

# Improving Pragmatic Competence in IT Students: Challenges and Strategies

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**Abstract:** Pragmatic competence plays crucial role in improving communication process in English. Especially, in ESP (English for specific purposes) students need awareness of pragmatic competence as they communicate with native speakers. Thus, demand for specialists who master English language like native speakers is rising. They gain more opportunity in achieving success in any sphere. Pragmatic competence the ability to use language appropriately in context is crucial for IT professionals, yet often overlooked in technical education. This study explores the improvement of pragmatic competence in first-year IT students at technical universities, focusing on their communication skills in team meetings. In order to conduct survey researcher used mixed-method approach which includes qualitative and quantitative data collection. 4-week observation was conducted to explore syllabus, process of lesson, challenges and strength of students. To check their level placement test was taken from students at the beginning of experiment. Placement test was taken online through Englishradar.com. 20 questions were created in a test form for the pre-test and post-test to find out differences in results before and after experiment. Questions were in an open ended test format and focused to assess how students handle turn-taking, disagreement strategies, politeness markers, and clarity in technical communication. Students were asked to fill dialogue in different situations. Answers of students were assessed according to rubric which was designed by researcher basing on CEFR. T-test was used to calculate results of pre-test and post test. According to findings researcher could find challenges and strategies of students in improving pragmatic competence in English lessons.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic competence, context, communicate, intercultural pragmatics, ESP (English for specific purposes), sociocultural norms, speech, setting, language, interlocutor.

**Introduction:** Pragmatic competence is not often implemented in the English classrooms. Although recent researches show how it is crucial in communicative competence, teachers do not apply it in their methodology. David L. Kiesa, U. Azizov, S. Khan, K. Nazmutdinova, and K. Tangirova, in their book "Reconceptualizing language teaching: an in-service teacher education course in Uzbekistan," define "communicative competence" as the capacity and understanding of a language user of what, how, and where to talk in a way that respects customs, culture, and basic laws and standards. The capacity to both comprehend and be understood in a social setting.

They divide it up into: The capacity to apply grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and stylistic norms to written and spoken language is known as linguistic or grammatical competence. It describes the structure of

sentences and utterances and provides a structural conception of language.

Understanding how common social norms and rules across cultures affect how we describe things, objects, and processes in society is known as sociolinguistic competence. It aims to help students comprehend how different cultures use different grammar, syntax, semantics, and stylistics when describing the same things, subjects, and processes.

A lack of knowledge like translating a message from one language to another using a method distinct from other competences can be addressed with strategic competence. Certain words are not always understood while speaking with various individuals in a foreign language; therefore, the capacity to explain the meaning of these unfamiliar phrases without actually saying them suggests the possession of strategic

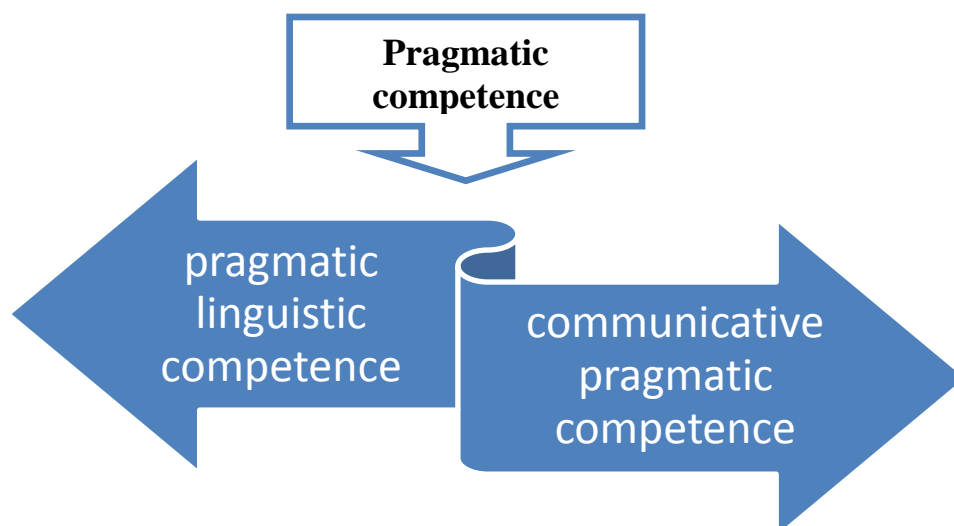
competence.

The capacity to comprehend and communicate meaning in a social setting is known as pragmatic competence. Beyond what is stated, there is more to the intended meaning. It is possible for dialogue to be correct in terms of pragmatic meaning yet incorrect in terms of form, structure, and semantics. Even when the interlocutors use grammatically erroneous sentences, the dialogue is still successful as long as they both grasp each other's intended meaning.

Teaching English for ESP can be more complicated as their specification is not English and most of the learners do not possess even foundation to learn some competences like pragmatics, sociolinguistics. However, these competences play crucial role in communication process in these days. Communicative competence became priority among competences which makes learners to acquire English language taking consideration not only basic skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing but also other necessary competences like pragmatics. There are several effective and modern ways of implying pragmatic competence to teaching process. The advances in technology create magnificent opportunity to reach expected result. Although it takes more attempt it is

sufficient to imply pragmatics into learning process in ESP. Showing real situations, culture, manner of native speakers make the learning process easier for ESP learners rather than to learners of English language as a main specification because they are familiar with some situations and culture of native speakers. They partly come across with pragmatics during lessons.

According to Kecskes (2014) Intercultural Pragmatics examines how language is used in social interactions between individuals with various first languages, communicating in a common language, and representing diverse cultures. In these encounters, current pragmatic norms and developing co-constructed features coexist to variable degrees, creating a synergistic communication process. (p.14). Intercultural Pragmatics is a socio-cognitive viewpoint that emphasizes the importance of both individual and social experience in constructing and comprehending meaning. In this case without experience it is complicated process to produce appropriate speech which conveys meaning which is suitable for the exact situation. This is the reason why language learners struggle in constructing conversation with native speakers.



**Figure 1: Two categories of pragmatic competence**

Dan (2016) mentioned that pragmatic linguistic competence is built on grammatical competence, and it is an important component of communicative competence when learning a foreign language. It gives an adequate interpretation of speech actions by taking into account the situational significance of the utterance, socio-cultural context, mindset, age, education, and social standing of speakers, as well as the appropriateness and purposefulness of speech

conventions (p.2). Communicative pragmatic competence is the capacity to utilize language effectively in a variety of social settings. It entails having the ability to modify one's communication style in accordance with one's knowledge of the intents, implicit meanings, and cultural quirks that underlie language use. This entails comprehending humor and sarcasm, recognizing nonverbal clues, knowing when and how to use polite language, and changing language

to fit various audiences and circumstances. Essentially, it comes down to having social skills in terms of the language you use to interact with people and effectively communicate your message.

Pavlova (2013) presented his experiment on pragmatic competence. There were students with pre-intermediate-intermediate and upper-intermediate-advanced level in his experiment. They compared Russian and English languages in terms of pragmatics. According to his experiment lower level students could not take test successfully. Higher level students make several mistakes although they were advanced level. He gave as an example the word “шведский стол” which means a buffet or a smorgasbord in English. Only 1 student out of 28 could give appropriate equivalent. Others focused on the word “шведский” and just translated phrase word by word. It is visible that even being advanced it is possible to make this kind of simple mistakes on word choice because of lack of pragmatic competence.

According to Zaxarova (2020: 3), pragmatics in English for particular purposes is founded on the synthesis of a number of ideas and theories, such as the theory of politeness, the theory of speech actions, the concept of communicative competence, and the principle of cooperation. Thus, regardless of country, culture, or language, being courteous results in fruitful dialogue. Understanding intercultural pragmatics is crucial for facilitating communication between speakers of different languages. Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) entails customizing language instruction to meet the unique needs of students, such as those of academic or professional contexts.

According to Vasilina (2013), pragmatic competence is the capacity to employ language tools for specific purposes (realizing communicative functions, creating speech acts) in accordance with professional interaction schemes. It consists of three components: 1) structural speech construction competence (the ability to consistently construct an utterance in accordance with interaction schemes); 2) functional competence (the use of oral and written statements to fulfill various communicative functions); and 3) discursive competence (knowledge of the rules for constructing statements and combining them into a text). Pragmatic competence is essential for completing communicative duties including informing, motivating, expressing opinions, evaluating, and creating contact. It also determines how well the message influences the interlocutor's behavior in the desired direction. (page 2).

Speech is significantly influenced by pragmatics. The speaker who employs it effectively will steer the

conversation instead of the one who does not. Kotovskaya (2021) said that rhetoric, the study of oratory, is regarded as pragmatics' forerunner since it was the first to show an interest in the best ways to sway the listener. (p.8) It is the art of speaking as not all language learners are able to comprehend and respond taking into consideration various aspects such as culture, society and situation.

Since language is a tool for generating a certain notion, Yusupova (2021) believes that pragmatic competence facilitates the study of language's role as a cognitive tool. Last but not least, pragmatic competence supports the study of language's basic function—communication—if language use is a component of speech communication content and every communicative act involves a moment of contact between communication partners (page 5). Mastering pragmatic competence serves to communicate without mistakes and misconceptions during conversation.

Pragmatic norms, as opposed to being strictly "right" or "wrong," describe a collection of societal customs or tendencies that determine whether behaviors are more or less appropriate, desirable, or acceptable in the given situation. Additionally, pragmatic norms can alter dynamically over time and depending on the situation, and they differ throughout languages and civilizations as well as within a particular language, language variety, or culture.

Practically speaking, language is a tool that influences people's beliefs and behavior. A favorable environment is necessary for the speaker to achieve his communication goal. [Esanova, 2017: 44 pages] Communication is considerably more than just the listener deciphering indications that the speaker encodes. It involves complex interpretation procedures that take into account both what is stated in terms of meaning and what is intended to be expressed in the sociocultural context.

In linguistic pragmatics, the following subjects related to speech are examined: a) the extent to which the communicative intention of the subject of speech is expressed through overt and covert forms of expression; b) the communicative intention strategy; c) the intended meaning problem; and d) the speaker's degree of perception of the objective world and the plan of thought expression. (Xakimov 2013 21p) Pragmatics is a separate field of linguistics that studies the selection of language units used in communication, their usage, and the impact these units have on its participants. (Page 76, Safarov 2008)

Therefore, pragmatic competence should exist independently, just like communicative competence. Pragmatic competence is essential for completing

communicative duties including informing, motivating, expressing opinions, evaluating, and creating contact. It also determines how well the message influences the interlocutor's behavior in the desired direction. While the style principle characterizes the conversation as precise (avoiding ambiguity), brief, and orderly, the attitude principle states that the speakers' real contributions should be suitable. This gives the communication process substance and clarity. When talking, it is crucial to consider both of them.

## METHODOLOGY

To determine the significance of corpus technologies in integrating pragmatic competency into English classes, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed. For this study, Fergana State Technical University students were chosen. In total, 60 people participated in the study. There were two groups for the study: experimental and controlled group. Firstly, placement exam was done in order to identify students' level of English. The CEFR was used to evaluate the placement test. Data regarding student proficiency was obtained online through. Data regarding student proficiency was obtained with the aid of the English Radar website. <https://www.englishradar.com/english-proficiency-certificate/> was the online test. The test took eighty minutes to complete. There were sixty questions in total, with one to twenty at the A1–A2 level, twenty to forty at the B–B2 level, and forty to sixty at the C1 level. Students at the A2 level were the lowest, and those at the B2 level were the highest. The pupils were proficient in computer programming. There were 30 students in one group. For experiment groups divided into control group and experimental group.

Observations were done to confirm the students' needs, interests, strengths, limitations, background data, preferred learning styles, and proficiency in the English language. The researcher observed four lessons during the investigation. It was beneficial to identify the subjects and the instructor's method of instruction in

the classroom. Lesson plans and syllabuses were available for the researcher to view, which helped with survey design.

A questionnaire was used to determine the pragmatic competence, strengths, and shortcomings of the pupils. Learners are given a pre-test and post-test task to gauge their awareness of pragmatic ability. There are four multiple-choice questions, four real-world scenario questions, four conversation completion tasks, and four true-false questions in a pre-test activity. Every student must receive 60 points, and each group must receive 1800 points in total. Students were instructed to send emails in order to identify areas where they struggled with writing.

The acquired data was analyzed using quantitative data collecting. By contrasting and comparing the findings of the observation with the responses to the questionnaire, analysis was made possible. A self-made rubric based on CEFR criteria was used to assess the writing of the questionnaire and emails. Language proficiency, pragmatic proficiency, sociolinguistic proficiency, and discourse proficiency were all evaluated using the rubric. Students' points were calculated using mathematical analysis to analyze the outcomes. The results were presented as tables (Tables 1 and 2). Results are contrasted and compared based on the table's points. It was clear that the experimental group outperformed the control group by 20–30 points.

The ability to test the hypothesis and track participants' real skill level was crucial to achieving measurable outcomes. The hypothesis regarding the difficulties and methods of enhancing the pragmatic competence of technical university students was supported by the gathering and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

## RESULT

Placement test showed following results:

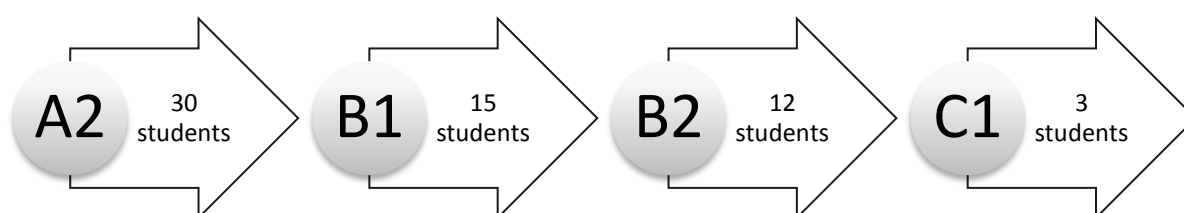
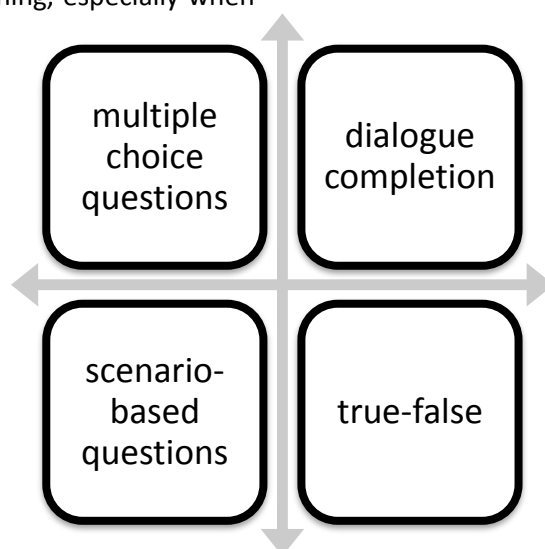


Figure 2. Results of levels of students according to CEFR (self-made)

The experimental group and the control group were the two separate subgroups into which the students in this study were split. The proficiency levels of the students in the two groups varied. Due to the professional pressures of working in global businesses, most students are eager to learn English. All of the contestants were men. Speaking proficiency is their primary demand, according to the majority of respondents, who said they struggle during interviews. Nonetheless, some of them acknowledged that they struggled with writing, whether they were writing program codes or emailing employers of big, multinational corporations. All of the students said that they preferred participatory learning, especially when

it included technological difficulties.

Close observation made it clear that traditional teaching methods are mostly used in English classrooms, with a particular emphasis on terminology and a concentration on teaching grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, during instruction, students' writing skills and communication abilities are not considered. According to the pre-test, the experimental group and the controlled group had comparable difficulties utilizing the right words in the right context and acting appropriately. There are four parts to the test:



**Figure 3 types of pre-test (self-made)**

These inquiries assess students' knowledge of language, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse proficiency. Based on the CEFR, the researcher created a rubric that was used to evaluate the students' scores.

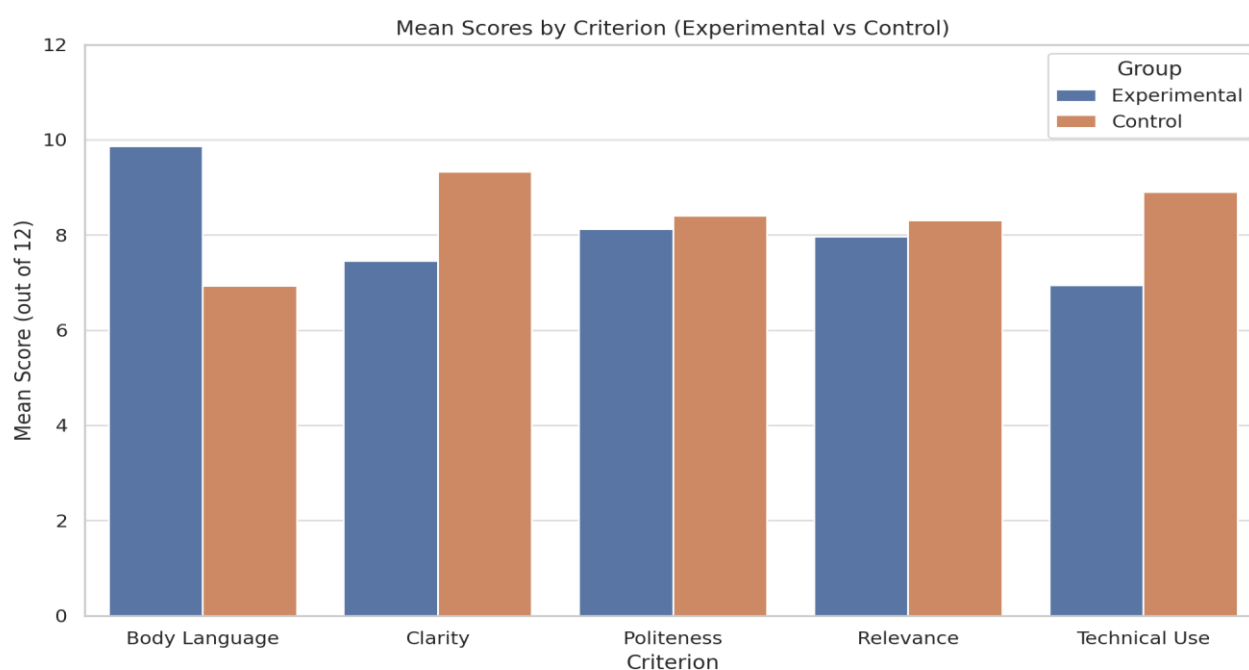
Criteria	3 points (Excellent)	2 points (Good)	1 point (Fair)	0 points (Poor)
<b>Politeness</b>	Uses polite phrases and appropriate tone	Polite but slightly abrupt	Minimal politeness, sounds blunt	Rude or dismissive
<b>Relevance</b>	Fully answers within the IT context	Mostly relevant but lacks detail	Partly relevant to IT situation	Off-topic or irrelevant
<b>Clarity</b>	Clear, concise, and professional language	Understandable but wordy or vague	Somewhat unclear or awkward	Confusing or incoherent
<b>Technical use</b>	Integrates IT terms naturally (e.g., API, cloud, debugging)	Some use of IT-specific language	Limited IT references	No technical language used
<b>Body Language</b>	Maintains eye contact, open posture, and	Occasional eye contact and neutral posture	Limited eye contact or closed-off posture	Avoids eye contact, appears disinterested

	confident gestures			
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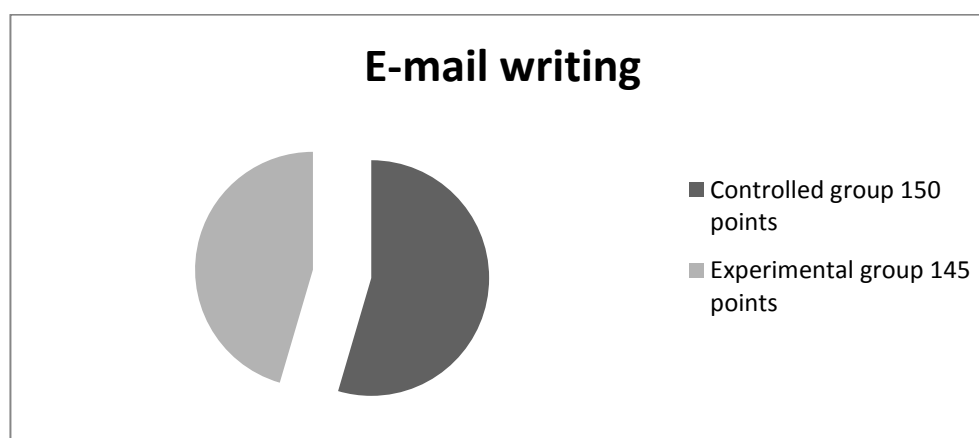
**1 Table. Assessment rubric for pre-test and post-test (self-made)**

Criterion	Experimental Mean	Control Mean	t-Statistic	p-Value	Significant (p < 0.05)
<b>Body Language</b>	9.87	6.93	6.767	0.0000	✓ Yes
<b>Clarity</b>	7.46	9.33	-5.368	0.0000	✓ Yes
<b>Politeness</b>	8.12	8.40	-0.760	0.4505	✗ No
<b>Relevance</b>	7.97	8.31	-0.914	0.3646	✗ No
<b>Technical Use</b>	6.95	8.90	-3.873	0.0003	✓ Yes

**2 Table Results of pre-test (self-made)**



**Figure 4. Comparison of results of pre-test (self-made)**



**Figure 5. Results of e-mail writing (self-made)**

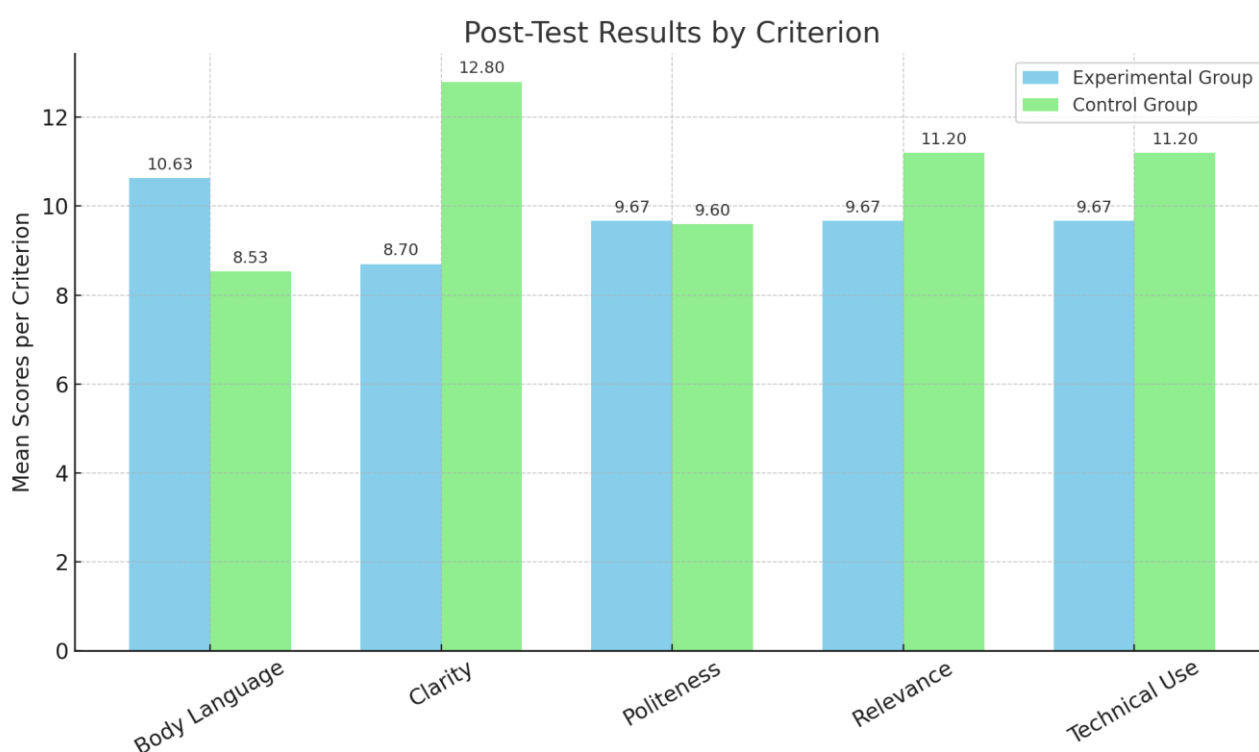


According to pre-test groups showed low results containing 1200 points overall by experimental group and 1247 points out of 1800 by control group. For e-mail writing control group gathered 150 points out of 450 and experimental group 145 out of 450 points. After 4 week practicing through role-plays, videos on

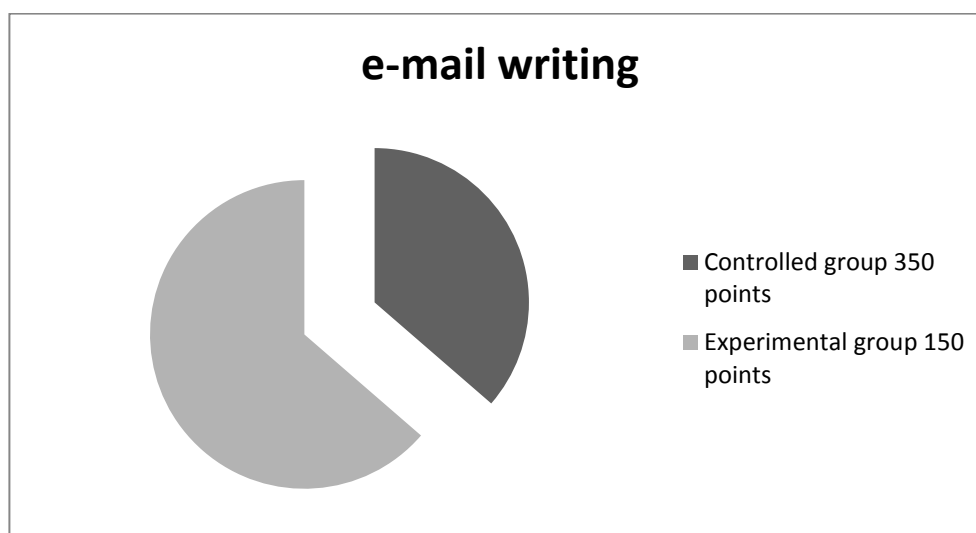
you tube, texts from magazine, online websites and blogs control group significantly improved pragmatic competence while experimental group practiced only through course book and did not show noticeably high result. Following table and diagram shows results of post-test.

Criterion	Max Points	Experimental Mean	Control Mean	t-value	p-value	Significant?
Body Language	360	10.63	8.53	2.89	$p < 0.01$	✓ Yes
Clarity	360	8.70	12.80	-6.01	$p < 0.001$	✓ Yes
Politeness	360	9.67	9.60	0.12	$p > 0.90$	✗ No
Relevance	360	9.67	11.20	-3.17	$p < 0.01$	✓ Yes
Technical Use	360	9.67	11.20	-3.17	$p < 0.01$	✓ Yes

**3 Table Results of post-test (self-made)**



**Figure 6. Comparison of results of pre-test (self-made)**



**Figure 7. Results of e-mail writing in post- test. (self-made)**

According to post-test control group had significant improvement in using pragmatic competence in communication. Experimental group gathered 1450 points out of 1800 while control group could achieve 1600 points. In writing e-mails also control group reached to 350 points out of 450 while experimental group did not have significant change in results.

## DISCUSSION

The results showed that experiment clearly showed challenges of students in implementing pragmatics into productive skills and found useful strategies to improve pragmatic competence. In pretest results were almost 1200 points out of 1800 in both groups. In post-test results significantly changed. Experimental group could gather 1350 while control group gathered 1600 points. In e-mail writing also results were similar containing almost 150 out of 450 for both groups. In post test control group could show 350 points while experimental group showed 150 points again.

This study's main goal was to pinpoint obstacles and assess methods for enhancing technical university students' pragmatic competency. With the experimental group scoring 1200/1800 and the control group scoring 1247/1800 overall, as well as 145/450 vs. 150/450 on an email writing assignment, respectively, the pre-test findings demonstrated poor starting performance. During a four-week intervention period, the groups differed despite having similar starting points. With significant improvements in Clarity, Relevance, and Technical Use, the control group—which participated in role-plays, YouTube videos, magazine texts, online blogs, and other real-world materials—showed far larger gains, achieving 1600 points on the post-test. This is consistent with other studies that demonstrate how realistic, multimodal input—like role-playing and digital media—improves pragmatic development by promoting active

participation and increasing contextual awareness.

However, although outperforming the control group in Body Language ( $t = 2.89$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the experimental group that solely used a standard coursebook demonstrated less improvement. This implies that nonverbal communication may be encouraged in even the most regimented school environments. It was less successful, therefore, in fostering socio-contextual flexibility and linguistic adaptability, both of which are essential components of pragmatic competence (Pirogova & Rozhkov, 2024, pp. 49–64).

The following issues have been noted:

1. Coursebook-based education lacks authentic and varied input, which restricts exposure to a variety of speech acts and contextual clues.
2. A lack of emphasis on metapragmatic awareness, which prior research has shown is essential for applying acquired forms in authentic settings (Fazilatfar & Cheraghi, 2013, p.5)
3. Assessment constraints, since sociolinguistic and nonverbal cues that are subtle but significant are frequently overlooked by present evaluation instruments (Kusevska, M. et al 2015. P.152).

Pedagogical Implications:

- Incorporate role-playing exercises that mimic real-world situations, which have been shown to be successful in EFL settings (Hosseini, 2016, p. 204).
- To improve contextual sensitivity, use real, multimedia content, such as blogs, videos, and actual conversations. Boudjemai, S., and Ammouche, Y. (2020, page 2)
- Include tasks that raise awareness as part of explicit metapragmatic instruction, as these have been demonstrated to enhance pragmatic performance (Fazilatfar & Cheraghi, 2013, p.5).



Intervention and Results of the Post-Test For four weeks, the experimental group only used a coursebook, while the control group used real materials and multimodal tactics, such as role-plays, YouTube videos, magazine texts, blogs, and interactive websites. The control group clearly improves in Clarity, Relevance, and Technical Use (statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ ), according to post-test data (1600 vs. 1450 total points). Email writing is acknowledged as a challenging pragmatic genre; students frequently encounter difficulties with speech act realization, discourse structure, and register variation: "[high] frequencies of perceived pragmatic failure across all aspects of English L2 email writing," particularly in establishing context-appropriate register, were discovered by Nicholas et al. (2023, p. 27).

These results unequivocally demonstrate that a coursebook-only approach or other forms of limited education are inadequate for addressing important pragmatic aspects of email writing, including tone, audience adaptability, discourse cohesiveness, and politeness techniques.

Following challenges were identified through the research:

1. Lack of authentic input: Sociopragmatic standards such as subjectivity (e.g., modality, hedging) and audience awareness in emails are not adequately modeled in coursebooks.
2. Minimal metapragmatic reflection: Learners lose out on opportunities to internalize pragmatic norms when they are not given noticing tasks, such as comparing drafts to native-like models.
3. Assessment mismatch: Current assignments could emphasize mechanics at the expense of pragmatic nuance, such as internal rhetoric, formality elements, email openings, and closings.

According to results of research usage of social media materials, videos, websites, magazine and journal can be helpful to meet these problems. It is important to select materials according to their level and preferences. Reliability of material plays crucial role in the teaching process. Thus teachers need to be more attentive and concentrate on choosing appropriate material. The study of pragmatics looks at how language form and context relate to one another, where that form is used, and how this relationship is perceived and realized in social interactions (Taguchi 2019:1). The study also showed that students preferred technology-based and participatory learning, which emphasized the necessity for contemporary teaching methods. According to the literature, corpus technology helps students acquire language more quickly (Sysoev 2010:99) and gives them the practical

abilities they need in real-world professional situations (Gardner & Nesi 2012:88).

## CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that without genuine, feedback-driven, and reflective education, pragmatic competence in email writing is still underdeveloped. Approaches that rely solely on textbooks neglect sociopragmatic components including discourse coherence, tone, and civility. Integrating real-world tasks, reformulation, and clear metapragmatic advice is not optional for technical students, who often use email in professional settings.

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