

Paper Type: Original Article



The Impact of the Formal Instruction of Invitation Speech Act on the Ostensible and Genuine Pragmatic Knowledge of Iranian EFL Learners

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Received: 12 March, 2023

Revised: 29 July, 2023

Accepted: 22 November, 2023

Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the impact of formal instruction as a facilitative tool to develop the ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners with a focus on the “speech act of invitation”. The participants of this study were 60 females Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level who were divided into two different groups, control and experimental. The all went through the Interchange series which resulted in having a similar background in learning English. The participants’ level was assessed with both a pretest and a posttest in order to be homogenized considering their pragmatic knowledge in advance. The results of this study showed that the formal instruction affected the participants by giving them a higher level of proficiency in pragmatic knowledge. The findings of the study would be helpful for language teachers and curriculum developers.

Keywords: EFL learner, Formal instruction, Intermediate level, Pragmatic knowledge, Speech act of invitation.

I | INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in speaking a foreign language has become increasingly essential for effective cross-cultural communication. Successful communication depends on the effective conveying of one's intended message, a task that can be more challenging than expected. Upon visiting a given country, it is not uncommon for individuals who have dedicated significant time to learning a foreign language to discover, that they still have it hard to communicate their intentions to native speakers. Adding to the complexity, language learners may construct grammatically correct sentences that native speakers understand, but the learners may not grasp the social nuances conveyed by these sentences within the specific cultural context of the target language (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). In this research paper, the author's objective is to explore the potential of teaching pragmatics to English Language Learners (ELLs). Therefore, the null hypothesis is “Formal instruction of the speech act of invitation has no effect on the development of the ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners”. The researcher will begin by providing a clear definition of pragmatic competence. Following that, the paper will delve into the various teaching methods employed to instruct



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10.22034/jsllt.2023.19850.1011



pragmatics. Lastly, there will be an outline of the techniques designed to enhance the awareness of learners regarding pragmatic aspects.

Cultural variations in the use of speech acts pose significant challenges to non-native speakers who try to communicate in an unfamiliar cultural context where the target language is spoken (Blum et al., 1989). It highlights the importance for language learners to grasp and consider this essential aspect.

Effective communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is highly challenging. Cultures shape individuals' unique ways of thinking, perceiving, listening, and comprehending the world. Consequently, even when individuals converse in the "same" language, identical utterances can carry different meanings for those from various cultural backgrounds. When languages differ and communication depends on interpretation and translation, the chances for misunderstanding increase (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005).

Communicative or pragmatic competence refers to the skill of utilizing language effectively across diverse settings while considering the dynamics among the individuals conversing and the social and cultural backdrop of the situation (Spada & Lightbown, 1999; Gass & Selinker, 1990). Even individuals who might be deemed "fluent" in a foreign language because of their adeptness in its grammar, vocabulary, or even more intricate structures may still fall short in terms of pragmatic competence. In simpler terms, they should produce the language that conforms to the social and cultural norms of the context.

There is a growing interest in sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies, which underscore the importance of incorporating pragmatic awareness into the curriculum of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This shift from a focus solely on grammar to a more comprehensive emphasis on communicative competence in language learning has further emphasized the need for this adjustment. While the significance of pragmatic awareness in TESOL is widely acknowledged, there is limited research on the specific elements constituting such awareness (Yaqubi, 2019). To effectively grasp the rules for the appropriate use of linguistic forms, EFL learners have to possess knowledge not only of grammar but also of text organization rules and the pragmatic aspects of the target language (Bachman, 1990). Kasper (1997) defines pragmatic competence as encompassing the understanding of communicative actions, how to execute them, and the ability to use language in accordance with contextual factors. In order to teach these pragmatic components and foster competence in this area, the researcher adopted the awareness-raising model of instruction. Research into the pragmatic competence of adult foreign and second language learners has demonstrated that grammatical development does not guarantee a corresponding level of pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1997) and that even advanced learners may fail to comprehend or to convey the intended intentions and politeness values.

The responsibility for imparting knowledge about the pragmatic aspects of language use primarily lies with teachers. However, as language educators, we encounter specific challenges in fulfilling this role. One of these challenges is the scarcity of teaching materials and techniques, a deficiency that stems from the limited emphasis on pragmatic matters in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses (Eslami-Rasekh & Koutlaki, 2018).

The development of the speech act theory (pioneered by Austin in 1962 and further advanced by Searle in 1969, 1975, 1976 as well as Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975) has provided researchers with a deeper understanding of how speakers intend to effectively and appropriately perform various functions in the act of communication. This theory triggered research endeavors centered on speech events and speech acts, yielding insights that have made educators more cognizant of the intricate interplay between situational, sociolinguistic, and linguistic aspects of competence (Eslami-Rasekh & Mardani, 2010).



The acquisition of language functions, namely speech acts such as requesting, complaining, thanking, refusing, apologizing, and inviting along with their associated strategies, has emerged as a significant concern in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), especially within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach not only encompasses the traditional learning of vocabulary and grammar but also regards discourse strategies and their combinations (known as semantic formulae) as well as politeness strategies.

It is highly desirable for EFL learners to begin acquiring pragmatic strategies concurrently with their mastery of vocabulary and sentence structure. This enables them to express themselves in natural and appropriate ways in various contexts. Learning a language should not be limited to comprehension, but should also encompass the ability to use it effectively. Thus, language learning is a dynamic process that involves developing the learners' pragmatic competence and understanding of the language.

There are numerous definitions proposed for pragmatics, but one particularly useful definition comes from [Crystal \(1985\)](#). According to him, "pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially focusing on the choices they make, the constraints they encounter when using language in social interactions, and the impacts their language use has on other participants in the communication process" ([Crystal, 1985, p. 240](#)).

An existing literature indicates, explicit instruction can have positive effects on the acquisition of speech acts. Unfortunately, the teaching of speech acts as a socio-cultural skill is not given sufficient emphasis in English language institutes, high schools, and universities. Consequently, Iranian EFL learners often fail to correctly understand the functions of speech acts in English-speaking contexts ([Eslami-Rasekh, 2005](#)). Assisting them in acquiring these skills through comprehensive teaching methodologies is considered an essential component of any EFL teaching program. So far, there has been limited research conducted in Iran to explore the strategies related to speech acts.

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the formal instruction of the invitation speech act and its influence on the pragmatic knowledge of Iranian Intermediate EFL female learners. Iranian learners learn English as a foreign language and, like all other foreign language learners, need to learn English pragmatics as well. They need to understand and produce English like a native-speaker; hence the necessity of improving their pragmatic knowledge.

This study focused on invitation because it is considered essential in people's everyday life. It can sometimes even cause misunderstandings in the target context, particularly when it comes to ostensible and genuine invitations ([Eslami-Rasekh, 2005](#)). For instance, to invite a native speaker of English, the speaker can use an utterance which causes the misunderstanding of the listener and make him or her confused as what the speaker's intention may be. Therefore, the need of our learners is to cope with interactive situations in the best way they can. The outcome of this study can help language teachers use instructions to achieve a better result in terms of the invitation speech acts. It is obviously necessary for teachers to guide their students in attaining a strong grasp of pragmatic knowledge. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of readily available resources to assist educators in pursuing this objective.

In an English environment, it is important to produce those forms and structures which can transfer one's intention correctly. The main problem that learners are faced with, however, is the lack of pragmatic knowledge in a variety of contexts. It is crucial for EFL and even ESL learners to understand native speakers' intentions completely and vice versa. As mentioned earlier, most of the time, EFL and ESL learners have it difficult to transfer their intentions. It is not because of their lack of knowledge in grammar; rather, it is their poor pragmatic knowledge of that language. [Dudley-Evans & St-John \(1998\)](#) proposed the concept of teaching pragmatic meanings and highlighted the significance of imparting cultural values and attitudes as a pivotal aspect in all domains of English for Specific Purposes. Consequently, the objective of the current study was to investigate the effects of the formal instruction of speech acts on the pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners.



As of now, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there remains a notable absence of empirical research exploring the impact of formal instruction on learning speech acts and the promotion of Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by finding a response to the question "Does formal instruction of speech acts have an impact on the development of the pragmatic knowledge of Iranian intermediate female learners?"

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Speech Act of Invitation

Researchers such as [Austin \(1975\)](#), [Yule \(1996\)](#), and [Paltridge & Burton \(2000\)](#) have collectively defined the speech act of invitation as an illocutionary act. This act is employed when an inviter intends to request the invitee's presence at a specific event and is open to accepting the invitee's attendance either immediately or in the future at a designated time and location.

"I would like to invite you to a celebrity next Monday." ([Bruder & Tillitt, 1999](#)).

In his categorization of speech acts, [Searle \(1979\)](#) classifies an invitation as a directive speech act, wherein the speaker prompts the hearer to take a particular action. In this sense, invitations share similarities with requests, orders, and commands, as they all prompt the hearer to perform certain actions. However, invitations differ in that they encourage the hearer to act for their own benefit rather than for the speaker's benefit, as is the case with orders, requests, or commands. In other words, in situations involving invitations, the focus is on enhancing the hearer's well-being rather than the speaker's. [Hancher \(1979\)](#) further explains that an invitation is both directive and commissive. In invitations, speakers not only direct the invitees to perform certain actions but also commit themselves to a future action. For instance, when inviting someone to a party, the inviters not only guide the invitees to attend the social gathering but also pledge to provide what they have promised to the invitees.

[Wolfson \(1989\)](#) points out that an invitation typically includes three essential components: a specified time, a designated place, and a request for restraint. Additionally, he notes the existence of another type of invitation referred to as ambiguous invitations, where the timing is left unspecified, and modal auxiliary verbs like "must", "should", or "have to" are often used.

[Isaacs & Clark \(1990\)](#) observe that people sometimes present invitations that they do not intend to be taken seriously. According to them, such invitations are termed ostensible invitations. When making ostensible invitations, speakers typically employ specific strategies to indicate that these invitations are not meant to be taken seriously. The purpose of ostensible invitations is not to initiate genuine invitations but rather to facilitate friendly, ceremonial and interactive functions in order to maintain suitable social interactions.

2. Types of Inviting

Invitations come in various forms suitable on different occasions, leading to the categorization of invitations into two main types: direct and indirect invitations. Depending on the structure of the sentences used, direct invitations can further be divided into several types of speech acts, including declarative, imperative, performative, hopeful, and conditional speech acts. On the other hand, indirect invitations are categorized into types such as interrogative invitations (utilizing Wh-questions, Yes/No questions, and tag questions) and requests for willingness. [Amelia \(2015\)](#) notes that sentences can be categorized based on their form, falling into types such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences or orders. However, speech acts go beyond sentence structure, as expressions may not always align with the sentence type, mode, or the original function of the sentence. In such cases, they are



referred to as “indirect speech acts”; that is, a manner of expression that tends to be more polite in communication.

One other important aspect considering the speech act of invitation is its being ostensible or genuine, which was offered by [Isaacs & Clark \(1990\)](#). According to [Eslami-Rasekh \(2005\)](#), intercultural misunderstandings in American / Iranian interactions relate to their ostensible and genuine invitations.

3. Politeness and Polite Invitation

[Green \(1996\)](#) asserts that politeness serves as a means of demonstrating concern for another person by striving to maximize their comfort and minimize any discomfort they may experience. In other words, norms governing social behavior, such as showing respect, maintaining appropriate distance, building rapport and demonstrating courtesy, are influenced by politeness as a key aspect of language use. This is reflected in a set of politeness principles or maxims that individuals expect to be followed in others’ speech, as outlined by [Lakoff \(1973, p. 199\)](#). Furthermore, Green suggests two overarching principles for effective communication: (i) clarity or being obvious and (ii) courtesy. The second principle encompasses three strategies: (1) refraining from imposition, (2) offering choices or options, and (3) adopting a friendly and approachable tone. [Lakoff \(1973\)](#) also underscores the importance of delivering a message in a clear and unambiguous manner, as this is essential for successful communication, ensuring that one’s intentions are not misinterpreted. Politeness in the context of language study can be defined in two key ways: (i) as the manner in which a language conveys the social dynamics and various positional relationships between individuals in a conversation and (ii) as the practice of face-work, which involves the efforts made to establish, maintain, and safeguard one’s social identity or “face” during verbal interactions within a speech community ([Richard et al., 2010](#)).

In English, politeness is exemplified by individuals who exhibit courteous behavior, possess good manners, and communicate in a manner that conforms with socially accepted norms and does not come across as rude or offensive to others. Politeness strategies have garnered significant attention in both research and theory. These strategies, which are employed by speakers, have been the subject of investigation by researchers and theorists such as [Leech \(2016\)](#), [Brown et al. \(1987\)](#), and [Lakoff \(1973\)](#). They are used by speakers to foster and maintain harmonious relationships by demonstrating respect for the feelings and sensibilities of their conversational partners.

One of the prominent theories regarding politeness is the Politeness Principle introduced by [Brown et al. \(1987\)](#). This theory introduces the concept of “face”, which represents the shared self-image that speakers aim to uphold during communication. The idea of “face” was originally introduced by [Goffman \(1967\)](#) as an image situated within the context of social interactions. According to this theory, there are two aspects of face: positive and negative face. Positive face relates to the desire for connection and rapport with others, while negative face pertains to the need to avoid imposition or intrusion ([Brown et al., 1987](#)).

Furthermore, [Brown et al. \(1987\)](#) argue that the concept of face is culturally specific. They suggest that cultural variations influence how polite behavior is perceived, such as whether a culture leans toward positive or negative politeness orientation. However, cultural differences do not alter the fundamental content and nature of negative and positive face. In essence, the core principle of the Politeness Principle revolves around respecting and valuing the speaker’s desires, emotions, and preferences while making them feel acknowledged and respected.

4. Previous Empirical Studies on Speech Act of Invitation

In a study by [Sukesti \(2014\)](#), the focus was on identifying invitation strategies used by Indonesian students, who are non-native speakers of English. The results revealed that Indonesian students employ various strategies when making invitations in English. It was evident that they often translate and transfer what they are familiar with in their first language into English when constructing invitations. Additionally, the



study found that certain factors, including gender, social status, and intimacy levels, influenced the choice of invitation strategies. Furthermore, participants with lower proficiency in English exhibited more pragmatic errors compared to those with higher proficiency. Polite markers were frequently used by Indonesian students when making invitations.

[Amelia \(2015\)](#) investigated the ability of English native speakers to orally produce speech acts of invitation. She identified three types of invitation speech acts: direct, indirect, and literal, which are influenced by the politeness principle used by speakers in real speech contexts.

In another study by [Suraih \(2019\)](#), Yemeni EFL learners were examined regarding their use of invitation strategies. The findings indicated that Yemeni EFL learners tended to favor direct approaches when inviting others. They often transferred elements from their native language and applied them when learning the English language.

[Rakowicz \(2009\)](#) conducted a study to examine the invitation strategies employed by adult Polish learners of English as a second language. The findings revealed that some Polish learners of American English sometimes interpreted ambiguous invitations as genuine ones. They tended to transfer elements from their native language into their English usage. Interestingly, the study indicated that Polish learners of American English tended to be more direct in their communication than native speakers.

[Abbood \(2016\)](#) conducted similar research to assess the ability of Iraqi English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in producing two types of speech acts: offers and invitations. The study identified challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners in producing these speech acts and found that they preferred using imperative and interrogative strategies but were less inclined to use exclamatory strategies when making offers or invitations. Additionally, the study highlighted a positive correlation between the learners' ability to produce these speech acts and factors such as their academic year.

[Salmani-Nodoushan \(2006\)](#) explored a different type of invitation known as Farsi ostensible invitations, as produced by Iranian inviters, within the context of pragmatics. The study revealed similarities between ostensible Iranian invitations and those produced by English speakers. It also showed that Iranian inviters employed similar strategies to make the pretense of their invitations apparent, akin to their English-speaking counterparts. In summary, the findings of this study illustrated that ostensible Iranian invitations is in line with the general linguistic norms and standards that influence language usage.

Another study assessing the quality of invitation creation and acceptance in Jordanian society from a pragmatic perspective was conducted by [Al-Khatib \(2006\)](#). The findings of the study revealed the invitation strategies employed by Jordanian individuals when inviting, accepting, or refusing invitations. In summary, the study highlighted that people in Jordanian society tend to extend invitations with the intention of demonstrating their willingness and expressing their desire to invite others, often accompanied by swear phrases. When accepting invitations, Jordanian individuals commonly employed expressions of gratitude, appreciation, goodwill, and compliments.

[Wolfson et al. \(1989\)](#) emphasized the importance of communicative competence, which includes the knowledge of giving, interpreting, and responding to invitations. Such knowledge is particularly crucial for individuals who aim to engage in effective communication within society. This information is of utmost significance for non-native English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners when interacting in the host speech community. According to [Hatch \(1992\)](#), language learners can demonstrate their proficiency in the target language when provided with the opportunity to directly communicate with native speakers. [Wolfson et al. \(1989\)](#) further observed that due to the diversity of speech patterns and behaviors in various speech communities, non-native speakers often aspire to engage with the target speech community to learn their customs and practices. Consequently, the fundamentals of conducting invitations often operate at a subconscious level among speakers. As a result, it is possible to examine



and provide language learners with the rules for producing invitations among American English speakers through descriptive analysis.

Van Trong (2017) focused on invitations with implicit or explicit performative elements as produced by Vietnamese speakers. In his dissertation, he noted that invitations, from a speech theory perspective, involve polite terms used to encourage others to participate in activities that are mutually beneficial to both the speaker and the hearer.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Participants

The participants of this study were female Iranian intermediate language learners who were learning English at English institutes in Sari. The English language learners were selected randomly from those in different institutes at the level of interchange 3. They were from 18 to 35 years old. In order to achieve reliable results, the participants were homogenized in terms of their proficiency level through an Oxford placement test from elementary to intermediate by Edwards (2007). Then, their pragmatic knowledge was assessed. Besides, the researcher chose the learners who studied the whole series in order to prevent any background differences. They were divided into two groups of learners, a control group and a treatment group, each including 30 learners.

2. Materials

The textbooks used as the materials were a) Interchange 3 which was taught to both groups (as mentioned earlier, all the participants had the same background of passing the series and it had to be kept as a stable material for both) and b) a supplementary and facilitative book named “Function in English” written by Jon Blundell, Jonathan Higgins and Nigel Middlemiss. The latter was just taught to the experimental group, and the researcher applied some parts of it which were related to the subject of the study.

3. Instrumentation

3.1. Oxford placement test elementary to intermediate

In order to homogenize the participants, the Oxford placement test elementary to intermediate by Edwards (2007) was used in this study. This test provides teachers with valuable insights into their learners’ proficiency levels. It consists of three components:

1. 50 Multiple Choice Questions: These questions assess the learners’ grasp of essential grammar and vocabulary concepts, ranging from elementary to intermediate levels.
2. Reading Comprehension: A reading text is provided along with ten comprehension questions, graded to match the learners’ proficiency.
3. Optional Writing Task: This task evaluates the learners’ ability to produce written language. While it is optional, it serves as an important assessment component.

The 50 multiple-choice questions and the reading task are intended to be completed in a single 45-minute lesson. The writing task, which takes around 20 minutes, can be assigned in a subsequent lesson. This comprehensive assessment approach aids teachers in gauging their learners’ language proficiency accurately (Edwards, 2007).



This test was validated before being given to the learners, and the reliability was 0.87 for a similar group as a pilot, who were 20 people and at the same level of proficiency (i.e. the intermediate level).

3.2. Pre- and Posttests for the speech act of invitation

Afterwards, the other test was used as a pretest which was derived from the textbook and the website named *Anglo-American Culture* by Marcel Van Amelsvoort and Greg Lum. This test was for evaluating the level of learners' pragmatic knowledge before starting the treatment. Its reliability was 0.791. This test was also given to 20 randomly selected learners as a pilot group. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) (Appendix 1) included two sections; one part was multiple-choice, and, in the other, the researcher gave some scenarios and asked the participants to invite the people mentioned due to those situations. In this way if a student chose the correct answers in the multiple-choice questions by chance, he or she could not answer the situation items. The posttest was the same as the pretest.

4. Procedure

The researcher tried to teach some of English learners by formal instruction to see the impact on their pragmatic knowledge. For this purpose, the researcher tried to select some English learners randomly. The researcher selected learners who studied the whole *Interchange* series to have the same background knowledge of what they learned. Although this cannot be exactly regarded as having the very same background, because some external learning may take place out of the classroom setting, the researcher attempted to minimize the differences. After the sampling process, the researcher gave the Oxford placement test to check their level of proficiency (i.e. the intermediate level). After the application of the test, 60 participants were divided into two groups, a control group and a treatment one.

The sessions lasted for 90 minutes. For the control group the researcher continued to teach *Interchange 3* and did nothing more in their class, but the experimental group were taught with *Interchange 3* for sixty minutes and for the next 30 minutes the researcher worked on the textbook, "Function in English". The researcher tried to apply cognitive approach in the teaching procedure for the experimental group. The whole term lasted for 20 sessions. The first session was spent for knowing learners to make them feel comfortable. The second session was the pretest session and after it, the researcher started to teach the *Interchange 3* to both groups. During the third to fourteenth sessions, the researcher worked on the speech act set of invitation. Fifteenth and sixteenth sessions were devoted to reviewing the whole set and finally on seventeenth session, the researcher gave the post test. The next two sessions went for just studying the *Interchange 3*, and, at last, in the twentieth session, the researcher gave an exam which was related to the term. The tests were given to all the participants in both groups.

5. Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS software, version 21. The analysis involved employing descriptive statistics, specifically calculating means and standard deviations, to summarize and describe the data. Additionally, an independent sample t-test was conducted to assess the influence of formal instruction on the speech act of invitation, specifically its impact on the ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners. This statistical approach allowed for a thorough examination of the findings and implications of the study.

IV. RESULTS

The analysis of the data for the pretest and the posttest and the result of the pilot study are presented below.



1. Data Analysis and Investigation of The Research Question

In order to find the reliability indices, the placement test and the test for both pretesting and posttesting were administered to a group of 20 learners who were at the same level of proficiency. As displayed in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha reliability indices for the placement test, pretest and posttest showed they could be used for this study.

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha reliability indices for the pilot study.

	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Placement test	.873	20
Pretest and posttest	.791	20

2. Pretest

The pretest was given to both groups. Their mean scores are shown in Table 2. There were 30 learners in each group. The mean score of the control group was a little higher than that of the experimental group.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the pretest for both control and experimental groups.

	Group	No.	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
pretest	control	30	13.2000	5.34596	.97603
	experimental	30	12.2667	5.46420	.99762

As it can be seen in Table 3, when the researcher gave the pretests to the participants, the P value was .891, which was more than 0.5 and conveyed that there was no significant difference between their pragmatic knowledge. Thus, the researcher could be sure that learners were at the same level before the researcher gave the treatment to the experimental group.

Table 3. Independent sample t-test for the pretest of both control and experimental groups.

pretest	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.019	.891	.669	58	.506	.93333	1.39567	-1.86040	3.72707
Equal variances not assumed			.669	57.972	.506	.93333	1.39567	-1.86043	3.72710

3. Posttest

In Table 4, the researcher got the gain scores of both groups, which represented the mean of the gain scores of the control group as 1.6333 which was lower than that of the experimental group as 4.1000.

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of the posttest for both control and experimental groups.

	Groups	No.	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
gain score	control	30	1.6333	.92786	.16940
	experimental	30	4.1000	1.72906	.31568



From the data presented in Table 5, it can be deduced that a noteworthy disparity exists between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the posttests. Specifically, the mean score of the experimental group surpasses that of the control group, indicating a significant difference in performance between the two groups. ($F = 5.371$, $P = .000 < .05$) The Sig. value was .024, which was less than .05 showing the rejectability of the null hypothesis, namely the Formal instruction of the speech act of invitation has no effect on the development of ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners. Also, the experimental group were more successful and better achieved in the posttest.

Table 5. Independent sample t-test for both control and experimental groups.

gain score	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.371	.024	6.885	58	.000	2.46667	.35826	1.74953	3.18381
Equal variances not assumed			6.885	44.423	.000	2.46667	.35826	1.74483	3.18850

Figure 1 signifies that the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, which implies that formal instruction affected the achievement of the experimental group.

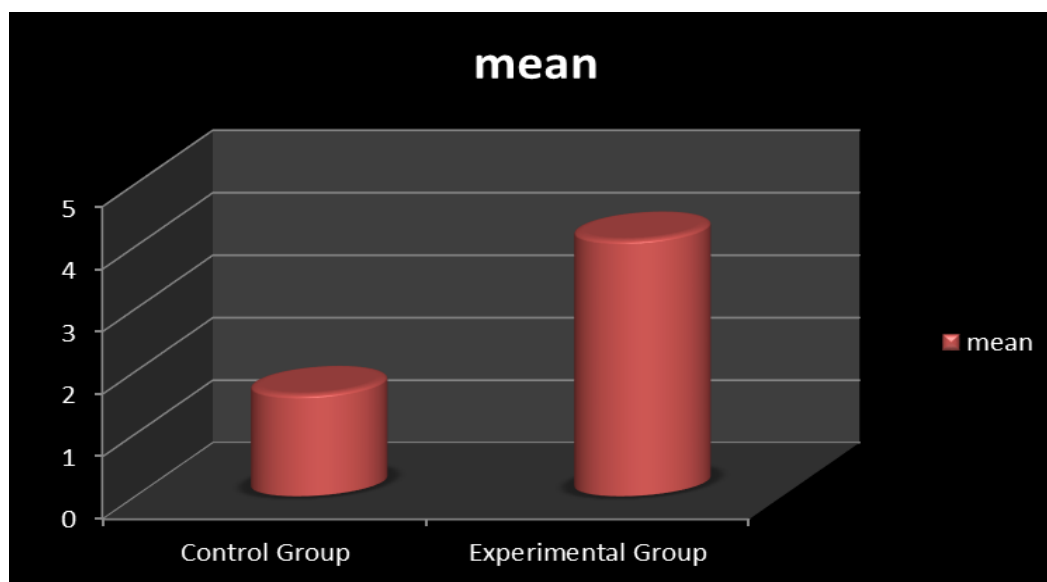


Figure 1. The difference of mean scores for both control and experimental groups.

4. Differences Between the Means Scores of The Two Groups

If the hypothesis is about comparing two groups, investigating whether it is correct or not must be done by comparing their mean scores.

In this test, there was no need for the data to be distributed normally. The test was as follows:

$F = \text{Fisher}$, $(k-1)$ for the degree of freedom is $(n_1 + n_2 + \dots + n_k - k)$.

As mentioned above, it was observed that the control and experimental groups were at the same level in the pretest, but, after the term finished, the experimental group which underwent the formal instruction as treatment was at a higher level in pragmatic knowledge; the control group just dealt with



Interchange 3. Hence, the formal instruction has an impact on intermediate EFL female learners' pragmatic knowledge.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The null hypothesis mentioned as "Formal instruction of the speech act of invitation has no effect on the development of ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge of Iranian EFL learners", is rejected through the analysis of the data provided by the present study. Actually, the results proved a strong positive impact of formally teaching the speech act of invitation on Iranian EFL learners' ostensible and genuine pragmatic knowledge. The treatment given to the participants as the formal instruction played a role in promoting EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge. Based on the diagrams and statistical data shown in tables, the scores of the participants involved in the experimental group were higher in the posttest.

At first, the pragmatic knowledge of both groups was slightly at the similar level, which conveyed the fact that they were not different in terms of the knowledge under study. This can be interpreted in a way that they could show similar abilities and attitudes and express similar utterances when encountering a native speaker of English. Also, the intention of both groups' would be understood to a similar extent. On the other hand, after offering the treatment and depending on the resulting data, we can expect totally different expressions conveying the intended meaning resulting in two different types of understanding, which would have either the appropriate intended meaning between the interlocutors or the negative one, which would sometimes lead to an unexpected consequences and misunderstandings.

As previously mentioned, the primary objective of English language teaching is to enhance learners' ability to effectively communicate and engage in genuine conversations in the target language. This approach underscores the significance of employing the second or foreign language meaningfully, particularly in oral tasks (Eslami-Rasekh & Koutlaki, 2018).

Furthermore, the study's findings revealed that certain participants attempted to directly translate and transfer expressions from their native language into the target language, often following similar sentence structures and word orders. This frequently results in misunderstandings and communication breakdowns in the target language, primarily due to a lack of consideration for the foreign culture and disparities between L1 and L2. Considering this issue, it was also suggested to the teachers to work on the related utterances more than the others by using different examples, feedbacks and peer corrections or even by getting the students to pay attention to the differences and try to correct themselves based on those differences.

1. Pedagogical Implications

This study can provide valuable support for other studies, whether confirmatory or exploratory, addressing the issue of teaching formal instruction and learners' pragmatic knowledge in order to decline the level of uttering wrong or misleading expressions concerning their intentions in an English-speaking context. Some of the implications of this study are presented below.

1.1. Implications for teaching and teacher training

Educators should contemplate how they can create an ideal setting where students are encouraged to utilize language appropriately within provided scenarios. This approach aims to enhance learners' understanding of pragmatic language in the context of foreign language acquisition. Using formal sources such as booklets or corpora in the classroom increases learners' pragmatic knowledge and the ability of using appropriate structures and speech acts in the context. Indeed, the results of formal instruction and assessments related to pragmatic knowledge can be invaluable for teachers.



These findings can inform teachers on how to design activities and tailor their instructional approaches to cultivate learners who can communicate effectively in English with a higher level of pragmatic knowledge. Teachers should strive to create an environment that encourages active communication and interaction among learners, which is essential for honing pragmatic skills.

1.2. Implications for materials development

Material developers play a crucial role in the field of education. One of their key responsibilities is to curate, organize, and elucidate the content within teaching materials. This involves structuring the content in a way that creates opportunities for effective communication and encourages the use of a second or foreign language in the classroom. Additionally, these materials should be designed to enhance learners' pragmatic knowledge, which is the understanding of how language is used in real-life contexts and interactions. In essence, the task of material developers is to facilitate language learning by providing resources that not only teach linguistic elements but also promote practical language usage and cultural understanding.

2. Limitations of The Study

There were two limitations that need to be addressed regarding the present study. The first concerns the number of participants and their gender, as this study was performed with female participants and the differences of genders in producing utterances was neglected. The second one relates to the environment. In fact, in different cities, the study may have a different result; the participants' level and their use of ostensible and genuine speech acts may depend on where they live or even on their L1. The performance may also be affected by the experience of living in an English environment. Therefore, the results would be far different for them.

In future studies, it is recommended to include more subjects from different gender and age groups. It would also be interesting to investigate the same speech acts by Iranians and with a large number of speakers and tokens.

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Appendix 1. DCT test

A. Multiple choice questions. Choose the answer that you think would fit the situation.

1. You are eating lunch at a café next to your office. Suddenly, you see your colleague who is your friend, too. You want to invite him/her and say ...

- a. Hey, come and join me.
- b. It will be a pleasure if you join me.
- c. I'd be glad if you join me

2. You are planning a surprise party for your boss and you want to invite your colleague who is a new member and you do not know him/her very much. You say...

- a. We are getting a party for Mr. Ray. Don't forget to come.
- b. We are getting a party for Mr. Ray. We would be happy if you join us.
- c. We are getting a party for Mr. Ray. Come and have fun.

3. You are between classes at school and you want to invite your close friend for a quick lunch. You say...

- a. Let's have something to eat.
- b. Would you like to have lunch with me?
- c. I'm going to have lunch and I would be glad if you join me.

4. You have just moved to a new neighborhood and a neighbor came to say hello. You invite him/her in but you do not want him/her to come (you do not intend to invite him/her). You say...

- a. Thank you for coming by. Do you want to come in and have some tea?
- b. Thank you for coming by. I would be so glad if you come inside and have some tea.
- c. Thank you for coming by. I would be glad if you come over sometime and have some tea.



5. You are having a family gathering on Friday and you want to invite your siblings. You say...

- a. I'm having a gathering on Friday and it would be my pleasure if you accept to come.
- b. I called to see if you have time and can come for dinner on Friday.
- c. I'm having a gathering on Friday night. Don't be late.

B. There are some situations with different people and you want to invite them. What would you say for each of them?

1. Suppose you would like to invite your boss, supervisor or manager to a party you are hosting at your place next month. What would you say to him/her?

2. A friend of yours is very desperate about some issues and experiencing a hard time. You want to take him/her out of this mood, so you decide to get him/her somewhere or to your place. What would you say? (You can also offer an activity to do together.)

3. You have a new colleague and you want to invite him/ her out to get familiar or closer. How would say that?

4. You are preparing to go on a trip. You want to invite your friend to join you. What would you say?

5. You have a birthday party with a specific time. You want to invite your close friend to join it. What would you say?

6. You are the boss of a big company. You want to invite the staff for a lunch meeting at a restaurant. What would you say?