

The Pragmatic Competence of Academically Talented English Language Students: Cross-Cultural Research

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Abstract—This study aimed to investigate the pragmatic competence of academically talented students in English as a foreign language (EFL) at Ajloun National University (ANU) in Jordan and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman, focusing on its role in communication, challenges in its acquisition, and strategies for effective teaching. Pragmatic competence can be defined as the ability to use language effectively in social interactions and is a crucial component of communicative competence, particularly for high-achieving learners in academic settings. A pragmatic competence scale administered to 113 students revealed relatively strong pragmatic competence needs among the EFL students. The results indicated that academically talented EFL students at ANU and SQU demonstrated a high level of pragmatic competence in the domains of perception, understanding, and communication skills. There were statistically significant differences in the learning and confidence domains based on country, with Omani students scoring a higher mean compared to Jordanian students. Moreover, the findings showed statistically significant differences in the areas of perception and understanding, as well as learning and confidence, favoring female students. Additionally, statistically significant differences were observed in the domains of learning and confidence, favoring 3rd and 4th-year students in both universities. The researchers recommended incorporating pragmatic instruction into EFL curricula, using technology to enhance pragmatic learning, and providing targeted support for male and lower-year students.

Index Terms—pragmatic competence, academically talented, EFL students, cross-cultural research

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental aspect of human communication, cultural identity, and psychology. It plays a vital role in the life of nations and individuals, serving as a tool for expressing emotions, needs, and transferring knowledge and ideas. It also reflects a person's identity and societal development. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners often focus on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition, neglecting the importance of pragmatic competence. Effective communication requires grammatical knowledge and the ability to understand and produce language appropriately in various social contexts, since it plays a crucial role in the language proficiency development of EFL students (Adyawardhani, 2015). However, pragmatic competence refers to using language appropriately in various social and cultural contexts, including understanding implied meanings, politeness strategies, and conversational norms. The term was introduced by Thomas in 1983, who defined it as "the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context." He examined pragmatic competence concerning language proficiency, asserting that a speaker's pragmatic competence entails the ability to use language effectively to achieve specific objectives while also comprehending language in its context and setting. He also emphasized the significance of both the linguistic and social or contextual dimensions of pragmatic competence. The acquisition of pragmatic skills enables learners to interpret and generate language that aligns with the norms and expectations of the target language (Tomasello, 1992).

Alduais et al. (2022) introduced the concept of pragmatic competence to highlight that language users possess an understanding of how verbal language interacts with specific contexts of use. However, the foundational distinction

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between competence and performance initially prompted many to categorize pragmatic phenomena within the realm of performance. As a result, pragmatics was often excluded from linguistic studies that predominantly focused on competence, which primarily concerned syntax. However, pragmatic competence is a cornerstone of communicative competence as it enables learners to interpret and produce language in contextually appropriate ways (Dorcheh & Baharlooie, 2016). Pragmatic competence is understood as the awareness of the linguistic resources available in specific languages to comprehend particular illocutions, identify the sequential characteristics of speech acts, and recognize the appropriate contextual application of certain linguistic tools. This definition highlights two aspects of pragmatic competence: the learner's linguistic capabilities in the foreign language and the contextual utilization of those resources (Mokoro, 2024). In the field of second language acquisition, pragmatic competence has become a vital element of communicative competence, involving the ability to utilize language suitably across various social and cultural contexts. For learners of EFL, pragmatic competence not only enhances effective interaction but also plays a significant role in overall language proficiency. As language learning exceeds mere grammatical rules and vocabulary acquisition, mastering the pragmatic aspect is essential for learners as they navigate cross-cultural communication scenarios. It frames pragmatic competence as the process of understanding the available linguistic means and being aware of their effective usage within a given context. This competence requires using language suitably across various social and cultural settings, including knowledge of speech acts, conversational implicatures, and sociolinguistic norms (Taguchi, 2009). For university students studying English as a foreign language, pragmatic competence is essential for effectively navigating academic, professional, and interpersonal interactions.

According to Mao (2023) communicative competence includes not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge. For EFL students, pragmatic competence is crucial for these reasons: Firstly, understanding implied meanings and recognizing indirect speech acts, sarcasm, and humor in English. Secondly, politeness strategies include using appropriate levels of formality and politeness in different situations. Thirdly, cultural awareness is like navigating cultural differences in communication styles and norms, and finally, effective communication, such as avoiding misunderstandings and building rapport with native and non-native speakers. Without pragmatic competence, EFL learners may struggle to communicate effectively, even if they possess strong grammatical and lexical knowledge. Traditional language instruction often emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, while pragmatic competence is overlooked or treated as peripheral. By equipping EFL students with pragmatic competence, educators can empower them to engage more effectively in academic discourse, professional collaborations, and social interactions across cultural boundaries (Omar, 2023). This, in turn, fosters mutual respect, reduces stereotypes, and promotes inclusivity in global contexts.

In academic settings, pragmatic competence directly impacts students' ability to engage effectively in various activities such as academic discussions, group projects, and academic writing. For instance, students with strong pragmatics skills can interpret implicit meanings in lectures, ask questions politely, and contribute relevant ideas during group discussions. According to Taguchi (2009) pragmatic competence is essential for understanding speech acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals, which are common in academic interactions. Without this competence, students may face challenges in interpreting instructions or communicating their ideas clearly, leading to misunderstandings and academic delays. However, the teaching of pragmatics aims to enhance learners' ability to use socially appropriate language in various contexts they encounter. In the realm of second language studies and teaching, pragmatics includes topics such as speech acts, conversational structure, conversational management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use, including the choice of address forms. So there is a clear need for pragmatics instruction, as observations of language learners indicate that this type of teaching can be effective (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996).

Cross-cultural studies have highlighted that the development of pragmatic skills varies significantly across different sociocultural backgrounds, influenced by learners' native languages, cultural norms, and educational contexts (Al-Zoubi, 2024). In EFL environments such as Jordan and Oman, where English is predominantly taught in academic settings rather than through immersive experiences, acquiring pragmatic skills poses unique challenges. Although these countries share some cultural similarities due to their geographical proximity, they also display distinct differences that can affect how learners interpret and produce speech acts in English (Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010).

Concerning personal development, pragmatic competence contributes significantly to personal growth because effective communication enhances students' confidence and self-expression, enabling them to articulate their thoughts and emotions appropriately. This skill is particularly valuable in situations such as interviews, presentations, and networking events. Emphasize that pragmatic competence helps learners avoid potential embarrassment or offense, which can negatively impact their self-esteem and willingness to communicate (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). As a result, students with strong pragmatic competence are better equipped to navigate social and professional interactions successfully. Despite its importance, developing pragmatic competence poses challenges for EFL students. Limited exposure to authentic language use and cultural contexts can hinder their ability to acquire pragmatic norms. Additionally, traditional language instruction often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over pragmatic aspects of communication. To address these challenges, educators should incorporate pragmatic-focused activities, such as role-plays, discourse analysis, and exposure to authentic materials, into their teaching practices (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

In conclusion, this study examines the pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students at ANU in Jordan and SQU in Oman. Its objective is to illuminate how cultural context shapes learners' pragmatic awareness and how this awareness, in turn, enhances their communicative effectiveness. By comparing these two cultural settings, the researchers provide a clear understanding of pragmatic competence within the Arab EFL landscape and make valuable insights into pedagogical practices that foster pragmatic development. For EFL students at both universities, developing pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication in academic, professional, and social settings. However, developing this skill is vital for achieving academic success, fostering interpersonal relationships, engaging in cross-cultural interactions, and attaining professional goals. By enhancing their pragmatic competence, students can become more effective, empathetic, and confident communicators, ultimately improving their cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills, and interpersonal connections. Language proficiency should be assessed not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the appropriate application of language in diverse social contexts. The advancement of pragmatic skills is a crucial component in determining the overall language competence of EFL learners.

A. Study Significance

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the understanding of the role of pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students in the academic, social, and professional success of EFL students' language proficiency at ANU and SQU. As global communication increasingly relies on English as a lingua franca, the ability to use the language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts has become a critical skill for learners. This study aims to address the gap in the existing literature by focusing on how the pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students how pragmatic competence impacts EFL students' language proficiency at ANU and SQU, besides identifying effective strategies for its development.

This study contributes to the field of foreign language acquisition by shedding light on the interplay between pragmatic competence and other dimensions of language proficiency. It underscores the importance of pragmatic skills in fostering meaningful communication and reducing misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions. By exploring the specific challenges faced by EFL university students, the study provides insights into the barriers that hinder their ability to apply pragmatic knowledge in real-life situations. Moreover, the findings of this research have practical implications for EFL educators and curriculum designers.

B. Statement of the Problem

EFL students at ANU and SQU encounter several obstacles in developing their pragmatic competence, primarily due to limited exposure to authentic language use, which restricts opportunities for interaction with native English speakers and real-life communication. Additionally, cultural differences pose challenges, as Jordanian and Omani students may struggle to understand and adapt to the cultural norms inherent in English pragmatics, such as indirectness and humor. Furthermore, traditional EFL teaching methods in Jordan and Oman often emphasize grammar and vocabulary at the expense of pragmatic skills, leaving students insufficiently prepared for practical communication situations. Lastly, a lack of pragmatic awareness may prevent EFL students from recognizing the significance of pragmatics or understanding how to apply it effectively in their language use.

C. Research Questions

- 1 - What is the level of pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students?
- 2 - Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to country (Jordan, Oman)?
- 3 - Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to gender?
- 4 - Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to students' academic level?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have highlighted the importance of pragmatic competence in second or foreign language learning. These studies suggest that the inclusion of pragmatic strategy training in language academies can significantly improve learners' ability to understand and produce speech acts appropriately. Additionally, research indicates that there is often a gap between what pragmatics research has found and how language is typically taught, emphasizing the need for a stronger focus on pragmatic competence in the EFL curriculum. This section reviews key studies relevant to the impacts of pragmatic competence on EFL university students, focusing on its development, challenges, and instructional strategies.

Studies conducted in other EFL contexts further support the importance of pragmatic competence. For instance, a survey of the gratitude strategies of Indonesian EFL students highlighted the relationship between second/foreign language learning and interlanguage pragmatics, emphasizing the need to incorporate pragmatic strategy training in language academic rooms (Adyawardhani, 2015). Similarly, research on the acquisition of pragmatic and cultural competencies by Indonesian language learners underscores the significance of considering language as a reflection of the speaker's culture rather than solely as a structural system (Suwarno, 2018). Yu (2011) examined the interlanguage behavior of Chinese learners of American English, particularly focusing on their approach to offering compliments in a second language. The study revealed that native Chinese speakers and native English speakers employed significantly

different linguistic strategies and options. This suggests that the socio-cultural strategies rooted in their first language were often transferred into their second language behavior. Shboul (2010) conducted a cross-cultural study on the linguistic expressions of the speech act of threatening, performed by native speakers of Jordanian Arabic and American English. The data for this investigation were gathered through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) that utilized real-life situations. The study identified five strategies for making threats: appealing to authority, committing harm, introducing options, issuing warnings, and promising vague consequences.

Regarding pragmatic competence and communication, research has consistently highlighted the critical role of pragmatic competence in successful communication and shown that pragmatic competence significantly impacts EFL learners' communication skills. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) examined the gap between linguistic and pragmatic competence among EFL learners and found that even advanced learners often fail to use language appropriately in social contexts. Their findings underscore the need to address pragmatic knowledge explicitly in language instruction. Similarly, Taguchi (2009) investigated how pragmatic comprehension develops in EFL learners and revealed that proficiency levels and exposure to authentic language significantly influence pragmatic understanding. Munir and Yavuz (2024) discussed the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic competence, noting that higher proficiency levels enable learners to focus on the nuances of communication. Additionally, Kentmen et al. (2023) conducted a study aimed at assessing the pragmatic competence of Turkish EFL learners concerning speech acts and conversational skills. Utilizing quantitative analysis, 54 adult English learners at a university in Cyprus were evaluated on their understanding and use of *s* and speech acts. The findings indicated that EFL learners performed better on the MCDT concerning the comprehension of formulaic and idiosyncratic expressions. Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant differences in pragmatic competence between male and female respondents. These outcomes underscore the importance of teaching pragmatics in EFL academic rooms as a crucial component of a sustainable learning environment.

According to challenges in developing pragmatic competence, EFL learners face several challenges in acquiring pragmatic competence, including limited exposure to authentic language use and cultural differences. Mokoro (2024) emphasized that pragmatic knowledge is context-dependent and often requires immersion in the target language culture for effective acquisition. Furthermore, Rose (2005) found that EFL learners often struggle with speech acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals, which require both linguistic and cultural knowledge. These challenges highlight the complexity of pragmatic competence and the need for targeted instructional interventions. Yusuf (2018) investigated the essays of 92 Egyptian university students at both intermediate and advanced levels. She identified six types of pragmatic linguistic errors: "Erroneous construction of sentences, Arabic construction of sentences, literal translation errors, multiple-meaning word errors, near-synonym errors, and lexical collocation errors" (p. 25). She concluded that most of these errors stemmed from the influence of the first language and a lack of language proficiency.

Concerning instructional strategies for enhancing pragmatic competence, effective teaching strategies play a crucial role in fostering pragmatic competence. Ishihara and Cohen (2010) proposed a framework for teaching pragmatics that includes explicit instruction, role-plays, and exposure to authentic materials. Their study demonstrated that learners who receive explicit pragmatic instruction outperform those who do not in terms of pragmatic awareness and performance. Al-Seghayer (2024) emphasized the importance of integrating pragmatics into language curricula and suggested using tasks that simulate real-life interactions to promote pragmatic development. Gharibeh et al. (2016) investigated the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction on the production of refusals among Iranian EFL learners. The study involved 36 male and 68 female participants. The findings indicated the effectiveness of explicit metapragmatic instruction in this context. Omar and Razi (2022) conducted a study involving university students at the intermediate proficiency level in Iraq. They provided direct instruction on the speech acts of suggesting and requesting to the treatment group by utilizing videos and TV series, while the control group was exposed to these pragmatic features through their textbook without receiving direct instruction from the researchers. The results of their experiment indicated significant improvements in the students' pragmatic performance. Al Kayed and Al-Ghoweri (2019) found that Jordanian EFL students who received explicit instruction in pragmatics demonstrated an improved ability to use English appropriately in social interactions. Al Qadi (2020) also highlighted the positive correlation between pragmatic competence and students' confidence in speaking English.

Alkawaz et al. (2023) conducted a study to examine the effects of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the use of English requests, apologies, and refusals by Iraqi EFL learners, while also considering the potential intervening roles of error type and gender. The study involved a sample of 80 English major B.A. students from Al-Kufa University in Iraq. Throughout six online sessions, the experimental group received instruction that focused on direct awareness-raising and the provision of metapragmatic information. The findings revealed that explicit pragmatic instruction significantly enhanced the students' ability to realize speech acts. Notably, female learners showed greater improvement from the intervention, and a higher proportion of sociopragmatic errors were corrected compared to pragmalinguistic errors following the treatment. However, the variables of gender and types of pragmatic errors did not demonstrate significant intervening effects. Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2023) found that Omani female students face challenges in using speech acts such as compliments, with the results showing that 61.02% of responses were linguistically inaccurate and 23.96% were pragmatically inappropriate, highlighting the need to integrate cultural and pragmatic knowledge into English language teaching curricula. Hammouri and Al-Khanji (2023) indicated that Jordanian learners of English as a foreign language

face challenges in performing speech acts such as responses to requests and suggestions, leading to pragmatic failures due to an imbalance between linguistic competence and knowledge of social and cultural contexts.

Concerning pragmatic competence in academic and professional contexts, pragmatic competence is particularly significant for EFL university students, as it impacts their academic success and employability. Al-Zoubi (2024) investigated the level of linguistic intelligence among academically gifted students at ANU in Jordan. The sample comprised 29 students, all of whom had a cumulative average exceeding 84% and were rated as excellent students. The students completed a linguistic intelligence questionnaire consisting of 26 statements. The findings indicated that students exhibit a high level of linguistic intelligence. Additionally, the study identified statistically significant differences in linguistic intelligence levels between gifted male and female students, with female students demonstrating a higher level of linguistic intelligence. Vellenga (2004) explored how pragmatic knowledge affects academic discourse and found that students with higher pragmatic competence are better equipped to engage in academic discussions and collaborative projects. Additionally, Bardovi-Harlig (2001) highlighted the importance of pragmatic competence in professional settings, where appropriate language use can enhance career opportunities and workplace relationships. Alqahtani (2023) confirmed that using cognitive structure theory in teaching listening skills improves Saudi female students' ability to understand spoken English, which enhances their pragmatic competence. On the other hand, Al-Juwaily (2023) showed that motivational programs, such as inviting guest speakers and giving group presentations, contribute to improving the communication skills of first-year English language students, which reflects the importance of an interactive educational environment in developing pragmatic competence.

To sum up, the literature reviewed stresses the vital importance of pragmatic competence in both second and foreign language education, especially within the context of EFL at the university level. Numerous studies affirm that pragmatic competence is crucial not only for effective communication but also for academic success and professional advancement. However, learners frequently face challenges in acquiring these pragmatic skills, largely due to limited exposure to authentic language use and cultural subtleties, as well as the lack of explicit instruction in many curricula. Research consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of instructional strategies, particularly explicit and metapragmatic approaches that leverage real-life situations, media, and interactive activities to enhance learners' pragmatic abilities. Additionally, while some findings indicate that language proficiency and pragmatic competence may not always evolve simultaneously, targeted pedagogical interventions have shown success in narrowing this gap. Consequently, there is an urgent need for EFL programs to systematically incorporate pragmatic instruction into their curricula to better equip students for real-world communication in academic and professional contexts.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section explains the methodological framework adopted in the present study, which aims to investigate the level of pragmatic competence among academically talented EFL students at ANU in Jordan and SQU in Oman during the 2024–2025 academic year. The study utilized a descriptive quantitative approach to collect and analyze pertinent data. It outlines the procedures employed for participant selection, data collection, and the administration of the pragmatic competence scale, specifically developed for this study. The methodology was designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings while adhering to ethical research standards.

A. Research Design

The current research followed a descriptive quantitative approach. The descriptive research aims to obtain quantitative data on the level of pragmatic competence among academically talented EFL students at ANU and SQU.

B. Participants

A convenience sample of 113 EFL students at ANU and SQU participated in this study in the academic year 2024–2025. These participants were identified as academically talented due to their outstanding GPA achievements. The GPA data was sourced from the Departments of Admission and Registration at both ANU and SQU.

TABLE 1
THE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Gender	M	42
	F	71
Country	Jordan	48
	Oman	65
Academic level	1-2 Y	37
	3-4 Y	76

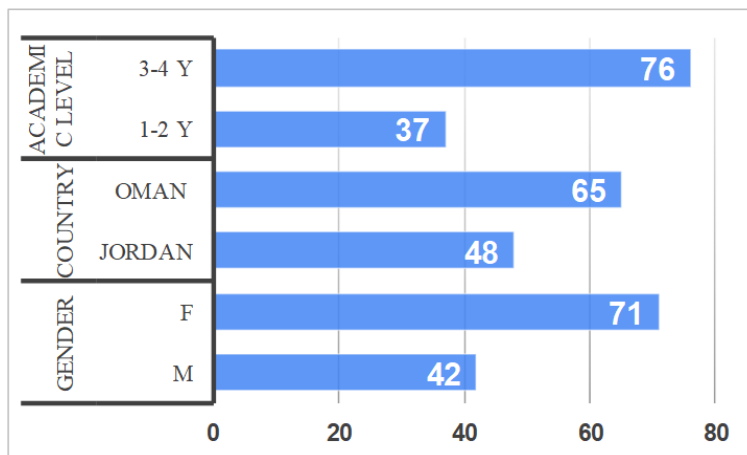


Figure 1. The Demographic Data

C. Instrument

The pragmatic competence scale was developed after reviewing the literature and previous studies. The first version of the scale consisted of 24 items distributed to four main domains: Perception and understanding, communication skills, communicative contexts, and learning and confidence. To verify the validity of the scale, it was reviewed by five experts in applied linguistics and English language teaching methods, who provided their comments and feedback. Based on these comments, the necessary modifications were made, and the final version of the scale consisted of 20 items, with 5 items for each domain. On the other hand, the scale's reliability was examined by applying it to a pilot sample of 33 EFL students at ANU and SQU. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficients were as follows: Perception and understanding (0.88), communication skills (0.83), communicative contexts (0.87), and learning and confidence (0.82). The scale items are responded to according to a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

D. Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the College of Education in SQU and the Deanship of Scientific Research in ANU. A link to the scale was distributed via WhatsApp and email to all students during the spring of 2025.

E. Procedures of the Study

- 1) The pragmatic competence scale (PCS) was developed after reviewing relevant studies.
- 2) The Departments of Admission and Registration at ANU and SQU were contacted to obtain data on EFL students for the academic year 2024-2025.
- 3) A purposeful selection was made, with 113 students chosen from the Departments of Admissions and Registration lists due to their high GPAs (Excellent).
- 4) The PCS was designed according to Google Forms, and the scale link was sent via university email to all participants at SQU and ANU.
- 5) In the instructions for responding to the scale, students were informed that participation was voluntary and free of charge and that their responses would be used for scientific research purposes only.

IV. RESULTS

1. Results of the first question:

What is the level of pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students?

TABLE 2
THE SUB-DOMAINS OF THE PCS SOCIAL COMPETENCE SCALE

Sub-Domains	N	M	S.D	Level
Perception & Understanding	113	3.82	.240	High
Communication Skills	113	3.94	.219	High
Communicative Contexts	113	3.29	.340	Average
Learning & Confidence	113	3.30	.377	Average

Table 2 reveals that academically talented EFL students at ANU and SQU demonstrate a high level of pragmatic competence in the perception and understanding (M =3.82) and communication skills (M =3.94) domains. However, their competence is average in the communicative contexts (M= 3.29) and learning and confidence (M= 3.30) domains.

2. Results of the second question:

Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to country?

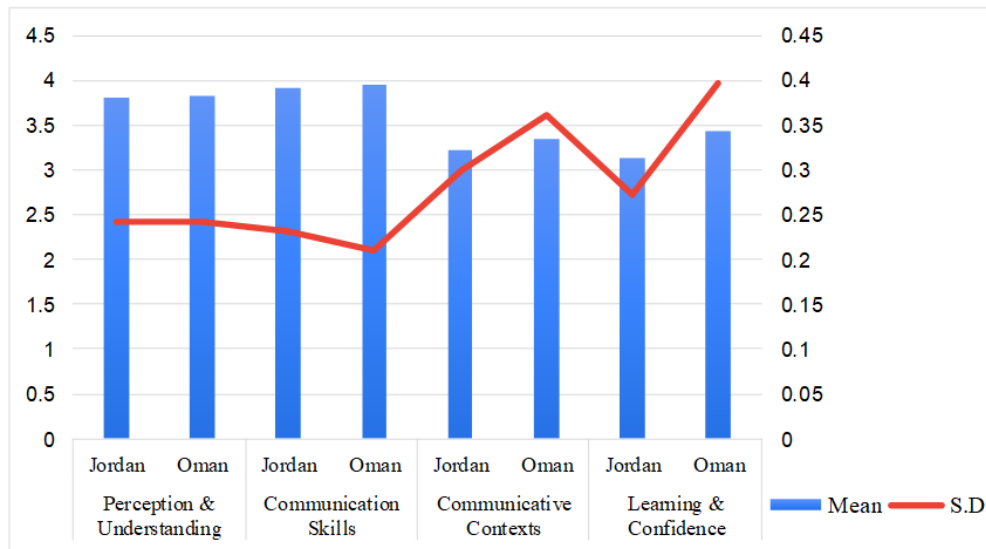


Figure 2. The PCS Sub-Domains According to the Country (Oman and Jordan)

Figure 2 shows differences in means on the PCS domains according to the country variable (Oman and Jordan). To reveal the statistical significance of these differences, the t-test was used. Table 3 shows the results of the t-test.

TABLE 3
T-TEST RESULTS ACCORDING TO COUNTRY

Sub-Domains	Country	N	M	S.D	df	t	Sig.
Perception & Understanding	Jordan	48	3.81	.243	111	-.438	.662
	Oman	65	3.83	.242			
Communication Skills	Jordan	48	3.92	.232	111	-.763	.447
	Oman	65	3.95	.210			
Communicative Contexts	Jordan	48	3.22	.299	111	-1.86	.064
	Oman	65	3.34	.361			
Learning & Confidence	Jordan	48	3.14	.273	111	-4.33	.001*
	Oman	65	3.43	.397			

Table 3 demonstrates that there are statistically significant differences in the domain of learning and confidence based on country, with Omani students scoring a higher mean (M = 3.43) compared to Jordanian students (M = 3.14). Conversely, the table indicates that there are no statistically significant differences in the other domains of the PCS.

3. Results of the third question:

Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to gender?

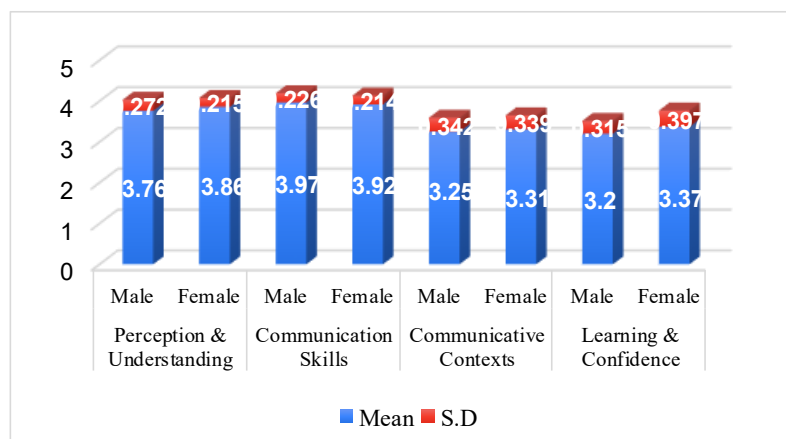


Figure 3. The PCS Sub-Domains According to Gender

Figure 3 means and standard deviations according to gender.

Figure 3 shows differences in means on the PCS domains according to gender. To identify the statistical significance of these differences, the t-test was used. Table 4 shows the results of the t-test.

TABLE 4
T-TEST RESULTS ACCORDING TO GENDER

Sub-Domains	Gender	N	M	S.D	df	t	Sig.
Perception & Understanding	Male	42	3.76	0.272	111	-2.11	.037*
	Female	71	3.86	0.215			
Communication Skills	Male	42	3.97	0.226	111	1.22	.223
	Female	71	3.92	0.214			
Communicative Contexts	Male	42	3.25	0.342	111	-0.993	.324
	Female	71	3.31	0.339			
Learning & Confidence	Male	42	3.20	0.315	111	-2.39	.019*
	Female	71	3.37	0.397			

Table 4 indicates that statistically significant differences exist in the areas of perception and understanding (M=3.86), as well as learning and confidence (M=3.37), favoring female students in Jordan and Oman. However, no statistically significant differences were found in the other domains of the PCS.

4. Results of the fourth question:

Does the level of pragmatic competence differ according to students' academic level?

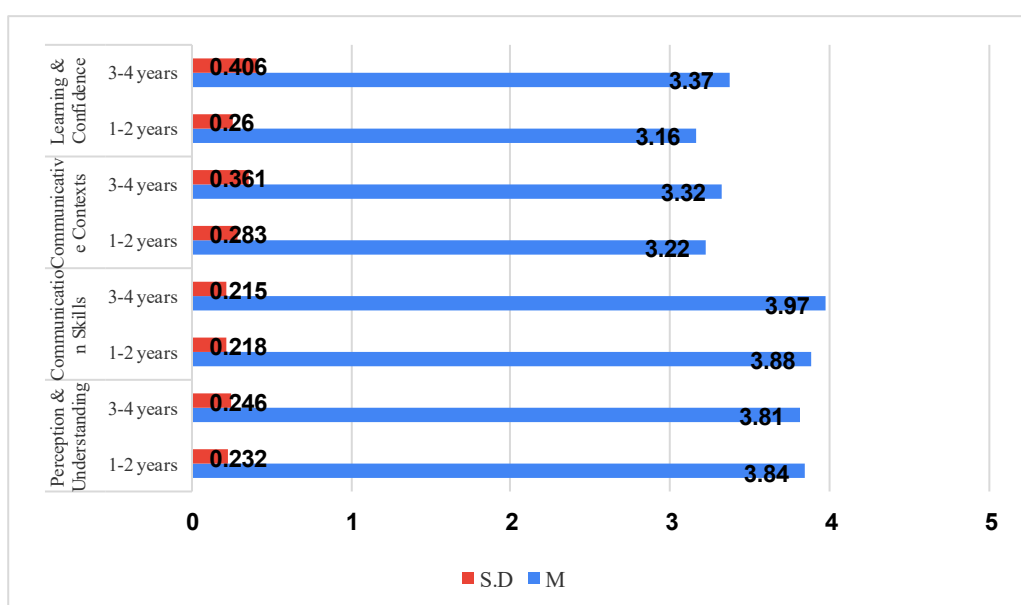


Figure 4. The PCS Sub-Domains According to Students' Academic Level

Figure 4 reveals differences in means on the PCS domains according to students' academic level. To identify the statistical significance of these differences, the t-test was used. Table 5 shows the results of the t-test.

TABLE 5
T-TEST RESULTS ACCORDING TO ACADEMIC LEVEL

Sub-Domains	Academic level	N	M	S.D	df	t	Sig.
Perception & Understanding	1-2 years	37	3.84	.232	111	.635	.528
	3-4 years	76	3.81	.246			
Communication Skills	1-2 years	37	3.88	.218	111	-1.94	.057
	3-4 years	76	3.97	.215			
Communicative Contexts	1-2 years	37	3.22	.283	111	-1.46	.146
	3-4 years	76	3.32	.361			
Learning & Confidence	1-2 years	37	3.16	.260	111	-2.84	.005*
	3-4 years	76	3.37	.406			

Table 5 shows that there are statistically significant differences in the domains of learning and confidence in favor of 3rd and 4th-year students (M=3.37) (Sig. 005*). There are no statistical differences in the other domains of the PCS.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Discussion of the Results of the First Question (The Level of Pragmatic Competence)

The results showed that academically talented EFL learners possessed a high level of pragmatic competence in perception and understanding, and communication skills. In the area of perception and understanding, students demonstrated a strong ability to distinguish pragmatic connotations, infer implicit meanings, and understand linguistic functions in their appropriate contexts. In the area of communication skills, students were able to use context-

appropriate expressions and manage dialogues in a way that reflected their awareness of the social and cultural dimensions of situations. They also used speech acts (such as requests, apologies, and suggestions) with high accuracy and fluency. These results showed that academically talented students possessed a high level of pragmatic competence in both the areas of perception and understanding and communication skills. This indicates their ability to accurately interpret social and linguistic contexts and use language appropriately for different situations. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Alqahtani (2023) and Al-Juwaily (2023). On the other hand, the results of this study are inconsistent with the findings of Zhai and Wibowo (2023) that integrating AI technologies can improve learners' communicative proficiency by providing an interactive environment that simulates real-life conversations.

Based on the above, it can be argued that developing pragmatic competence among academically talented students requires educational strategies that focus on authentic interaction, providing learning environments that mimic real-life contexts, and integrating modern technologies that promote self-directed and interactive learning. The study results showed that academically talented students at ANU and SQU enjoyed high levels of pragmatic competence in the areas of perception, comprehension, and communication skills. However, their performance was average in the areas of communicative contexts and learning, and confidence. These results reflect students' excellence in their ability to analyze implicit meanings and understand speech acts. However, they also reveal difficulties in applying these skills in real-life interactions that require linguistic flexibility and confidence in using language in unplanned situations.

It's also worth noting that psychological factors play an important role in this context. Alqahtani (2023) showed that some students with good language skills suffer from low self-confidence when using English in situations that require immediate responses or verbal negotiation. This can be observed in academic learning environments such as ANU and SQU, where talented students face internal pressure to achieve excellence, which can negatively impact their communicative flexibility. On the other hand, Willcox-Ficzere (2018) showed that the assessment of pragmatic competence should go beyond traditional tasks such as dialogue completion tests and include assessments based on extended oral discourse, allowing learners to demonstrate their ability to organize speech and use pragmatic devices naturally.

In conclusion, it can be said that talented students at ANU and SQU possess a strong linguistic and cognitive structure, but they need to enhance the practical application of language in lifelike contexts and build self-confidence through modern educational practices that integrate cognitive and communicative aspects simultaneously. Furthermore, investing in the technical resources available at both universities may constitute a supportive element in raising the level of pragmatic competence in areas that have shown relative deficiencies.

B. Discussion of the Results of the Second Question (Country)

The results revealed that Omani students at SQU had a higher level of self-confidence in using English in communicative situations than students at ANU. The differences were statistically significant in favor of Omani students in the areas of learning and self-confidence. This indicates that Omani students benefited more from the university's learning environment, both in terms of academic support and the psychological aspects that enhance their confidence in their language skills. In addition, a study by Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2023) in an Omani context showed that Omani students at some Omani universities can adapt to educational conditions that promote lifelong learning and develop a sense of confidence in using English as a foreign language. This finding can also be linked to the success of initiatives such as summer language exchange programs or seminars that enhance social and linguistic communication among students, increasing their self-confidence. In contrast, the study results did not reveal any significant differences in the remaining areas measured, including communicative contexts, perception, and comprehension. This suggests that students at ANU may not have received the same type of social and educational support as Omani students at SQU. Al-Juwaily (2023) suggested that an educational environment that incorporates interactions with native speakers or interactive lectures can significantly contribute to developing self-confidence, a quality that may be lacking in other educational environments that do not provide the same level of interactive support.

Self-confidence in using English is an essential component of effective communication. Recent studies, such as Cao et al. (2024), emphasized the importance of a learning environment that encourages positive verbal interaction in fostering this confidence, which contributes to improving students' performance in real-life communication situations. Educational programs that focus on group activities and project-based learning at SQU may explain these differences in favor of Omani students, as these activities provide students with multiple opportunities to interact with their peers in a way that increases confidence and language proficiency.

In summary, this inconsistency between the two universities highlights the importance of academic and psychological support in fostering self-confidence and developing pragmatic competence. This suggests the need to consider students' psychological aspects when designing educational programs aimed at improving communication skills, in addition to the need to improve teaching methods in contexts where self-confidence is a key factor. It is also recommended to expand interactive activities at universities such as ANU to enable students to build confidence in communicating effectively using English.

C. Discussion of the Results of the Third Question (Gender)

The results indicated statistically significant differences in the areas of Perception and Understanding and Learning and competence of students at both SQU and ANU. These differences may be the result of several factors, including

psychological, social, and educational characteristics that influence how language is learned and used. It is well known that females, in many studies, demonstrate higher levels of pragmatic perception and understanding than males, particularly in situations requiring social awareness and the ability to interpret implicit meanings in communication. In the context of our study, the differences in favor of females in this area suggest that they may possess superior skills in reverse thinking and awareness of the pragmatic approaches used in social situations. Regarding learning and self-confidence, the study results indicate that females demonstrated higher levels of self-confidence in English than males. Several psychological and cultural factors can explain this. Kormos and Csizer (2014) indicated that females are often more motivated to learn a foreign language and demonstrate greater academic achievement in educational contexts emphasizing pragmatic skills. This factor may have led the females in the study to exhibit higher levels of learning and self-confidence than males, which could reflect their intrinsic motivation to master language skills in general. In addition, these differences can be explained by certain social perceptions, as females in some cultures typically face greater challenges in asserting themselves in specific fields, such as science and technology, which may push them to work harder to develop their self-confidence in other areas, such as language. Zhai and Wibowo (2023) indicated that females prefer activities involving group interaction, enhancing their confidence in language use. This is consistent with the findings of Al-Mahrooqi (2023) indicated that females in Omani society demonstrate a greater ability to use language in a way that more accurately considers cultural and social differences.

To sum up, the significant differences in favor of females in the Perception & Understanding and Learning & Confidence domains point to the importance of psychological and social factors in shaping pragmatic competence. Although males may possess strong language skills, females excel at applying these skills socially appropriately and with greater confidence in communicative contexts. Based on these findings, educational institutions should pay greater attention to enhancing male self-confidence through training programs that focus on developing pragmatic awareness and increasing interactive opportunities for all students.

D. Discussion of the Results of the Fourth Question (Academic Level)

The results showed that students in the third and fourth years of university demonstrated higher levels of self-confidence in using the English language, with statistically significant differences in favor of these students in the domain of learning and confidence. These results indicate that advanced academic experience and continuous exposure to academic materials and diverse educational activities in the advanced years have a significant impact on self-confidence and learning level. Students typically gain confidence in their advanced years as a result of their accumulated knowledge and practical experience in dealing with academic content. Students in their third and fourth years have taken more specialized courses that require intensive interaction using English in specialized fields, which contributes to enhancing their self-confidence in applying language skills. According to Kormos and Csizer (2014), continued exposure to the language in complex academic environments helps strengthen confidence and the ability to interact more confidently in communication situations. As students' progress through their studies, they develop greater academic maturity and the ability to manage time and tasks, which contributes to increased self-confidence. Benson (2007) indicated that students in their advanced years typically possess independent learning skills that enable them to use academic resources such as online libraries and advanced academic discussions, which enhance their academic performance and increase their sense of competence. Social interaction is an essential part of the university experience, and this increases in the advanced years, as students are exposed to greater opportunities for group work and participation in academic seminars and discussions. These interactions contribute to enhancing self-confidence in communicative situations. Al-Mahrooqi (2023) observed that frequent social interaction with peers and professors enhances self-confidence and leads to improved pragmatic competence.

In many universities, opportunities for practical experiences increase for students in the advanced years, such as participation in academic conferences, internships, or extracurricular activities that encourage the use of English in real-life contexts. These activities provide opportunities for students in the advanced years to improve their language skills and thus boost their self-confidence.

VI. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study is to examine the pragmatic competence of academically talented EFL students at ANU and SQU. The findings offer valuable insights into the pragmatic capabilities of these students. Overall, the students demonstrate high proficiency in the areas of perception and understanding, as well as communication skills. However, their performance in communicative contexts and learning, and confidence is average. Statistically significant differences were identified in the learning and confidence domain based on nationality, with Omani students outperforming their Jordanian counterparts. Additionally, noteworthy gender-related differences favoring female students were observed in the perception and understanding, as well as the learning and confidence domains, suggesting that female students may display greater awareness and self-assurance in their pragmatic use of English. Furthermore, the year of study emerged as a significant factor, with third- and fourth-year students exhibiting higher competence in the learning and confidence domain compared to their junior peers. These findings underscore the need for ongoing support and targeted instruction to enhance pragmatic skills, particularly in areas where students exhibit moderate proficiency. They also highlight the influences of gender, nationality, and academic progression on pragmatic

development. Finally, the researchers recommend incorporating pragmatic instruction into EFL curricula, using technology to enhance pragmatic learning, providing targeted support for male and lower-year students, enhancing cross-cultural communication training, as well as utilizing assessments to identify and address students' weaknesses in pragmatic skills.

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