

Pragmatic Competence Development: Demystifying the Impact of Task Types and EFL Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

Interlanguage pragmatics, as an inseparable part of communicative competence, has been emphasized as an ultimate objective in language learning. This study explored the perceptions of Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) students regarding interlanguage pragmatics and the impact of textbooks tasks on shaping their pragmatic competence. To accomplish this objective, 137 senior EFL students from 12 state universities, ranging from 23 to 28 years, were selected based on convenience sampling procedures. The researcher utilized teachers' perception questionnaires, first used by Jandt (2011), to investigate the students' perceptions. A semi-structured interview as well as a document analysis of the university English textbooks were applied. Moreover, thematic analysis was carried out regarding the interview. Themes were identified for meaningful interpretations based on a document analysis to investigate if they were either linguistically or pragmatically oriented. Results from quantitative analysis revealed that university English students specified a perception that pragmatic knowledge is as imperative as linguistic knowledge. Besides, by analyzing the qualitative data via the participants' interviews, the researcher extracted three codes, including the inadequacy or the quantity of pragmatic information, the suitability or the quality of pragmatic information, and also cross-cultural diversities. Moreover, students acknowledged that meta-pragmatic information is lacking in ELT textbooks, and the textbooks provide learners with more linguistic resources. The findings of the study suggest that university English instructors require to be more aware of pragmatic knowledge. In addition, they should design some pragmatically oriented practice for students to become pragmatically competent.

Keywords: Cross-cultural diversities, linguistic knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, textbooks, quality of pragmatic information

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary globalization of the world and the necessity for international communication require a more fluent, precise, and appropriate form of English. Beside linguistic competence, as stated by Ji (2007) and Kim and Hall (2002), students should have pragmatic competence. As said by Taguchi (2006), pragmatic competence is described as what a speaker should identify to understand and convey meaning in communication. Correspondingly, Kasper (1997) demarcated pragmatic competence as the capability to use language appropriately based on the context, and the individual's familiarity with communicative acts and the method to implement it.

Nonetheless, the need for more studies on students' perceptions about learning pragmatics in their learning process seems one of the very foundations of the nature of pragmatics to be studied. These key issues need to be delved more in academic context to have a better understanding of the nature of interlanguage pragmatics as stated by Jandt (2011).

Furthermore, course materials and textbooks are assumed the midpoint of the curriculum and course outline in every schoolroom, and they have an influential impact in the context of English teaching. In most countries, specifically in Iranian context, the majority of the learners' desired input is provided through EFL textbooks. Nevertheless, it appears that these textbooks lack two main considerations. First, these textbooks cut down the pragmatic information to the least in the way that learners would not be able to be competent in communicating language. Second, these textbooks pay much more attention to syntactic knowledge of language. Unquestionably, it is believed that Iranian EFL textbooks should not be blamed as the only foundation of these difficulties since the procedures and policies which have been applied in Iranian EFL schoolrooms are somehow problematic too, as mentioned by Eslami (2005).

Due to the paucity of pragmatic knowledge in course books, in recent years there has been an increasing curiosity in the scrutiny of pragmatic

elements in EFL textbooks. Some of them targeted the inclusion of specific speech acts, such as complaints (Boxer & Pickering, 1995), apologies and suggestions (Aksoyalp & Toprak, 2015), the metapragmatic knowledge in textbooks (Savignon & Wang, 2003; Vellenga, 2004), and the overall coverage of pragmatic knowledge (Ren & Han, 2016). However, no other studies of this type, in which the perceptions of students regarding the effect of textbooks on their pragmatic competence are assumed, have so far been conducted. Therefore, this study also analyzed specialized English textbooks assigned for senior EFL students and scrutinized the degree to which these textbooks could affect their pragmatic productions and their pragmatic competence, which is considered as the most effective skill in communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of research studies have been conducted on pragmatic knowledge in English textbooks used in different countries. In 2004, Vellenga explored eight intermediates to upper-intermediate level ESL and EFL textbooks by analyzing speech act material, metalanguage style, and pragmatic evidences through a page-by-page investigation, followed by interviewing several teachers. After a series of analyses, Vellenga (2004) found that textbooks offered the minimum quantity of metalinguistic and metapragmatic information, and pragmatic information was insufficient in all the texts. Besides, the findings of interviews demonstrated that the majority of teachers implemented external activities to complement their selected textbooks while these activities rarely included pragmatic topics as well.

Khaki (2006) discovered the Iranian pre-university English Book by using an agenda of textbook assessment. This agenda consisted of subject matter, vocabulary and structures, exercises, illustrations and physical make-up. Following the analyses of data, Khaki (2006) found that this book lacked the sufficient information pertaining pragmatics and there was no rationality behind the arrangement of the reading texts.

Shimizu, Fukasawa and Yonekura (2007) investigated the primers and practices of speech acts in textbooks utilized in Japan. They analyzed the number of types of speech acts of 17 textbooks used in Japan. They compared the degree of explicitness of the pragmatic information in each textbook as well as the variations of linguistic forms. After a series of analyses, they found that learners could acquire just an inadequate number of linguistic forms for each speech act and speech acts were not offered explicitly in the textbook. Furthermore, the textbooks' quantity and quality of metapragmatic information were very low and learners had inadequate chance to exercise the speech acts and the forms they had just acquired.

In another study in 2007, Ji attempted to investigate the nature of pragmatic resources and tasks in the textbooks titled College English Listening and Speaking Course (book 1-4). In fact, Ji (2007) reviewed the proportion and quantity of pragmatic information provided by the textbooks, the nature of pragmatic data, and the level of productivity of pragmatic data. Following the analyses of data, Ji (2007) discovered that the majority of the metapragmatic descriptions in these books were simple and the diversity of pragmatic data was inadequate.

Jahangard (2007) scrutinized a study concerning the textbook layout, grammar presentation, and visual materials available of Iranian high school EFL textbooks. After a series of analyses, Jahangard (2007) revealed that Iranian high school EFL textbooks did not pay much more attention to the pragmatic knowledge and it is overlooked.

Furthermore, Darali (2007) examined the addition of pragmatic issues, by making a precise analysis of *Spectrum* series. According to the analyses of data, Darali (2007) found that the series have offered different language functions. Nevertheless, some of the functions which were often employed in ordinary conversation (e.g. promising and threatening) were not only in the form of accidental functions, but also not as common as others.

The study conducted by Ma and Xu (2010) examined pragmatic misunderstanding that Japanese university English students showed in their speech. The goal was to delve into the pragmatic competence of Japanese

university English learners and to provide practical ways as to how to boost the learners' communicative competence. Seventy-five Japanese university college students were chosen who were freshmen and senior students. Different methodologies such as interviews were applied to gather data. It was shown that Japanese students' demonstrated failures which were rooted in cultural differences between Japanese and other cultures.

Recently, a variety of studies investigating pragmatics have been done in a variety of educational context (Ma & Xu, 2010). The study conducted by Rao (2002) aimed discovering the type of speech act strategies in Thai with Arabic students to delve the cultural. Forty-four females and 43 native speakers of Arabic participated and they were not English major students. In this study, the researcher conducted a discourse completion test. The results of this study showed that participants tended to apply communication competence, but they still expressed some failures in their pragmatic production.

In another study, with respect to the link between Sudanese university acquisition of pragmatics, Taguchi (2014) examined the way and the variety of the responses and also the way students demonstrated their learning strategy choices. Four hundred and fifty-four Sudanese English students participated in the questionnaire. The gathered data depicted that Sudanese students lacked pragmatic knowledge in different situations. When it came to gender differences, a tremendous difference was seen and men were showed fewer errors.

Vellenga (2004) was done in order to grasp students' strategies in their learning process in Hungary. The researcher tried to investigate the relationship between some relevant concepts in pragmatic learning. In this regard, different methods were applied to run the research. What was so marked in this research was the role of the experience of the students. It was shown that those students who were aware of language learning strategies had better production.

Roohani and Molana (2013) attempted to deconstruct the patterns of cultural representation and intercultural interactions in Interchange

textbooks, an ELT textbook series taught to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Iran. The result showed that textbooks' materials should be supplemented by EFL teachers' constructive discussion of the cultures.

Birjandi and Soleimani (2013) conducted a study to develop and validate four tests of pragmatic knowledge that measured LLs' knowledge of speech acts. The finding of the study showed that the constructed test batteries were sufficiently reliable and valid for measuring pragmatic knowledge of L2 learners. The study demonstrated the lack of appropriate familiarity of students with English language speech acts.

Regarding the above-mentioned studies, no studies have been done in Iran inspecting pragmatic learning and the role of textbooks task in shaping this knowledge. As a result, this study is to reveal the university students' perceptions of interlanguage pragmatics, and the degree to which university textbooks can shape this competency.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The core objective of the study was to investigate senior EFL students' perceptions of pragmatics. In other words, it intended to explore students' perception of the practical use of English, in Iran. EFL students in Iran are not sufficiently exposed to authentic English learning contexts and English language input. The second aim of the study is to investigate the role of textbooks tasks on learning pragmatics in academic context. The researcher analyzed general English textbooks, which are assigned for EFL students and scrutinized the degree to which these textbooks can affect their pragmatic productions and their pragmatic competence. Accordingly, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are senior EFL students' perceptions of interlanguage pragmatics in their learning process in academic context?
2. How can English university textbooks tasks influence and shape EFL students' pragmatic competence?

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study involved Iranian EFL students who were all native speakers of Persian. To gather the required data, 137 senior EFL students from 12 state universities took part in this study. They were selected on the basis of convincing sampling procedures. Furthermore, the data were collected from senior students, who had completed at least 4 years of study. This allowed them to be qualified for the study at university and to acquire adequate English language proficiency to take part in the investigation. The sample was made up of both male and female students aged between 23 to 28 years old.

Instrumentation

To find answers to the aforementioned questions, the researcher made use of a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a document analysis of university textbooks.

The first instrument was a teachers' perception questionnaire, which was first used by Jandt's (2011). The Cronbach alpha coefficients were measured and considered as satisfactory to ensure the reliability of the items. The questionnaire composed of 15 multiple choice closed-ended items, and two open-ended questions. The questionnaire was adopted for the study as the most valid one in the relevant literature.

The second instrument was a document analysis, which was analyzing the textbooks tasks for general English courses in 12 state universities. As for the reading books, *The Inside Reading* books (The Second Edition, Oxford University Press) were analyzed. In addition, regarding general English courses, *The Interchange Series*, Fourth Edition, by Richards, Hull, and Proctor (2005) were classified and investigated. The underlying principle behind choosing these books can be the realization of how textbooks tasks in most of the Iranian universities may affect EFL students'

pragmatic competence in their academic learning process. In fact, during university education in Iran, some textbooks are presented as to improve English general proficiency for EFL students, which involve different types of tasks with different orientations, such as linguistic and pragmatic tasks. Besides, the researcher attempted to have relevant classroom recording and course observations to gain better analysis.

The third instrument was a semi-structured interview to know about the perceptions of the Iranian students concerning the impact of learning tasks provided by textbooks on their development of pragmatic competence. It was a one-to-one interview within the sample population, which functioned as qualitative information. Besides, each interview took around 20 minutes.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study was collected through a teachers' perception questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a document analysis of the textbooks tasks. For the first research question, the questionnaire was utilized and the initial participants were 137 EFL students who were provided with the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire was administered to them either through electronic emails, Telegram, or through hard copies. It is worth noting that before administering the questionnaire, a brief instruction had been given to the participants informing them of the purpose of the questionnaire and asking them to respond to each statement promptly, without very much thinking and altering their choice. It was pinpointed that the accuracy of the results depended on how honest they would be.

To gather the required data for the second research question, 38 EFL learners from aforementioned universities were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling procedures. Then, the researcher made use of a semi-structured interview and a document analysis from the textbook tasks in this study. In addition, a semi-structured interview was used to examine learners' cognizance of pragmatic competence. Learners were interviewed individually, and each interview took around 20 minutes. It was done either

face-to-face or via mobile phone since the locations of the learners might not have been predicted.

Data Analysis

The information gathered from the participants was evaluated by means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22). Regarding the quantitative data, the results of the first research question were statistically reported through frequency and percentage. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the reliability measure of all items were taken, and the Cronbach alpha coefficients were measured and considered as satisfactory. The overall value for the items was 0.79, which is considered as adequate for the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire.

With respect to the second research question, the data were analyzed and grouped in terms of task orientations whether they were either pragmatically or grammatically orientated by applying a way of calculating the numbers and kinds of tasks and by presenting them as tables. As with the qualitative part of the study, no statistical analysis was required. Instead, the perceptions of the participants were qualitatively interpreted and examined. Coding of data was performed to identify the main themes under the study. The following coding procedure was applied to analyze the data thematically.

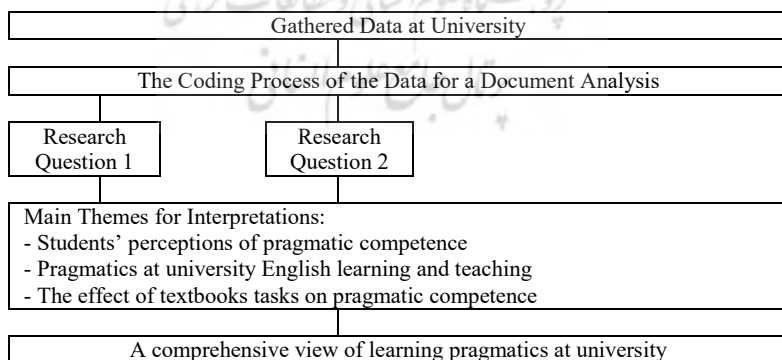


Figure 1: Coding of the Data

RESULTS

Students' Perceptions of Interlanguage Pragmatics

The first research question of this study attempted to examine senior EFL students' perceptions of interlanguage pragmatics in their learning process in academic context. To accomplish this purpose, the items of the questionnaire were analyzed and the frequency and percentage of items were calculated. The following sections represent the results.

Based on the questionnaire, respecting Item 1 (the perception of learners towards linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge), approximately 59 percent of the learners rejected the idea that knowing lexical knowledge is learning language, while less than 37 percent of them approved this statement. As for Item 2, almost two-third of learners claimed that dominating over both lexical and pragmatic knowledge is crucial, while 29.89 percent of them rejected this idea. Thus, it could be claimed that learners were attentive to the significance communicative competence.

Item 3 of the questionnaire (students' preferred knowledge) asked learners to enumerate the kind of competency and knowledge they are willing to learn, and more than half of the learners (53.93%) preferred to learn communication skills, whereas just 11.23 percent of them favored to acquire linguistic knowledge. Besides, the knowledge on how to use English (18.21 %) was the second preferred kind of knowledge that learners chosen, while 12.9 percent of them specified that they desired to learn cultural knowledge.

Item 4 of the questionnaire (students' desired ability) asked learners to list the ability they need to gain most in their English learning. As revealed, 65.77 percent of the learners claimed that they preferred to attain the competency to communicate with people, and 18.29 percent of them specified that they required to gain the ability to do well in English examinations. Besides, the ability to read materials related to their majors (12.61%) was the third preferred kind of ability that learners chosen. Just 5.04 percent of the learners stated that they favored to obtain the ability to

translate.

Items 5, 6, and 7 of the questionnaire (learners' perception on English language learning outcomes) tried to explore the learners' perception on English language learning outcomes. As demonstrated in item 5, a majority of the learners (70.52 %) rejected the idea which claimed the reason regarding passing the final test, while around 29 percent of them accepted this statement. As for Item 6, more than two-third of the learners (77.48 %) stated that they adore those who are fluent and accurate enough with others in English, whereas 22.1 percent of them rejected this idea. Concerning Item 7, more than two-third of the learners (74.23 %) specified that they wished to speak like English native speakers and would like to imitate native speakers' pronunciation and intonation, while 22.85 percent of them rejected this impression. Thus, it could be stated that the main objective of the learners was to be communicatively competent language users.

Item 8 of the questionnaire (kinds of English) asked learners to determine the kind of English they would like to learn to use most. More than half of the learners (55.74 %) stated that they preferred to learn to use American English, followed by British English (26.70 %). Besides, 17.8 percent of the learners claimed that they preferred to learn to use Iranian English while just 1.67 percent of them identified the other varieties of English as their preferences. Accordingly, it could be claimed that some communicative methods of learning are preferred more by students.

Items 9, 10, and 11 of the questionnaire tried to explore the learners' perception on communicative language and teaching practices in university English classrooms. As revealed, as for Item 9, only 20.12 percent of the learners accepted the statement, which claimed that communicative activities were of no use, while approximately 79% of them held the opposite view. Pertaining to Item 10, a majority of the learners (79.16 %) stated that teachers ought to adopt a more communicative approach, while 15.34 percent of them disagreed. Respecting Item 11, close to the two-third of the learners (70.64 %) believed that classroom tasks should be focused more on communication, with grammar explained only when necessary,

while 25.54 percent of them rejected this idea.

Item 12 of the questionnaire inspected tasks related to pragmatic which English teachers mostly apply in the classroom teaching. Learners claimed that the most frequent task which teachers used in the classroom teaching was debate (27.18 %), followed by pair-work (26.12 %), and group discussion (25.11 %). Besides, they held that role-play (18.34 %) was the least frequent used task applied by teachers in the classroom.

Items 13, 14, and 15 of the questionnaire attempted to discover the learners' perceptions on classroom learning and teaching. Concerning Item 13, a majority of the learners (59.4) believed that university English textbooks did not provide much information on culture, conversation rules, usage, and on how to use English correctly while 38.65 percent of them accepted this statement. Regarding Item 14, almost two-third of the learners did not agree with the statement claiming activities done in the classes help students boost their practical skills, while 25.58 percent of them approved this idea. As for Item 15, more than half of the learners (52.14 %) maintained that they did not like grammar and vocabulary explanation, and sentence drills in their English class, while 48.73 percent of them stated that they like this methodology.

Furthermore, learners were provided with several open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The first one inspected the tasks that learners believed seemed essential in order to escalate their skills in communication in their learning process. As it was analyzed, more than two-thirds of the learners (79.66 %) selected the role of films and videos as a suitable tool for improving their communicative ability followed by authentic materials for reading (76.23 %) and attending in group discussions (65.65 %). In addition, almost half of the learners chose the item of debate (42.43 %) as an appropriate means for escalating their communicative ability followed by working in pairs (41.22 %) and learning how to practice songs (39.89 %). Role play (29.12 %) and giving lectures (9.88 %) were the last selected tasks learners recognized as proper resources for improving their communicative ability.

The Impact of Textbook Tasks on Students' Pragmatic Competence

To see the influence of English university textbook tasks on EFL students' pragmatic competence, a document analysis was done on *The Inside Reading* books (The Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2016). In addition, regarding general English courses, *The Interchange Series* (Fifth Edition, by Richards, Hull, and Proctor (2005) were classified and investigated. In fact, this analysis had two objectives. First, it was done to scrutinize the nature of learning tasks provided by university English textbooks. Second, it was carried out to attain a deep understanding of the efficacy of textbooks tasks. Followings are the results of the document analysis.

These books offered diverse texts and tasks on the basis of themes, which were supposed to be associated with learners' real life. They were designed along with the principles of interaction and a task-based method, which aids learners in their improvement of language competence. Table 1 illustrated the pages of task types in general English textbooks.

Table 1: Percentage and Pages of University Books for General English Courses

		Inside Reading 3	Inside Reading 4	Interchange 2	Interchange 3
Lexical Items	Pages	59	63	89	84
	Percentage	38.22	39.54	43.19	42.22
Comprehension Items	Pages	24	23	28	30
	Percentage	16.13	15.15	15.26	15.43
Pragmatic Items	Pages	23	22	21	20
	Percentage	13.99	12.33	10.89	10.01
Written Items	Pages	14	21	18	26
	Percentage	9.55	12.43	9.88	13.46
Translation Items	Pages	11	12	13	14
	Percentage	6.23	6.88	7.78	7.97
Metalanguage Items	Pages	9	7	7	5
	Percentage	5.76	3.45	3.45	2.29
Grammatical Items	Pages	7	7	8	9
	Percentage	4.16	4.85	5.85	6.32
Cultural Items	Pages	2	2	3	2
	Percentage	1.29	1.21	2.11	1.29

As shown in Table 1, textbook pragmatic tasks covered less than 19% of all tasks in four books, whereas linguistic tasks encompassed more than 79% of all language tasks offered by the textbooks.

Furthermore, Table 2 demonstrated the number of pages and the percentage of diverse types of tasks on pragmatic knowledge in the four textbooks.

Table 2: Pages Related to Pragmatic Tasks in Four General English Textbooks

Pragmatic Tasks	Pages	Percentage	Percentage of Tasks in Textbooks
Pragmatic Items as Tasks	79	64.33	10.12
Metalanguage Items as Tasks	29	23.55	3.97
Cultural Items as Tasks	12	9.06	1.87
Total	120	100	16.10

As displayed in Table 2, pragmatic items tasks were the extensive kinds of pragmatic tasks which were provided by the four textbooks as they covered 79 pages (64.33 %) of the four books. The cultural tasks, however, were the least one, (12 pages, 9.06 %). Besides, metalanguage tasks offered by four textbooks were 29 pages (23.55 %). It should be noted that these four textbooks did not provide tasks regarding general pragmatic knowledge and how to learn pragmatic competence.

In addition, Table 3 depicted the number of pages and the percentage of diverse types of tasks on linguistic knowledge in the four textbooks.

Table 3: Pages of Linguistic Tasks for the Four General Textbooks

Linguistic Tasks	Pages	Percentage	Percentage of Tasks in the Set of Textbooks
Lexical Items as Tasks	279	50.44	41.63
Comprehension Items as Tasks	105	17.55	14.73
Written Items as Tasks	79	12.97	11.74
Translation Tasks	50	9.73	8.32
Grammatical Items as Tasks	34	6.95	5.87
Total	557	100	80.31

Based on Table 3, lexical tasks were the extensive kinds of linguistic

tasks provided by the four textbooks as they enclosed 279 pages (50.44 %) of the eight books, whereas the grammatical tasks were the least one, (34 pages, 6.95 %). In addition, comprehension tasks offered by four textbooks were 105 pages (17.55 %), followed by writing tasks (79 pages, 12.97%), and translation tasks (50 pages, 9.73%).

Then, pragmatically oriented tasks contained within the textbooks were in the method of listening tasks and speaking tasks. It should be distinguished that listening task offered in the textbooks was limited to answering the questions of the tasks while speaking tasks involved different tasks which are represented in Table 4.

Table 4: The Number of Pages of Pragmatic Tasks in the Four General English Textbooks

Pragmatic Tasks in the Books	Pages	Percentage
Varied Pair work	21	24.78
Different Group work	19	22.35
Numerous Group discussions	18	21.51
Different Questions and answers	11	13.63
Group Debate	7	8.32
Role play	4	4.22
Oral presentation	2	1.22
Speech Challenge	1	0.86
Total	83	100

Based on Table 4, pair work tasks were the wide-ranging types of pragmatic tasks offered by the four textbooks as they bounded 21 pages (24.78 %) of the four books, whereas the speech contests and oral presentation were the least one, (one page, 0.86 %). In addition, group work tasks offered by four textbooks were 19 pages (22.35 %), followed by group discussions (18 pages, 21.51%), questions and answers (11 pages, 13.63%), debate (7 pages, 8.32%), and role play (4 pages, 4.22%).

To assess the perceptions of Iranian senior English-majored students concerning the impact of learning tasks offered by textbooks on their

progress of pragmatic competence, the researcher evaluated the results of the interview. By analyzing the participants' interview, the researcher extracted three codes:

- Inadequacy or Quantity of Pragmatic Information in the Textbooks
- Suitability or Quality of Pragmatic Information, and
- Cross-Cultural Diversities.

With respect to the inadequacy or quantity of pragmatic information, a number of students claimed that pragmatic information in most textbooks and course resources failed to offer sufficient quantity of pragmatic knowledge for us to progress our pragmatic competence. The following excerpts specified how the interviewees justified this idea:

...the amount of pragmatic information in the textbooks is insufficient as a relevant source to improve pragmatic competence for EFL learners.

...these language textbooks are unable to offer us sufficient and applicable input which expand our pragmatic competence.

...so after several years of learning English, we are less likely to acquire pragmatic features of the target language deeply.

...in spite of the fact that there are different pragmatic features in textbooks, the quantity of pragmatic tasks in these books is far from being a convincing material for us to make progress in pragmatic competence.

...the number of pragmatic information in these course books is remarkably far from being satisfactory for me to achieve pragmatic competence.

As for suitability or quality of tasks, several students acknowledged that metapragmatic information is lacking in ELT textbooks, and these textbooks provide the learner with more linguistic resources. The following excerpts specified how the interviewees vindicated this notion:

...such materials concentrated on improving lexical knowledge and

provided little increase in boosting students' communicative competence.

...one can put forward that the English textbooks are not based on communication and they do not cover speaking skills.

...the conversations in these assigned textbooks were not pragmatically efficacious and functional.

...the ways that the speech acts are offered in the textbooks do not contain any cultural explanation of varied speech styles.

...textbooks do not contain relevant communicative activities and lean heavily towards rote learning.

...textbooks are to some extent more grammar-based than skill-based. In other words, textbooks give more importance to grammar study and grammar practice compared to practice regarding the four communicative skills.

...the textbooks show a tendency toward lexical knowledge that do not demonstrate knowledge of use. Communicative activities are more practical to escalate information and to increase output. However, the role of how to actual such tasks in the real life is as significant as its knowledge.

...the assigned textbooks which contain the most significant aspect of English learning at university, especially in some contexts that interlocutors ought to practice language in a naturalistic way.

...adopted texts in the textbooks were very repetitious and out of style and easy texts and difficult ones are not distinguishable, which makes it hard for students to develop linguistic competence or pragmatic competence step by step.

Pertaining to cross-cultural diversities, a few students believed that our English textbooks in university have a strong touch of Iranian culture. The following excerpts specified how the interviewees justified this idea:

...textbooks are not contrived relatively according to the norms and

conventions of the country of target language.

...textbooks more often look like Persian books literally translated into English, and somewhat they are not consistent with English culture and lifestyle.

...in our English textbooks, there is cultural mismatch and also some kinds of distortions of norms are seen.

...textbooks are not very comprehensive and little cultural knowledge was contained within the texts.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the first research question, it was revealed that Iranian English learning process does not show regularity in balance to some extent. In fact, as they need to communicate efficiently with people of different countries and acquire practical abilities in English, EFL students claimed that their mere purpose was not to pass the examinations. This leads them to realize that both linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge are needed to be a competent language user. In other words, learners tried to focus more on improving communicative skills during their English language learning process. Such a tremendous shift is witnessed in the Item 8 of the questionnaire, in which almost two thirds of learners claimed that the knowledge of communicative competence seems to be as significant as linguistic knowledge.

Moreover, a majority of the learners preferred American English followed by British English, and they desired to imitate native speakers' pronunciation and intonation. This is not in line with the notion of Kirkpatrick (2010), who claimed that language learners should learn and use different variations of their local language and how to use them felicitously. In fact, it could be claimed that learners had a solid tendency to be engaged with interactional methods such as communicate language teaching and they wished to be able to interact in English in a natural way.

In addition, learners identified knowledge on how to use English

appropriately as the most favored knowledge that they desired in English classroom teaching followed by cultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge. In fact, they were keen to be trained how to communicate with other and how to use English in a proper way. In other words, learners need to be taught through communicative activities to learn communicative competence in the classroom and natural setting in order to become communicative competent. This is in line with Savignon and Wang (2003), who found that needs, tendencies, expectations and preferences were different among English language learners, and the way they were instructed was not in line with their perceptions.

Additionally, the analysis proves that learners desired to be communicatively competent language users, was that they preferred teachers who focus on communicate language teaching and practice, with grammar explained only when needed. In fact, Iranian EFL students believed that the methodology of communicate language teaching and learning improve their communicative competence. In other words, they preferred their English language instructors to outline pragmatically oriented tasks such as doing different exercises as debates, practicing the language through role play, presenting themselves in group discussions and also doing pair work activities to amplify their pragmatic competence. These results confirmed the studies conducted by Vellenga (2004).

Based on the results of the second research question, it was revealed that in order for students to become language competent, English textbooks need to provide both linguistic tasks and pragmatic tasks. However, Iranian students believed that their textbooks hardly offer sufficient information for them to fruitfully attain pragmatic competence. The results of the analyses of textbook tasks underlined that textbook pragmatic tasks covered less than 20% of all tasks whereas linguistic tasks encompassed more than 80% of all the reported English language tasks offered by the textbooks. This could lead us to the fact that the role of teaching pragmatics was not so important. In fact, learners focus on language usage rather than language use as is required for their exams.

In other words, Iranian EFL learners nearly entirely count on classroom textbooks to attain the required knowledge of use and practice pragmatic competence in the Iranian learning context. This contradicted the notion of Darali (2007) who declared that textbooks have been disparaged for disabling to offer EFL students with sufficient and proper pragmatic knowledge. In addition, he maintained that language learners should not rely solely on textbooks as they are not supposed to be considered as a valid source of pragmatic learning. Likewise, Vasquez and Sharpless (2009) believed that textbooks do not offer plenty data for students to efficaciously gain pragmatic competence. In the worst case, it can be a cause of pragmatic failure.

One possible reason for inadequacy of opportunity for learning second language pragmatics for university students was mentioned by Ma and Xu (2010), who drew that it is owing to commercial nature of textbooks. Thus, many textbooks either do not provide or they provide speech acts unrealistically (Ma & Xu, 2010).

Regarding pragmatic tasks, this study demonstrated that most of the pragmatic drills in textbooks are developed as pair or group work, where the learners are required to communicate with each other to exercise the features concerned. Even though these exercises give learners the chance to work with each other and shape their skills of communication with different people, this may not be the perfect way to practice pragmatic skills of a foreign language. Performing an exercise with another Iranian-speaking learner may not be effective because neither of the speakers would be able to correct the other or provide authentic or real-life feedback.

In other words, the findings of this inquiry have specified that metapragmatic information is lacking in ELT textbooks, and these textbooks offer the learner with more linguistic resources. This is in line with the notion of Vallenga (2004, p. 4), who clarified “metalinguistic and metapragmatic information related to ways of speaking were missing from ELT textbooks used in most university worldwide”. Correspondingly, Boxer and Pickering (1995) expressed that textbooks encompass little information

regarding pragmatic language use.

Moreover, the findings identified the value of knowing the cultural setting and the essential role played by culture. To put it differently, English textbooks are not very comprehensive and little cultural knowledge was contained within the texts. In effect, the abilities of the university students to decode the cross-cultural differences and keeping adaptability between themselves and foreign cultural norms are the essential aspects that lead them to a more efficient communication. This confirmed the notion of Bardovi-Harlig (2001, p. 3), who upheld that “speech act realizations presented in textbooks might not reflect the manner in which native speakers commonly realize in a speech act”. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) maintained that the target language culture may be misrepresented and the rules of speaking or politeness norms may be distorted.

The findings were in line with the studies conducted by several researchers in different contexts. For instance, Vellenga (2004) explored eight intermediates to upper-intermediate level ESL and EFL textbooks by analyzing speech act material, metalanguage style, and pragmatic evidences through a page-by-page investigation. She found that textbooks offered the minimum quantity of metalinguistic and metapragmatic information, and pragmatic information was insufficient in all the texts.

Likewise, Khaki (2006) discovered the Iranian pre-university English Book and found that this book lacks the sufficient information pertaining to pragmatics and there is no rationality behind the arrangement of the reading texts. Furthermore, Jahangard (2007) scrutinized a study concerning the textbook layout, grammar presentation, and visual materials available of Iranian high school EFL textbooks. Jahangard (2007) found that Iranian high school EFL textbooks did not pay much more attention to the pragmatic knowledge and it is overlooked.

Besides, the findings also confirmed the study led by Shimizu, et al. (2007) who investigated the primers and practices of speech acts in textbooks utilized in Japan. They found that learners could acquire just an inadequate amount of linguistic forms for each speech act and speech acts

were not offered explicitly in the textbook. Furthermore, the textbooks' quantity and quality of metapragmatic information were very low and learners had inadequate chance to exercise the speech acts and the forms they had just acquired. In addition, Ji (2007) reviewed the proportion and quantity of pragmatic information provided by the textbooks, the nature of pragmatic data, and the level of productivity of pragmatic data. Following the analyses of data, Ji (2007) found that the majority of the metapragmatic descriptions in these books were simple and the diversity of pragmatic data was inadequate.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Iranian university English education has demonstrated unorganized levels of teaching and learning process. In fact, as they need to communicate efficiently with people of different countries and acquire practical abilities in English, learners claimed that they do not want to learn English just to pass the examinations. In addition, learners identified knowledge on how to use English appropriately as the most favored knowledge that they desired in English classroom teaching followed by cultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge. In fact, they were keen on being trained how to interact with others and how to use English in a proper way. Furthermore, the results of this research have shown that the textbooks only provided sufficient information on metalanguage style.

It is anticipated that the present study used university English textbooks and they would not assist learners in improving their pragmatic competence because the quantity and quality of pragmatic knowledge or pragmatic tasks in the textbooks are not satisfactory. Learners need to be exposed to real-life English language learning resources and activities as they are confident they could obtain adequate pragmatic knowledge and information from these resources and activities. Finally, these materials lead to improvement in their pragmatic competence in communication. Consequently, the textbooks should cover pragmatic features with the aim of compensating for the

absence of real-life context. To put it differently, providing sufficient pragmatic information in the textbooks could help students boost their pragmatic understanding and develop their pragmatic competence. The results of this study could develop some new insights in research on teaching and learning, and also suggest relevant data for the improvement of Iranian senior EFL students' pragmatic knowledge and awareness in university English learning.

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