The barefoot shoemaker's son: examining EFL teachers' pragmatic competence in a Saudi context

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Abstract

Purpose – English instructors' pragmatic competence (PC) is an aspect of the overall communicative competence forming the basis of language instructors' knowledge. Their knowledge of pragmatics should not be overlooked when seeking to understand foreign language learners' communicative ability. This study aims to investigate the pragmatic awareness and teaching practices of non-native EFL instructors with different qualifications and from various cultural backgrounds in Saudi Arabia.

Design/methodology/approach – To obtain a broader perspective, this study adopted a quantitative research design. An online questionnaire, developed from Ivanova (2018) and Tulgar (2016), was accessed by 320 instructors at one English teaching institute in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information about participants and 12 closed Likert-type questions.

Findings – The data analysis showed that most of the language instructors were aware of PC. However, some variations were evident in their views of the importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning and in their actual pragmatic teaching practices.

Originality/value – This study emphasizes the importance of pragmatic awareness for EFL instructors. It indicates that while non-native English instructors' academic levels and cumulative experience in teaching English play a major role in teaching, instructors have several challenges in teaching pragmatics and promoting students' awareness of pragmatics in this context. For effective second language teaching of pragmatics, instructors, managers and policymakers need to recognize the importance of pragmatics and competencies that students need to develop in EFL contexts.

Keywords Pragmatic competence, EFL language instructors, EFL, Language learning

Paper type Research paper

Pragmatic competence (PC) is an essential element in second language learning. L2 PC of non-native English-speaking instructors is an aspect of the overall communicative competence forming the basis of language instructors' knowledge (Ishihara, 2011). Teaching English to ESL or EFL learners is intended to qualify them to communicate successfully in English. Researchers (Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Faerch *et al.*, 1984) have acknowledged the crucial components of learners' communicative ability, including linguistic competence, PC, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency. Hymes (1972, p. 278) defines communicative competence as ". . . rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." The vast majority of pragmatics studies have focused on issues related to learners' PC (e.g. Ekin and Damar, 2013; Fordyce and Fukazawa, 2004; House, 1996; Rose, 2005; Tanaka and Oki, 2015; Tulgar, 2017). However, there are only few studies of teachers' PC, especially in EFL contexts.

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Instruction in English is intended to enable the students to achieve communicative competence, but inadequate instruction in pragmatics for EFL learners may lead to poor communicative ability. Instructors in EFL contexts are the primary source of input for the target language. Non-native English-speaking instructors may have sufficient knowledge of grammar and lexicon, and some may be native-like in speech, but many of them have insufficient knowledge of pragmatics, especially compared to natives. Teaching English in Saudi Arabia is currently expanding. Presently, it is an essential component of the current education system from grade one to tertiary education, and for admission to some Saudi university programs, a student needs a high score in the locally administered test known as the Standardized Test of English Proficiency (STEP). English is also essentially necessary for many jobs in Saudi Arabia (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015). Although the new Saudi curriculum framework states that students should attain a high level of proficiency, graduates' communicative ability is not as high as expected (Alqahtani, 2019). The average scores of Saudi students on English Standardized Tests (e.g. TOEFL iBT) between 2012 and 2017 were much lower than in other Arabic-speaking countries (Al-Abiky, 2019). One reason might be an insufficient exposure to the English language, especially its communicative use. At the tertiary level, even though preparatory programs teach the four basic skills of English to enhance students' proficiency, they may still lack successful communication in English.

These competency deficiencies are due to many reasons. One of the reasons for learners' incompetent communicative ability can be the lack of pragmatics knowledge among incompetent teachers, especially in an EFL context, where most teachers are non-native speakers. EFL instructors and their preparation are the reasons for students' consistent low performance in English (Al-Abiky, 2019), especially instructors' inadequate PC. Many studies have shown that EFL teachers may lack pragmatic knowledge (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh and Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Glaser, 2020; Hussein and Albakri, 2019; Ivanova, 2018). When English is taught by non-native English speakers in an EFL context, teachers' awareness of pragmatics is crucial, as they can facilitate students' learning and their development of L2 pragmatics. It has been indicated that instruction targeted at raising L2 learners' awareness has a positive impact (Bardovi-Harlig and Su, 2021; Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Kasper, 1997; Koike and Pearson, 2005). However, this is overlooked in an EFL context, such as in Saudi Arabia, where most of the instructors are non-native English speakers, coming to the Kingdom from different cultural backgrounds.

Teachers' knowledge of pragmatics should not be overlooked when we want to understand learners' communicative ability. Therefore, this study mainly investigates the pragmatic awareness of non-native EFL teachers. This study aims to shed light on teachers' awareness of pragmatics and answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What evidence is there that non-native English teachers are familiar with pragmatics?

RQ2. To what extent do they consider pragmatics important in second language learning?

RQ3. To what extent do they practice teaching pragmatics?

This study is the first step of a larger project that will examine the PC among non-native EFL instructors in the Saudi context from different perspectives. This part of the study primarily focuses on the quantitative data in the analysis, examining instructors' knowledge and understanding of PC in an EFL context. Then, the study qualitatively analyzes the cultural backgrounds and demographic descriptions of participants, as well as the correlation between participants' backgrounds and their understanding and practice of PC.

Literature review

Background

Second language teaching's ultimate goal is to assist learners in achieving communicative ability in the target language. There is consensus among researchers that the ability to communicate successfully in the second language is contingent not only on assisting learners to acquire lexical features of the target language (e.g. phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) but also on helping learners to use the target language in its social context (i.e. pragmatics). Harlow (1990, p. 348) states that, "[f]inally, and most importantly, both teachers and textbooks alike need to emphasis to the learner that language is composed of not just linguistic and lexical elements; rather, language reflects also the social context, taking into account situational and social factors present in the act of communication." Regarding the latter, previous studies focused on defining the meaning of pragmatic ability for second language learners. In many studies, the concept of pragmatic ability for L2 learners is explained as communicative competence. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of "communicative competence" that includes linguistic proficiency and also contextual or sociolinguistic competence.

Consequently, theoretical models identifying the constituents of communicative competence have been suggested and developed by several researchers (see Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale and Swain, 1980). Two primary competencies have always been emphasized: using the language appropriately and language knowledge, including linguistic proficiency and PC (Niezgoda and Röver, 2001; Taguchi, 2011). Several researchers (e.g. Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Faerch *et al.*, 1984) have identified several components, including linguistic competence, PC, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency.

In their well-known attempt to define the constituents of PC, Canale and Swain (1980) stated four aspects of PC, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. In Bachman's (1990) model of language competence, PC is a principal component, including the ability to use the language for various functions and to interpret the speakers' intention for their utterance according to the socio-cultural settings of their usage. Taguchi (2011) expressed that the meaning of pragmatics is what we can find in the connection between the second language users' appraisal of the specific situation (sociopragmatics) and their accessible linguistics resources (pragmalinguistics).

Research on interlanguage pragmatics has various focuses on specific topics concerning learners' pragmatic ability. For more than two decades, diverse and extensive research has been conducted to investigate the pragmatic ability of non-native English speakers (Kasper and Rose, 2002). A body of research on the pragmatic production and comprehension of non-native English speakers has been developed, and several variables have been shown to contribute to a variety of L2 learners' outcomes (e.g. Al Masaeed *et al.*, 2020; Röver, 2012; Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019; Tai and Chen, 2021; Zand-Moghadam and Samani, 2021). Crystal (2008, p. 379) defines pragmatics as "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." However, while this field has been covered by research on learners, studies of language instructors' knowledge of pragmatics are very rare.

Teachers' role in pragmatic competence

In an EFL context, teachers are the primary source of input. It has been argued that the language used by teachers in the classroom is essential for classroom organization and management and the acquisition process (Nunan, 1995). To achieve adequate instruction of pragmatics and communicative competence for the EFL learners, teachers need to have some

knowledge bases. Knowledge of pragmatics is viewed as a requisite element of the knowledge base for language teachers (Ishihara, 2011). Some qualifications for effective teachers of second language pragmatics have been stated to include their knowledge of pragmatics in terms of pragmatic awareness of norms and variation, their knowledge of pedagogical content in terms of their ability to deliver pragmatically attentive teaching and assessment and their knowledge of their leaners and the context in terms of being sensitive to their learners' culture and subjectivity (Ishihara, 2011; Kasper, 1997; Yates and Wigglesworth, 2005). This has led researchers to suggest that teachers' education programs should include pragmatics (e.g. Kasper, 1997, p. 113).

Similarly, studies show that instruction planned to raise learners' pragmatic awareness can positively enhance second language learners' PC, elaborating on features of pragmatics that can be taught implicitly or explicitly and the type of pragmatic knowledge involved in second language learning (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; House, 1996; Kasper, 1997; Koike and Pearson, 2005; Rose, 2005).

In light of these issues, researchers have recently attempted to investigate teachers' pragmatic awareness, especially in contexts where exposure to the target language is limited and instructor-dependent. Investigating 30 teacher trainees' awareness of pragmatic features and presenting a pragmatically focused lesson, Ekin and Damar (2013) used a discourse completion task, in addition to the reflection papers done by the teacher trainees, and interviewed a small number of participants. They found that trainee teachers in general had an awareness of the theoretical knowledge of pragmatics but did not perform well when practicing teaching some pragmatic features. This can be attributed to their lack of experience and the context in which the study was conducted.

Oda-Sheehan (2017) interviewed two experienced female Japanese EFL teachers in their 50s to elicit their perceptions about teaching grammar and communication, including pragmatic aspects and how their perceptions support their teaching practice. It was found that even though the two female teachers had not learned about pragmatics in their school, they perceived pragmatics as an indispensable factor in communication and that the integration of both grammar and communication, including pragmatic aspects, is probable in teaching and learning.

More recently, Ivanova (2018) surveyed 30 teachers of English working at secondary schools in an EFL context to determine their pragmatics awareness and its role in language teaching and learning. Unlike the previously mentioned research by Ekin and Damar (2013) and Oda-Sheehan (2017), Ivanova (2018) employed a comprehensive survey that included some open-ended questions about different aspects of pragmatics and Likert-scale items containing statements to which the participants agreed or disagreed. The findings indicate that although most of the teachers showed some extent of pragmatic awareness and agreed that while PC is central for learners to be taught and tested, 43% of the teachers were not able to name any speech acts.

Similarly, Tulgar (2017) conducted a study of 50 faculty members' perspectives on teaching and assessing PC in an EFL context. Data were collected by a questionnaire eliciting demographic information and evaluating the participants' perceptions of PC and their ideas on teaching PC. Tulgar (2017) analyzed the data regarding age, gender, academic degree and teaching experience. The findings show no statistical significance among participants in three variables concerning their views of the value of teaching and assessing PC in a foreign language context.

In a recent study conducted by Tajeddin et al. (2018), non-native Iranian teachers were asked about their perceptions of idealized native-speaker linguistic norms and pragmatic norms for communication in English within an international language context. A total of 125 teachers completed an 18-item questionnaire and 22 of the teachers were interviewed, yielding varied results. The EFL teachers tended to follow native-speaker patterns

concerning linguistic norms, but concerning the pragmatic strategies, they seemed to adjust to either native or non-native English varieties depending on the need.

Glaser (2020) employed a judgmental task to investigate the pragmatic awareness of 84 prospective EFL language teachers in Germany using a different research instrument. The task has 15 situations examining learners' ability to recognize and repair pragmatic and grammatical infelicities. The results showed that learners could spot the pragmatic problems, but they struggled to adequately repair them.

In a recent study conducted in Saudi Arabia, Al-Qahtani (2020) completed a mixed-method research study on teaching PC investigating the importance of teaching PC in English; how Saudi EFL teachers implement features of PC in their teaching; and the difficulties they encounter. A total of 160 Saudi EFL teachers in public schools participated in the study, which employed a PC questionnaire, instructed classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that while there was a gap in adequate input regarding PC, there was a noticeable implementation of teaching pragmatics. The study also showed that teachers face different challenges and constraints when teaching pragmatics. There is also a need for training programs to strengthen teachers' skills dealing with PC teaching activities.

In addition to a paucity of EFL pragmatic awareness, there is a lack of research on non-native English-speaking teachers. It appears, then, that there is a limited literature on EFL teachers' pragmatic awareness and that the research in the field is context-dependent. The environment in which teachers perform their duties can vary from one context to the other. There is no consensus in the research on the tools used to investigate this issue. In light of these issues, this study attempts to investigate the PC of teachers in Saudi Arabia in a context that has not been fully explored in the literature. Unlike previous studies, a larger sample of participants come from different cultural backgrounds and work as English instructors.

Methodology
The study used a quantitative research approach to answer the three aforementioned research questions. This is a suitable and reliable approach considering the nature of the research questions, its instrument, the number of participants and the need to explore relationships between the variables. The research instrument consisted of an online questionnaire accessed by respondents at the English education institute of a government university in Saudi Arabia, where many non-native teachers with varied years of experience are expected to develop students' linguistic and interaction skills in English and provide the students with comprehensive knowledge of the English language, its literature, linguistics and translation skills.

For this study, a questionnaire was developed from Ivanova (2018) and Tulgar (2016). Before the study, the ethical procedures of the university were followed. A first draft of the developed questionnaire was piloted and given to three non-native English instructors working in the department of English within the university to ensure the clarity of the questionnaire and that the language used was understandable. The final version of the online questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, demographic information about participants was collected, including their age, gender, degree, teaching experience and length of living or studying in an English-speaking country. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 12 closed Likert-type questions and space at the end of the questionnaire for additional comments about the research area or any items. The items were designed to identify the participants' awareness and perception of PC in teaching.

Following information describing the purpose of the research, alongside the link to the online questionnaire, a definition of PC was provided. Despite these measures, some respondents stated that they were unaware of PC. Therefore, 39 respondents had to be

eliminated from analysis. Some English language teachers felt that they were not qualified to complete the questionnaire, perhaps evidencing the still vague nature of PC as a concept.

This study focused on the PC of non-native EFL instructors at a four-year college program designed to develop students' command of English linguistic and interaction skills and to provide students with comprehensive knowledge in the English language, its literature, linguistics and translation. The researcher chose to focus on this group of teachers at this educational level, as these students have reached an intermediate level of English learning, having fulfilled the English language admission requirement, and need to gain PC in L2 as a part of their learning outcome expectations.

After data cleaning, the responses of 281 non-native English instructors of different genders from different cultural backgrounds were analyzed. Participants varied in their age, gender, academic degree and teaching experience (Table 1). The numerical data were then entered into SPSS version 23.

This study was conducted at a large language institute that supervises English teaching courses to the university's entire student population. The large number of instructors who participated gave the researcher a comprehensive understanding of how these instructors view PC and its significance in teaching the English language. As explained in Table 1, 138 of these instructors are male and 148 female; 85 are PhD holders; and 180 are MAs and language instructors. A majority of the instructors are international faculty coming from countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan, Egypt and Yemen. There are also a number of Saudi instructors, but they make up only about 20% of the study population.

The responses were analyzed by categorizing them under the three research questions. A Cronbach's alpha analysis of the questionnaire items yielded a reliability measure of 0.88, which is reasonable, given the respondents' diverse backgrounds. The 320 respondents were teachers from different countries.

Results

What evidence is there that non-native English teachers are familiar with pragmatics?
The first research question explores the extent to which respondents were familiar with pragmatics by asking them about their familiarity with the concept and their evaluation of their PC.

As we can see from Table 2, nearly 12% of teachers were not familiar with the concept of pragmatics or were unsure what it is. Many of them believe that they do not need to know the concept of pragmatics to teach English as a foreign language. However, nearly 88% of the

Variables		Frequency	Valid percent
Gender	Female	143	50.9
	Male	138	49.1
Degree	Bachelor	16	5.7
	MA	180	64.1
	PhD	85	30.2
Age	30 or younger	28	10.0
	31–39	90	32.0
	40–49	109	38.8
	50 or older	54	19.2
Teaching experience	1–9 years	74	26.3
	10–20 years	153	54.4
	More than 20 years	54	19.2

Table 1.
Participants'
information

teachers reported familiarity with the concept, though some commented that they perceived their knowledge to be insufficient. For example, one respondent stated:

> Unfortunately, even for us as L2 educators, we lack sufficient knowledge about pragmatic competence and its role or value in language learning. A framework for instruction for this purpose (not only for assessment) should be developed.

The next question was about their evaluation of their own PC. Therefore, teachers were asked whether they evaluate their own PC as good (Table 3). About 14% of respondents reported that they did not evaluate their PC as good or were unsure if it was good. For example, one respondent elaborated on this matter as follows:

> I really wanted to help—I just do not know what pragmatics is or pragmatic competence is. Even though there was a short definition at the beginning, I wished there were more detailed [statements].

To what extent do they consider pragmatics important in second language learning, and to what extent do they practice teaching pragmatics?
The second research question deals with the teachers' perceptions about the importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning. As we can see in Table 4, we investigated this issue using five items.

Overwhelmingly, respondents answered positively about the importance of PC, with a small number claiming that PC was not important or that they were unsure about its importance, and this pattern was repeated fairly closely for all the items. This study further explored this issue by cross-comparing the different academic levels of respondents (PhD holders, master's degree and bachelor's degree) and their length of experience teaching English. A one-way ANOVA with "academic group" as the independent variable showed no significant differences except for item number 3. PhD holders considered linguistic competence alone to be insufficient for effective communication in the target language ($F = 6.09$; df = 278; $p < 0.003$) than master's degree holders ($M = 4.16$) or bachelor's degree holders ($M = 3.63$). We return to these findings in our discussion.

However, a one-way ANOVA with "length of experience of teaching English group" (1–9 years; 10–20 years; more than 20 years) as an independent variable produced two significant differences. First, more of those with more than 20 years of teaching experience

Respondents answers	Frequency	Valid percent
No	10	3.13
Yes	281	87.81
Not sure	29	9.06
Total	320	100

Table 2.
Teachers' pragmatic competence familiarity

Note(s): Respondents answered this question: Are you familiar with the concept of pragmatics?

Respondents answers	Frequency	Valid percent
No	11	3.4
Yes	275	85.9
Not sure	34	10.6
Total	320	100

Table 3.
Teachers' self-evaluation of pragmatic competence

Note(s): Respondents answered this statement: I evaluate my own pragmatic competence as very good)

Item	SD		D		NS		A		SA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
PC is important for language learners	2	0.71	0	0	4	1.42	121	43.0	154	54.80
The instruction of PC should be part of effective language teaching program	1	0.36	2	0.71	15	5.34	131	46.62	132	46.98
Linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for effective communication in the target language	2	0.71	8	2.85	32	11.39	132	46.98	107	38.08
Linguistic competence and PC are the two components of successful foreign language learning	1	0.36	4	1.42	20	7.12	120	42.71	136	48.40
Since foreign language education is about teaching students how to communicate in a target language, the culture of that language should be taught in the classroom	1	0.36	18	6.41	56	19.93	122	43.42	84	29.89

Note(s): Total number of participants in this analysis were 281 as 39 participants who were not sure about the concept of pragmatic competence were eliminated from this analysis; item = items in the questionnaire; SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = number of respondents; % = the percentage of responses; PC = Pragmatic Competence

($M = 4.33$) considered linguistic competence alone not sufficient for effective communication in the target language ($F = 6.67$; df $= 278$; $p < 0.001$) than of those who had been teaching English for less than 10 years or more ($M = 3.91$). Second, for linguistic competence and PC as two components of successful foreign language learning, those with more than 20 years of experience teaching English ($M = 4.52$) considered it more important ($F = 4.39$; df $= 278$; $p < 0.01$) than those who had been teaching English for less than 10 years ($M = 4.18$) or more than 10 and less than 20 years ($M = 4.42$). We return to these findings in our discussion.

To what extent do they practice teaching pragmatics?

The third research question deals with teachers' pragmatic teaching practices. As we can see in Table 5, we asked this question using five items.

To probe non-native English teachers' pragmatic teaching practices further, a series of questions relating to teachers' efforts inside the classroom were asked. Teachers were first asked if they found it challenging to develop learners' pragmatic competence because of the limited exposure to English use and its culture. Roughly two-thirds of the teachers (about 66%) agreed with this statement, suggesting a possible overall challenge in teaching pragmatics in non-native English contexts. When teachers were asked about the efforts they make in the classroom to elevate learners' pragmatic awareness, they overwhelmingly responded positively, with a small number claiming that they do not do much when it comes to pragmatic teaching. There was a similar pattern shown for three other statements (2, 3 and 4). However, when asked about their overall pragmatic teaching, almost half of the teachers (49.82%) responded that, although many efforts to teach pragmatics were reported, there is insufficient pragmatic teaching in their English classrooms.

Given that our sample had teachers with different academic levels and teaching experiences, non-native English teachers' pragmatic teaching practices were further explored by comparing the respondents' different academic-level groups (PhD holders, master's degree holders and bachelor's degree holders) and their length of English teaching experience. A one-way ANOVA with "academic group" as the independent variable showed no significant differences except for item number 3, for which PhD holders ($M = 4.12$) draw their students'

Item	SD		D		NS		A		SA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I find it challenging to develop my students' English pragmatic competence because they are not exposed to English language use and English culture	5	1.78	37	13.17	53	18.87	130	46.27	56	19.93
I make my students aware of the significance of pragmatic competence in language learning	1	0.36	6	2.14	41	14.59	135	48.04	98	34.88
I draw my students' attention to pragmatic appropriateness	1	0.36	6	2.14	43	15.30	144	51.25	87	30.96
I correct learners' pragmatic error systematically	1	0.36	13	4.63	58	20.64	140	49.82	69	24.56
In general, there is insufficient pragmatic teaching in my English classroom	16	5.69	48	17.08	77	27.40	107	38.08	33	11.74

Table 5.
Teachers' pragmatic teaching practices (N = 281)

Note(s): Total number of participants in this analysis were 281 as 39 participants who were not sure about the concept of pragmatic competence were eliminated from this analysis; item = items in the questionnaire; SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = number of respondents; % = the percentage of responses; PC = Pragmatic Competence

attention to pragmatic appropriateness ($F = 4.485$; df = 278; $p < 0.01$) more than bachelor's degree holders do ($M = 3.56$). A one-way ANOVA with "length of experience of teaching English group" (1–9 years; 10–20 years; more than 20 years) as an independent variable showed the following significant differences: (1) those who had been teaching for 10–20 years ($M = 4.05$) considered correcting learners' pragmatic errors systematically ($F = 4.087$; df = 278; $p < 0.02$) more than those who had been teaching for more than 20 years ($M = 3.89$); (2) regarding developing students' PC, those with more than 20 years of experience ($M = 3.96$) found it more challenging ($F = 4.68$; df = 278; $p < 0.01$) than those who had been teaching for less than 10 years (3.82) or between 10 and 20 years ($M = 3.54$).

Discussion

This study investigated non-native teacher's pragmatic awareness, which seems to be overlooked in attempts to understand aspects of learners' communicative ability in higher education. The first research question concerned respondents' familiarity with pragmatics and their self-evaluation of their PC. The findings suggest that even though the concept of pragmatics is still vague to some extent for some language instructors, non-native English teachers are aware of the concept. While a lower percentage of language instructors who were unaware of the concept of pragmatics is to be expected as the research sample is diverse, consisting of instructors holding different academic degrees and having different teaching experiences and training, the importance of some basic knowledge of pragmatics for instructors goes without saying (Ishihara, 2011; Kasper, 1997; Yates and Wigglesworth, 2005). Generally, this supports the findings of earlier studies carried out in different contexts, such as Ekin and Damar (2013), who found that EFL trainee teachers generally had an awareness of the theoretical knowledge of pragmatics.

The second research question revealed the EFL teachers' perception of the importance of pragmatics in second language learning and teaching. The results indicate that most respondents considered pragmatics in teaching and learning important, although this perception of the importance declined with the academic qualification and experience in

teaching English. PhD holders considered linguistic competence alone to be insufficient for effective communication in the target language more than master's or bachelor's degrees holders did. Furthermore, more experienced teachers (more than 20 years) considered linguistic competence alone insufficient for effective communication in the target language and viewed linguistic and PC as two components of successful foreign language learning more than did those with less teaching experience (less than 10 years). The results are not entirely consistent with Tulgar (2017), who found that neither in teaching experience nor in academic degree showed statistically significant differences in faculty members' viewpoints about the value of pragmatic knowledge and competence in foreign language education. However, other studies, for example, Oda-Sheehan (2017), showed that experienced EFL teachers perceived pragmatics as an indispensable factor in communication. The data contributes a clearer understanding of Canale and Swain's (1980) model that posits four aspects of PC: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies.

Although the academic degree of instructors in this research (bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees) did not reveal significant differences between the three groups in the other items, there was an increase within the mean scores in terms of instructions' envisaged importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning, such that the more the instructors furthered their academic studies, the more they realized the importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning.

The length of teaching English also seems to matter in the perception of the importance of pragmatics for successful foreign language learning and in being a central component besides linguistic competence. Further education for language educators can bring about constructive changes in teaching PC, as instructors' horizons expand regarding the important different aspects of language education.

Regarding the teaching experience variable, the outcomes of this study suggest that an awareness of pragmatics and its importance in English learning and teaching develops over time. When language teachers start their careers, their knowledge of students' needs is unknown, especially in a new context. They attempt to adapt to the new context and apply what they feel comfortable doing, but after a certain amount of time, they may realize that certain aspects of language education are essential and should be the focus of their instruction. This can stem from the fact that most instructors have English as the *lingua franc* with students, and incidents of misunderstanding may be evident in their daily communication with students. The more experienced instructors are, the more they realize what learners need to be successful language users. It can be the case that instructors know what pragmatics is and how language learning occurs successfully, but they lack the activation of that knowledge in reality. This is an instance where language teaching experience matters in the knowledge and practice of teaching pragmatics.

Regarding the third research question about non-native English teachers' pragmatic teaching practices, the results indicate an overall challenge in teaching pragmatics in non-native English contexts, with insufficient pragmatic teaching in the English classrooms. However, teachers are making efforts to elevate the learners' pragmatic awareness. Comparing the respondents' different academic degree groups (PhD, master's and bachelor's degrees holders) shows statistically significant differences for PhD holders, who draw their students' attention to pragmatic appropriateness. Comparing the "length of experience of teaching English group" (1–9 years; 10–20 years; and more than 20 years), the results show statistically significant differences in two items; teachers who had been teaching for 10–20 years considered correcting learners' pragmatic errors systematically and teachers with more than 20 years of experience found it challenging to develop students' pragmatic competence. In other words, instructors' efforts and pragmatics teaching practices seem challenging in the study context because of the limited exposure to English. However, although studies in this area are limited, non-native instructors in other EFL contexts have

been reported not to perform well in adequately repairing pragmatic problems (Glaser, 2020) or teaching some pragmatic features (Ekin and Damar, 2013).

The study results are in line with those of Al-Qahtani (2020), which was conducted in the Saudi context and found a noticeable implementation of teaching pragmatics in public schools. However, there was a gap in adequate input regarding pragmatic competence, and teachers faced different challenges and constraints when teaching pragmatics.

In Saudi Arabia, students are exposed to English mainly in their classrooms, which can be insufficient to enhance their pragmatic skills. Besides their textbooks and study materials, they depend on their instructors to receive their pragmatic knowledge. While instructors make efforts to teach pragmatics to their students, there is insufficient pragmatic teaching in their English classrooms, and their course plans do not emphasize teaching pragmatics. Again, instructors with higher academic degrees seem to draw their students' attention to the pragmatic appropriateness. It could be the case that the more knowledgeable an instructor is, the more they try to perform in terms of exposing students to the appropriate pragmatic forms. Teaching experience also plays a role in instructors' efforts to systematically correct students' pragmatic errors. However, teaching experience of more than 20 years seems not to be statistically significant in systematically correcting errors. This can be attributed to the fact that more experienced instructors believe that emphasis should not be placed on correcting errors but on getting students to the correct/appropriate form. While this approach can help learners attain pragmatic competence, the deductive approach can develop the learners' sociopragmatic proficiency (Rose and Kwai-fun, 2001). According to Ivanova (2018), teachers found it challenging to systematically treat learners' pragmatic errors.

In this study, instructors are expected to follow the guidelines sent to them by the concerned curricula committee or the higher administration at the institution detailing the course learning objectives and its content and distribution over the semester. Although the course content may have some pragmatics materials, those guideline documents do not emphasize or state clearly that a particular item(s) in the course plan aims to upskill the students' PC. This may lead instructors to receive these already-prescribed materials and teach them without paying attention to the outcome related to enhancing the students' pragmatic ability. Therefore, it is crucial to keep instructors aware of the principles underlying the course learning outcomes, including, but not limited to, pragmatics. As an instructor, it can feel satisfying to follow the prescribed daily teaching routines, but this is not all that matters. Another essential point is the feedback that teachers should receive when teaching pragmatics and the discussion groups that should be established to talk about the best approaches that sufficiently benefit their learners. Without these, we may not know what works and what does not, even if we have sufficient knowledge in pragmatics.

This study has some limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, this study focused on only one institution in Saudi Arabia, but the results could vary in other teaching contexts where policies and recruitment procedures differ. Second, this study participants' gender, degree, country and cultural backgrounds were not analyzed, and future studies can shed light on these issues.

Conclusions

There has been little research on EFL instructors' pragmatic awareness, especially in a culturally rich and diverse context like Saudi Arabia. While most of this study's respondents are familiar with the concept of PC, there have been some variations in their views of the importance of pragmatics in teaching and learning and their pragmatics teaching practices. This is due to the instructors' academic degrees and their cumulative experience in teaching English. Non-native English instructors face several challenges in teaching pragmatics and promoting students' awareness of pragmatics in the EFL context. This is a context where the

classroom may be the only available setting to practice aspects of pragmatics. However, they will likely improve their practices when given more space to develop pragmatic-related materials and guidelines emphasizing pragmatics. EFL instructors must adapt proper materials to provide learners with effective pragmatics instruction due to the shortcomings of textbooks that are concerned with the presentation and instruction of pragmatic language (Karatepe and Civelek, 2021).

Instructors, managers and policymakers must clearly understand the importance of pragmatics and the kinds of competencies that students need. It is also essential that teaching materials be adequately resourced and that instructors be appropriately instructed on the importance of elevating students' pragmatic awareness and its importance in L2 communication. Having weekly discussion meetings on ways to improve pragmatic teaching practices could be one of the tasks that can be implemented by the educational institution's competent body to improve the teaching practices and the overall outcome of students' ability to communicate in English. For effective second language teaching of pragmatics, English language institutions, especially in the EFL contexts, should invest in equipping instructors with the necessary knowledge and skills.

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Appendix

I developed the questionnaire from both Ivanova's (2018) and Tulgar's (2016) questionnaires, selecting questions related to the topic of the research and focusing on PC in an EFL context.

Part one

(1) Name (optional)

(2) Email (provide your email if you accept to be interviewed).

(3) Age

- 30 or younger
- 31–39
- 40–49
- 50 or older

(4) Gender

- Male
- Female

(5) Degree

- Bachelor

- MA
- PhD

(6) Country in which you studied your latest qualification

(7) Native language

(8) Length of residence in an English-speaking country, if any (number of years)

(9) Years of teaching English

- 1–9 years
- 10–20 years
- More than 20 years

Part two

(10) Rate the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I am familiar with the concept of pragmatics					
I evaluate my own pragmatic competence as very good					
Pragmatic competence is important for language learners					
The instruction of Pragmatic competence should be part of effective language teaching program					
Linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for effective communication in the target language					
Since foreign language education is about teaching students how to communicate in a target language, the culture of that language should be taught in the classroom					
I find it challenging to develop my students' English pragmatic competence because they are not exposed to English language use and English culture					
I make my students aware of the significance of pragmatic competence in language learning					
I draw my students' attention to pragmatic appropriateness					
I correct learners' pragmatic error systematically					
In general, there is insufficient pragmatic teaching in my English classroom					

(11) Any comment.

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