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The Impact of Online Learning on the Pragmatic Competence of Refusal Speech Acts: Perspectives of Jordanian Instructors

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to define the pragmatic practice and proficiency of refusal speech acts among English as a Foreign Language undergraduate students who completed online-based learning at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE) in Jordan. It also explores whether their pragmatic proficiency was affected by the transition from face-to-face to online instruction, as perceived by their instructors. The present study employed a quantitative approach using a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. Data were collected from ten WISE lecturers and statistically analyzed to quantify students' pragmatic knowledge of refusal speech acts, including familiarity, power, directness, and politeness. The findings indicated that the students' pragmatic competence to produce and comprehend refusal speech acts was low across online classes, as observed by their lecturers. Moreover, the findings indicated that teachers presupposed the move to online education negatively affected students' pragmatic competence, making it more difficult for them to use and comprehend refusals appropriately. These findings highlight the need for higher education policymakers to consider the sensitivity of speech act instruction in online settings when creating and designing courses. Additionally, the study highlights the need for integrating pragmatic competence development into online courses to enhance students' communication skills in virtual learning environments.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 (coronavirus) was declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, and it was a worldwide tragedy in which every country, including Jordan, had to respond effectively, especially within the educational system[1–3]. Traditionally, classes are conducted face to face; that is, teaching and learning activities are done in a class, laboratory, or other place that gathers people in one location. However, due to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, teaching and learning activities have shifted rapidly from face-to-face classes to online virtual meetings. While online class systems were already in use in most educational institutions, they had not been widely adopted across most schools and universities on the scale seen today[4, 5]. Videla et al. further noted that the education sector had been forced to adjust from traditional to online-based learning[6].

Hence, the government of Jordan decided to introduce the online-based learning and teaching approach as an alternative to classroom teaching. Students in Jordanian universities studied throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period in the 2020/2021 academic year through online learning platforms, Microsoft Teams. According to the Jordan Times, the Higher Education Council endorsed and accepted a plan to incorporate online and blended learning into the higher education system in close coordination with all universities. According to the Royal decree of His Majesty King Abdullah II on 1 August 2021, this was implemented to apply the blended learning system in Jordanian universities[7]. This system combines face-to-face and web-based learning to modernize and diversify learning and teaching procedures. However, online learning outcomes vary in different countries. They were also affected by online learning amenities such as internet accessibility, speed, and availability of the required electronic devices and computers[1]. Mardiningsih et al. (2020) stated that lecturers play a significant role in online learning[8]. They must work towards being interactive throughout the online sessions to achieve the given learning objectives. It is a herculean task, particularly for English teachers who emphasize student-centered learning, to create an English environment in online sessions without interacting with the students face-to-face[9].

Effective speech aids in effective teacher-learner communication in online learning. This study investigates the deployment of speech acts in online learning, considering the influence of the learning environment, the subject matter, and social and psychological interaction among teachers and learners. Ma'yuuf and Ghitheeth (2021) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has led researchers to explore various fields in linguistics, including the effects of online learning on communication[2]. As an international language, English still plays a significant role in education, business, and commerce, hence again referring to the necessity of effective communication in online studies.

Over the past twenty years, information and communication technology development has facilitated global contact, boosting the use of English as a lingua franca. As such, English has gained more visibility in Jordan, which has further deepened its roots in universities and workplaces[10, 11]. With its increased function, English learning has become an unavoidable area of research. Previous studies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have emphasized the challenges students face in achieving pragmatic competence, an indispensable aspect of effective communication. Although many learners acquire vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pronunciation skills, they find it difficult to master pragmatic aspects of language use, leading to communication breakdowns—a phenomenon known as pragmatic failure.

Previous research has long examined pragmatic failure in conventional classroom settings, emphasizing the perception, understanding, and production of speech acts by EFL learners. However, limited research has explored the impact of the shift to online learning on pragmatic competence, more particularly in refusal speech acts. This study tries to bridge the gap by exploring how Jordanian university undergraduate students perceive and produce refusal speech acts in online classes, as assessed by their lecturers. Building on existing research, this study aims to provide insight into the challenges of maintaining pragmatic capacity in virtual learning environments and inform best practices in pragmatics teaching in online EFL classrooms.

Historically, previous studies have centered on prag-

matic failure and how EFL learners understand and enact speech acts in conventional face-to-face classrooms. With the sudden shift to online classes during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to look into how the shift has influenced students' pragmatic competence. Contrary to earlier studies, the present research focuses on how learning via the Internet may affect students' capacity to produce and comprehend refusal speech acts. To the best of the author's knowledge, no existing studies are exploring how Jordanian undergraduate university students employ refusal speech as a pragmatic marker of competence based on their lecturers' perspectives in online learning. In order to fill this lacuna, this research analyzes how undergraduate university students rate and assess their construction of refusal speech acts in online classes, as viewed and rated by their instructors. It contributes to existing research by providing information on the issues of pragmatic competence in virtual classrooms and informing teaching implications on teaching EFL.

This study aims to obtain an accurate description of the pragmatic competence and practices of the refusal speech act among EFL undergraduates (EFLUs) who joined online classes and if their pragmatic competence is affected by the change from physical face-to-face classes to online classes at The World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE) in Amman, as perceived and assessed by their instructors while joining online classes.

Pragmatic competence is an essential part of effective communication. Yet, learning and acquiring pragmatics in a Jordanian English language class seems to be neglected at the university level and even at the elementary level. This article sheds light on pragmatic competence in Jordan by analyzing teachers' perceptions of their students' pragmatics and how the students applied their pragmatic knowledge in their interaction and communication in the newly conducted online classes. This research helps evaluate students' pragmatic competence and communication experience in online classes. It is simply a regional research study but can be used with potential at the national level. It is essential to understand teachers' perceptions since their observations influence direct teaching approaches and classroom practice. In addition, it is incredibly advantageous to understand the perceptions of lecturers since they are very much engaged with teaching and learning practices and evaluating the competence and performance of students. They also apply educational princi-

ples and theories to inform their pedagogy[12]. The novelty of this study lies in the methodology of using language to describe behavior in terms of response to specific problems. The current paper assists researchers in the same field and readers are required to enact a specific policy or decision, particularly in education. Through language factors study, we can determine whether the current online teaching and learning system is effective or needs adjustment, especially when adjusting it in the future.

This paper is conducted to answer the following questions:

- How does the pragmatic knowledge reflect the degree of familiarity, politeness, power, and level of directness in the utterances of Jordanian EFL Undergraduates when they perceive and produce a refusal speech act during the online class?

- How is the pragmatic competence of Jordanian EFL Undergraduates affected by the change from conventional classes to online classes as perceived and assessed by the lecturers?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Theories such as Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), Austin's speech act theory (1962), and Searle's speech act theory (1969) are usually referred to as basic elements explaining some concepts in pragmatics research[13–15].

2.1.1. Definition of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that concerns meaning in communication between the speaker and the listener. It is very important for interlocutors since they need to understand the literal meaning of an utterance and its indirect meaning[16]. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the study of indirect contextual meaning to know what is meant when it is not said[17].

2.1.2. Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is performing appropriate communicative actions and strategies within a specific environment or situation. Koike (1989) and Brown & Levinson (1987) determined that knowledge and enactment of polite-

ness and appropriateness rules guide how the speaker perceives and formulates speech acts[13, 18]. Thomas (1983) also grouped pragmatic competence under socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic competence[19]. Pragma-linguistic competence refers to knowledge of form and strategy for realizing particular Speech and communicative acts and the performance of pragmatic functions. Socio-pragmatic competence is the knowledge of using the form and strategy in an appropriate context or situation[20].

2.1.3. Speech Act Theory

Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts evolved out of Austin's (1962) first theory, in which he referred to the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts of Speech[14, 15]. The illocutionary act (purpose of locutionary Speech) in Searle's (1969) theory is classified into the following five classes:

- Declaratives - Speech acts that change the world through their words or utterances.

- Representatives - Speech acts that convey the speaker's belief.

- Expressive - Speech acts that convey what the speaker feels.

- Directives - Speech acts that speakers use to get someone to do something.

- Commissives - Speakers use speech acts to commit to future action[15].

In addition, Searle determined two other speech act categories: direct and indirect[15]. The difference between indirect and direct speech acts is a matter of Speech structure. According to Yule (1996), a speech act can be called direct if there exists a direct equivalence between the function and structure of an utterance[17]. On the other hand, if an indirect equivalence exists between the function and structure, it is known as an indirect speech act. For instance, a declarative sentence used to state something is a direct speech act, whereas a declarative sentence used to request something is an indirect speech act. In general, indirect speech acts are associated with more politeness than direct speech acts.

2.1.4. Refusal Speech Act

Refusal speech act happens in response to another speech act, such as a request, suggestion, or invitation[21]. Refusals have sometimes been termed 'reactive acts' and second-pair parts because they are thought to be responding to some other speech acts[22]. Refusals are largely determined by gender, age, education, power (social rank), and social distance[13]. It should be realized that different cultures and languages differ in their refusals[21]. Refusals are used in this study because there is not much research on pragmatic competence testing with other speech acts[23].

2.2. Empirical Studies

Rafiq and Yavuz (2024) conducted a study to find out whether online pragmatic treatment would enhance the pragmatic ability of students and also to see whether explicit or implicit procedures would be more helpful[24]. Sixty randomly recruited undergraduate students were divided into three groups of 20 students each. There were two experimental groups (implicit and explicit) and a control group. Online training was done via Google Meet. The three groups completed a pre-test Discourse Completion Task consisting of twelve situations. Respondents in the experimental group registered improvements in their pragmatic competence in contrast to the pre-test and post-test of control group members. Though the scores between the implicit and explicit group post-test responses differed, statistically, the differences did not materialize. Pragmatics training, therefore, enhances efficient use and communication in a target language.

Ghadiri et al. (2024) examine the corrective feedback of L2 pragmatics instruction in online teaching[25]. They investigated the types of corrective feedback the EFL teachers provide in online classrooms regarding responding to their students' pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic infelicitous production of the request and refusal speech acts. They analyzed data from 18 hours of online classroom interaction using conversation analysis and a taxonomy that classifies the feedback into (1) explicit and implicit input-providing and (2) output-prompting corrective feedback. In their findings, teachers used explicit output prompts as the most frequently used corrective feedback. Teachers preferred using prompting questions and meta-pragmatic cues to help the learners understand the speech acts of request and refusal instead of directly offering the correct reformulation. Also, due to the face-threatening nature of the two speech acts, the teachers used explicit output prompts as corrective feedback to facilitate the accuracy of learners' production. They concluded that the online learning environment influences the explic-

itness of pragmatic corrective feedback. They claimed that their research is of significant value for teachers to use implicit and explicit corrective feedback to construct learners' pragmatic competence in online instruction.

Huwari et al. provide a comparative and contrastive study of the refusal speech act in Jordanian Arabic and American English to outline the differences and similarities that may exist in refusal strategies among non-native and native English speakers [26]. While refusal strategies have been widely researched, cross-cultural comparative research between these two languages has not been extensive. This refusal of speech is a face-threatening act relevant to social interaction. Not every refusal is refused in the same way across cultures without difficulty. The research employs a modified Discourse Completion Test as a research instrument to experiment with Jordanian and American subjects' responses to refusals. Results showed that both subjects had a strong preference for indirect strategies, followed by adjunct and direct strategies. However, Jordanians use more subtle strategies, and Americans use more explicit refusals. Variation in the realization of speech act refusal across the two cultures is investigated by the research. It suggests avenues that may be intriguingly investigated in intercultural pragmatics and the acquisition of pragmatic competence among second language speakers.

Moreover, Simamora and Videla et al. examined online learning issues during the COVID-19 pandemic from the learners' and lecturers' perspectives, respectively [6, 27]. Moreover, Mardiningsih et al. studied lecturers' speech acts in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. In addition, Renaldo studied polytechnic students' emotions and illocutionary acts used in recounting online learning issues [3]. Kumari et al. explored pragmatic learning activities for the English language in the era of COVID-19 [9].

Al-Issa (2003) did a contrastive analysis of refusals with Jordanian and American speakers in the Jordanian environment [28]. He elicited data through written discourse completion tests (DCTs), invitations, suggestions, requests, offers, and follow-up interviews. Pragmatic transfer is supported. Moreover, Jordanian refusals were lengthy, elaborative, and supported by vague explanations and justifications based on God. His results stated that Jordanians used more indirect strategies than Americans. Finally, both groups frequently employed similar indirect strategies. Other studies

on refusal strategies concerning the cultural and ecological environment were conducted by Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015), who researched negative pragmatic transfer and the role of cultural values in Jordanian EFL speech refusal [26]. Interestingly, this study also identified the speech refusal act reflecting each student group's cultural values and traditions. Specifically, refusals may be treated differently for those with different cultural backgrounds, which could cause several misunderstandings or communication problems.

After reviewing the above literature, it has been noticed that in Jordan, insufficient studies were conducted on students' refusal speech act and pragmatic competence level as perceived and assessed by their lecturers in online classes, which constitutes a gap in this field.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative method to collect the required data to meet the research objectives. Quantitative research allows researchers to familiarize themselves with the problem or the concept to be studied and perhaps generate hypotheses to be tested [29].

3.1. Study Design

3.1.1. Survey Questionnaire

Questionnaires were "any written devices that present respondents with several questions or statements to which they are to respond either by writing out their response or choosing from among given answers" [30]. Since questionnaires are key instruments for data collection in quantitative research, they allow researchers to collect a general overview from respondents on a broad range [31]. This study selected the survey questionnaire due to its cost savings, time efficacy, and standard answers whereby all the respondents answer the same questions. Questionnaires have been utilized in previous studies to examine teachers' attitudes towards pragmatics and teaching pragmatics by teachers [12]. An online survey of 100 students was conducted to explore and portray adequately the pragmatic competence and practice of the refusal speech act among EFLU students learning online. The study particularly tried to examine if students' pragmatic competence had been affected by the sudden shift from conventional face-to-face classes to online-based education. The COVID-19 pandemic offered the perfect window of oppor-

tunity for the study to be conducted. The questionnaire was made on Google Forms in an easy and convenient manner to complete by lecturers because of the pandemic limitation of no face-to-face contact. As Kusevska et al. (2015) pointed out, the responses will be assessed based on the proper use of the refusal speech act, the typicality of the expressions, the politeness, the appropriateness of the given amount of Speech and information, the level of formality, and the directness[32].

To achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers composed 13 paragraphs as a questionnaire to be answered by Language lecturers who delivered online classes on e-learning platforms during the Coronavirus pandemic. The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies and related literature. The paragraphs were composed of a five-way gradient: (I strongly agree = 5, I agree = 4, neutral = 3, I disagree = 2, I strongly disagree = 1).

3.1.2. Validity and Reliability

A group of English language learning and teaching experts guaranteed the validity of the questionnaire. Three professors reviewed it: the first, a professor of linguistics at the Department of English at The Hashemite University in Jordan; the second, a TESOL specialist and associate professor at the Department of English in the WISE; the third, also an associate professor at the Department of English in the WISE, specializing in linguistics. The reviewers evaluated the content for appropriateness, relevance, and correctness. In addition, the researchers sought their supervisor's advice, an expert in this field, who provided valuable comments concerning the questionnaire's validity and reliability. It was reviewed and approved before being administered to the study participants.

The questionnaire was applied electronically to a non-sample survey of four instructors at Tafilah Technical University. Cronbach's test was used to test the stability of the questionnaire with a 0.71 rate.

3.1.3. Population and Location of the Study

The study population consists of ten English language lecturers who teach courses via Microsoft Teams application to about 300 Jordanian EFL Undergraduates at the WISE in Amman, Jordan. **Table 1** presents the characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1 demonstrates that 70.0% of the lecturers are

male and 30.0% are female. Regarding their English teaching experience, 60% have over 15 years of experience, 10% have under 10 to 15 years, and 20% have under 5 to 10 years. Only 10.0% have less than 5 years of experience.

Table 1. Demographic data of the study participants (N = 10).

Demographic Variables		Count	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	7	70
	Female	3	30
Teaching English	Less than 5 years	1	10
	5–10 years	2	20
	10–15 years	1	10
	More than15 years	6	60
Award	Bachelor	0	0
	Master	2	20
	Ph.D.	8	80
Overseas English	Yes	4	40
	No	6	60
Pragmatic knowledge	Yes	10	100
	No	0	0

Furthermore, the majority of the participants hold Ph.D. degrees (80%), while 20% have M.A. degrees. As for overseas English learning, 40% of the participants answered "No." On the other hand, all of the participants had taken courses in pragmatics. The demographic data of the participants in the study is presented in **Figure 1**.
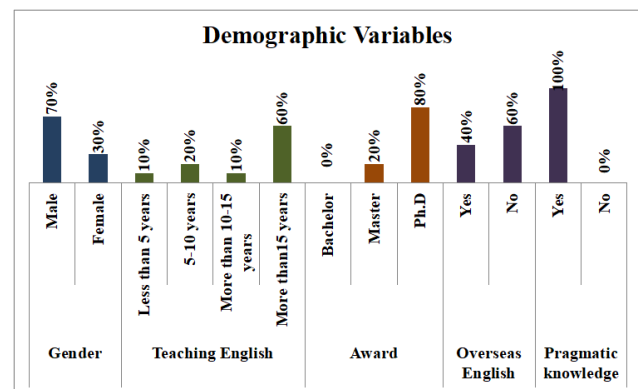

Figure 1. Demographic data of the study participants.

3.1.4. Statistical Analysis

To address the research questions, data were arranged and entered into the statistical program (SPSS v25) for analysis after coding the responses. Descriptive statistics were utilized to calculate arithmetic averages and standard deviations. Five-step categories have also been changed to three-step categories by utilizing (5-1) = 4, and 4/3 = 1.33. This value was used to quantify the phrase's length and classified

as follows: 2.33 (Low), 2.34–3.67 (Average), and 3.68–5.00 (High).

The demographic profile indicates that most participants (70%) were male, with female participants accounting for 30%. The majority (60%) had over 15 years of teaching experience, while the remainder had varying levels: 10% with less than 5 years, 20% with 5 to 10 years, and 10% with 10 to 15 years. This means that most of the respondents were highly experienced. Additionally, 80% of participants hold Ph.D. degrees, and 20% hold M.A. degrees. The absence of Bachelor's degree holders further emphasizes the participants' advanced academic credentials.

As for overseas English learning, 40% of the participants reported overseas experience, and 60% reported no experience abroad, so most of the teachers' experience with English would likely have been in regional or national environments. Nevertheless, all subjects (100%) claimed pragmatic knowledge, meaning they were adequately equipped to prove students' pragmatic competence, particularly in refusal speech acts. This combination of theoretical background and practical experience renders their assessment of students' pragmatic performance in virtual learning contexts more credible. Nevertheless, the gender imbalance and restricted international experience of most participants may affect the perspective offered in the study.

4. Results

The results were analyzed and presented in light of the study questions' sequence. For the analysis of this questionnaire, the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the study area were calculated. The results for question one, "How does the pragmatic knowledge reflect the degree of familiarity, politeness, power and the level of directness in the utterances of Jordanian Undergraduates of EFL when they perceive and produce refusal speech act during the online class? " were presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2 illustrates "arithmetic averages and standard deviations about the perceptions of the lecturers of how pragmatic knowledge reflects the degree of familiarity, politeness, power and the level of directness in undergraduates refusals during the online classes, "in which the fifth paragraph," The refusal speech act produced by the female students contains more politeness markers like "please" or "excuse me.."

achieved (3.200) with a standard deviation of (1.169). This result indicates that the lecturers' level of perception was in the middle of this paragraph.

The first paragraph, "During online classes, the learners understand the language as intended by the speaker," achieved the lowest arithmetic average of (1.700), with a standard deviation of (0.674). That is to say that the lecturers' perception of this paragraph was indicated as low. The general average of these paragraphs was average, which indicates that the student's level was low according to their lecturers' perception, with an average of (2.300) arithmetic value.

The results of question two, "How is the pragmatic competence of Jordanian Undergraduates of EFL affected by the rapid change from the conventional classes to the online classes as perceived and assessed by the lecturers?" are illustrated in **Table 3**.

Table 3 shows "how the pragmatic competence of the undergraduates was affected by the rapid change from the conventional classes to the online classes as perceived by the lecturers." The fourth paragraph, "Students realize the levels of social distance and psychological distance (how distant or close the speaker and the listener feel to each other)," achieved the highest arithmetic mean of (2.500) and standard deviation of (0.849) and a low estimate according to the lecturers' perception. In the seventh paragraph, "The student's intention is not communicated clearly; e.g., The student said, "Could you borrow a webcam?" Not clear what he meant." achieved the lowest arithmetic mean of (1.700) and standard deviation of (1.159). The lecturers' overall perception of their students' pragmatic competence level was low, with an arithmetic mean of 2.171 and a standard deviation of 0.465. This indicates that the rapid change from conventional to online classes negatively affected the students' pragmatic competence level regarding refusal perception and production as perceived by the lecturers.

5. Discussion of Findings

The current research focused on examining the effect of online learning on the pragmatic competence of Jordanian EFLU students in producing refusal speech acts based on their instructors' perceptions. The results clearly respond to the research questions and show that online-based learning

Table 2. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations about the perceptions of the lecturers of how pragmatic knowledge reflects the degree of familiarity, politeness, power, and the level of directness in undergraduates' refusals during the online classes.

Paragraph	Mean	Std. Deviation
During online classes, the learners understand the language as intended by the speaker.	1.7000	0.67495
Learners' handling of the cultural reasoning or ideologies behind the L2 pragmatic norms or foreign setting, i.e., learners adopt target culture ideologies (if this is their intent)	1.9000	0.73786
Students realize the relative social status and power of the speaker/writer and the listener/reader when communicating during online classes.	2.5000	1.26930
Students use direct strategies to refuse a demand, a suggestion or an offer (e.g., when you ask them to do a home assignment, they refuse directly by saying no we don't.	1.8000	0.42164
The refusal speech act produced by the female students contains more politeness markers like "please" or "excuse me".	3.2000	1.61933
The refusal speech act produced by the male students contains more politeness markers like "please" or "excuse me".	2.7000	0.67495
Refusal_Q1	**2.3000**	**0.37515**

environments significantly influence students' performance in using refusals appropriately in English. More specifically, the study finds that students struggle with the pragmatic aspects of refusals, particularly in interpreting the implied meaning in speech acts, recognizing social relations of power, and noting appropriate politeness and formality. These are consistent with current research (e.g., that conducted by Al-Issa in 2021 and Taguchi in 2015), emphasizing that pragmatic competence is context-dependent and requires the acquisition of social interaction [28, 33]. However, the results are based on previous research that highlights the specific challenges online learning poses in developing pragmatic competence, particularly for Jordanian university students.

One of the significant findings of this study is that online learning has resulted in pragmatic failures, which have led students to fail to understand the intended meaning of refusals and be unable to detect the underlying cultural and social reasoning behind refusal strategies. The quantitative results show that students scored low in their ability to realize the relative social status and power dynamics in online communication, which affected their pragmatic appropriateness. This result is supported by several studies that have confirmed social context in pragmatic competence development. However, unlike the research findings reporting students developing pragmatic awareness through increased exposure to digital communication, this study reports a need for explicit pragmatic strategy instruction in Jordanian EFL learners to make up for the inadequacy in online learning

of face-to-face interaction [34]. This supports the argument that pragmatic competence does not develop naturally online unless explicitly taught [35].

The other crucial thing concerning the results is the gender variations in refusal strategies. The results indicate that female students employ more politeness markers such as "please" and "excuse me" in their refusals than male students, who are more direct. This corroborates the findings of previous research such as that by Holmes and Mills, which reveal that women speakers employ more politeness strategies than men in most social situations [36, 37]. However, the overall decrease in formality and politeness in the refusal acts of the students shows that online learning has contributed to undermining pragmatic sensitivity, possibly due to a lack of immediate non-verbal feedback and formality inherent in electronic communication. The finding is significant as it underlines the need to reinforce pragmatic awareness in online communication, where formal and informal speech boundaries are liable to be blurred.

The study also provides insight into the implications of the shift from face-to-face to online learning. The results indicate that the ability of students to produce proper refusal speech acts was diminished in the online context. Unlike traditional classroom contexts, where there is more potential for immediate social interaction, online learning limits exposure to natural speech interaction, reducing the potential to practice and enhance pragmatic competence. This supports previous studies that have established the limitations

Table 3. How the pragmatic competence of the undergraduates was affected by the rapid change from the conventional classes to the online classes as perceived by the lecturers.

Paragraph	Mean	Std. Deviation
The students' language conveys their intention during online classes.	2.3000	1.05935
Students choose and produce appropriate Speech acts strategies taking in consideration the level of politeness, formality, and directness.	1.9000	0.56765
The refusal speech act is produced more frequently during online classes when compared to face-to-face classes.	2.4000	1.26491
Students realize the levels of social distance and psychological distance (how distant or close the speaker and the listener feel to each other).	2.5000	0.84984
During online classes, students realize social power and distance to select direct or indirect strategies to refuse a demand or a suggestion or an offer (e.g., when you ask them to join an extra online class tomorrow, they refuse directly by saying no.	2.3000	1.05935
During online classes, the amount of Speech produced by the students is appropriate, e.g., "Saying 'excuse me' is overdone."	2.1000	0.87560
The student's intention is not communicated clearly e.g., The student said "Could you borrow a web cam?" Not clear what he meant.	1.7000	1.15950
Refusal_Q2	**2.1714**	**0.46560**

of online learning on the acquisition of pragmatic competence[38]. Furthermore, the fact that the students were unable to differentiate between social and psychological distance shows that the absence of face-to-face interaction in online communication makes it difficult for them to feel the degree of directness and politeness to employ when rejecting suggestions or requests.

5.1. Implications of the Study

This study has far-reaching implications for the teaching of EFL, particularly in online environments. Given that pragmatic competence is crucial to effective communication, there is a need for explicit pragmatic instruction in online English classes. Teachers must incorporate explicit refusal strategy instruction, emphasizing the exercise of social power, politeness, and indirectness as variables that influence good communication. Role-playing and simulated conversations must be integrated into online learning to allow learners to develop pragmatic skills in a controlled environment. In addition, exposing students to actual refusal interactions through video content, online discussions, and virtual communication with native or competent English speakers would further enhance their pragmatic sensitivity.

Furthermore, language instructors should consider developing test instruments to examine learners' pragmatic competence in online settings. Because pragmatic breakdown is most likely to cause communication failure, language testing should incorporate learners' speech act ability as a critical component. Providing learners with useful feedback on how to enhance refusal tactics would help increase pragmatic competence in learners in the long term.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Despite this study's significant findings, a few limitations must be highlighted. Firstly, the study relied on instructors' assessments of students' pragmatic competence rather than on analyzing the students' actual speech productions in authentic online communication. Future research might utilize a more integrated strategy by collecting data from students' recorded conversations or DCTs to assess their refusal strategies more intensively.

Second, the sample was limited to a single university in Jordan, which may restrict the applicability of the findings. Future studies must investigate students from multiple educational institutions and cultural backgrounds to paint a more accurate picture of the impact of online learning on pragmatic competence. Additional research could also examine the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions, e.g., pragmatics-focused online training courses, in increasing students' refusal strategies.

Lastly, the research only looked at refusals as a speech act, yet other pragmatic features, including requests, apologies, and compliments, also need to be investigated to develop a better picture of the impact of online learning on various areas of pragmatic ability. Future studies might explore how various forms of online communication (e.g., synchronous vs. asynchronous instruction) affect students' use of different speech acts appropriately.

6. Conclusions

This paper explores and obtains an accurate description of the pragmatic competence and practices of the refusal speech act among EFLUs who joined online classes and also finds whether their pragmatic competence was affected by the rapid change from face-to-face classes to online classes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as perceived by their lecturers at the WISE. The results indicated that the pragmatic knowledge regarding refusal speech act production and perception that includes the degree of familiarity, power, and the level of directness and politeness was generally low in the utterances of EFL Jordanian Undergraduates during the online class as was perceived by their lecturers. The results also showed that the lecturers believed that the pragmatic competence of their students was negatively affected by the rapid change from conventional classes to online classes since the students could not produce or perceive refusal speech acts effectively.

This study was conducted to provide feedback for various parties, significantly higher education policymakers, when assessing a decision and designing and developing online courses. It also considers the sensitivity of teaching and learning, not only the refusal of speech acts but all speech acts in general.

This research recommends that higher education policymakers consider the sensitivity of teaching and learning not only refusal speech acts but all speech acts in general when assessing a decision and designing and developing online courses.

This study covers only the refusal speech act in one university in Amman (the capital city). Future research should cover other speech acts, such as apologies, in other universities, especially in the south of Jordan, such as Tafilah Technical University. Collecting authentic spoken data as an indication of the student's pragmatic competence, especially in a university in the southern part of Jordan, is also recommended as it constitutes a research gap in an uncovered area.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Informed Consent Statement

Data Availability Statement

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Conflict of Interest

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