THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE TELEGRAM-BASED INSTRUCTION IN THE ENHANCEMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN IRAQI EFL UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

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Abstract:
This paper addresses the role of collaborative instruction using a Telegram social media application on the enhancement of pragmatic competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Iraqi university context. A quasi-experimental study with a non-equivalent control group and a pre-test/post-test design has been adopted to find any substantial differences between the two groupings. The first group (N=45) was instructed using 5 to 1o minutes of pragmatics-based video tasks and materials from the Telegram group activities of the group members. At the same time, the second group (N=45) was instructed similarly implementing individual Telegram activities. Findings indicated that teaching pragmatics deploying a virtual classroom instruction model through the Telegram group is found to be more effective than the individual one. The results suggest that teaching pragmatics using a virtual classroom and technology through collaborative Telegram learning activities can serve as one of the appropriate alternatives to advance EFL learners' practical competence.
Key Words: Virtual Classroom; Technology; Collaborative Instruction; Telegram; Pragmatic Competence

1. Introduction:

With the emergence of technological networks in the 2000s, the technologies built upon Web 2.0 platforms that are known as social media, took a variety of kinds such as blogs, wikis, social networking services, and media technologies. Social media has unquestionably impinged into human exchanges a lot since they have significantly altered people's communicative habits (Reinhardt, 2019). Technology (or sometimes called electronic) devices and various applications such as Telegram, Moodle, Google classroom, WhatsApp, and e-mail have lately been increasingly recognized as crucial elements in the process of language teaching and learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Recently, educational institutions such as schools and universities have admitted the significance and positive effects of modern technologies since they are viewed as complementary instruments to assist the abilities of educators and learners' motivation towards their competences and métier (Chik & Ho, 2017). According to Rostami and Khodabandeh (2019), these developments in technology "resulted in intercultural and socio-pragmatic developments, raised people's awareness of social issues, and shaped language learners' identities" (p.70).

For example, with their specialized features, WhatsApp, Telegram, and email are found to have a positive effect on the enhancement of students' achievement in the skill of writing (AbdAlfattah, 2015; Alfaki & Alharthy, 2014). Therefore, utilizing technology has become a crucial demand in most EFl classes in different countries. Different computer-based tools and instruments have been adopted or adapted in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages. This phenomenon alsooccurs in both EFl and ESl teaching contexts. Social media has become one of these facilities that support both teachers and learners in what is called 'flipped classroom' or virtuallearning environment (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018; Arifani, 2019; Suranakkharin, 2017). According to Motteram (2013) and Zhu & Chen (2015), various technological aids have been suggested in such environments such as Email, Youtube, Skype, WhatsApp, Videotapes, Data-show presentations, wikis and the like. However, most contexts have limited proficiency in EFl rather than communicative or pragmatic competency. Thus, very few studies have tackled the impact of technologies on the enhancement of learners' pragmatic competence. More specifically, social media such as Telegram and WhatsApp have been rarely focused on, especially as far as the Iraqi academic EFl circle is concerned. For instance, computer-mediated communication (CMC) in its classical form has been the focus of study about pragmatics. Khoshsima, Toroujeni & Samani (2017) argue that this technology would possibly support learners' interlanguage pragmatics. In a previous study, Sykes (2005) attempted to scrutinize the possible link between CMC and Interlanguage Pragmatics and examined the connection between three types of synchronous group discussion (written chat, oral chat, and traditional face-to-face discussion) on how Fllearners of Spanish whose mother tongue was American English acquired the speech act of refusing the invitation. In Sykes' study, "the subjects were assigned to different synchronous group discussions and assess the effect of the modes of discussion using role-play".

In another study, Muzhir, Raheem & Ghani (2013) dea1t with the ro1e of videoconferencing (VC) in the deve1opment of pragmatic competence in the Iraqi EF1 context. Uti1izing a Discourse Comp1etion Test (DCT), it is remarkab1y conc1uded that VC 1earners proved more pragmatica11y competent than other 1earners and that VC is a very usefu1 too1of teaching pragmatic competence in EF1 contexts. In another context, Nobre (2018) high1ights the significance of techno1ogies in 1anguage 1earning environments because they enhance f1exibi1ity in 1earning, deve1op interactive strategies in students, motivate on1ine connections and reinforce continuous fo11ow-up and feedback (see Sharikhani, 2014; Kabooha & E1yas 2018). Simi1ar1y, it is proposed that e-1earning cou1d he1p students be se1f-confident since such communicative and techno1ogica1 too1s, especia11y those invo1ving videos require se1f-management and contro1. As Sa1es (2013) disc1oses, "this type of f1ipped c1ass encourages students to take responsibi1ity for their 1earning process when watching videos toorganize this process a11 by themse1ves". It can be a1so emphasized that techno1ogy can motivate and improve student-centered 1earning theories (Khoshsima, Toroujeni, & Samani, 2017). Thus, such too1s wi11 encourage se1f-assessment, autonomous 1earning, and peer-eva1uation with ease and benefit.

Arifani (2019) indicates that virtua1 c1asses are very effective, as shown by the monitoring process of co11aboration between EF11earners, whose scores were noted to be higher than the ones reached by students receiving individua1 instruction. However, "the principa1 aspect of co11aboration remains invisib1e, especia11y during the out-of-c1ass activity that cannot be optima11y monitored. Moreover, the chat history is not indicated, either" (Arifani et a1, 2020: 123). Hence, the current study is an attempt to investigate whether a virtua1 c1assroom mode1 invo1ving sma11 grouping via Te1egram used for interactive activities in sma11 co11aborative groups cou1d deve1op EF11earners' pragmatic competence more effective1y than individua1 group activities.

2. 1iterature Review:

2.1. Pragmatic Competence:

A1though the term "communicative competence" was introduced by Hymes in the 1960's (Hymes, 1964), communicative and socia1 competences were not under the spot of 1anguage teaching and 1earning unti1 the 1970's (Krisnawati, 2011, p. 105). Defining pragmatics is the key to understanding the meaning of pragmatic competence. Pragmatics is genera11y defined by different scho1ars in different ways; for examp1e, it is viewed as the study of 1anguage in use or 1anguage in context (1evinson, 1983; Kasper, 2001). Additiona11y, pragmatics is divided into two basic types: the first is 1inguistic pragmatics in which the focus of the study is on direct and indirect strategies of communication, and" then socio-pragmatics which dea1s with how aspects or notions such as socia1 power, distance, so1idarity, rank, and accommodation are re1ated to dai1y communication in a variety of socio-cu1tura1 contexts" (1eech, 1990). Types of competence vary a1ong with the different 1eve1s of 1inguistic apparatus in 1anguage. Cana1e and Swain (1980) c1assify communicative competence into four kinds: grammatica1 competence (which invo1ves the speaker's know1edge of syntax, morpho1ogy, phono1ogy, and semantics), socio1inguistic competence (which dea1s with the speaker's perception of appropriate 1anguage use), discourse competence (which invo1ves the achievement of cohesion and coherence in spoken and written texts), and strategic competence (which invo1ves the communicative steps used by speakers to make communication more fe1icitous or upbeat). Simi1ar1y, Chomsky (1980) defines pragmatic competence as the speaker's know1edge of the conditions and manners of the appropriate use of 1anguage. Afterward, Cana1e (1988), fo11owed by Bachman (199o) subdivides pragmatic competence into socio1inguistic competence and i11ocutionary competence which is concerned with the speaker's know1edge of the achievement of different kinds of speech acts (Byram, 1995). on the other hand, Bia1ystok (1993) considers discourse competence as a sub-kind of pragmatic competence since "he thinks that pragmatic abi1ity must contain ru1es with which parts of texts come together to create a coherent discourse".

Consequent1y, appropriateness is the basic aspect of the achievement of pragmatic competence, and it is the best way of improving the second 1anguage (S1) 1earning (Meier, 1992). Pragmatic competence re1ies on the activation of socio-cu1tura1 norms. Such norms are 1earned by S11earners at an advanced 1eve1of competence in S1 (Marowa-Hopkins &Strambi, 2005, p. 49). Schmidt (1993) proposes that there is no adherent re1ationship between the capacity of pragmatic competence and the acquisition of grammatica1 competence. This demonstrates that pragmatic know1edge can be a prerequisite for successfu1 communication, rather than grammar. Moreover, one can say that teaching pragmatic competence and strategies does not fu11y depend on grammar teaching. Therefore, pragmatic fai1ure is seen as more inf1uentia1 than a structura1one; Amaya (2008, p.12) argues that "pragmatic fai1ures affect the interpretation of messages and sometimes b1ock communication comp1ete1y".

2.2. Te1egram as a Virtua1 C1assroom:

Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, Arfstrom (2013), and Suranakkharin (2017) emphasized the ro1e of virtua1 c1assrooms in the enhancement of co11aborative 12 teaching and 1earning since it reinforces group discussion, dai1y activity, face-to-face communication among teachers and students. This is on the one hand among students, but on the other hand, it's different in contexts and for different academic aims and objectives. Such techno1ogy is supposed to improve or aid co11aborative 1earning in pragmatic competence contexts. As

proposed by Muslem, Mustafa, Usman & Rahman (2017), collaborative learning plays a crucial role in building the quality of learning that all learners deserve and gives them equal opportunities to acquire it. Collaborative learning can be defined as a set of teaching and learning strategies promoting student collaboration in different academic contexts (Arifani, 2019). It motivates the learners' inclination towards self and group evaluation, assessment, confidence, and interaction. However, few studies have dealt with the importance of Telegram in EFl contexts (Rostami and Khodabandeh, 2018). In their study, they focused on the stylistic differences between Telegram and email writing forms as far as students' activities were concerned." Therefore, more studies are needed to advance our understanding of such virtual technological social media applications in the process of teaching and learning".

3. The Present Study:
3.1. Research Question:
Since this study is intended to measure the effects of utilizing Telegram as a technology for collaborative learning to enhance pragmatic competence in Iraqi EFl university context, the following question is postured: Will there be any significant difference in the ability of EFl learners' pragmatic competence after the implementation of collaborative activities in Telegram as a virtual classroom?

3.2. Design of Study:
Arifani et al.'s (2019) model will be used here with some modifications to suit pragmatic goals. This quasi-experimental design is classified as quantitative, involving a non-equivalent control group and pre-test/post-test design. This study aims to find any significant difference in terms of mastery of pragmatic strategies between individual and collaborative Telegram groups. Two different quasi-designs were classified. The first cohort was categorized as a collaborative group. Each collaborative group was assigned collaborative pragmatic activities in their virtual classroom in Telegram. Each group consisted of 8 to 9 learners. The second one was attributed to their activities in an individual group. Each learner was assigned individual pragmatic activities in his or her Telegram. The instructional design for both groups is presented in Table 1 below.

3.3. Participants:
The population consists of three classes of undergraduate students. Two of the classes had been randomly selected as a sample of the study. To find the two homogeneous classes, the researchers had assessed the English scores reached by the learners using an English placement test designed by the Faculty. Thus, two classes were randomly selected and then divided into two groups. The first group of respondents, designated as "Collaborative group", was divided into sub-groups, and each group included 8 to 9 learners with a total of 45 respondent students (22 male, 23 female). However, the second group, designated as "Individual group", consists of 45 students (2o males, 25 females) who were assigned to install Telegram in their smartphones. The first and second groups were attributed to pragmatic activities as collaborative and individual activities in Telegram, respectively. Two tests, namely the pre-and post-test, were administered in the study. The researchers prepared a written pragmatics test for the pre-test and post-test (see Appendix). During the pre-test and the post-test activities, the learners' achievement scores were measured. The elements of pragmatics that were assessed involved speech acts, politeness strategies, implicature, deictic expressions, and presupposition. To address the issue of validity and reliability of research findings, the researchers evaluated the students' portfolio and examined their pragmatic competence development. Cohen's Kappa statistical analysis was implemented to measure inter-rater reliability. This ranged from -0.1 to + 1.0.

Subsequently, the collected data were evaluated and subdivided into three phases. In the first phase, the researchers adopted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test to establish the normality of the data distribution; then, a homogeneity test was deployed to determine the variance occurring in the data under scrutiny. In the second phase, the researchers measured the average score. The pre-test and post-test findings from both selected groups were analyzed to obtain the average score in each writing test. In the third step, a hypothesis test was performed utilizing a t-test.

Table 1: Summary of teaching pragmatics through Telegram

Stage	Collaborative group activities in Telegram		Individual group activities in Telegram
Stage 1: Introduction	1	Students are assigned to create Telegram groups consisting of 8 to 9 students in each group	Each student is assigned to create an individual Telegram.
	2	Pre-test for both groups	
	5 to 10 minutes of pragmatics-themed videos are prepared for each group.		5 to 10 minutes of pragmatics-themed videos are prepared for each student.
Stage 2: learning Materials	**They deal with:**		
	Speech acts, Politeness strategies; Implicature; Deictic expressions; Presupposition		
	1. Outside Class		**1. Outside Class**

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	(a) Each week the instructor sends a conversation video to the students' Te1egram groups.	(a) Each week, the instructor sends a conversation video to each student's Te1egram.
	(b) Discuss the pragmatic strategies video from their Te1egram group.	(b) Each week, every student watches and studies the video individua11y.
	(c) Each co11aborative group watches and discusses notions or a strategy of pragmatic topics from their Te1egram group.	(c) Every student 1earns about the concept of each notion or a strategy of pragmatic topics individua11y.
	(d) Each week every group comp1etes 1o items of pragmatics exercises.	(d) Each week, every student comp1etes 1o items of pragmatics exercise.
	(e) Submit the exercise to the instructor's Te1egram each week.	(e) Each student submits the exercise to the instructor's Te1egram individua11y.
Stage 3: Te1egram imp1ementation (week 1 to 6)	**2. In C1ass (6o minutes)**	**2. In C1ass (6o minutes)**
	(a) Every week the co11aborative group ho1ds a c1assroom discussion and makes a presentation to c1arify the pragmatic notions and their re1ated exercises.	(a) Every week, a c1assroom discussion and an individua1 presentation are imp1emented to c1arify the pragmatic notions and their re1ated exercises. A random individua1 presentation se1ection is appointed.
	(b) The instructor provides feedback and comments.	(b) The instructor provides feedback and comments
Stage 4: week7	**Post-test**	**Post-test**

3.4. Resu1ts:

The resu1ts of norma1ity and homogeneity of co11aborative groups and individua1ones were statistica11y ca1cu1ated as shown in Tab1e 2.

Tab1e 2 Norma1ity tests between the two groups

Group	Ko1mogorov-Smirnov *			Shapiro-Wi1k		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Co11aborative Group (CG)	0.20	45	0.331	0.972	45	0.345
Individua1 Group (IG)	0.17	45	0.480	0.981	45	0.678

*Significant at $p < 0.o5$

Tab1e 2 revea1s the resu1ts of the norma1ity test derived from the co11aborative and individua1 groups. Since the resu1ts of the norma1ity test derived from the two groups are beyond A1pha 5% with p= 0.331 and p= 0.480, the data from both co11aborative group and individua1 group groups have been norma11y distributed. The resu1ts of the homogeneity test derived from the co11aborative group and individua1 group groups using the 1evene test indicate that the statistica1 computation amount was 2.641. The p-va1ue from the test was 0.107 at a 95% confidence 1eve1. Since the resu1t of the p-va1ue is bigger than the a1pha 1eve1 (5%), the data are convincing1y homogeneous.

Tab1e 3: Mean score comparison between the two groups

Gr0up	N	Mean ± std		
		Pre-test	P0st-test	Change
C011ab0rative Gr0up	45	43.08 ± 7.69	64.25 ± 9.71	21.17
Individua1 Gr0up	45	39.15 ± 9.05	52.76 ± 11.30	13.61
Difference		3.93	11.49	+ 7.56

As shown in Tab1e 3, the resu1ts of the pre-test and post-test mean score comparison between the co11aborative group and individua1 groups are presented. It was found that the 1earners from the co11aborative group reached a mean score of 43.08 in the pre-test with standard deviation (std) = 7.69 and the mean score of the post-test was 64.25 with std = 9.71. Converse1y, the 1earners who were taught in the individua1 group

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model reached a mean score of 39.15 with std = 9.05, and their mean score in the post-test amounted to 52.76 with std = 11.30. It is clear that collaborative activities in Telegram lead to increasing the score of the students by 7.56.

Table 4: Comparison of mean score between groups

Pragmatic Elements	Collaborative Group			Individual Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Speech acts	2.1	3.48	1.38	1.67	2.41	0.74
Politeness strategies	2.32	3.61	1.29	1.88	2.61	0.73
Implicature	2.49	3.31	0.82	2.21	2.68	0.47
Deictic expressions	2.34	3.6	1.26	1.57	2.91	1.34
Presupposition	1.6	2.82	1.22	1.26	1.43	0.17
Total score	10.85	16.82	5.97	8.59	12.04	3.45

Table 4 illustrates the mean scores of learners who were taught in the Collaborative Group (16.82) with a mean change score (5.97) that was higher than the mean scores of those learners who were taught in the Individual Group's (12.04) with a mean change score (3.45) in overall elements of pragmatics obtained namely speech acts, politeness strategies, implicature, deictic expressions, and presupposition. It could be said that both collaborative and individual groups' pragmatic score gains increased from the pre-and post-test. Although both collaborative and individual groups attained their positive score improvement, the score gain of the collaborative group was higher than those individualones. This may serve to illustrate that the EFLlearners' mastery of pragmatic strategies could be fostered by implementing a collaborative Telegram group (consisting of 8 to 9 learners) activities.

More specifically, the finding for the collaborative group indicates that out of all five pragmatic strategies and notions, the speech act strategies proved to be the most familiar for the learners. This is why their speech act score reveals the highest score gain (1.38) among the other pragmatic strategies. In the meantime, learners' scores gained in the category of Implicature are the lowest among the other pragmatic strategies (0.82). "This indicates that Implicature was the most problematic topic for them to grasp. It could be asserted that the collaborative Telegram group significantly contributes to the score improvement of the English speech act and politeness strategies categories in developing pragmatic competence". On the other hand, the results of the individual group indicate that out of all five pragmatic elements, the topic of deictic expressions proved to be the most familiar for this group. Therefore, the score gain in this particular category ranks as the highest among other pragmatic strategies (1.34). Conversely, in the individual group, the topic of English presupposition is considered to be the most challenging topic for its members. As a result, their score gain on presupposition is very low (0.17). This indicates English speech acts are the most problematic for this individual group. It could be affirmed that the individual Telegram activities significantly contribute to the score enhancement in the categories of English implicature and deictic expressions.

Table 5: Summary of independent t-test results

Assumption	levene's test					
	F	Sig	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Score	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	2.64	0.107	5.019	0.000	64.25	11.49
Equal variances not assumed			5.048	0.000	52.76	11.49

According to the statistical analysis shown in Table 5, there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis H_o (p-value <0.05), and thus the alternative hypothesis H_a is accepted. It could be explained that there was a significant difference between the pragmatics test results of learners who were taught

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collaboratively using Telegram group activities compared to the pragmatics scores attained by learners who were taught using individualones.

4. Discussion:

The present study attempted to make a comparison between the effects on Iraqi EFLlearners taught using the collaborative Telegram model and the individual Telegram model (both adopting the virtual classroom model) in activities to develop pragmatic competence. The results reveal that the Iraqi EFLlearners who were taught video materials on pragmatic activities using the collaborative Telegram model achieved significantly higher scores than those using the individual Telegram model. The results also show that Iraqi EFLlearners' post-test scores for pragmatic communicative skills within the collaborative Telegram groups are statistically higher than their pre-test scores. The results of the study provide different understandings toward the implementation of the virtual classroom wherein the traditional approach video discussion and task activities carried out outside the classroom are accomplished through face-to-face discussion.

However, one of the possible limitations is that when one of the learners cannot attend the face-to-face discussion model because of externalor non-academic factors such as illness, inclement weather, or even limited time for the discussion meeting, the virtual classroom model will be far from optimal. Consequently, based on this study, by combining the virtual classroom approach using the Telegram application, learners can discuss the video through their Telegram group without any boundaries or obstacles.

Telegram collaborative instruction is viewed to be highly advantageous because of its vital merits. This result agrees with Suranakkharin's (2017) empirical study in which the Thai EFLlearners' ability in mastering collocations was significantly advanced after the implementation of the virtual classroom model. With the application of a virtual modelof teaching pragmatics using Telegram in the current study, it should be affirmed that Telegram can eliminate boundaries between students and their teachers and motivate collaborative learning activities. Moreover, even autonomous learning can be enhanced and developed by implementing Telegram mobile application in the process of teaching pragmatic competence. This recalls Alzubi and Singh's (2o18) study in which they examined the influence of social strategies employing smartphones on EFl Saudi learners' autonomous abilities and skills in reading skills. Their findings convey that the use of smartphone applications endorses EFLlearners' reading skill autonomy.

In line with previous studies such as Raja & Saeed (2012) and Hazea& Alzubi (2016), collaborative learning, the flexibility of the virtual classroom model, and Telegram have been seen as a foundation for the development of pragmatic competence. Such a model and technology allow EFLlearners to envision the concept of pragmatics by way of videos through their Telegram including speech acts, implicature, politeness, deictic expressions, and presupposition, that lead to more flexible, effective, dynamic and interactive virtual classroom group activities. Accordingly, this reinforces high pragmatic competency on a part of Iraqi EFLlearners.

As for collaborative learning, it seems that the small group Telegram virtual approach in teaching pragmatic strategies has a positive effect on learning about pragmatic competence. This result matches the results of Muslem et al. (2017) and Arifani (2019) in their study of small group and individuallearning models. These studies claim that small group collaborative learning activities have a positive effect on the speaking performance and skills of EFLlearners. However, it is still stimulating to determine exactly to what extent the impact of collaborative learning in small groupings is, and whether it directly affects the learners' mastery of pragmatic strategies in general.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

This research was conducted to compare whether the learners taught by virtual classroom involving small groups via Telegram with pragmatics-related activities carried out by small groups was found out to be more effective in the enhancement of pragmatic competence with regard to speech act strategies, politeness, implicature, deictic expressions, and presupposition. Generally, the findings indicated that learners' scores for pragmatic strategies improved significantly. The results also demonstrated that learners who were instructed implementing the virtual classroom model involving small groups via Telegram achieved better than those taught utilizing the individual virtual grouping via Telegram. It is recommended that the teachers of pragmatics and communicative skills should employ the amalgamation of the collaborative group-based virtual classroom model and Telegram as a supportive learning tool through small group activity models in the teaching and learning process and should implement this combination with their EFl curriculum. Thus, further research to better comprehend one of the aforementioned pragmatic notions would be worth conducting.

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