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Using Pragmatic-Based Activities to Develop Preparatory Stage Students' EFL Speaking Skills

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using pragmatic-based activities to develop preparatory stage students' EFL speaking skills. The instruments of the study were a speaking checklist, speaking test and scoring rubric. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design using two groups; the first was experimental, and the second was the control group comprising the sample of the study (n=30). The results showed that the experimental group students exceeded their counterparts of the control group students on the posttest. In addition, the experimental group showed a significant improvement in the posttest when comparing students' pre-scores to their post-scores. Also, using pragmatic activities in EFL classrooms developed students' speaking skills.

Keywords:

Pragmatic competence, speech acts, authentic situations.

Introduction

In learning English, preparatory school students must master the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing, since those required skills are the keys to communication. Among the four skills taught at these schools, Speaking is one of the most challenging skills to build in the classroom. Bordonaro (2014) said that Speaking is the ability to formulate original thoughts by using spoken words to do so.

Richards (2008) asserted that the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second-language or foreign-language learners. Consequently, learners often measure their success in language learning and the effectiveness of their English course based on how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Thornbury (2005) also asserted that Speaking is so much a part of daily life that we take it for granted. Smith (2003) pointed out that speaking skills are a fundamental skill essential for a learner's success in life.

Although pragmatics is a comparatively new branch of linguistics, reference to pragmatics can be traced back to ancient Greek and Rome; the

term 'pragmatics is found in Latin and' pragmatics is found in Greek, and both terms mean 'being practical' Liu (2005). Pragmatics is needed for language users because they must understand the meaning conveyed by the words rather than the meaning of each word. In understanding the pragmatics, language users share specific rules and conventions which enable them to understand each other in many instances where the purpose and the intent of utterances are not clearly stated Pohl (, 2004).

Jung (2005) supported the opinion that learners need particular abilities to become pragmatically competent; they need to perform a speech act, convey and interpret nonliteral meaning, perform politeness function, and perform discourse competence. Ji (2008) claimed that pragmatics suggests what cannot be found in traditional linguistics, and pragmatic methods help people understand how to use language to develop their communicative competence.

In the recent history of foreign language instruction, the issue of pragmatic competence was largely ignored. Traditionally, foreign language instruction was based on standard language Kramsch (, 2002). As a result, learners were taught the idealized type of language that gave invariant linguistic usage (Mougeon & Rehner, 2001). Furthermore, it essentially differed from how the language was used. However, with the shift from grammar-based to communicative approaches, teaching language variation has somewhat changed. There is now a growing tendency among researchers and language teaching professionals that the study of pragmatic competence should be an integral part of the foreign language curriculum (Blyth,2003; Gass, Bardovi-Harlig, Magnan, & Walz, 2002).

The role of instruction in pragmatics becomes even more important in foreign language classrooms because it is the primary way most learners explore the target language. Learning English is rather difficult in an EFL environment compared to ESL learners do. In foreign language classrooms, Cook (2001) stated that the target language tends to be viewed as an object of study instead of a means of communication. Language activities in EFL classrooms often focus on language practice, not exposing learners to sociolinguistic input that facilitates competence. For a non-native speaker, linguistic forms can be learned by practising and learning the rules and structures. However, there are no definite rules for appropriate language use, although communicating effectively is the main aim of learning English as a foreign language.

This study traced the effect of teaching pragmatic activities in a different context. It is fair to say that pragmatics has become the mainstream in second and foreign language teaching and learning.

Review of Literature and Related Studies

Speaking Skill

According to AstrogaCabezas (2015), a good speaker is characterized by applying grammar structures accurately and choosing vocabulary that is comprehensible and suitable for the audience. Generally, speaking skills are the ability to talk, address, make known, and use the given language in honest communication. Speaking has variously been defined. Boonkit (2009) defined speaking as one of the basic four skills needed for active communication in any language. English speaking skills have to be practised by using these technologies to improve language learning.

Luoma (2004, p.1) argues that "*speaking in a foreign language is very difficult and competence in speaking takes a Long time to develop*." The skill of Speaking is quite different from writing in its typical grammatical, lexical and discourse patterns. Moreover, some of the processing skills needed in Speaking differ from the ones involved in reading and writing. According to Hybel and Weaver (2001, p.45) defined speaking as "*any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings, it involves all the body language mannerism and style-anything that adds meaning to a message*".

The importance of speaking in EFL learning

According to Zuliati (2013), Speaking is an important language skill in which communications take an essential role in information. Speaking is a spoken language that is taught in the era of globalization. Because of Speaking, students can communicate with other students in our country or different countries to share ideas and opinions. Some people see the skills of the student based on their speaking skills and not on language skills. Students can effectively use speaking skills. Soureshjani (2013) asserts that:

"In this age of communication, speaking plays a vital role, and the purpose of teaching the language has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use the language for communicative purposes" (p. 167). Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students" eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world (Brown, 2001).

Realizing the importance of speaking skills in EFL classrooms, finding and using the best instructional methods, materials, activities, media, and other requirements is imperative to help students master speaking skills. Despite having a significant number of studies aiming to help learners master speaking skills have been conducted, many EFL learners still find speaking very difficult to master.

Components of the speaking skills

Fluency

Fluency in Speaking is one of the competencies targeted by many language learners. Hughes (2002) asserted that fluency and coherence refer to the ability to speak at an average level of continuity, rate and effort, and link the ideas together coherently. On the other hand, frequent pausing is an indication that the speaker has problems speaking.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of learning to speak a foreign language. Widiastuti (2008) stated that pronunciation is the way students produce more explicit language when they speak. It deals with the phonological process, which refers to the grammar component of the elements and principles that determine how sounds vary and pattern in a language.

Grammar

The main objective of grammar teaching is to help learners internalize the structures of the target language and apply them in future communication. It is the central heart of language and a tool to help learners' comprehension of the target language. It provides systematic rules of structure and word order; learners can create their own spoken and written discourse using these grammatical rules (Elmansi et al, 2021).

Eleni (2011) asserted that grammar plays an essential role in language learning. Grammar is needed for pupils to arrange a correct sentence in conversation. The usefulness of grammar is also to learn the accurate way to attain proficiency in a language oral and a written form. Using grammar correctly in speech implies producing the language's distinctive grammatical structures and using them effectively in communication. Thus, simple phrasal structure and purposeful repetition can often be markers of high proficiency. (Louma, 2004 & Hughes,2002).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to words used for effective communication. Language teachers must possess considerable knowledge on how to manage an exciting classroom. One cannot communicate effectively or express their ideas both in oral or written forms if they do not have sufficient vocabulary. So, vocabulary means the appropriate diction which is used in communication (Widiastuti, 2008).

Teaching Speaking: Activities and Tools

The goal of teaching speaking skills is communicative efficiency. Learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. They should try to avoid confusion due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary and observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situation. Speaking is so much a part of daily life that we take for granted.

Speaking performance techniques

One of the most important goals of teachers is to enable learners to use English for communication. According to many theories, speaking skills can be improved by games, role play, etc. Evidence shows that speaking should incorporate activities in group work (Oradee, 2012). Some types of speaking performance can help speakers to improve speaking skills (Brown, 2007):

1. Imitation

Speakers should pay attention to certain vowel sounds and intonations; next, they should imitate correctly. Meanwhile, they need to practice an intonation or to find exactly a particular vowel sound.

2. Responsive

It refers to short replies to teachers. It can be learners" response to initiated questions or comments. Students should be active in the classroom and reply to teachers" questions and comments. They should participate in the classroom.

3. Intensive

Any speaking performance is planned to practice some phonological or grammatical features of language that can be self-initiated or pair work activity.

4. Transactional Dialogue

It is used to convey a message or exchange information. In addition, it is utilized to elaborate a concept or to manifest the purpose of something. Learners should participate in the conversation.

5. Interpersonal Dialogue

It is regarded as maintaining social relationships, not for transmitting facts and information, involves factors like casual register, colloquial language, slang, ellipsis, sarcasm and a covert "agenda" (Brown, 2007).

6. Extensive

It refers to speakers at intermediate to advanced levels who are asked to provide extensive monologues in oral reports, summaries, or short speeches. To improve foreign language skills, learners should practice regularly. First, learners should expand their general vocabulary, and then they can improve their vocabulary by listening from simple sentences to complex sentences. Meanwhile, they can increase their knowledge by reading a short story and sometimes memorizing some essential parts.

In conclusion, teachers should vary speaking activities to motivate pupils to study and speak in English, increasing the classroom environment. They can use discussion and ask pupils questions. Students' participation in discussion causes other pupils to take part in negotiation actively.

Speaking difficulties and Challenges

Speaking skill is considered somewhat hard for some language learners. Whereas pupils have limited time to learn English in class, they still do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside. Zhang (2009) argued that Speaking remains the most challenging skill to master for most English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. Echevarria et al. (2008) support that the difference between how things must be done and the ability to do these things is crucial in the learning process. Learners often find some difficulties when practising their speaking skills, even those who know about the system of the foreign language. Parrott (1993) asserts that teachers must perform a series of tasks that aim at providing learners with the confidence and the skills required to take advantage of the classroom opportunities to speak English effectively.

According to Baker and Westrup (2003, p.12), "*barriers to learning can occur if students knowingly or unknowingly transfer the cultural rules from their mother tongue to a foreign language*." Lack of the vocabulary of the target language usually leads learners to borrow words from their native language. Therefore, the learners will not use the foreign language correctly if their mother tongue influences them.

Inadequate strategic competence and communication competence can be another reason for not keeping the interaction going. Some learners also lack the motivation to speak English. They do not see a real need to learn or speak English.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is language use in context. Language cannot exist outside of its sociocultural context. Language situations rely heavily on the context involved with each utterance, whether it is written or spoken. A working definition of pragmatics is the study of language meaning used in context (Huang, 2014). There are two parts of pragmatics with this definition in mind: the linguistic or language portion and the context. The linguistic aspect during a discourse event is the actual utterances that occur—the words and their semantic meanings along with grammar or syntax, while the context is the related environment, including any significant factors at play during the discourse event, such as the people, place, culture, and time.

Categorization of Pragmatic Knowledge

Practical knowledge has been variously categorized. Bachman and Palmer (2010) indicated that "*pragmatic knowledge enables us to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intention of language users, and relevant characteristics of the language use setting*" (p.46). Practical knowledge can be categorized as functional knowledge and linguistic knowledge.

Functional knowledge enables people to interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and language users' intentions, and it includes knowledge of four categories of language function: ideational, manipulative, instrumental, and imaginative. Sociolinguistic knowledge enables people to create or infer language suitable in a particular setting (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010).

Guided by Bachman and Palmer's notion of pragmatic knowledge, Ji (2008) categorized pragmatic knowledge into general pragmatic information, metalanguage information, metapragmatic information, speech acts, cultural knowledge, pragmatically oriented tasks, and knowledge on how to learn *pragmatic knowledge*.

Interlanguage pragmatics

Interlanguage pragmatics is the study of how practical knowledge is expressed in the interlanguage of FL/SL learners. It is focused on the FL learners' understanding and use of the FL/ SL concerning FL/SL

sociocultural norms. It further considers how the development of the FL/SL learner's interlanguage at the practical level changes, either converging or diverging from native-speaker norms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2014). The study of interlanguage pragmatics aims to discover "*how interlanguage development interacts with and underpins L2 pragmatic development*" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2014, pp. 135-136).

Interlanguage pragmatics, derived from pragmatics theory and developments in second language pedagogy, is a comparatively new area. It looks at the issue of acquisition as a mix of structure and use (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010) and adopts pragmatic theories, principles and frameworks to study how second language or foreign language learners encode and decode meaning in their second language or foreign language (Schauer, 2009).

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is "*the ability to act and interact using language*" (Kasper &Rover, 2005, p.317). Taguchi (2009) broadly described pragmatic competence as "*the ability to use language appropriately in a social context, has become an object of inquiry in a wide range of disciplines including linguistics, applied linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication research, and cross-cultural studies*". (p.1).

(Nureddeen, 2008) defined pragmatic competence as "*the ability of the second language learner to use the language according to the pragmatic rules that govern the use of linguistic utterances as used by the native adult speaker*" (p.280). To have pragmatic competence means that culture is a core element in encoding and decoding utterances. The cultural context of discourse plays a crucial role in understanding meaning, so cultural awareness is critical in successful intercultural communication.

Instructional Pragmatics

Interlanguage development, pragmatic and sociocultural norms, and pragmatic competence are examined together out of a need to understand more completely the factors that contribute to pragmatic failure on the part of FL/SL learners. The desire to realize how pragmatic failure can be overcome, and assist FL learners with improving their overall language competence, has led to the creation of pedagogy for teaching and learning pragmatics. This pedagogy is referred to as instructional pragmatics (Ishihara, 2006, 2010; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Vellenga, 2008).

Even FL/SL learners with a high level of grammatical ability can experience pragmatically faulty interactions or misunderstandings. Many

pragmatic norms positively transfer from L1 to FL/SL does not guarantee that FL/ SL learners will achieve sufficient pragmatic competence in the FL/SL. In addition, FL/SL learners immersed in the FL/SL environment may not always acquire pragmatic abilities in line with native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Taguchi, 2018). The amount of input a learner is exposed to in the FL/SL positively impacts FL/SL norms acquisition. According to Schmidt's cognitive theory of noticing, attention, and awareness (the noticing hypothesis), the act of noticing a linguistic element in the FL/SL via input is the first step toward the acquisition of that element (Alcon Soler, 2008; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Although noticing does not automatically equate to the acquisition, it does contribute to the process. Once a learner has noticed something about the FL/SL, the next step is to pay attention to that element in a conscious way; eventually bringing one's attention to total awareness of the element, and then retaining or acquiring that element to be utilized and demonstrated toward increased competence (Bu, 2012; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Rose, 2005; Takahashi, 2010).

Speech Acts Theory

In an attempt to convey meaning, people do not only create utterances involving grammatical structures and words, but they also perform actions via those utterances. Thus, John Austin (1962) firstly introduced Speech act Theory, and John Searle (1969) further elaborated it from the essential principle that language is used to perform actions. According to Austin (1962), Speech acts are an integral part of the exploration of pragmatics. Speech acts can be defined as utterances or a string of utterances (the uttering of a string of morphemes, words, or sentences) consisting of a propositional meaning or elocutionary act, an ill, and a perlocutionary force. The propositional meaning of a speech act is its linguistical or literal meaning. The illocutionary force is the speaker's implied meaning of the utterance—the speaker's meaning related to their state of mind and the context. The perlocutionary force of a speech act is the result or effect on the hearer in response to the speaker (Huang, 2014; Holtgraves, 2007; Intachakra, 2004). For example, the propositional meaning of the statement "I am cold" indicates that the person making the statement is in a state of feeling cold. The illocutionary force of this utterance could imply that the speaker wants the window closed or the heat turned up. The perlocutionary force might result in the hearer closing the window or turning up the heat.

Indirect Speech Acts

In almost all languages, there are three basic sentence types: declarative, interrogatives, and imperatives. A declarative sentence structure is generally associated with the intended meaning (illocutionary force) of asserting or stating something. An

interrogative is associated with questioning or searching for a fact. An imperative has the force of ordering or requesting. When the sentence type matches the illocutionary force or intended meaning, it is considered a direct speech act. When the sentence type does not match the illocutionary force, it is considered an indirect speech act (Huang, 2014; Cutting, 2008; Searle, 1976). For example, the question *'Did you clean up your room?'* is a yes-no interrogative and in its most direct form would be considered a representative speech act that could be answered with a representative statement of fact, as in *Yes, in fact, I did clean up my room.*

However, if a parent were to direct this question to their child, would the intended meaning or illocutionary force be a representative or a directive? Might this question be a directive to *clean up your room*? Does the parent already know the room is not cleaned up and indirectly commands the child to clean their room? What if the parent were to use the indirect, nonconventional, *Your room is such a mess!* On the surface, this exclamatory statement may be acting as a representative speech act, but indirectly it may be acting as a directive to clean the room. For FL and L2 learners, the use of indirect speech in the FL and L2 is generally more challenging to comprehend and control because it necessitates analyzing context and understanding sociocultural norms along with linguistic rules.

Apologizing is an Expressive Speech Act

For learners, understanding when and how to make an apology is essential when using the target language. There are many reasons that a speaker may want to utter an apology to a hearer. Through the study of pragmatics and discourse analysis, it is possible to understand better what prompts a speaker of any language to apologize for something and how speakers express those apologies through linguistic routines or strategies. Many studies have been done on the act of apologizing. According to the Pragmatics and Speech Acts Bibliography on The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition website (CARLA, 2018), the number of research articles recorded for apologies is higher than most other speech acts. Apologies are also one of the most commonly used speech acts in everyday life (Cheng, 2017; Intachakra, 2004).

This review will consider what defines an apology and how apologies are routinely performed in English and other languages. An apology is a speech act or discourse event used to remediate or rectify a situation where the speaker has committed wrong to the hearer.

Requesting as a Directive Speech act

Requests belong to the category of directives. However, distinguishing requests from the other speech acts in the category of directives is not entirely obvious. For example, it may be challenging to draw between requests, suggestions, warnings and advice. Trosborg (1995) solution is to consider whether the speaker or the hearer will benefit the most from the illocutionary act. Both may benefit from suggestions, whereas advice and warnings are mainly beneficial for the hearer. Requests, however, will benefit the speaker since their purpose is "to involve the hearer in some future action which has positive consequences for the speaker and may imply costs to the hearer" Trosborg (, 1995, p.15).

Another issue is whether or not to distinguish between the speech act of request and speech acts that fulfil the same functional criteria but differ in intensity. As an example, begging, ordering and commanding imply that the speaker wants the hearer to do something in the speaker's interest, but they are marked with a different force. Flöck (2016) distinguishes these speech acts, as she finds that commanding, ordering and begging are speech acts used between interlocutors of unequal power. Requests must therefore be characterized by equal power between interlocutors. As a result, all directives that agree to the condition of equal power are considered to be requests in Flöck's study. However, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) does not make this distinction. Instead, commanding, ordering and begging would be considered subtypes of requests. As an example, a situation in which a policeman asks a driver to move her car is considered to represent a request in their study, even though the power relations are unequal.

Pragmatics and Speaking skills

To use pragmatically appropriate speech, EFL users must account for the form and function of a second language and the context (Taguchi 2015). In doing so, they will be more comfortable speaking to interlocutors who may vary in age, gender, social class, and status (Kinginger and Farrell 2004; Ishihara and Cohen 2010). Special conversational choices are also required based on the relationship between speakers— whether they know each other and how long. In addition, conversational expectations and desired objectives can influence linguistic and strategic choices of what to

say. The ability to account for and adjust to these variables when speaking English defines one's pragmatic competence.

Despite its importance in EFL communication, the teaching of pragmatics is often overlooked in the classroom and underrepresented in teaching materials and teacher education courses. Reasons include insufficient class time, lack of interest, or inadequate recognition of its importance in interpersonal communication. There may also be a shortage of practical and achievable activities for the classroom that introduce and promote the development of such nuanced language use. While teachers may recognize the importance of pragmatics and want to use it in their lessons, many are unsure how to select and incorporate pragmatic teaching activities in EFL classes. This seems to be the case in Japan, where I teach, and I suspect the situation is similar in other EFL contexts.

Related Studies

Speaking skills

Abdullah (2016) conducted a study to determine the impact of using interactive teaching strategies (brainstorming, role-playing, and classroom discussion) on improving EFL speaking skills for second-year preparatory stage pupils. The participants of the quasi-experimental study consisted of seventy pupils. The study revealed that the experimental group using some interactive strategies outperformed the control group on the post administration of the speaking test. It was concluded that using interactive teaching strategies had positive effects on improving the speaking skills of the target sample.

Oradee (2012) conducted a study to develop speaking skills of grade eleven students using three communicative strategies (problem-solving, discussions and role-play). The study instruments were eight lesson plans, an English speaking ability test and an attitude questionnaire. A one-group pretest-posttest design was also employed. The results revealed that using the three communicative strategies were significantly effective in improving the EFL speaking skills.

Murad (2009) investigated the effectiveness of a task-based language teaching (TBLT) program in developing the speaking skills of Palestinian secondary students and their attitudes towards English. The instruments were: A pre-post speaking test and a TBLT program, and an attitudinal questionnaire. The study results revealed that the TBLT program enhanced the students' speaking skills significantly and positively affected

their attitudes towards English. Also, the TBLT program improved the girls" speaking skills more than the boys in the experimental group.

Pragmatics

Farahian, Rezaee, & Gholami (2012) attempted to study the efficacy of explicit instruction of refusal at a pragmatic level to four types of acts: Invitations, suggestions, offers and requests. The participants were 64 Iranian intermediate university students who were divided into two groups: Experimental and control. The study used the quasi-experimental design as it adopted a pre-posttest design. Data were collected through a written Discourse Completion Test, as well as a written self-report. The findings were expected to contribute to the interlanguage pragmatic pedagogy that may develop learners' communicative competence.

Mohammad Shariati & Fariba Chamani (2011) examined the frequency, combination, and sequential position of apology strategies in Persian to see how the universality of apologies should be treated in this language. The investigation is based on a corpus of 500 naturally occurring apology exchanges collected through an ethnographic observation method. The results revealed that explicit apology with a request for forgiveness was the most common apology strategy in Persian. Together with an acknowledgement of responsibility, the strategy mentioned above formed the most frequent combination of apology strategies in this language. The same apology strategies used in other languages were standard in Persian; however, preferences for using these strategies appeared to be culture-specific.

Lili and Mardijono, (2011). investigated the type of apology strategies used by the workers to the old and young bosses. Their study showed that the most frequent apology strategy used by the workers to the old and young bosses was explanation or account. The workers applied more strategies (8 strategies) and combinations (7 combinations) of apology strategies to the old boss than to the young boss (3 strategies and two combinations).

Al-Gahtani and Roever (2009) carried out a study and examined the requests made by Saudi Arabic-speaking students, focusing on instances where the hearer treated the speakers' utterance as a request. The study addressed particular attention towards the relationship between second language proficiency and pragmatic transfer. Learners were divided into four levels of proficiency, and the researchers carried out three role-plays in which power was a constant, reporting that learners resorted more to

pragmatic transfer the higher their proficiency levels. High-intermediate and advanced learners negatively transferred considerably more L1 pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic norms into the L2 context than beginners, and low-intermediate level learners did. Findings revealed increased pragmatic transfer into L2 contexts at higher proficiency levels. This may happen because higher proficiency learners are more confident and want to do more, so they attempt to do so, sometimes failing.

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to assess the second year Preparatory Stage students' EFL speaking skills. A speaking test was designed and applied to second-year Preparatory Stage students (N=30) at Delta International Language Schools. Results of the pilot study are presented in the following table:

Some Speaking Skills	No.	Max.	Mean	percentage
Vocabulary	30	10	6.0	60%
Grammar	30	10	2.5	25%
Pronunciation	30	10	3.5	35%
Fluency	30	10	3.5	35%
Total	**30**	**60**	**15.5**	**38.75**

Table (1): Students Score on the Speaking Test

Results of the speaking test indicated that the Second Year Preparatory Stage students had a low level of speaking skills.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study emerged from students' low level in speaking skills and then need to interact in authentic English and develop their pragmatic competencies and speaking skills. Thus, pragmatic-based activities are suggested to be used to develop students' speaking skills.

The Questions of the research

This research was set up to answer the following questions:

- What are the pragmatic-based activities that can be used for developing second-year preparatory students' EFL speaking skills?
- What is the impact of Pragmatic-based activities on improving the second year preparatory students' EFL speaking skills?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to determine the effect of using pragmatic-based activities on improving second-year preparatory students' EFL speaking skills.

Significance

This research derived its significance from the following considerations:
  (1) Suggesting an alternative approach to the teaching of speaking skills through using pragmatic activities.
  (2) Providing the teacher and curriculum designer with a model of integrating pragmatics activities within the textbook materials.
  (3) Providing a piece of empirical evidence on the utility of pragmatic activities in teaching English.
  (4) Helping curriculum designers and researchers to consider pragmatic aspects in redesigning learning/teaching materials.

Delimitations

The research was delimited to:
  1- A sample of second-year Preparatory Stage students.
  2- The second-year preparatory stage textbooks. (Hello English for Preparatory Schools).
  3- Some speaking skills necessary for EFL second year preparatory stage such as (pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary).

Hypotheses

   This research was concerned with verifying the following hypotheses:
  1. There is a statistically significant difference at .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post-administration of the speaking test in favour of the experimental group.
  2. There is a statistically significant difference at .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students on the pre and post administration of the speaking test in favour of the post-administration.

Definition of terms

Speaking Skill

   The researcher defines speaking as an individual ability for a student that helps him /her express his/her feelings, impressions, thoughts and ideas orally and employing some skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency.

Pragmatics

   For this study, pragmatics can be defined as the subfield of linguistics intended to study the use of the individuals' language according

to the context or situation where the language is used. It also can be defined as an active use of language in social life situations.

Pragmatic Activities

They are social activities that can be used to develop expressive abilities and speaking skills.

Pragmatic competence

A variety of abilities is concerned with interpreting language in contexts, or most prominently, using and interpreting nonliteral forms, such as metaphorical uses of language and indirect requests.

Speech acts

"The minimal unit of speech that has rules in terms of where and when they may occur and of what their specific features are culturally named acts, such as complaining, apologizing, advising, and so on" (Hymes,1972). This definition will be adopted as the operational definition of speech acts.

Participants of the research:

The participants of the study were a group of EFL second year Preparatory Stage students. They were selected from Delta International Preparatory School. Two classes were used where the experimental group were trained according to the pragmatic activities. On the other hand, the control group were trained according to the regular method of teaching speaking skills presented in the teacher's guide. Each group consisted of 15 students.

Design:

The study adopts the quasi-experimental design in terms of dividing the sample of the study into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group were trained using the pragmatic activities, while the other group used the regular method.

Instrument:

The study employed the following instruments:
1- An EFL Speaking Skills Checklist determines the most important EFL speaking skills necessary for the EFL second year Preparatory Stage Students.
2- An EFL Speaking skills Test (SST) was designed to be administered in pretest and posttest to assess EFL second year Preparatory Stage

Students' speaking skills. A speaking rubric was developed for scoring the speaking test.

Results and Discussion

The results of the research are statistically analyzed in terms of its hypotheses, and they are discussed in light of the theoretical background and related studies. Research results were reported as follows:

Results of the first hypothesis stated that:

"There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post-administration of the speaking test in favour of the experimental group ".

To verify the first hypothesis, a post-administration was used to compare the two groups performance on the SST. Table (8) illustrates the results.

Table (8)

Comparing the performance of the control and experimental groups on the post administration of the SST.

Skills	*The group*	*N.of cases*	*Mean Rank*	*Sum of Ranks*	*Z.Value*	*Sig.*
Fluency	Control	15	9.10	136.50	-4.308	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	21.90	328.50		
Vocabulary	Control	15	9.17	137.50	-4.198	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	21.83	327.50		
Pronunciation	Control	15	10.10	151.50	-3.705	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	20.90	313.50		
Comprehensibility	Control	15	9.67	145.00	-3.891	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	21.33	320.00		
Grammar	Control	15	10.70	160.50	-3.231	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	20.30	304.50		
Total	Control	15	8.00	120.00	-4.711	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	15	23.00	345.00		

Table (8) shows statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups students in the sub-skills of the speaking test and the total score of the test in the post-administration in favour of the experimental group students. Where all "Z" values were statistically significant at the significance level (0.01). The researcher attributes these differences to the effect of the proposed pragmatic-based activities instruction.

A closer look at the results reveals that the experimental group students outperformed the control group students in all individual sub-skills (means of ranks =21.9; 21.8; 20.9; 21.3; 20.3 respectively). In addition, the experimental group performance in speaking skills as a whole was significantly higher than that of their counterparts (means of ranks = 23.0 compared to 8.0 for the control group).

The highest speaking sub-skill achieved by the experimental group was fluency, followed closely by vocabulary and comprehensibility, while grammar was the sub-skill that received the slightest improvement.

On the other hand, the control group speaking performance did not achieve any significant improvement. However, their highest progress was on grammar and pronunciation.

Results of the second hypothesis

The use of the second hypothesis stated that

"There is a statistically significant difference at .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students on the pre and post administration of the speaking skills test in favour of the post-administration."

To verify the second hypothesis, the pre and posttest were used to compare the performance on the SST. Table (9) illustrates the results.

Table (9)

Comparing the performance of the experimental group on the pre and post administration of the SST.

Variables	Rank	N.of cases	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z.Value	Sig.	η2	Effect size
Fluency	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.153	0.01	%81.4	High
	Positive Ranks	12	6.50	78.00				
	Ties	3						
	Total	15						
Vocabulary	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.153	0.01	%81.4	High
	Positive Ranks	12	6.50	78.00				
	Ties	3						
	Total	15						
Pronunciation	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-2.428	0.05	%62.7	High
	Positive Ranks	7	4.00	28.00				
	Ties	8						
	Total	15						
Comprehensibility	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.153	0.01	%81.4	High
	Positive Ranks	12	6.50	78.00				
	Ties	3						
	Total	15						
Grammar	Negative Ranks	1	3.00	3.00	-2.565	0.01	%66.2	High
	Positive Ranks	9	5.78	52.00				
	Ties	5						
	Total	15						
Total	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.431	0.01	%88.6	High
	Positive Ranks	15	8.00	120.00				
	Ties							
	Total	5						

The results in a table (9) indicate that:

The experimental group students' speaking performance in the post administration of the SST was significantly higher than their pre-

administration in all sub-skills and the whole test score. A closer look at the results reveals that the posttest administration's mean rank scores were 6.5; 6.5; 4.0; 6.5; 5.8 in the sub-skills of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehensibility, and grammar, respectively.

The total test score mean rank was 8.0, and the z score was significant for all speaking sub-skills and the test as a whole at the .0; level.

It is worth noting that the $\eta 2$ values ranged from 62.7 to 81.4 which amount to a high effect size of the pragmatic-based activities instruction in enhancing the EFL students' speaking skill.

Discussion of the results

The current study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of pragmatic-based activities instruction in developing EFL speaking skills among preparatory school students. The results of the study indicated that the proposed instruction was highly effective in developing the students' levels of Speaking Skills on the pre posttest compared to the posttest results. In this sense, these results are in harmony with the findings and suggestions included in the studies carried out by Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga (2015); Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury' (2004); Li's (2012); Romina & Marazita' (2009); Farahian, Rezaee, & Gholami, (2012) and Grossi's study (2009).

The results might be due to the following reasons:

- The proposed instruction used materials that raised students' motivation, interest and providing pupils with opportunities for active participation. The videos and the tracks with each other helped them to understand the lessons and interact.
- The instruction provides the second stage students with a new opportunity to engage in conversations, prepare, and share with their classmates.
- The researcher explored various learning and teaching tools in speaking activities that helped the students to develop their EFL speaking skills, such as various games and activities which depended mainly on authentic materials to enrich students' learning in an enjoyable environment.
- The formative assessment form designed by the researcher contributed to improving students' practice and enthusiasm to participate and interact pragmatically.

The previous results and discussion led the researcher to conclude that second-year preparatory stage students' EFL speaking skills have been

improved due to experimental treatment (Pragmatic-Based Activities Instruction).

Conclusions

The study led to the following conclusions:

- The present study provided evidence of the effectiveness of using pragmatic-based activities in developing EFL learners' Speaking Skills. The study results came in accordance with some previous related studies.
- The experimental group performance developed at the end of the treatment, and it was much higher than that of the control group.
- The mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group on each sub-skill of the post Speaking Skills test.
- The proposed program is effective in developing preparatory stage students' EFL speaking skills.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the results and conclusions of the current study, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Pragmatic competence should be a significant concern in teaching EFL in our classes. It has been argued that the lack of pragmatic competence affects communicating in English negatively.
2. Pragmatic activities should be used to supplement or complement speaking skills.
3. It is recommended that EFL curriculum designers design and develop the curricula to suit students' needs and educational levels.
4. The proposed program that was presented in this study should be accessible to EFL teachers in Egyptian schools.

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