

Developing Pragmatic Comprehension of Indirect Speech Acts through Explicit Instruction: Evidence from Algerian EFL University Students

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study investigates the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instruction on Algerian EFL university students' comprehension of indirect speech acts. Sixty-four second-year English majors from an Algerian university participated in an eight-week intervention. The experimental group ($n = 32$) received explicit instruction targeting requests, refusals, and suggestions, while the control group ($n = 32$) followed conventional communicative language teaching methods. Data collection involved discourse completion tasks and metapragmatic assessments administered pre- and post-intervention. Analysis of covariance revealed statistically significant differences favoring the experimental group, $F(1, 61) = 47.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .32$, with large effect sizes for request comprehension (Cohen's $d = 1.28$) and refusal recognition (Cohen's $d = 1.18$). Qualitative analysis of learner reflections indicated enhanced metalinguistic awareness and contextual sensitivity. Findings provide novel evidence supporting the integration of explicit pragmatic instruction within Algerian EFL curricula, addressing persistent gaps between linguistic competence and pragmatic performance. This study offers one of the first empirical investigations of pragmatic comprehension development in the Algerian EFL context, extending current interlanguage pragmatics research. Pedagogical implications emphasize structured awareness-raising activities, authentic materials incorporation, and teacher professional development in pragmatic pedagogy.

Keywords: Explicit Instruction; Pragmatic Comprehension; Indirect Speech Acts; Algerian EFL Learners; Interlanguage Pragmatics

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1. Introduction

The globalization of English as a lingua franca has intensified the need for communicative competence extending beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass pragmatic appropriateness (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Pragmatic competence – the ability to produce and comprehend language in contextually appropriate ways – remains a critical yet underdeveloped dimension of foreign language proficiency, particularly where learners have limited exposure to authentic target language use (Alcón-Soler & Martínez-Flor, 2022). In Algeria, where English functions as a foreign language learned primarily through formal instruction, university students frequently demonstrate grammatical proficiency while struggling with pragmatic comprehension, especially regarding indirect speech acts requiring inferential reasoning and cultural knowledge (Al-Issa, 2003; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Indirect speech acts – utterances whose intended meaning differs from literal interpretation – pose significant challenges for EFL learners who must navigate linguistic form, contextual cues, and sociocultural norms simultaneously (Searle, 1975; Thomas, 1983). Algerian EFL learners, immersed in an educational system emphasizing grammatical structures and vocabulary acquisition, often lack systematic exposure to pragmatic features, resulting in miscommunication when engaging with proficient English speakers.

The Algerian higher education context presents unique characteristics influencing English pedagogy. Following implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system in 2004, universities adopted communicative approaches emphasizing interaction and authentic language use. However, instructional practices frequently prioritize linguistic forms over pragmatic functions, with curricula offering insufficient attention to speech act realization patterns, politeness strategies, and contextual variation. Furthermore, large class sizes, limited resources, and teacher unfamiliarity with pragmatic instruction methodologies constrain implementation of pragmatically focused activities (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020).

Research within instructed second language acquisition has increasingly demonstrated that pragmatic competence benefits from explicit, focused instruction rather than incidental acquisition alone (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Taguchi, 2015). Explicit instruction – involving metalinguistic explanations, consciousness-raising activities, and structured practice – enables learners to develop awareness of form-function-context mappings essential for pragmatic comprehension (Schmidt, 1993). While studies in diverse EFL contexts have documented explicit pragmatic instruction effectiveness for production abilities, fewer investigations have examined its impact specifically on comprehension, particularly within North African educational settings.

This study addresses three critical gaps. First, despite growing interest in pragmatic instruction research, limited empirical evidence exists regarding Algerian EFL learners' pragmatic comprehension development. Second, while production-oriented studies dominate interlanguage pragmatics research, comprehension – which precedes and informs production – requires independent investigation (Roever, 2012). Third, most pragmatic instruction studies have focused on Asian or European contexts, necessitating context-specific research considering the sociocultural and pedagogical realities of Algerian higher education.

The present investigation employs a quasi-experimental design examining whether explicit pragmatic instruction enhances Algerian EFL university students' comprehension of indirect speech acts, specifically requests, refusals, and suggestions. These speech acts were selected because they occur frequently in academic contexts, exhibit substantial cross-cultural variation, and pose documented challenges for Arabic-speaking EFL learners (Al-Issa, 2003; Bella, 2021). Three research questions guide the study:

1. Does explicit pragmatic instruction significantly improve Algerian EFL learners' comprehension of indirect requests compared to conventional instruction?
2. To what extent does explicit instruction enhance learners' ability to recognize and interpret indirect refusals and suggestions?
3. How do learners perceive the role of explicit pragmatic instruction in developing their metapragmatic awareness?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Pragmatic Competence and Instructed Development

Pragmatic competence constitutes a fundamental component of communicative competence, encompassing both pragmalinguistics – the linguistic resources available for conveying communicative acts – and sociopragmatics – the social perceptions underlying language use in context (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). Interlanguage pragmatics research has documented systematic patterns in learners' pragmatic development, revealing that pragmatic competence develops gradually, influenced by proficiency level, exposure length, individual differences, and instructional interventions (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Crucially, studies demonstrate that pragmatic competence does not develop naturally through general language instruction alone; rather, it requires focused attention and explicit pedagogical support (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Takimoto, 2020).

Comprehension of indirect speech acts represents a particularly complex dimension of pragmatic competence. Unlike direct speech acts, where illocutionary force matches linguistic form, indirect speech acts require listeners to infer intended meanings through contextual integration and pragmatic reasoning (Searle, 1975). Research on pragmatic comprehension has identified several cognitive processes involved in interpreting indirect speech acts. Bouton (1994) found that understanding implicatures posed significant challenges for ESL learners, with certain types proving particularly difficult. Subsequent studies confirmed that comprehension difficulties persist even among advanced learners, suggesting that explicit instruction targeting inferential reasoning may be necessary (Roever, 2012; Taguchi et al., 2021).

2.2 Explicit Instruction Effectiveness

Jeon and Kaya's (2006) seminal meta-analysis of 49 studies demonstrated that explicit instruction yielded significantly larger effect sizes than implicit instruction across various pragmatic features. These findings have been corroborated by subsequent research examining diverse speech acts, proficiency levels, and instructional contexts (Li, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021; Takimoto, 2020). Explicit instruction has proven particularly effective for developing pragmatic comprehension, as metalinguistic explanations facilitate the cognitive processing required for mapping forms to functions and contexts (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2023).

Recent investigations have explored optimal approaches to explicit pragmatic instruction. Taguchi et al. (2021) demonstrated that combining explicit instruction with meaningful communicative practice enhanced both comprehension and production abilities. Similarly, Alcón-Soler and Martínez-Flor (2022) found that structured input activities directing learners' attention to form-meaning connections proved particularly effective for pragmatic comprehension development.

2.3 The Algerian EFL Context

Research on pragmatic competence within Arab EFL contexts has revealed systematic patterns of pragmatic transfer, cultural variation in politeness norms, and persistent gaps between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic appropriateness (Al-Qahtani, 2022). Within the Algerian context specifically, research has primarily focused on pragmatic production, revealing difficulties with speech act realization, politeness strategies, and register variation (Al-Issa, 2003; Bella, 2021). However, substantial gaps remain regarding pragmatic comprehension within Algerian EFL education. Limited research has

systematically examined the effectiveness of explicit instruction for developing comprehension abilities, nor have investigations explored pedagogical interventions specifically designed for the Algerian university context.

2.4 The Algerian EFL Curriculum Context

English occupies the status of foreign language in Algerian education, introduced at the middle school level (approximately age 11) and continuing through secondary and tertiary education. At the university level, English department students typically receive 20-25 contact hours per week across various skill areas. The curriculum structure under the LMD system emphasizes four primary domains: written expression, oral expression, linguistics, and literature/civilization studies, with additional courses in grammar, phonetics, and research methodology.

Within this framework, oral expression courses – where the present intervention was implemented – typically allocate 3 hours weekly across two 90-minute sessions. The official curriculum guidelines emphasize communicative competence development through interactive activities, role-plays, presentations, and discussions. However, pragmatic competence receives minimal explicit attention within these guidelines. Standard departmental syllabi for second-year students address general communicative functions such as describing, narrating, expressing opinions, and making presentations, but rarely include systematic treatment of speech act realization, politeness strategies, or cross-cultural pragmatic variation.

This curricular gap becomes particularly significant given that Algerian EFL learners have limited exposure to authentic English interaction outside the classroom. Unlike ESL contexts where learners encounter English in daily communication, Algerian students primarily experience English through textbooks, classroom discourse, and occasional media consumption. Consequently, opportunities for noticing pragmatic patterns, observing contextual variation, and developing intuitions about appropriate language use remain severely constrained. The absence of explicit pragmatic instruction within the existing curriculum thus represents a critical pedagogical limitation that the present study seeks to address.

2.5 Integrated Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three complementary theoretical perspectives: Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT), and Usage-Based Theory (UBT). From an SCT perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), explicit instruction serves as a mediational tool facilitating

learners' transition from other-regulated to self-regulated pragmatic performance. The Zone of Proximal Development suggests that explicit instruction provides scaffolding enabling learners to accomplish pragmatic comprehension tasks beyond their independent capabilities.

SAT (DeKeyser, 2007, 2015) proposes that complex skills develop through progression from declarative knowledge (knowing what) through procedural knowledge (knowing how) to automatized performance. Applied to pragmatic comprehension, learners initially require explicit declarative knowledge about speech act conventions, indirectness strategies, and contextual factors. Through repeated comprehension activities involving diverse contexts, this knowledge becomes proceduralized, enabling faster and more efficient processing.

UBT (Tomasello, 2003; Ellis, 2019) conceptualizes language acquisition as an emergent process wherein linguistic knowledge derives from exposure to and processing of language in use. Explicit instruction, from a usage-based perspective, enhances pragmatic comprehension by increasing the salience of pragmatic features within input and directing learners' attention to relevant patterns.

These three perspectives converge in explaining how explicit pragmatic instruction facilitates comprehension development. Explicit instruction initiates development through multiple pathways: providing mediation and scaffolding (SCT), establishing declarative knowledge foundations (SAT), and heightening attention to pragmatic patterns (UBT). Through structured practice involving diverse contexts, knowledge becomes consolidated, associations strengthen, and comprehension becomes more efficient.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The independent variable was instructional condition (explicit pragmatic instruction vs. conventional communicative teaching), and dependent variables included pragmatic comprehension scores assessing recognition and interpretation of indirect requests, refusals, and suggestions.

Participants were 64 second-year English majors (41 female, 23 male; ages 19-22, $M = 20.3$, $SD = 0.8$) enrolled at an Algerian university during the 2023-2024 academic year. All were native Arabic speakers (Algerian dialectal Arabic and/or Tamazight) who had studied English for approximately seven to eight years. Participants were enrolled in two intact classes of 32 students each, with one class assigned to the experimental condition and the other serving as

control. Both instructors were experienced faculty members with similar educational backgrounds and teaching experience.

3.2 Materials and Instruments

The primary assessment instrument was a Pragmatic Comprehension Test (PCT) incorporating Discourse Completion Recognition Tasks (DCRTs) and Metapragmatic Assessment Questionnaires (MAQs). The DCRT component consisted of 30 scenarios depicting authentic university-related situations, with questions targeting: (a) recognition of illocutionary force, (b) interpretation of implicit meaning, and (c) evaluation of contextual appropriateness. The MAQ component included 15 scenarios requiring participants to identify pragmatic features, explain speaker intentions, and demonstrate metapragmatic awareness.

The PCT underwent pilot testing with 20 students from a comparable department, yielding acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). Two experienced applied linguistics researchers reviewed the instrument for content validity.

For the experimental group, instructional materials included: (1) explicit instruction modules targeting indirect requests, refusals, suggestions, and integrated pragmatic competence; (2) authentic materials including video clips, audio recordings, and email transcripts; (3) consciousness-raising activities; and (4) structured practice tasks. Control group materials consisted of standard departmental textbook units focusing on general communicative functions without systematic attention to pragmatic features.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval at the departmental level. All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purposes, procedures, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Participation was voluntary and did not affect students' course grades. Data were anonymized and stored securely.

3.4 Procedures

During the first week (February 2024), both groups completed the PCT under standardized conditions. The eight-week intervention (mid-February through mid-April 2024) occurred during regularly scheduled 90-minute oral expression classes meeting twice weekly, totaling 16 sessions.

Experimental Group: Explicit pragmatic instruction followed a structured

sequence within each module. For example, the indirect requests module (Weeks 1-2) included metalinguistic presentations explaining direct versus indirect requests, conventional indirectness patterns, and factors influencing directness choices; consciousness-raising activities comparing request realizations across contexts; and structured practice progressing from recognition to interpretation to production tasks. Similar sequences addressed indirect refusals (Weeks 3-4), suggestions (Weeks 5-6), and integrated application (Weeks 7-8). Throughout the intervention, the instructor provided explicit feedback and encouraged metapragmatic reflection.

Control Group: Conventional communicative instruction followed the departmental syllabus, addressing topics including describing processes, expressing opinions, and delivering presentations. Activities emphasized fluency development, vocabulary expansion, and pronunciation accuracy without systematic attention to pragmatic features.

Several practical challenges were encountered during implementation. Student attendance averaged 89% across sessions, with occasional absences due to illness or scheduling conflicts. One session in Week 5 was postponed due to facility unavailability. Despite efforts to standardize instruction, minor differences in teaching style between the two instructors may have influenced outcomes.

Immediately following the intervention (final week of April 2024), both groups completed the PCT under identical conditions. Experimental group participants also completed reflection questionnaires, and four volunteers participated in 30-minute semi-structured interviews exploring their experiences with explicit instruction.

3.5 Data Analysis

DCRT responses were scored dichotomously (correct/incorrect), yielding scores from 0 to 30. MAQ responses were scored using a rubric assigning 0-2 points per item (0-30 total), with two raters achieving inter-rater reliability of $\kappa = .87$.

Preliminary analyses examined data distributions, outliers, and assumption violations. Independent samples t-tests compared pretest scores between groups to verify initial equivalence. The primary analysis employed Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) with posttest scores as the dependent variable, instructional condition as the independent variable, and pretest scores as the covariate. Separate ANCOVAs examined effects on overall comprehension, DCRT subscales, and MAQ performance. Effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared (η^2_p) and Cohen's d.

Reflection questionnaires and interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, focusing on patterns in learners' perceptions regarding explicit instruction's benefits, challenges experienced, and developing metapragmatic awareness.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Preliminary Analyses and Overall Comprehension

Preliminary examination revealed no missing values, with score distributions approximating normality for both groups at both time points. At pretest, independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between experimental and control groups on overall comprehension, $t(62) = 0.47$, $p = .64$, confirming initial equivalence. Both groups demonstrated moderate pretest performance (approximately 50-52% accuracy), indicating substantial room for improvement.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for pretest and posttest scores. Visual inspection reveals substantial improvements in the experimental group across all measures, with posttest means increasing by approximately 13-14 points for overall comprehension. In contrast, the control group demonstrated modest gains of 5-6 points.

Figure 1 illustrates the pretest-posttest comparison between groups. Visual inspection reveals that while both groups demonstrated improvement, the experimental group's gain (13.39 points) substantially exceeded the control group's gain (5.94 points), representing a difference of 7.45 points in improvement magnitude.

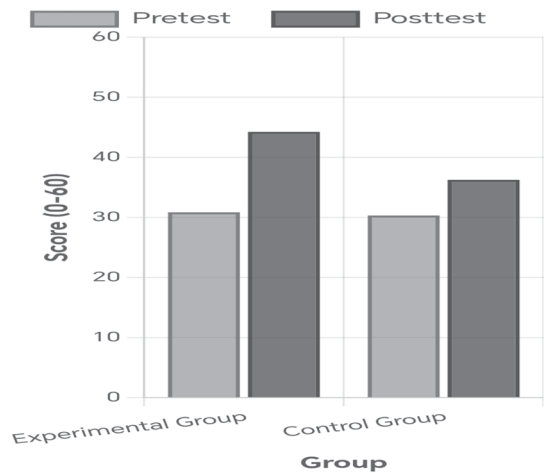
ANCOVA with posttest overall comprehension as the dependent variable yielded statistically significant results, $F(1, 61) = 47.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .32$. The large effect size indicates that instructional condition accounted for 32% of variance in posttest scores after controlling for pretest performance. Adjusted posttest means revealed that the experimental group ($M = 44.21$, $SE = 0.89$) significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 36.27$, $SE = 0.89$), with a mean difference of 7.94 points (95% CI [5.82, 10.06]). Cohen's $d = 1.24$ represents a large effect, indicating the average experimental group participant scored more than one standard deviation above the control group mean.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics for Pragmatic Comprehension Assessment by Group and Time

Measure	Experimental Group (n=32) M (SD)	Control Group (n=32) M (SD)
Overall Comprehension (0-60)		
Pretest	30.84 (5.23)	30.31 (5.67)
Posttest	44.23 (5.12)	36.25 (6.12)
DCRT Total (0-30)		
Pretest	15.72 (2.81)	15.34 (3.04)
Posttest	22.45 (2.68)	18.19 (3.18)
DCRT: Illocutionary Force (0-10)		
Pretest	5.78 (1.26)	5.53 (1.38)
Posttest	7.89 (1.12)	6.41 (1.45)
DCRT: Implicit Meaning (0-10)		
Pretest	5.06 (1.32)	4.97 (1.41)
Posttest	7.54 (1.24)	5.84 (1.52)
DCRT: Appropriateness (0-10)		
Pretest	4.88 (1.15)	4.84 (1.29)
Posttest	7.28 (1.18)	5.94 (1.41)
MAQ Total (0-30)		
Pretest	15.12 (3.18)	14.97 (3.26)
Posttest	21.87 (3.08)	18.06 (3.45)

Note. DCRT = Discourse Completion Recognition Task; MAQ Metapragmatic Assessment Questionnaire.

Figure 1- Comparison of Overall Pragmatic Comprehension Scores: Pretest and Posttest by Group



Note. Error bars represent standard deviations. Maximum possible score = 60.
Experimental group: Pretest $M = 30.84$ ($SD = 5.23$), Posttest $M = 44.23$ ($SD = 5.12$).
Control group: Pretest $M = 30.31$ ($SD = 5.67$), Posttest $M = 36.25$ ($SD = 6.12$).

4.2 Speech Act Specific Analyses

Separate ANCOVAs examined intervention effects on specific comprehension dimensions. For illocutionary force recognition, ANCOVA revealed significant group differences, $F(1, 61) = 58.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .49$. Experimental group participants ($M = 7.88$, $SE = 0.24$) demonstrated substantially higher recognition accuracy than control participants ($M = 6.42$, $SE = 0.24$), $d = 1.15$. Analysis by speech act type revealed that improvements were most pronounced for requests ($M_{exp} = 8.35$, $M_{ctrl} = 6.81$, $d = 1.28$) and refusals ($M_{exp} = 7.89$, $M_{ctrl} = 6.22$, $d = 1.18$), with somewhat smaller but still substantial effects for suggestions ($M_{exp} = 7.52$, $M_{ctrl} = 6.25$, $d = 1.08$).

For implicit meaning interpretation, ANCOVA yielded significant results, $F(1, 61) = 52.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .46$. Experimental participants ($M = 7.53$, $SE = 0.23$) outperformed control participants ($M = 5.85$, $SE = 0.23$), $d = 1.12$. Error pattern examination revealed that control group participants frequently selected literal interpretations over intended pragmatic meanings, particularly for indirect refusals. For example, when interpreting “That sounds interesting, but I’m completely overwhelmed this week,” 67% of control participants at posttest selected “The speaker is interested in the proposal” rather than recognizing the

refusal function. In contrast, 91% of experimental participants correctly identified the refusal.

For appropriateness evaluation, ANCOVA showed significant group differences, $F(1, 61) = 34.19, p < .001, \eta^2p = .36$. Experimental participants ($M = 7.27, SE = 0.22$) demonstrated superior appropriateness judgments compared to control participants ($M = 5.95, SE = 0.22$), $d = 1.02$. Experimental participants demonstrated particular sensitivity to power dynamics and social distance factors, with appropriateness ratings aligning closely with native speaker norms (correlation $r = .84$) compared to control group ratings ($r = .58$).

For metapragmatic knowledge, ANCOVA revealed highly significant effects, $F(1, 61) = 43.67, p < .001, \eta^2p = .42$. Experimental participants ($M = 21.84, SE = 0.58$) substantially outperformed control participants ($M = 18.09, SE = 0.58$), $d = 1.09$. Qualitative analysis of MAQ responses revealed that experimental participants provided sophisticated explanations referencing politeness strategies, face-saving motivations, and contextual factors, while control group responses were typically brief and focused on surface features.

Table 2 summarizes ANCOVA results across all dependent measures, demonstrating consistent and substantial intervention effects

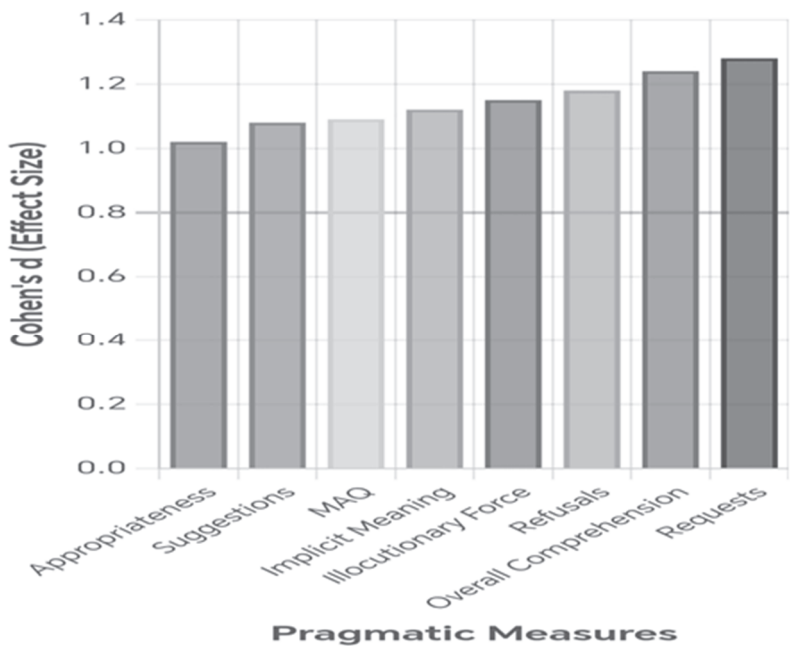
Table2- Summary of ANCOVA Results for Pragmatic Comprehension Measures

Measure	F	df	p	η^2p	Cohen's d
Overall Comprehension	47.83	1, 61	<.001	32	1.24
DCRT Total	55.41	1, 61	<.001	48	1.18
Illocutionary Force	58.24	1, 61	<.001	49	1.15
Implicit Meaning	52.36	1, 61	<.001	46	1.12
Appropriateness	34.19	1, 61	<.001	36	1.02
MAQ Total	43.67	1, 61	<.001	42	1.09

Note. All effects remained significant after Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .008$).

Figure 2 displays effect sizes across all pragmatic measures. All Cohen's d values exceeded 1.0, indicating large practical significance. Effect sizes were largest for requests ($d = 1.28$) and overall comprehension ($d = 1.24$), with somewhat smaller but still substantial effects for appropriateness evaluation ($d = 1.02$). These consistently large effects across multiple measures demonstrate the intervention’s robust impact on pragmatic comprehension.

Figure 2 - Effect Sizes (Cohen's d) for Pragmatic Comprehension Measures



Note. Cohen's d values: small effect = 0.2, medium effect = 0.5, large effect ≥ 0.8 . All effects exceeded the large effect threshold. Dashed line indicates $d = 0.8$ threshold.

4.3 Qualitative Findings: Learner Perceptions

Analysis of reflection questionnaires and interview transcripts yielded four primary themes: (a) enhanced awareness of implicit meanings, (b) development of analytical strategies, (c) increased confidence in interpretation, and (d) challenges with complexity and transfer.

[Note: The quotation has been edited for clarity while preserving the participant's intended meaning]

4.3.1 Enhanced Awareness of Implicit Meanings

Participants consistently reported that explicit instruction heightened their awareness of indirect communication strategies previously unnoticed. One participant (EP12) reflected:

“Before this course, I think understanding English is just know the words and grammar. Now I know there is hidden meaning everywhere. When someone say ‘I will think about it’, maybe they mean ‘no’.”

This heightened awareness extended beyond classroom contexts, with several participants reporting noticing indirect speech acts in English-language films and social media.

4.3.2 Development of Analytical Strategies

Participants described developing systematic strategies for interpreting indirect speech acts. EP08 articulated:

“The teacher teach us to ask questions like: What is the situation? What is relationship between speakers? What does the person really want? Now I use this questions automatically when I am confused about someone meaning.”

The structured practice activities were frequently cited as beneficial for consolidating analytical approaches.

4.3.3 Increased Confidence in Interpretation

Participants reported enhanced confidence comprehending English communication in academic contexts. EP23 described:

“Before, I was always not sure about what professors or classmates really mean, especially in emails. Now I feel more confidence to interpret their messages. I can tell when professor is making suggestion or giving order.”

4.3.4 Challenges with Complexity and Transfer

Despite overall positive perceptions, participants acknowledged challenges applying pragmatic knowledge to complex, authentic situations. EP16 articulated:

“In class, the examples was clear and we have time to think. But in real conversations, everything happen fast and there might be many speech acts mixed together.”

Transfer beyond practiced contexts also presented challenges, with participants uncertain whether learned strategies applied to non-academic contexts.

4.4 *Interpretation and Implications*

The substantial improvements demonstrated by experimental group participants align with and extend previous research documenting explicit

instruction benefits for pragmatic development (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Taguchi, 2015). The overall effect size ($\eta^2p = .32$) falls within the range typically reported in pragmatic instruction research, suggesting the theoretically grounded, multi-componential intervention design proved effective.

However, the intervention was not uniformly effective for all participants. Approximately 12-15% of experimental group students demonstrated minimal improvement, suggesting that individual differences in learning style, motivation, or prior knowledge may moderate instructional effectiveness. Additionally, three students in the experimental group reported finding the metalinguistic explanations initially confusing, indicating that explicit instruction may require scaffolding for some learners.

Several factors account for the positive effects observed. First, the integration of metalinguistic explanations, consciousness-raising activities, structured practice, and metapragmatic reflection created complementary learning opportunities addressing multiple dimensions of pragmatic competence. Metalinguistic presentations established foundational declarative knowledge, as predicted by Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2015). Consciousness-raising activities facilitated noticing processes essential for acquisition (Schmidt, 1993), supporting Usage-Based Theory contentions regarding attention allocation's influence on acquisition (Ellis, 2019). Structured practice involving diverse contexts promoted robust construction formation while facilitating generalization, resonating with usage-based accounts emphasizing that abstraction emerges from exposure to varied instances (Goldberg, 2006). Metapragmatic reflection activities served as mediational tools facilitating internalization of pragmatic knowledge (Swain, 2006), consistent with Sociocultural Theory.

The particularly large effects for illocutionary force recognition ($d = 1.15$) and implicit meaning interpretation ($d = 1.12$) indicate that explicit instruction effectively targeted the inferential reasoning and contextual integration processes central to comprehension. These findings extend Taguchi's (2007, 2011) work documenting that pragmatic comprehension speed and accuracy improve with instruction, demonstrating that focused pedagogical intervention can substantially accelerate comprehension development within a relatively brief timeframe.

An important contribution involves the focus specifically on comprehension rather than production. The substantial gains in metapragmatic knowledge ($\eta^2p = .42$) support theoretical claims that metapragmatic awareness facilitates pragmatic development by supporting comprehension monitoring, strategic processing, and transfer (Roever, 2012; Schmidt, 1993). Experimental group participants demonstrated sophisticated metapragmatic understanding, with

this explicit knowledge appearing to support comprehension by enabling systematic analysis when confronted with ambiguous situations.

These findings hold particular significance for the Algerian EFL context. The study demonstrates that explicit pragmatic instruction can effectively address challenges despite resource constraints and pedagogical challenges characterizing North African higher education settings. The modest pretest performance (approximately 50% accuracy) indicates that current instructional approaches inadequately address pragmatic competence, despite students' relatively advanced grammatical proficiency. The substantial improvements following focused instruction suggest that systematic pragmatic focus could meaningfully enhance communicative competence outcomes.

4.5 Pedagogical Implications

The findings yield concrete implications for integrating pragmatic instruction within Algerian and similar EFL contexts:

1. **Systematic Pragmatic Focus:** Rather than assuming pragmatic competence develops incidentally, curricula should incorporate systematic, focused instruction on pragmatic features across proficiency levels. Even relatively brief interventions can substantially enhance comprehension.
2. **Metalinguistic Explanations:** Providing explicit explanations of form-function-context relationships, politeness strategies, and cultural norms enables learners to develop conscious understandings supporting comprehension and self-regulation. Explanations should address not only what patterns occur but why they occur.
3. **Consciousness-Raising Activities:** Activities directing attention to pragmatic features within authentic materials facilitate noticing and pattern extraction. Comparison tasks highlighting variation across contexts, analysis activities requiring identification of speech act strategies, and metapragmatic discussions prove particularly valuable.
4. **Authentic Materials Integration:** Despite limited naturalistic exposure, learners benefit from encountering pragmatic features within authentic discourse. Video clips, audio recordings, and written texts representing diverse contexts provide input for pattern extraction and comprehension practice.
5. **Structured Practice Progression:** Practice activities should progress from controlled (recognizing speech acts in isolated contexts) to communicative (interpreting speech acts within extended discourse). Contextual diversity promotes generalization and flexible application.
6. **Teacher Professional Development:** Effective implementation requires teacher preparation addressing content knowledge (pragmatic concepts,

cross-cultural variation), pedagogical techniques (designing consciousness-raising activities, facilitating metapragmatic discussions), and ongoing support through communities of practice and resource access.

7. Addressing Contextual Challenges: For large classes, use pair and small group activities maximizing participation. When resources are limited, download and curate free authentic materials for offline use, create transcripts enabling multiple uses, and leverage learner resources. When time is constrained, integrate pragmatic focus within existing activities and implement a spiral approach with brief, recurring focus.

5. Conclusions

This quasi-experimental study provides robust empirical evidence that focused, theoretically grounded explicit instruction substantially enhances Algerian EFL university students' pragmatic comprehension abilities. Experimental group participants demonstrated large gains in recognizing illocutionary force, interpreting implicit meanings, evaluating contextual appropriateness, and articulating metapragmatic knowledge following an eight-week intervention. These results address critical gaps by examining pragmatic comprehension specifically within the underexplored Algerian EFL context, demonstrating that explicit instruction proves effective despite resource constraints characterizing North African higher education settings.

The findings extend theoretical understanding of how pragmatic competence develops in instructed settings, supporting predictions from Sociocultural Theory regarding mediation's facilitative role, Skill Acquisition Theory regarding declarative knowledge establishment and proceduralization, and Usage-Based Theory regarding attention direction and pattern extraction from input. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled both measurement of learning outcomes and exploration of mechanisms underlying comprehension development from learners' perspectives.

Several contributions distinguish this research. First, the focus specifically on comprehension addresses a gap in interlanguage pragmatics research, which has predominantly examined production abilities. Comprehension merits independent investigation because it involves distinct cognitive processes and remains essential for successful communication even when production abilities are limited. Second, the study provides empirical evidence within a previously underexplored context, contributing to global understanding of pragmatic development across diverse educational settings. Third, the substantial effect sizes ($\eta^2p = .32$ overall; d ranging from 1.02 to 1.28) demonstrate meaningful, practical significance beyond statistical significance.

Limitations acknowledge several constraints that should inform interpretation of findings. The quasi-experimental design, while appropriate for the intact classroom context, limits causal inference possibilities compared to randomized controlled trials. The eight-week intervention duration, while producing measurable gains, prevents conclusions about long-term retention or delayed effects; longitudinal follow-up assessment would strengthen understanding of pragmatic knowledge durability.

The relatively modest sample size ($n = 64$) and limited number of assessment items, while sufficient for detecting large effects, constrain generalizability and may not capture the full range of pragmatic comprehension abilities. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples across multiple institutions and proficiency levels, along with expanded test batteries containing more items per speech act category to enhance reliability and enable more fine-grained analysis of comprehension patterns.

Assessment relied primarily on recognition tasks in controlled conditions, which may not fully represent comprehension in spontaneous communication where processing time is limited and multiple pragmatic demands compete for attention. Practical challenges including student absences (89% average attendance), one postponed session, and potential instructor effects despite standardization attempts may have influenced outcomes. The homogeneous sample (second-year English majors at one Algerian university) limits generalizability to other proficiency levels, educational contexts, or Arabic-speaking populations. Finally, the study examined comprehension without directly assessing production transfer or application in authentic communication contexts, leaving questions about whether enhanced comprehension translates to improved pragmatic performance in real interactions.

Future research should address these limitations through randomized controlled trials, longitudinal designs tracking development over extended periods, incorporation of real-time processing measures, examination of production transfer, and replication across diverse populations. Additionally, research should investigate technology-mediated approaches, teacher professional development models, and factors facilitating transfer and generalization across contexts.

Despite limitations, this study makes meaningful contributions to interlanguage pragmatics research, second language pedagogy, and Algerian English language education. The findings demonstrate that pragmatic comprehension benefits substantially from focused, explicit instruction. For Algerian EFL learners facing documented challenges with pragmatic appropriateness despite advanced grammatical proficiency, systematic

pragmatic instruction represents a pedagogical priority that can meaningfully enhance communicative competence.

As globalization intensifies English's role as an international lingua franca, pragmatically competent speakers who can navigate cross-cultural communication successfully become increasingly critical. Algerian university students, preparing for careers requiring English-medium communication, need not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic awareness enabling them to interpret intentions, recognize indirectness, evaluate appropriateness, and avoid miscommunication. This study suggests that explicit pragmatic instruction can equip learners with these essential capabilities, contributing to their academic success and professional readiness.

Moving forward, the challenge involves translating research findings into widespread pedagogical practice through curriculum reform incorporating pragmatic objectives, professional development preparing teachers effectively, materials development providing accessible resources, and institutional support recognizing pragmatic competence as a legitimate educational goal. This study represents one contribution to the growing body of research supporting pragmatic instruction's central role in foreign language education, ultimately serving language learners worldwide by equipping them with pragmatic awareness essential for meaningful participation in our increasingly interconnected global community.

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Appendix: Sample Assessment Items

1. Discourse Completion Recognition Task (DCRT) Sample

Item 1: Indirect Request

Scenario: Student A is working on a group presentation with her classmate Student B. She needs to access a research article that Student B downloaded yesterday.

Dialogue:

Student A: “How did your research go yesterday?”

Student B: “Really well! I found some great articles about sociolinguistics.”

Student A: “That sounds helpful. I haven't been able to access the university database from home.”

Student B: “Oh, that's frustrating.”

Questions:

1. What is Student A's primary communicative goal?

- a) To complain about the database.
- b) To request access to Student B's articles.
- c) To discuss her research progress.
- d) To express sympathy for Student B's situation.

2. How would you interpret Student A's statement “I haven't been able to access the university database from home?”

- a) She is explaining why she's behind schedule.
- b) She wants technical support.
- c) She is indirectly asking Student B to share resources.
- d) She is criticizing the university's system.

3. Is Student A's indirect approach appropriate for this situation?

- a) Yes, very appropriate.
- b) Appropriate.
- c) Somewhat inappropriate.
- d) Very inappropriate.

Item 2: Indirect Refusal

Scenario: Professor X receives an email from a student inviting him to attend the English Club's poetry reading event next Friday evening.

Email Response:

“Dear Student,

Thank you so much for thinking of me and for the invitation. The poetry reading sounds like a wonderful event, and I really appreciate the effort you and the club members have put into organizing it. Unfortunately, Friday evenings are typically when I catch up on grading and prepare for the following week's lectures. I hope the event goes very well, and perhaps you could share some photos or recordings afterward.

Best wishes,

Professor X”

Questions:

1. What speech act is Professor X performing?

- a) Accepting the invitation enthusiastically.
- b) Requesting more information about the event.
- c) Declining the invitation.
- d) Postponing his decision.

2. Which linguistic features indicate Professor X's actual intention?

- a) “Thank you so much”.
- b) “Unfortunately”.
- c) “sounds like a wonderful event”.
- d) “Friday evenings are typically when I catch up on grading”.

3. Why might Professor X choose this indirect style rather than simply writing “I cannot attend”?

- a) He is uncertain about his schedule.
- b) To maintain a positive relationship and soften the refusal.

- c) He wants the student to invite him again.
- d) To confuse the student.

Item 3: Indirect Suggestion

Scenario: Two students are discussing their group project strategy. One student notices that the other's proposed approach might be too complicated given their time constraints.

Dialogue:

Student A: "So you're thinking we should analyze all five novels for the comparison?"

Student B: "Yes, I think it would make our project really comprehensive."

Student A: "That's an ambitious plan. I'm just thinking about the deadline – we have only three weeks left. What if we focused on three novels and went deeper with the analysis? That might let us really develop our arguments."

Student B: "Hmm, that could work actually."

Questions:

1. What is Student A's primary communicative intention?

- a) To criticize Student B's idea.
- b) To suggest a more manageable alternative.
- c) To complain about the deadline.
- d) To take control of the project.

2. Which strategy does Student A use to soften her suggestion?

- a) Acknowledging the positive aspect first ("ambitious plan").
- b) Using a question form ("What if we focused...").
- c) Providing a rationale (deadline constraint).
- d) Being direct and assertive.

3. How appropriate is Student A's indirect approach in this peer-to-peer context?

- a) Very appropriate.
- b) Appropriate.
- c) Somewhat inappropriate.
- d) Very inappropriate.

Item 4: Indirect Acceptance/Agreement

Scenario: A department coordinator is responding to a colleague's proposal to reschedule their committee meeting.

Email:

“Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your email regarding the committee meeting. I can see the conflict with the conference you mentioned, and it sounds like an important event for your research area. The proposed alternative time on Wednesday afternoon works well with my schedule. I'll send a revised meeting notice to the other committee members.

Best regards,

Department Coordinator”

Questions:

1. What speech act is the coordinator performing?

- a) Refusing the request.
- b) Accepting the proposal.
- c) Requesting more information.
- d) Making a counter-suggestion.

2. How does the coordinator's response style differ from simply writing “Yes, Wednesday works”?

- a) He acknowledges the reason for the request.
- b) He validates the colleague's needs.
- c) He demonstrates consideration of the broader context.
- d) He avoids clear commitment.

3. Why might the coordinator choose this elaborated acceptance style?.

- a) To maintain collegial relationships and show respect.
- b) To make his message longer.
- c) To avoid giving a clear answer.
- d) To demonstrate superior knowledge.

Item 5: Indirect Request (Formal Register)

Scenario: A graduate student is emailing the university librarian about accessing restricted archive materials for her thesis research.

Email:

“Dear Librarian,

I hope this message finds you well. I am a second-year MA student in the English Department, currently working on my thesis examining colonial-era education documents. During my preliminary research, I discovered that the university archives contain several relevant collections from the 1920s-1940s period. I noticed that these materials are classified as restricted access. I was wondering whether there might be a possibility to consult these documents for my research purposes. I would be happy to complete any necessary forms or meet with you to discuss the appropriate procedures.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Graduate Student”

Questions:

1. What is the primary speech act in this email?

- a) Requesting information.
- b) Requesting permission/access.
- c) Complaining about restrictions.
- d) Making a suggestion.

2. Which politeness strategies does the student employ?

- a) Providing justification for the request.
- b) Using tentative language (“wondering whether,” “might be a possibility”).
- c) Offering to comply with procedures.
- d) Using imperative forms.

3. Is the level of indirectness appropriate for this context?

- a) Yes, very appropriate for a formal student-librarian request.
- b) Appropriate.
- c) Too indirect.
- d) Not indirect enough.

Item 6: Indirect Suggestion (Peer Context)

Scenario: Two classmates are reviewing each other’s essay drafts. One student notices that the other’s introduction is unclear.

Dialogue:

Student A: “I really like your thesis statement about social media’s impact. The examples you chose are interesting too.”

Student B: “Thanks! I wasn’t sure if they were strong enough.”

Student A: “They’re definitely relevant. I’m just finding the introduction a bit hard to follow on first reading. Maybe it could benefit from a clearer roadmap of where the essay is going? Like, what if you outlined the three main points right after the thesis?”

Student B: “Oh, good point. Let me try that.”

Questions:

1. What communicative function does Student A’s feedback serve?

- a) Criticizing the essay harshly.
- b) Making a suggestion for improvement.
- c) Requesting clarification.
- d) Accepting the draft as-is.

2. How does Student A mitigate the potentially face-threatening act of criticism?

- a) Beginning with positive feedback.
 - b) Using personal framing (“I’m finding...”) rather than absolute statements.
 - c) Presenting the suggestion as a question.
 - d) Avoiding any mention of problems.
3. In peer feedback contexts, why might indirect suggestions be preferred?
- a) To maintain positive relationships.
 - b) To avoid responsibility.
 - c) To confuse the peer.
 - d) To sound more academic.

2. Metapragmatic Assessment Questionnaire (MAQ) Samples

Item 1: Request Analysis

Scenario: A student sends an email to her professor:

“Dear Professor,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing regarding the research paper assignment. I’ve been working on my topic selection and have narrowed it down to two possibilities, but I’m having difficulty deciding which would be more appropriate for the course objectives. I was wondering if you might possibly have some time available this week to discuss these options briefly, either during your office hours or at another time convenient for you. I understand you have a very busy schedule, so if this week doesn't work, I'm happy to wait until next week.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Student”

Questions:

1. Identify the main speech act the student is performing in this email.
2. The student uses several politeness strategies in her request. List at least three specific linguistic features or strategies she employs to maintain politeness, and explain why each is appropriate for student-professor communication.

3. How does the student's request differ from a more direct version such as “I need to meet with you this week to discuss my paper topic”? Discuss the pragmatic effects of her chosen approach.

Item 2: Refusal Analysis

Scenario: A colleague responds to an invitation to collaborate on a research project:

“Dear Colleague,

Thank you so much for thinking of me for this exciting project on language policy. The research questions you’ve outlined are fascinating, and I can see this developing into significant work. I’m genuinely honored that you considered me as a potential collaborator.

I must confess, however, that I’m currently overcommitted with my existing projects. I have two article deadlines in the next three months, plus thesis supervision responsibilities that are requiring more time than anticipated. Taking on additional commitments at this point wouldn’t allow me to contribute at the level this project deserves.

I hope you’ll keep me in mind for future collaborations when my schedule is less demanding. Perhaps we could still meet for coffee to discuss your ideas – I’d love to hear more about your approach, even if I can’t formally join the project team.

Warm regards,

Faculty Member”

Questions:

1. What is the primary speech act in this response?
2. Identify and explain at least four strategies the writer uses to soften the refusal. Why are these strategies particularly important in professional academic contexts?
3. How does the indirect refusal approach differ from a direct “No, I cannot participate” response? Discuss the relationship maintenance functions of the chosen style.

Item 3: Suggestion Evaluation

Scenario: During a department meeting, a senior professor addresses a junior colleague's proposal:

"I think your idea about restructuring the literature course sequence has real merit. The chronological approach you're suggesting could definitely help students see the historical connections more clearly. One consideration that might be worth thinking about is how this would interact with the current linguistics courses. Since students take Introduction to Linguistics concurrently with 19th Century Literature in the current system, there might be some benefits to maintaining that parallel. Have you had a chance to look at how the revised sequence would align with the linguistics track? It might be worth consulting with the linguistics coordinator about the potential overlaps."

Questions:

1. Is the senior professor accepting, rejecting, or modifying the proposal? Explain your interpretation.
2. Identify the linguistic strategies used to express reservation or suggest modification without direct criticism. Why might these strategies be important in a professional meeting context?
3. How does power dynamics (senior to junior colleague) influence the pragmatic choices made in this interaction? Would a peer-to-peer suggestion likely be phrased differently?

3. Notes on Assessment Design

The complete Pragmatic Comprehension Test (PCT) contains:

- 30 DCRT items covering requests (n = 10), refusals (n = 10), and suggestions (n = 10);
- 15 MAQ items requiring extended metapragmatic analysis;
- items represent diverse contexts: student-professor, peer-peer, professional colleagues;
- scenarios include both positive (acceptance, agreement) and negative (refusal, disagreement) politeness contexts;
- register variation ranges from informal peer interaction to formal institutional communication.