes of pragmatics instruction although it showed explicit instruction of the request speech act to be more effective than its implicit instruction. The results, therefore, indicate the significance of including pragmatics instruction in L2 instructional programs and emphasize the supremacy of explicit instruction over implicit instruction. However, the results are specifically revealing in showing implicit instruction beneficial in increasing the learners' email writing ability in the Iranian EFL context. They show that instruction, even in the form of mere provision of materials with no metapragmatic information given, can be effective in the learners' development of the request speech act in email writing. It can, therefore, be concluded that pragmatics instruction should constitute one essential part of L2 instruction and this instruction should be preferably explicit. Language teachers are recommended based on the findings of this study to provide explicit description and explanation of L2 pragmatic aspects and, where this is not feasible, to employ awareness-raising activities at the least.

In light of the present findings, definite pedagogical implications may be proposed. Based on Alcon Soler (as cited in Salemi, Rabiee, & Ketabi

2012), the second language educational context provides the suitable setting for understanding and learning L2 pragmatics. In an EFL context which does not set this ground for pragmatics learning, the teachers are expected to provide as much native-like input as possible to assist the learners become aware of the relations between sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic dimensions of the L2. Furthermore, since some studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harling, 2001) have indicated that some aspects of L2 pragmatics need explicit instruction to be learned, teachers are suggested to provide metapragmatic information along with the related input given to the learners. The study also has implications for curriculum developers and syllabus designers. It suggests that L2 pragmatics instruction must find a more significant status in L2 teaching programs. In sum, materials developers and instructors are advised to integrate more explicit teaching of L2 pragmatics into their classroom practice to help their learners develop better pragmatic perception and production. The outcomes of the current study confirmed that the pragmatic characteristics of language are teachable. Textbook writers and material developers should concentrate more on teachability of L2 pragmatics and the need for its instruction, specifically explicit instruction. Therefore, it is advisable that instructors and materials developers integrate metapragmatic content into the language teaching practice and teaching materials to facilitate learners' pragmatic development.

Declaration of interest: none

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