

The Effect of Individual/Group Focused vs Unfocused Feedback on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Performance in Terms of Accuracy and Fluency

Elahe Pordank*

ELT Department, Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran.
E-mail: eliii.pordang@yahoo.com

*Corresponding author

Mohammadreza Valizadeh

Department of Translation and Interpretation (English), Faculty of Humanities, Cappadocia University, Cappadocia, Turkey
E-mail: mrvalizadeh2015@gmail.com

Received: 17/09/2021, Revised: 20/05/2022, Accepted: 25/05/2022

Abstract

This research investigated the feasible effects of individual/group focused versus unfocused feedback on EFL learners' pragmatics achievements in terms of accuracy and fluency. To do this, 60 female intermediate level English students were divided into four experimental groups and asked to write request letter based on the instruction they had received. In order to check the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their level of proficiency, an Oxford Placement Test was administered. Afterwards, to estimate the participants' speech act performance before the experiment in each group, a pre-test was used. During treatment sessions, the writings were corrected, individual/group focused and unfocused feedbacks were provided, and then they were handed back to the students to notice the errors. To assess the pragmatic knowledge of the participants regarding the speech act of request in each group after the treatment, a post-test was administered. To reach more reliable data, two raters corrected the participants' responses on pretest and posttest. Two repeated-measures two-way ANOVA and MANOVA were used to analyse the data. The results indicated individual/group focused and unfocused group significantly benefited from the provision of feedback. Besides, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are both addressed at the end of the paper.

Key words: Focused/Unfocused Corrective Feedback; Second Language Writing; Accuracy; Fluency; Pragmatic Competence; Speech Act of Request

1. Introduction

Pragmatics can be defined 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” (Crysral, 1997; Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993) stated that pragmatics concerns with the learners' ability in understanding and producing linguistic actions in various contexts. According to Bachman (1990), speech acts, as one of the main aspects of pragmatics theory, are related to functional dimensions of language in communication cases. More specifically, there are five branches of speech acts which include: assertives, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressive.

According to Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984), learning speech act of request is not easy for language learners and it needs high level of linguistic, cultural and pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, knowing how request speech acts can be better taught in a foreign language environment is of significant importance. Besides, teaching speech acts enables EFL students to become aware of the sociolinguistic conventions of language use and cultural differences between their first language and the target one which results in the appropriate use of the second language (L2).

Moreover, feedback is an essential tool to build well-shaped L2 structure. Based on Furnborough and Truman (2009), feedback involves the existence of a distance between what has been learned and the target competence of the learners, and the attempts undertaken to bridge these gaps. Since corrective feedback (CF) has long been regarded as an essential strategy for the development of second or foreign language learning skills and drawing learners' attention to the target features, the purpose of this study was to analyse the impact of individual/group focused feedback and unfocused feedback on L2 learning. The research provides a short overview of studies on the effectiveness of the use of focused and unfocused feedback. Moreover, pragmatics is expanded in speech acts which are categorized as: suggestions, invitations, requests, apologies, complaint, refusals, and agreements. The most widely examined feature in pragmatics is requesting that displays the speaker's favour for the hearer to perform an action or attempt to obtain specific information. Requesting has been regarded as one of the most threatening speech acts, because it threatens the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Therefore, in this study the effect of individual/group focused and unfocused feedback was evaluated on learners' pragmatic performance specifically on their request speech act (formal/informal) in terms of accuracy and fluency. In the process of learning any foreign language making errors is extremely unavoidable. This research was done by some means in order to reduce these errors. Different types of CF (focused/unfocused) could be one of those means by which errors are not permitted to get fossilized in learners' mind.

Based on the previous studies, learners even in advanced proficiency level have lack of knowledge and ability to produce appropriate pragmatic utterance in their communication (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Kasper, 1997). Consequently, the major problem of most EFL learners is lack of knowledge of pragmatics and its subcategories and they cannot use suitable structure in target situation. Hence, it is more essential to pay attention to the development of pragmatic competence that was paid less or no attention. This inability in learners regarding their pragmatic competence may have different reasons. First, it might be the result of inefficiency of teaching materials. Whereas pragmatic productions of the students are considered as one major issue among EFL teachers in Iranian institutes, the fact of how to produce them appropriately is not paid much attention to.

Moreover, as Negari (2011) pointed, understanding L2 writing is the most demanding skill for learners, especially for EFL learners because they should pay attention to other issues like content, organization, vocabulary and the use of proper spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Also, it is necessary to increase the writing performance through a particular strategy. For that reason, Hattie & Timperley (2007) proposed many strategies in writing learning process, among which feedback has the most powerful effects for the advancement of the students writing skill.

According to Ferreira, Moore & Mellish (2007), in both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learners' motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. By providing feedback, teachers can actually motivate their students to perform better. Purnawarman (2011) argued that feedback help learners increase their attention on what they want to write through receiving feedback; thus, they learn how to improve their performance. Additionally, the responsibility for teaching and giving feedback to the learners in the pragmatic aspects of language use depends on teachers, and teachers can play an important role in giving credit to the students' pragmatic production by the usage of CF which has been considered as an essential tool for building a well-shaped L2 structure. The nature of feedback would help learners to rebuild their obtained language better and survive the miscommunication problems which may have been caused in social interactions.

Therefore, the focus of this research was the effectiveness of CF and its influence on the speech acts of request which can both be realizations of pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners. Also, few studies have already focused on the accuracy of speech acts or emphasized on the fluency and accuracy of pragmatic performance of EFL learners.

To address these gaps, this study investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: Does individual focused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency?

RQ2: Does group focused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency?

RQ3: Does individual unfocused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency?

RQ4: Does group unfocused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency?

RQ5: Does group/individual focused vs. unfocused feedback create any significant difference in EFL learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency?

2. Method

2.1 Design

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was utilized in the current study. The participants were selected through convenience sampling method. Independent variables of this study were the individual focused, the group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedbacks, while pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency were the dependent variables.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 60 female EFL learners with the age range of 18 to 28. All the participants were Iranian and their native language was Persian. All of them were at the intermediate level of proficiency in English. Then, they were assigned into four experimental groups (each including 15 students) and taught by the same instructor.

2.3 Instruments

In order to achieve the study goal, the following instruments were utilized: Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used to ensure homogeneity of the participants in terms of their language proficiency; a pre-test was given to the students to determine their initial knowledge of the speech act of formal/informal request; a post-test was administered to compare the performance of the learners after the treatment. Both pre- and posttests required the participants to write a request letter for the given topic in 30 minutes. The topics of the tests was adapted from IELTS General Writing Topics. In the present research, in the first and second experimental groups accuracy was calculated based on the formula by Wolfe-Quintero et al (1998):

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{\text{Number of pragmatic errors} - \text{free t} - \text{units}}{\text{Number of t} - \text{units}}$$

Considering the same formula, calculating the syntactic errors was added to the pragmatic ones in the third and fourth experimental groups.

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{\text{Number of pragmatic \& syntactic errors} - \text{free t} - \text{units}}{\text{Number of t} - \text{units}}$$

In the present research, fluency in writing was measured by total number of words divided by total number of clauses based on Larsen-Freeman (2006). The formula is as follows:

$$\text{Fluency} = \frac{\text{total number of words}}{\text{total number of clauses}}$$

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning of the study, the OPT was administered among learners to check their proficiency level and ensure their homogeneity. After that, the participants were divided into four groups: naming as experimental 1 (n=15), experimental 2 (n=15), experimental 3 (n=15), and experimental 4 (n=15). Prior to the treatment, the pretest of writing was administered to evaluate students' pragmatic performance with regard to the speech act of request before they receive the treatment. Then, the treatment was carried out. Each treatment session lasted for about an hour and a half. The whole treatment was conducted for five sessions plus one more review session. During the instructional sessions, all groups

received the same kind of instruction and had to write request letters as their assignment. All groups received training on how to write letter of request and received the instructions on the pragmatic speech act of request as their treatment accompanied by either focused/unfocused feedbacks in relation to appropriateness of request letter.

In the first session, learners in all groups received instructions on the pragmatic speech act of formal/ informal request as their treatment accompanied by either focused/ unfocused feedbacks in relation to appropriateness of request letter. The purpose was to teach different kinds of request structures based on different situations. After receiving instruction, learners were asked to write a letter of request. For all groups writing of request were selected and the letters were corrected by the two researchers. Then, the teacher-researcher gave feedback to their writing task based on whether it belonged to individual/group focused or individual/ group unfocused group. In the focused group, the learners were informed of their pragmatic errors by drawing circles around them, underlined in order to attract the learners' attention to the error and comments were made at the bottom of the page concerning the errors. On the contrary, for unfocused group, the learners were informed of their pragmatic, punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors by underlining them without giving any clues.

In the second session, the format of letter writing including what is the letter writing for, the importance of writing letter, why writing a letter was chosen instead of talking for communicative targets and then different parts of letters were explained to them such as complementary close, salutation, heading, address and how did the body of the letter begin and end and what steps should be taken to write the body.

In the third session, the main styles of the letter, such as block and modified block, as well as the main style of the punctuation, such as open, close and mixed-punctuation were taught.

In the fourth session, teaching a request letter writing began; the instruction included what a request is, what is the purpose of writing letter of request, how to start the letter of request, how to begin and finish the body of request letter, and how to finish their letters politely.

In the fifth session, different request, inquiry, application, and announcement letter samples were provided to them. Afterwards, they were asked to recognize request letter and highlight the main components of the letter such as complementary, and salutation. Therefore, the students would know that the form of request letter did not differ from other letters and then in the body section, they set out the common sentences between the samples. In the sixth session, the format of the request letter was reviewed. The aim was to help learners in order to remember what they learn. And finally, in the last session, a post-test was administered.

Eventually, the degree of accuracy and fluency of the learners' pragmatic performance in pre-test and post-test which included writing request letters were analysed and compared against. Moreover, to reach more reliable data, two raters rated the subjects' writings. At the end, if the learners were accurate enough, no negative point was recorded for them, but if they had any errors in their production, each and every error had been counted singly and included in their accuracy and fluency lists. Each accuracy could be punctuation, grammar, spelling, style, or lexical usage. Fluency included lexical frequency, irrespective of spelling and content in a meaningful way with regard to the number of words which was produced in a specified time frame. The inter-rater reliability of all groups in terms of accuracy and fluency was measured by Pearson Correlation and found acceptable ($r \geq .8$).

3. Data Analysis

First, because there were four experimental groups in the present study, to which a proficiency test was administered at the start of the research, the suitable analysis to conclude about their homogeneity was a one-way ANOVA.

The other writing tests were aimed to examine the participants' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency before the treatment and after that. After termination of the treatment and testing periods, test scores were statistically analysed using two repeated-measures two way ANOVAs and a Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). As there were four experimental groups in this study and their performances in two periods of time were intended to be compared, two repeated-measures two-way ANOVAs were used; further, a MANOVA was utilized due to the fact that the researchers were interested

in analysing the mixed effect of both dependent variables on all four independent variables of the study (Pallant, 2013). It should also be mentioned here that since each accuracy and fluency of writing was scored by two raters, in all the analyses, the mean of the scores given by the raters were used.

4. Results

4.1 Normality of the Data

All the sets of the present study’s data were checked using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (K-S). Sig. value for all the tests were more than .05, which indicated normality (Pallant, 2013).

4.2 Inter-Rater Reliability

The inter-rater reliability of the pretests and posttest of all groups were above .80, indicating high reliability.

4.3 Ensuring the Homogeneity of the Groups

A one-way between groups ANOVA was performed on the groups’ OPT scores to ensure the homogeneity in terms of language proficiency in the four groups. The significance value for Levene’s test was .65 (Sig. = .65 > .05); meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The results of ANOVA test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in general linguistic proficiency mean scores amongst the groups at the $p < .05$ level, $F(3,56) = 1.35, p = .26$. The results ensured the researchers that the four groups were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency before the start of the research.

4.4 Findings of the Research Questions

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores in the pretest and posttest of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused feedback and the group unfocused feedback groups

		Accuracy Scores in Pretest	Accuracy Scores in Posttest	Fluency Scores in Pretest	Fluency Scores in Posttest
Individual Focused feedback Group	Mean	11.58	16.59	6.08	7.47
	SD	2.24	1.69	1.21	.85
Group Focused feedback Group	Mean	11.85	16.88	6.18	7.47
	SD	2.96	1.41	1.07	1.20
Individual Unfocused feedback Group	Mean	11.06	16.49	6.17	7.47
	SD	1.79	1.62	1.33	1.06
Group Unfocused feedback Group	Mean	11.19	16.85	6.35	7.87
	SD	1.63	1.47	1.08	1.35

The 1st research question investigated whether individual focused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Comparing the mean scores reported for the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of the individual focused feedback group, which were 11.58 and 16.59 respectively, makes it clear that the participants had a better performance in the posttest. The same thing is true about the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the individual focused feedback group which also shows its development as there was a change from 6.08 to 7.47.

The 2nd research question examined whether group focused feedback given to the EFL learners have any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Comparing the mean scores reported for the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of

the group focused feedback group, which were 11.85 and 16.88, respectively, makes it clear that the participants had a better performance in the posttest. The same thing is true about the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the group focused feedback group which also shows its development as there was a change from 6.18 to 7.47.

The 3rd research question explored whether individual unfocused feedback given to the EFL learners had any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Comparing the mean scores reported for the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of the individual unfocused feedback group, which were 11.06 and 16.49, respectively, makes it clear that the participants had a better performance in the posttest. The same thing is true about the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the individual unfocused feedback group which also shows its development as there was a change from 6.17 to 7.47.

The 4th research question investigated whether group unfocused feedback given to the EFL learners had any significant impact on their pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Comparing the mean scores reported for the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of the group unfocused feedback group, which were 11.19 and 16.85, respectively, makes it clear that the participants had a better performance in the posttest. The same thing is true about the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the group unfocused feedback group which also shows its development as there was a change from 6.35 to 7.87.

The 5th research question explored whether group/individual focused vs. unfocused feedback create any significant difference in EFL learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Table 1 indicates the effect of the treatment the four groups received during the study on pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy checked through repeated-measures two-way ANOVAs.

Table 2. Tests of within- and between-subjects effects of pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy in the pretest and posttest of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback groups

Effect		Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Pillai's Trace	.82	271.69	.00*	.82
Group			.74	.41	.02
Time * Group	Pillai's Trace	.01	.24	.86	.01

As Table 2 shows, the within-subjects factor is represented by time, which refers to the interval between the pretest and posttest scores of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy. The Sig. value reported for this factor is .00 and it is smaller than the standard .05 level, meaning there was a significant difference between the participants' performance from pretest to posttest. The size of this effect is large as the value of the Partial Eta Squared is .82 based on Pallent (2013).

The second row, named 'group' in Table 1, shows the results of the effect of between-subject effects. According to the Sig. value which was .41, it was concluded that the performance of the four groups' participants was not significantly different from each other on the pretest or posttest. The effect size of this difference is small as the Partial Eta Squared is .02.

The last row named 'time * group' reported the interaction of time and group, the Sig. value of which is .86 > .05, meaning there was no significant difference between the performance of the four groups' participants from pretest to posttest. That is, there was a similar amount of improvement in the four groups. The Partial Eta Squared reported in this row which is .01 can further confirm the results as it showed a small effect size.

Consequently, based on Tables 1 and 2, it can be concluded that the participants of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused feedback and the group unfocused feedback groups had a significant improvement in the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy from pretest to posttest and that neither of the groups had a better performance on the posttest.

Moreover, Table 3 below is presented to check the effect of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback on the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the four groups through another repeated-measures two-way ANOVA.

Table 3. Tests of within- and between-subjects effects of pragmatic performance in terms of fluency in the pretest and posttest of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused feedback and the group unfocused feedback groups

Effect		Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Pillai's Trace	.45	46.34	.00*	.45
Group			.49	.68	.02
Time * Group	Pillai's Trace	.00	.07	.97	.00

The within-subjects factor in the Table 3 was represented by time which refers to the interval between the pretest and posttest scores of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency. The sig. value reported for this factor is .00 and it was smaller than the standard .05 level, meaning there was a significant difference between the participants' performance from pretest to posttest. The size of this effect was large as the value of the Partial Eta Squared is .45.

According to the second row devoted to between-subjects effects, the participants of the four groups did not perform differently from each other on the pretest or posttest as the Sig. value is .68 which is above the standard .05 levels. The size of this effect was small due to the fact that the Partial Eta Squared was .02.

The last point in Table 3 was about the interaction of time and group. Based on the Sig. value reported in this row that was .97 and bigger than the standard level of significance, the conclusion was that the participants of the four groups did not perform significantly different from each other from pretest to posttest. This interaction size was also small according to the Partial Eta Squared reported which was .00.

Consequently, putting the results of Tables 1 and 3 together, it was concluded that although the participants of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback groups had a considerable amount of improvement from pretest to posttest, neither of them outperformed the other on the posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency.

Figure 1 shows the differences between the pretest and posttest scores of pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of the four groups.

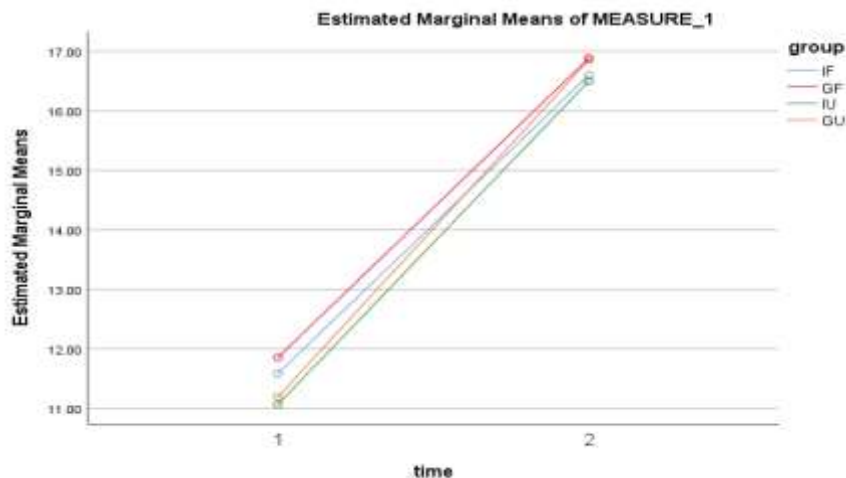


Figure 1. Differences between the pretest and posttest of pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy of the four groups

Looking at Figure 1 makes it clear that the participants of the individual focused feedback, the group focused feedback, individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback groups had similar scores on the pretest and the posttest, and an almost similar amount of improvement from pretest to posttest.

Figure 2 shows the amount of the differences between the pretest and posttest scores of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the four groups.

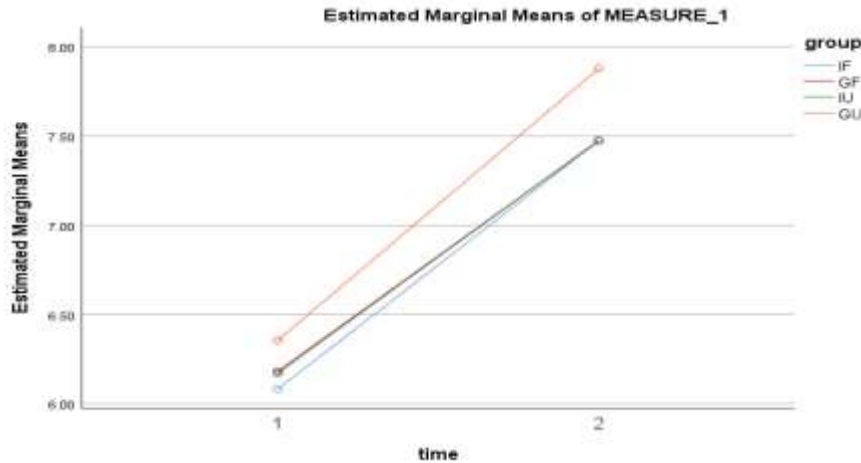


Figure 2. Differences between the pretest and posttest of the pragmatic performance in terms of fluency of the four groups

Checking the lines devoted to the performance of the four groups on the pretest and posttest of four groups make it clear that the same amount of difference on pretest of the individual focused feedback group with the group focused feedback, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback groups is also seen on their posttest, that is, the four groups had that same amount of improvement from pretest to posttest which reconfirms the outcomes of Tables 1 and 3.

Another point which was checked was the amount of the difference between EFL learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores using the individual focused, group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback groups. As this comparison was multidimensional, the researchers ran MANOVA. The outcomes of this analysis are provided in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 Multivariate test of the pretest and posttest of learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores of the four groups

Effect		F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda test	Group	.97	.80	.01
	Time	130.27	.00*	.70
	Time * Group	.13	.99	.00

The value reported for the group in Table 4 is .80 and was a sign of no significant difference between the four groups' participants' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores in the pretest or posttest as it was bigger than the standard .05 level of significance. That is, the participants of the four groups had a similar performance on the pretest and also the posttest. The Partial Eta Squared reported as .01 supports the point and shows a small effect size.

In addition, compared to the pretest, the four groups had a significantly different performance on the posttest as the sig. value reported for time was .00 which was smaller than the standard .05 level. In other words, the four groups performed significantly better in the posttest of both accuracy and fluency scores.

The conclusion was supported by the value reported for the Partial Eta Squared which was .70 which showed a large effect size.

The last point to be made was about the interaction of time and group, the results of which were presented in the third row. The sig. value reported in this row which was bigger than the standard level was .99 which means there was not a significant difference between the performance of the members of the four groups in learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores from pretest to posttest. That is, they had almost the same amount of improvement in pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency using the individual focused, group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedbacks. The Partial Eta Squared of this interaction was .00 which showed a small effect size.

Table 5 below provides more details about the existence of any possible differences between the participants of the individual focused, group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedbacks groups' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency.

Table 5 MANOVA on the pretest and posttest of learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency scores of the four groups

Source	Measure	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Accuracy	5.26	3	1.75	.47	.69	.01
	Fluency	2.16	3	.72	.53	.65	.00
Time	Accuracy	837.46	1	837.46	227.74	.00	.67
	Fluency	56.95	1	56.95	42.35	.00	.27
Time * Group	Accuracy	2.27	3	.75	.20	.89	.00
	Fluency	.260	3	.08	.06	.97	.00

According to Table 5, in the group's row, the sig. value of the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency were .69 and .65 respectively which were both bigger than the standard level means that individual focused, group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedback did not have any significant effect on the performance of the participants of the four groups in the pretest or posttest. The point was further confirmed by their Partial Eta Squared values which were .01 and .00 respectively, both were smaller than .06 that show the small effect size of the treatments.

As the Sig. values reported for pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency of time for the four groups in the second row were both .00, it is concluded that there was a significant difference between the performances of the four groups in both accuracy and fluency of writing scores from pretest to posttest. That is, all four groups had a considerable amount of improvement in both accuracy and fluency of writing. The Partial Eta Squared reported for the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency are .67 and .27 respectively, both of which showed a large effect size of the treatments provided to all groups.

The last and the most important row presents the information about the interaction of time and group which showed the amount of progress of the participants of the four groups in the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. Here, the Sig. value reported for the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency were .89 and .97, respectively. Therefore, the conclusion was that the performance of the participants of all groups in the pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency in either the pretest or posttest was not significantly different from each other. In addition, the Partial Eta Squared reported for both accuracy and fluency of writing was .00 meaning that the effect size of this interaction was small. In other words, individual focused, group focused, the individual unfocused and the group unfocused feedbacks did not have different amounts of effect on pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency of the participants from the pretest to posttest.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effect of individual/group focused vs. unfocused feedback on the improvement of intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic performance in terms of accuracy and fluency. With regard to both dependent variables (that is pragmatics knowledge in terms of accuracy and fluency), individual/group focused and unfocused feedback (the independent variable) were found significantly effective at the intermediate level of language proficiency in case of Iranian EFL learners.

As the statistics of this study revealed, all four groups who received individual/group focused and unfocused feedback gained higher scores on the post-test compared to the pre-test. In other words, individual/group focused and unfocused feedback had a positive influence on learners' pragmatic performance. Therefore, it can be claimed that focused/unfocused CF has a great impact on EFL learners' pragmatic performance. Therefore, Truscott's (Truscott, 1996; 1999; 2004; 2007; 2009) arguments that CF has detrimental side effects is not supported by this study.

In addition, a number of previous research studies have also indicated the importance and the effect of CF (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Ellis et al, 2006; Ferris et al, 2011, 2013; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Nia & Valizadeh, 2021; Sheen, 2007b; Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2018b, 2018a; Valizadeh, 2020, 2021; Van Beuningen, 2010).

Considering the usefulness of focused feedback, the findings of this study corroborates the results of the previous studies which showed promising results for the focused feedback (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al, 2005, 2010; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009, 2010; Sheen, 2007a, 2010; Sheen et al, 2009).

As for the positive effect of unfocused feedback, the findings of this study support the effectiveness of unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF), also found by some previous researchers (Bonilla López et al, 2018; Chandler, 2003; Coyle & Larios, 2014; Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2018b, 2018a; Valizadeh, 2020; Van Beuningen et al, 2012; Vyatkina, 2010; Zhang, 2017). Nevertheless, this finding is not in line with the earlier researchers' findings which demonstrated evidence against the effectiveness of unfocused WCF (Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984; Truscott & Hsu, 2008).

Considering the differences between focused correction feedback and unfocused correction feedback, the finding of the present study confirms the study done by Ellis et al (2008), which found no significant difference between focused and unfocused group. However, the result of the present study is different from that of Sheen et al (2009), which compared focused and less focused direct WCF with 80 ESL intermediate students at a US college. The focus was the acquisition of English articles; for the "unfocused" group, WCF target was five linguistic features including English articles (i.e., copular 'be', regular past tense, irregular past tense and preposition). There was a writing practice group and a control group, both of which did not receive any WCF with the difference that the former performed written narrative tasks while the latter was not required to write anything and the results of this study indicate that, in the use of articles, the focused group outperformed the control group and the unfocused group in the short term. In the longer term, the focused group outperformed the control group, whereas the unfocused group did not. All groups including the writing practice group performed better than the control group, suggesting that "doing writing tasks is of value by itself" (Sheen et al, 2009).

Additionally, several cognitive and socio-cognitive theoretical theories can support the findings of the present study. First, the findings are in line with the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990; 2001) because conscious attention to linguistic form facilitates or even is a prerequisite for the development of interlanguage, so the CF can support the second language acquisition (SLA) process (DeKeyser, 1994). When the WCF is provided, learners have enough time, and therefore cognitive resources, to compare their output with the received CF, which raises the likelihood that learners notice gaps in their inter language (Polio et al., 1998). It can be concluded that in the present study, the WCF may have helped the learners notice and mentally process the information, and this might have contributed to improvement in written accuracy and fluency.

Moreover, the results can be corroborated by the interaction approach to SLA because there is a strong connection between the oral or written interaction and learning (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Gass & Mackey, 2015; Mackey, 2012; Spada & Lightbown, 2010). In the present study, learning occurred via the

learner's exposure to language, production of language and feedback on that production. Socio-cultural theory of human mental processing, based on Vygotsky also assumes that all cognitive development occurs as a result of social interactions, especially when learners can collaborate and interact with more knowledgeable speakers of the L2 (e.g., teachers) (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). In short, learners in this study received proper scaffolding, so their written accuracy and fluency improved.

6. Conclusion

Even though pragmatics has still not gained as much popularity in EFL classrooms as other areas such as grammar and vocabulary, it is still an important area with which even advanced learners may face some troubles. For this reason, teachers have to provide learners enough information in their comments. This study investigated the effect of feedback provision on pragmatic production of students and the results indicated the effectiveness of using individual/group focused and unfocused feedback. Consequently, it can be said that teachers should spend more time on providing planned feedback toward the pragmatic production of the students, especially on their writings, because the correct form of a sentence provided by a good feedback will remain in learners' minds and facilitate learning process.

7. Limitations of the Study Suggestions for Further Research

This research was limited to just a small size. Because of time and expense constraints, the researchers did not have the chance of having access to vast number of students. Another limitation was related to gender. In this research, there existed only female participants. Further, due to some constrains, conducting a delayed posttest was not possible, so caution must be taken in interpreting the results. Additionally, the existence of a control group has been stated by some scholars, such as Guénette (2007) as a necessary factor in doing empirical research. However, it was not possible for the researchers of the present study to include such a group in this study.

Based on the limitations and delimitation of the current study, some recommendations can be made for future research for a better understanding of the effect of individual/group focused and unfocused feedback on the pragmatic performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners in terms of accuracy and fluency. Following is the list of some of those ideas presented in the form of suggestions for further research.

This research did not cover all of the aspects of speech act of requests. It only focused on the types of request and request strategies viewed from pragmatic analysis. Other researchers are suggested to conduct research on requests analysed from different perspectives. Additionally, since there are various types of writing, such as descriptive writing, narrative writing, persuasive writing, and others, it would be a good suggestion to investigate the effect of the same factors on the other types of writing and not just speech acts. Finally, the participants in the present study were at intermediate level of proficiency, other investigations could examine other proficiency levels in larger populations.

References

- Ashwell, T. (2000). Patterns of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: Is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9(3), 227–258.
- Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2013). Developing L2 pragmatics. *Language Learning*, 63(s1), 68–86.
- Bitchener, J. (2008). Evidence in support of written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(2), 102–118.
- Bitchener, J., East, M., & Cartner, H. (2010). *The effectiveness of providing second language (L2) writers with on-line written corrective feedback*. New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa Publication.
- Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 191–205.
- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing*. England: Routledge.

- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2008). The value of written corrective feedback for migrant and international students. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(3), 409–431.
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2009). The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written corrective feedback. *System*, 37(2), 322–329.
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2010). Raising the linguistic accuracy level of advanced L2 writers with written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(4), 207–217.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 196–213.
- Bonilla López, M., Van Steendam, E., Speelman, D., & Buyse, K. (2018). The differential effects of comprehensive feedback forms in the second language writing class. *Language Learning*, 68(3), 813–850.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Chandler, J. (2003). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(3), 267–296.
- Coyle, Y., & Larios, J. R. De. (2014). Exploring the role played by error correction and models on children's reported noticing and output production in a L2 writing task. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 36(03), 1–35.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. (2nd ed.). England: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. M. (1994). Implicit and explicit learning of second language grammar: A pilot study. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(1), 188–194.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2), 339–368.
- Ellis, R., Sheen, Y., Murakami, M., & Takashima, H. (2008). The effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in an English as a foreign language context. *System*, 36(3), 353–371.
- Ferreira, A., Moore, J. D., & Mellish, C. (2007). A study of feedback strategies in foreign language classrooms and tutorials with implications for intelligent computer-assisted language learning systems. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 17(4), 389–422.
- Ferris, D. R., Brown, J., Liu, H., & Stine, M. E. A. (2011). Responding to L2 writers in college writing classes: What teachers say and what they do. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(2), 207–234.
- Ferris, D. R., Liu, H., Sinha, A., & Senna, M. (2013). Written corrective feedback for individual L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(3), 307–329.
- Ferris, D. R., & Roberts, B. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(3), 161–184.
- Furnborough, C., & Truman, M. (2009). Adult beginner distance language learner perceptions and use of assignment feedback. *Distance Education*, 30(3), 399–418.
- Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2015). *Input, interaction, and output in second language acquisition*. England: Routledge.
- Guénette, D. (2007). Is feedback pedagogically correct? Research design issues in studies of feedback on writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(1), 40–53.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112.
- Kasper, G. (1997). *The role of pragmatics in language teacher education*. England: McGraw-Hill.
- Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). *Interlanguage pragmatics: An introduction*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Kepner, C. G. (1991). An experiment in the relationships of types of written feedback to the development of second language writing skills. *Modern Language Journal*, 75(3), 305–313.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2006). The emergence of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the oral and written production of five Chinese learners of English. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 590–619.
- Mackey, A. (2012). *Input, interaction, and corrective feedback in L2 learning*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Negari, G. M. (2011). A study on strategy instruction and EFL learners' writing skill. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 1(2), 299–307.
- Nia, Z. A., & Valizadeh, M. (2021). A comparison of the effects of revision-mediated and attention-mediated indirect coded feedback on EFL learners' written syntactic accuracy. *Shanlax International Journal of*

- Education*, 9(4), 146–156.
- Pallant, J. (2013). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS*. (5th. ed.). London: Open University Press.
- Polio, C., Fleck, C., & Leder, N. (1998). “If only I had more time”: ESL learners’ changes in linguistic accuracy on essay revisions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(1), 43–68.
- Purnawarman, P. (2011). *Impacts of different types of teacher corrective feedback in reducing grammatical errors on ESL/EFL students writing*. (Dissertation). The Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129–158.
- Schmidt, R. W. (2001). *Attention*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Semke, H. (1984). The effects of the red pen. *Foreign Language Annals*, 17(3), 195–202.
- Sheen, Y. (2007a). The effect of focused written corrective feedback and language aptitude on ESL learners’ acquisition of articles. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(2), 255–283.
- Sheen, Y. (2007b). *The effects of corrective feedback, language aptitude, and learner attitude on the acquisition of English articles*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Sheen, Y. (2010). Differential effects of oral and written corrective feedback in the ESL classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(02), 203–234.
- Sheen, Y., Wright, D., & Moldawa, A. (2009). Differential effects of focused and unfocused written correction on the accurate use of grammatical forms by adult ESL learners. *System*, 37(4), 556–569.
- Soltanpour, F., & Valizadeh, M. (2018a). Revision-mediated and attention-mediated feedback: Effects on EFL learners’ written syntactic accuracy. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(4), 83–91.
- Soltanpour, F., & Valizadeh, M. (2018b). The effect of individualized technology-mediated feedback on EFL learners’ argumentative essays. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(3), 125–136.
- Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (2010). *Second language acquisition*. England: Hodder Education.
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46(2), 327–369.
- Truscott, J. (1999). The case for “the case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes”: A response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 111–122.
- Truscott, J. (2004). Evidence and conjecture on the effects of correction: A response to Chandler. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(4), 337–343.
- Truscott, J. (2007). The effect of error correction on learners’ ability to write accurately. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(4), 255–272.
- Truscott, J. (2009). Arguments and appearances: A response to Chandler. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18(1), 59–60.
- Truscott, J., & Hsu, A. Y. (2008). Error correction, revision, and learning. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(4), 292–305.
- Valizadeh, M. (2020). The effect of comprehensive written corrective feedback on EFL learners’ written syntactic accuracy. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 11(1), 17–26.
- Valizadeh, M. (2021). Revision vs. attention requirements: Impacts on the efficacy of the written indirect corrective feedback. *Turkish Online Journal of English Language Teaching (TOJELT)*, 6(1), 25–43.
- Van Beuningen, C. G. (2010). Corrective feedback in L2 writing: Theoretical perspectives, empirical insights, and future directions. *International Journal of English Studies*, 10(2), 1–27.
- Van Beuningen, C. G., De Jong, N. H., & Kuiken, F. (2012). Evidence on the effectiveness of comprehensive error correction in second language writing. *Language Learning*, 62(1), 1–41.
- Vyatkina, N. (2010). The effectiveness of written corrective feedback in teaching beginning German. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43(4), 671–689.
- Wolfe-Quintero, K., Inagaki, S., & Kim, H. Y. (1998). *Second language development in writing: Measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity*. Hawaii: University of Hawai’i, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.
- Zhang, X. (2017). Reading-writing integrated tasks, comprehensive corrective feedback, and EFL writing development. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(2), 217–240.