Enhancing Speaking Skills of EFL adult learners: A pragmatic approach

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Abstract

This paper investigates 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. Quantitative data collected was statistically analyzed to validate the research hypotheses while a qualitative discourse analytic approach was used to examine the changes in the control group strategies in performing the selected speech acts before and after the treatment. Results of data analysis 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 sociopragmatic norms of the target language.

Keywords: Speaking skill, communicative competence, pragmatics, speech acts, explicit instruction

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1. Introduction

The English language is an international language used to communicate in the fields of education, technology, trade and politics and is learnt nowadays as a foreign language in many countries around the world. In Egypt as in many other outer circle countries (Kachru, 1995), English has been an integral part of education policy in Egyptian schools and universities. Nunan (1999) maintains that success in learning a language is determined in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language. In spite of this fact, it has been noted that a conventional teaching approach is often applied in most Egyptian educational institutions in which learners are required to strictly focus on the lesson content and what the teacher pours into their minds without actively engaging in communication and exploring any real-life subjects.

Effective communication requires more than just linguistic knowledge; rather, the ability to use this linguistic knowledge appropriately in the given socio-cultural context is more important. One of the main causes of misunderstanding and communication disruption between native speakers

and foreign language speakers is pragmatic failure. It also results in stereotyping EFL learners as insensitive, blunt, or awkward (Thomas, 1983). Learners often fail to convey their intended messages because they are not equipped with the necessary pragmatic or functional information. The development of pragmatic competence in a second language involves the ability to appropriately use a wide range of speech acts such as greeting, apologizing, complimenting, and requesting according to the socio-cultural norms of the L2 community. Pragmatic instruction (whether explicit or implicit) and pedagogic intervention has proven to be useful especially in those cases in which one must be aware of social norms, linguistic routines, directness and politeness values in the target community.

Very few studies in Egypt have attempted to focus on Egyptian ESL learner speech act production and development. This research suggests teaching speech acts as a way to enhance learners' speaking and communication skills. It presents a pedagogical application for teaching three speech acts: requests, suggestions, and refusals within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and explicit instruction. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using communicative activities and explicit instruction of pragmatics in developing the English speaking ability of Egyptian college students. The specific questions addressed in this study are:

- To what extent is the proposed program effective in developing college students' speaking skills in general and pragmatic competence in particular?
- What are the features of a speaking lesson that adopts the communicative approach and aims at developing the speaking skills of college students?
- What are the features of a lesson that adopts explicit instruction and attempts to promote the pragmatic competence of college students?

2. Theoretical Background

Pragmatics consists of conventional rules of language which are manifested 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. Pragmatic 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 pragmatic competence has been introduced in the Communicative competence taxonomies of Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990). In Canale and Swain's model, pragmatic competence is identified as sociolinguistic competence and defined as the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use. Later, Canale (1983) expanded this definition to include "illocutionary competence, or the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context" (p. 90). In Bachman's model, on the other hand, there is a more complex account of pragmatic knowledge. This account is broadly concerned with knowledge of how to use language appropriately and effectively in different contexts.

Communicative competence is the goal of language teaching by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The term "communicative competence" has been defined as the knowledge of both rules of grammar and the appropriate use of language rules in a given social context (Hymes, 1971). Canale and Swaine (1980) described communicative competence as consisting of four basic components:

• *Grammatical competence:* producing a structured comprehensible utterance (including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling).

• *Sociocultural competence:* using socially-determined cultural codes in meaningful ways, often termed "appropriacy".

• *Discourse competence:* shaping language and communicating purposefully in different genres (text types), using cohesion (structural linking) and coherence (meaningful relationship).

• *Strategic competence:* enhancing the effectiveness of communication (ie. deliberate speech), and compensating for breakdowns in communication (ie. comprehension checks, paraphrase, conversation fillers).

This theoretical model of communicative competence has undergone some further modifications over time. Bachman (1990) has proposed a more complex model of communicative competence. According to this model, communicative competence is divided into language competence, strategic competence and psycho physiological mechanisms.

Language Competence includes:

1. *Organizational Competence* including: (a) Grammatical competence (b) textual competence involving: cohesion/coherence and conversational analysis.

2. *Pragmatic Competence* including:

(a) Illocutionary competence consisting of speech acts and language functions. These might include the following functions:

- Ideational (which express people's experiences of the real world);
- Manipulative (which are used to affect the world around us);
- Heuristic (which extend people's knowledge of the world around us);
- Imaginative (which comprises creative language use for aesthetic purposes).

(b) Sociolinguistic competence: includes sensitivity to differences in dialects or varieties, and register.

Strategic Competence consists of three phases: assessment, planning and Execution

Psycho-physiological Mechanisms include factors such as: Channel - visual/auditory, and mode - productive/receptive.

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has explored the effect of pedagogical intervention on the development of learners' pragmatic competence.

More specifically, it has examined the impact of instruction on learners' development of L2 pragmatic competence within the framework of explicit versus implicit learning. As suggested by DeKeyser (2003), explicit teaching involves working with the rules of language, which can be done deductively or inductively. While in the former case explanations of the rules of languages are provided, in the latter case learners are asked to examine examples from a text and to formulate the rules of the target language. Explicit learning begins with the understanding that there is something to be learned, and may result in explicit knowledge if selective features in the second language input are noticed and enhanced by various means of explicit instruction. Explicit learning is the learners' voluntary involvement in a program of instruction and their involvement with material offered during a period of instruction. It engages participants in voluntary explicit learning, which may result in establishing knowledge about form, linguistic features and norms in the L2. In contrast, when there is no focus on the rules of language, the approach is described as implicit. Results of the studies reported in House and Kasper (1981b), House (1996), and Takahashi (2001) seem to indicate that explicit metapragmatic instruction appears to be more effective than implicit teaching.

The foundation for investigating the effect of explicit instruction in the acquisition of second language pragmatic knowledge is the Noticing Hypothesis from the work of Schmidt (1990, 1993a, 1994a, 1995). According to Schmidt, "Noticing" is defined as conscious registration or online processing of the simple occurrence of some event (what linguistic material is stored in memory). It is a mental process at the level of experiential awareness and refers to a surface level of phenomena. For example, awareness that on a particular occasion someone says to their interlocutor something like, "I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?" is a matter of noticing. Although both are mental processes at the experiential level, Schmidt distinguishes between "Noticing" and "Understanding". He refers to "Understanding" as recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern (how the material is organized into a linguistic system). It lies at a higher level of awareness than noticing and involves a deeper level of abstraction. Relating the form of the utterance "I'm terribly sorry to

bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?" to its usage and recognizing degrees of politeness as well as context elements such as social distance, power and level of imposition are all matters of understanding.

   Schmidt asserts that learning requires awareness at the level of noticing. Second language learners need to "notice" the specific relevant pragmalinguistic and contextual features of a speech event and then analyze their significance. Simple exposure to sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic input is insufficient due to the fact that pragmatic functions tends to be opaque and non-salient to learners and thus are not likely to be noticed despite prolonged exposure (Schmidt, 1993). Research (Bacelar da Silva, 2003; Takahashi, 2001) has shown that many aspects of pragmatic competence cannot be acquired without a focus on pragmatics instruction.

3. Method
Participants
   A group of 40 first year students were selected from Al-Ahram Canadian University (ACU) during the fall semester of 2016-2017 (20 students in the experimental group and 20 students in the control group). ACU is a private university established by Al-Ahram Press Institution in 6th of October City in Egypt. A standardized placement test (SEPT) that is in alignment with the CEFR is conducted as a prerequisite for admission at the university. Participants in this study were enrolled in Eng.100 course which corresponds to Basic User level. Students registered in the *English 100* course received two sections of English instruction per week; each one lasted for a period of three hours. The teacher-researcher worked at ACU and was the instructor of both groups (experimental and control).

Instruments
The current study made use of the following main tools:
a- The pre-post speaking test

   A pre-post speaking test was constructed and administered by the researcher in order to measure the proficiency level of both the experimental and control groups before and after the treatment. It was

used as a pre-test to make sure that both groups were of the same speaking level before the start of the experiment and hence the progress achieved by the experimental group could be attributed to the program they had been exposed to. As a post-test, it was used to examine the effect of the proposed program in developing the selected speaking skills of ACU first year students. The final version of the pre /post speaking test, after being reviewed by a panel of jury specialized in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, included a warm- up stage and seven sections or interactional tasks that tackled a variety of speaking skills corresponding to those taught during the program. The first version of the test was submitted to nine TEFL professors, assistant teachers and lecturers to assess its validity. The jury members were asked to evaluate the suitability of the test to the students' proficiency level and the appropriateness of the different sub-skills of the speaking test. After designing the tasks and modifying them according to the panel of jury, a pilot study of the speaking test was conducted. The purpose of the pilot study was mainly to determine the suitability and the timing of the test.

b-The proposed teaching program

The suggested program aimed at developing the speaking skills of the experimental group of first year ACU students through engaging them in communicative tasks and getting exposed to explicit instruction of pragmatic aspects. The speaking skills targeted in the program can be categorized into linguistic (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), discourse, and pragmatic. The selected components of language competence were developed throughout seven units. The first four units were adapted from *Skillful Speaking and Listening: Book 1* (Baker and Gershon, 2012) while the other three units were mostly tailored by the researcher with some adaptations from various resources. Some of the communicative activities and vocabulary input proposed by the *Skillful book* seemed to be dull, monotonous, and uninteresting for learners. The researcher, therefore, made the appropriate modifications in order to ensure the efficiency of the program. Communicative tasks such as interviews, presentations, and role plays were incorporated in the units. The teacher researcher added vocabulary worksheets, sample dialogues, and grammar exercises from various internet websites to enhance the

lexical and syntactic repertoire of learners. Moreover, the book was extremely inadequate in tackling the speech acts necessary for native-like communication. It only provided simple rules for making requests without any extensive practice or any reference to any other speech acts. With this purpose in mind, the researcher developed units 5, 6, and 7 with the aim of improving the pragmatic competence of learners. They introduced a pedagogical application for teaching the speech acts of requests, suggestions, and refusals respectively. The aim of the activities in the three units was to raise students' awareness to the form and use of speech acts, engage them in tasks that required them to produce the target language functions (requests, suggestions, and refusals) in real world contexts, and give them opportunity to reflect on their performances. See Appendix A for a sample lesson.

According to regular instruction, students are given very little chance to practice their speaking skills or engage in interactive classroom activities. They are just taught to master grammatical forms, learn new vocabulary and writing genres, and do some listening and reading comprehension. With all this content that must be learnt for passing the final exams successfully, the speaking part becomes neglected and students usually display very low speaking proficiency levels. The activities developed by the researcher are meant to fill in the gaps in the teaching material and give the speaking skill especially pragmatic competence more room in the syllabus. The evaluation of the program was composed of two types: formative and summative. Formative evaluation was provided during the teaching sessions through the exercises and tasks out carried by the learners. The teacher instructor gave feedback to students according to the speaking skills checklist. Summative evaluation was conducted at the end of the experiment through the posttest which aimed at examining the effectiveness of the proposed program in developing ACU students' speaking skills.

c- The analytic speaking rubric

The researcher developed a rating scale (See Appendix B) in the light of the speaking skills identified in the current study. The scale was adapted from Torky (2006) with slight modifications. It measured three types of

communicative competence: linguistic competence (which is divided into grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), pragmatic competence and discourse competence. For each of the five sub skills, five levels were identified. Level five represented the highest level while level one was the lowest. Each of the five sub skills was given equal weight of 5 marks out of 25 total marks. The rubric was submitted to jury members to assess its validity.

Treatment and procedure

The experiment took a period of 12 weeks, including the pre-posttest during the fall semester of the academic year 2016-2017. The program was taught through seven sessions; each unit per week. Week 1 and 2 and the last two weeks were dedicated to test administration. Students of the experimental group got exposed to a set of speaking activities as well as direct instruction of pragmatic aspects of selected speech acts (request, suggestion, and refusal). The lessons were tailored by the researcher and embedded in the learners' official curriculum. They were taught over a period of nearly three months or twelve weeks of instruction. The activities attempted to develop the speaking skills of the experimental group. On the other hand, students in the control group received the regular conventional instruction. A pre-posttest was administered to both groups before and after the treatment. The teaching strategy adopted in this study was designed in the light of task based instruction (TBI) and explicit instruction of pragmatic aspects. In the first four units, the lessons followed three main phases of TBI:

1- **Pre- communicative Activities Phase: (Controlled Activities Phase)**
   The overall purpose of these activities is to prepare learners for a later phase of communicative activities by providing them with the needed linguistic forms and the necessary links between forms and meaning.

2- **Communicative Activities Phase: (Guided Activities Phase)**
   In this phase, learners use their linguistic repertoire in order to communicate specific meanings for specific purposes. The focus

here is to communicate meanings effectively regardless of grammatical mistakes.

3- **Meta-communicative Activities Phase: (Free Activities Phase)**
By this third phase, the learner has already mastered both the linguistic aspects and the ability to employ them in real- life situations. This is the phase where learners are communicatively competent and are able to evaluate their own progress (Littlewood, 1981).

As far as explicit instruction of pragmatics is concerned, many of the studies conducted in this area such as Alcon-Soler and Pitarch (2013) and Martínez-Flor and Soler (2007) proposed nearly the same framework or model that can be adopted to the teaching of different speech acts and it involves the following steps:

1- **Identifying the speech act in interaction**
   ➢ Learners watch/listen to authentic dialogues representative of potential situations and performed by native speakers.
   ➢ They identify the linguistic pattern of the target speech act through the provided transcripts (awareness raising).
   ➢ Learners translate the speech acts into their native language and compare both forms so that cross- linguistic differences in the performance and realization of the given language functions are emphasized.

2- **Explicit Instruction**
   ➢ This stage involves teaching the grammatical, pragmalinguistic, and sociolinguistic aspects of the speech act through drilling, repetition, and examples.

3- **Practice Stage**
   ➢ Learners practice using the speech act individually or in pair work.
   ➢ The teacher provides corrective feedback.
   ➢ Learners might record their performance for self-evaluation.

In line with the theoretical orientations of Schmidt (1990; 1993; 1995), the instructional procedures in this study were based on the above model as well as the methodological principles of the communicative approach and task- based learning.

Data Analysis

The data employed in this study was of two types: quantitative (represented in students' scores in the pretest and posttest) and qualitative (represented in the experimental group responses in the role-plays in the pretest and posttest).

Quantitative Analysis

For the quantitative part, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze and compare the scores obtained from the pre-posttest.

- The statistical techniques employed in this study were descriptive and inferential statistics.
- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) were calculated using SPSS.
- T-tests for independent samples were obtained to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups.
- Paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare the means within the same group.
- To measure the effectiveness of the proposed program on learners' speaking skills accurately, the effect size was calculated using Dunlap's (1994) formula:

  $$d = \frac{2t}{\sqrt{d.f}}$$

  Where d = the **calculated size effect**, t= the **t value**, and d.f= the **degrees of freedom**
- The referential framework for identifying the effect size of t-values is illustrated below:

Table (1)
The Referential Framework for Identifying the Effect Size of t-values

Effect Size	Interpretation
From 0.2 till less than 0.5	Small effect
From 0.5 till less than 0.8	Medium effect
From 0.8 or more	Large effect

Qualitative Analysis

As far as the qualitative part is concerned, this study adopted a discourse analytic approach in order to examine the changes in participants' responses during the post-test as compared to the pre-test. A discourse analysis of the experimental group responses in the role-plays performed in the pre-posttest was carried out. The study adopted the linguistic taxonomy of Blum-Kulka et al (1989) for requests (See Appendix C), Flor (2005) taxonomy of suggestion realization strategies (See Appendix D), and Beebe et al (1990) classification of refusals (See Appendix E). Data collected by means of role-play were transcribed and used to explore the progress in the experimental group level of acquiring the sociopragmatic components of the speech acts of requests, suggestions, and refusals. All occurrences of semantic formulae for each speech act were located and analyzed.

4. Results and Discussion

Quantitative Statistical analysis

Before the treatment, a speaking pre-test was administered to the experimental and control groups to ensure that both groups were at the same level of proficiency. In order to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test, a t-test for independent samples was applied. Table (2) shows the difference between the mean scores of the two groups.

Table (2)

Test Results of the Speaking Pre-Test Comparing the Control Group and Experimental Group Mean Scores

Group	N	M	S.D	df	T-value	Significance Level
Control	20	10.7	3.61	38	0.41	0.68 (not significant at 0.01)
Experimental	20	11.2	4.04			

Table (2) shows that the estimated t-value was 0.41 which is not statistically significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the two groups are almost at the same level of proficiency in speaking before the treatment.

Verifying the Hypotheses of the Research

The First Hypothesis

"The experimental group exposed to the suggested program outperforms the control group receiving regular instruction in overall speaking proficiency in the post test".

In order to test the validity of this hypothesis, a t-test for independent samples was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the post- test. The following table describes the results. See table (3).
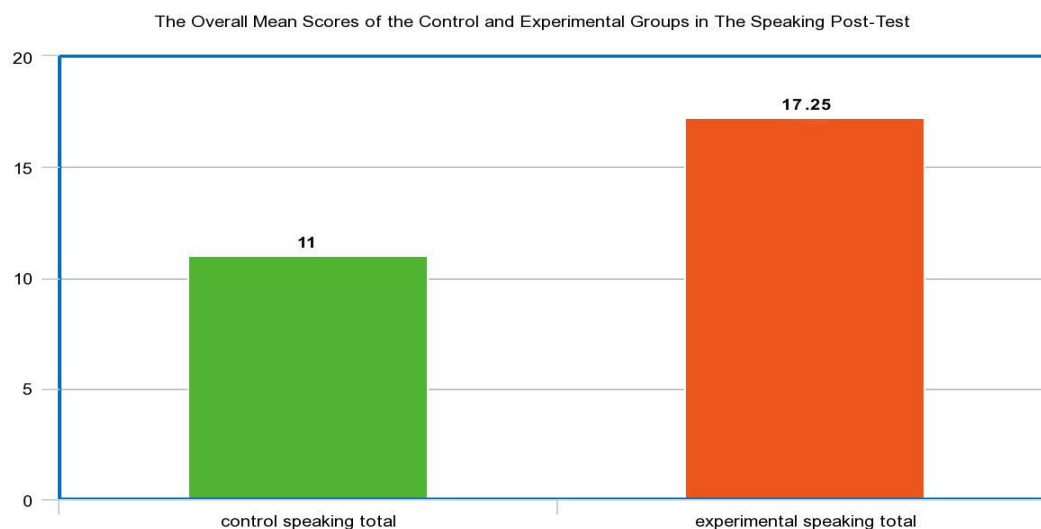
Table (3)

T- Test Results of the Speaking Post-Test Comparing the Control and Experimental Group Overall Mean Scores

Group	N	M	S.D	df	T value	Significance Level	Effect Size
Control	20	11.0	2.47	32	5.9	Significant at 0.01 level	2.1
Experimental	20	17.25	4.03				Large

Table (3) shows that the calculated t value (5.9) is statistically significant at 0.01 level and the effect size is 2.1. Thus, it can be concluded that the proposed strategy has a significant effect on the experimental group students' overall performance as compared to that of the control group students. The difference between the control group and

experimental group students' ability to speak can be illustrated in the following figure.

Figure (1)

The Overall Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups in The Speaking Post-Test

Furthermore, independent samples t-test were conducted to examine the differences between the control and experimental mean scores with regard to the speaking sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse competence). The results are shown in table (4).

Table (4)

T-Tests Results of the Speaking Post-Test Comparing the Control and Experimental Groups in Speaking Sub-Skills

Speaking Skills	Control group Post-test Mean	Experimental group Post-test Mean	t-value	Significance Level	df	Effect Size
1.Grammar	2.5	3.45	3.08	0.004	38	1.004
						Large
2.Vocabulary	2.35	3.25	2.83	0.007	38	0.92
						Large
3.Pronunciation	2.75	3.75	3.18	0.003	38	1.034
						Large
4.Discourse Competence	1.9	3.2	5.28	0.001	38	1.71
						Large

As shown in Table (4), there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group students

and the control group students on the speaking post- test in favor of the experimental group in the four above mentioned sub-skills.

The Second Hypothesis

"The experimental group which receives the proposed explicit instruction on pragmatic competence outperforms the control group not receiving the proposed explicit instruction in the post test".

T-test for independent samples was out carried to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups with respect to pragmatic competence. Table (5) below describes the results:

Table (5)

T-Test Results of the Speaking Post-Test Comparing the Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups in Pragmatic Competence

Group	N	M	S.D	df	T value	Significance Level	Effect Size
Control	20	1.75	0.78	33	5.66	Significant at 0.01 level	1.99
Experimental	20	3.6	1.23				Large

Results of the t-tests above prove to be statistically consistent with the hypothesis. The calculated t-value is 5.66 which is significant at 0.01 and the effect size is 1.99. Therefore, it can be said that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test regarding pragmatic competence in favor of the experimental group. Moreover, the calculated effect size reveals that the proposed strategy has a large effect on the experimental group students' pragmatic knowledge as compared to control group. The difference can be illustrated in the following figure.

Figure (2)

Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups in Pragmatic Competence in the Post-Test
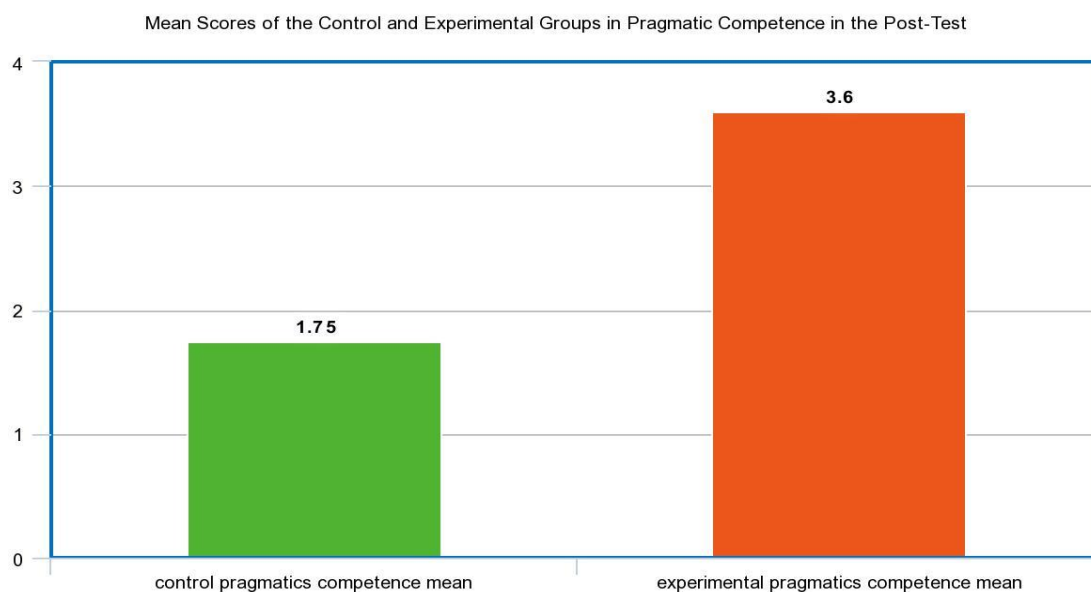
The Third Hypothesis

"The experimental group mean scores on the post-test exceed the pre-test scores in overall speaking proficiency".

A t-test for paired samples was used in order to verify the validity of this hypothesis. The results are shown in Table (6).
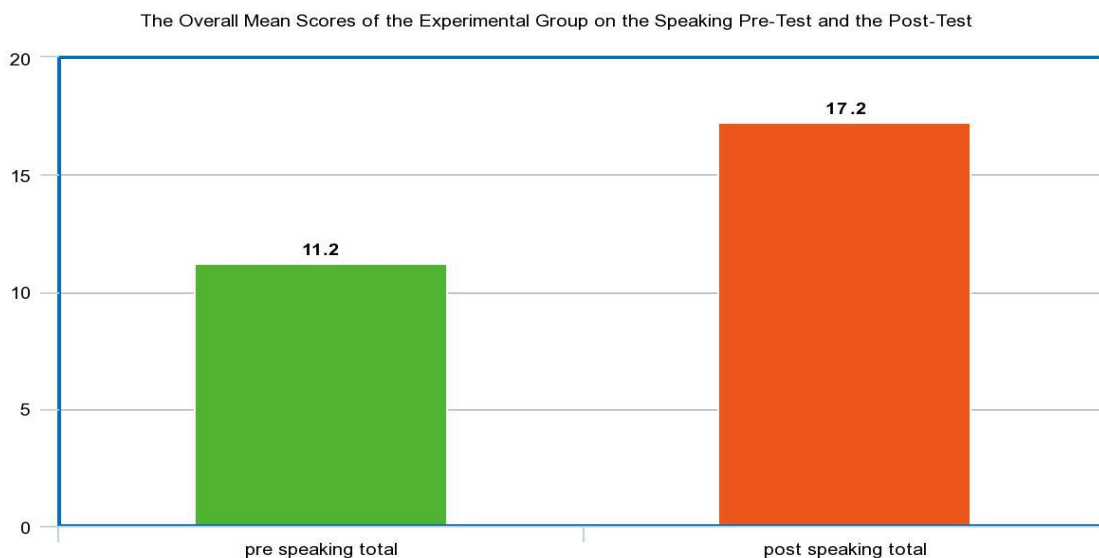
Table (6)
T-Test Results Comparing the Speaking Pre-Test and Post-Test Overall Mean Scores of the Experimental Group

Group	N	M	S.D	df	T value	Significance Level	Effect Size
Pre-Test		11.2	4.04			Significant	3.43
Post-Test	20	17.2	4.03	19	7.47	at 0.01 level	Large

The statistical results in the table above clearly shows that there is a difference in the performance of the experimental group before and after the treatment as far as overall speaking proficiency is concerned. The estimated t-value (7.47) is statistically significant at 0.01 level and the effect size value is 3.43. Thus, it can be said that the results of the t-test

proves to be statistically consistent with the above stated hypothesis. The difference in students' performance can be attributed to the effect of the proposed strategy. The following figure can illustrate the results.

Figure (3)

The Overall Mean Scores of the Experimental Group on the Speaking Pre-Test and the Post-Test

Moreover, paired samples t-tests were employed in order to investigate the difference in the performance of the experimental group students before and after the implementation of the program with regard to the speaking sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse competence). The results are shown in table (7) below:

Table (7)
T-Test Results Comparing the Speaking Pre-Test and the Post-Test Mean Scores of the Experimental Group in Speaking Sub-Skills

Speaking Skills	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	t-value	Significance Level	df	Effect Size
1.Grammar	2.4	3.45	3.05	0.007	19	1.4
						Large
2.Vocabulary	2.25	3.25	2.082	0.006	19	1.4
						Large
3.Pronunciation	2.85	3.75	2.78	0.002	19	1.27
						Large
4.Discourse Competence	2	3.2	4.06	0.001	19	1.86
						Large

Table (7) shows that there is statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the speaking pre-test and the post-

test of the experimental group in favor of the post- test with respect to the above mentioned sub-skills. It can be inferred from the calculated effect size in each skill that the proposed program has a large impact on the experimental group students' performance.

The Fourth Hypothesis

   "The experimental group mean scores on the post-test exceed the pre-test scores in pragmatic competence".

   In order to compare the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the treatment with respect to pragmatic competence, a t-test for paired samples was executed. The results are displayed in table (8).
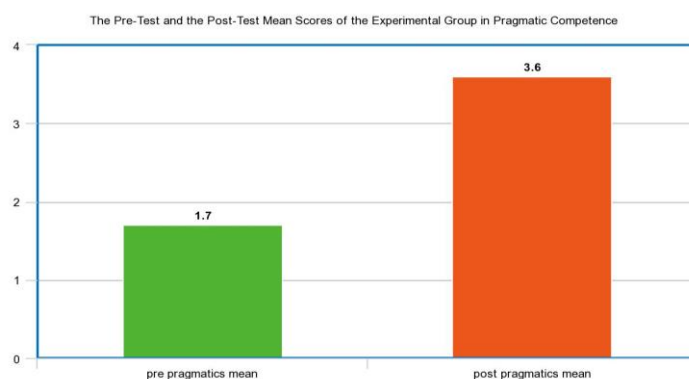
Table (8)

T-Test Results Comparing the Pre-Test and the Post-Test Mean Scores of the Experimental Group in Pragmatic Competence

Group	N	M	S.D	df	T value	Significance Level	Effect Size
Pre-Test		1.7	0.73			Significant	3.22
Post-Test	20	3.6	1.23	19	7.07	at 0.01 level	Large

   Table (8) shows that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the pre-test and the post- test of the experimental group in pragmatic competence in favor of the post- test (t-value is 7.02). The effect size value is 3.22 which proves that the proposed instructional strategy has a large effect on the experimental group students' pragmatic ability. The difference can be illustrated in the following figure.

Figure (4)

The Pre-Test and the Post-Test Mean Scores of the Experimental Group in Pragmatic Competence

Qualitative Discourse Analysis of Role-plays

As shown above, the results of the quantitative analysis (Tables 5 & 8) reveal a significant improvement in the pragmatic competence level of the experimental group. In order to cross-validate the results of the study, a discourse analysis of the experimental group responses in the role-plays performed in the pre-posttest was carried out. The study employed the linguistic taxonomy of Blum-Kulka et al (1989) for requests, Flor (2005) taxonomy of suggestion realization strategies, and Beebe et al (1990) classification of refusals. The politeness mode adopted in the study is Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of positive and negative face.

The findings of the qualitative data analysis support the quantitative results and suggest that the instructional treatment had a positive effect on the experimental group sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic abilities. This was demonstrated by the changes in their choices of Internal and external modification devices in making requests and suggesting as well as their refusal strategies from pre-test to post-test. Such changes are not found in the data collected from the control group.

Below is a summary of the main patterns drawn from the qualitative assessment of the discourse data collected.

Requests

In the pre-test, except for two respondents who used the interrogative "Could you…", most participants responded using **direct strategies** such as "I want to…" or the same form of "Can you…?" for lower and higher status situations, and they rarely used **mitigators** for politeness or to minimize the face-threatening nature of the request. In the post-test, however, direct strategies were non-existent and were replaced by **syntactic downgraders** such as Interrogatives "Could you lend me…?", "May I….?" **consultative devices** "Do you mind if I…?", "Would it be okay if I …." for more formal and higher status requests, and the **politeness device** "please" was extensively used.

Suggestions

Participants in the pre-test either responded with totally irrelevant forms such as "In my opinion, this restaurant is bad", with the wrong grammatical form "What about visit the cinema?" or even using the direct strategy of the **performative verb** "I suggest we…" Few of them made

use of **mitigation devices** or indirect strategies. After the treatment, a higher level of accuracy was achieved in formulating suggestions. Results in the post-test showed more correct forms of the **interrogatives** "What about going to the cinema after school?", "Have you tried going to another restaurant?", "why not go to another place?" This shows that direct instruction of grammatical forms was effective in producing the correct cases of gerund/ infinitive.

More frequent use of **possibility/ probability** "I would probably suggest that….", "May be going to….", "Perhaps we…." as well as **conditionals** "If I were you, I wouldn't ….." was displayed. Participants' responses in the post-test also indicated their awareness of using the suggestion forms for higher status. For example, they used "I would probably suggest that…" for suggesting another restaurant to their boss.

Refusals

A comparison of participants' refusals before and after the treatment suggests a noticeable degree of progress in their choices of refusal strategies. Almost all responses in the pre-test employed the **direct non-performative** statement "No, I can't. I can't give you ….", "No, thank you", "No, I want to go home", "I can't stay because I'm tired", "You can't borrow my notebook". The post-test, on the other hand, displayed more use of **indirect semantic formulae** and less frequent use of non-performative refusals. For example, **statements of regret** "I'm sorry" were mentioned more considerably. Many participants started with an **adjunct stating a positive feeling** or agreement (e.g. I'd love to) followed by an **excuse or explanation** for refusal (e.g. "I need it today", "I have an exam tomorrow", "I have a headache now", "I want to have coffee".) then provided an **alternative** at the end. Some of the participants even used the **indirect strategy of Promise of Future Acceptance**. This was apparent in responses such as "Perhaps I'll lend you tomorrow" and "May be next time".

Discussion

Discussion of the results related to the first research question

The first question tried to examine the effect of the proposed program on enhancing the learners' speaking skills.

First, results of the study showed that the experimental group students performed significantly better on the speaking post- test than the control group students who were taught conventionally. The analysis of the t-test revealed that t=5.9. Thus, the program proved its effectiveness in the development of learners' overall speaking proficiency. Moreover, the t-test results of the speaking post- test comparing the control and experimental groups in the four speaking sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse competence) proved that there were significant statistical differences at 0.01 level. Also, the calculated effect size was "large" in the four sub-skills. With regard to the fifth sub-skill (pragmatic competence), there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post- test in pragmatic competence in favor of the experimental group. T-test analysis showed that t=5.66 and that the effect size was large.

Second, there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- test and post- test in overall speaking proficiency in favor of the post- test scores since t=7.47. In addition, analysis of the t-tests revealed a great impact on the experimental group students' performance as far as the four speaking sub- skills are concerned. T-test results comparing the speaking pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group in the four mentioned speaking sub-skills showed that the effect size was "large". Additionally, there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group on the speaking pre-test and post- test in pragmatic competence in favor of the post- test scores. Analysis of t-test revealed that t= 7.02 and the effect size was large. Finally, the qualitative discourse analysis revealed that there was a difference in students' replies before and after the treatment. A comparison of the experimental group participants' responses in the role-plays in the pre-test and post-test suggested a considerable degree of improvement towards the sociopragmatic norms of the target language. Therefore, these results proved the effectiveness of the program in enhancing the overall speaking performance as well as all speaking sub-skills of the experimental group students.

Discussion of the results related to the second research question

The second question attempted to explore the features of a lesson that adopts the communicative approach and aims at the development of college students' speaking skills.

In fact, the effectiveness of using the communicative approach in developing students' speaking skills in this study can be attributed to a number of factors: Firstly, the pre-task phase provided learners with the relevant input to be used later at both the main- task and post- task phases. It incorporated a set of controlled- practice activities that enhanced their range of vocabulary, grammatical structure and pronunciation skills, all contextualized and related to the theme of the lesson. Secondly, the main- task phase included guided activities that enabled learners to carry out the intended language functions using the linguistic repertoire they acquired in the pre- task phase. It also contained direct instruction of rules (focus on form) and some drilling to help them master the necessary forms. Finally, in the post- task phase, learners were engaged in varied types of communicative activities to practice and produce the language freely. The tasks instructed them to employ language in real- life situations and interactive contexts.

Another factor which contributed to the success of the program is the variety of tasks (interviews, presentations, and role-plays) that helped create interest and increased learners' motivation. They served to meet their different learning styles and needs. Students were encouraged to use language creatively in a risk- free environment without the intervention of the instructor. Performing the tasks in pairs and groups broke the monotony of class. Assigning roles (leader, writer, representative, and time- manager) 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 and get motivated.

Last though not least, fluency and accuracy were two complementary targets during the lessons. However, fluency was valued over accuracy during the free activities phase since the learners' focus was on communication rather than paying attention to the correct use of exact language forms. Thus, the teacher provided positive or supportive

feedback during the post- task phase and kept negative or corrective feedback till the end of the task.

Discussion of the results related to the third research question

The third question focused on identifying the features of a lesson that adopts explicit instruction and targets learners' development of pragmatic competence.

The effectiveness of using explicit instruction in developing students' pragmatic competence in this study can be attributed to a number of factors: Firstly, teaching the selected speech acts within the framework of the communicative approach and task- based learning provided students with a purpose to use the language functions in a meaningful context, share information, and work toward a clear goal of genuine interaction. For example, the videos and audios at the beginning of the "awareness raising stage" in each unit engaged the learners and served as a start point to direct their attention to the appropriate linguistic choice that guided each speech act (e.g. formal/ informal relationship between interlocutors). Also, the questions and transcripts following each audio/ clip helped them realize the forms of the speech act in focus.

Secondly, asking learners to compare the patterns of each speech act with their counterparts in Egyptian Arabic helped to raise their awareness to the cross- linguistic and cultural differences that govern the performance of speech acts in each language. Pointing out the features of pragmatic transfer and divergence in learners' speech while performing the tasks (negative feedback) due to the intervention of Arabic norms (L1) was of great help in directing learners' attention to the importance of following the pragmatic rules of the target language.

Finally, the guided practice stage consolidated the rules and patterns taught at the "Explicit Instruction" stage while free practice (role-plays) provided a chance for learners to produce the target speech act freely and in a contextualized situation.

5. Conclusion

The present study provides evidence for the effectiveness of using communicative activities in developing learners' speaking skills. Activities in the pre- task and main- task phases are of pivotal influence in enriching learners' lexical, phonetic, grammatical, and pragmatic resources so that they perform the final speaking task efficiently. This is supported by the findings of Obadi (2003) and Torky (2006). There is evidence that using a variety of communicative activities raises learners' motivation and meets their different learning styles. Engaging in group and pair work fosters self- confidence for weak students as they start learning from their more proficient classmates. One of the basic components in CLT is the role of positive and negative feedback in class. Providing supportive feedback after finishing the task allows for more fluency and free self- expression for students. However, maintaining balance between accuracy and fluency is a key element to a successful speaking class.

It is evident that employing explicit instruction proves to be effective in improving learners' pragmatic competence. This result is supported by Billmyer (1990), Kondo (2001), and Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford (1993). Explicit instruction of L2 pragmatics helps to raise the awareness of students to the importance of following the correct sociopragmatic norms of the target language in order to avoid sounding rude or inept. There is an indication that exposing students to audiovisual material performed by native speakers of the language enables them to pay *conscious* and identify the pragmatic features of speech acts. Translating speech acts from English to Arabic and making comparisons enhances learners' awareness to differences in speech act realization in each language. Moreover, incorporating metapragmatic awareness into task- based methodological principles proves to be effective in teaching speech acts. This is supported by Silva (2003).

Implications of the study

In light of the present research conclusions, a number of implications could be made. First, more attention should be given to speaking instruction in order to develop the communicative competence of Egyptian college students and equip them with the necessary tools to reach success in the global market. Second, employing the

communicative approach is highly recommended in speaking instruction since it increases learners' motivation and fosters their fluency and proficiency. Learner- centered teaching should be encouraged in our EFL classes. The focus should shift from the teacher to the learner. Teachers and instructors are highly advised to adjust their teaching material and design syllabi that cater for learners' needs, interests, and different proficiency levels. Tasks that require students to analyze, brainstorm and gain independence away from the authoritative figure of the teacher should be greatly emphasized.

Furthermore, explicit teaching of L2 pragmatics should be integrated into the EFL curriculum so that learners can communicate using socially appropriate language for the situations they encounter. Curriculum designers and textbook writers are advised to design syllabi that incorporate metapragmatic information about register, speech acts and rules of politeness. In the same respect, it is advised that explicit teaching of pragmatics is taught within the framework of the communicative approach and task- based learning.

Limitations of the study

The findings of the current study should be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, the study is restricted to a group of 40 students only (20 in control group and 20 in experimental group). The intention of the researcher was to include all 60 students registered in each class (30 in control and 30 in experimental). However, those who actually participated in the pre-posttest and attended regularly during the academic semester ended up to be 20 in each group. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the proposed program could still be widely applicable on a larger population. Second, the program was applied within a limited duration of time (one academic semester, i.e. nearly three months). In future research, it is advisable to carry out similar experimental studies over a longer period of time in order to yield more accurate and reliable results. Finally, for the scope and purpose of this paper, only three types of speech acts (requests, suggestions, and refusals) were covered. However, future research needs to discuss and tackle more speech acts in the Egyptian context.

Suggestions for further research

In light of the present research results, further research is required to explore the effectiveness of the communicative approach in the other three language skills (reading, writing, and listening), to investigate the effectiveness of the proposed strategy on other populations (such as college students in public universities) and over a longer period of time, to explore the effectiveness of explicit instruction on other speech acts, to identify cross cultural and linguistic similarities and differences between colloquial Egyptian Arabic and spoken English in speech act realization, and to identify the reasons and patterns of pragmatic transfer among speakers of Egyptian Arabic.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sample lesson

Unit 5: Making Requests

A- *Post-listening*: **Answer the following questions about the video you just watched.**

1- What is happening? _____
2- Where are the participants? _____
3- What is their relationship? _____
4- What is the topic of the conversation? _____
5- List all forms of requests used in the conversation.

_____
_____

B- **Read the following dialogue with a partner. Underline all the requests.**

At the restaurant

Jim: So darling! How did you find this restaurant?

Anne: Well Jim, I looked on a map.

Jim: Oh! I mean did you like the food and service?

Anne: Yes, but I didn't try the dessert yet! And I really want to sit in a different area now. It has gotten too loud in here!

Jim is calling waiter: Excuse me, my wife and I are feeling a bit crammed at this table. Could we move over to a quieter place, please?

Waiter: Well, this section is all fully booked. Do you mind sitting near the register?

Jim: Oh! Okay sure.

Waiter: Great! It will just take a minute to collect your things and clean the other table.

Jim: Do you think you could bring us the dessert menu please? Darling? Which do you prefer?

Anne: I would like to have an apple pie.

Waiter: oh! Sorry we don't have that one.

Anne: Could you tell me what's the special dessert for the day?

Waiter: The dessert of the day is pumpkin pie. It is November the local farms have great pumpkin

Anne: Awesome then. But could you tell me about the spices because I am allergic to cinnamon.

Waiter: Then maybe you wouldn't want to try our pumpkin pie. Would you like to try the pecan pie? I recommend adding our homemade ice cream for an extra dollar!

➢ **Language Form: Consider the suitable ways of requesting.**

POLITE REQUEST	EXAMPLE	DEGREE OF FORMALITY
I would be	I would be grateful if you could get here before five.	Formal
will	I will open the door for you, if you like.	Can be used in both situations
may	May I have a look at your paper?	Formal
can	I can help you, if you like. Can you check if your door is closed, please?	Informal
could	Could I have something to drink, please? Could I borrow your pen, please? Could you take me to the church, please??	Can be used in both situations
Do you think you could	Do you think you could take me to a nightclub?	Formal – you don't know if your request will bother the listener

Would it be all right / ok if	Would it be all right if I picked you up at 7?	Formal – you don't know f your request will bother the listener.
Would you mind	Would you mind taking me downtown today instead of tomorrow?	Formal - you don't know if your request will bother the listener.

C- **Look at the photos below and fill in the chart with the most appropriate answer.**
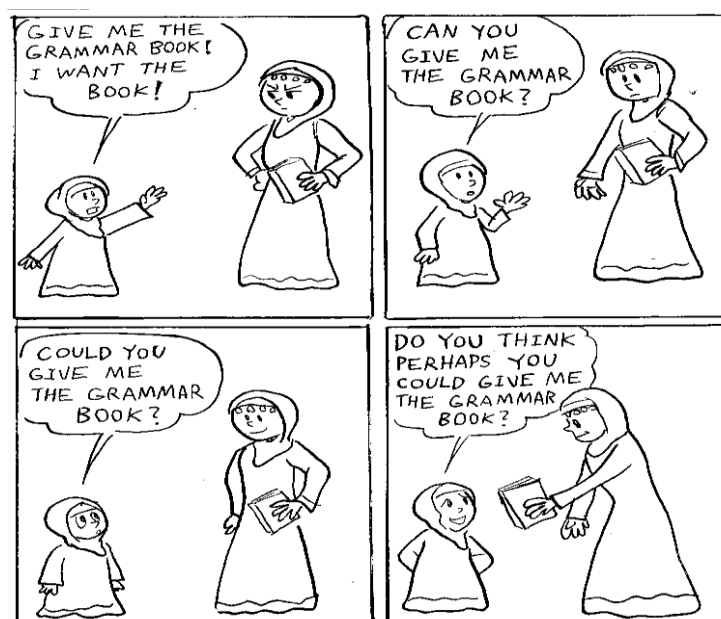
impolite	polite	More polite	Much more polite

Pronunciation skill

PRONOUNCING WORD STRESS AND INTONATION IN QUESTIONS

Yes / no questions have rising intonation. This means the voice rises on the last stressed syllable and then keeps on rising until the end of the sentence. Sometimes, the last stressed syllable is the last word of the sentence. Wh- questions have a rising–falling intonation. The voice goes up on the last stressed syllable and then goes down.

Do you have a PROBLEM with JET lag?

WHY do SOME people experience JET lag?

1 🔊 1.15 <u>Underline</u> the last stressed syllables. Draw arrows to show rising and falling intonation. Then listen and check your answers.

1 What do you want to find out?
2 Is there a cure for jet lag?
3 Why do lions hunt at night?
4 Who discovered circadian rhythm?
5 Do plants respond to the cycles of the moon?
6 Are you tired?

2 🔊 1.15 Listen again and repeat. Focus on your stress and intonation.

D- **Use the cards to practice lending items in the classroom.**

One student holds card A and the other one holds card B. Student A should proceed to request at least three items from student B using the items and useful phrases on card A. Student B gives possible answers for "yes" from card B. Then, the two students exchange roles.

Card A:

Items and things to request:
*stapler * class notes *Eraser * a pen
* opening the door * closing the window
* a ruler * printing paper

Useful phrases to help you request:
Could you lend me_____, please?
Do you mind _____, please?
Excuse me, can I use_____?
Do you think you could
_____?
Would you mind
_____?

Card B: possible answers
☐ Sure
☐ No problem
☐ Go a head
☐ Yes, of course

E- **Role play with a partner. Get attention and ask for permission in these situations.**

1- You are at your friend's house. You feel cold and you want to close the window.
2- Your teacher is working in his office. You have a question. Ask for permission to enter.
3- You have a doctor's appointment. Ask your professor if you can leave class early.
4- You are at a restaurant. Ask the waiter if you can pay with a credit card.
5- You want to use your friend's phone because you left yours at home.

Appendix (B)
The Analytic Speaking Rubric

	Grammar	Vocabulary	pronunciation	Pragmatic competence	Discourse Competence
5	A relatively effective use of grammatical rules. (within his/her level of Proficiency and the taught grammar points	The speaker uses relevant, adequate and correct vocabulary. (within his/ her level of language proficiency)	Pronunciation is Intelligible characterized by the appropriate use of stress, the smooth linking of words, and the use of appropriate intonation.	The speaker is able to fulfill a wide range of functions. The speaker generally considers register and demonstrates appropriate response.	The speaker contributes fully and effectively throughout the interaction. Can expand and develop topics. Uses a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers effectively.
4	Almost no grammatical inaccuracies except for occasional few grammatical errors.	Almost appropriate range of words with few difficulties. Occasionally uses inappropriate words.	Almost acceptable stress, linking of words, and intonation. Flaws in articulation, stress and intonation rarely disturb the listener.	The speaker is almost able to fulfill required functions effectively. Errors not significant enough to cause social misunderstandings.	The speaker contributes with ease for most of the interaction with occasional difficulties in negotiation. Uses a range of cohesive devices with few errors.
3	Some grammatical and word order errors occur which may cause mis-understanding.	Vocabulary range is somewhat limited. Some Misunder-standings may arise from inaccurate word choice.	Stress, intonation and linking words are sometimes faulty.	The speaker may lack skill in carrying out the intended functions. Inappropriate responses may sometimes cause social misunderstanding.	The speaker handles communication for parts of the interaction with deviations at times. Responses may be short. Uses only basic cohesive devices with errors.
2	Frequent minor and major errors in grammar that impede comprehension	Frequent misuse of word, and limited vocabulary make comprehension quite difficult.	Serious errors in, Pronunciation and stress; often influenced by the mother language, which makes understanding difficult.	The speaker often lacks skill in addressing intended functions. Generally inappropriate response to audience/ situation.	Difficulty in maintaining contributions throughout. Rare use of even simple conjunctions.
1	Almost all grammatical patterns are inaccurate. Grammatical Mistakes severely hamper communication.	Vocabulary is irrelevant, inadequate and limited even for the most basic communication.	Severe and constant pronunciation problems cause almost complete unintelligibility.	Unable to perform the functions in the spoken language. No evidence of ability to respond to audience/ or register.	Communication is totally dependent on repetition. No use of cohesive devices which interferes with discourse competence.

Appendix (C)
Taxonomy for requests

Internal Modifications

Syntactic downgraders

1. Interrogative (*Could you do the cleaning up?*)
2. Negation (*Look, excuse me. I wonder if you wouldn't mind dropping me home.*)
3. Past Tense (*I wanted to ask for a postponement.*)
4. Embedded 'if' clause (*I would appreciate it if you left me alone.*)

Lexical downgraders

1. Consultative devices (The speaker seeks to involve the hearer and bids for his/her cooperation)
Do you think I could borrow your lecture notes from yesterday?
2. Understaters (The speaker minimizes the required action or object)
*Could you tidy up **a bit** before I start?*
3. Hedges (The speaker avoids specification regarding the request)
*It would really help if you **did something** about the kitchen.*
4. Downtoner (The speaker modulates the impact of the request by signaling the possibility of non-compliance.)
*Will you be able to **perhaps** drive me?*
5. Politeness device
*Can I use your pen for a minute, **please**?*

External Modifications   (Supportive Moves)

1. Checking on availability
2. Getting a precommitment (The speaker attempts to obtain a precommitment)
3. Sweetener (By expressing exaggerated appreciation of the requestee's ability to comply with the request, the speaker lowers the imposition involved.)
4. Disarmer (The speaker indicates awareness of a potential offense and thereby   possible refusal.)
5. Cost minimizer (The speaker indicates consideration of the imposition to the requestee involved in compliance with the request)

(Adapted from CCSARP Model in Blum-Kulka, et al, 1989, pp.203-205)

Appendix (D)
Taxonomy of Suggestion Linguistic Realization Strategies

Type	Strategy	Examples
Direct	Performative Verb	I suggest that you… I advise you to… I recommend that you...
	Noun of Suggestions	My suggestion would be….
	Imperative	Try using…
	Negative Imperative	Don't try to…
Conventionalized Forms	Specific Formulae (Interrogative Form)	Why don't you…? How about…? What about…? Have you thought about…?
	Possibility/ Probability	You can… You could… You may… You might…
	Should	You should…
	Need	You need to…
	Conditional	If I were you, I would
Indirect	Impersonal	One thing (that you can do) would be… Here's one possibility… There are a number of options that you… It would be helpful if you… It might be better to… A good idea would be… It would be nice if…
	Hints	I've heard that…

Taxonomy of Suggestion Linguistic Realization Strategies (Flor, A., 2005, p.175)

Appendix (E)
Classification of refusals

I. Direct
A. Performative (e.g., "I refuse")
B. Non performative statement
1. "No"
2. Negative willingness ("I can't". "I won't". "I don't think so".)

II. Indirect
A. Statement of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry…"; "I feel terrible…")
B. Wish (e.g., "I wish I could help you…")
C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "My children will be home that night."; "I
 Have a headache.")
D. Statement of alternative
1. I can't do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather…" "I'd prefer…")
2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g., "Why don't you ask someone else?")
E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "If you had asked me earlier, I would have…")
F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I'll do it next time"; "I promise I'll…" or
"Next time I'll…"-using "will" of promise or "promise")
G. Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business with friends.")
H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., "One can't be too careful.")
I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the request (I won't be any fun tonight" to refuse an invitation)
2. Guilt trip (e.g., Waitress to customers who want to sit a while: I can't make a living off people who just offer coffee.")
3. Criticize request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion);
4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.
5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., "Don't worry about it." "That's okay." "You don't have to.")
6. Self-defense (e.g., "I'm trying my best." "I'm doing all I can do." "I no do nutting wrong.")
J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
1. Unspecific or indefinite reply

2. Lack of enthusiasm

K. Avoidance

1. Nonverbal

a. Silence

b. Hesitation

c. Do nothing

d. Physical departure

2. Verbal

a. Topic switch

b. Joke

c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Monday?")

d. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it.")

e. Hedging (e.g., "Gee, I don't know." "I'm not sure.")

Adjuncts to Refusals

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement ("That's a good idea…"; "I'd love to…")

2. Statement of empathy (e.g., "I realize you are in a difficult situation.")

3. Pause fillers (e.g., "uhh"; "well"; "oh"; "uhm")

4. Gratitude/appreciation

Classification of refusals adapted from Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990)