The Role of Pragmatic Competence in the Language Proficiency of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract

English language learning programs are always evolving to suit the needs of the changing demands of the learners. In Saudi Arabia, English programs are solely focused on achieving language proficiency through teaching learners' vocabulary and grammar only, excluding other important language constructs such as pragmatics. This research investigates the relationship between pragmatic proficiency and language proficiency by administering an MDCT (multiple-choice discourse completion task) survey test on 80 Saudi health track students who are enrolled in King Abdul-Aziz English language institution. The test questions were adopted from Çetınavci and Öztürk's original MDCT instrument, designed to focus on testing knowledge of implied meaning "implicatures". The results were analyzed using SPSS to measure the correlation between pragmatic proficiency and language proficiency and observe the most difficult implicature the students found. The findings indicate that there is no linear relationship between the students' English proficiency and their pragmatic proficiency.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

English became a global language due to it being geographically widespread, thus, teaching English as a means to develop economical and sociological relations has been the catalyst for developing Second language learning methods in non-native English-speaking countries (Crystal, 2012). Methods such as grammar translation, audio-lingual and structural approach were adopted as a means of teaching English to second language learners. Later, more methods developed and emerged such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT) and many more (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). With the use of these methods, many English programs in non-speaking countries were established within the school curriculum and in independent language institutions. However, even with the integration of English in Saudi Arabian early education schools, learners find difficulties in conversing in the English language in everyday situations.

In Saudi Arabia, English learning programs have a variety of mixed methods utilized in teaching English, for example, in universities, the communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language learning (TBL) are employed to help facilitate students' learning and keep them engaged in their learning which help them feel motivated in learning English (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). Furthermore, English language curriculums in Saudi Arabia mostly focus on teaching English explicitly through grammar and vocabulary, where the aim is to supply the learner with enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge that may help them in forming coherent sentences and understanding written material (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

However, in the last few years, there has been a growing concern in Saudi English language teachers regarding Saudi students' inability to use English even after studying English for more than 8 years (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). This concern is reflected in recent research in the field of English teaching in Saudi Arabia, such as teachers' focus on dated teaching methods while viewing grammar competence as language competence which could explain their reliance on grammar-focused learning (Alhaisoni & Rahman, 2013). However, language is used as a means of communication, whether it's explicit or implicit, meaning is deprived of words, phrases or/and sentences that illustrate the speaker's thoughts and ideas which in turn is received by the listener and turned into meaning. For example, expressions with implied meaning, such as, "it's raining cats and dogs", which implies heavy rain or "why are you looking blue?" which implies "why are you sad?" may appear difficult or confusing to a non-native English listener whose knowledge is limited to the vocabulary and grammar rules of the speaker and cannot understand the implied meaning of these sentences. In the previous example, the learner's basic language knowledge is not enough to fully comprehend the underlying meaning of those pragmatically constructed sentences which are not highlighted in most English language classes in educational institutions. Pragmatic communication skills play a vital role in avoiding miscommunication because pragmatic errors, unlike linguistic ones, can have major repercussions, such as offending others and possibly jeopardizing jobs, promotions, or academic success (Barron et al., 2017; Altheeby, 2018).

Although academic language use is important and the focus of most language curriculums, pragmatics tools such as metaphors and implied meanings are vital to understanding and comprehending academic expert language, and materials discussing proper pragmatic use of the language should be integrated within these language curricula in order to increase learners' level of English proficiency. Moreover, the level of language proficiency needed to understand second language pragmatics is thought to be determined by their communicative

competence level. Communicative competence is the ability to successfully achieve communication using second language components such as sociocultural components, e.g., "pragmatics", and lexical components, e.g., "grammar" (Hymes, 1972 cited in Savignon, 2017).

In Saudi universities, the main focus of English language courses is grammar and vocabulary taught through the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking; however, students may not reach a successful level of Communicative competence due to the strict English curriculums (Alhaisoni & Rahman, 2013).

In comparison, Communicative competence could be achieved in a spontaneous nonstructural classroom that facilitated the students learning through strategies such as scaffolding and activities (Savignon, 2017),

Considering the theories on linguistic competence and pragmatic competence being compartments of communicative competence, perfecting one competence does not necessarily mean mastering the other.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Language Competence and Pragmatic Competence

The term competence was first defined by Lado (1961) as a system consisting of phonemes, morphemes, phrases, clauses, and sentences, as well as listening, speaking, writing, and reading (cited in Amirian et al., 2017). Later, Chomesky's (1965) ideas on competence were reorientated by Hymes et al. (1972), Campbell and Wales's (1970) proposals of including communicative competence with language competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Based on this definition, this paper will attempt to describe language proficiency's relationship with pragmatic competence.

In order to study pragmatic competence, first we need to explore communicative competence and how it is linked with pragmatic competence.

Chomsky (1965) initially defined pragmatic competence as knowledge of the conditions and style of proper language usage in diverse settings (Tchoutezo, 2010). It is important to understand that the definition of pragmatic that is used in this paper is based on Bachman's (1990) concept of the two language knowledge types internalized within a second language learner:

a) Organizational knowledge, which is similar to Lado's language competence/proficiency i.e., grammatical and textual knowledge.

b) Pragmatic knowledge which entails understanding of how to attribute context and function to words and utterances, i.e., lexical, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge (Ivanova, 2017).

Pragmatic competence is the ability to recognize, produce, and articulate correct and suitable narratives in social and cultural situations. It is worth noting that the use of the words competence/proficiency is interchangeable in this paper. The communicative approach and the word "competence" prompted consideration of several facets of communicative competence; these elements are linked and could be combined under the wider term "pragmatic competence"; thus, the aim of learning pragmatics is to assist learners to become familiar with the spectrum of pragmatic devices and practices in the target language (Savignon, 2017).

1.2.2 Methods of Testing Pragmatic Competence

There are many methods to explore pragmatic competence. One of them is through studying its effect on the learner's second language as is seen in the phenomena of transfer (Ghawi, 1993; Barron et al., 2017). Second Language learners often transfer traits of their native language into the target language. This phenomenon is widely studied from different trajectories, from grammar transfer to pragmatics transfer. Past studies have examined the transfer of L1 pragmatic to L2. Ghawi (1993) investigates socio-pragmatic transfer in Arabic learners of English demonstrated in learners' use of apology speech act. He states that the study duplicates Berman and Olshtain's (1983) research in all major aspects to explain pragmatic transfer between native and target languages. Ghawi's study measures socio-pragmatic competence by identifying non-native abnormalities in the socio-cultural context of apologizing. The participants were seventeen Arabic native speakers learning English at The University of Arizona. The data were collected using tape recordings of closed role plays between the researcher and the participants in relation to separate apology-based scenarios in both languages. The results show that Arab learners found the apology speech acts strategy in the target language complicated and not sincere. The native speakers found that the native Arab learners' way of explaining their mistakes is avoidance and showing a lack of responsibility. Both English and Arabic native speakers agree that each other's way of apologizing could cause misunderstanding and unsuccessful communication. Finally, Ghawi concludes that it is vital to integrate cultural knowledge "pragmatics" into L2 classrooms to help eliminate miscommunication.

Another study which examined the transfer of L1 pragmatic to L2 was done by Liu (2016) who examined the Interference of first language cultural Identity on Pragmatic Competence of the Target Language by studying the effect of non-native Spanish speakers' native culture on the target language culture. She administers a qualitative phenomenology research model that interprets data collected from semi-structured interviews and reflective notes of three volunteer participants from different native backgrounds, America, the UK and China. Thematic analysis methods were employed in the reflective notes and interviews in the form of direct quotes and summary phrases. The data interpretation shows that cultural bewilderment could cause the participants' incomprehension of certain situations, thus resulting in unsuccessful communications due to misunderstanding the situation. These results support the argument that L1 pragmatics affect the achievement of the target language's communicative competence due to the impeded pragmatic cultural codes found in the target language. Yi-Fen notes that some cultures are similar to the target language's culture and thus will not affect the learner's communicative competence, while others might greatly be affected by the dissimilarities leading to a clash of identity and language.

Both previously mentioned studies have the participants living in the target language country, which might affect the study's results, as the length of residency is a recognized variable in most research in interlanguage pragmatics. Sağdıç (2021) studied the effect of L2 proficiency, exposure and length of residency on the learner's L2 pragmatics skill in interpreting implied meaning. The participants are 30 English as a Second Language (ESL) students who are native to 9 different languages. These participants were from 2 different groups, Intensive English Program (IEP) (low proficiency) and matriculated ESL students (high proficiency). The researcher administered a 24-question pragmatic listening exam with the goal of testing requests, refusals, and idiosyncratic implicature examples. Each item is preceded by a brief description, followed by a brief dialogue. Participants are asked to state what the speaker meant after each recorded speech. There were three diversions and one accurate response. The study found that each variable is positively linked to the learners' L2 pragmatic abilities, with proficiency having a greater influence than the length of residency and L2 exposure, which had a moderate effect. Moreover, when comparing the results of both samples, Sagdic

concluded that there is a direct effect of the learners' L2 proficiency on the L2 pragmatics relating to implicatures.

Comparatively, other factors may affect learners' Pragmatic proficiency such as exposure. Altheeby (2018) study compared the pragmatic competence, specifically speech acts, of 90 English as a foreign language (EFL) Saudi learners living in Saudi Arabia, 90 English as a second language Saudi learners living in the UK (ESL), and 60 British native English speakers (NSE) used as the standard. He used a discourse completion test (DCT) and a roleplay task (RPT) consisting of refusal and request scenarios. Compared to the (NSE) group who showed favorability to conventionally indirect requisite strategies and included internal modifiers to soften their request, ESL showed close similarity with their patterns of request and refusal albite direct sometimes, they use the same modifiers (NSE) group used. On the other hand, (EFL) group's results indicated a more direct approach with less modifier use thus, generating the conclusion of the research, that the reason for ESL group similarity with NSE is due to length of residency and exposure which lead the ESL group to be more linguistically and pragmatically proficient compared to the EFL group.

As discussed above, examining the relationship between second language proficiency and second language pragmatics in different settings using different methods but reaching the same results, second language proficiency positively affects second language pragmatics. This means that second language competence is directly linked with acquiring second language Pragmatic competence. However, some studies showed that the Language proficiency level is not related to achieving pragmatic competence. Farnia (2015) investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' English proficiency and their pragmatic competence in speech acts. The sample contained 95 Iranian students from the University of Mysore who were divided into 2 groups based on their proficiency level measured by using the Oxford Placement test (OPT). As for their pragmatic competency, they undertook a 12-item multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) and a written discourse completion task (WDCT) that examined the recognition of refusals speech act. Findings show that there is no significant difference in the performance of both groups when applying statistical analysis to both groups' results. Farnia concluded that there is no difference in pragmatic comprehension between the high and low proficiency groups, implying that language competence has no effect on pragmatic comprehension.

On the other hand, other research found a distinct relation between L2 language proficiency and L2 pragmatic competence. Xu et al. (2009) studied the effect of length of residence and overall L2 proficiency on pragmatic and grammatical competence. The sample included 126 international students residing in the United States who had two academic levels of English proficiency and were split into two groups. Undergraduates at the intermediate level and graduates at the advanced level according to their TOEFL results. They were asked to recognize the accurateness of 20 written school-related scenarios. Eight scenarios had pragmatic mistakes but no grammatical errors, eight had grammatical errors but were pragmatically correct, and four had no errors. Both pragmatic and grammatical competence were assessed based on detecting and correcting inaccurate statements and sensitivity to mistakes. Xu, Case and Wang concluded that, while the length of residency and overall L2 proficiency was important in recognizing and correcting pragmatic errors, overall L2 proficiency impact exceeded that of the length of residency.

Many factors influence L2 pragmatics, with language proficiency being the main catalyst. The study will analyze the correlation between King Abdelaziz University students' English test and pragmatic test results. In order to accomplish this, we must first identify a suitable method for obtaining accurate findings, as illustrated in the following study.

Similar to the study conducted by Farnia (2015), Çetınavci and Öztürk (2017) study employed a multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) they developed to measure the interpretation of teachable and testable formulaic expressions, specifically implicature (implied meanings) as they are a notion of pragmatic competence itself. The researchers tested the reliability and validity of the (MDCT) by piloting it with different sample groups. The test included real-life situations that would test Implied meanings included in the instructional phase of this study. The outcome was an (MDCT) that the native speaker takers reached a good compromise on and is usable in computerized and pen-and-paper format. Furthermore, several other studies included Pope Questions, Indirect Criticism, Irony, Topic Change, Disclosures, and Indirect Refusals (Roever, 2013; Taguchi, 2005). However, Çetınavci and Öztürk combined indirect requests and indirect advice with the previously stated implied meanings, unlike past research. Indirect requests and indirect advice were included in their analysis because, according to them, Grice's (1975) description of implicatures and Searle's (1975) definition of indirect speech acts are comparable. A number of the implied meanings covered in their study have been described as formulaic in the literature related to the investigated topic. The researchers claim that some of their variations are formulaic or possibly formulaic and thus worth incorporating in the educational strategy and evaluated for their teachability.

Implicatures is an element in pragmatics and the main focus of this paper and is used as a criteria to measure pragmatic competence. Grice (1975) used the term "implicature" to describe situations when what is meant differs from what is said. Following his theory, implicatures are divided into "conventional" and "conversational," the latter of which comes from his Principle of Cooperation and Maxims (quality, quantity, relevance, manner) (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017). Bouton (1988) was the first researcher to explore implicatures in connection to pragmatic comprehension evaluation. He found that nonnative speakers' (NNSs) capacity to perceive implicatures is very problematic since they tend to take utterances at face value (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017). Nevertheless, Implicatures are argued to be a teachable pragmatic constituent as it is considered formulaic language that aids second language learners successful use of the second language (Meunier, 2012).

1.2.3 Implicatures Types

The following are the implied meaning (implicatures) used in this research as noted in the original study by Çetınavci and Öztürk (2017) which this paper investigates. First, Pope Questions which are questions in which the answers are implied through similar questions where the answer is a clear yes or no to a question.

Secondly, indirect Criticism is a form of criticism that occurs when we are asked what we think of something or someone we don't like, but don't want to express it explicitly. Instead, we respond indirectly, commenting on features of the thing that are not central to its evaluation (Bouton, 1988)

Thirdly, Verbal Irony which is a statement interpreted as ironic must be contrary to the real state of affairs. A divergence must exist between the reality and the utterance, and the listener must be able to recognize this divergence in order to interpret the utterance (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017). In other words, the speaker uses words that mean the opposite of what he or she believes.

Fourth, indirect refusals. In the light of the pertinent literature, indirect refusals can be viewed as another type of formulaic implied meanings. Routine expressions reflecting relatively fixed patterns of discourse exchange (e.g., giving an excuse when refusing) are referred to as routine expressions (Taguchi, 2005). What is more, they are cited as notably appropriate for

classroom instruction of pragmatic comprehension with their previously mentioned conventional features (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017).

The fifth type of implicature is topic Change. Topic changes occur when someone redirects a conversation and avoids bringing up a subject they don't want to talk about.

Sixth, Disclosures which are cryptic answers that avoid uncomfortable facts (Taguchi, 2002). Seventh, Indirect Requests (Requestive Hints). Çetınavci and Öztürk (2017) restated Weizman's (1993) suggestion which considers requestive hints in two dimensions: propositional and illocutionary. The first dimension, 'propositional content,' has three categories: first, zero (no reference to the listener, the act, or any of its elements, e.g., 'There's a problem'), second, element (reference to some element of the requested act, e.g., 'Are there any batteries?'), and third, act (reference to the requested act, including some or all of its elements, e.g., 'The sign'. The second dimension, 'Illocutionary device' includes four types; first, zero (no statement of illocutionary purpose, e.g., 'Here's the mail' as a request to carry the mail to the mailroom); second, stating prospective grounder (giving a reason why the request is necessary, e.g., 'The printer is running out of ink'); third, challenging feasibility (asking about some prerequisite for the request to be granted e.g., 'do you think I could rewrite my assignment?'); fourth, other (illocutionary device not fitting into one of the three prior categories) (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017).

The final implicature item is indirect Advice. The term indirect advice refers to statements without explicit advice which do not specify the speaker's intentions (Çetınavci & Öztürk, 2017).

2. Method

This research follows Canale-Swain (1980) construct of communicative competence from the theoretical framework developed by Walters (1980), which hypothesized a dependent/independent relationship between Grammar Competence (GC) and Pragmatic Competence (PC), in turn, define the relationship between GC and PC found in the researcher's context. This hypothesis was used to address the relationship between interlanguage pragmatics and grammar. As shown from exploring existing literature, there is evidence of both dependents and independent relationships between GC and PC, which were examined using different methods.

This research sought to answer questions that explore pragmatics competence relationship with grammatical competence in the researcher's context by using a tool multichoice discourse completion test (MDCT) which was developed by Çetınavci and Öztürk (2017) who collected previous studies that examined pragmatic interpretation (Bouton, 1988; Roever, 2005; Taguchi, 2005) and selected teachable implied meanings which were adapted in their MDCT.

The quantitative method is used to determine the relationship between the level of a learner's language proficiency (dependent on their first semester grade) and their pragmatic proficiency that is measured using the MDCT test tool developed by Çetınavci and Öztürk that relied on past pragmatic interpretation research made by multiple researchers.

2.1 Data Collection

An online version developed on google forum of the (MDCT) will assess the L2 learners' pragmatic competence by testing their comprehension of implied meanings included in real-life situations that contain: Pope Questions, Indirect Criticism, Irony, Indirect Refusals, Topic Change, Disclosures, Indirect Requests, Indirect Advice. Their language proficiency level will be determined by self-reported data collected from a survey section at the beginning of

the MDCT asking students about their first semester evaluation results. The students' pragmatic proficiency will be assessed using the (MDCT) at the start of the students' second semester.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The procedure used to select the sample was investigating the different students section in the English language institution that would have students that were more fluent in English according to the view of the institutions' instructors. The researcher concluded that according to the instructors' recommendation, the health section students are more fluent and more motivated to participate in research than students from other sections.

2.2.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

The sample for this study is second module preparatory year students from the health sector at King Abdelaziz University. English for health science is a required intensive 18 hours a week (total of 9 weeks per semester) course for the health sector students who are eligible for entry to medical school. The first semester course focuses on English for specific purposes (ESP) courses that target developing students' proficiency level to a high-1B proficiency level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale (CEFR). Approval from the English Language Institution is obtained to administer tests on-campus to their students. It is important to acknowledge that the number of participants in this study are originally 80 participants. However, 5 students for the plot, 5 students were excluded, and there were 74 students in the main study.

2.2.2 The Instrument

The google forum that had been shared with English language instructors was shared and exported to their students via a QR code, Email and Link. It contains a brief explanation of the intention of the exam with assurance of privacy for the participants. The participants were asked to approve their participation and share their responses with the researcher. They are also asked to write their first semester English course grade which is an accumulation of their scores in the first module. After that, they start the MDCT test which consists of 33 questions with 28 main study questions and 5 filler questions that are meant to examine the comprehension of the nonliteral meanings found in the listed situations. Lastly, the researcher added a question where participants are asked "where did you learn the answers of the previous questions?" and are given the choices of school, university, tv and media or the option of "other" in which they can write themselves. This question will trace the origin of the learner's pragmatic knowledge.

2.2.3 Analysis

For the analysis, SPSS is used to analyze the correlations between students' language proficiency level and pragmatic proficiency level by using Pearson correlation formula to find the relationship between them. The standard deviation between language proficiency level and pragmatic proficiency level from each student's response was found in order to understand how much these variables deviate from each other.

In order to do that, first each MDCT question was graded with one score each (except the filler questions). The researcher used a mathematical formula in excel to turn the value of the scores (28 in total) to an even percentage (e.g., the MDCT score 23 out of 28 is equal to 82.14%).

Then the following scale was applied:

Score Range	Numeric Value	Letter Grade
less than 70	0	F
70-74	1	C
75-79	2	C+
80-84	3	B
85-89	4	B+
90-94	5	A
95-100	6	A+

Then the researcher counted how many students got 6 and how many got 0 and what is the relationship if any with the level of their language proficiency. Moreover, in order to see which implicature the students found most difficult; the researcher examined the answer pool found in the google form which shows the responses.

The MDCT tool used in this research is a reading only instrument, as stated by the original creators of the instrument, while the situations where implied meaning occur are more likely reliant on hearing and seeing

3. Results

The following section will illustrate the results of the 74 participants of the study.

Table 1. Pearson's correlation between the MDCT test and their English proficiency level

		MDCT	English test
MDCT	Pearson Correlation	1	.355[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	74	74
English test	Pearson Correlation	.355[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	74	74

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the SPSS analysis conducted on Table 1, the Pearson correlation between the MDCT and English test is .355. This indicates a positive correlation between the two variables, suggesting that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase. While the correlation coefficient .355 suggests a moderate correlation, it should be noted that further tests would be needed to determine the strength and significance of the relationship. Nonetheless, this finding may be informative for educators and administrators who seek to better understand the relationship between MDCT scores and English language proficiency in their students.

Table 2. Frequency of responses with the scale score (0☐6) of each MDCT and English level (Note 1)

Scale (0-6)	6	5	4	3	2	1	**0**	**N**
English Test	14	13	26	10	5	2	4	74
MDCT	3	3	3	3	2	3	57	74

In Table 2, the results of both MDCT score and the students' English test are scaled from 0 as the lowest value and 6 as the highest value and measured for their frequency. In the English level score determined by their first English module grade, as reported by the students, out of 74 students, 14 students scored 95% to 100%, 13 students scored 90% to 94%, 26 scored 85 to 89, 10 students scored 80% to 84%, 5 students scored 75% to 79, 2 students scored 70% to 74%, and 4 students scored below 69%. In comparison, In the MDCT test, 3 students scored 95% to 100%, 3 students scored 90% to 94%, 3 scored 84% to 89%, 3 students scored 80% to 84%, 2 students scored 75% to 79, 3 students scored 70% to 74%, and 57 students scored below 69%.

Table 3. High level English proficiency students' MDCT scores

	MDCT	English Test
N	32	32
Median	69.6429%	95.00
Mean	62.9464%	94.56
Std. Deviation	26.76843%	2.687

Table 3 illustrates MDCT scores achieved by high English proficiency level students. There were 32 students that reported their English grade level as 90%☐99%. The median of their English level is 95 %, the mean is 94% and the standard deviation is 2.677. As for their MDCT score, the median is 69.64%, the mean is 62.94%, and the standard deviation is

26.76%.

Table 4. High MDCT score and English test scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MDCT	5	93	100	95.60	2.881
English test	5	89.00	99.00	96.20	4.08656
Valid N (listwise)	5				

Table 4 shows the minimum and maximum grades of the top MDCT scores achieved by the participants and their English test scores. It also lists the mean of the top scores (95.60) and the mean of their English test scores (96.20).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the MDCT score and students reported level

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MDCT	74	0.00%	100.00%	46.524%	26.27%
English Test	74	63.00%	99.00%	86.75%	8.29%
N	74				

The table above illustrates the minimum grade scored on the MDCT which is 0% and the maximum is 100%, with an average score of 46.524%. The standard deviation found between each response and the mean is 26.27%. While on the English test, the minimum grade scored is 63% and the maximum 99%, The average score is 86.75%, and the standard deviation found between each response and the mean is 8.29%.

Table 6. Frequently missed questions

		Frequency
Valid	Implicature	Missed question per implicture
	(Verbal) Irony	2/3
	Disclosure	2/3
	Filler question	1/5
	Indirect Advice	1/4
	Indirect Criticism	3/4
	Indirect Refusals	1/3
	Indirect Requests	2/2
	Pope Question	2/5
	Topic Change	3/4
	Total number of missed implicture	17/33

Table 6 views frequently missed questions and their type of implicature. These results were gathered from the MDCT survey done via the google form, which had questions with less than 50% correct response rate. All the questions characterized as Indirect requests are answered wrong by all the 74 students. The most correctly answered questions are filler questions, indirect refusal, and indirect advice.

4. Discussion

4.1 What Is the Relationship Between Pragmatics Competency and Saudi EFL Learners' Language Proficiency

The first research question was aimed at investigating the relationship between English learners' language proficiency and their pragmatic proficiency. The results in Table 1 demonstrate a positive linear correlation of 0.355 which could indicate that there is a positive relationship between the level of students' proficiency and their knowledge of implied meaning. Taking into consideration the level of the students who participated in the test, their scores are mostly average to high as they acquired an average score 86.75%. In their first module English test, the students' MDCT average score of the same group is 46.524% which is less than their English test results. The difference of both the test averages may be observed to be the result of students not being exposed to study materials that teach implicatures. And upon examining high level students who achieved more than 90% in the English test, it is apparent that the difference in both tests' median scores, (69% MDCT and 95% English test), could indicate that there is no linear relationship between the students' high level in English and their pragmatic proficiency. This is in line with Farnia's (2015) statement that the level of English doesn't affect the pragmatic knowledge. On the other hand, the opposite could not be said. In Table 4, the high MDCT scores are achieved by students who have high English proficiency.

4.2 What Is the Most Difficult Implicature Factor for Low Pragmatic Proficiency Learners

The second research question goal was to view the most difficult implicatures found by students who achieved less scores in the MDCT test. As seen in Table 6, Indirect request, irony, disclosure, and indirect criticism are the most frequently missed questions in the MDCT. All of which are implicatures that are teachable according to Çetınavci and Öztürk (2017) who stated that formulaic expressions such as implicatures are both teachable and testable. The low number of students who scored 80%□100% in the MDCT test in comparison to their high proficiency in English may suggest the need to implement materials in English programs that teach English language students English language pragmatics such as implicatures that are needed to understand what certain dialogues imply.

In conclusion, this research found a positive relationship between the level of pragmatic proficiency and English proficiency by using MDCT and students' first module test results as tools for the investigation. It is discovered that high English proficiency does not necessarily translate to high pragmatic proficiency. However, a high pragmatic proficiency could indicate a high English proficiency level. Moreover, it is observed that the most difficult implications are Indirect request, irony, disclosure, and indirect criticism.

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Notes

Note 1. It is worth noting that (0 for less than a 70 score, 1 for 70 to 74, 2 for 75 to 79, 3 for 80 to 84, 4 for 85 to 89, 5 for 90 to 94, and 6 for 95 to 100).

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