A Digital EFL Learning Program in Pragmatics for Developing English Majors' Communicative Speaking, Pragmatics Competence and Attitudes Towards Digital Learning

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ABSTRACT

This investigation aimed at studying the effect of a digital EFL learning program in pragmatics on developing English majors' communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and attitudes towards digital learning. Participants were thirty first year English majors at Minia Faculty of Education. The instruments of the study included a communicative speaking test, a pragmatics competence test, and an attitude scale. A pragmatics-based program was prepared for training. Results showed high significant differences on the pre-post measures of the communicative speaking test, the pragmatics competence test and the attitude scale, favoring the post administration. This indicated the positive effect of the-training program. It is recommended that curriculum designers should integrate some aspects of pragmatics in English majors' curriculum.

Key words: communicative speaking, pragmatics competence, attitudes towards digital learning

برنامج تعلم رقمي في البرجماتية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لتنمية التحدث التواصلي و الكفاءة البرجماتية و الاتجاه نحو التعلم الرقمي

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مستخلص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الي دراسة اثر برنامج تعلم رقمي فى البرجماتية لتنمية التحدث التواصلي والكفاءة البرجماتية والاتجاه نحو التعلم الرقمي لدي طلاب الفرقة الاولي تخصص لغة انجليزية بكلية التربية جامعة المنيا. شارك في الدراسة ثلاثون طالبا وطالبة. اشتملت ادوات الدراسة على اختبار في التحدث التواصلي واختبار في الكفاءة البرجماتية ومقياس الاتجاه نحو التعلم الرقمي. قامت الباحثة باعداد برنامج في البراجماتية. اوضحت النتائج وجود دلالة احصائية عالية بين التطبيق القبلي والبعدي في ادوات البحث الثلاثة لصالح التطبيق البعدي. وتوضح هذه النتيجة الاثر الايجابي للبرنامج التدريبي. وتوصي الباحثة واضعي المنهج بضرورة دمج بعض مظاهر البرجماتية في المناهج الدراسية لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحدث التواصلي – الكفاءة البرجماتية – الاتجاه نحو التعلم الرقمي

Introduction

Pragmatics focuses not only on what people say but also how they say it and how others interpret their utterances in social context. Utterances are literally the units of sound made when one talks, but the signs that accompany those utterances give the sounds their true meaning. Semantics refers to the literal meaning of a spoken utterance. Grammar involves the rules defining how the language is put together. Pragmatics takes context into account to complement the contributions that semantics and grammar make to meaning.

Teacher educators have to accelerate teachers' ability to interpret and explain to students the sociocultural meanings of oral, written, and nonverbal communication. Those educators should give practical insights as to how teachers can incorporate a pragmatics component into their foreign-language (FL) instruction. At times, divergence from the norm in FL interactions may result in pragmatic failure. Teacher education programs still do not pay the required attention to this matter. Instead, they may look only at the theory, rather than at how to teach pragmatics in the classroom.

Students usually memorize words and phrases, and then they do not really know where and how to use them effectively. Educators have to be provided with books and other materials that provide pre- and in-service teachers with pragmatics activities. Such activities cover instructional approaches, examples of classroom practice, and suggested means for assessing pragmatic performance.

Strides should be taken to narrow the gap between what research on pragmatics' use in a variety of foreign languages has

revealed, and how language is generally taught today. This focus on pragmatics in teacher development programs would ideally result in greater emphasis on it in the EFL classroom.

Fortunately, there has been now a great interest in enhancing learners' control over the pragmatics at a practical level, though there is *very* little on how to incorporate pragmatics into a teacher preparation program. Interestingly, most of the writings about pragmatics instruction stop at the level of theoretical background. Rather, the focus is on the effect of teaching pragmatics to learners. Pérez (2019) explains that teaching Pragmatics aims to facilitate learners' ability to find socially appropriate language. Pragmatics encompasses speech acts, conversational structure, implicature, etc.

For foreign language learners, developing pragmatics competence has to take place in instructional settings. However, these settings are limited (LoCastro, 2012). For instance, classroom settings are generally teacher-centered, to complete the syllabus with little or no time to facilitate practice of language where learners are involved in understanding and producing the pragmatic meaning. Besides, the opportunities to use language in real life situations and conversations are limited.

The complexity increases when it comes to pragmatic classroom practices in an EFL environment. Native speakers learn the social rules of speaking through socializing at home, at school, and in society (LoCastro, 2012). However, for EFL learners, learning rules of appropriateness are extremely difficult as there are almost no opportunities for interaction with native speakers (LoCastro, 2012).

Moreover, EFL learners have little or no exposure to English outside the classroom which mostly imposes restrictions on the acquisition and instruction of pragmatics in many ways. First, grammatical accuracy takes priority over pragmatic appropriateness owing to the dominance of structural syllabus. Second, language is treated as an object rather than a means of communication, and opportunities for socialization are limited (Cook, 2001). Third, the classroom environment is only sufficient to few speech acts and cannot represent the real-world language use. Research shows that the pragmatic dimensions in textbooks have not been well represented, especially when it comes to speech acts (Aksoyalp & Toprak, 2015).

As such, it cannot well prepare language learners for conversing easily in the foreign setting (Webb, 2013). Within the EFL context, textbooks can serve as an important source for teaching EFL pragmatic norms since learners interact with their textbooks, and their teachers use textbooks as a guide (Moghaddam, 2012). However, we cannot depend on textbooks as main sources of pragmatic input for FL learners as they are primarily based on the author's intuition rather than on research. Therefore, they are often inadequate, simple, and may be incorrect for presenting foreign language pragmatics (LoCastro, 2012).

In addition, textbooks lack authenticity as research showed inconsistencies between the English found in textbooks and the English which appears in spoken language (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Therefore, textbooks cannot prepare EFL learners for real-life situations. Last, the activities and tasks designed to be practiced are

limited in the coverage of communication scenarios they present, and they provide superficial practice for realizations of different speech acts (Ozverir, Osam & Herrington, 2017).

On the other hand, teachers still hesitate to teach pragmatics in EFL classrooms (Jianda, 2006) for several reasons: **First**, they may not have adequate knowledge of what pragmatics is or how to teach it; hence, they might feel at a loss as they might lack awareness of the FL pragmatic norms (LoCastro, 2012). **Second,** EFL teachers have an overloaded curriculum (Usó–Juan & Martinez–Flor, 2008) and are often pressed for time as they have to prepare students for tests (Cai & Wang, 2013), for success in the exam is given more credit in the EFL classroom than successful communication with native speakers. **Third,** EFL teachers have little access to pragmatics research findings. Besides, there is a gap in what research has found and how pragmatics is taught. Hence, teachers have to rely on their intuition in teaching pragmatics (Webb, 2013). **Fourth**, teachers mostly work as a main source of information for learners. However, they have their teaching activities or the input they provide may not be honest. Moreover, EFL teachers are reluctant to teach pragmatics (LoCastro, 2012).

Furthermore, in case pragmatics has received some attention, it will be at the level of theory not how to teach pragmatics (Cohen, 2012). This neglects most probably results from lack of emphasis on different aspects of pragmatics in language teaching methodology courses.

According to LoCastro (2012), FL learners seldom receive corrective feedback on their pragmatic errors. This is particularly true

for EFL learners, whose teachers often do not know when and how to give feedback. Furthermore, valid methods of assessing pragmatic knowledge are obviously absent (Jianda, 2006). Teachers do not know how to assess the performance of speech acts (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Therefore, teachers normally avoid assessment of pragmatic knowledge (Cohen, 2014). This is especially true for EFL teachers who think they cannot judge the appropriate pragmatic behavior. Hence, tests of pragmatics knowledge have not been part of classroom assessment (Cohen, 2014).

Therefore, digital learning materials may offer a means of providing FL pragmatic instruction. Advantages of using computer-based learning materials give opportunities for useful interaction and use of authentic materials, exposure to a greater diversity of pragmatic features and discourse, and evidence of pragmatic development as well as the effectiveness of FL pragmatic instructional interventions (Eslami et al., 2015). Hence settings such as websites, virtual environments, and computer-mediated communication may afford a suitable context to enhance and facilitate pragmatics instruction both in FL and L2 learning settings.

Sykes and Cohen (2008a:99), have repeatedly pointed out that "CALL technologies play an important role in ensuring that pragmatics instruction is comprehensive in nature. However, very few technology-mediated pragmatics learning tools seem to exist, and even fewer have been investigated empirically. Among the few empirically informed tools that were explicitly designed for L2

pragmatics instruction were Web sites, mobile game applications and virtual environments.

Although most resources have been investigated in terms of the means they provide for promoting pragmatics ability, no research exists, to the researcher's knowledge that has investigated the effectiveness of digital pragmatics instruction. Therefore, material developers are now advised to depend on empirical research findings in the preparation of ELT textbooks and materials. Besides, the books must be provided with sequenced communicative activities moving from controlled to less controlled activities because available practice activities do not provide learners with adequate practice on automatic realization of speech acts (Ozverir, Osam, & Herrington, 2017).

Additionally, pragmatics teaching materials must include at least three key elements (i.e., social context, language use, and interaction). Taguchi (2011) has proposed three types of tasks to be included in pragmatics materials: conscious-raising tasks, receptive-skills tasks, and productive-skills tasks.

Apart from traditional pragmatics teaching materials, technology has brought new opportunities for pragmatics instruction and practice. For instance, videotapes of naturalistic interactions can serve as an effective medium for explicit instruction of pragmatics. More recently, computer-assisted language learning has given us more opportunities for teaching and learning pragmatics. Social networking and virtual social platforms provide technological facilities for practicing pragmatics (Taguchi, 2011). Similarly, the Internet and

the World Wide Web have facilitated pragmatics teaching and learning.

The field of technology and language learning González-Lloret (2019) is now an important area of study especially in applied linguistics. The lack of research in pragmatics is puzzling if one considers that pragmatic competence is one of the essential components of communicative competence and that most of the technologies today exist in the service of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the connections between interlanguage pragmatics and a variety of technologies and innovations, as well as existing resources to bring FL pragmatics teaching into the language classroom.

Teacher-training in pragmatics is critical (Taguchi, 2011), and teacher educators must convince EFL teachers that pragmatics must become a basic part of FL instruction. Besides, they must provide practical insights into how to teach pragmatics in the language classroom (Cohen, 2012) since "the focus on empirically validated pragmatics in teacher development programs would ideally result in greater emphasis on it in the FL classroom" (Cohen, 2012).

As such, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2001), as cited in O'Keeffe et al., (2011:141), proposed three pedagogical practices for teaching pragmatics to FL learners. These are as follows:

1) using authentic language samples;
2) input should be followed by interpretation and/or production;
3) teaching pragmatics at early levels.

Nipaspong (2008) mentioned that providing corrective feedback in pragmatics could also help FL learners move towards

native like pragmatic norms. However, EFL teachers must be cautious about how to make corrections at the pragmatic level since correcting socio pragmatic failure is a more delicate issue than correcting pragma linguistic failure. Socio pragmatic decisions are *social* before they are linguistic. While foreign learners can accept corrections which they regard as linguistic, they are sensitive about having their social judgment called into question.

Moreover, even if teachers teach pragmatics in EFL classrooms, they do not adequately assess it. Therefore, Cohen (2014) recommends teachers to include assessment of pragmatics knowledge in short and long tests and proposes the following six strategies for assessing pragmatics:

1. Keep the speech act situations realistic and engaging.
2. Check for key aspects of performance.
3. Have a discussion with students after they have performed speech acts.
4. Have the students compare their performance with that of a native.
5. Have the students provide a reason for their response.
6. Be strategic about when to assess what.

Context of the problem

Nowadays, the practice of teaching foreign languages at university level involves focusing on the development of oral and written skills. At the same time, the educational process in the university mostly underestimates and sometimes ignores the pragmatic aspects in teaching English as a foreign language and does not take into account the practical factors of communication.

Ignoring the pragmatic aspect of FL communication leads to the fact that learners do not possess the appropriate skills to adequately apply them in accordance with the real-life communication situations, intentions, the social roles of communicants, as well as the other social, pragmatic and linguistic communication markers.

Conversing with the majority of undergraduates, the researcher noticed that their communicative speaking is mostly unsatisfactory. In Egypt, English is considered a vital part of the education policy. The success in learning a language is based on the ability to carry out a conversation in English. However. It is evident, that our students do not use what they learn communicatively. Effective communication requires not only linguistic knowledge; but also, the ability to use this knowledge appropriately in the given socio-cultural context.

One of the main causes of misunderstanding and communication disruption between native speakers and FL speakers is pragmatic failure. Students often fail to convey their messages because they are not equipped with the necessary pragmatic or functional information. The development of pragmatic competence in a FL involves the ability to use a wide range of speech acts such as greeting, apologizing, complimenting, and requesting according to the socio-cultural norms of the FL community. Pragmatic instruction has proven to be useful in cases in which one must be aware of social norms, linguistic routines, directness and politeness values.

Being able to speak naturally and appropriately with others in a variety of situations is an important goal for EFL learners. Because the skill of speaking involves interaction with people and using language to reach objectives, it is necessary for instructors to provide

activities that help students learn the ways to express language functions.

Very few studies in Egypt have attempted to search EFL learner speech act production and development. The present research suggests teaching speech acts as a way to develop students' communicative speaking. It presents a pedagogical application for teaching speech acts: requests, suggestions, and refusals within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching. Accordingly, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the effect of a digital EFL learning program in pragmatics on developing English majors' communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and their attitudes towards digital learning.

However, despite the good opportunities that face-to-face instruction may offer, it might also influence learners' oral competence negatively. Digital learning offers the opportunity for all learners to participate in a community of inquiry.

Statement of the problem

Pre-service teachers are not equipped with the pragmatic knowledge that would help them to communicate orally in any given English context. A digital EFL program in pragmatics was suggested to develop first year English majors' communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and foster positive attitudes towards digital learning.

Objectives

The present study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identifying the effect of a digital EFL learning program in pragmatics on developing first year English majors' communicative speaking.

2. Identifying the effect of a digital EFL program in pragmatics on developing first year English majors' pragmatics competence.

3. Identifying the effect of a digital EFL program in pragmatics on improving first year English majors' attitudes towards digital learning.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There would be a statistically significant differences between mean scores of the study group in the pre and post administration of the communicative speaking test in favor of the post administration.

2. There would be a statistically significant differences between mean scores of the study group in the pre and post administration of the pragmatics competence test in favor of the post administration.

3. There would be a statistically significant differences between mean scores of the study group in the pre and post administration of the attitude scale in favor of the post administration.

Rationale of the study

The research design is based on the following linguistic and learning theory:

Social Constructivist Learning theory

Constructivist Learning theory has multiple rules in psychology and philosophy; and it aims at promoting FL learners' communicative skills as well as fostering their autonomy (Tuncer, 2009). Constructivist learning theory makes different sets of assumptions about learning and suggests new instructional principles (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 1995).

Principles of this theory are:

- Knowledge is constructed individually in many ways through a variety of tools, resources, and contexts.
- Language is both an interactive and a reflective process.
- Learning is internally controlled and mediated by the learner.
- Social interaction introduces multiple contexts.

Significance

The results of the present study were significant in many ways:

- Offering a digital EFLprogram in pragmatics to be used by EFL pre service teachers.
- Offering tests to be used by EFL instructors for assessing the English majors communicative speaking and pragmatics competence.
- Offering an attitude scale to be used by EFL Instructors for assessing the English majors' attitudes towards digital learning.

Delimitations

1. The study was delimited to 30 (the total number of students) first year English majors at Faculty of Education, Minia University. As being freshmen, they can benefit from studying pragmatics from the very beginning of their preparation program to be real teachers after years of training.

2. The study focused only on communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and attitudes towards digital learning.

Definition of Terms

Pragmatics:

According to Erton (2007) pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effect their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication"

Pragmatics is also defined by Rudplph (2008) as the societally necessary and consciously interactive dimension of the study of language.

The operational definition: In this study, pragmatics is defined as the study of how to use English language in oral communication.

Communicative speaking

LTC EASTBOURNE (2018) defined it saying:

Communicative English is an approach to language teaching in which a student learns from real life interaction, which can help to reinforce the value of their studies.

Pragmatics competence

According to David (2008), pragmatics competence is defined as a comprehension of speech acts and conversational implicatures.

According to Taguchi (2009), it is 'the ability to use language appropriately in a social context'.

The operational definition: It is the ability to use English language in real life communicative situations.

Attitudes

Cherry (2021) defined it as a set of emotions, beliefs, and behaviors toward a particular object, person, thing, or event. Attitudes are often the result of experience or upbringing, and they can have a powerful influence over behavior.

The operational definition: an attitude is a learned tendency to evaluate things in a certain way. Such evaluations are often positive or negative, but they can also be uncertain at times. Students in the present study evaluate their attitudes towards digital learning.

Theoretical Background

Pragmatics consists of language rules which appear in the production and interpretation of utterances. Lack of ability to use language according to contextual factors or absence of the cultural and pragmatic norms in cross-cultural communication can lead to breakdown in communication. Without enough instructional intervention, this is unfortunately the case in speeches of non-native speakers of a language.

Pragmatics competence is defined by Barron (2003) as "knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources." The subject of pragmatics competence has been introduced in the communicative competence taxonomies of Canale and Swain (1980) who defined pragmatic competence as sociolinguistic competence and as the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use. They described communicative competence as consisting of the following basic components:

● **Grammatical competence**

● **Sociocultural competence**

● **Pragmatics Competence** including:

a) Illocutionary competence

b) Sociolinguistic competence

Some Aspects of Pragmatics Competence:

1. **Implicature:**

Implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is *meant* in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is *said*. What a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what he/she directly expresses; (Horn, 2006).

2. **Presupposition**

Presupposition can be informally defined as an inference or proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of a sentence. Its main function is to act as a precondition of some sort for the appropriate use of that sentence. Presupposition is usually generated by the use of particular lexical items and/or linguistic constructions. (Huang, 2007).

3. **Speech Acts**

When we speak we can do all sorts of things, from aspirating a consonant, to constructing a relative clause, to insulting a guest, to starting a war. These are all speech acts – acts done in the process of speaking. The theory of speech acts, however, is especially concerned with those acts that are not completely covered under one or more of the major divisions of grammar – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

Teaching Pragmatics Online

Modern requirements for graduates, show that on the basis of modern ICT the following discourse skills can be developed: for example,

1. using a FL's lexical resources;
2. using stylistic and genre resources.
3. organizing a sequence of statements in a FL
4. formulating and expressing a point of view,
5. describing and explaining facts
6. providing motives and goals of communication
7. defining the scope of the communicative situation;
8. taking into account the historical and cultural contexts;
9. considering personal experience;
10. predicting the course of the communicative situation;
11. predicting the semantic content of the text; etc. (Sysoyev, 2013).

Furguson (2020) showed that socio pragmatic competence is essential to success in the workplace: it can foster solidarity and integration, and allow participants to understand and manage task-oriented interactions. While it is clear that adult English Language Learners (ELLs) can benefit from strong communication skills in the workplace, instructors are often unsure how to address these needs in an online setting. The research question that this capstone addresses is, what are the best practices of teaching pragmatic competence to adult ELLs taking online classes?

To overcome any challenges, computer-mediated learning materials may offer a means of providing or complementing L2

pragmatic instruction whether in the form of independent self-study or online learning. Potential advantages of utilizing computer-based learning materials include meaningful interaction and use of authentic materials, exposure to a greater diversity of pragmatic features and discourse, and evidence of longitudinal pragmatic development as well as the effectiveness of L2 pragmatic instructional interventions (Eslami et al., 2015). Hence settings such as websites, virtual environments, and computer-mediated communication may afford a suitable context to implement the pedagogical principles identified in the literature and, thus, enhance and facilitate pragmatic instruction.

Although researchers, such as Sykes and Cohen (2008a), have repeatedly pointed out that "CALL technologies play an increasingly important role in ensuring that pragmatics instruction is comprehensive in nature, very few technology-mediated pragmatics learning tools seem to exist, and even fewer have been investigated empirically. Among the few empirically informed tools that were explicitly designed for L2 pragmatics instruction are Web sites.

It must be stated that to be knowledgeable about pragmatics competence, it is as important as developing one's (IT) and technology skills. Both are indispensable tools for the world of today, irrespective of one's regional or geographical location" (LoCastro, 2012:308). Consequently, FL learners need to familiarize themselves with different aspects of pragmatic competence.

Likewise, successful instruction of pragmatic competence requires collaboration of teachers, teacher educators, materials developers, and test designers. In particular, it is teachers who are

on the frontlines of pragmatic development agenda. Therefore, they must incorporate pragmatics into their teaching practices along with vocabulary and grammar.

Review of Literature

Judd (1999) explained three areas of skill development for learners: cognitive awareness, receptive skill development, and productive use He raised a series of questions regarding the teaching of speech acts – that providing detailed information on speech acts can be time-consuming and takes a lot of time. Another issue was that teachers may not have adequate pragmatics information.

Matsumura (2001) conducted a study with the aim of investigating university level FL learners' socio-cultural perceptions and how they affect their pragmatic use of English in giving advice. Results suggested the importance of input in developing pragmatic competence.

Kasper and Rose (2002) looked at the impact of classroom instruction on pragmatic performance, and found research suggesting that over time learners can become more adept at pragmatic functions. They attributed this both to the students' universal interactional competence and to teacher input as well – that these enabled them to identify transition-relevant places and start turns.

LoCastro (2003) dealt with pragmatics issues that might not be covered by others, such as reanalyzing what politeness means and a consideration of learner subjectivity and how it influences language learning. In other words, it may be an actualization of a learner's self-identify for the person to resist communicating in a pragmatically

appropriate way, particularly if it means adhering to normative behavior that is inconsistent with their self-esteem.

Brock and Nagasaka (2005) used the acronym **SURE**, to have their students *see, use, review,* and *experience* pragmatics in the EFL classroom. So students first see the language in context, then be conscious of the role of pragmatics in specific communicative situations.   Then teacher-led activities can get students to use English in simulated or real contexts where interaction depends on understanding of the situation.   Then comes a stage which incorporates review, reinforcement, and recycling of the practiced material. Finally, teachers arrange for students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in communication (using videos, native-speaking guests in the classroom, etc.).

Based on a review of current literature on the effects of instruction in L2 pragmatics, Rose (2005) mentioned that although some implicit techniques (such as input enhancement) may be helpful, explicit instruction is seen more beneficial. In addition, studies including meta pragmatic information had more contribution to learners' control of socio-pragmatics than instruction lacking a meta pragmatic component.

Regarding the materials for pragmatics instruction, Tatsuki (2006) studied what "authenticity" of pragmatics materials might mean, and arrived at the realization that teachers need to deal with "degrees of authenticity" from authentic input to altered, adapted, or simulated authenticity to inauthentic input.   She offered a set of questions that classroom teachers might wish to ask themselves in

order to determine whether a given set of materials are authentic enough for their purposes:

- Whose language?

- In which contexts and for what purposes?

- By what means is the material conveyed?

Ultimately, she was convinced that it is up to teachers to select materials and to frame them appropriately for their students.

A study by Cohen & Shively (2007) clarified that students improved their request and apology performance over the course of one semester, whereas there were no statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in their rated speech act performance overall. A qualitative analysis of speech act development among learners helped to identify areas in which their performance on requests and apologies either resembled that of native speakers or diverged from it.

Rakowiecz (2009) investigated how Polish speakers of English deal with vague ways of L2 invitation. He analyzed participants' responses to the way they do when speaking Polish and to the way Americans adopt when responding to invitation. Rakowiecz collected data from 56 participants divided into two groups. Whereas one group comprised 26 Polish speakers of English, the other group included 30 Americans .Data collected was based on six various situations on invitation. Findings showed that Polish speakers tend to apply the Polish strategies when responding to vague invitation.

Suzuki (2009) explained the pragmatic strategies which the Americans   used politely when expressing the speech act of

invitation. Such strategies provide a teaching model which foreign language instructors can use in teaching the pragmatic behavior to their Egyptian EFL learners. Findings provided materials that can be natural and useful for use through the English language teaching to non-native speakers of English in order to help them produce the speech act of inviting.

Moody (2014) explored how students initially responded when exposed to new instruction regarding a pragmatically complex item. He developed an expanded method for teaching Japanese "plain" and "polite" speech styles. Data were analyzed. Results showed improvements in awareness of new information among beginning learners while qualitative investigation revealed that learners tended to pull from a L1 socio-pragmatic knowledge base in order to engage with the content of expanded pragmatic instruction. The researcher argued that explicit instruction may best be seen as a starting point for constructing a space in which students can engage with the target language.

Ahadi (2016) assessed modularity of language. To this end, the researcher measured the ability of children with specific language impairment in pragmatic and grammar and compared them with normal children. First, narrative speech, language development and specific language impairment tests for diagnosis, then 6 children with specific language impairment (SLI) were compared with 6 age-matched and 6 language-matched normal children in their grammar and pragmatics. Data analysis showed that the children with SLI performed much lower in their language-level with respect to grammatical properties (time agreement), but in pragmatic properties

(reference) they did not have meaningful differences. Results showed that impairment in grammar beside good performance in pragmatics provided support for modularity of language.

Hedia (2016) investigated the effectiveness of using communicative activities and explicit instruction of pragmatics in developing the English-speaking ability of Egyptian college students. The study adopted the quasi-experimental pretest- posttest control group design. Results revealed that the experimental group students outperformed their control group counterparts in overall speaking proficiency. Besides, the discourse analysis of participants' responses in the pre-posttest role-plays suggested a considerable degree of improvement towards the socio-pragmatic norms of the target language.

Wain et al. (2019) attempted to develop and evaluate an interactive, self-access computer application titled which aimed to raise adult   learners' pragmatic awareness. The study focused on the pedagogic principles of (L2) instruction underlying the design of the computer-based learning environment and explored the perceived usefulness of computer-assisted language learning (CALL)–mediated L2 pragmatic instruction. The researchers found evidence that users desired learning environments that encompass authentic audiovisual input, personalized and immediate feedback, and extensive opportunities for interaction and self-reflection.

All the previous studies agreed on the fact that pragmatics deserves more attention in teaching English as a foreign language, not only for university level but for all educational stages. There is thus a

need for instruction in pragmatics, since the FL context does not provide varied input needed for pragmatics development (Juan, 2002).

Method

Research design

The research adopted the quasi-experimental one group pre-posttest design. This design is justified in cases where the researcher is attempting to change knowledge that cannot be changed without the introduction of an experimental treatment.

Variables of the Study

The independent variable

A digital EFL learning program in pragmatics (See Appendix A)

The dependent variables

- Communicative speaking
- Pragmatics competence
- Attitudes towards digital learning.

The instructor

The researcher trained the participants using a digital EFL learning program in pragmatics to develop their communicative speaking, pragmatics competence, and attitudes towards digital learning.

The Participants

The study was conducted on thirty first year English majors volunteers, at the Faculty of Education, Minia University during the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021. They constituted the one group of the study.

The pilot study

The instruments and the material of the study have been piloted before conducting the experiment in order to verify their suitability in

terms of validity, reliability, difficulty, and time. The instruments and material were administered to a randomly selected sample consisting of thirty first year English majors at the Faculty of Education in the academic year 2020/2021. The pilot study started one term before conducting the experiment.   Piloting helped in making the modifications suggested by the jury members.

Instruments

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following instruments were used: (See Appendix B)

1. A Communicative Speaking Test
2. A Speaking Rubric
3. A Pragmatics Competence Test
4. A Scale of the Attitudes Towards Digital Learning

1. **The Communicative Speaking Test**

It aimed at assessing the communicative speaking skills of first year English majors. It includes ten open ended questions.

1- assessing talking about shopping activity

2- interview famous celebrity

3- conducting a food conversation

4- using common English greetings and expressions

5- asking about different things

6- making promises

7- making polite requests / questions

8- accepting and refusing an invitation

9- introductions

10-   describing people

Students were required to follow the instructions given for each question. The duration of the test was two hours and the total score is 40 (four points each). According to the jury members, the test is suitable for the objectives of the program. and the language level of the participants. Reliability of the test was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha It was found to be (0.75) See table (1)

Table (1)

Alpha Cronbach's Reliability value of the Communicative Speaking Test

No. of items	Alpha Cronbach's Reliability value
10	0.75**

** Significant at 0.01 level

The difficulty indices of the test ranged from 0.30 to 0.70. The discriminating power ranged from 34 to 70. A speaking rubric was used to score the responses of the participants on the test questions. Two raters scored the responses of the participants. Correlation coefficient of the scores of the two raters on the speaking test 0.91 is highly significant See table (2).

Table (2)

Correlation coefficient of the scores of the two raters on the Communicative Speaking Test

Test	Test		Re-Test		Person correlation	Significance
speaking	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	0.91**	0.000
	18.82	8.36	18.02	5.64		

**significant at 0.01 level.

2. **The Speaking Rubric:**

In order to receive two points, a student utterance should have the following scale ranging (2) , (1), and (0).

Comprehension: *The ability to understand what is said to the speaker.*

(2 points) Shows ability to understand the target language when spoken at a somewhat normal rate of speed, with only one repetition or rephrasing,

(1 point) Can understand the target language when spoken at a somewhat normal rate of speed, with more than one repetition or rephrasing.

(0 point) Does not seem to understand the target language.

Pronunciation: *Pronouncing words in such a way that native speaker would understand what is being said.*

(2 points) Can be understood in the target language, but may make few or minor errors. Makes an effort to sound "native," i.e., uses target language speech patterns, intonation, and phrasing.

(1 point) Can be understood in target language, but may make one or two major errors and/or has some interference from English language speech sounds, patterns, and rules.

(0 point) Makes major errors and/or uses English pronunciation rules to speak in the target language, or doesn't/can't respond.

Vocabulary: *Words and expressions used in the target language.*

(2 points) Uses excellent vocabulary with relative ease. Demonstrates an increasing knowledge of words and expressions.

(1 point) Uses vocabulary that is just adequate to respond. No attempt is made to use a variety of expressions. Generally understood.

(0 point) Makes no attempt, or response is totally irrelevant or inappropriate.

Fluency：*Easy, smooth flow of speech, within a reasonable amount of time*

(2 points) Has a generally smooth flow, with self−correction and little hesitation.

(1 point) Speaks slowly, using hesitant speech.

(0 point) Makes no attempt or shows constant hesitation

Grammar：*Word order and sentence structures in the target language*

(2 points) Demonstrates good use of grammatical structures. Makes no or few grammatical errors that do not interfere with communication.

(1 point) Uses a range of grammatical structures, but may make several grammatical errors that do not interfere with communication.

(0 point) Makes many grammatical errors that negatively affect communication, or doesn't / can't respond.

3. The Pragmatics Competence Test

This test was designed to assess participants' pragmatic competence, before and after the administration of the program. The test has taken into account the students' ability to produce language samples that reflect mastery of effective communication of the intended meaning, appropriate content, ability to address the social status of the speaker. The test consisted of 40 multiple choice items. Duration of the test was one hour. Total score is 40.

Validity：

For content validity, the test was judged by TEFL staff members who affirmed its suitability to the objectives of the program and to the students' language level.

Reliability:

This was established through using Alpha Cronbach and test-retest methods. The calculated Alpha Cronbach was (0.98) See table (3).

Table (3)

Alpha Cronbach's Reliability Value of the Pragmatics Competence Test

No. of items	Alpha Cronbach's Reliability value
40	0.98**

** Significant at 0.01 level

Coefficient of reliability of the test-retest method was (0.50) which is significant at 0.01 level. See table (4).

Table (4)

Correlation Coefficient Between the Test and Retest of the Pragmatics Competence Test

Test	Test		Re-Test		Person correlation	Significance
pragmatics Test	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	0.50 **	0.000
	26.57	7.22	24.49	5.14		

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Testing Time

During piloting the test, the researcher calculated time taken by each student finishing the test and the average was calculated, and was found to be 120 minutes. Thus, the testing time is two hours.

4. The Scale of the Attitudes Towards Digital Learning

The scale was designed to measure students' attitudes towards digital learning. The scale consisted of four dimensions: student factor, technology factor, perceived usefulness, and ease of use. The total score is 120.

Validity:

To ensure the validity of its content, it was judged by TEFL specialists who affirmed its suitability for the prescribed objective.

Reliability:

This was established through Alpha Cronbach method. The calculated Alpha Cronbach was 0.95, which is significant at (0.01). See table (5).

Table (5)

Alpha Cronbach's Reliability Value of the Attitudes Towards Digital Learning Scale

No. of items	Alpha Cronbach's Reliability value
40	0.95 **

** Significant at 0.01 level

To ensure the validity of the content, the scale was subjected to judgment by a jury of staff members specialized in TEFL. They affirmed the suitability of the scale for the objectives of the program.

Table (6)

Internal consistency of the Attitudes Towards Digital Learning Scale Correlation Between each Individual Domain and the Total Score (Validity)

Dimension	Correlation
1. student factor	0.48**
2. technology factor	0.88**
3. perceived usefulness	0.93**

4. ease of use	0.86**

** Significant at 0.01

The Digital Learning Program in Pragmatics

The program was designed for first year English majors at Minia faculty of Education. It is based on their need for being trained in pragmatics and how this training would develop their communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and attitudes towards digital learning.

Construction of the program

The aim of the program was to make use of digital learning in pragmatics to promote 1st year English majors' communicative speaking, pragmatics competence and attitudes towards digital learning.

General objectives of the program

The Program aimed at developing first year English majors'

* communicative speaking skills
* Pragmatics competence
* attitudes towards digital learning

Program description

This is a digital EFL learning program in pragmatics. It consists of (8) lessons.

Lesson One: Introduction to linguistics

Lesson Two: What pragmatics is

Lesson Three: Presupposition

Lesson Four: Implicature

Lesson Five: Basic greetings

Lesson Six: Introductions

Lesson seven: Positive face and negative face

Lesson Eight: Speech acts

Teaching Method

The program was based on digital learning, incorporating speaking activities and pragmatics. The following teaching methods were used: Web based training, online discussion, live modeling of a skill.

The Experimental Treatment:

- An orientation lesson was administered to help the participants be

  acquainted with the program.

- Google applications were used to download the program with its files such as (**google classroom & google meet**)

- After being given the permission, the participants were asked to use the sites of the course **google classroom** / **google meet**.

- Each participant should have a google e-mail account (Gmail).

- The participants were asked to write down their usernames and passwords to log in to the website.

- They had access to the pragmatics course content.

- They were allowed to go through the different online activities.

- They participated in active discussions via the web site forum.

- There were MCQ assessment questions.

- Participants were given online assignments to be completed.

- The instructor gave feedback after each session.

- Participants were asked to give reflections about their learning.

Roles of the instructor as the administrator of the course

- giving students permission to register on the website.
- turning editing on; this feature gives the instructor the following facilities:
  - move any part of the content.
  - replace any part of the content.
  - add an activity or resource.
  - assign roles.
- having access to students' accounts.
- following up the students throughout the course.
- having a grade report about the whole participants.
- editing the discussion forum.
- sending and receiving e-mails.
- sending announcements.

Roles of the participants:

- Choosing a username and a password.
- Getting access to any part of the course
- Entering the chat room
- Entering the discussion forum
- Sending and receiving e-mails

Results

Results were analyzed to calculate the t-test value that shows the difference between the mean scores obtained by students on the pre- post testing.

Testing hypothesis one:

Hypothesis one stated that there would be a statistically significant difference between mean scores of the study group in the pre and

post administration of the communicative speaking test in favor of the post administration.

Comparison between pre and post scores of the communicative speaking test showed that the participants got higher scores on the posttest than the pre test. t- value (14.25) is significant at (0.01) level. Consequently, this hypothesis was confirmed. See Table (7) below.

Table (7)

Means, standard deviations, t-value, and eta squared (η^2) of the pre and post communicative speaking test   (N=30)

Test	Score	Subjects	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	Eta Squared η^2
Pre test	40	30	28.87		29	14.25**	0.95
Post test		30	37.47				

** Significant at (0.01)

As shown in table (7), the mean score of the participants on the post communicative speaking test is (37.47) which is higher than their mean score on the pre test. (28.87). The t- value (14.25) is significant at (0.01) level. The eta squared (0.95) indicates the level of improvement that happened due to the digital learning program in pragmatics.

Testing hypothesis two:

Hypothesis two stated that there would be a statistically significant difference between means of scores of the pragmatics competence test on the pre and post administration in favor of the post administration.

Comparison between pre and post scores of the pragmatics competence test showed that the participants got higher scores on the posttest than the pre test. t– value (26.09) is significant at (0.01) level. Consequently, this hypothesis was confirmed. See Table (8) below.

Table (8)

Means, standard deviations, t–value, and eta squared (η^2) of the pre and post pragmatics competence test (N=30)

Test	Score	Subjects	Mean	SD	t–value	Eta Squared η^2
Pre test	40	30	18.93	4.39	26,09**	0.629
Post test		30	37.47	1,83		

** Significant at (0.01)

As shown in the above table, the mean score of the participants on the post pragmatics competence test is higher than their mean score on the pre test. The t– value (26.09) is significant at (0.01) level. The eta squared (0.629) indicates the level of improvement that happened due to the digital learning program in pragmatics.

Testing hypothesis three:

Hypothesis three stated that there would be a statistically significant differences between mean scores of the study group in the pre and post–performance of the attitude scale in favor of the post–performance.

Comparison between the pre and the post values of the attitude towards digital learning scale showed that the participants got higher scores on the post–performance than the pre one. t– values of the four dimensions are $(8.89, 10.195, 6.517, 6.773)$ for dimensions 1,

2, 3 and 4 respectively are significant at (0.01) level. Consequently, this hypothesis was confirmed. See Table (9) below.

Table (9)

Means, standard deviations, and t-values, of the pre and post-performance on the Attitude towards digital learning scale (N=30)

dimensions	test	Means	SD	Mean difference	t value	Sig.
1. Student Factor	Pre	6.43	1.30	3.733	8.89**	High
	post	10.17	1.90			
2. Technology factor	Pre	5.07	1.311	3.733	10.195**	High
	post	8,80	1.518			
3. Perceived usefulness	Pre	4.50	1.225	2.667	6.517**	High
	post	1.83				
4. Ease of use	Pre	4.70	1.26	2,330	6.773**	High
	post	2,37	1.40			

**Significant at 0.01

Discussion

The findings of the present study confirmed that students should have the opportunity to develop their awareness and observations of pragmatics. Materials should be designed to explicitly draw attention to the different aspects of pragmatic competence so that students may understand and adapt their speech acts. For instance, one participant noted that she had always thought the greeting "morning" was more formal and would be appropriate when speaking with a person in a higher position whom she did not know well. The pragmatics input she received explained that this greeting is more informal and therefore, inappropriate when considering the socio pragmatic component; that is, speaking to a

superior requires a more formal greeting. After being aware of this informal greeting and pragma linguistic input on its level of formality, she indicated that she would need to adapt her usage of the term. Hence, a combined approach to pragmatic instruction that utilizes the affordances of online technology could help to improve conversational skills and self-evaluation in students.

Thus, to acquire proficiency in a foreign language, participants needed to learn how to use linguistic knowledge and skills appropriately and effectively in different communicative contexts. Thus, speakers must not only know what to say but also how and when to say it, in relation to whom they are speaking. This ability is described as "pragmatic competence" Bardovi-Harlig, (2013) and Taguchi, (2012) and is a basic feature of communicative competence (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Pragmatic failure creates negative impressions about the speaker (Taguchi & Sykes, 2013). Yet, including pragmatics in instructional materials is still very limited, which may leave English language learners (ELLs) either unaware of or ill prepared for pragmatic challenges in the English-medium workplace.

Many researchers have frequently mentioned the amount of learning materials that focus on (FL) pragmatics (e.g., Cohen 2008; Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013) pointed out the shortage of pragmatics in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks, arguing that it leaves instructors faced with the task to "offer extra input as well as set specific tasks that help to understand how sociocultural constraints and situational factors influence pragmatic choices".

The main factor which contributed to the success of the digital learning program was the variety of activities that helped create interest and increased learners' participation. Participants were encouraged to use language creatively. Performing the activities in pairs and groups broke the monotony of learning. Assigning roles gave the opportunity for each student to feel that he/ she was important and had a role in the group. This created self– confidence and helped meet the different social needs of the students. Mixed ability students were grouped together so that weak ones benefited from good ones.

Investigating the presence and presentation of speech acts in course books may be significant in an EFL environment. To fill in this gap, the study of Aksoyalp & Toprak (2015). aimed to investigate how complaints, apologies and suggestions were presented in EFL course books. To this end, a content analysis on 17 course books of different language proficiency levels (i.e. from beginner to advanced) was conducted to find out (i) whether the course books included the speech acts (ii) the range and frequencies of linguistic strategies used to perform these speech acts and (iii) whether their frequency showed variation across all proficiency levels. The findings have clear implications for course book writers, publishers and language teachers. The findings are presented and implications are made.

Learning a foreign language requires students to acquire both grammatical knowledge and socio–pragmatic rules of a language. Pragmatic competence as one of the most difficult aspects of language provides several challenges to learners of a foreign language. To overcome this problem, the researcher tried to find the

most effective way of teaching pragmatic knowledge to the participants. Accordingly, the present study investigated the effect of teaching   apology politeness, requests, promising, introductions, invitations, speech act, as   aspects of pragmatic competence. The results revealed that instruction in these speech acts was a facilitative tool that helped participants use the proper speech acts in different situations.

In the context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), Sykes and Cohen (2008a) emphasized the limited number of digital FL pragmatics learning tools, criticizing   the lack of content developed based on empirical data. Additionally, Sykes and Cohen (2008b) pointed to a closer investigation of L2 pragmatics learning in CALL environments, with a specific focus on "what learners do when interacting with the online materials as well as how these materials are perceived by the learners themselves". Hence researchers emphasized the need to implement pedagogic principles of FL pragmatics teaching in the design of curricula, lesson plans, and learning tools (Sykes & Cohen, 2008a; Timpe-Laughlin, 2016).

The theme of interlanguage pragmatics and in particular the link between language and culture has gained wide appeal internationally, and has enjoyed attention in the field of language education for the last thirty years at least. It is probably fair to say that pragmatics has increasingly become mainstream in FL teaching and learning.   As noted before, there is a gap between what research in pragmatics has found and how language is generally taught today. Recently, research in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics has delved into a number of topics with direct relevance

to language instruction. For example, there are now numerous studies available exploring speech acts such as *requesting*, *refusing*, *apologizing*, *complimenting*, *greeting*, *criticizing*, *giving suggestions*, and *complaining* in various languages.

There are also many studies on how FL speakers of those languages comprehend and behave pragmatically in their first language (L1) and in their L2. On the other hand, not much of this work has been systematically applied to the L2 classroom. In addition, few teacher education programs seem to deal with the practical application of pragmatics theories. The researcher hoped to see this gap filled by making readily available examples of ways in which pragmatics material can become a main part of teacher development and can assume a more prominent place in FL instruction. So, the primary interest is in support of instructional pragmatics.

The participants appeared to demonstrate that they value their pragmatic control of the FL as they became able to identify different norms of behavior across cultures. Learners also appeared to become highly aware of the relationship between the use of language and context, which presumably assisted them in producing the FL in its sociocultural context.

The attitude scale results showed broad acceptance of the digital learning and indicated that digital learning options can partially replace conventional face-to-face teaching. For content taught by lecture, online teaching might be an alternative or complement to traditional education.

Conclusion

The present study emphasized how important to teach pragmatic behavior of the English native speakers to Egyptian EFL learners. The education of pragmatics is necessary and important in our globalized world. The reason is that English is currently used by people in the world for interaction and communication with each other in order to do international trade or participate in the academic conferences (McKay, 2002). For avoiding miscommunication caused by cultural difference, being familiar with diverse cultures and pragmatics is essential. Studies of pragmatics emphasized the appropriateness in inter-cultural discourses. Through learning pragmatics, the English speakers' intercultural communication competence should be raised. Their Pragmatic Competence would be better because of knowing cultural differences and being aware of the significance in appropriate languages. In other words, the teaching and learning of pragmatics would release the difficulties of international communications for both native and non-native speakers.

Implications:

Regarding the digital learning program in pragmatics, the participants mentioned that the online content materials had positive effect on their speaking performance, their pragmatics competence, and their attitudes towards digital learning.

The comparison of the results of the pre and post attitude scale revealed that students' attitudes towards digital learning changed positively and in particular, their knowledge of how to learn on the internet increased considerably as a result of this study.

The results of the digital learning revealed that despite some problems, such as technical frustrations, and inadequate computer skills, most of the participants enjoyed studying on the internet, as they felt that their language skills had improved, and their motivation and self−confidence had increased as they realized that they were able to complete the tasks on their own. The flexibility and convenience of the internet were two other aspects that made participants feel positive about studying on the internet independently. Evaluation techniques were comprehensive, and participants were interested in this kind of evaluation

Digital learning helped to reduce students' anxiety and fear of making mistakes, increase their language use, and eventually develop their speaking competence. The instructor's role as a facilitator, an organizer, prompter, and participant motivated students to use the language without fear of making mistakes and to effectively participate in different communicative speaking activities.

Students' awareness of the criteria according to which their speaking performance is evaluated made them work hard to meet these criteria.

These results proved the effectiveness of the digital learning program in developing the different variables of the program, The results agreed with those of Matsumura (2001) who investigated pragmatic competence, Hadia (2016) and LoCastro (2003) who studied the pragmatics of politeness, Cohen and Shiverly (2007) who studied pragmatics of request and apology, Rakowiecz (2009) and Suzuki (2009) who studied the pragmatics of invitation.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Faculties of Education instructional programs should take into account the pragmatics knowledge in curriculum design.
2. Secondary school students should be introduced to pragmatics.
3. Developing oral communicative competence among EFL pre service and in-service teachers.
4. Encouraging instructors to use online learning as a requirement of the period of covid 19 pandemic.

Suggestions for further research

Below are some suggestions for further research:

1. A study can be conducted to investigate FL linguistic competence.
2. The present study can be replicated using other speech acts.
3. Investigating the sociolinguistic and sociocultural variables affecting the communicative behavior of English native speakers.
4. Devising target language community culturally based activities for teaching pragmatics.
5. Investigating the positive and negative Arabic transfer into the linguistic formula of Egyptian EFL learners' pragmatic output.

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