Optimizing Pragmatic Awareness and Production in ESL Learners: A Quasi-Experimental Research on the Effectiveness of Implicit Versus Explicit Instruction

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Abstract

Understanding social interactions, deriving pertinent semantic clues, and deciphering the inferred meanings of expressions are all essential components of mastering a second language. These capabilities should be utilized with the foundational grammatical and strategic skills already acquired. Since the concept of pragmatics was only established forty years ago, teaching language is not as old as teaching grammar and other subjects (Chen, 2011). Unlike pragmatics, its teaching methods are still developing. Communication is the primary function of language (Locke, 1975, as referenced in Morris, 2007), and the interlocutors' face-threatening demeanour is avoided. Penelope (1987) discusses strategies that speakers deploy to foster appealing social interactions and prevent listeners from engaging in a way that could be construed as intimidating. Penelope's "Politeness Theory" (1987) served as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. Since pragmatic production may be better analysed using qualitative methods and pragmatic awareness growth can be better evaluated using quantitative methods, a mixed method approach has been employed to acquire true insight into the problem at hand. The objective of the study is to determine the most effective method of teaching pragmatics and how implicit and explicit instruction affect second language learners' pragmatic output and pragmatic understanding, which is imperative to enhancing communicative competence.

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

INTRODUCTION

Hedge (1993) established pragmatics as the discipline of linguistics that studies the laws and regulations governing language use in many settings, including situational, social, ideological, and so on. As a result, it is different from earlier linguistic study levels. Thus, pragmatics must be properly included in the teaching materials, just as grammar and vocabulary are. The pragmatic element must now be systematically included into second language teaching materials rather than being added as an afterthought in particular activities. The methodology of instruction is therefore important for second language learners, who might not even be completely aware of this aspect of the language that depends on culture. The two main teaching strategies that can support language learners' pragmatic growth are explicit and implicit instruction. Teaching strategies where the learning objectives are not explicitly stated are referred to as implicit instruction. As an alternative, pupils must derive and infer the

knowledge on their own by reading books, experiencing situations, etc. On the other hand, implicit and explicit instruction are incompatible. It is an organized and straightforward teaching method in which the learning objectives are elucidated and divided into digestible steps. Research on teaching English, and especially pragmatics, is worthwhile when it incorporates explicit or implicit instruction derived from real material.

Effective comprehension and use of a language in social situations is referred to as pragmatic awareness. Understanding the underlying motives, meanings, and social conventions of language use is necessary. It requires talking with others while keeping in mind context, cultural differences, tone, and body language. Pragmatic awareness, in short, aids people in navigating and interpreting variations in language in a variety of social contexts. In social interactions, pragmatic production is the capacity to use language in a way that accomplishes communicative objectives and conveys intended meanings. Language proficiency is simply one aspect of it; another is the flexibility to modify language use according to the situation, societal conventions, and the demands of the other individual. People who utilize pragmatic production have to take into account a number of things, including the relationship between the speakers, cultural variations, the conversational context, and the communication objectives. This includes adapting speech to the listener's cognitive level and being conscious of non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions. All things considered, effective communication requires pragmatic production since it helps people understand others' intentions, communicate themselves accurately, and navigate social circumstances. Just as grammatical proficiency can be transferred into communicative competence, pragmatic awareness can sometimes be turned into pragmatic output. However, the transmission of pragmatic understanding can sometimes impair pragmatic production, as stated by Mouton (2010).

Research Objectives

- To investigate how teaching pragmatics is affected by implicit versus explicit instruction

- To determine which pragmatics concepts can be taught to second language learners

Significance of the Study

Second language learners are always focused on the language's phonetics and grammar, but even after they have mastered these elements, they may still encounter a communication gap and a hostile attitude from their listener because they are not aware of pragmatics, which is a culturally specific word. As stated by Cheng (2010), there is often a difference between the viewpoints of native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs). According to this study, second language learners can improve their pragmatic competence and steer clear of awkward situations when speaking with native speakers. Despite their ignorance of pragmatic competence, many educators, learners, and content creators in non-native nations continue to struggle with the Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching Method in an attempt to improve their interpersonal abilities. Moreover, this study will open the door for further investigation on pragmatics' teachability and appropriate ways to include it into teaching and instructional materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christie (2000, as cited in Grant & Adolphs, 2011) states that pragmatics provides "a theoretical framework that can account for the relationship between the cultural setting, the

language user, the linguistic choices the user makes, and the factors that underlie those choices". Given its critical role in improving communicative competence, studies emphasize the necessity of including pragmatics into second language instruction (Deda, 2013). The literature on second language (L2) pragmatics has fully explored the idea of pragmatic awareness. Pragmatic competence is the result of combining pragmatic production with pragmatic awareness. The inclusion of both in educational materials is crucial for pragmatic competency. The development of pragmatic awareness, which is considered a necessary condition for pragmatic competence, is believed to be facilitated by instruction. The benefit of using pragmatic awareness as an educational aim is that it allows students to select their own pragmatic objectives and gives them the autonomy to decide whether or not to study L2 pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017).In a given situation, pragmatic production is the process of producing the appropriate pragmatic phraseIt can be challenging at times because of the compromise a speaker must make in a particular setting, culture, and environment. Although it can occasionally lead to accurate pragmatic output, pragmatic awareness is not always necessary to produce suitable pragmatic work (Mouton, 2010).In order to ascertain whether or not their relationship is proportionate, it is worthwhile to conduct this investigation.

Castillo (2009) presents an instance in The Role of Pragmatics in Second Language Teaching that led to an embarrassing scenario because of a pragmatically improper answer, despite the fact that both interlocutors were highly fluent in the language. Castillo then chose to investigate this linguistic feature. Even second language learners who excel at using the language can feel embarrassed by pragmatics shortcomings. According to Castillo (2009), intercultural interaction varies based on the individual, the situation, and the background; skill is not a deciding factor. Several scholars concluded that speech acts might be taught successfully after making a thorough investigation of the subject at hand. Researchers were motivated to investigate the application of formal education to the domain of socio-cultural and sociolinguistic abilities because pragmatics instruction was a genuine issue at the time due to the preponderance of morpho-syntactic studies in taught SLA (Taguchi, 2009). It is therefore possible to adapt the educational implications of pragmatics to the learning characteristics of other countries. Additionally, the materials and teaching methods must to be modified to take into account the evolving needs of the pupils as well as shifting trends.

A number of researchers have argued that pragmatics is crucial, but there is debate among scholars on the best way to teach it, therefore it is crucial to examine how pragmatics is expressed either openly or implicitly in educational materials. Unlike implicit training, explicit instruction gives students comprehensive pragmatic knowledge. Students who receive explicit instruction do better than those who get implicit instruction, according to the overwhelming majority of intervention studies conducted to date (Rose, 2005, as mentioned in Chen, 2008). The necessity of explicit pragmatics education was not entirely refuted by Chen's (2008) study, despite Kim and Hall's (2002) complete denial of explicit material presentation. Exposure, incentive, and implicit teaching instructions are the essential elements of a successful pragmatics integration method (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). The value of the research is increased and more misunderstandings result from textbooks that provide real content, whether openly or implicitly. By connecting the nature of pragmatic elements as conventional and nonconventional implicature to implicit material presentation, Cohen (2012) tried to resolve the dispute. There were instances, he continues, when the use of implicit implicatures was insufficient to illustrate how language and context interact. While earlier research has concentrated on the question of whether pragmatics should be taught clearly or implicitly, this

study employed survey research to integrate pragmatics in a way that allows the combination of implicit and explicit approaches for improved student understanding.

Theoretical Framework

Pretest and posttest results were used to gather study data. 50 BS Civil Engineering students were split up into two equal groups of 25 each, one serving as the experimental group and the other as the control group. In their previous lesson, all 50 students examined a few pragmatic things from the intermediate textbook, which is required of students at this level. A pretest has been administered to both groups in the first phase. The experimental group received explicit instruction on identical refusals, directives, and apologies tactics during the second phase, along with certain clear-cut exercises like role-plays. Penelope's (1987) theory of politeness is used in these role-playing exercises as a theoretical framework for obtaining a favorable or negative reaction. Both groups completed a posttest following the intervention, and a comparison was conducted.

Data Analysis

Three sections comprise the pretest; The third section is an open-ended DCT that assesses the results of pragmatic production; the second section has multiple-choice questions that assess pragmatic awareness; and the first section is a test of discourse completion. Evaluation of orders, apologetic strategies, and rejections form the basis of pragmatics' targeted components.

Pretest Results of Pragmatic Awareness:
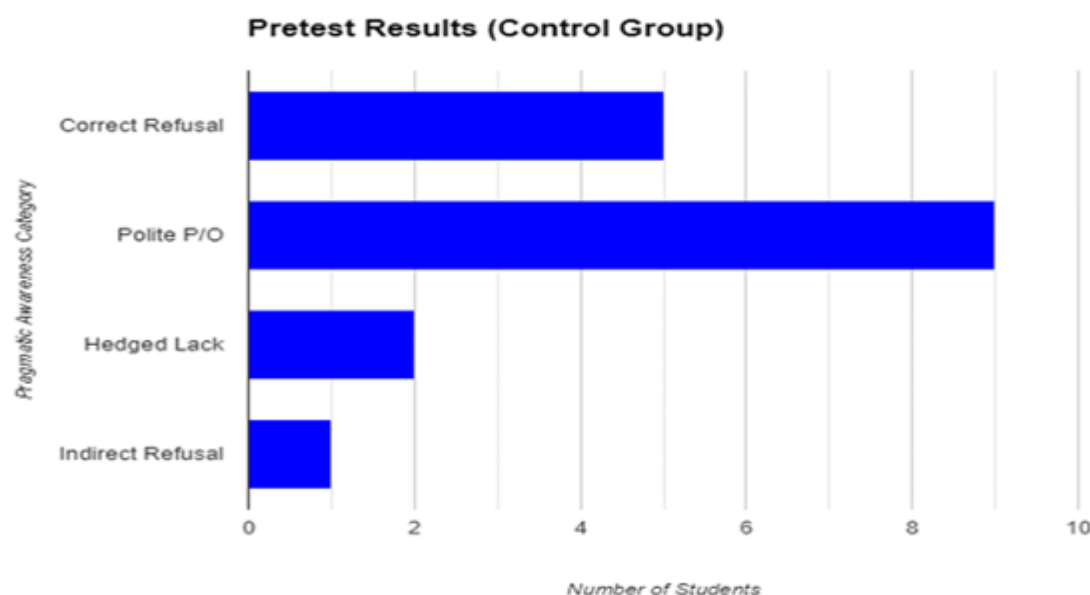
The following is the 25 students' proportion of pragmatic awareness results:

- Appropriately declining with a hedger (I'm a little busy) and a kind explanation: 20%

- Apologies, polite orders, or permissions that use "please" and "thanks" : 36 percent

- Refusal to justify lack of knowledge or unavailability by citing information or order (I'm afraid): 8%.

- Non-traditional implicature-based indirect refusal: 4%

Pretest Results - Pragmatic Awareness (Experimental Group)
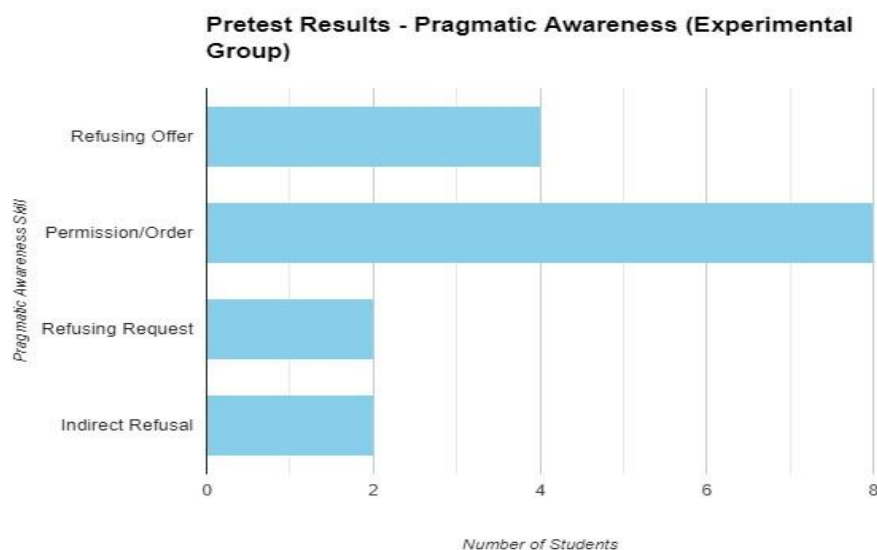
The following represents the percentage of the 25 students in the experimental group who scored well on the pragmatic awareness pretest:

- Appropriately declining with hedger (I'm a little busy) and giving a courteous explanation: 16%

- Apologies, polite orders, or permissions that use "please" and "thanks" 32%

- Refusing to provide information or an order (I'm afraid) and citing ignorance or unavailability: 8%

- Indirect rejection by unconventional implicature: 8%
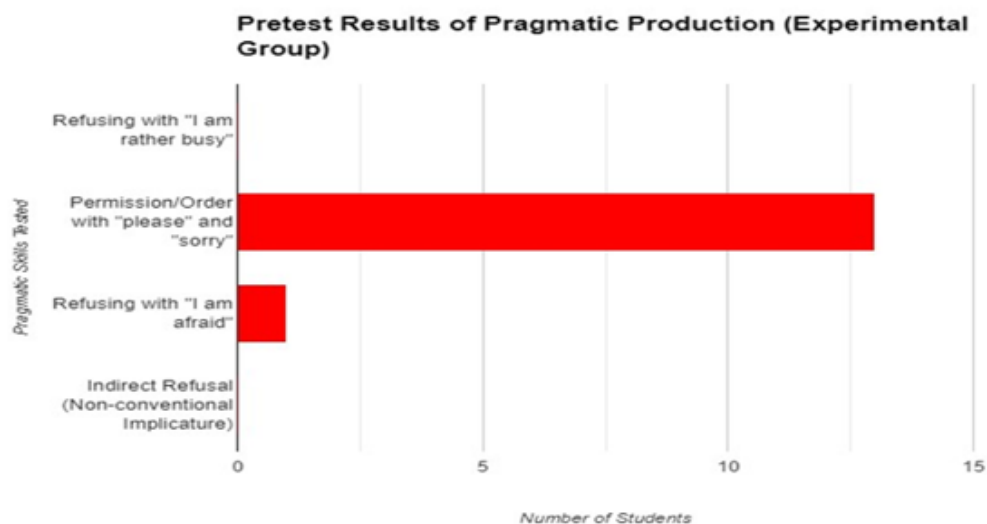
Pretest Results of Pragmatic Production:
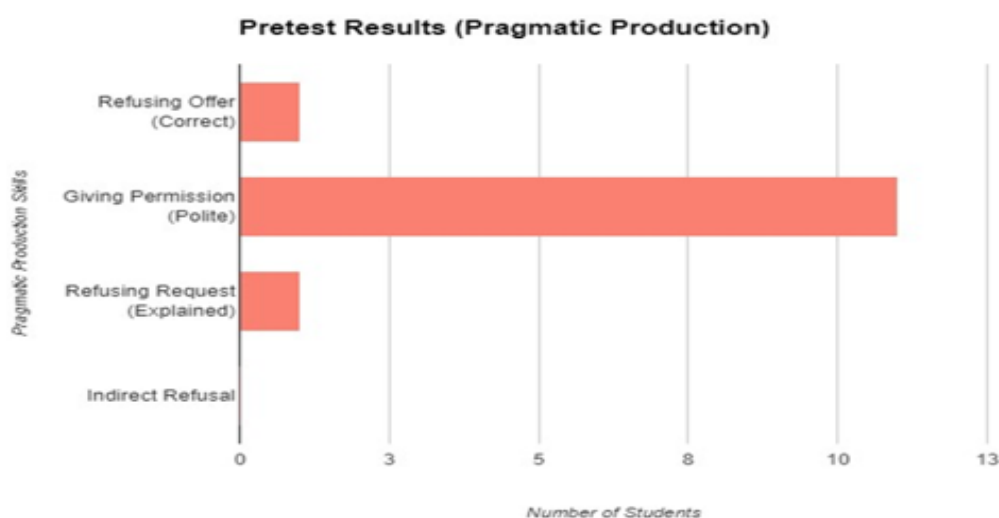
Control Group

Pretest Results (Pragmatic Production)

With the appropriate hedger "I am rather busy" and a courteous explanation, 4% of students correctly responded that they would decline an offer. Using the speech act "please"

and using the relevant language, 44% of pupils politely granted permission or delivered an order. Four percent of students used the hedger "I am afraid" to decline an order or request for information, citing their inability to learn about the subject or the unavailability of the requested item. Through unconventional implicature, 0% of pupils properly identify the indirect refuse.

Experimental Group

Pretest Results of Pragmatic Production (Experimental Group)

- Appropriately declining with hedger (I'm a little busy) and giving a courteous explanation: 0%

- "Please" and "thanks" are polite ways to ask for permission, give an order, or apologize. 44 %

- Refusing to provide information or an order (I'm afraid) and citing ignorance or unavailability: 4%.

- Refusal by indirect means using unconventional implicature: 0%

Post Test Results of Pragmatic Awareness:

Control Group
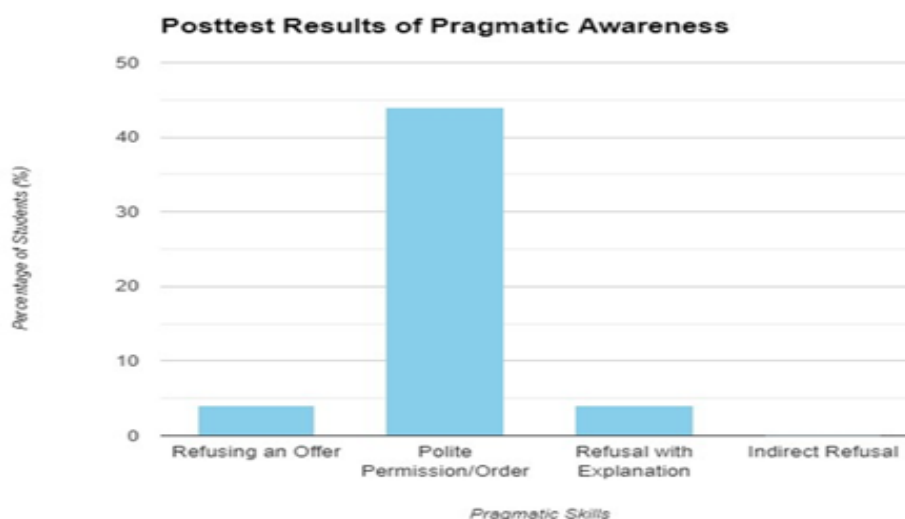
Posttest Results of Pragmatic Awareness

With the appropriate hedger "I am rather busy" and a courteous explanation, 4% of students correctly responded that they would decline an offer. With the use of the speech act "please" and the appropriate sentence, 44% of pupils graciously provided an order. 4 %of students used the hedger "I am afraid" to decline an order or request for information, citing their inability to learn about the subject or the unavailability of the requested item. Through unconventional implicature, 0% of pupils properly identify the indirect refuse.

Post Test Results of Pragmatic Awareness (Experimental Group)
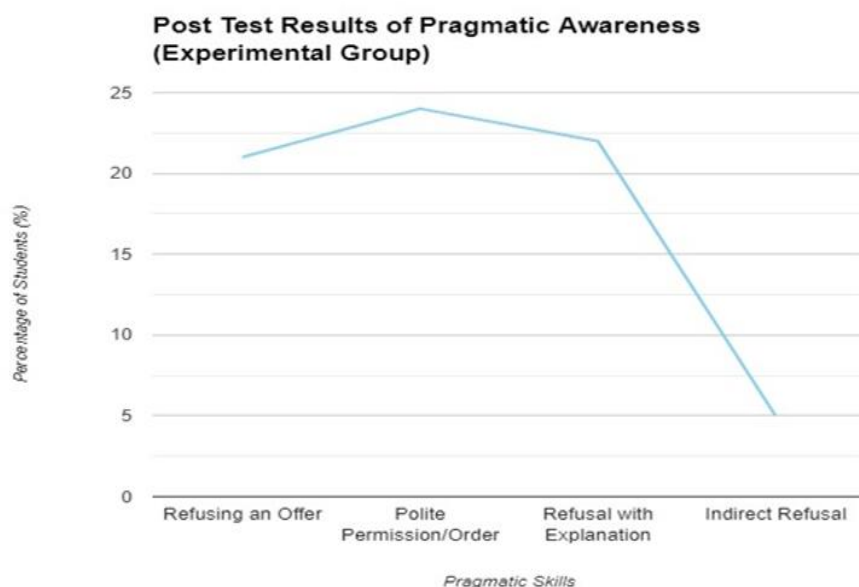
The following is the proportion of the Experimental Group's twenty-five students' Pragmatic Awareness scores:
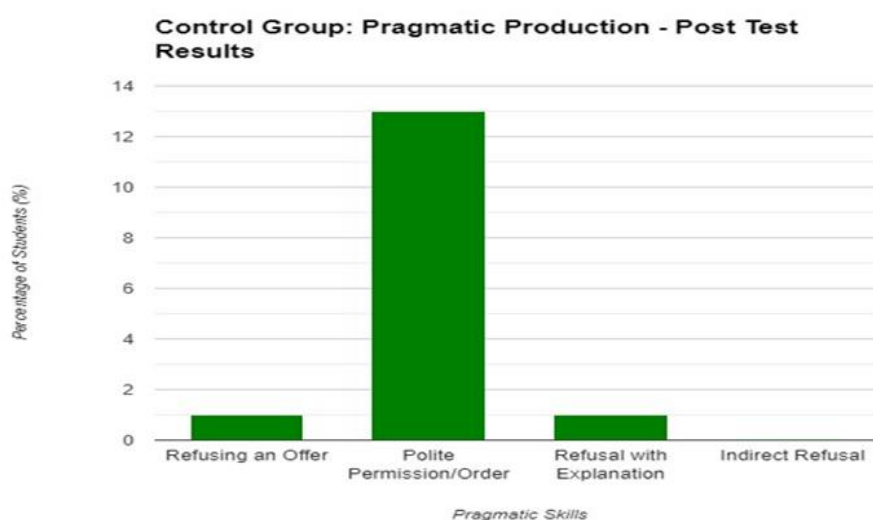
- Of the 25 students who declined an offer, 84% gave the appropriate hedger, "I am rather busy," along with a courteous protest.

- Using the speech act "please" and adding the word "sorry," 96% of the 25 students granted permission or provided an order in a courteous manner.

- 88% out of 25 students used the hedger "I am afraid" to decline an order or request for information, citing their inability to learn about the subject or the unavailability of the requested item.

- 20% of 25 students accurately identify the indirect rejection using unconventional implicature.

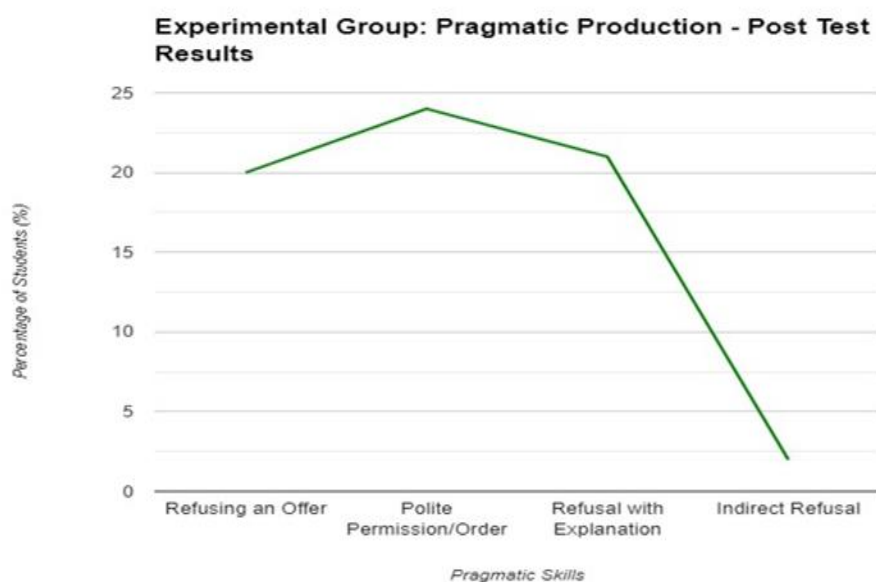**Post test Results of Pragmatic Production: Control Group**

The following represents the percentage of the 25 Control Group students' pragmatic performance outcomes:

- 4 % out of 25 students correctly responded that they would decline an offer, using the appropriate hedger "I am rather busy" along with a courteous justification.

- Using the speech act "please" and adding the word "sorry" with the appropriate sentence, 52% of 25 kids graciously granted permission or provided an order.

- 4% of 25 students used the hedger "I am afraid" to decline an order or request for information, citing their inability to obtain the requested item or their ignorance of the subject.

- Of the 25 pupils, 0 % correctly generated the indirect refusal using non-traditional implicature.

Control Group: Pragmatic Production - Post Test Results

Post test Results of Pragmatic Production: Experimental Group

Experimental Group: Pragmatic Production - Post Test Results

- Of the 25 students, 80% correctly responded that they would decline an offer, using the appropriate hedger "I am rather busy" and a courteous justification.

- Using the speech act "please" and adding the word "sorry" with the appropriate sentence, 96% of the 25 kids offered permission or gave an order in a courteous manner.

- Of the 25 students, 84% declined an order or request for information by utilizing the hedger "I am afraid" and stating that they were either unaware of the subject or that the requested item was unavailable.

- Using non-traditional implicature, 8% of 25 pupils were able to partially produce the indirect refuse.

The sum of the data from the experimental and control groups shows that students who were given implicit instruction before the intervention did almost the same on the pretest in terms of pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production. Results from pragmatic awareness tests are superior to those from pragmatic production. Requests and permissions, which include the responses "sorry," "please," and "thanks," are the only things that result in more than 30% of the outcomes; all other refusals have fewer than 20%. In the experimental group's posttest, over 80% of students' responses were for conventional implicatures, with the only category in which students received a 20% score being non-conventional implicatures, or indirect refusal. In contrast, the control group's pragmatic awareness posttest results almost exactly match the pretest trend.

For both groups, students' pragmatic output on the pretest was below 5% in every speech act except for one area that covered speech actions involving "sorry" and "please," which had over 40% of the correct answers. The control group reflects the pragmatic production result in a manner similar to how both groups reflected during the pretest. Only one speech act—indirect rejection through the use of unusual implicature—sees the experimental group's performance decline to 8%, whereas in all three speech acts, the experimental group surpasses the control group by more than 85%.The results of the experimental group's pragmatic production and pragmatic awareness amply illustrate the impact of explicit instruction.

CONCLUSION

A post-test that followed the structure of the pretest was administered following the pragmatic activity session. The findings demonstrated pragmatic transfer in the students' language acquisition. The average success rate for the pragmatic awareness-oriented section is 84%, 96%, 88%, and 20%. Included in this is the success rate for recognizing the non-traditional implicature, which is thought to be harder to find. But 88%, 96%, 84%, and 8% of pragmatic phrases are all produced appropriately. Explicit instructions are used to augment the learners' pragmatic proficiency; nonetheless, the outcomes are better in terms of pragmatic awareness and a discernible improvement in pragmatic production. Bardovi (1999) contended that pragmatics could be taught, and this goal focuses on the teachable aspects of pragmatics. Despite both explicit and implicit instruction, the last component of indirect rejection did not improve by 10%, which supports Bardovi's notion that traditional implicatures should be taught. According to the findings, pragmatics should be taught openly while taking into consideration the concept of mutual intelligibility and pragmatics' character, which includes its applicability and cultural exposure.

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