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Investigating the Impact of Explicit and Implicit Instruction on Pragmatic Awareness and Production in Non-Native Learners: A Quasi-Experimental Research

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Abstract

A crucial part of language competency is understanding social interactions to extract pertinent semantic cues in any expression's implied meaning besides grammatical and strategic competencies (Taguchi, 2011). Teaching of pragmatics is around 40 year older concept (Chen, 2011) while it is teachable (Bardovi, 1999). The purpose of any language is communication (Locke, 1975) and avoiding face-threatening responses. Penelope (1987) elaborates on ways that are used to develop positive social interaction. Politeness theory is based on the concept of "face," which refers to a person's sense of self-esteem. Penelope's (1987) "Politeness Theory" has been used in this study as a guiding theoretical framework. A mixed method approach has been adopted for getting real insight into the matter as the development of pragmatics. The study aims to find out the better way of teaching pragmatics and the impact of implicit and explicit teaching on the pragmatic production and awareness of communicative competence (Glaser, 2009).

Keywords: Implicit Instruction, Explicit Instruction, Pragmatic Awareness, Pragmatic Production

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Investigating the Impact of Explicit and Implicit Instruction on Pragmatic Awareness and Production in Non-Native Learners: A Quasi-Experimental Research

Abstract

A crucial part of language competency is understanding social interactions to extract pertinent semantic cues in any expression's implied meaning besides grammatical and strategic competencies (Taguchi, 2011). Teaching of pragmatics is around 40 year older concept (Chen, 2011) while it is teachable (Bardovi, 1999). The purpose of any language is communication (Locke, 1975) and avoiding face-threatening responses. Penelope (1987) elaborates on ways that are used to develop positive social interaction. Politeness theory is based on the concept of "face," which refers to a person's sense of self-esteem. Penelope's (1987) "Politeness Theory" has been used in this study as a guiding theoretical framework. A mixed method approach has been adopted for getting real insight into the matter as the development of pragmatics. The study aims to find out the better way of teaching pragmatics and the impact of implicit and explicit teaching on the pragmatic production and awareness of communicative competence (Glaser, 2009).

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Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Research Objectives](#)
- [Significance of the Study](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Theoretical Framework](#)
- [Data Analysis](#)
- [Pretest Results of Pragmatic Production](#)
- [Control Group](#)
- [Post test Results of Pragmatic Production](#)
- [Control Group](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Keywords: [Implicit Instruction](#), [Explicit Instruction](#), [Pragmatic Awareness](#), [Pragmatic Production](#)

Introduction

According to Hedge (1993), pragmatics is the area of linguistics that studies the laws and regulations governing language use in a variety of situations,

including situational, social, ideological, and so on. This makes it different from other levels of the study of language. Consequently, pragmatics must be carefully included in the teaching materials in



the same manner as grammar and vocabulary. From now on, the pragmatic element must be systematically added to second language teaching materials instead of being added as an afterthought to certain exercises. Hence the instructional method is pivotal for second language learners who are even not well aware of this culturally dependent aspect of the language. There are two basic instructional methods - Implicit instruction and explicit instruction which can lead to the pragmatic development of language learners.

Implicit instruction refers to teaching methods where the learning objectives are not directly explained. Instead, students figure things out by themselves through reading books or getting exposed to some situation, etc. while students need to deduce and infer the knowledge themselves. On the other hand, explicit instruction is contradictory to implicit instruction. It is a structured and direct teaching approach where the learning objectives are clearly explained and broken down into manageable steps. Adopting implicit or explicit instruction of authentic material in teaching English particularly pragmatics makes it worthy to be researched.

Pragmatic awareness refers to the ability to understand and use language in social contexts effectively. It involves understanding the implied meanings, intentions, and social norms behind language use. This includes being aware of factors such as tone, body language, cultural differences, and context when communicating with others. In essence, pragmatic awareness helps individuals navigate and interpret the subtleties of language in various social situations. Pragmatic production refers to the ability to effectively use language in social interactions to convey intended meanings and achieve communicative goals. It involves not only linguistic competence but also the ability to adapt language use based on the context, social norms, and the needs of the interlocutors. In pragmatic production, individuals must consider various factors such as the relationship between the speakers, cultural differences, the setting of the conversation, and the goals of communication. This includes using an appropriate language register, adjusting speech based on the listener's level of understanding, and being sensitive to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language. Overall, pragmatic production is essential for

successful communication as it allows individuals to express themselves clearly, understand others' intentions, and navigate social interactions effectively. Sometimes, pragmatic awareness can be transferred into pragmatic production like grammatical competence into communicative competence but a transfer of pragmatic awareness is not a guarantee of pragmatic production, according to Mouton (2010).

Research Objectives

- To discover the impact of implicit instruction as compared to explicit instruction for the teaching of pragmatics.
- To find out the aspects of pragmatics that can be taught to second-language learners

Significance of the Study

Second language learners always focus on the grammar and phonetics of the language and even after mastering all these aspects they can be exposed to communication gaps and face the threatening attitude of their listener which owes to the unawareness about the pragmatics-cultural bound aspect of the language-. The opinions of non-native speakers (NNSs) differ frequently from those of native speakers (NSs), as has been noted (Cheng, 2010). This study can prove significant in terms of developing the pragmatic competence of second language learners to avoid embarrassing situations while communicating with the native speaker. Many teachers, students, and material developers in Non-native countries are yet combating Grammar Translation Methods and Communicative Language Teaching Methods to enhance communicative abilities and are unaware of pragmatic competence. The study will help in bringing awareness about the inevitability of pragmatics.

In addition, this study will pave the way for further investigation in the field of pragmatics its teachability, and suitable methods for its incorporation in the teaching and instructional materials.

Literature Review

Pragmatics offers “a theoretical framework that can account for the relationship between the cultural setting, the language user, the linguistic choices the

user makes, and the factors that underlie those choices,” according to Christie (2000, as cited in (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Studies highlight the need to include pragmatics in the teaching of second languages (Deda, 2013), owing to its crucial role in enhancing communicative competence. In the literature on second language (L2) pragmatics, the idea of pragmatic awareness has fully emerged. Pragmatic competence is a combination of pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production. Both are pivotal for pragmatic competence and need to be incorporated into instructional materials meticulously. It is believed that teaching may foster pragmatic awareness, deemed a necessary condition for pragmatic competence. In addition to enabling students to choose their own pragmatic aims, pragmatic awareness as an instructional goal has the benefit of empowering students to decide whether or not to pursue L2 pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017). Pragmatic production is about producing the appropriate pragmatic expression in a given situation. It is sometimes complex for a speaker because of the negotiation that a speaker needs to make in a particular setting, culture, and context. On a few occasions, pragmatic awareness can lead to accurate pragmatic production but most of the time it is not key to apt pragmatic production (Mouton, 2010). Therefore, this is research worthy to find out if the relation between them is proportional or not.

The Role of Pragmatics in Second Language Teaching by Castillo (2009) mentions one of the incidents that resulted in an embarrassing situation due to a pragmatically inappropriate response though both interlocutors were quite proficient in the language. Then Castillo decided to do research on this aspect of the language. Pragmatics deficiencies can cause humiliation, even for second language learners who are excellent in language use. Intercultural interaction differs depending on the background, the person, and the environment; skill is not a determining factor (Castillo, 2009). After conducting extensive research on the subject, a number of academics came to the conclusion that speech acts might be taught effectively. The teaching of pragmatics was a legitimate concern at the time due to the predominance of morpho-syntactic studies in instructed SLA, which inspired scholars to investigate how formal instruction could be applied to the field of socio-cultural and

sociolinguistic abilities (Taguchi, 2011). Therefore, the pedagogical implications of pragmatics can also be changed in light of the learning variables of other countries. The teaching methods and resources should also be modified in accordance with the evolving needs of students and shifting trends.

Numerous researchers contended that pragmatics is essential, however, there is disagreement among academics over how pragmatics should be offered, so it is important to look into how it is presented explicitly or implicitly in instructional materials. Learners receive comprehensive pragmatic knowledge from explicit instruction, but not from implicit instruction. The majority of intervention research conducted to date has shown, with rare exceptions, that learners who get explicit instruction do better than those who receive implicit instruction (Rose, 2005, as quoted in Chen, 2008). While Kim and Hall (2002) have entirely refuted the presentation of material in an explicit manner, Chen’s (2008) study did not entirely refute the necessity of explicit pragmatics instruction. The key components of an effective pragmatics integration strategy are exposure, motivation, and implicit teaching instructions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). The implicit or explicit presentation of real content in textbooks causes more misunderstandings and increases the value of the research. In an attempt to resolve the conflict, Cohen (2010) connected implicit material presentation to the nature of pragmatic elements as conventional and nonconventional implicature. He further explains that implicit implicature presentation occasionally fell short of capturing the interaction between language and context. The question of whether pragmatics should be taught implicitly or explicitly has been the subject of earlier research; however, this study drew upon survey research to incorporate pragmatics in a way that allows for the combination of implicit and explicit approaches for improved student understanding.

Theoretical Framework

Data from the study was collected through pretest and posttest results. 50 Students of BS Civil Engineering were divided into two equal groups of 25 each one as a control group and the other as the experimental group. All 50 students studied a few

pragmatic items during their previous class from the Textbook of Intermediate, which is a prerequisite for this level of students. The textbook of intermediate contains few speech acts implicitly (Mubasher, 2024).

In the first step, a pretest has been conducted in both groups. During the second phase, the experimental group was instructed with similar refusals, orders, and strategies of apologies explicitly and through some obvious activities like role-plays. During these role plays theory of politeness by Penelope (1987) is considered a theoretical framework for getting the response in

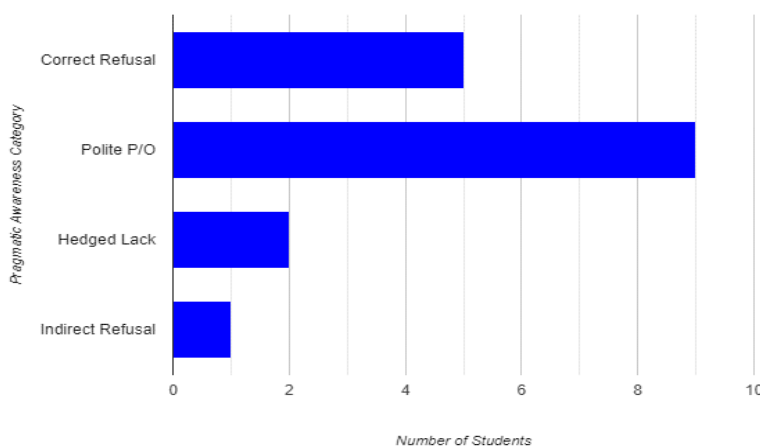
positive face or negative face. After the intervention, both groups went through a posttest and a comparison was drawn.

Data Analysis

The pretest contains three sections. The first section is a Discourse Completion Test, 2nd is MCQ which assesses pragmatic awareness, and the third is open-ended DCT to find out the results of pragmatic production. Targeted elements of pragmatics are based on the assessment of refusals, orders, and apologetic strategies.

Figure 1

Pretest Results of Pragmatic Awareness

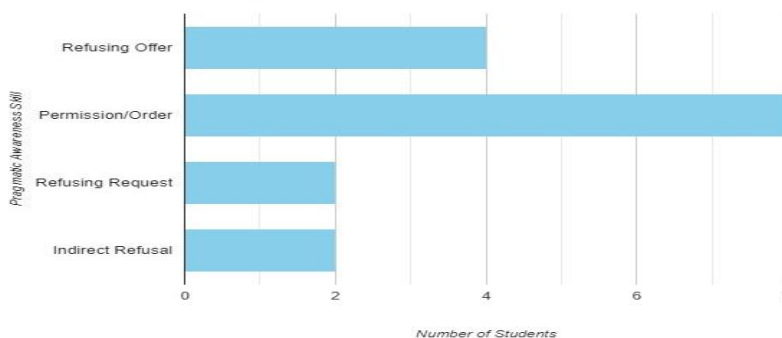


The percentage of the Pragmatic Awareness results of the 25 students is as follows:
 Correct refusal with hedger (I am rather busy) and polite reason: 20%
 Polite permission/order or apology using "please" / "thanks" and "please: 36%

Refusal using information or order (I am afraid) and explaining lack of knowledge or unavailability: 8%
 Indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature: 4%

Figure 2

Pretest result –pragmatic awareness (Experimental Group)



The percentage of the Pretest results of Pragmatic Awareness of the 25 students of the Experimental group is as follows:

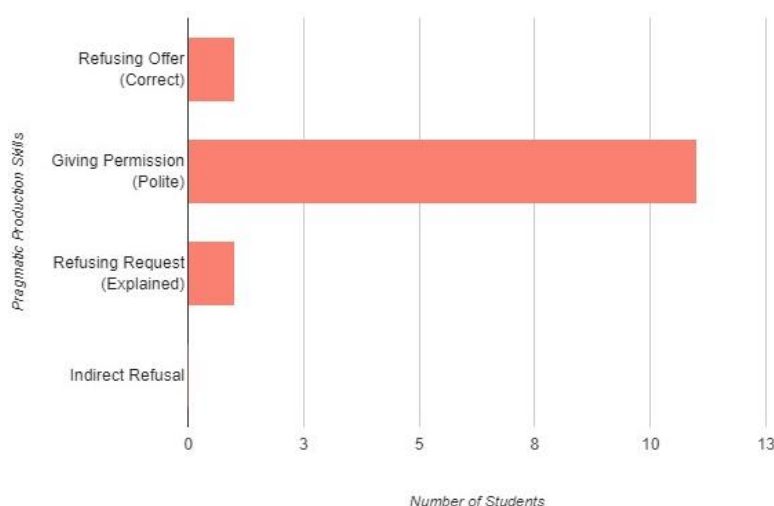
Correct refusal with hedger (I am rather busy) and polite reason: 16%
 Polite permission/order or apology using "please" /

"thanks" and "please: 32%
 Refusal using information or order (I am afraid) and explaining lack of knowledge or unavailability: 8%
 Indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature: 8%

Pretest Results of Pragmatic Production Control Group

Figure 3

Pretest results (Pragmatic production)



4% of students gave the correct answer of refusing an offer with the correct hedger "I am rather busy" and a polite reason for refusal.

44% of students gave permission or ordered politely using the speech act "please" and incorporating the use of appropriate expression.

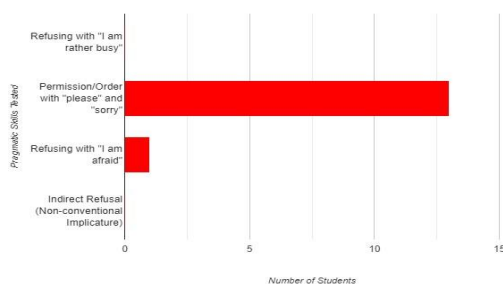
4% of students refused a request for information or order by using the hedger "I am afraid" and explaining their lack of knowledge on the topic or the unavailability of the ordered item.

0% of students find correctly indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature.

Experimental Group

Figure 4

Pretest results of pragmatic production (Experimental; Group)



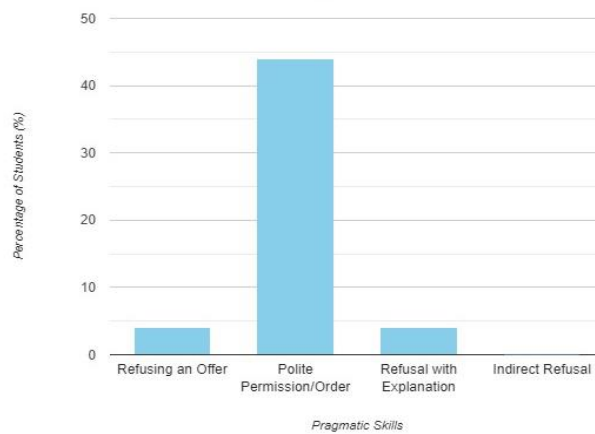
Correct refusal with hedger (I am rather busy) and polite reason: 0%
 Polite permission/order or apology using "please" / "thanks" and "please: 44%
 Refusal using information or order (I am afraid)

and explaining lack of knowledge or unavailability: 4%
 Indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature: 0%

Post-Test Results of Pragmatic Awareness: Control Group

Figure 5

Posttest results of pragmatic awareness



4% of students gave the correct answer of refusing an offer with the correct hedger "I am rather busy" and a polite reason for refusal.

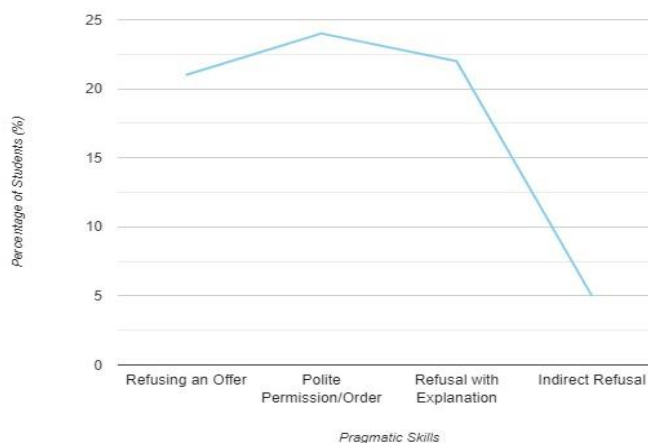
44% of students gave permission or ordered politely using the speech act "please" and incorporating the use of suitable statements.

4% of students refused a request for information or order by using the hedger "I am afraid" and explaining their lack of knowledge on the topic or the unavailability of the item ordered.

0% of students find correctly indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature.

Figure 6

Post test results of pragmatic awareness (Experimental Group)



The percentage of the Pragmatic Awareness results of the 25 students of the Experimental Group is as follows:

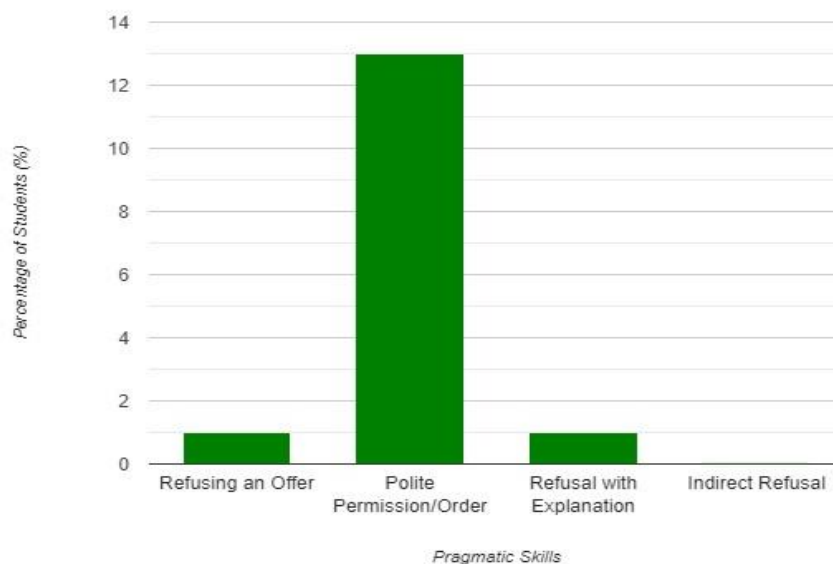
- 84% of 25 students refused an offer with the correct hedger "I am rather busy" and a polite reason for refusal.
- 96% of the 25 students gave permission or ordered politely using the speech act "please" and incorporating the use of "sorry."
- 88% of 25 students refused a request for information or an order by using the hedger "I am afraid" and explaining their lack of knowledge on the topic or the unavailability of the item ordered.
- 20% of 25 students found the indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature.

Post-test Results of Pragmatic Production: Control Group

The percentage of the Pragmatic Production results

Figure 7

Control group: pragmatic production-post test results



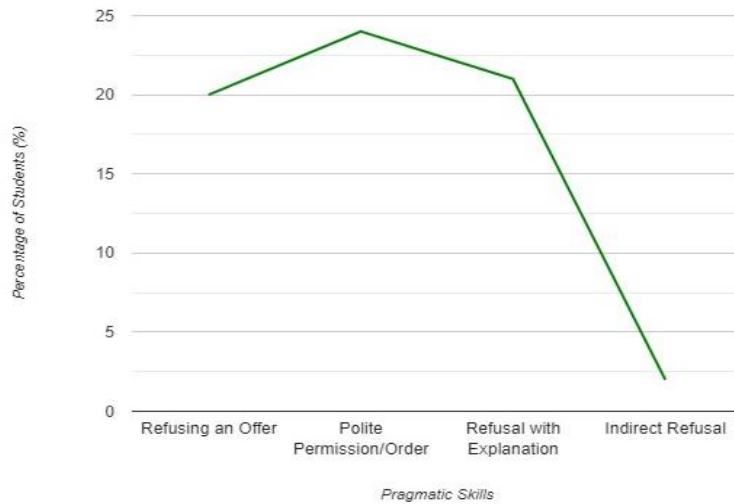
Post-test Results of Pragmatic Production: Experimental Group

of the 25 students of the Control Group is as follows:

- 4% of 25 students gave the correct answer of refusing an offer with the correct hedger "I am rather busy" and a polite reason for refusal.
- 52% of 25 students gave permission or ordered politely using the speech act "please" and incorporating the use of "sorry" with the right sentence.
- 4% of 25 students refused a request for information or order by using the hedger "I am afraid" and explaining their lack of knowledge on the topic or the unavailability of the item ordered.
- 0% of 25 students produced correctly the indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature.

Figure 8

Experimental group: Pragmatic production-post test results



- 80% of 25 students gave the correct answer of refusing an offer with the correct hedger "I am rather busy" and a polite reason for refusal.
- 96% of 25 students gave permission or ordered politely using the speech act "please" and incorporating the use of "sorry" with the right sentence.
- 84% of 25 students refused a request for information or order by using the hedger "I am afraid" and explaining their lack of knowledge on the topic or the unavailability of the item ordered.
- 8% of 25 students could partially produce the indirect refusal through non-conventional implicature.

Overall data collected from the control group and experimental group of the students shows that the students who got implicit instruction before intervention gave almost similar results for pragmatic awareness during the pretest while results of pragmatic production of both groups are also almost identical. Results of pragmatic awareness are better than pragmatic production in Pretests. The results of all other refusals are less than 20%, only orders in the form of requests and permissions have more than 30% results which contain the responses with "sorry", "please", and

"thanks". Post-test results of pragmatic awareness of the control group also follow the same trend of pretest almost in aspects but the experimental group's post-test reflects more than 80% results for conventional implicatures and the only area where students have given 20% result is related to non-conventional implicature-indirect refusal.

Pragmatic production of the students remained less than 5% in all speech acts during the pretest for both groups except the one part, which is related to speech acts with "sorry" and "please" and it got more than 40% correct responses. The control group reflects the result for pragmatic production in a similar way as both groups reflected during the pretest. Contrary to the control group, the experimental group enhanced the result in all three speech acts with more than 85% just one area which is indirect refusal by the use of non-conventional implicature remains very low at 8%. The impact of explicit instruction is quite evident in the results of pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production of the experimental group.

The highest ratio of the results can be seen in the questions related to the speech acts with "sorry" "please" and "thanks" in pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production. This result indicates that exposure to a few pragmatic items may produce positive results. Time is also a very important factor

which shows as time passed from the pretest to the post-test the maturity level of students enhanced over the period of time and it had a positive impact on the result of not only the experimental group but also on the control group as far as “sorry” and “please” speech acts are concerned.

Conclusion

Following the pragmatic activity session, a post-test using the pretest's pattern was administered. The findings demonstrated that the student's language learning had experienced pragmatic transfer. The average success percentage for the pragmatic awareness-oriented part is 84%, 96%, 88%, and 20%, which also includes the ratio of success in detecting the non-conventional implicature, which is thought to be more difficult to identify. On the other hand, 88%, 96, 84%, and 8% of pragmatic expressions are produced successfully. Intervention through explicit instructions enhances the pragmatic competency of the learners but its impact has a much better result for pragmatic awareness while there is also great improvement in pragmatic production is also discernable. Though pragmatic awareness can be the initial building block for pragmatic production its transferability is not cent percent and this finding is in line with Mutton's (2010) claim that there is no straightforward connection between pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production. These findings illustrate that pragmatics can be taught like other aspects of language which confirms the idea of Taguchi (2011) about instructing pragmatics. so, students who got explicit instruction performed far better than the students with implicit instruction and this finding proves Rose's (2005, as cited in Chen, 2008) notion of adopting explicit instruction but not negating implicit instruction completely.

The second objective is about the teachable aspects of pragmatics which explores the thought

of Bardovi (1999) that pragmatics is teachable. The teaching of conventional implicatures proves Bardovi's claim right but when it comes to the last part of indirect refusal the result could not be improved by 10% even, after implicit and explicit instruction, and this finding proves Taguchi's (2012) point:

“Meanings that are more conventionalized, regular and thus require fewer linguistic and cognitive resources are more easily processed, as long as learners can take advantage of the conventionality. In contrast, meanings that are more contexts dependent and less common or highly culture-specific are more difficult to comprehend” (p. 35).

The result of responses related to the use of “Sorry” “Thanks” and “Please” advocates the idea of exposure and conventionalized expressions which are culturally mutual and usage wise so much common due to English as Lingua Franca that they are used so frequently by any community that the language users of the community consider them part and parcel of the community's language. The results of the Pretest and post-test reflect that students made the right choices of the pragmatic expressions linked with the speech acts like “sorry” and they also produced the maximum responses correctly related to these kinds of common speech acts.

The findings of the study are self-evident that the explicit teaching of pragmatics is more effective than implicit teaching. The nature of the pragmatic element that is being imparted is also very crucial owing to its nature of being conventionalized or non-conventionalized along with other variables like exposure. As far as the teachable aspects of pragmatics are concerned, explicit teaching methods can be preferred over implicit while teaching through implicit methods cannot be completely negated.

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