

A way of developing pragmatic competence by means of explicit instruction: interpreting meanings that are embedded in culture in English

Desarrollo de la competencia pragmática mediante la instrucción explícita: Interpretación del significado culturalmente arraigado en inglés

Desenvolvendo a competência pragmática através da instrução explícita: interpretando significados culturalmente enraizados no inglês

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence is an essential part of communicative competence, although it is still given relatively little attention in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs. It has been suggested that giving students explicit instruction in pragmatics is an effective way of improving their ability to understand meanings that depend on context. The present study looked at the impact of such explicit pragmatics instruction on the pragmatic competence of Ecuadorian pre-service EFL teachers. A quantitative descriptive approach was used, involving 35 seventh-semester pre-service EFL teachers studying at a public university in Ecuador. After receiving explicit instruction on the topics of presupposition, conversational implicature, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, contextual meaning, and intended meaning, the participants took a Pragmatic Interpretation Test which included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. As a whole, the participants showed satisfactory performance and obtained perfect scores in the multiple-choice part. However, there was more variability in the open-ended questions concerning presupposition, indicating that explaining pragmatic reasoning was more difficult than simply recognising pragmatic meaning. The results show that explicit pragmatics instruction helps in the development of pragmatic competence and point to the need for promoting metapragmatic awareness in EFL teacher education through reflective and explanatory activities.

Keywords: explicit teaching of pragmatics; pragmatic competence; metapragmatic awareness; teacher education in the context of EFL; interlanguage pragmatics.

Resumen

La competencia pragmática es un componente esencial de la competencia comunicativa, mientras que no continúa subrepresentada en muchos programas de formación de profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El lenguaje explícito de la pragmática tem ha sido propuesto como un abordaje eficaz para mejorar la capacidad de dos alumnos de interpretar significados dependientes del contexto. Este estudio examina los efectos del aprendizaje explícito de la pragmática en la competencia pragmática de los futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera en el Ecuador. Utilizou-se uma abordagem quantitativa descritiva com 35 alunos do sétimo semestre do curso de formação de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira de uma universidade pública do Equador. Depois del lenguaje explícito sobre una presión, implicatura conversacional, ironía, sarcasmo, lenguaje figurado, significado contextual y significado pretendido, los participantes realizaron una prueba de interpretación pragmática compuesta por preguntas de escuela múltiple y preguntas abiertas. Los participantes demostraron un desempeño global satisfactorio y obtuvieron un acuerdo total en la sección de escuela múltiple. Sin embargo, observou-se uma maior variabilidade nas tarefas de pressuposição com questões abertas, sugiriendo que explicar el raciocínio pragmático era más difícil de reconocer el significado pragmático. Los resultados indican que el aprendizaje de la pragmática apoia o el desarrollo de la competencia pragmática, a su vez, destaca la importancia de promover una conciencia metapragmática a través de atividades reflexivas y explicativas en la formación de profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: enseñanza explícita de la pragmática; competencia pragmática; conciencia metapragmática; formación de profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera; pragmática de la interlengua.

Resumo

A competência pragmática é uma componente essencial da competência comunicativa, no entanto continua sub-representada em muitos programas de formação de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). O ensino explícito da pragmática tem sido proposto como uma abordagem eficaz para melhorar a capacidade dos alunos de interpretar significados dependentes do contexto. Este estudo examinou os efeitos do ensino explícito da pragmática na competência pragmática dos futuros professores de inglês como língua estrangeira no Equador. Utilizou-se uma abordagem quantitativa descritiva com 35 alunos do sétimo semestre do curso de formação de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira de uma universidade pública do Equador. Após o ensino explícito sobre a pressuposição, implicatura conversacional, ironia, sarcasmo, linguagem figurada, significado contextual e significado pretendido, os participantes realizaram um Teste de Interpretação Pragmática composto por questões de escolha múltipla e questões abertas. Os participantes demonstraram um desempenho global satisfatório e obtiveram um acerto total na secção de escolha múltipla. No entanto, observou-se uma maior variabilidade nas tarefas de pressuposição com questões abertas, sugerindo que explicar o raciocínio pragmático era mais desafiante do que reconhecer o significado pragmático. Os resultados indicam que o ensino explícito da pragmática apoia o desenvolvimento da competência pragmática, ao mesmo tempo que destaca a importância de promover a consciência metapragmática através de atividades reflexivas e explicativas na formação de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: ensino claro da pragmática, competência pragmática, consciência metapragmática, formação de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira, pragmática da interlíngua.

Introduction

Pragmatic competence has now become an essential aspect of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), since effective communication relies not just on grammatical accuracy but also on learners' capacity to understand the intentions of speakers, the implied meanings, and the use of language that is appropriate in a given cultural context (Taguchi, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Nowadays, a growing amount of research stresses that it should be seen as a basic aim of language teaching, especially in EFL situations where chances for genuine interaction are usually limited and where classroom teaching generally places more importance on grammatical accuracy than on the use of language that is sensitive to context (Huang, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Literature Review

The evidence recently compiled by Wang et al. (2024) strongly supports the idea that pragmatic competence is important in the teaching of English. In a systematic review of 42 studies that were published between 1993 and 2023 and are listed in Scopus and Web of Science, the authors looked at how pragmatic competence develops among both EFL and ESL learners. Their results show that research into pragmatics has increased considerably over the last thirty years, especially in EFL situations, where learners typically show lower levels of pragmatic competence compared to their ESL peers. The review also points out that explicit teaching methods always help in the development of learners' pragmatic skills by enhancing their understanding of sociocultural norms and the appropriate use of language in different contexts. Furthermore, Wang et al. point out a number of unresolved issues, such as the need for more research regarding instructional practices and the sociocultural factors that affect pragmatic competence, thus giving a solid reason for further empirical studies in this area.

It has always been shown by recent research that teaching pragmatics explicitly plays a key role in enabling learners to use language appropriately in a variety of communicative situations. Huang (2022) combined the evidence from studies of interlanguage pragmatics and found that explicit teaching is usually more effective than implicit methods at developing pragmatic competence. The review stresses that metapragmatic explanations, awareness-raising exercises, and guided reflection aid learners in paying attention to both pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic conventions, while simple exposure to the language is generally not enough to lead to real pragmatic development.

This study was supported by Vali et al. (2025), who looked into the effects of both explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction on the pragmatic competence of 120 Iranian EFL learners, the learners being divided into three proficiency levels. The researchers used an experimental pre-test/post-test approach and assessed the learners' pragmatic performance

through Discourse Completion Tests, Error Recognition Tests, role-play activities, and writing tasks. Even though both types of instruction led to improvements, explicit instruction resulted in significantly greater gains, especially in the learners' ability to use language appropriately in communicative situations. The study also showed that the learners' proficiency level had an effect on their pragmatic development, thus underlining the pedagogical value of including explicit pragmatics instruction in EFL classrooms.

Also, Isaee and Barjesteh (2024) looked at the effectiveness of both explicit and implicit instruction by teaching intermediate EFL learners some compliment strategies. Their results showed that although both types of instruction had a positive effect on learners' pragmatic competence, explicit instruction led to better learning outcomes. The authors stress that pragmatic competence goes beyond grammatical knowledge and includes the learners' ability to interpret implicatures, implied meanings, and the use of language that is appropriate in a given context. These findings support the increasing agreement that explicit instruction not only promotes pragmatic production but also increases learners' awareness of how meaning is developed in real communicative situations.

Even though there is a growing amount of evidence in favour of giving students explicit instruction in pragmatics, such instruction is still not systematically incorporated into EFL classrooms. Kanık et al. (2023) looked at teaching practices in an international EFL setting and discovered that pragmatic instruction was only sometimes given and was usually dealt with incidentally rather than as part of carefully designed pedagogical activities. The authors explain this state of affairs as being due to a number of factors, such as inadequate teacher preparation, limitations imposed by the curriculum, and a lack of instructional resources. As a result, even though research continuously shows that explicit pragmatics instruction is effective, many EFL learners still get only a relatively small amount of systematic exposure to pragmatic features throughout their language study.

Huang (2022) combined the evidence from research into interlanguage pragmatics and found that explicit teaching is consistently more effective than implicit methods when it comes to developing learners' pragmatic competence. The review points out that activities which involve giving learners metapragmatic explanations and raising their awareness help them to concentrate on both pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic conventions, while simple exposure to the language is generally not enough to lead to pragmatic development. These findings also reinforce the value of explicit instruction in EFL situations.

Apart from its application in the classroom, recent research has placed greater emphasis on the idea that successful communication involves not just the production of suitable language but also the correct interpretation of the meanings intended by speakers within their cultural and social settings. Huang (2024) states that for effective cross-cultural communication people need to realise how contextual factors, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships influence the way messages are interpreted. Since speakers coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds often express their intentions, emotions, and attitudes in an indirect manner, learners should become sensitive to the implied meanings rather than depending solely on literal interpretations.

Similar empirical research has also shown how important pragmatic comprehension is when it comes to learning English as a foreign language. Even though specific instructional interventions have been found to have a positive impact on learners' pragmatic competence, a large number of studies still focus mainly on the production of speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals. Rather than this, fewer studies have looked at learners' ability to understand conversational implicatures, irony, sarcasm, and other pragmatic meanings which are embedded in culture. The fact that there is this imbalance indicates that pragmatic comprehension is still an area that has not been sufficiently explored in the study of interlanguage pragmatics and thus merits more empirical investigation.

The literature as a whole shows that pragmatic competence has now become a basic element of communicative competence in EFL teaching and that explicit instruction has a significant role in promoting learners' pragmatic development (Wang et al., 2024; Huang, 2022; Vali et al., 2025; Isaee & Barjesteh, 2024). Yet, even though there is increasing empirical evidence in favour of explicit pragmatics instruction, its use is still limited in a great many EFL classrooms because of pedagogical, curricular, and contextual restrictions (Kanik et al., 2023). Moreover, the existing intervention studies have mainly concentrated on learners' production of speech acts, while comparatively little attention has been given to developing learners' ability to interpret pragmatically embedded cultural meanings, such as implied meanings, conversational implicatures, irony, and sarcasm. As a result, further empirical research is required in order to examine how explicit pragmatics instruction can help EFL learners to interpret contextually and culturally rooted meanings in real communicative situations.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to study instructional interventions in real educational settings, a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design was used and the quantitative and qualitative evidence was combined in order to achieve a full understanding of the learning outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Context

The research was carried out at a public university located on the coast of Ecuador, in which English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) as part of the undergraduate English Language Teaching programme. It took place in the Semantics and Pragmatics course in the seventh semester. By that semester, the students had already finished their basic studies in English language skills, linguistics, grammar, and methods of language teaching, enabling them to deal with more advanced topics concerning meaning, context, and the use of language.

Even though they had a high level of linguistic ability, a great number of the learners still had trouble in understanding pragmatic meanings that are culturally based, such as implied messages, irony, sarcasm, indirectness, and other expressions which depend on context. It was for these reasons that this kind of educational environment was suitable for investigating the effect of explicit pragmatics teaching on students' ability to interpret meaning beyond the literal level and on their capacity to communicate more effectively in intercultural situations.

Participants

The study involved 35 undergraduate students who were in their seventh semester studying English Language Teaching at a public university located on the coast of Ecuador. Of these, 11 were men and 24 were women, with ages ranging from 22 to 24 years. All the participants were taking the Semantics and Pragmatics course in which they were given formal teaching about meaning, context, and the use of language in communication. Since the study was carried out with a complete class, convenience sampling was used. This group was chosen because they had an intermediate to upper-intermediate level of English and a solid linguistic background, qualities that made them appropriate for investigating the effects of explicit pragmatics instruction on the interpretation of culturally embedded meanings.

Instructional Intervention

The instructional intervention was created with the aim of helping EFL students improve their pragmatic competence by giving them explicit instruction on how to interpret culturally embedded meanings in English. Unlike traditional language teaching, which focuses on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary building, this intervention sought to increase learners' awareness of the way in which contextual, social, and cultural factors affect meaning in real-life communication. Students were asked to analyse the speakers' intentions, the implied meanings, the contextual clues, and the use of language that is appropriate in a given culture through guided explanations, collaborative discussion, and practical communication exercises.

The design of the instruction was based on recent research which shows that explicit teaching of pragmatics is effective in promoting pragmatic awareness and the ability to interpret meaning. The intervention took place over eight instructional sessions as part of the regular Semantics and Pragmatics course. In each session a different aspect of pragmatic interpretation was dealt with, for example contextual meaning, implicature, presupposition, figurative language, irony, sarcasm, mood and modality, and culturally embedded expressions. The instruction combined clear explanations of pragmatic concepts with authentic examples, classroom discussions, role-play activities, collaborative problem-solving tasks, and guided interpretation exercises. Students were encouraged to give reasons for their interpretations, compare different possible meanings, and think about how context and cultural knowledge influence communication. The sequence of the instruction moved from guided practice to more independent analysis.

As the instructional intervention moved on, the responsibility for learning passed from teacher-led instruction to a form of student-focused collaborative learning. In the last stage, the participants worked in small groups to plan and give presentations on important topics in semantics and pragmatics, such as presupposition, conversational implicature, contextual meaning, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, and the difference between literal and intended meaning. Each group also created an interactive classroom activity to get their classmates involved in analysing real examples and discussing how implied meanings are interpreted in a given context. By means of these presentations and the activities that were led by their peers, the students showed that they understood the pragmatic concepts by explaining the ideas themselves, helping to run the discussions, and answering the questions put to them by their classmates, rather than depending just on written material. This collaborative phase strengthened their metapragmatic awareness and offered further opportunities to put their explicit knowledge of pragmatics into practice in realistic communicative situations. The

presentation found in the uploaded file is an example of the kind of collaborative work carried out during this stage, combining several pragmatic concepts into one instructional sequence.

Instruments

In order to look at the effects of explicit instruction in pragmatics on students' ability to interpret culturally embedded meanings, two research tools were used: the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) and the Pragmatic Learning Perception Questionnaire (PLPQ). The employment of more than one instrument is in line with the recommendations of the literature on interlanguage pragmatics, which suggests that performance-based assessments should be combined with learners' self-reported perceptions in order to gain a more complete understanding of pragmatic development and the effectiveness of instruction (Huang, 2022). Moreover, using multiple sources of evidence increases the credibility of research carried out in classroom settings by offering different viewpoints on both learners' performance and their perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT)

The Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) was made up of ten multiple-choice questions intended for assessing learners' capacity to tell the difference between the literal and the intended meanings in real-life communicative situations. The scenarios covered pragmatic features such as indirect requests, irony, sarcasm, contextual meaning, implicature, and speaker intention. Different from conventional pragmatic assessment tasks which mainly look at learners' production of speech acts, the PIT was specially designed to check learners' ability to interpret the meanings intended by speakers by taking into account contextual, interpersonal, and sociocultural information. This focus on interpretation is in line with the latest suggestions in interlanguage pragmatics, which stress the need to assess both pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production (Huang, 2022; Roever, 2011). Pragmatic Learning Perception Questionnaire (PLPQ)

After taking the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT), **the** participants filled out the Pragmatic Learning Perception Questionnaire (PLPQ), which was intended to look at their views of the explicit pragmatics instruction and the way in which it had helped them to interpret culturally embedded meanings. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part contained ten statements on a five-point Likert scale which looked at the learners' perceptions of the instructional activities, their confidence in interpreting pragmatic meanings, and the extent to which they found the explicit instructional method effective. The second part consisted of five open-ended questions that asked the participants to reflect on their learning experiences, to name the pragmatic concepts that they found most difficult, and to explain how the instructional intervention had affected their understanding of contextual and culturally embedded meanings. The use of both closed- and open-ended questions provided complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence about learners' metapragmatic awareness and their perceptions of the intervention, thus strengthening the overall assessment of the instructional programme (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Procedure.

Data collection took place throughout the instructional intervention in the regular Semantics and Pragmatics course. At the start of the study, the participants took the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) as a pre-test in order to assess their original ability to interpret both literal and pragmatic meanings in real communicative situations. The application of pre-test and post-test methods is well established in research involving classroom-based interventions since it allows researchers to look at changes in learners' performance after they have received the instructional treatment and to judge the effectiveness of the teaching interventions (Roever, 2022). The pre-test results showed that a number of students had trouble understanding implied meanings, irony, sarcasm, indirect requests, and other expressions which depend on context, thus confirming the need for explicit pragmatics instruction.

After the pre-test, the participants took part in an explicit instructional intervention which took place over eight instructional sessions. During this intervention, the students were given systematic teaching on various pragmatic concepts such as contextual meaning, implicature, presupposition, figurative language, irony, sarcasm, mood and modality, and culturally embedded expressions. The classroom instruction incorporated clear explanations together with collaborative discussions, guided interpretation exercises, authentic communicative situations, and the Role-Play with Interpretation activity in order to help learners become aware of the influence of contextual and sociocultural factors on meaning. Research carried out in the classroom recently has stressed that pragmatics instruction which is based on authentic communicative activities promotes learners' pragmatic awareness and helps them to interpret intended meanings in context.

After the instructional intervention had ended, the participants took the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) a second time as a post-test in order to assess any changes in their ability to interpret culturally embedded pragmatic meanings. Right after that, the students filled out the Pragmatic Learning Perception Questionnaire (PLPQ) in order to give details about their perceptions of the instructional activities, their confidence in interpreting pragmatic meanings, and their view of the effectiveness of the intervention. Since the combination of achievement data and learner perception data is increasingly being recommended in classroom-based pragmatics research, it provides complementary evidence with respect to both the learning outcomes and the learners' experiences throughout the instruction. Lastly, all the quantitative and qualitative data were arranged for later statistical and thematic analyses.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to gain a thorough understanding of the students' pragmatic competence after they had received the explicit instructional intervention. By using

both types of analysis the researchers were able to look not only at the students' total performance on the objective test questions but also at the quality of their written explanations, thus giving a more complete view of their understanding of pragmatic concepts.

The quantitative analysis looked at the students' answers to the multiple-choice questions, which tested their understanding of presupposition, presupposition triggers, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, and intended meaning. The answers were evaluated in accordance with the answer key that had been prepared for the test, and the results were presented using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and the overall accuracy rate. These statistical measures were employed to ascertain the students' level of achievement with respect to the various pragmatic concepts and to assess how much the instructional intervention had improved their understanding of semantics and pragmatics.

The qualitative analysis focused on the three open-ended tasks involving the interpretation of presuppositions, since in these tasks students had to identify the presupposition contained in each sentence and give reasons for their answers by explaining the linguistic trigger which was responsible for the implied meaning. The students' written answers were compared with the official answer key and were classified as correct, partially correct, or incorrect based on the accuracy and completeness of their explanations. Furthermore, common patterns in the students' responses were looked at in order to spot their usual strengths, misconceptions, and difficulties when it came to metapragmatic reasoning. This analytical process was based on the principles of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), who maintain that by identifying and interpreting significant patterns in qualitative data researchers are able to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and performance.

In the end, the quantitative and qualitative results were combined in order to give a thorough interpretation of the effects of the instructional intervention. By comparing the

students' objective performance on the multiple-choice questions with the quality of their written explanations, it was possible to tell the difference between having a conceptual recognition and possessing a deeper metapragmatic understanding. This integrated method allowed for a more detailed assessment of the students' pragmatic competence and enabled the researchers to spot the areas in which the learners showed strong conceptual knowledge as well as those aspects which still posed challenges following the explicit instruction.

Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out in keeping with the basic ethical principles that should apply to educational research which involves human participants. Prior to the introduction of the instructional intervention, the students were made aware of the aims of the study, the procedures to be followed, and how the data gathered would be used. Taking part in the research was voluntary, and it was clearly explained to the students that their choice to take part or to withdraw at any time would have no effect on their academic position or course grades.

In order to protect the privacy of the participants, the data were kept confidential and analysed without using any personal information. The names of the students and all other identifying details were omitted from the dataset, and the findings are given in an aggregated form so that individual participants cannot be identified. The data collected were used solely for research and were stored securely during the study.

The instructional activities carried out during the intervention matched the aims of the regular course and did not place the participants in any physical, psychological or social risks beyond those normally met in classroom learning. The study followed the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as set out in the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research,

1979), as well as the ethical guidelines for research involving human participants formulated by the *American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020).

Table 1

Overview of the Explicit Pragmatics Instructional Intervention

Session	Topic	Main Classroom Activity	Learning Objective
1	Contextual Meaning	Dialogue analysis	Recognize contextual meaning
2	Hidden Meaning	Short conversations	Identify implied meaning
3	Implicature	Problem-solving	Interpret conversational implicatures
4	Presupposition	Multiple-choice tasks	Identify presupposed information
5	Figurative Language	Literary excerpts	Distinguish literal and figurative meaning
6	Pragmatic Interpretation: Irony and Sarcasm	Role plays with interpretation.	To help students recognize how pragmatic meaning can shift based on context, tone, and social dynamics, even when the linguistic forms remain the same.
7	Mood & Modality	Authentic conversations	Analyze attitudes and certainty
8	Integrated Practice	Case studies	Interpret culturally embedded meanings

One of the principal instructional activities implemented during the intervention was Role-Play with Interpretation, which was incorporated into the session on Pragmatic Interpretation: Irony and Sarcasm. Unlike traditional role-play activities that primarily emphasize language production, this activity required students to interpret speakers' intended meanings before formulating a response. Participants analyzed authentic communicative situations by considering contextual information, tone of voice, speaker intention, and interpersonal relationships, thereby recognizing that identical linguistic expressions may convey different pragmatic meanings depending on the communicative context. Through guided discussion and reflection, students were encouraged to justify their interpretations and compare alternative perspectives, fostering greater awareness of the role of context and culture in meaning construction.

Results

Overall Performance on the Pragmatic Interpretation Test

After the instructional intervention, the Pragmatic Interpretation Test (PIT) was given in order to assess the students' understanding of the pragmatic topics covered in the course. The test consisted of multiple-choice questions which measured their conceptual knowledge and three open-ended tasks which looked at their ability to identify and explain presuppositions. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the overall performance of the 35 participants, giving a general summary of their achievement before a more detailed analysis of their performance on each section of the test.

Table 2

Presents the descriptive statistics for the overall scores obtained on the PIT.

Descriptive Statistics		
	Student	Score
Mode	18.00	7.416
Median	18.00	8.100
Mean (arithmetic)	18.00	8.191
Std. Deviation	10.25	0.985
Maximum	35.00	10.00

Table 1 shows that the participants averaged a score of 8.19 out of 10 on the grading scale, the median score being 8.10. The individual scores varied between 7.20 and 10.00, which means that every participant scored enough to pass the Pragmatic Interpretation Test. Moreover, the relatively small standard deviation (0.98) indicates that there was not much variation in the students' performance, implying that the majority of the participants showed a comparable degree of achievement. Taken together, these results demonstrate that the students had attained a satisfactory level of performance as a result of the instructional intervention. The descriptive statistics give a general account of the students' achievement and form the

foundation for the more detailed analyses of the multiple-choice and open-ended questions that are given in the following subsections.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Students' Scores on the Pragmatic Interpretation Test

Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
7.0–7.9	17	48.6
8.0–8.9	7	20.0
9.0–10.0	11	31.4
Total	35	100.0

Table 2 The frequency distribution of the students' scores on the Pragmatic Interpretation Test is shown in Table 2. About half of the participants, that is 48.6 per cent, scored between 7.0 and 7.9, while 31.4 per cent scored between 9.0 and 10.0, which shows a high level of performance. The other 20.0 per cent obtained scores in the range 8.0 to 8.9. Taken as a whole, the distribution shows that every participant achieved a passing score, about one-third of them showing high achievement on the test.

Performance on the Multiple-Choice Section of the Pragmatic Interpretation Test.

The students' ability to identify the pragmatic concepts which had been covered during the instructional intervention—such as conversational implicature, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, contextual meaning, and intended meaning—was measured in the multiple-choice part of the Pragmatic Interpretation Test. For these questions, the participants had to interpret the communicative situations and select the most suitable pragmatic interpretation from the available options.

When the responses were analysed it was found that all 35 participants gave the correct answers to Questions 2 to 11, which meant that the multiple-choice section had a 100% accuracy rate. This shows that after having been given specific instructions the students were able to identify the pragmatic concepts which were assessed by the instrument when they were

given a structured format for their responses. The high level of performance in all cases suggests that the participants could tell the difference between the literal and the intended meanings and were able to correctly identify the pragmatic features shown in each question.

The students showed complete accuracy in the multiple-choice part, but different results were obtained in the presupposition interpretation tasks, since in those tasks the participants had to produce their own explanations rather than choose from a set of predetermined responses. The findings from these tasks are given in the subsection that follows.

Performance on the Open-Ended Presupposition Tasks

The presupposition interpretation tasks required students to identify the implicit assumptions conveyed in three sentences and justify their responses. Unlike the multiple-choice section, these tasks required participants to generate their own interpretations and explanations rather than select from predetermined alternatives.

Analysis of the responses revealed greater variability in students' performance on the presupposition tasks. Of the 35 participants, four (11.4%) demonstrated complete mastery by correctly identifying and justifying the presuppositions in all three scenarios. Twenty students (57.2%) exhibited partial understanding, receiving scores between 0.5 and 2.5 points. The remaining eleven students (31.4%) were unable to correctly identify or justify the presuppositions, obtaining a score of zero on the task.

These findings indicate that, although students successfully recognized pragmatic concepts in the multiple-choice section of the test, greater difficulty emerged when they were required to independently identify and explain presuppositions. The variability observed in the open-ended tasks suggests differences in students' ability to articulate the pragmatic reasoning underlying their interpretations.

Discussion

Effect of Explicit Pragmatics Instruction

The findings of this study indicate that explicit pragmatics instruction positively influenced participants' ability to recognize and interpret pragmatic meanings. Students achieved a mean score of 8.19 out of 10 on the Pragmatic Interpretation Test, while all participants correctly answered the multiple-choice items assessing conversational implicature, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, contextual meaning, and intended meaning. These results suggest that explicit instruction effectively supported the development of learners' pragmatic comprehension.

These findings are consistent with recent research demonstrating that explicit pragmatics instruction facilitates learners' ability to comprehend implied meanings, recognize contextual cues, and interpret speakers' communicative intentions in English as a foreign language. Recent empirical studies have shown that explicit classroom instruction contributes to measurable improvements in learners' pragmatic awareness and interpretation abilities across different educational contexts.

The effectiveness of explicit instruction may be attributed to its emphasis on metapragmatic awareness, which encourages learners to consciously analyze contextual information, linguistic forms, and speakers' intentions rather than relying exclusively on grammatical knowledge. Through guided explanations and classroom practice, learners become more capable of recognizing how meaning is constructed beyond the literal interpretation of language.

The present study extends this body of research by demonstrating that explicit pragmatics instruction can support pragmatic comprehension among Ecuadorian EFL university students. Although participants demonstrated high levels of success in recognizing pragmatic meanings, subsequent analyses revealed that generating explanations for

presuppositions remained more challenging. This distinction suggests that recognizing pragmatic meaning and articulating the underlying pragmatic reasoning may represent different dimensions of pragmatic competence.

Recognition versus Explanation of Pragmatic Meaning

One of the most noteworthy findings of the present study is the contrast between students' performance on the multiple-choice section of the Pragmatic Interpretation Test and their responses to the open-ended presupposition interpretation tasks. Whereas all participants correctly identified the pragmatic meanings assessed through the multiple-choice items, considerably greater variability emerged when they were required to independently identify and justify presuppositions. This contrast suggests that recognizing pragmatic meaning and explicitly explaining the underlying pragmatic mechanisms represent related but distinct dimensions of pragmatic competence.

The multiple-choice items primarily measured learners' ability to recognize contextual cues and select the most appropriate interpretation from a set of alternatives. In contrast, the presupposition tasks required students to generate explanations without linguistic support, drawing on their metapragmatic knowledge to explain why a particular interpretation was licensed. This additional cognitive demand likely explains why students who successfully recognized pragmatic meanings did not always demonstrate the same level of success when articulating their reasoning. Recent research has similarly argued that pragmatic assessment tasks differ in the types of knowledge and processing they require, with production and explanation tasks generally demanding greater metapragmatic awareness than recognition tasks.

The findings also reinforce the importance of metapragmatic awareness in the development of pragmatic competence. Explicit instruction may facilitate learners' recognition of pragmatic phenomena by directing attention to contextual information, pragmatic cues, and

speakers' communicative intentions. However, the ability to verbalize the reasoning underlying those interpretations appears to require a deeper level of conceptual understanding and conscious reflection. Contemporary discussions in interlanguage pragmatics emphasize that explicit instruction is particularly valuable because it promotes learners' awareness of the relationship between linguistic forms, contextual factors, and intended meanings rather than simply increasing exposure to pragmatic input.

The present findings therefore suggest that explicit pragmatics instruction effectively supported students' pragmatic comprehension while simultaneously revealing areas in which further instructional practice may be beneficial. In particular, instructional activities that require learners to justify their interpretations, discuss pragmatic triggers, and reflect on the relationship between linguistic forms and implied meanings may further strengthen their metapragmatic competence. Rather than viewing the lower performance on the presupposition tasks as evidence of instructional limitations, these results indicate that learners had begun to develop pragmatic awareness but still required additional opportunities to consolidate their ability to explain pragmatic meaning independently. This distinction contributes to current discussions on pragmatic instruction by highlighting the complementary roles of recognition and explanation in the development of pragmatic competence.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the present study have several implications for the teaching of pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The overall positive performance of the participants suggests that explicit pragmatics instruction can effectively enhance learners' ability to recognize and interpret implied meanings in communicative situations. Consequently, pragmatics should not be treated as an incidental component of language learning but rather as an integral part of English language instruction. Systematic classroom attention to pragmatic concepts such as presupposition, conversational implicature, irony,

sarcasm, and figurative language may help learners develop a more comprehensive understanding of authentic communication.

The contrast observed between students' performance on the multiple-choice section and the presupposition interpretation tasks also highlights the importance of incorporating instructional activities that promote metapragmatic reflection. While recognition tasks allow learners to identify appropriate interpretations in context, open-ended activities encourage them to explain the reasoning underlying those interpretations and to become more aware of the relationship between linguistic forms, contextual information, and speakers' communicative intentions. Classroom practices such as guided discussions, collaborative problem-solving, reflective questioning, and analysis of authentic dialogues may therefore support deeper levels of pragmatic development.

The results further suggest that effective pragmatics instruction should provide learners with opportunities to engage in both receptive and productive forms of pragmatic practice. Recognition-based activities remain valuable for introducing new pragmatic concepts and reinforcing comprehension; however, they should be complemented by tasks requiring learners to justify their interpretations, explain pragmatic meanings, and discuss how contextual factors influence communication. Such activities may foster learners' ability to transfer pragmatic knowledge beyond structured classroom exercises and apply it in authentic communicative situations.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of preparing future English language teachers to recognize the pedagogical value of pragmatics instruction. As the participants in this study were pre-service EFL teachers, strengthening their pragmatic competence may have implications that extend beyond their own language development. Teachers with greater awareness of pragmatic phenomena are better positioned to design classroom activities that address communicative meaning, anticipate learners' pragmatic difficulties, and promote more

effective intercultural communication. Integrating explicit pragmatics instruction into teacher education programs may therefore contribute to improving both language proficiency and instructional practice in EFL contexts.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of the present study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 35 seventh-semester EFL teacher education students from a single Ecuadorian university. Although the sample was appropriate for addressing the research objectives, the results may not be generalizable to learners from different educational contexts, proficiency levels, or cultural backgrounds.

A second limitation concerns the assessment design. Pragmatic competence was evaluated through a single post-instruction Pragmatic Interpretation Test, which primarily measured learners' comprehension of selected pragmatic phenomena. Although the instrument provided valuable insights into students' ability to recognize and interpret pragmatic meanings, it did not include delayed post-testing to examine the long-term retention of the instructional effects. Consequently, the findings reflect learners' pragmatic performance immediately following the instructional intervention rather than the durability of their pragmatic development over time.

Furthermore, the study focused on a limited number of pragmatic concepts, namely presupposition, conversational implicature, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, contextual meaning, and intended meaning. Pragmatic competence is a multidimensional construct encompassing a much broader range of communicative phenomena. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of explicit instruction for these particular aspects of pragmatics rather than as a comprehensive assessment of learners' overall pragmatic competence.

Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples drawn from multiple educational institutions and by employing longitudinal research designs to examine the sustained effects of explicit pragmatics instruction. Additionally, future studies may investigate other dimensions of pragmatic competence, such as speech acts, politeness strategies, intercultural pragmatic awareness, and pragmatic production in authentic communicative interactions. Comparative studies examining different instructional approaches or assessment formats may also provide further insights into how various components of pragmatic competence develop in EFL contexts.

Overall, despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the growing body of research supporting the role of explicit pragmatics instruction in fostering learners' pragmatic competence. The findings provide evidence that explicit instruction can effectively enhance pragmatic comprehension while highlighting the need for continued instructional attention to learners' ability to independently explain and apply pragmatic knowledge in communicative contexts.

Conclusions

The present study examined the effects of explicit pragmatics instruction on the development of pragmatic competence among seventh-semester Ecuadorian pre-service EFL teachers. By implementing an instructional intervention focused on presupposition, conversational implicature, irony, sarcasm, figurative language, contextual meaning, and intended meaning, the study sought to determine how explicit instruction influences learners' ability to interpret pragmatic meaning in English. Through the administration of a Pragmatic Interpretation Test, the research provided empirical evidence regarding students' pragmatic comprehension following systematic classroom instruction.

The findings indicate that explicit pragmatics instruction positively contributed to learners' pragmatic development. Participants demonstrated satisfactory overall performance

on the Pragmatic Interpretation Test and achieved complete accuracy in recognizing pragmatic meanings in the multiple-choice section of the assessment. However, greater variability emerged when students were required to independently identify and justify presuppositions in open-ended tasks. These findings suggest that recognizing pragmatic meaning and explaining the pragmatic reasoning underlying that meaning represent distinct, though complementary, dimensions of pragmatic competence. While explicit instruction effectively supported learners' comprehension of pragmatic phenomena, opportunities for deeper metapragmatic reflection remain essential for consolidating this knowledge.

Beyond its immediate findings, this study underscores the pedagogical importance of integrating explicit pragmatics instruction into EFL teacher education programs. Preparing future English language teachers requires more than developing grammatical accuracy or linguistic proficiency; it also involves fostering the ability to interpret communicative intentions, understand context-dependent meanings, and reflect critically on how language functions in authentic interaction. Instructional practices that combine recognition activities with opportunities for explanation, discussion, and reflection may contribute to a more comprehensive development of learners' pragmatic competence and, ultimately, to more effective communication in multilingual and intercultural settings.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on interlanguage pragmatics by providing empirical evidence from the Ecuadorian EFL context regarding the benefits of explicit pragmatics instruction. The findings reinforce the view that pragmatic competence constitutes a fundamental component of communicative competence and that its development deserves a more prominent place in language teacher education. It is hoped that this research will encourage educators, curriculum designers, and researchers to continue exploring effective approaches to pragmatics instruction and to promote learning environments in which learners not only recognize pragmatic meanings but also develop the metapragmatic

awareness necessary to explain, apply, and transfer that knowledge to authentic communicative situations.

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