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Enhancing Saudi Female EFL Learners' Complaint Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of explicit instruction on the development of appropriate complaint strategies among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Specifically, it focused on students' ability to produce both direct and indirect complaints in various social and academic contexts. Given the importance of pragmatic competence in effective communication, the study aimed to determine whether explicit instruction could enhance learners' ability to formulate complaints that align with sociocultural norms in English. A true-experimental design was employed, involving 70 university students at the B2 CEFR level, randomly assigned to either an experimental or a control group. A Computer-Animated Production Task (CAPT) was used as a pre-test and post-test to measure differences in complaint production between the groups. Data were collected through a production task designed to assess students' ability to generate pragmatically appropriate complaints. The effectiveness of explicit instruction was measured immediately after the intervention. The findings revealed that students in the experimental group significantly improved their ability to produce appropriate complaint strategies, outperforming the control group in the post-test assessment. These results underscore the effectiveness of explicit instruction in fostering pragmatic competence among EFL learners, reinforcing the need for incorporating pragmatic instruction into language curricula.

Keywords: Appropriate Complaint Choices; Explicit Instruction; Pragmatics; CAPT; EFL

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1. Introduction

Through my experience, I have come to believe that appropriacy is more important than accuracy in language learning. Many non-native speakers reach a plateau in their acquisition process, where they cease to acquire additional linguistic forms. Instead of focusing solely on expanding their linguistic repertoire especially with forms they may never use it is crucial to help them develop pragmatic competence, ensuring their language use is appropriate in real-life contexts.

Traditional EFL teaching materials often prioritize a lexico-grammatical approach, emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, direct meanings, and serious topics like environmental issues. However, there is a tendency to overlook the socio-pragmatic aspects of communication in the ways in which speakers engage in casual conversations, express dissatisfaction, or lodge complaints in socially appropriate ways. According to[1], developing pragmatic competence is a long process, but explicit instruction on appropriate language use can significantly reduce the time required to attain it.

Pragmatic errors can have a greater negative impact than grammatical mistakes. While grammatical errors may signal that a learner lacks proficiency, pragmatic failures can affect how they are perceived as individuals[2]. Ref.[3] further emphasized that research shows native English speakers view L2 learners' pragmatic failures as more undesirable than linguistic errors. In particular, inappropriate complaint strategies may cause unintended offense, disrupt communication, or lead to misunderstandings in social and professional settings.

This study focuses on developing appropriate complaint strategies among Saudi EFL learners. In many Saudi classrooms, the emphasis is primarily on grammar, translation, and direct language, often at the expense of pragmatic competence. While these skills are undoubtedly valuable, raising learners' awareness of pragmatics through explicit instruction can help them make appropriate spoken choices, particularly when formulating complaints in various contexts.

Research Question:

How effective is explicit instruction in the short-term development of pragmatically appropriate complaint strategies among Saudi female EFL learners at the CEFR B2 level in a Saudi higher education institution within a non-English-speaking environment?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately within social and linguistic contexts[4]. It involves understanding both the literal meaning of an utterance and the speaker's intended meaning, which may extend beyond surface-level words[5]. As a key component of communicative proficiency, pragmatic competence is essential in second language acquisition, particularly in mastering speech acts such as complaints[6].

Pragmatic competence consists of two interrelated components:

- **Sociopragmatic knowledge**, which involves understanding cultural norms, social conventions, and contextual appropriateness[7].
- **Pragmalinguistic knowledge**, which refers to the linguistic resources used to perform speech acts, such as modals, hedging devices, and politeness markers[8].

A lack of balance between these components often results in pragmatic failure, where learners produce grammatically correct but socially inappropriate utterances[9]. Given the significance of complaints in daily communication, it is crucial to develop both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence to ensure effective language use.

2.2. Developing Appropriate Complaint Strategies

Complaints are illocutionary acts in which a speaker expresses dissatisfaction with a past or present situation[10]. They are inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs)[11] as they challenge the hearer's positive face, their desire to be accepted and valued. To mitigate this, speakers adjust their level of directness, typically using:

1. **Direct complaints**: Explicitly expressing dissatisfaction (e.g., "This meal is cold. I want a replacement.").

2. **Indirect complaints:** Implying dissatisfaction more subtly (e.g., "This meal doesn't seem very warm. Is there a way to heat it up?").

Research on speech acts[12, 13] and politeness strategies[14, 15] has classified complaint strategies based on

their directness and mitigation features, emphasizing their role in effective intercultural communication. However, prior research on Saudi EFL learners' complaint formulation suggests that these learners frequently rely on direct complaint strategies, often transferring patterns from their first language (L1), which can lead to pragmatic failures in L2 communication [16]. This reliance on direct complaints, rather than employing mitigated or indirect strategies, highlights the necessity of explicit instruction to help learners develop more appropriate and socioculturally aligned complaint strategies in English.

2.3. Explicit Pragmatic Instruction

Explicit instruction plays a vital role in developing pragmatic competence, as learners who receive direct teaching of speech acts perform better than those who learn implicitly [17]. In the context of complaints, explicit instruction helps learners understand both social appropriateness and linguistic realization of complaints.

Pragmatic input in EFL classrooms is often insufficient, as textbooks rarely present language in authentic, contextualized ways [18]. To bridge this gap, instruction should focus on:

1. **Providing authentic input** through real-world interactions.

2. **Raising metapragmatic awareness** of complaint strategies.

3. **Creating practice opportunities** through role-plays and reflective exercises.

Studies suggest that explicit instruction, combined with corrective feedback, enhances learners' ability to adapt to social norms and use pragmatically appropriate speech acts [19, 20].

2.4. Research on Pragmatic Instruction

Empirical studies highlight the effectiveness of explicit instruction in teaching pragmatic strategies. Ref. [21] found that direct teaching improved learners' ability to use indirect strategies, reinforcing the importance of structured instruction. Similarly, ref. [22] demonstrated that explicit teaching of English speech acts enhanced both grammatical accuracy and sociocultural awareness among Pakistani ESL learners.

2.5. Pragmatic Instruction in the Saudi EFL Context

Several studies emphasize the need for explicit pragmatic instruction in Saudi EFL settings [1, 23–25]. Ref. [1] showed that teaching the appropriate way of forming requests explicitly improved Saudi learners' ability to formulate pragmatically appropriate speech acts. However, limited research has explored explicit instruction in complaint strategies, leaving a significant gap in the literature.

2.6. Addressing Research Gaps

To overcome limitations in prior research, this study:

1. Uses an experimental design with control and experimental groups to isolate the effects of explicit instruction.

2. Incorporates pre-tests and post-tests to assess short-term development.

3. Focuses on B2-level learners, addressing a gap in prior Saudi-based studies that primarily examined lower proficiency levels.

Innovative Approach: CAPT in Pragmatic Research

This study is the first in the Saudi EFL context to employ Computer-Animated Production Task (CAPT) for teaching and assessing complaints. CAPT provides interactive, role-play-based assessment, offering a realistic and controlled environment for evaluating pragmatic competence. By integrating technology into pragmatic instruction, this study introduces a novel methodological approach that could shape future research in second language pragmatics.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

This study investigates the impact of explicit instruction on developing Saudi EFL learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate complaint strategies. It explores how learners' complaint strategies are influenced by form-function relationships, situational context, and interlocutor status [4]. A classroom-based, quantitative research design, experimental design was employed to assess the effectiveness of instruction in enhancing pragmatic competence.

Classroom-Based Research Approach

As a classroom-based study, this research was conducted within an instructional environment where pragmatic awareness was explicitly taught. Classroom research is particularly relevant in EFL contexts where exposure to authentic language use is limited [6]. According to [26], this approach provides valuable insights into teaching and learning processes, making it an effective method for investigating pragmatic development.

3.2. Quantitative Research Design

This study employed a quantitative experimental design to measure the short-term impact of explicit instruction on Saudi EFL learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate complaint strategies. The research focused on pre-test and post-test assessments to evaluate instructional effectiveness. As outlined in **Table 1**, the study's framework includes the use of an experimental group that received 10 hours of explicit instruction, while a control group received none. Pre-test and post-test assessments were used to evaluate learners' complaint production, and data were analyzed using SPSS to measure instructional effectiveness. This design ensures objective measurement of learners' progress, providing empirical evidence on the role of explicit instruction in pragmatic competence development.

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3.3. Experimental Research Design

This study employed a true experimental design to measure the short-term impact of explicit instruction on Saudi EFL learners' complaint strategies. Following [27, 28], the research adhered to key principles of experimental studies:

- Use of experimental and control groups.
- Random assignment of participants.
- Pre-test and post-test to assess the effect of instruction.
- Controlled intervention with explicit instruction as the independent variable.
- Measures to isolate external factors, ensuring internal validity.

The study prioritized quantitative data, as it aligned directly with the research objectives, providing measurable evidence of instructional effectiveness in a short-term framework.

3.4. Participant Groups and Testing Procedure

Bulleted The study involved 70 Saudi female undergraduate students, randomly assigned to two groups:

Experimental Group (n = 35): Received explicit instruction on pragmatically appropriate complaint strategies.

Control Group (n = 35): Received no explicit instruction in pragmatics.

Both groups completed pre-test and post-test assessments to evaluate short-term learning outcomes.

Rationale for the Experimental Design

This study employed a quantitative experimental design to assess the impact of explicit instruction on pragmatic competence. A classroom-based approach was chosen to ensure the instruction was delivered in an authentic learning environment [29], allowing direct application to EFL teaching practices.

The experimental design included:

- A control group to isolate the effects of explicit instruction.
- Pre-test and post-test assessments to measure short-term gains in complaint strategy use.
- A structured comparison of two groups at the same proficiency level to ensure validity.

This design enabled a clear evaluation of instructional effectiveness, demonstrating whether explicit teaching significantly enhances learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate complaints.

3.5. Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was the Computer-Animated Production Task (CAPT), an interactive virtual role-play tool introduced by [30]. CAPT simulates real-life interactions through animated scenarios, incorporating both verbal and non-verbal cues. Participants' responses were digitally recorded for analysis.

Implementation of CAPT

CAPT was used as both:

- An Assessment Tool: Facilitating pre-test and post-test evaluations.
- A Simulation Environment: Providing realistic com-

Table 1. Outlines the study's framework.

Condition	Procedure	Outcomes
Experimental Approach	The experimental group received 10 hours of explicit instruction in complaint strategies, while the control group received none.	Measuring the impact of instruction on pragmatic competence.
Data Collection	Pre-test and post-test assessing complaint production.	Numeric data collected through test scores.
Data Analysis	Statistical analysis using SPSS to compare pre-test and post-test results.	Measuring short-term instructional effectiveness.

plaint scenarios to assess learners' pragmatic competence.

Scenarios in CAPT

The study featured six simulated scenarios, representing academic and social situations where participants had to formulate complaints. Each scenario involved an interlocutor of varying social distance and power status, requiring appropriate pragmatic adaptation.

Adaptation of the Instrument

CAPT was modernized using animated video clips, following[30] methodology, ensuring a more engaging and realistic assessment compared to traditional Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs).

Rationale for Using CAPT

The Computer-Animated Production Task (CAPT) was chosen as the primary assessment instrument due to its ability to provide semi-authentic role-play scenarios, simulating real-life complaint interactions. Unlike traditional Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), CAPT captures spontaneous spoken responses, ensuring a more realistic assessment of pragmatic competence in complaint strategies.

Justification for CAPT Over Traditional Methods

- **Authentic Role-Play for Realism**
  CAPT presents interactive complaint scenarios, allowing learners to practice making contextually appropriate complaints in real-life situations.
  In this study, learners were required to ask students to stop eating in the classroom and inform a graduate that her outfit was inappropriate for the ceremony, both of which require strategic pragmatic adaptation based on social context and power dynamics.
- **Contextual Relevance**
  The scenarios were designed to align with Saudi EFL learners' academic and social experiences, ensuring

that cultural and linguistic appropriateness were maintained.
The complaint situations were tailored to reflect real-life challenges students may face in professional and social settings.

- **Integration of Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues**
  CAPT incorporates facial expressions, body language, and intonation, helping learners interpret and respond to pragmatic cues more naturally.
  This multimodal approach enhances learners' awareness of polite and effective complaint strategies.
- **Technological and Practical Advantages**
  CAPT's digital format allows for flexibility in different learning environments, including classroom-based and remote instruction.
- **Overcoming Limitations of Written DCTs**
  CAPT records spontaneous speech, avoiding the unnatural structure of written responses, leading to a more accurate measurement of pragmatic competence in complaint strategies.
  This approach ensures a quantitative, controlled, and objective assessment of short-term instructional effects, aligning with the pre-test and post-test methodology.

In the following **Figures 1** and **2**, you can see examples of two complaint scenarios used in this study:

1. **Complaining About Students Eating in the Classroom:** A scenario where the participant must express dissatisfaction and request that students stop eating during a lecture, as it disrupts the classroom environment and violates established rules.

2. **Complaining About a Graduate's Inappropriate Attire for the Ceremony:** A situation where the participant must voice concern and tactfully address the graduate's

unsuitable outfit, highlighting its inappropriateness for the formality of the event.
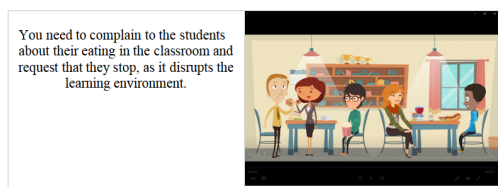

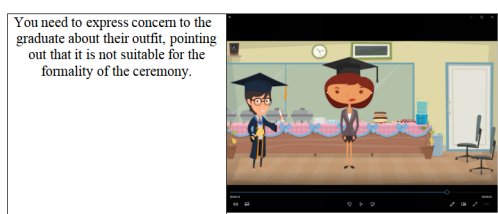**Figure 1.** Depicts Scene 1 ("Complaining About Students Eating in the Classroom") from the production task.

Figure 2. Illustrates Scene 3 ("Complaining About a Graduate's Inappropriate Attire for the Ceremony"). [1] https://www.animaker.com/.

These scenarios illustrate the type of pragmatic challenges learners encounter, emphasizing the importance of context-appropriate language use in complaint strategies.

3.6. Participants

This study involved 70 Saudi female EFL learners at the CEFR B2 level, randomly assigned to:

- **Experimental Group (n = 35)**: Received 10 hours of explicit instruction on complaint strategies over five consecutive days (two hours per day) before the post-test.
- **Control Group (n = 35)**: Received no explicit instruction.

Demographic and Linguistic Background

- **Age Range**: 19–23 years (M = 21, SD = 2.82).
- **Language Background:** Native Arabic speakers with 6–9 years of English learning experience (M = 7.5, SD = 2.12).
- **Academic Status**: First-year university students in the English Department at a Saudi university.
- **Study Abroad Experience**: None.

Study Conditions and Sampling

Participants completed pre-tests and post-tests, with the experimental group receiving explicit pragmatic instruction on complaints. The study followed purposive sampling [31], ensuring homogeneous participant characteristics to control for external variability.

This design allowed for a controlled comparison between groups, ensuring that any performance differences could be attributed specifically to explicit instruction rather than external factors.

3.7. Data Collection Procedures

This study followed two key data collection phases: instruction and testing.

Instruction Phase

The experimental group received 10 hours of explicit instruction on complaint strategies over five consecutive days (two hours per day). Instruction focused on enhancing learners' ability to produce pragmatically appropriate complaints in various social contexts.

The intervention was designed based on [32], demonstrating that short-term, focused instruction can lead to measurable improvements in pragmatic competence. Instructional materials were standardized to ensure consistency and control over content delivery.

Testing Phase

This study assessed the short-term impact of explicit instruction on complaint strategies using the Computer-Animated Production Task (CAPT). Both the experimental and control groups completed identical tests, with no instructional intervention for the control group. Test Design and Implementation

To measure pragmatic competence, participants completed:

- **Pre-Test** – Administered before instruction to establish a baseline.
- **Post-Test** – Conducted immediately after instruction to assess short-term learning gains.

This quantitative assessment provided objective data on the effectiveness of explicit instruction in enhancing learners' complaint strategies within a controlled experimental framework.

Consistency and Test Administration

To ensure consistent and objective assessment of complaint strategies, the same CAPT-based test was administered during both the pre-test and post-test phases for both groups.

•The CAPT video scenarios remained unchanged, but video clip order was randomized to prevent memorization.

•The pre-test and post-test comparison measured short-term learning gains from explicit instruction.

This structured, repeated-measures approach ensured that changes in pragmatic performance were directly attributed to the explicit instruction intervention.

3.8. Data Collection Process

1. Elicitation of Responses

- Participants watched CAPT videos featuring complaint scenarios and provided spontaneous spoken responses.
- Responses (N = 420) were electronically recorded for accuracy.

2. Evaluation by Native-Speaker Raters

- Two native English-speaking teachers assessed responses blind to group assignment for unbiased evaluation.
- Raters attended a standardization session to align on assessment criteria and scoring.

This quantitative rating process ensured an objective measurement of pragmatic competence, reinforcing the study's experimental validity.

Scoring and Data Analysis

Participants' complaint strategies were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (Shively & Cohen, 2007), measuring pragmatic appropriateness:

- **1 (Poor)** – Highly inappropriate, minimal awareness.
- **2 (Limited)** – Some awareness but lacks refinement.
- **3 (Moderate)** – Acceptable but could improve.
- **4 (Good)** – Mostly appropriate with minor flaws.
- **5 (Native-like)** – Fully appropriate, demonstrating strong pragmatic competence.

Scores were analyzed using SPSS, comparing pre-test and post-test results to measure short-term learning gains in the experimental group.

3.9. Coding Framework for Complaint Strategies

A structured coding framework was used to analyze students' complaint strategies, adapted from [14, 15, 33]. It classified responses into:

1. Direct Complaints – Explicitly stating dissatisfaction (e.g., "You must stop eating in the classroom.").

2. Indirect Complaints – Politeness strategies to soften complaints (e.g., "Would it be possible to lower the music?").

3. Hints – Implying dissatisfaction rather than stating it directly (e.g., "It's hard to concentrate with noise.").

4. Modification Strategies – Internal (softeners, politeness markers) and external (apologies, justifications) elements used to adjust complaint intensity.

This quantitative framework provided an objective, structured method for analyzing short-term improvements in pragmatic competence following explicit instruction.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Analysis of the Production Task

Data analysis confirmed a normal distribution, allowing for the application of parametric statistical tests. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences between the pre-test and post-test scores, supported by paired t-tests to measure short-term learning gains in pragmatic competence.

4.2. Raters' Reliability

Inter-rater reliability was assessed using an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) to ensure consistency in scoring:

- Pre-test: ICC = 0.73 (substantial agreement)
- Post-test: ICC = 0.82 (excellent agreement)

These values confirm the reliability and validity of the pragmatic appropriateness scores assigned to participants' responses.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics

In the below **Table 2**, you can find a summary of the descriptive statistics for the experimental and control groups across the pre-test and post-test assessments.

The experimental group demonstrated a significant increase in post-test scores compared to the control group, which remained relatively stable.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics – Native-Speaker Raters' Scores for Students' Responses.

Group	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)
Experimental Group (N = 35)	26.02 (5.03)	41.31 (4.92)
Control Group (N = 35)	29.57 (6.08)	29.97 (2.29)
Total (N = 70)	27.80 (5.82)	35.64 (6.86)

4.4. Inferential Statistical Analysis

A 2 (time) × 2 (group) repeated-measures ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant main effect of time and interaction effect between time and group ($p < 0.000$).

•Paired t-tests revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group from pre-test to post-test ($p = 0.001$).

The control group showed no significant improvement, suggesting that mere exposure to an EFL environment without explicit instruction was insufficient for pragmatic development.

4.5. Effect Size Analysis

To assess the magnitude of learning gains, Cohen's d was calculated:

•Experimental Group:

Pre-test to Post-test: d = 1.54 (large effect)

•Control Group:

Pre-test to Post Test: d = 0.69 (moderate effect)

These results demonstrate that explicit instruction produced strong initial learning gains, with some knowledge attrition over time, though learners in the experimental group still retained significantly higher scores than their baseline performance.

4.6. Visual Representation of Findings

Figure 3 illustrates the progression of mean scores across the pre-test and post-test phases:
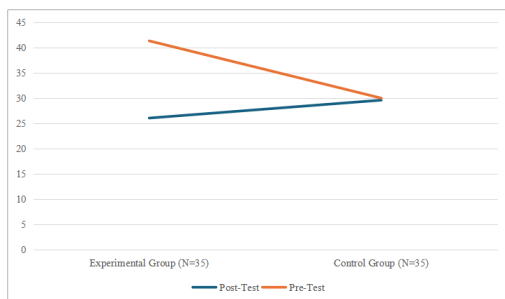

Figure 3. The differences that occurred by time passage.

•The experimental group exhibited a sharp increase in post-test performance.

•The control group remained stable, showing no meaningful improvement.

4.7. Gain Score Analysis

To further evaluate learning gains, gain scores were calculated to compare pre-test and post-test performance see **Table 3** below for further explanation.

Table 3. Gain scores

Group	Post-Test–Pre-Test M (SD)
Experimental Group (N = 35)	15.29 (10.81)
Control Group (N = 35)	0.4 (0.28)
Total (N = 70)	7.84 (5.54)

The experimental group demonstrated a substantial improvement from pre-test to post-test.

4.8. Independent Sample T-Test Results

Independent sample t-tests confirmed significant differences between the experimental and control groups:

•Pre-Test Comparison: The experimental group started with significantly lower scores than the control group ($p = 0.009$).

•Post-Test Comparison: The experimental group outperformed the control group ($p < 0.000$, large effect size, d = 3.14).

These findings confirm that explicit instruction had a strong, lasting impact on pragmatic competence in complaint strategies.

4.9. Summary and Interpretation

- The experimental group consistently outperformed the control group, confirming that explicit instruction significantly improved pragmatic competence.
- While some attrition occurred, the experimental group

retained higher scores than their pre-test baseline, indicating long-term learning effects.

- The control group did not improve, reinforcing that exposure to an EFL environment without explicit instruction is insufficient for pragmatic development.
- Effect size analysis confirmed a strong impact of explicit instruction, with large initial learning gains and moderate retention over time.

These findings suggest that explicit instruction in complaint strategies is highly effective in enhancing Saudi EFL learners' pragmatic competence. While short-term learning gains were substantial, sustaining pragmatic competence over time may require ongoing reinforcement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that explicit instruction significantly enhances pragmatic competence in complaint strategies among Saudi EFL learners. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test assessment, demonstrating the effectiveness of direct instruction in pragmatic appropriacy.

Impact of Explicit Instruction on Complaint Strategies

The experimental group demonstrated substantial improvements in their ability to formulate appropriate complaint strategies following explicit instruction. Their post-test performance showed a clear shift towards more contextually appropriate and polite complaints, incorporating politeness markers, mitigators, and indirect complaint strategies.

In contrast, the control group showed no significant improvement across testing stages, confirming that mere exposure to English in an EFL environment was insufficient for developing pragmatic competence.

Retention of Pragmatic Competence

The experimental group in the post-test scores remained significantly higher than their pre-test baseline, confirming that explicit instruction had a lasting impact.

Effectiveness of Instruction in Short-Term Learning Gains

The experimental group's improvement from pre-test to post-test supports the effectiveness of explicit instruction in rapidly enhancing pragmatic competence. The findings align with previous research [32] , demonstrating that focused,

short-term interventions can yield measurable improvements in pragmatic ability.

To summarize, the study confirms that explicit instruction leads to significant short-term learning gains in complaint strategies. While some knowledge attrition occurred over time, the experimental group retained higher scores than their baseline performance, reinforcing the long-term benefits of structured pragmatic instruction. These results highlight the importance of direct teaching interventions in EFL settings, particularly for developing contextually appropriate communication skills.

Implications for Future Research and Teaching

Explicit pragmatic instruction should be integrated into EFL curricula to enhance learners' pragmatic competence.

Future research should explore short-term interventions with extended follow-ups to assess retention of pragmatic strategies.

Further studies could examine cross-cultural pragmatic differences to improve learners' intercultural communication skills.

Final Thought

This study confirms that pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication. Explicit instruction in complaint strategies significantly enhances EFL learners' ability to produce appropriate requests, reducing pragmatic failures and facilitating cross-cultural communication.

6. Limitations

This study confirmed that explicit instruction significantly improves Saudi EFL learners' ability to produce appropriate complaint strategies. The experimental group demonstrated significant short-term learning gains, as evidenced by their post-test performance.

6.1. Key Findings

1. Explicit Instruction Enhances Pragmatic Competence

The experimental group outperformed the control group in post results, confirming the effectiveness of direct pragmatic instruction.

Participants developed greater awareness of politeness strategies, mitigators, and indirect complaints.

2. Effectiveness of Technology-Enhanced Learning

CAPT (Computer-Animated Production Tasks) proved effective in facilitating pragmatic instruction and assessment.

Technology-driven learning provided engagement, realism, and structured reinforcement in EFL classrooms.

6.2. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study had several limitations:

- Gender-Based Restriction: The study focused on female Saudi EFL learners, limiting generalizability to male learners or mixed-gender settings.
- Context-Specific Findings: Conducted in a single Saudi university, results may not be directly applicable to other educational or cultural contexts.
- Short-Term Focus: A long-term follow-up could provide deeper insights into pragmatic retention.
- Sample Size: The study included 70 participants, which, while sufficient for statistical analysis, could be expanded for broader generalizability.

6.3. Independent Recommendations for Future Research and Teaching

1. Sustained Pragmatic Instruction

Explicit pragmatic teaching should be continuously integrated into EFL curricula, rather than a one-time intervention.

Regular reinforcement through role-plays, simulations, and feedback is necessary to sustain pragmatic competence.

2. Advancing CAPT-Based Learning

Future research should explore advanced CAPT applications, such as:

AI-driven conversational agents for real-time interaction.

Virtual reality (VR) environments for immersive language practice.

3. Expanding the Scope of Research

Studies should examine pragmatic learning in male learners to compare gender-based differences.

Longitudinal research should track pragmatic development over extended periods to assess long-term retention strategies.

6.4. Independent Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of explicit instruction in developing Saudi EFL learners' pragmatic competence in complaint strategies. While short-term learning gains were strong, maintaining long-term competence requires ongoing reinforcement.

Key takeaways include:

- Explicit instruction significantly enhances pragmatic appropriacy in EFL learners.
- Technology-based learning tools like CAPT improve engagement and learning outcomes.
- Sustained reinforcement is necessary for long-term retention of pragmatic strategies.
- By integrating pragmatic instruction into EFL curricula, educators can equip learners with effective communication skills, ensuring they develop both linguistic competence and pragmatic awareness.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not commissioned, externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Informed Consent Statement

Obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

support, or donations in kind (e.g., materials used for experiments).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

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