Effect of 'Focus on Form' versus 'Focus on Forms' Pragmatic Instruction on Development of Pragmatic Comprehension and Production

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Abstract
To develop target language pragmatic competence, language learners' attention must be directed toward not only linguistic but also pragmatic aspect of the target language expressions (Schmidt, 2001). Thus, some sorts of pragmatic awareness-raising instruction, using either explicit 'Focus on Forms' or implicit 'Focus on Form' techniques, are advised by scholars to develop pragmatic competence in language learners (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003). To this end, the current experimental study was conducted on 52 undergraduate students of English at a university in Iran to investigate the effect of 'Focus on Form' versus 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on the development of their pragmatic comprehension and production. The experiment consisted of three phases: 1) the random assignment of participants to two groups: a 'Focus on Forms' group receiving metapragmatic explanations of target language pragmatic forms and a 'Focus on Form' group receiving target language pragmatic instruction using input enhancement, input flood, and recast, 2) conducting intervention for one semester, and 3) assessing their pragmatic comprehension and production knowledge following the intervention. Assessment tools consisted of a 4-senario discourse completion task and a 16-item multiple-choice pragmatic comprehension test both developed by Taguchi (2012). The results of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that both 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' methods of pragmatic instruction had a significant effect on the development of pragmatic comprehension and production. However, language learners in 'Focus on Forms' group had a significantly better development than language learners in the 'Focus on Form' group. This significant development was evident for both the comprehension and production aspects of pragmatic competence. The pedagogical implications of the findings suggested furnishing English as foreign language classes with 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction.
Keywords: Focus on Form Instruction, Focus on Forms Instruction, Pragmatic Comprehension, Pragmatic Production

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to convey one's intention appropriately and to interpret another's intention, explicitly or implicitly stated, in a communicative situation (Thomas, 1995), is a major component of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990). To communicate successfully across cultures, language learners need to possess not only knowledge of linguistic competence but also knowledge of pragmatic competence. However, language teachers in English as foreign language contexts focus dominantly on the linguistic features of the target language and do not pay much attention to the pragmatic features of the target language (e.g. Farashaiyan & Tan, 2012). Therefore, some sorts of pragmatic awareness-raising instruction, using either 'Focus on Forms' technique which corresponds to the traditional teaching of discrete linguistic structures in separate lessons and in a sequence which has been determined by syllabus designers (Long, 1991) or 'Focus on Form' technique which "overtly draws language learners' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991:45-46), are advised by the scholars in the field of language education in order to develop pragmatic competence alongside linguistic competence in language learners (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003).

The call for the incorporation of target language pragmatic knowledge into language instruction to develop pragmatic competence was followed by a number of research studies by scholars in the field of inter-language pragmatics. Pearson (2001) was one of the scholars who conducted a study on two groups of participants: one receiving 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic treatment using video scene viewing, comprehension questions, role-play, and metapragmatic discussions and the other receiving 'Focus on Form' pragmatic treatment using video scene viewing, comprehension questions, and role-play without metapragmatic discussions to examine the effect of 'Focus on Form' compared to 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on the acquisition of Spanish commands, requests, apologies, and expressions of gratitude. The findings of the experimental study indicated that not only pragmatic instruction did not have a significant effect on the acquisition of Spanish speech acts but also there was no significant difference between the two types of treatments. Fukuya and Martinez-Flor (2008) also conducted a study over 49 Spanish learners of English to explore whether 'Focus on Form' instruction, using input enhancement and recasts, and 'Focus on Forms' instruction, using awareness-

raising tasks, affect use of pragmatically appropriate suggestions. The results of the discourse completion task indicated that both instruction types improved the use of pragmatically appropriate suggestions. Ulbegi (2009) was the other researcher who conducted a study on two groups of participants including a 'Focus on Form' treatment group and a 'Focus on Forms' treatment group to investigate whether 'Focus on Form' versus 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction can be facilitative in acquiring polite refusals in English or not. The findings of the experiment indicated that although both 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction helped the pupils to learn polite refusals in English, 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction had a significantly better effect on the learning of polite refusals than 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction. Takimoto (2012) conducted another study over 45 non-English major intermediate level Japanese learners of English to investigate the relative effect of two different approaches of problem-solving tasks including problem-solving tasks with metapragmatic discussion ('Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction) and problem-solving tasks without metapragmatic discussion ('Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction) on language learners' recognition and production of English request downgraders. The results obtained through a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test demonstrated that the two types of treatments had a positive effect on recognition and production of English request downgraders. Finally, Nguyen et al. (2012) conducted a study over 69 high-intermediate level learners of English in Vietnam to investigate the effect of explicit and implicit form-focused pragmatic instruction on language learners' performance on constructive criticism in English. 'Focus on Forms' group participated in consciousness-raising activities and received metapragmatic explanations whereas 'Focus on Form' group was exposed to enriched target pragmatic input via input enhancement and recast activities. The results showed that although both types of instruction proved effective in developing and sustaining language learners' pragmatic performance, 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction tended to produce a larger magnitude of effect than 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction.

The studies conducted so far have had mixed findings. some studies found no significant effect for neither type of instruction, some studies found both instructional types effective, some studies revealed the effectiveness of 'Focus on Forms' instruction, and some studies revealed the effectiveness of 'Focus on Form' instruction. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted to determine the type of pragmatic instruction which will have the highest effect on the development of pragmatic competence in language learners. Furthermore, the studies conducted so far have mainly focused on the production aspect of pragmatic competence and the comprehension aspect has gone uninvestigated to a great extent. To compensate for the shortcomings of research in this area of language, the current study tries to address the issue by investigating the effect of 'Focus on Form' as compared to 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on both comprehension and production aspects of pragmatic competence. Therefore, the research questions to be addressed in the current study are:

To what extent do 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction affect overall pragmatic competence?
To what extent do 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction affect pragmatic comprehension?
To what extent do 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction affect pragmatic production?
Accordingly the null hypotheses are:
'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on overall pragmatic competence.
'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on pragmatic comprehension.
'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on pragmatic production.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Participants of the study consisted of 52 undergraduate students of English as a foreign language (TEFL) at a university in Iran. The sample consisted of 28 juniors and 24 seniors. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26, with an average age of 22.4. Among the participants, 32 were females and 20 were males. These participants were selected based on their performance on a language proficiency test. Prior to the study, researcher administered a language proficiency test to all undergraduate students of TEFL at the university. To include language learners of acceptable English proficiency level with relatively equal levels of proficiency in the study, high achievers and low achievers were excluded from the study. Only language learners who exhibited an equally moderate proficiency level were admitted for inclusion in the study. None of the participants had previously visited or lived in an English speaking country; therefore, they did not have the opportunity to be exposed to target language pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features or have contact with target language speakers to develop their pragmatic competence.

2.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data in the current study: a pragmatic comprehension test to measure language learners' pragmatic comprehension level and a discourse completion task to measure language learners' pragmatic production level. The pragmatic comprehension test consisted of 16 items. It was adopted

from a previous study by Taguchi (2012). For each item there was a dialogue between a male and a female native English speaker. The last sentence in each dialogue contained an implied opinion which intended to test language learners' ability to comprehend the speaker's implied intention. Each dialogue was followed by a multiple-choice question with four options, one appropriate option and three distractors. Participants had to listen to each dialogue and select the option which referred to the speaker's intention. The discourse completion task was also adopted from the same study by Taguchi (2012). It consisted of 4 scenarios in which participants had to read situational descriptions and produce a proper speech act to the best of their knowledge by writing.

2.3 Procedure

At the beginning of the second semester of the academic year 2015/2016, all language learners participating in the study were randomly assigned to two equal groups of 26 participants each: a 'Focus on Form' group and a 'Focus on Forms' group. Language learners in 'Focus on Forms' group received metapragmatic explanations of target language pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features whereas input enhancement, input flood, and recast techniques were used for language learners in 'Focus on Form' group to implicitly direct their attention to target language pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features. Language learners in both groups attended the treatment sessions twice weekly for 12 weeks comprising a total of 24 sessions, each session lasting 45 minutes. At the end of semester following the intervention, pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production tests were administered to all language learners in both groups.

2.4 Data Analysis

To assess language learners' pragmatic comprehension level, 1 mark was allocated to each appropriate answer whereas no marks were allocated to inappropriate answers. As there were 16 items on the test, each participant could get a mark ranging from 0 to 16. To assess language learners' pragmatic production level, the appropriateness of the responses was assessed by two native speakers of English using a four-point rating scale ranging from zero (cannot evaluate) to three (native-like). For the items which were rated differently, the raters discussed until they reached an agreement. The ratings along with the description for each band on the scale have been provided in Table 1. As there were 4 scenarios, each participant could get a mark ranging from 0 to 12.

Table 1: Description of Ratings for Pragmatic Production

Rating	Band	Descriptions
3	Native-like	The utterance is almost perfectly appropriate. This is what a native speaker would usually say in the situation
2	Slightly off, but acceptable	The utterance is a little off from native-like due to minor grammatical and lexical errors but overall acceptable
1	Obviously off	The utterance is clearly non-native like because of strange, non-typical way of saying and/or major grammatical and lexical errors
0	Cannot evaluate	The utterance is impossible to understand

Adopted from Taguchi (2013)

The degree of agreement between the ratings assigned by the two native speakers of English was then assessed through Cohen's Kappa which is a measure of inter-rater reliability used to measure agreement between two coders (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). The analysis of Cohen's Kappa would give a value between -1 and +1. The interpretation of the values obtained through Cohen's Kappa, according to Landis and Koch (1977), are presented in Table 2. The inter-rater reliability assessed for the responses to the discourse completion task was 0.90 which, according to the guidelines set by Landis and Koch (1977), indicates an almost perfect agreement between the two raters. For cases which received different ratings, the two native speakers of English discussed until they reached an agreement.

Table 2: Interpretation of Cohen's Kappa Values

Values	Interpretation
Smaller than 0.00	Poor Agreement
0.00 to 0.20	Slight Agreement
0.21 to 0.40	Fair Agreement
0.41 to 0.60	Moderate Agreement
0.61 to 0.80	Substantial Agreement
0.81 to 1.00	Almost Perfect Agreement

To assess the effect of 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which is an extension of analysis of variance for use when there is more than one dependent variable (Pallant, 2013), was used. MANOVA will tell if there is a significant difference between the groups on the composite dependent variable; it also provides the univariate results for each of the dependent variables separately (Pallant, 2013). In this regard,

the impact of 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on overall pragmatic competence as well as on each of distinct aspects of pragmatic competence (pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production) was assessed.

To assess the importance of the impact of 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction on pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production, partial eta squared which represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variables (pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production) that can be explained by the independent variable ('Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction) was used. To interpret the values obtained for partial eta squared, Cohen (1988) proposed a set of guidelines which have been presented in Table 3. Finally, the graphical presentation of the performance of language learners in 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' groups on pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production tests was provided.

Table 3: Interpretation of Partial Eta Squared Values

Value	Effect Size
0.01	Small Effect
0.06	Moderate Effect
0.14	Large Effect

3. Results

Table 4 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of the data. The descriptive analysis presented in the table consists of the number of participants in each group as well as the mean and standard deviation obtained for the performance of each group of participants ('Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms') on pragmatic comprehension test and pragmatic production test. According to the descriptive analysis of the data, the mean scores obtained by language learners in the 'Focus on Forms' group on both pragmatic comprehension test and pragmatic production test were higher than the mean scores obtained by language learners in the 'Focus on Form' group. The mean score by itself, however, does not show whether the difference between the performance of the two groups on the two tests is considered significant or not. To determine whether the difference between the mean scores obtained by the two groups on the two tests are significantly different from one another or not, the results of the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) need to be observed.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pragmatic Comprehension	Focus on Forms	10.62	2.578	26
	Focus on Form	8.46	3.010	26
	Total	9.54	2.980	52
Pragmatic Production	Focus on Forms	7.08	1.468	26
	Focus on Form	5.92	1.468	26
	Total	6.50	1.566	52

Table 5 presents the results of multivariate tests of significance. Multivariate tests of significance will indicate whether there are statistically significant differences among the groups ('Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms') on a linear combination of the dependent variables (pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production). There are a number of statistics to choose from in the table. One of the most commonly reported statistics is Wilks' Lambda (Pallant, 2013). There are two sections in the table. The value of interest is in the second section of the table, in the row labeled Group. If the significance level (p value) for Wilks' Lambda is above 0.05 (p > 0.05), there is no significant difference between the performance of the two groups; however, if the significance level is equal to or less than 0.05 (p ≤ 0.05), there is a significant difference between the performance of the two groups (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). The value obtained for Wilks' Lambda for group in this study is 0.856, with a significance value of 0.022. This significance value is less than the cut-off of 0.05; therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group in terms of their overall pragmatic competence.

Table 5: Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.955	517.858[b]	2.000	49.000	0.000	0.955
	Wilks' Lambda	0.045	517.858[b]	2.000	49.000	0.000	0.955
	Hotelling's Trace	21.137	517.858[b]	2.000	49.000	0.000	0.955
	Roy's Largest Root	21.137	517.858[b]	2.000	49.000	0.000	0.955
Group	Pillai's Trace	0.144	4.138[b]	2.000	49.000	0.022	0.144
	Wilks' Lambda	0.856	4.138[b]	2.000	49.000	0.022	0.144
	Hotelling's Trace	0.169	4.138[b]	2.000	49.000	0.022	0.144
	Roy's Largest Root	0.169	4.138[b]	2.000	49.000	0.022	0.144

a. Design: Intercept + Group
b. Exact statistic

Since a significant result on multivariate test of significance was obtained, further investigation in relation to each of the dependent variables (pragmatic comprehension/pragmatic production) to discover whether 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group differ on the dependent measures is possible. This information is provided in Table 6. In this table, the third set of values in the row labeled Group should be considered. In the significance (Sig.) column, values less than 0.025 (the adjusted alpha level using Bonferroni adjustment method to reduce the chance of Type I error) should be looked for. In this case, both dependent variables (pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production) recorded a significance value less than the cut-off (with a significance value of 0.008 for pragmatic comprehension and a significance value of 0.007 for pragmatic production). In this study, the significant difference between 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group was on both pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production.

The significance value merely determines whether there is a significant difference among variables or not. It does not determine the size of the difference (if considered significant). The importance of the impact of pragmatic instruction on pragmatic comprehension and production can be evaluated using the effect size statistic provided in the final column labeled Partial Eta Squared. The value in this case is 0.133 for pragmatic comprehension and 0.138 for pragmatic production, which according to generally accepted criteria proposed by Cohen (1988), is considered a large effect for both variables. This represents 13.3 percent of variance in pragmatic comprehension and 13.8 percent of variance in pragmatic production scores explained by pragmatic instruction.

Table 6: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Pragmatic Comprehension	60.308[a]	1	60.308	7.680	0.008	0.133
	Pragmatic Production	17.308[b]	1	17.308	8.036	0.007	0.138
Intercept	Pragmatic Comprehension	4731.077	1	4731.077	602.508	0.000	0.923
	Pragmatic Production	2197.000	1	2197.000	1020.036	0.000	0.953
Group	Pragmatic Comprehension	60.308	1	60.308	7.680	0.008	0.133
	Pragmatic Production	17.308	1	17.308	8.036	0.007	0.138
Error	Pragmatic Comprehension	392.615	50	7.852			
	Pragmatic Production	107.692	50	2.154			
Total	Pragmatic Comprehension	5184.000	52				
	Pragmatic Production	2322.000	52				
Corrected Total	Pragmatic Comprehension	452.923	51				
	Pragmatic Production	125.000	51				

a. R Squared = 0.133 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.116)
b. R Squared = 0.138 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.121)

Although 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group differed in terms of pragmatic comprehension level and pragmatic production level, it is necessary to determine which group had the higher scores. To find this out, Table 7 should be referred to. Table 7 presents the mean scores obtained for 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group on pragmatic comprehension test and pragmatic production test. With respect to pragmatic comprehension, the mean score for 'Focus on Forms' group was 10.615 and the mean score for 'Focus on Form' group was 8.462 which indicate 'Focus on Forms' group outperformed 'Focus on Form' group on the pragmatic comprehension test. With respect to pragmatic production, the mean score for 'Focus on Forms' group was 7.077 and the mean score for 'Focus on Form' group was 5.923 which again indicate 'Focus

on Forms' group outperformed 'Focus on Form' group on the pragmatic production test as well. The graphical presentation of the performance of 'Focus on Form' group and 'Focus on Forms' group on pragmatic comprehension test and pragmatic production test has been depicted in Figure 1.

Table 7: Estimated Marginal Means

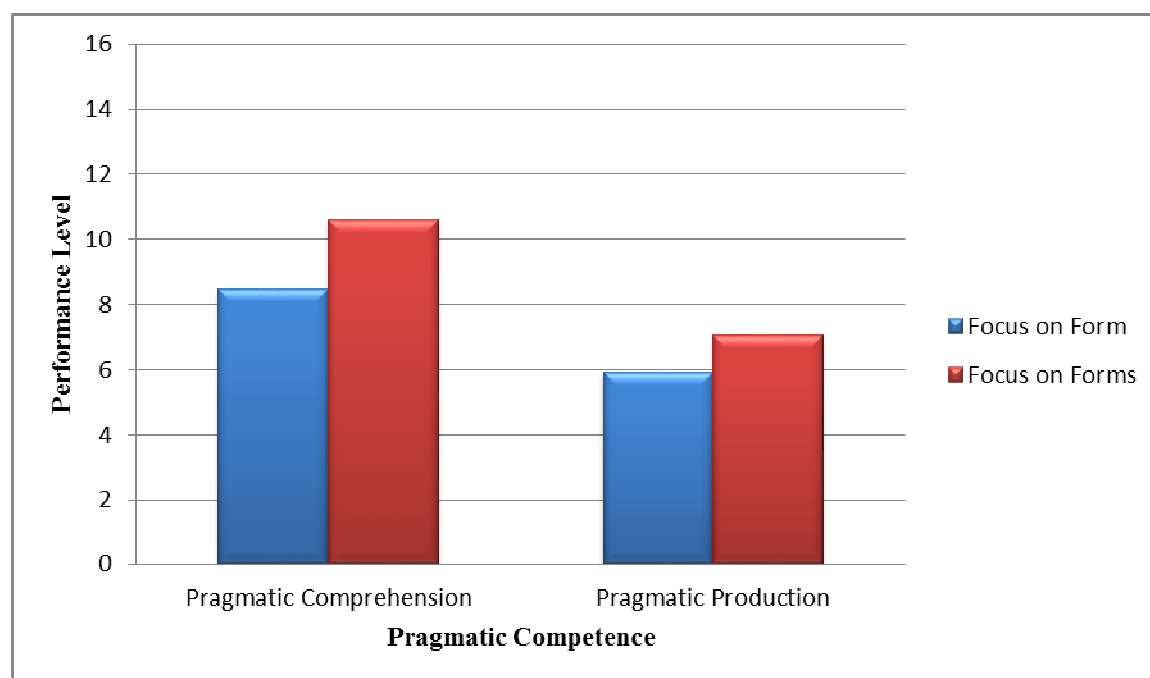| Dependent Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pragmatic Comprehension	Focus on Forms	10.615	0.550	9.512	11.719
	Focus on Form	8.462	0.550	7.358	9.565
Pragmatic Production	Focus on Forms	7.077	0.288	6.499	7.655
	Focus on Form	5.923	0.288	5.345	6.501

Figure 1: Performance of 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' Groups on Pragmatic Comprehension and Pragmatic Production Tests

4. Discussion

The study found that pragmatic instruction has a significant effect on the development of pragmatic competence in general. However, the development of language learners in 'Focus on Forms' group was significantly better than the development of language learners in 'Focus on Form' group. This significant development was evident for both the comprehension and production aspects of pragmatic competence. Therefore, all three null hypotheses of the study which state that 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on overall pragmatic competence, 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on pragmatic comprehension, and 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction have no effect on pragmatic production were rejected.

These findings can be explained through Noticing Hypothesis. Noticing Hypothesis introduced by Schmidt (1990) states that "people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (Schmidt, 2001:30). This hypothesis emphasizes that in order for the input to become intake, the detection of input in the form of awareness and attention is necessary (Schmidt, 1995). Not all input has equal value and only that input which is noticed then becomes available for intake and effective processing (Schmidt, 1990; 2001). Intake is part of the input which is being paid attention to and is taken into short-term memory and consequently is integrated into the interlanguage, a language independent from both the language learner's native language and the target language (Selinker, 1972).

Pragmatic instruction either using 'Focus on Form' or 'Focus on Forms' techniques not only developed knowledge of target language pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features in language learners but also developed awareness of the existence of differences between pragmatic features of their own language and the target language. The attention to and noticing of the target language pragmatic features stimulated in language learners definitely helped them develop their target language pragmatic competence. The superiority of 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction over 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction, however, can be attributed to the

fact that drawing language learners' attention to target language forms through direct explicit awareness-raising instruction can lead to faster learning of the target language forms than through implicit indirect awareness-raising instruction. However, implicit awareness-raising instruction might be effective in the long run to attract language learners' attention to target language forms and develop the knowledge in them. Therefore, explicit awareness-raising instruction can bring a larger magnitude of effect when the instruction is conducted for a limited period of time.

The findings obtained in the current study are in line with the findings obtained in the studies conducted by Fukuya and Martinez-Flor (2008), Takimoto (2012), Rafieyan et al. (2014), and Rafieyan (2016) who found that both 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' methods of pragmatic instruction developed language learners' ability to use target language pragmatic forms. The findings obtained in the current study are also consistent with the findings obtained in the study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2012) who found that although both types of instruction ('Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms') proved effective in developing and sustaining language learners' pragmatic performance, 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction tended to produce a larger magnitude of effect. The findings obtained in the current study, however, do not support the findings obtained in the study conducted by Ulbegi (2009) who found that 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction had a significantly better effect on the development of pragmatic competence than 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that although both 'Focus on Form' and 'Focus on Forms' types of pragmatic instruction develop pragmatic competence to a great extent, 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction brings up a larger magnitude of effect than 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction. In the current study, language learners who received pragmatic instruction either using 'Focus on Form' or 'Focus on Forms' techniques generally exhibited a high level of pragmatic competence; however, language learners who received 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction outperformed language learners who received 'Focus on Form' pragmatic instruction. The significant development of pragmatic competence in general and the superiority of 'Focus on Forms' technique over 'Focus on Form' technique was evident in both comprehension and production aspects of pragmatic competence. This suggests that English language classes in foreign language contexts should be furnished with 'Focus on Forms' pragmatic instruction to develop pragmatic competence in language learners alongside linguistic competence in an ideal way.

The study was limited in some ways, however. First of all, the study did not include a control group to compare the performance of those who receive pragmatic instruction with those who do not receive pragmatic instruction. Secondly, the study did not include a pre-test to assess the precise effect of pragmatic instruction on the development of pragmatic competence. Finally, the study did not include a follow-up test to investigate the sustainability of pragmatic competence developed through each type of pragmatic instruction. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve comprehensive experimental studies consisting of a 'Focus on Form', a 'Focus on Forms', and a control group measuring pragmatic competence immediately before, immediately after, and a period of time following intervention to present a better picture of the effect of form-focused pragmatic instruction on the development and sustainability of pragmatic competence.

Acknowledgements

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