

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SAUDI EFL TEACHERS' PRAGMATIC AWARENESS

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate Saudi teachers' pragmatic awareness and the impact of their gender and qualification. A lack of appropriate knowledge and pragmatic activities may limit students' pragmatic growth in the target language. Thus far, most pragmatic research has focused on issues concerning learners' pragmatic competence, with only a few studies focusing on teachers' pragmatic competence, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A total of 86 EFL teachers from Saudi public schools participated in this study. The questionnaire created by Ivanova (2018) was used to collect data for this study. The findings indicated that even though some teachers did not respond or provided irrelevant or incorrect examples of speech acts, Saudi EFL teachers have a relatively high level of awareness in general, and teachers' qualifications and gender have no significant effect on pragmatic awareness, with female teachers having slightly higher pragmatic awareness than male teachers, and master's degree holders having slightly higher pragmatic awareness than bachelor's degree holders. This suggests that, while individual characteristics, such as gender and degree, have no apparent effect on awareness, teachers should be aware of their own pragmatic competence to develop their students' pragmatic competence.*

Keywords: *pragmatic awareness, pragmatic competence, EFL teachers, language learning*

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Introduction

Little research has been conducted on how English pragmatic knowledge is perceived and evaluated by Saudi Arabic-speaking teachers. Thus, this study hopefully will enable policy and professional development decision-makers to take the required actions to guarantee that English teaching produces better results. In a nation such as Saudi Arabia, where English is taught as a foreign language, educational authorities take steps to encourage English language teaching and assessment methods. The Saudi 2030 Vision has placed much emphasis on projects, such as providing pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for future employment (Human Capability Development Program, n.d.). Speaking the target language is essential owing to the rise in foreign investment and the growing role of Saudi Arabia in the international economy. This prompted the Ministry of Education to develop measures to increase the quality of English teaching techniques. In addition, it has recently made English a compulsory part of the primary school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Studies have shown that providing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students with pragmatic instruction helps them become more fluent communicators (see, e.g., Tajeddin & Alemi, 2020). According to Taguchi (2008), while EFL learners may not interact with native English speakers, they can develop pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences similar to learners in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts and native speakers. Taguchi (2008) explains,

Hence, it seems that learners in a FL environment are not necessarily disadvantaged in pragmatic development; pragmatic comprehension develops naturally in domestic, formal classroom settings that afford limited opportunity for input, communicative practice, and pragmatic awareness, as long as the context affords sufficient resources for such development (p. 443).

Although the evidence for effective pragmatics teaching methods is inconclusive, review papers (e.g., Taguchi, 2015) show that explicit education is more effective than implicit instruction. Studies have shown that implicit and explicit pragmatic instruction in both ESL and EFL settings improves pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Taguchi, 2015). However, formal pragmatic instruction in EFL signifies L2 pragmatic norms and raises EFL learners' awareness, which improves their target language comprehension (Bu, 2012; Chang, 2011; Rose, 2005). Bu (2012), for example, discovered that Chinese EFL students who received explicit pragmatics instruction outperformed students who received implicit and no pragmatics instruction. The study reported that direct instruction improves language learners' ability to use language in everyday contexts, whereas explicit instruction helps them focus and accomplish better results.

Teachers are the primary source of L2 input in EFL environments. Their classroom interactions offer students linguistic and lexical information and

skills for speaking effectively in the target language in various situations. A lack of adequate information and correct pragmatic practices may impact students' pragmatic development in the target language. Students' low sociopragmatic awareness may also be viewed as a consequence of teachers' general lack of pragmatic instruction (Wyner & Cohen, 2015).

Researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; House, 1996; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Rose, 2005) have shown that pragmatic awareness pedagogy positively influences students' pragmatic competence while learning a second language. Thus, this study is conducted to fully understand teachers' pragmatic awareness, particularly in contexts where students' interaction with the foreign language is limited and strongly dependent on their instructor.

More research on the pragmatic beliefs and attitudes of pre-and in-service teachers should be conducted to effectively target and customize pragmatics instruction (Savvidou & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2019). To understand EFL learners' communicative capacity, we need to examine a hitherto unknown area of literature: the pragmatic competence of Saudi Arabian teachers in public schools. This study aims to shed light on teachers' pragmatic awareness and address the following research questions.

1. To what degree do Saudi EFL teachers believe pragmatics is important in acquiring a second language and teaching pragmatics?
2. How do gender and educational qualifications influence teachers' responses?
3. What are some frequent speech acts that English teachers are aware of?

Literature Review

Communicative Competence and Speech Acts

EFL teachers can positively impact their students' pragmatic competence. However, teachers need a high level of competence to achieve this positive impact. Pragmatic competence, that is the ability to understand and convey meanings flexibly in literal and non-literal ways, has been a major focus of interlanguage pragmatics. It is described as the study of the processes through which non-native speakers of a language develop their competence in understanding and performing actions in a target language (Kasper & Rose, 2002). This is partly due to the popularity of various communicative competence theories in the 1980s and 1990s (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2011). The following is Crystal's (2008, p. 379) definition of pragmatics:

The study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction

and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.

According to the literature, both linguistic competence and pragmatic ability are crucial components of communicative competence. In response to Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance, Hymes (1972) characterized communicative competence as encompassing not only language skills (or grammatical competence), but also contextual or sociolinguistic competence. As a result, many scholars have proposed and developed theoretical models for defining communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Communicative competence traditionally consists of two main parts: the ability to use language appropriately and the understanding of language, which includes linguistic competency and pragmatic competence (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Taguchi, 2011). The latter includes achieving communicative ability in a second language.

Sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics, the two facets of pragmatic competence highlighted by models of communicative competence, are both important for understanding the pragmatics of a given situation (Bachman, 1990; Leech, 2016). The former refers to how individuals' social perceptions affect their performance and understanding of linguistic activities and is defined as "the Sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech, 2016, p. 10). The latter refers to "the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" (Leech, 2016, p. 11).

Speech act theory is a subfield of pragmatics that investigates how words may be used to execute acts, in addition to conveying information (Omar & Razi, 2022). Speech acts are utterances with locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary forces. (Omar & Razi, 2022). A speech act's linguistic or literal meaning is its locutionary or propositional meaning. Based on their state of mind and circumstances, the speakers' implied meaning of the speech is an illocutionary force. A speech act's perlocutionary force is determined by its influence on the listener (Huang, 2014; Searle, 1976).

Searle (1976) categorizes speech acts by illocutionary force, or the speaker's intended meaning, to include representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. A *representative* speech is any statement in which the speaker commits to the fact or truth. *Directives* tell someone to do something. *Commissives* are speakers' commitments to doing something in the future; they include pledges, threats, and offers. *Expressive* speech acts convey psychological states. A *declaration* is a statement that affects or changes the state of an object. Although research on learners has been conducted in this field, investigations on language instructors' pragmatic knowledge are relatively rare.

Teachers' Pragmatic Awareness Research

Teachers are the major source of L2 input in EFL settings. Teachers' educational programs should incorporate pragmatics because a pragmatic understanding of norms and variation is necessary for language teachers' knowledge base (Ishihara, 2011). While studies suggest that implicit and explicit pragmatic teaching in both ESL and EFL contexts enhance pragmatic ability (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Taguchi, 2015), formal pragmatic instruction in EFL denotes L2 pragmatic norms and elevates EFL learners' awareness, which improves target language comprehension (Bu, 2012; Chang, 2011; Rose, 2005).

Recently, researchers have attempted to uncover more about teachers' pragmatic awareness, particularly in EFL contexts, when exposure to a foreign language is restricted and depends on the instructor. To assess pragmatic awareness and its role in teaching and learning a language, Ivanova (2018) conducted a study on 30 English teachers working in secondary schools in Bulgaria. She used a comprehensive survey with open-ended questions regarding various aspects of pragmatics and Likert-scale statements that participants agreed or disagreed with. According to the study's findings, while the majority of teachers demonstrated some level of pragmatic awareness and confirmed that teaching and assessing pragmatic competence is essential, 43% of teachers were unable to mention any speech acts.

Tajeddin and Khodaparast (2020) examined EFL teachers' metapragmatic awareness and pragmatic instruction. A 30-item questionnaire was distributed to 300 EFL teachers from private language institutions, and they were examined according to four components: teachers, learners, institutes and colleges, and coursebooks and assessments. Classes of 30 instructors were qualitatively assessed using a 20-item observation checklist. The results showed that only 'language teachers' had high pragmatic awareness. However, class observations showed they did not regularly teach pragmatic features. Furthermore, the mean pragmatic awareness questionnaire scores of the less-experienced and more-experienced teachers were not statistically significant except for language teachers. The lack of pragmatic training in teacher education programs may explain the poor awareness and practice.

Glaser (2020) evaluated 84 future foreign language instructors in Germany, which used a different study tool and judged examination to determine their level of pragmatic awareness. The task had 15 situations that assessed instructors' abilities to recognize and correct grammatical and pragmatic mistakes. Despite being able to identify pragmatic challenges, the instructors struggled to resolve them.

Ariani et al. (2021) investigated the perceptions of 104 Indonesian EFL teachers on pragmatic competence and pragmatic socialization using an exploratory

research design that included a questionnaire and focus group interviews. The results revealed that even though teachers have a tendency to isolate linguistic knowledge from its application in a given context, most acknowledged the need to teach English pragmatics. They recognized the importance of pragmatic socialization in developing learners' pragmatic competence and identified the numerous pragmatic socializing roles that EFL learners need to be aware of. Teachers considered explicit and implicit language socialization procedures promising and worthwhile to practice, even though how to execute them was unclear.

A descriptive study and sequential mixed methods were employed by Korkmaz and Karatepe (2023) to evaluate Turkish university EFL instructors' pragmatic awareness and competence. 61 EFL instructors' pragmatic awareness and competence were assessed using 12 items in five categories: teaching linguistic knowledge; pragmatic knowledge and communicative English teaching; teaching strategies for teaching pragmatic knowledge; culture and identity in teaching English and the need to comprehend various varieties of English; and aspects impacting teaching pragmatics. It was found that EFL teachers had a moderate understanding of pragmatics and how to teach pragmatics. Most instructors emphasized the need to teach about pragmatics and cross-cultural issues, and they incorporated teaching styles and practices that address the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Al-Qahtani (2020) used a mixed-method study methodology to investigate the importance of teaching pragmatic competence in English, how Saudi EFL teachers incorporate it into their teaching, and the challenges they experience. The researchers employed semi-structured interviews and guided classroom observations, and 160 Saudi EFL instructors (male and female) from public schools answered a pragmatic competence questionnaire. While there was a lack of proper pragmatic input, there was a recognizable incorporation of pragmatic teaching. The study also revealed that, while teaching pragmatics, the teachers encounter numerous challenges and constraints that call for training programs to help teachers improve their abilities to deal with pragmatic-based instructional activities.

Few studies have been conducted to explore the differences in pragmatic competence between male and female English foreign-language teachers. Even though gender is one of the most fundamental features of individual differences, studies have only highlighted the differences between men and women in a few areas, such as language taboos, phonetics, vocabulary, communication patterns, and so on (Usuludin et al., 2021). Chen (2017) found significant gender differences in pragmatic competence among non-English-major postgraduates in China, with females having better pragmatic competence than males but no significant differences among majors, age, or job experience.

In another study on gender differences in pragmatic competence and motivation, Usuludin et al. (2021) compared male and female students' pragmatic skills and motivation. The study included 109 tenth-grade EFL students (male and female) in high schools. They found that the pragmatic competence of male and female students differed significantly and that pragmatic competence and English learning motivation were positively correlated.

In Al-Qahtani (2020), there were no statistically significant variations in teachers' average estimates of the extent to which they employed pragmatic competence when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) based on gender (male, female). Saudi male and female EFL learners' pragmatic awareness was examined by Almegren (2022). There were slight variances between both genders in the pragmatic awareness of 56 intermediate-to-advanced university EFL learners, male and female language learners. However, the statistical analysis revealed no significant gender differences.

Several studies in EFL contexts concur that EFL teachers experience challenges while teaching pragmatics, even when their pragmatic awareness seems sufficient. Teachers are considered the source of the greater part of learning inputs, although this field of study remains underrepresented. Research is scarce on English language teachers who are not native speakers, in addition to a scarcity of research on EFL pragmatic awareness. There appears to be no consensus among researchers regarding the approaches that should be used to investigate this issue. Teachers can work in various settings, each with unique challenges and opportunities. It is worthwhile to investigate Saudi teachers' knowledge of pragmatic competence, gender, and qualifications, which may influence their pragmatic teaching practices.

In light of these issues, this study aims to assess the pragmatic awareness of Saudi teachers in a context that has not been sufficiently addressed in prior studies.

Methods

Depending on the nature of the study and the information needed, this study used a descriptive technique that involved collecting data about a particular occurrence and analyzing that data to arrive at the conclusion. This study used a quantitative method to gauge Saudi teachers' pragmatic competence awareness to increase their students' competence.

The questionnaire developed by Ivanova (2018) was used to collect data on the study's objectives. This instrument has three major sections. The first component gathered information about the participants' age, gender, qualification, and length of experience. Furthermore, the teachers were asked to answer two questions about their knowledge of the concept of pragmatics and whether

they considered their own pragmatic ability to be good. The second section of the questionnaire evaluated the participants’ awareness and assessment of pragmatics. This section has ten questions, each with a Likert scale score ranging from one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). The statements on which they were asked to agree or disagree concerned their beliefs about pragmatics and its teaching. In the third section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to list speech acts that students must master to communicate successfully in English.

This study followed the ethical procedures of the institution. The first draft of the generated questionnaire was administered to five teachers to assess its content validity and to ensure that the language used was clear and understandable. The teachers agreed that the items were appropriate for the objectives and that phrasing was appropriate.

After providing the instructions detailing the research goal and a link to an online questionnaire, the questionnaire was distributed to the teachers via social media platforms to ensure that the survey reached a broad number of respondents. In contrast to the original study by Ivanova (2018), this study’s respondents were given a brief explanation of what pragmatic competence is, to obtain more accurate information about their perceptions and to avoid alienating them by challenging their knowledge. During the second academic semester of 2021, 120, male and female Saudi teachers majoring in English and working as English teachers in Saudi Arabia’s public schools completed the online questionnaire, which resulted in a random sample of male and female participants. Two participants had PhDs, while 32 said they were unfamiliar with pragmatic competence. Consequently, 34 responses were eliminated from the study, yielding a sample size of 86. Of the participants, 60.5% were male, and 39.5% were female; 64% had bachelor’s degrees in English, while 36% had master’s degrees. The information on the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Participants’ Information

Variables		Frequency	Valid percent
Gender	Female	34	39.5
	Male	52	60.5
Degree	Bachelor	55	64.0
	Master	31	36.0

Variables		Frequency	Valid percent
Age	30 or younger	8	9.3
	31-39	48	55.8
	40-49	26	30.2
	50 or older	4	4.7
Teaching experience	2-28 years		

After data cleaning, 86 English teachers' responses were evaluated. The participants differed in age, gender, academic degree, and teaching experience. The numerical data were imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 23. (SPSS). The responses were categorized according to the three study questions. Descriptive statistics were produced to establish the participants' perception of pragmatic competence, and inferential statistics (independent t-tests) were used to identify differences depending on the gender and qualification variables. Given the diversity of the respondents, Cronbach's alpha evaluation of the questionnaire items yielded a reliability measure of 0.93.

Results

Ivanova's (2018) survey was used to investigate and analyze the participants' levels of pragmatic awareness. This includes participants' familiarity with pragmatics and their beliefs about the importance of pragmatics. To respond to the first question, which concerns teachers' perspectives regarding the significance of pragmatics in learning a second language and the approaches they use to teach pragmatics, teachers' perspectives were calculated using means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages.

As shown in Table 2, the participants demonstrated a relatively high level of awareness in almost all items. Of the teachers, 73.3% believed that having a competent level of pragmatics is essential for language learners. Even though the vast majority of respondents (approximately 68.6%) believed that pragmatics should be part of effective language education programs, only approximately 56.9% of teachers believed that pragmatics should be explored and tested. Of the teachers, 68.6% were either in agreement or strongly agreed that politeness was fundamental to pragmatics. However, 61.7% of teachers believed that politeness differs greatly from one culture to another. Regarding speaking in English, most teachers (66.2%) believed that having a solid understanding of the appropriate politeness norms is essential for students.

Regarding the pragmatic teaching practices teachers engage in, most teachers stated that they make their students aware of the significance of pragmatic

competence and draw their attention to pragmatic appropriateness, with 57% and 55.8% of teachers reporting these practices, respectively. In contrast, less than half of the teachers admitted (48.8%) that they did not address the pragmatic errors made by their students in a systematic manner. Of the teachers, 61.6% agreed or strongly agreed that their students were sensitive to rude or aggressive verbal behavior.

Table 2.
Participants' Responses about the Importance of Pragmatics and their Pragmatic Teaching Practices (N=86)

Item	M	SD	SD		D		NL		A		SA	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
PC is important for language learners.	3.81	1.21	7	8.1	7	8.1	9	10.5	35	40.7	28	32.6
The instruction of PC should be part of an effective language teaching program.	3.67	1.16	7	8.1	7	8.1	13	15.1	39	45.3	20	23.3
Learners' PC should be part of an effective language testing program.	3.51	1.19	8	9.3	7	8.1	22	25.6	31	36	18	20.9
Politeness is an important aspect of pragmatics.	3.87	1.21	6	7	6	7	15	17.4	25	29.1	34	39.5
Politeness is culture-specific.	3.66	1.28	8	9.3	8	9.3	17	19.8	25	29.1	28	32.6
It is important for students to be aware of politeness norms when speaking English.	3.69	1.43	11	12.8	10	11.6	8	9.3	23	26.7	34	39.5
I make my students aware of the significance of PC in language learning	3.48	1.29	8	9.3	14	16.3	15	17.4	27	31.4	22	25.6
I draw my students' attention to pragmatic appropriateness	3.35	1.23	8	9.3	16	18.6	14	16.3	34	39.5	14	16.3
I correct learners' pragmatic error systematically	3.29	1.11	6	7	15	17.4	23	26.7	32	37.2	10	11.6
My students are sensitive to impolite or aggressive verbal behavior	3.66	1.18	6	7	8	9.3	19	22.1	29	33.7	24	27.9

M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; NL = neutral; SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = number of respondents; % = the percentage of responses; PC = Pragmatic Competence

To address the second question concerning how teachers' responses varied based on gender and qualifications, independent t-tests were conducted to evaluate the differences based on gender and qualification variables. Male teachers had a mean score of 35.65, whereas female teachers had a mean score of 36.53. Male teachers had a standard deviation of 9.47, whereas female teachers had a standard deviation of 10.27. This implies that female teachers have slightly higher pragmatic awareness than male teachers. However, this difference was not statistically significant when comparing the male and female teachers ($p = 0.686, > 0.05$). Bachelor's degree holders had a mean score of 35.76, with a standard deviation of 10.26. The mean value for individuals with a master's degree, in contrast, was 36.42, with a standard deviation of 8.90. This implies that master's degree holders possess a slightly greater pragmatic awareness than bachelor's degree holders. However, the difference in qualifications across teachers did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.766, > 0.05$). These results suggest that there were no statistically significant changes.

For the third research question concerning common examples of speech acts that English teachers are familiar with, 28 teachers (32.6%) did not respond to the question. In contrast, 58 teachers responded to the question with answers that were either irrelevant (or inaccurate) or correct (34.9% and 32.6%, respectively). This accounted for 67.4% of all responses received.

Table 3 below shows the speech acts identified by the teachers and the frequency with which they occurred. On average, 28 teachers (32.6%) could name between two and four correct speech acts. The majority of correct speech acts stated by teachers were directive and expressive (25% each), and the most frequently mentioned speech act was request (17% of the examples), followed by apologies (11.4%). The teachers were less familiar with promises, which only one teacher noted, and asserting, which was addressed by two teachers.

Table 3.
Participants' Responses about the Speech Acts (N=28)

Speech Act	Frequency	Valid percent
Representatives	5	5.7
representative	3	2.3
assertion, description	2	2.3
Directives	22	25.0
request	15	17.0
suggestion	4	4.5
inviting	3	3.4
Commissives	9	10.2
refusal	5	5.7

Speech Act	Frequency	Valid percent
promising	1	1.1
offering	3	3.4
Expressives	22	25.0
expressive	4	4.5
apology	10	11.4
greeting/welcoming	4	4.5
complaining	4	4.5

Many teachers did not understand the concept of a speech act, as evidenced by the fact that 32.6% of all teachers were unable to mention any speech acts, and 34.9% of all teachers provided either inaccurate or irrelevant answers. The following are examples of some of these responses:

1. “Skills in communication”
2. “Demonstrating command of the language when speaking”
3. “Use of tenses in a correct way to demonstrate the ability to speak, listen, and write in English”
4. “The use of correct grammar to speak using a variety of vocabulary”
5. “To introduce yourself”
6. “To comprehend the language”
7. “Practicing the language”

One of the teachers stated that he was familiar with the concept of speech acts but was unable to name any or provide an example. The findings indicate that many teachers have inadequate knowledge of pragmatics, particularly speech acts.

Discussion

This study investigated EFL public school teachers in Saudi Arabia for their pragmatic awareness, which seems to be disregarded in efforts to comprehend the components of learners’ communicative capacity. Specifically, this study focuses on answering three research questions.

The first study question examined the respondents’ pragmatics knowledge and their pragmatic competence assessment. In general, Saudi EFL teachers consider pragmatics crucial in learning a second language and the extent to which they really practice teaching pragmatics. Most teachers demonstrated a high degree of awareness in almost all items. The results reveal that, although 32 participants said that they were unfamiliar with pragmatic competence and were, therefore,

excluded from the study, the notion of pragmatics is still evident to some language teachers. The teachers reported that language learners need a solid pragmatic foundation and that pragmatics should be incorporated into language education programs and language testing. They also believe that politeness is essential and culture-specific and that it is crucial for English-speaking learners to learn politeness rules. Teachers reported on teaching pragmatic competence and appropriateness to their students. Although teachers stated that they did not handle students' pragmatic mistakes systematically, most believed that their students were sensitive to aggressive speech.

This is consistent with Ivanova's (2018) findings, which show that, despite some gaps in their knowledge in the field, most teachers believe that pragmatics is essential for language learners and should be instructed and assessed as part of any effective English teaching, that politeness is an essential culturally unique part of pragmatics, and that pupils should be aware of the target language's politeness standards. Other researchers, such as Glaser (2020) and Korkmaz and Karatepe (2023), found that teachers have an understanding of pragmatics.

The second study question determined how teachers' responses differed by gender and qualifications. The statistical analysis of the teachers' qualifications (bachelor's, master's, degrees) and gender (male and female) did not reveal significant differences between the groups. These findings contradict those of Usuludin et al. (2021) and Chen (2017), who investigated gender differences in pragmatic competence and found significant differences between male and female learners.

Although the difference was not statistically significant in the current study, females were found to outperform their male counterparts. The results are in line with those of Almegren (2022), who investigated learners' gender differences in the Saudi context and reported that females scored higher in two parts of the pragmatic competence instrument. However, the statistical analysis revealed no significant gender differences.

There was a slight increase in the mean scores for the importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning in the view of the teachers, indicating that as teachers advanced in their academic studies, they acknowledged the value of pragmatics in teaching and learning. This is consistent with Tajeddin and Khodaparast's (2020) study, which indicated that the mean scores on the pragmatic awareness questionnaire for less and more experienced instructors were not statistically significant. However, a lack of essential preparation and sufficient pragmatic input in teacher education and training may explain why the findings did not show a significant difference between teachers with different qualifications.

For the third study question, although many teachers did not respond or their responses were irrelevant or incorrect, most correct speech acts reported by

teachers were directive and expressive, and the most common one was request, followed by apologies. Promise and assertion were the least mentioned. This is in partial agreement with Ivanova's (2018) study, in which teachers struggled to name speech acts, but provided appropriate examples of requests, refusals, and apologies. As Ivanova (2018) explained, requests, refusals, and apologies are speech acts taught in schools and included in course books.

Conclusion

The pragmatic competence of Saudi Arabian teachers in public schools is an understudied area of the literature that needs to be explored to better target and personalize pragmatic instruction and to understand EFL learners' communicative competence.

Examining pragmatic awareness and the effect of gender and qualifications among EFL Saudi teachers, the findings from our admittedly small sample suggest that although the concept of pragmatics remains hazy for some teachers, most teachers demonstrated a relatively high level of awareness in almost all of the items and that teacher degrees (bachelor's and master's degrees) and gender (males and females) had no significant effect on pragmatic awareness, with female teachers having slightly higher pragmatic awareness than male teachers and master's degree holders having a slightly higher pragmatic awareness than bachelor's degree holders. Although some teachers did not respond or provided irrelevant or incorrect examples of speech acts, most correct speech acts reported by teachers were directive and expressive, with requests being the most common and apologies being the least common. This implies that while individual characteristics such as gender and degree have no significant impact on awareness, teachers should be aware of their own pragmatic competence to improve learners' pragmatic competence. Teachers should use materials and various teaching resources to make English classes more effective to raise learners' awareness of the importance of pragmatic knowledge. Exam questions should be designed to assess students' pragmatic competence. Educational leaders, as well as policy and professional development decision-makers, should take steps to improve EFL learners' pragmatic awareness and communicative competence through more engaging teaching methodologies and appropriate assessment methods.

Future research on EFL teachers' pragmatic competence should aim to provide a clearer picture of how teachers can raise learners' pragmatic awareness. Furthermore, while this study assessed EFL teachers' pragmatic awareness by asking them about their perceptions and the speech acts they were familiar with, observational studies are needed in this context to gain a better understanding of teachers' actual awareness and teaching practices. Given the importance of teachers in the EFL context, future research should examine other teacher-

related factors that may influence students' pragmatic competence, such as years of teaching experience, motivation, and pragmatic knowledge.

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