

Iranian EFL Learners' Production of Online English Requests: Effects of Technology-Mediated Task-Based Instruction

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Abstract This quasi-experimental study scrutinized the impact of technology-mediated TBLT in an online collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of request production of 20 male and female B.A. students of TEFL. The participants were divided into two equal individual and collaborative experimental groups to receive online video-prompt task-based instruction on request speech act production in six distinct situations defined based on different contextual variables including distance, power, and imposition. Two similar versions of video-prompt Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) focusing on six situations covered in online classes were given to the participants as a pretest and posttest. The results indicated that both groups' request speech act production improved significantly after the intervention. However, there was no significant difference between the performance of the two groups. It was then concluded that both techniques are facilitative in boosting students' pragmatic competence; however, more time is required to find out the extent to which these techniques differ in terms of their productiveness.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, Pragmatic instruction, Request speech act, Task-based language teaching, Technology-mediated language teaching

1. Introduction

Forms and functions are two inseparable components that need to be taken into consideration by EFL teachers while teaching. Generally, several linguistic forms such as vocabularies, phrases, sentences, and grammatical structures are initially taught to L2 learners; however, their appropriate functions in different contexts are overlooked in many cases. It is also essential to understand how these forms function in various discourse situations (Widya, 2017). Social settings, cultural norms, and individual social roles can significantly affect the language used, and these factors can vary from moment to moment and context to context. Mistakes and misunderstandings that occur when an L2 learner does not understand the socio-cultural norms in the target context are considered pragmatic failures. The better the learner's pragmatic competence, the more successful they will be in communicating in different social situations; besides, preventing misperception will increase EFL learners' confidence resulting in further L2 development (Borer, 2018).

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Therefore, pragmatics focuses on the meaning and the use of language in context. How students actively use language to interact with others for a specific purpose is called the language function. The relevant term here is a speech act. According to Hatch (1992), speech acts take many forms; they can be comprised of one or more words or sentences and include direct or indirect gestures and body movements that perform a communication function. Indeed, speakers need language for stating, requesting, responding, greeting, thanking, etc. In pragmatics instruction, the language function is studied using speech acts based on which speakers do a particular action (Chong-yuan, 2021). While having a real conversation in various cultures, special attention should be paid to at least three factors, including the relative status, the level of familiarity, and the degree of the imposition, to ensure the learners' appropriate use of speech acts and level of politeness (Eslami Rasekh & Ko, 2015). Here, the specific cultural context is a vital part of communication, and lacking the knowledge of socio-cultural norms may lead to the use of inappropriate speech acts causing the speakers to be even considered impolite.

Among the different speech acts, requesting a social context is one of the essential parts of developing a relationship with others. The act of request is often considered the most challenging part of interlanguage pragmatics as requesting involves imposing on the hearer for the speaker's benefit, potentially a face-threatening act (Pinto & Raschio, 2007). As politeness and linguistics components vary between cultures, it is typical for EFL learners to produce improper request speech acts in the target context (Situmorang, 2022). Although different techniques have been applied to boost EFL learners' pragmatic competence and proper request speech act production, the problem of making an appropriate request still exists (Alerwi & Alzahrani, 2020). This may be due to inadequate access to everyday natural life input in EFL contexts and little emphasis on pragmatics in the classroom (Alerwi & Alzahrani, 2020). This problem has become more severe during the Covid-19 pandemic as it caused an incredible growth in distance education (Vellanki & Bandu, 2021). It has limitations and might make teaching speech acts more difficult for teachers. In such a context where technology has come to play a prominent role in the area of language teaching and learning (Akbari & Pishghadam, 2022), further studies are required to scrutinize the impact of more practical techniques on teaching pragmatic norms in general and speech acts in particular in technology-mediated spaces (Situmorang, 2022). In this regard, the current study aimed at bridging this gap by investigating the impact of technology-mediated TBLT in an online collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence and request speech act production.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatics is a distinctive field extensively used in EFL/ESL-related studies, particularly prevalent in the late sixties and early seventies (Saadatmandi et al., 2018). It pays special attention to what kind of language is used to express opinions in different contexts. That is to say, it is a study that depends on the context-based meanings of utterances (Horn & Ward, 2006). Taguchi (2009) stated that pragmatics is the best way to master a second language and achieve successful communication. According to Murray (2010), pragmatic competence enables language learners to communicate successfully by understanding the desired speech act and using it in the correct context.

Vásquez and Sharpless (2009) called attention to the significance of raising EFL learners' awareness of pragmatics in the area of interlanguage pragmatics. Similarly, Doughty (2001) stated that pragmatics requires continuous attention, exercise, and long-term retention. Explicit pragmatic instruction advocates claim that to increase EFL learners' pragmatic competence, their attention should be directed toward the target speech act forms. Schmidt (1993) claimed that pragmatic aspects could be learned by making the learners notice the forms. Moreover, research has shown that learners cannot automatically learn certain pragmatic aspects until they receive pragmatic instruction (Gholamia & Aghaib, 2012). The politeness strategies in request speech acts are one of these pragmatic aspects. Learners should receive metapragmatic information on different forms of the request speech act and to whom and how each form should be communicated politely. Consequently, learners can properly apply the language based on the context after being directly guided to the target forms.

2.2. Request Speech Act

As Safont-Jordà (2008) asserted, the speaker accomplishes a request by motivating the listener to action that “coincides with the speaker’s goal” (p. 168). The request speech act is a face-threatening act (FTA) as it threatens the hearer’s negative face. However, in Searle’s speech acts taxonomy, requesting is known as an illocutionary act because it relates to the speaker’s “directives”. Trosborg (1995) suggested that linguistic indirectness or politeness could soften the speaker’s request speech act to achieve their non/verbal services. In illocutions (direct and indirect), the term “impositives” is used to prevent confusion with the term “directive” (Janochová, 2013, p. 34).

Several studies have attempted to define, measure, and categorize request strategies. For example, Trosborg (1995) graded the request strategies taxonomy from direct to indirect based on the work of Austin (1975) and Searle (1969) and reformulated the results of Brown and Levinson (1978) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). He categorized request types into four groups: (a) direct, (b) conventionally indirect (which is hearer-based), (c) conventionally indirect (which is speaker-based), and (d) indirect. Other researchers have categorized direct request strategies into three groups (1) external and internal modification, (2) the level of the head act directness, and (3) the core request (e.g., Blum-Kalka & Olshtain, 1984; Nodoushan & Allami, 2011; Xiaoning, 2017). The internal modification softens the degree of request imposition and force, while the external modification is applied to lessen alarming moves (Xiaoning, 2017).

According to previous research on politeness and indirectness, the more indirect an illocution is, the higher the degree of politeness as explained by Leech (1983) “(a) because they raise the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be” (p.131-32). From another angle, Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1987) asserted that the hearer-oriented perspective makes requests more imposing than the speaker-oriented perspective because when the speaker avoids naming the hearer as the actor of the requested act, it minimizes the imposition of the request on the hearer’s negative face. Since speaker-oriented requests also indicate that the speaker asks for permission, the recipient of the request has control over the speaker. In fact, speaker-oriented requests are recognized as more polite than hearer-oriented ones because they decrease the level of imposition on the hearer.

2.3. Task-based Pragmatic Instruction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) mirrors authentic language use by focusing on both goal-oriented and meaning-oriented activities. TBLT uses a three-stage process of pre-task, task, and post-task activities. The pre-task serves as an introduction to the activity; the task involves planning on and reporting assignment results, and the post-task or “language focus” entails analysis of the task and subsequent practice (Klapper, 2003, p. 36). The different TBLT designs are defined based on the use of the tasks. To integrate pragmatics and TBLT, researchers should incorporate the effect of each task feature to reflect pragmatic considerations. For example, a task-related goal would be expanded from producing linguistic and non-linguistic forms to successfully finishing a task to including how to complete the task and successfully perform speech acts in the correct socio-cultural context. Likewise, a task can also be extended to include politeness, appropriateness, formality, directness, or other socially-oriented meanings. Furthermore, different authenticity features – text, context, and task authenticity – should be considered when assessing pragmatic authenticity.

Many pragmatic teaching activities still lack authentic, goal-driven, or needs-based materials. Moreover, the current pragmatics instructional studies focus primarily on explicit and implicit teaching methods. Incorporating TBLT principles into pragmatic approaches would produce more realistic tasks encouraging the appropriate use of L2 in social contexts. By adopting insights from TBLT findings, L2 pragmatics researchers can analytically determine which task features lead to better pragmatic learning outcomes. TBLT research has shown that fluency, accuracy, and complexity of pragmatic production are affected by task design and features that focus on different cognitive demands (e.g., task complexity and availability of planning time) (Ellis, 2005; Robinson, 2011).

2.4. Research on Task-based Pragmatic (Request) Instruction

One area of pragmatic research which has received particular attention is investigating the role of different types of instruction in learners' pragmatic competence development. For instance, Gaily (2014) studied apology, request, complaint, and refusal speech acts to discover the effect of programmed pedagogical sessions on increasing the EFL learners' verbal communicative ability and enabling them to select the most appropriate strategies for communicating in different contexts with different people. Data were collected through a multiple-choice pragmatic comprehension test (MCPCT) and a written discourse completion test (WDCT). The posttest results showed a noticeable improvement in the learners' targeted speech acts performance. In the other study, Nemati and Arabmofrad (2014) studied the production and awareness of speech acts under the impacts of instruction and grouping. The participants were divided into five groups named (1) individual input-oriented, (2) collaborative input-oriented, (3) individual output-oriented, (4) collaborative output-oriented instructions, and (5) control group. The teaching materials were chosen based on the students' real needs in different situations with noticing different levels of imposition, social distance, and power in producing apology and request speech acts. According to the results, the collaborative group performed better than the individual one in the perception and production of the targeted speech acts.

Also, Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2014) scrutinized the effect of individual and collaborative pragmatic output-based instructions on the production of requests, apologies, and refusal speech acts by B.A. university students. Individual and collaborative groups attended three sessions to learn each speech act (total = 9) by watching various parts of famous series and movies based on the real-life needs of participants in different situations. As the result indicated, while the improvement of interlanguage pragmatics output was seen in both groups, the efficiency of collaborative output was more than the individual one. Moreover, Derakhshan and Eslami Rasekh (2015) explored the impact of awareness-raising video-driven prompts on Persian EFL learners' progress in the production of request and apology speech acts. Using a multiple-choice conversation completion test, their results revealed learners' development in all three types of collaborative instructions. Besides, Hashemian et al. (2016) studied the effect of utilizing movies to help develop EFL learners' pragmatic competence in various request and apology strategies in an individual environment. During the course, the experimental group watched the movies, analyzed the requests and apology strategies from different parts of the movie, and developed a dialogue of a request or apology based on the received prompts. The findings showed that movies positively impact the EFL students' usage of different apology and request strategies.

Further, Hosseini (2016) investigated the effect of role-playing on the pragmatic competence of Iranian EFL learners. While the experimental group engaged in role-playing, the control group discussed a written conversation. Both groups took a pretest, including nine request speech act situations. The results showed that the treatment group outperformed the conversation group, proving the positive impact of role-playing on increasing EFL learners' pragmatic competence. In another study, Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018) used video-based input to investigate the effect of pragmatic instruction on the intermediate-level EFL learners' comprehension of request, apology, and refusal speech acts. The students were randomly separated into four groups: (1) metapragmatic group, (2) form search group, (3) interactive translation group, and (4) control group. The three treatment groups were told to focus on request, refusal, and apology speech acts while watching clips of different parts of three popular movies to increase their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistics knowledge. The students in the form search group concentrated on forms, the metapragmatic group focused on sociolinguistics and pragmalinguistics, and the interactive translation group cooperatively translated the scripts to discover the similarities and differences in performing speech acts in their mother tongue and English. The control group engaged in general conversation without any specific instruction. The results indicated that the metapragmatic group performed better than the other groups.

Additionally, Bagherkazemi (2020) explored the production of apology and request speech acts by EFL learners assigned to collaborative and individual groups. Both groups completed WDCTs consisting of five apology and five request speech acts. Besides, the collaborative group was provided with the opportunity for paired interactions while recording their answers. The findings indicated that the collaborative group had better performance and more successful output modifications. Similarly,

Fakher and Panahifar (2020) explored the request speech act production among EFL learners who were divided into three teacher's scaffolding (TS), peers' collaborative dialogue (PCD), and individual groups. During the teaching sessions, the teacher gave explicit metapragmatic instructions followed by class discussions on the pragmatic rules in the target language. Also, while TS and PCD groups were provided with the teacher's support and peers' mediation for completing problem-solving tasks, the individual group had no help. The posttest result confirmed that the TS and PCD groups' pragmatic performances were significantly improved. However, the PCD group outperformed two other groups.

According to the review of the studies above, although numerous studies have been conducted on pragmatic instruction and the request speech act production of EFL learners, there is a paucity of literature on the impact of technology-mediated TBLT on EFL students' pragmatic competence. As distance learning has become vital in education since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, exploring valuable techniques to enhance EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in online spaces seems to be an urgent need. Therefore, the current study pursued the following questions scrutinizing the impact of two distinct techniques, namely collaborative and individual learning:

1. Does technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative EFL learning environment affect the development of L2 pragmatic competence in the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students?
2. Does technology-mediated TBLT in an individual EFL learning environment affect the development of L2 pragmatic competence in terms of the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students?
3. Is there a significant difference between the impact of technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in terms of the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Twenty Iranian male and female B.A. students teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), aged between 19-30, participated in the current study. They were selected through both convenience and purposive sampling. On the one hand, it was convenience sampling as the participants were chosen from the available university and voluntarily. On the other, it was purposive sampling, as only sophomores whose level of language proficiency was intermediate were selected. In fact, they were decided to be intermediate-level students as they needed to understand video prompts and produce the request speech act. Then, they were divided into two equal experimental groups to investigate the practicality of two different teaching techniques.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Video-prompt Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs)

Video-prompt discourse completion tests (DCTs) were the main instrument in the current study to elicit the participants' request for speech act productions. The researcher's video prompts addressed six situations defined based on different contextual variables, including the degrees of formality, distance, power, and imposition. More precisely, there were six videos from everyday life covering the following situations: (1) formal equal-equal; (2) informal equal-equal; (3) formal high-low; (4) informal high-low; (5) formal low-high; and (6) informal low-high. It should also be noted that two similar sets of videos were prepared (total = 12 videos) to be used in the pretest and posttest.

3.2.2. Pretest and Posttest Assessment Criteria

To assess the participants' produced request speech acts in the pretest and posttest, two raters rated the results of these two tests according to the rating criteria proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) (Table 1).

Table 1*Blum-Kulka and Olshtain Request Categorization(1984)*

Request Categorization	Individual Strategies (in declining directness)
Direct Requests	1- Imperatives 2- Hedged/Unhedged performatives 3- Locution Derivables 4-Want Statements
Conventionally Indirect Requests	1- Suggestory Formula 2- Temporal Availability 3- Prediction 4- Permission 5- Willingness and Ability
Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests	1-Strong Hints 2- Mild Hints

Then, they were scored according to the Five-point Likert scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory, 2 = unsatisfactory, 3 = somewhat appropriate, 4 = appropriate, and 5 = the most appropriate. The scale's validity was substantiated by two experts in the field of TEFL.

It should be mentioned that interrater reliability was calculated applying Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The degree agreement for two raters in the pretest was 1 and in the posttest was %75, confirming the scores to be reliable.

3.2.3. The Course Content

In this study, the contents were extracted from the book entitled 'English for intercultural relationships (1)' by Alemi (2021), which has 13 lessons focusing on vocabulary and reading needed for intercultural communications. In the 12th lesson, entitled "requesting and responding to it", the differences between Eastern and Western cultures affecting the production of request speech act in these contexts were explained. In addition, the aim of making requests was noticed, followed by introducing different ways of requesting and responding in some Eastern and Western countries such as Iran, Japan, China, Greece, and Canada in terms of using honorifics, the degree of directness, and politeness. This lesson inspired the researcher to prepare the appropriate contents and define six distinct situations to be taught during the course.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The whole data collection process was done via the sky room platform as these kinds of social media platforms provide the users with the opportunity to access a variety of information easily and with few expenses (Bocar & Jocson, 2022). To collect the data, during the pretest, the participants were asked to watch six pre-recorded request speech act video prompts in the virtual class run on the sky room platform and respond to each video separately. Each participant's produced request speech acts were saved in a separate profile and transcribed for rating and data analysis.

In the second data collection phase, the targeted participants were randomly assigned to individual TBLT (n = 10) and collaborative TBLT groups (n = 10). Each group attended six 45-minute virtual teaching sessions once a week, and the process took approximately one and a half months to accomplish. The lesson plans for each session were devised based on four standard phases of TBLT: (1) warm-up, (2) pre-task, (3) during task, and (4) post-task. During the warm-up, the participants were asked some general questions about the topic of that session to be prepared for the rest of the session. During the pre-task phase, a video about the type of the request speech act that was supposed to be taught in that session was displayed. A question was asked about the whole story without raising the participants' awareness of the target language. In the next phase (during the task), the target language (one out of the six types of the request speech acts defined previously) was taught explicitly by the instructor (the researcher). From this stage, the lesson plan for individual and collaborative groups differed significantly, and the instructor defined some controlled practices for each group. While the participants

who were taught based on individual TBLT interacted individually with their instructor to do the exercises, the participants in the collaborative group were paired to perform some role-plays and practice the target language. Finally, in the post-task phase, the instructor defined some free practice for each group. Similar to the previous phase, while the first group produced the target language individually in response to the defined situation, the participants in the second group were provided with the opportunity for collaborative learning as they were asked to do the exercise and produce the target language in pairs. At the end of each session, the instructor also got feedback to ensure the participants' learning.

The contents covered in each session are as follows: In the first session, the instructor had a conversation with the students to create a warm atmosphere. Then, he tried to generate enthusiasm among students by asking several task-relevant questions. In advance, the instructor did not focus on the target language. He asked students to talk about the story in the video so that learners could concentrate on similar formal requests during the task. This task aimed at enabling learners to use polite structures for asking a favor or making a request by using "would", "I need a big favor" and "is it possible". This procedure was reviewed in the subsequent sessions. In the second session, the aim was to help students make a polite request for equal informal interactions by using "can", "may", and "will". In the third session, the participants learned how to make a polite request for formal low to high interaction and to use polite structures for asking a favor or making a request by implementing "if clauses". In the fourth session, the students were instructed to use polite forms for asking a favor or making a request in informal low to high interactions by using "would you mind", "could you" and "do you mind". The fifth session concentrated on helping the participants make a polite request for informal high to low interactions and use polite structures for asking a favor or making a request by implementing "I'd like", "I'd rather", and "do you think you can". In the final session, the students were trained on how to make a polite request for formal high to low interactions using "I want", "should" and "I need you to".

In the last data collection phase, during the posttest, the participants were asked to watch the six pre-recorded speech act video prompts (similar to those in the pretest) in the virtual class and respond to each video separately. Each participant's produced request speech acts were saved in a separate profile and transcribed for rating and comparison with their performance in the pretest.

3.4. Data Analysis

After rating the pretests and posttests, two dependent sample *t*-tests were calculated to compare the pretest and posttest results for each group to reveal whether there was a significant difference in their performance after receiving the technology-mediated task-based pragmatic instruction.

Besides, an independent sample *t*-test was calculated to compare the performance of the two experimental groups in the posttest to reveal if there was a significant difference between the performance of the first group who got engaged in the process of individual learning and the second group, which was provided with the opportunity for collaborative learning.

4. Results

Initially, this study investigated the effect of technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative EFL learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to track improvements in L2 pragmatic competence of the collaborative class over time, from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Collaborative Class

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Collaborative Group	Pretest	1.50	0.71	0.22
	Posttest	3.70	0.82	0.26

Table 3*Paired Samples t-test for the Collaborative Class*

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI				
					Lower	Upper			
Collaborative Group	Pretest Posttest	2.20	0.79	0.25	2.76	1.64	8.82	9	.00

As shown in Table 3, the paired-sample *t*-test illustrated that the students in collaborative had some advances over time (a 2.20 points increase), from the pretest to the posttest, $t(9) = 8.82, p = .00$. More specifically, as displayed in Table 2, it can be argued that the students in the posttest ($M = 3.7, SD = 0.82$) had a significantly better performance compared to theirs in the pretest ($M = 1.50, SD = 0.70$), with Cohen's *d* of 2.79, which signified a significant effect (Sawilowsky, 2009).

Secondly, the current study investigated the effect of technology-mediated TBLT in an individual EFL learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students. Another paired samples *t*-test was implemented to shedding light on improvements in L2 pragmatic competence of the individual class over time, from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics of the Individual Class*

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Individual Group	Pretest	1.70	0.67	0.21
	Posttest	3.80	0.63	0.20

Table 5*Paired Samples t-test for the Individual Class*

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI				
					Lower	Upper			
Individual Group	Pretest Posttest	2.10	0.56	0.17	2.50	1.66	11.69	9	.000

As can be seen in Table 5, the paired-sample *t*-test signposted that the students in the individual group had some improvements over time, from the pretest to the posttest (a 2.10 points increase), $t(9) = 11.69, p = .00$. Hence, it can be claimed that, as Table 4 depicted, the students in the posttest ($M = 3.8, SD = 0.63$) had significantly better performance as against with theirs in the pretest ($M = 1.70, SD = 0.67$), with Cohen's *d* of 3.71, which suggested a significant effect (Sawilowsky, 2009).

Finally, to investigate the differential effects of technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in terms of the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students over time, from the pretest to the posttest, and independent-samples *t*-test was calculated on gain scores (the deviation scores), the difference between the pretest and the posttest of students in both collaborative and individual groups. The gain (improvement) from the pretest and the posttest can be calculated for each participant by subtracting each person's posttest score from their pretest score. It should be said that before conducting the *t*-test, the normality assumption was scrutinized, and the skewness values of the pretests and the posttests in both groups, collaborative and individual, were between -2 and +2 (See Table 6 and Table 7); consequently, the normality assumption of independent-samples *t*-test was satisfied.

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Individual Group (N = 10)*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pretest	1.00	3.00	1.70	0.67	0.43	0.69
Posttest	3.00	5.00	3.80	0.63	0.13	0.69

Table 7*Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Collaborative Group (N = 10)*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pretest	1.00	3.00	1.50	0.71	1.18	0.69
Posttest	2.00	5.00	3.70	0.82	-0.81	0.69

The results of the independent-samples *t*-test on gain scores of pragmatic competence from the pretest to the posttest showed that there was not any significant difference between the mean of gain of the individual group ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.57$) and that of the collaborative group ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.79$), $t(18) = -0.33$, $p = .70$, equal variance assumed (See Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8*The Descriptive Statistics of Pragmatic Competence Gain Scores of Different Groups from Pretest to Posttest*

Group		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gain	Individual	2.10	0.57	0.18
	Collaborative	2.20	0.79	0.25

Table 9*Independent Sample T-test*

		Levene's Test		t-test						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
									Lower	Upper
Gain	Equal variances assumed	2.27	0.15	-.33	18.	.75	-.10	.31	-.75	.55
	Equal variances not assumed			-.33	16.35	.75	-.10	.31	-.75	.55

According to the Tables above, it can be said there was not any significant difference between the impact of technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in terms of the production of requests among undergraduate TEFL students.

Both groups had approximately the same improvement in their scores from pre to posttests. According to the Five-point Likert scale in the posttest, both groups had no "very unsatisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" scores. In contrast, 40 % and 50% of the students' scores were the mentioned scores, respectively, in the pretest. There were not any "appropriate" or "the most appropriate" score in the pretest results. However, in posttest results, 60% of learners gained "appropriate" and 10% achieved "the most appropriate" scores (Table 10).

Table 10*The Individual Group Results*

Score	Classification	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
5	The most appropriate	0	0	1	10
4	Appropriate	0	0	6	60

3	Somewhat appropriate	1	10	3	30
2	Unsatisfactory	5	50	0	0
1	Very unsatisfactory	4	40	0	0
Total		10	100	10	100

Table 11*The Collaborative Group Results*

Score	Classification	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
5	The most appropriate	0	0	1	10
4	Appropriate	0	0	6	60
3	Somewhat appropriate	1	10	2	20
2	Unsatisfactory	3	30	1	10
1	Very unsatisfactory	6	60	0	0
Total		10	100	10	100

Additionally, in the collaborative learning group pretest, 60% and 30 % were “very unsatisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” scores, respectively. There were not any “appropriate” or “the most appropriate” score in the pretest results, same as the individual ones. The posttest result depicted that 60% of learners gained “appropriate” and 10% achieved “the most appropriate” scores same as the individual learning group (Table 11).

5. Discussion

The first research question investigated how technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative EFL learning environment affected undergraduate TEFL students’ L2 pragmatic competence development. The result indicated that the participants outperformed in the production of request speech acts after participating in the collaborative learning environment. Overall, the significant role of collaborative learning in the students’ development of L2 pragmatic competence was proved in the current study. The facilitative role of collaboration in EFL students’ process of learning English has been supported in the existing literature (e.g., Al-Rawahi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2015; Lou et al., 2001) as it has been revealed to provide students with the opportunity to interact and share ideas with their peers freely and consequently motivate them to be more active in not only in-person classes but also in online spaces.

This result also aligns well with the findings of some of the recently conducted studies conducted in this area of pragmatics. For instance, Myrest (2022) studied the effect of concept-based instruction in the production of requests with two young learners’ collaborative groups. This study illustrated an increase in the learners’ variety of using modal verbs, supportive moves, down graders, and the organization of requests as a result of collaboration with their peers. This study's finding also agrees with the results of a survey by Bui et al. (2021). They concluded that the collaborative environment is effective in the pragmatic development of students even within a short period due to group discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' opinions.

In the same direction, Axmadjonovna (2021) scrutinized the effectiveness of collaborative learning in raising students’ pragmatic awareness. In line with this study, using collaborative learning was shown to lead students to make more progress in their learning process due to the opportunity to interact with peers in a friendly situation. In fact, working with partners in a small group motivated the learners to collaborate and have a productive and enjoyable study. The result is also in line with the findings of a study by Ebru (2018), which revealed that both learners and teachers found group work more motivating and helpful for acquiring request speech acts.

The result of the second research question, which investigated the extent to which technology-mediated TBLT in an individual EFL learning environment affected undergraduate TEFL students’ L2 pragmatic competence development, indicated that the participants made progress in the production of request speech acts. Therefore, individual technology-mediated TBLT was also proved influential in the students’ pragmatic competence improvement. This result concurs well with some of the previously

conducted studies in this area. For instance, Saadatmandi et al. (2018) explored the impact of teaching pragmatic features based on TBLT. Similar to this study, it was shown that the EFL students' made significant progress in producing request speech acts as a result of getting engaged in task-oriented activities. The result of this research question also agrees with the findings of a study by Anani Sarab and Alikhani (2015), who explored the impact of TBLT-based pragmatic instruction on request speech act recognition and production. The result of the study revealed that there was a significant improvement in awareness and production of requests. The finding of this study is also supported by Zalama (2021), who confirmed the effectiveness of task-based activity implementation in developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence. Similarly, the learners in this study experienced a significant improvement in the production of request speech acts in the individual TBLT group and had a satisfying performance during the learning sessions.

The result of the third research question scrutinizing whether there was a significant difference between the impact of technology-mediated TBLT in a collaborative and individual EFL learning environment on the development of the TEFL students' L2 pragmatic competence in terms of request speech act production revealed no significant difference. Both groups had approximately the same improvement in their scores from the pre- to posttests. This finding was approximately in contrast with the results of several previously conducted studies as they mainly indicated the participants' outperformance in collaborative groups compared to the individual groups. For instance, Nemati and Arabmofrad (2014) explored the impacts of instruction and grouping on the production and awareness of speech acts. In agreement with this study, the results showed that the input and output-based groups had a better performance than the control group. However, contrary to the results of the current study, the collaborative group outperformed the individual one in terms of awareness and production of speech acts.

The finding of this study is also in contrast with the results of a survey by Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi (2014), who compared the impact of individual and collaborative pragmatic output-based instructions on the production of requests, apologies, and refusal speech acts. It was indicated that the collaborative output was more efficient than the individual one. Similarly, Bagherkazemi (2020) compared the production of apology and request speech acts by several female EFL learners individually and collaboratively. The findings illustrated that the collaborative group outperformed using more appropriate socio-cultural variables, reflections, and successful output modifications in speech act performance. The conclusion here also aligns well with the results of a study by Fakher and Panahifar (2020), who explored the impact of collaborative dialogue, teacher's scaffolding, and balanced and unbalanced proficiency groupings compared with individual work on request speech act production. The final result of the posttest revealed that the collaborative groups outperformed the individual ones.

Given these findings, the current study has some implications. The first implication is for teacher educators who should raise teachers' awareness of the significance of teaching pragmatics, particularly speech act productions, to students and train them in using practical methods such as technology-mediated TBLT and video-prompt instructions in either collaborative or individual environments to enhance students' pragmatic competence. The second implication is for teachers who need to keep up with the new technology and be well-prepared to teach how to perform different speech acts appropriately in the target language using video prompts and task-based instructions in the online environment. Also, material developers are suggested to produce a variety of materials, including video prompts on the production of different types of speech acts, as they were proved to be facilitative and motivating in the participants' process of pragmatic learning. Finally, EFL learners are recommended to keep studying in the area of pragmatics and searching different sources to expand their knowledge of pragmatics, various speech act productions, and intercultural differences.

As the current study had some limitations, further studies can be conducted to bridge these gaps. First, the same research can be performed while addressing factors such as students' gender, age, attitude to participate in which group (individual or collaborative), and preferences in choosing their pairs. Also, as the number of participants was 20, it is recommended to do this survey with a larger sample to gain more generalizable results. Moreover, the current study only focused on the production request speech act. Thus, a study similar to the current study could be conducted by concentrating on other speech acts.

In addition, all the participants were from the same cultural background. It would be a good experience to do the same experiment with a multinational sample. Finally, as the findings here revealed no significant difference between the performance of the individual and collaborative group after receiving the instruction, it is recommended to replicate the same study in other contexts to reveal if the findings will differ or not.

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