Contributions of Flipped and Blended Teaching to EFL Learners' Pragmatic Awareness: Effects and Attitudes

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This study investigated the contributions of flipped and blended teaching to EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. The participants were 90 Iranian intermediate female EFL learners in six intact classes divided into three 30-member groups each comprising two classes (i.e., two experimental and one control group). A Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to assure language proficiency homogeneity. Next, the three groups received a discourse completion test (DCT) before instruction in flipped and blended modes for the experimental groups and conventional instruction for the control group. After treatment, the posttest of DCT was administered. Moreover, 20 students took part in semi-structured interviews. The results of One-way ANOVA revealed that flipped and blended instruction significantly improved participants' pragmatic awareness. The analysis of interview responses indicated that both groups held positive attitudes towards using flipped and blended instruction. EFL teachers may decide to implement flipped and blended instruction to enhance EFL learners' pragmatic awareness.

Keywords: pragmatic awareness, speech acts, apology, request, flipped teaching, blended teaching

INTRODUCTION

Decidedly, successful communication in the target language entails possessing knowledge of lexis, grammar, text organization, and more importantly knowledge of second language (L2) pragmatics (Katchamat, 2018). Thomas (1995, as cited in Alcon-Soler, 2015) maintains that pragmatic competence consists of two main parts including pragmalinguistic competence which involves the knowledge and application of linguistic resources to impart specific illocutions in context, and sociopragmatic competence which is the knowledge and use of L2 in accordance with social norms in a particular community. Kasper (1997) asserts that pragmatic competence can be described as the knowledge concerning the communicative action as well as how it should be implemented along with the knowledge of how to use language appropriately in a particular context. Pragmatic competence is defined as one's capability to carry out language functions appropriately in a given context (Taguchi, 2009). Pragmatic competence is regarded as a complex and challenging dimension of language for EFL learners (Alsuhaibani, 2020). Similarly, as García-Gómez (2020) maintains, many learners do not succeed in proper communication with native speakers because they do not possess the required pragmatic understanding in diverse contexts. In a similar vein, Nuridin (2018) notes that, EFL instructional materials should incorporate materials which contribute to the development of pragmatic competence because if students cannot meet pragmatic competence, unsuccessful communication will transpire.

Closely related to the concept of pragmatic competence is pragmatic awareness (Alcón & Jordà, 2008). Eisenchlas (2011) defines pragmatic awareness as an individual's knowledge in regard to the interlocutor(s), the context, and the sociocultural environment in which communication transpires. As Timpe-Laughlin, Green, and Oh (2021) maintain, pragmatic awareness refers to an individual's deliberate and introspective comprehension of pragmatic components. Alcón and Jordà (2008) note

that pragmatic awareness embodies the explicit and cognizant understanding of pragmatics. Thus, pragmatic awareness involves understanding the rules and conventions that govern the use of appropriate language in specific communicative contexts, as well as the linguistic practices observed by members of particular speech communities (Timpe-Laughlin et al., 2021; Zughaibi, 2023). More specifically pragmatic awareness constitutes the explicit knowledge and awareness of inherent speech acts being employed in a given communicative setting among the community members. Two of the important speech acts in language are apology and request.

The inevitability of committing wrong actions by individuals in their social interaction requires that individuals be capable of making apologies (Trosborg, 1995). Apology seems to be important because using apology helps individuals maintain their social relations (Trosborg, 1995). Along the same lines, the speech act of request also seems to be of utmost importance. As Byon (2004) maintains the request speech act is a kind of act through which the speaker tends to get something done by the hearer. An appropriate pragmatic performance entails sufficient knowledge both in linguistic and pragmatic scopes as well as the strategic capabilities to put such knowledge in practice (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020).

One approach to teaching which can possibly offer contributions to the development of pragmatic competence is the employment of technology (García-Gómez, 2020). Technology can be used in various ways in classroom applications including blended teaching and flipped teaching. Banados (2006) defines blended teaching as a flexible approach which makes use of the benefits of technology in classroom instructions by delivering a part of the training program online and a portion of it in a conventional face-to-face format. The use of blended learning in ELT contexts has been on the rise since this mode of learning has the advantages of both traditional and online teaching modes (Sun & Qiu, 2017). The results of previous research studies (e.g., Edward, Asirvatham, & Johar, 2018; Maulan & Ibrahim, 2012; Sun & Qiu, 2017) indicate that the application of blended learning contributes to more meaningful learning. Moreover, blended learning helps learning as it shifts the emphasis from teaching to learning which results in more learner involvement and enhances their perseverance and commitment (Ismail, Mahmood & Abdelmaboud, 2018). Flipped teaching is a type of blended teaching in which learners are first exposed to the lesson outside of class via online presentation and the class time is dedicated to the application of the material in the form of discussion and problem-solving (Katchamat, 2018). Andujar, Salaberri-Ramiro, and Cruz Martínez (2020) hold that, flipped learning provides learners with chances of learning at their own pace. Moreover, this mode of learning is engaging, customized, and thus lends itself to a more active learning environment compared to conventional methods. Likewise, Lindeiner-Stráský, Stickler, and Winchester (2020) contend that flipped learning provides higher chances for learners to reflect on content as this mode of instruction provides learning content before the class time and discussion. Tura and Akdag-Cimen (2020) note, most of the studies done on flipped learning have pointed to the benefits of this instruction mode. For instance, Chen Hsieh, Wu, and Marek (2017) examined the impact of flipped instruction on idioms in an EFL context. The results showed that using idioms was improved via the employment of flipped classroom. Likewise, Tadayonifar and Entezari's (2020) findings revealed that the use of flipped instruction significantly improved EFL learners' speaking and writing. In another study, Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020) showed that flipped teaching made significant improvement to learners' self-efficacy. He (2020) found that students' learning attitude, interest, autonomous learning, and cooperative learning improved as the result of the application of flipped teaching.

Several studies have so far investigated technology-driven instruction, flipped, blended classroom, and EFL learners' pragmatic development. For instance, García-Gómez's (2020) results showed that communicating effectively was hampered due to participants' insufficient pragmatic competence. As García-Gómez concluded the lack of pragmatic success had a negative effect on participants' interpersonal relationships and consequently led to the development of negative attitudes towards

using WhatsApp in a learning mode. Katchament's (2018) results indicated that flipped classroom instruction had a significant impact on the appropriate use of English apology. In another study, Haghighi, Jafarigohar, Khoshsima, and Vahdany (2019) found that flipped classroom led to the enhancement of appropriate use of refusals. Wafa and Altakhaineh (2019) investigated the impact of flipped classroom on the improvement of request speech acts. Their results demonstrated the positive impact of the use of flipped classroom on request speech acts. Sun and Qiu's (2017) results revealed that the participants of the study perceived blended learning beneficial in terms of enhancing English proficiency. Similarly, Maulan and Ibrahim (2012) and Ismail et al. (2018) have pointed to the usefulness of blended learning for enhancing academic achievement.

Although an abundant number of studies has thus far been undertaken with regard to pragmatic competence (e.g., Alsuhaibani, 2020; Derakhshan, & Shakki, 2020; Eslami & Noora, 2008; García-Gómez, 2020; Katchamat, 2018; McConachy, 2019:Muhammad & Nair, 2017; Salemi, Rabiee & Ketabi, 2012; Wafa & Altakhaineh, 2019; Zand-Moghadam & Adeh, 2020), flipped learning (e.g., Andujar et al., 2020; Lindeiner-Stráský et al., 2020; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020; Tadayonifar & Entezari, 2020; Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020), and blended learning (e.g., Ismail et al., 2018; Maulan & Ibrahim, 2012; Sun & Qiu, 2017), it is not yet enough to get a clear understanding of its acquisition especially when considering the fact that many factors influence human learning and language learning. Moreover, studies that targeted English language pragmatic development in Iran are so few (e.g., Molavi, Biria & Chalak, 2018; Salemi et al., 2012) that more attention is needed to be paid to the way Iranian pragmatic competence of English is developed. The review of extant investigations indicates that, in none of the previous empirical studies, the two speech acts of apology and request have been subject to investigation via flipped instruction. Moreover, none of the previous investigations has compared the effects of flipped teaching with ordinary blended learning. Therefore, to fill the gap in the existing literature, the present study attempted to explore the contributions of flipped and blended teaching to EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. Additionally, the study was an effort in probing the attitudes of the participants towards effects and attitudes the use of flipped and blended teaching in terms of improving EFL learners' pragmatic awareness.

To address the purposes of the present investigation, the hereunder research questions were conceived:

RQ1: Does flipped teaching significantly improve EFL learners' pragmatic awareness?

RQ2: Does blended teaching significantly improve EFL learners' pragmatic awareness?

RQ3: Is there any significant difference between the effects of flipped and blended teaching in improving EFL learners' pragmatic awareness?

RQ4: What are the attitudes of EFL learners towards the use of flipped teaching in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness?

RQ5: What are the attitudes of EFL learners towards the use of flipped teaching in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness?

METHOD

Participants

Six intact classes comprising a total number of 90 Intermediate female English students at a Language Institute in Tehran were chosen for the present study based on convenience sampling due to availability and manageability reasons. Their age ranged from 18 to 32. Their level of intermediate proficiency had been determined through either the placement test for those students who had just enrolled or through passing the preceding courses within the same language institute. The six classes were randomly put into three groups. Thus, each two classes consisting of 30 learners formed one of the three groups of the study.

Instruments

The instruments included a Preliminary English Test (PET), a pragmatic awareness questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews a description of which follows:

Preliminary English Test (PET)

A sample of PET was used to determine the participants' overall proficiency level and homogenize them in this regard. This test comprised reading and writing sections, a listening section, and a speaking section.

Questionnaire on Pragmatic Awareness

A Discourse Completion Test (MDCT), containing 20 situations, developed by Birjandi and Rezai (2010) was administered to measure pragmatic knowledge. The first 10 items in the questionnaire measure the pragmatic awareness concerning apology and the second 10 situations tap learners' pragmatic awareness in terms of making requests. Participants were required to read the situations, put themselves in those roles, and then indicate their own ability to respond appropriately in those situations by choosing the appropriate choice. The reasons behind employing Birjandi and Rezai's (2010) questionnaire in the current study were two-fold. First and foremost, this questionnaire had been developed in the Iranian context of EFL learning and its validity and reliability had already been established. Thus, to observe concerns for context-specificity (Daumiller, Janke, Rinas, Hein, Dickhäuser & Dresel, 2023; McClenahan, Giles, & Mallett, 2007; Robie, Schmit, Ryan, & Zickar, 2000), this questionnaire was used as the context in which the instrument had been developed and the setting it which the questionnaire was utilised were the same. Moreover, this questionnaire directly measured the speech acts of apology and request and these two speech acts were the focus of the current study. Although the reliability of the questionnaire had already been established by Birjandi and Rezai (2010), to estimate the reliability of MDCT for this study, it was piloted on a sample of 20 intermediate learners and Cronbach's Alpha was used to compute the internal consistency of the measure. The Cronbach's Alpha was found 0.94 which was a high index of reliability.

Semi-structured interviews

Two sets of three interview questions were used to tap learners' attitudes towards the use of flipped (Appendix A) and blended teaching (Appendix B) in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness. To develop the interview questions, initially the pertinent literature in regard to the speech acts of apology (e.g., Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Katchamat, 2018), request (e.g., Byon, 2004; Eslami & Noora, 2008; Trosborg, 1995), flipped teaching (e.g., Andujar et al., 2020; Chen Hsieh et al., 2017; Haghighi et al., 2019), and blended teaching (e.g., Banados, 2006; Edward et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2018; Maulan & Ibrahim, 2012) was extensively reviewed to set the initial list of questions on a solid theoretical ground. Next, an initial list of questions consisting of five questions for tapping into learners' attitudes in regard to flipped instruction and six questions for examining learners' attitudes with respect to blended teaching were developed. The two list of questions then became subject to expert opinion. In so doing, the two list of questions were discussed in a panel of experts comprising three PhD holders in the field of TEFL with each having a minimum of 20 years of EFL teaching and teacher education. Based on their comments, two questions were excluded from the list of five questions for flipped instruction due to having overlapping content. Similarly, three questions were removed from the list of six questions for blended teaching. Following that, the two sets of questions were piloted on five participants from each experimental group to enhance the clarity and readability of the interview questions. Finally, and after the treatment, 10 participants from each experimental group were interviewed. Each interview lasted for about 25 minutes and the learners were asked each of the questions in order. Moreover, learners were interviewed individually and their responses were voice recorded after obtaining their consent. At the end the interview contents were transcribed and became ready for analysis. To analyse the interview content, the gathered data were summarized and

reported in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative data analysis scheme consisting of data reduction, theme identification and conclusion. From the extensive reading of the responses, it was possible to identify the common patterns and themes. Finally, the researcher summarized the participants' responses to the questions.

Data Collection and Procedure

Initially, sixty female students studying at the intermediate level were selected in Kish language institute in Tehran. Each two classes consisting of 30 learners were considered as one of the groups in this study. The first group received the instruction in a flipped teaching mode, another received treatment in a blended learning environment while the third group served as the control group of the study. Before the main study, the participants in both groups sat for a pragmatic awareness test to assure participants' homogeneity respecting pragmatic awareness.

The group involved in flipped environment, as the name implies followed a backward process. This group was given an opportunity to download the speech acts materials for the coming lesson, which were made accessible by the teacher from a group created in Telegram for this purpose. Students were free to practice these lessons within three days. Here students were free in terms of time, place and practicing the lesson as many times as they desired. Since students received the instructions online, the face-to-face part in the classroom involved just practice and discussion leading to a face-to-face collaborative learning environment. It started with teacher's questions about what students understood from the materials they practiced as well as when and how they were going to use those speech acts. It continued with teacher's questions about the students' problems and what they had not understood. Then students were then divided into groups and each group received a paper involving questions. The learners in each group were supposed to answer the questions collaboratively. In the next step, the groups swapped their papers and they were required to correct the possible problems of the group whose paper they received. In this stage, the learners were also asked to give reasons for the parts they believed to be erroneous. At the end, the teacher, going through the questions one at a time, gave complimentary explanations about each question and provided final correct responses.

The group involved in blended learning environment were initially provided with instructional materials in class and then they received further follow-up online at home. In this group, first, the teacher gave some examples to the students. There was also time allocated to students' questions. Each session students received speech acts materials in class and then in the online part at home, students were free within a week to participate in complimentary tasks of the instructional program by referring to a group page in telegram in four groups called step by step toward development 1, 2, 3. The group pages included information as follows:

The first group page was: what I understood, in this group students were supposed to write everything that they had understood in classroom such as the usage of the speech act, (where and when), and how it works. The second group was discussion or problem-solving part; in this part, students were supposed to share their problems. Students were allowed to correct each other by discussing and representing reasons for their ideas. The teacher also monitored all the process and participated in this part just to give the last word about each issue, this part was visible to all. The third part was assignment part: in this part students were supposed to do predetermined assignments set by the teacher, it was different for each student and the teacher posted the assignment for each student to her own personal page.

As for the control group, the speech acts were taught in a conventional face-to-face mode and learners were taught the speech acts without being provided with any flipped or blended modes. The treatment lasted 10 sessions in five weeks altogether for the three groups. At the end of treatment, the three groups received the pragmatic awareness test as posttest. Moreover, 10 learners from each of the experimental groups took part in semi-structured interviews to tap learners' attitudes towards the use of flipped and blended teaching in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness.

FINDINGS

Checking Language Proficiency Homogeneity

In order to make sure that the three groups participating in the study had homogeneity of language proficiency, a PET was administered. The results were analysed through running an ANOVA to determine any significant differences among the groups. Table 1 demonstrates descriptive statistics of the PET scores belonging to the three groups.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of PET

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
PET Flipped	30	39.6000	13.46848	3.47755	19.00	62.00
PET Blended	30	40.1333	12.97727	3.35072	25.00	64.00
PET Control	30	41.5333	9.99190	2.57990	27.00	58.00

Table 2 depicts One-Way ANOVA results for PET.

Table 2
Results of ANOVA run on the PET scores of the three groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	42.183	2	14.061	.100	.960
Within Groups	7908.800	87	141.229		

As Table 2 demonstrates, the significant value is 0.960 which is higher than the critical value of .05 revealing that there were no significant differences among the three groups of the study in terms of overall language proficiency prior to the main study.

Pretest Results for the Pragmatic Awareness Test

In order to make sure that the three groups were not significantly different in terms of pragmatic awareness, the results were analyzed through running an ANOVA. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the pragmatic awareness scores for the three groups.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the pragmatic awareness scores for the three groups on pretest

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Pragmatic Awareness Flipped	30	12.450	5.3254	1.128	7.00	14.00
Pragmatic Awareness Blended	30	13.2400	4.3452	1.452	8.00	16.00
Pragmatic Awareness Control	30	12.6534	4.852	1.564	8.00	13.00

Table 4 displays the results of One-Way ANOVA for the pragmatic awareness pretest scores of the three groups.

Table 4
Results of ANOVA run on the pragmatic pretest awareness scores of the three groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.328	2	77.025	29.322	.431
Within Groups	6505.300	87	2.321		

As displayed in Table 4, the significant value equals .431 which is higher than the critical value of .05 revealing that there were no significant differences among the three groups of the study in terms of pragmatic awareness prior to the administration of the treatment. Therefore, any differences on the posttest results can be attributed to treatments.

Posttest Results for the Pragmatic Awareness Test

To respond the first three research questions, a One-Way ANOVA was run. Table 5 illustrates the results of descriptive statistics for the posttest scores on the pragmatic awareness test.

Table 5
Descriptive statistics of the pragmatic awareness scores for the three groups on posttest

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Control Group Posttest	30	12.8333	1.80198	.32899	8.00	16.00
Flipped Posttest	30	15.2667	1.79911	.32847	12.00	18.00
Blended Posttest	30	16.2333	1.65432	.30204	12.00	19.00

Table 6 presents the results of One-Way ANOVA for the pragmatic awareness posttest scores of the three groups.

Table 6
Results of ANOVA run on the pragmatic posttest awareness scores of the three groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	184.156	2	92.078	29.958	.000
Within Groups	267.400	87	3.074		

As shown in Table 6, the significant value equals .000 which is lower than the critical value of .05 revealing that there are significant differences among the three groups of the study in terms of pragmatic awareness on the posttest. To compare the groups two by two, the post-hoc Scheffe test was run. Table 7 reports the respective results.

Table 7
Results of Post-hoc Scheffe Test on the posttest pragmatic scores

(I) Posttest Groups	(J) Posttest Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control Group	Flipped	-2.43333*	.45266	.000	-3.5607	-1.3060
	Blended	-3.40000*	.45266	.000	-4.5274	-2.2726
Flipped	Control Group	2.43333*	.45266	.000	1.3060	3.5607
	Blended	-.96667	.45266	.108	-2.0940	.1607
Blended	Control Group	3.40000*	.45266	.000	2.2726	4.5274
	Flipped	.96667	.45266	.108	-.1607	2.0940

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As indicated in Table 7, there is a significant difference between the control group and the flipped teaching group (p=0.0<0.05). Additionally, as seen in Table 5, the mean of the posttest scores for the flipped teaching group is higher than that of the control group (15.26>12.83). Thus, it can be concluded that flipped teaching has significantly improved EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. As presented in Table 7, there is a significant difference between the control group and the blended teaching group (p=0.0<0.05). Furthermore, as seen in Table 5, the mean of the posttest scores for the blended teaching group is higher than that of the control group (16.23>12.83). Thus, it can be concluded that blended teaching has significantly improved EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. As illustrated in Table 7, there is not a significant difference between the flipped teaching and blended teaching group (p=0.108>0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the effects of flipped and blended teaching in improving EFL learners' pragmatic awareness.

Results of the Interviews for Research Question Four

The results of the interviews concerning learners' attitudes towards flipped teaching in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness indicated three themes including interest, effectiveness and motivation. Table 8 displays the number of participants along with their respective percentages pointing to the identified themes.

Table 8
The number of participants along with their respective percentages pointing to the identified themes
for the Flipped teaching group

Number	Theme	Total Number of Interviewees	Theme Frequency	Percentage
1	Interest	10	8	80%
2	Effectiveness	10	9	90%
3	Motivation	10	7	70%

As for interest, one of the participants commented that:

I found it very interesting that the materials were given to us before the class. This way I was able to prepare myself before the lesson.

Another participant commented that:

The fun thing about this method of teaching was that when I came to class I had some idea of the lesson, it was very interesting because when the teacher asked us questions I could answer.

Concerning effectiveness, one of the respondents mentioned that:

The lessons were more effective for me when I compare them with previous lessons. I was able to read the lesson several times and in class we had more time to discuss and it was more effective for learning.

Another respondent thought that:

Because of this method I think my learning was better. The reason was that before the class I studied the lesson somehow and, in the class, I was able to practice and we had more time to aske questions and review all the points.

Regarding motivation, one of the interviewees held that:

I think this type of lesson gave me more motivation because I could see technology being used in a good way in learning English.

Another interviewee commented that:

With this method, I want to learn English more than before. For the future, I will try to ask my teacher who do not use this method to use it in teaching. If they do not want to use it, I will study the lesson somehow myself before the class.

Results of the Interviews for Research Question Five

The results of interviews regarding learners' attitudes concerning the use of blended teaching in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness indicated four themes including usefulness, interest, effectiveness and motivation. Table 9 displays the number of participants along with their respective percentages mentioning the identified themes.

Table 9
The number of participants along with their respective percentages mentioning the identified themes
for the blended teaching group

Number	Theme	Total Number of Interviewees	Theme Frequency	Percentage
1	Usefulness	10	5	50%
2	Interest	10	9	90%
3	Effectiveness	10	8	80%
4	Motivation	10	8	80%

With respect to usefulness, one of the participants said that:

I think it was very useful for us to follow the lesson after the class via telegram. Because we had access to other classmates and the teacher for our questions and it really helped me learn better.

Another learner thought that:

I think this method of teaching really helped me in learning more because I was bale to learn and review after the class on my mobile phone. You know half of the class was in real class and another half was for us outside and it was very helpful for us to ask any questions after the class finished.

As for interest, one of the interviewees mentioned that:

This type of lesson was really interesting as we could use the technology. I think if we use technology the lesson is not boring both in class and out of class.

Another interviewee noted that:

When teachers use the technology, we really feel that our mobile phones and computers are very interesting tools for learning too. I usually use my mobile phone for fun activities such as games. But when I see that I can use the same thing for learning it is really interesting for me.

With respect to effectiveness, one of the respondents commented that:

I think discussing the lesson after the class was very effective for learning the lesson. I saw the points of the lesson after the class again very soon and it was very effective for improving my English.

Another student thought that:

For me, reviewing the lessons with the teacher and other students after the end of the lesson is really important. Because when we review the lessons and ask our questions I can really learn better and do not forget the points easily.

With regard to motivation, one of the participants noted that:

I really want to take part in class more than before and I think I really like English learning better than before. There was a time for us to discuss the lesson together after the class and I really think it helped me like English more.

Another learner commented that:

I think the method made me want to learn English more than before. I even searched the net to find more examples of the language we learnt in the class and I think I will continue this for other English lessons we have in the future.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigated the contributions of flipped and blended teaching to EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. Additionally, the study examined participants' attitudes towards using flipped and blended teaching in terms of improving pragmatic awareness. The One-way ANOVA results demonstrated that both flipped and blended instruction significantly improved participants' pragmatic awareness. The analysis of interview responses showed that overall, both groups held positive attitudes towards using flipped and blended instruction in terms of improving their pragmatic awareness.

The results of the present study concerning the effectiveness of flipped teaching are consistent with the findings of Katchament's (2018) study. Katchament (2018), who conducted the study in the Thai context, concluded that flipped classroom instruction was significantly effective on the appropriacy of English apology by EFL learners. Therefore, one would argue that regardless of the context in which this technique of instruction is performed, it may yield similar results when practicing cultural aspects of the target language. The results of the current study are also in congruence with Haghighi et al.'s

(2019) findings. They came to the conclusion that the flipped classroom improved EFL learners' appropriate use of refusals. Considering the fact that both this study and the above-mentioned one have been conducted in the Iranian context, the similar results further confirm that this technique of instruction is accepted by Iranian learners regardless of the fact that it is new to many Iranian learners and teachers. Therefore, one would conclude that the use of such new techniques and methodologies can enhance learning and that educators and learners should be open-minded towards open-minded towards new trends. Likewise, the findings of the current study are in agreement with Wafa and Altakhaineh's (2019) results. They came to the conclusion that flipped classroom instruction led to the improvement of request speech act used by the participants, who were Emirati EFL learners. However, this study was an attempt to triangulate the data collection by using an interview to find out about the attitudes of the learners towards flipped classroom and blended learning in general, which Wafa and Altakhaineh's study lacked, therefore the present study's findings may promise more rigor.

The results of the present study are also in accordance with Chen Hsieh et al.'s (2017) study. Their study demonstrated that the use of idioms was enhanced through the employment of flipped classroom. Similar to the results of the present study, Tadayonifar and Entezari (2020) found that the application of flipped instruction improved EFL learners' speaking and writing. In a similar way, Namaziandost and Çakmak's (2020) results revealed that flipped teaching significantly improved learners' self-efficacy. The results of the present study are also in line with He's (2020) study. He's findings indicated that flipped teaching contributed to the development of EFL learners' proficiency. The reasons for the effectiveness of flipped instruction can be the engaging nature of this mode, and its flexibility which pave the way for the creation of a more active learning environment (Andujar et al., 2020). Moreover, flipped learning provides more chances of reflective learning because this mode of instruction provides learning materials prior to the class time and discussion (Lindeiner-Stráský et al., 2020).

The results of the current study concerning the effectiveness of flipped instruction on pragmatic awareness can be justified based on several reasons. First and foremost, this approach provides learners with more control over their learning and encourages them to take responsibility for their own progress (Chen Hsieh et al., 2017). Additionally, flipped instruction allows students to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed. This is particularly beneficial for EFL learners who may need extra time to process and understand new concepts (Andujar et al., 2020; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). Furthermore, this approach can help learners develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they engage with the material in a more active way (Alias, Iksan, Abd Karim, Nawawi, & Nawawi, 2020; Nugraheni, Surjono, & Aji, 2022). Overall, flipped instruction provides a flexible and engaging approach to teaching that can lead to the improvement of EFL learners' pragmatic awareness.

The results of the current study concerning the effectiveness of blended learning on pragmatic awareness are consistent with the findings of Sun and Qiu (2017). Sun and Qiu's (2017) results showed that blended learning contributed to the development of English proficiency. Moreover, similar to the results of the current study, Sun and Qiu (2017) found that learners' attitudes were positive towards blended learning as they perceived that blended learning was useful for improving their English proficiency. The main reasons for the effectiveness of blended learning can be increasing learning engagement and awareness which can pave the way for meaningful learning (Edward et al., 2018) which can thus facilitate the learning process. Other reasons could be the enhancement of learners' involvement, perseverance, and commitment to learning (Ismail et al., 2018) which can enhance learning outcomes. The results of the present study regarding the effectiveness of blended learning on pragmatic awareness can be explained based on several reasons. First and foremost, blended teaching allows students to access materials and resources outside of class, which can help them develop a deeper understanding of the topic (Banados, 2006; Edward et al., 2018). Moreover, this approach provides learners with more opportunities for interaction and collaboration

with their peers, which can help them develop the intended skills and language points (Ismail et al., 2018; Maulan & Ibrahim, 2012; Sun & Qiu, 2017). Furthermore, blended teaching allows teachers to provide personalized feedback and support to individual learners (Hassoulas, de Almeida, West, Abdelrazek, & Coffey, 2023). This is particularly important for EFL learners who may need additional support in order to fully grasp new concepts (Pérez-Segura, Sánchez Ruiz, González-Calero, & Cózar-Gutiérrez, 2022). Such inherent features of blended learning might have rendered a significant impact on EFL learners' pragmatic awareness in the current study.

Overall, the positive effects of computers and online learning have also been reported in other aspects of language learning. A study conducted by Hiltz and Turoff (1993) showed that computer-mediated learning can lead to an increased social connectivity as well as to equal opportunities for individuals' participation. The researchers have always been looking for the most effective types of technologies to reinforce the collaboration in educational contexts. In a similar vein, Crook (1994) has extensively investigated the ways in which computers can pave the way for collaborative learning in educational institutes. His analysis shows the positive effect of computer-mediated collaboration on writing performance of the learners. The results of the present study can be explained via the benefits that flipped and blended teaching can provide for the learners. As the results of the interviews in the current study revealed most of the learners commented that the use of technology was interesting, useful, and effective for improving their learning. Moreover, the majority of the learners in the blended group mentioned that the use of blended teaching had helped them become more motivated to learn. Thus, apart from improving collaborative learning, blended and flipped teaching have significantly improved EFL learners' pragmatic awareness as these two modes of learning have been interesting, useful, effective, and motivating.

Based on the findings, EFL teachers are encouraged to use flipped and blended instruction to enhance EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. Materials developers are also encouraged to develop materials which can pave the way for a better employment of flipped and blended teaching for improving students' pragmatic awareness. Teacher educators may draw on the results to develop EFL teacher trainees' awareness concerning the positive effect of blended and flipped teaching on improving EFL learners' pragmatic awareness. Similar to many empirical studies, the present study had some limitations which can be addressed by future researchers. The participants were all intermediate, female learners. Similar studies can be done with male learners across different proficiency levels. In the current study, the researcher investigated the two speech acts of apology and request. A similar study can be carried out with other speech acts. The present study used flipped and blended instruction modes as the independent variables. A similar study can be done with other types of technology-based instruction e.g., hybrid instruction.

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Appendix (A)

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Flipped Teaching Group

Q1: What is your idea about the use of flipped teaching for learning apology and request speech acts?
Q2: How did flipped teaching help you in learning apology and request speech acts?
Q3: What were the positive and negative points for flipped teaching?

Appendix (B)

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Blended Teaching Group

Q1: What is your idea about the use of blended teaching for learning apology and request speech acts?
Q2: How did blended teaching help you in learning apology and request speech acts?
Q3: What were the positive and negative points for blended teaching?