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Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication: Scrutinizing the Causes and Challenges Involved in Iranian EFL Context

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Abstract

Pragmatic failure is an issue usually occurring in cross-cultural communication when L2 learners cannot express themselves appropriately. This study aimed to discern the factors leading to cross-cultural pragmatic failure (CCPF) and the challenges EFL learners face in trying to overcome miscommunication problems. Following a qualitative research design, in the first study phase, one of the researchers observed 10 EFL teachers' classes for 90 minutes each, twice a week during the term to take the required field notes for further analysis. To obtain more in-depth information, in the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 EFL teachers and learners, and the data were collected. The EFL teachers were from private English language institutes, and the student participants were EFL learners studying either in state-run universities or private language centers. The results of the thematic analysis revealed that EFL classroom context, time and budget, assessing pragmatic knowledge, ELT textbook, and teacher education were perceived as the causes of CCPF by the interviewees. Moreover, the extracted themes associated with learners' challenges included linguistic incompetency, investing insufficient time and effort, psychological factors, cultural and sociocultural differences, inappropriate teaching methodology, and teachers' pragmatic competence.

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Introduction

The major purpose of learning a foreign language in latest years has been to communicate and socialize using the foreign language. Matthews (2012, 325) claims that "as society becomes more universally connected, the capability to communicate over cultural boundaries has achieved growing importance". Fernández (2008) claims that understanding a new language together with its grammar rules does not absolutely signify that you can communicate appropriately with its native speakers, especially in the case of social contexts or situations.

English language education in Iran mainly reflects the context where students whose first language is Persian try to learn the mentioned target language in their own country. In fact, English is not considered a means of communication in Iranian context, and students are not generally prepared for proper functioning in their society. In line with the new trends in education, communicative competence is believed to be the main purpose of English language teaching. However, achieving pragmatic competence is not always an easy task since most teachers rely on grammatical syllabus in their classes instead of providing opportunities for students to develop their knowledge of socio-cultural and pragmatic norms of the target community. Hence, they cannot function effectively when interacting with English native speakers and miscommunication will result eventually. According to Eslami-Rasekh (2005), with the pedagogical focus of EFL teachers on pragmatic competence in the language classroom, pragmatic awareness and production of their students will develop.

Development of participants' pragmatic awareness or pragmatic competence is one of the most important areas of study in L2 acquisition since it helps language learners utilize language appropriately and according to the context to accomplish their pragmatic goals. Most importantly, pragmatic competence has been realized as one major component of communicative competence as claimed by Laughlin et al. (2015), Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006). It has also been considered as a huge challenge to most L2 learners, even those who enjoy high proficiency levels but usually lack of appropriate knowledge and capability to establish successful communication in a socially and culturally acceptable manner (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Halenko & Jones, 2011; Kasper, 1997). According to Thomas (1983, p. 94), pragmatic competence is "the skill to implement language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to discern language in context". Additionally, Fernández (2008, 11) suggests that "L2 participants' lack of pragmatic competence can lead to pragmatic failure and, more importantly, to a complete communication breakdown." As a result, to establish effective communication with others, EFL learners are required to intensify their pragmatic awareness. In this regard, Thomas (1983) posits that pragmatic competence comprises both pragmalinguistic knowledge, the ability to utilize linguistic resources efficiently, and sociopragmatic knowledge, reflecting the ability to use language appropriately in social situations. In fact, Thomas acquired these terms from Leech (1983) who defined pragmalinguistics as the individual's linguistic knowledge of language use, and sociopragmatics as how sociological knowledge impacts interaction, the study of the social backgrounds of the participants in an interaction and searches for the way in which features such as gender, power, age etc. affect individuals' choices of linguistic forms. In the same vein,

Al Saidi (2015) states that when translators possess adequate linguistic knowledge as well as L2 cultural awareness, sociopragmatic failure can be decreased or even abolished.

In addition, the increasing interest in the study of pragmatic awareness is the consequence of the recent tendency toward the utilization of pragmatics in language teaching in a real manner. (Sachtleben & Denny, 2012). Based on a few scholars' idea, "error of grammar cannot cause a speaker to be so inept, inappropriate, and funny, as problems a learner meets when he or she does not perceive or disregard a language's rules of use" (Rintell-Mitchell, 1989, cited in Trosborg 1994, 3). In line with this view, Hymes (2001) stated that absolutely grammatical competence does not verify competence or proficiency in the target language. Accordingly, he maintained that there exist rules of language use without which grammar rules would be impractical. Just as rules of syntax can manage features of phonology, and exactly as semantic rules possibly deal with attributes of syntax, so rules of speech acts perform as a dominant component for linguistic form generally.

Moreover, the cause of EFL learners' miscommunication across cultures is mostly due to pragmatic failure rather than lack of pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar knowledge. As Thomas (1983) pointed out, pragmatic failure is a major factor that could hinder such communication. She adds that failure to select the appropriate words to interact meaning gives rise to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns among speakers from various cultural backgrounds. This failure is also defined as cross-cultural pragmatic failure (CCPF). As a result, to improve L2 learners' awareness of cultural varieties and enhance their cross-cultural communicative skills, it is prominently recommended that L2 learners' pragmatic failure be studied and focused on.

Literature Review

Addressing the major causes of CCPF and the challenges EFL learners' face in trying to overcome it are the prominent purpose of this study. Concerning the causes of pragmatic failure, scholars like Thomas (1983)appear to have restricted their account to the role of the nonnative speaker in cross-cultural communication. It is mostly approved that possible misunderstanding may originate when people from different L1 contexts and cultures try to communicate together.

In 2000, Wang broadened the scope of pragmatic research by delving into the realm of cross-cultural perspectives, where he elucidated the factors behind pragmatic failure and proposed measures to mitigate such occurrences. Shen (2013) similarly tried to uncover the major factors leading to pragmatic failure in Chinese EFL classrooms which bring about misunderstanding or breakdown in cross-cultural communication. In the same line, Ge (2002) highlights that the primary cause of ineffective interaction between speakers and listeners could be attributed to the differences in their cultural backgrounds.

According to Yang Huijuan (2019), internal prospects such as pragmatic awareness, cultural literacy, pragmatic knowledge, register selection capability, and external prospects such as English textbooks and tests, teacher instruction are all attributed to the causes of teachers' pragmatic failure. With regard to the reasons for pragmatic failure, Dai and Zhang (2002) point out that culture transfer is among the main factors resulting in such failure which should be

taken into account. By the same token, Rumyantseva et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of fostering a multicultural personality through language learning as a key element in creating a sustainable language learning environment. With regard to reasons behind communication misunderstandings, Ren and Liu (2019) investigated the L2 learners' communication problems, and instances of phatic communion, form of address, utterance, politeness, and non-linguistic activities were identified as evidence of pragmatic failure. In a similar vein, Betti (2020) states that pragmatics involves exploring the social and physical distances between interlocutors to comprehend the factors influencing the choice of spoken and unspoken elements in communication. Nursanti et al. (2015) claim that pragmatic failure shows misunderstanding made by interlocutors when failing to communicate because of inconsistent expressions or inappropriate style.

Bardovi-Harlig (1996) highlights the essentials of blending pragmatics into the classroom interaction and states that language pragmatic functions could be considered as a challenge for students, regardless of their grammatical competence. She focused on the importance of input which should be exposed through books or classroom interactions in EFL context.

Through reviewing the nature of foreign language learning situations generally, Kasper (1997) maintained that the FL classroom might be the exclusive occasion to utilize the L2 for communication. She came to the conclusion that foreign language instruction in the classroom should focus more on heightening learners' acknowledgement of pragmatic functions not via instruction but by making them be more careful to pragmatic functions. Correspondingly, Bardovi-Harlig (2002) stated that pragmatic instruction could help raise foreign language learners' pragmatic awareness. Then, it is important to increase learners' comprehension and provide them with "authentic and representative language" (p. 30). She recommends that the raising of EFL learners' input could be done through going beyond the shortage of teacher-fronted talk, by providing additional activities showing different contexts of use and practice, and by linking of those contexts of use into textbooks. Soler (2005) also examined whether instruction is useful for learning pragmatics in the EFL context or not. The results of her work showed that instruction has a positive effect on students' improvement of pragmatic competence.

The above-mentioned studies indicate the importance of emphasizing the development of cross-cultural pragmatic awareness among EFL learners as it plays a significant role in fostering effective and appropriate communication, enabling them to avoid pragmatic misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions (Pamugkas & Wulandari, 2020). Therefore, further studies are required to delve into the causes of pragmatic failure especially in cross-cultural communication and the challenges our L2 learners face in trying to overcome such dilemma.

This brief overview of L2 learners' pragmatic failure across cultures demonstrated that cross-cultural miscommunication is of great significance to EFL teachers and researchers who consider communication as an essential social life skill. Taking into consideration what has been mentioned above regarding the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What challenges do EFL learners face in trying to overcome cross-cultural pragmatic failure?
2. What are the major causes of EFL learners' cross-cultural pragmatic failure?

Methodology

Participants

Two groups of participants were asked to take part in the present research. First, from among the Iranian EFL teachers who accepted to participate in the semistructured interviews, only 10 teachers including both genders were selected from private English language institutes through purposive sampling and based on their consent to allow their classes to be observed by the researchers while they were teaching upperintermediate and advanced English language classes. The participant teachers were full-time or part-time nonnative English instructors, with different teaching experience.

The second group of participants were 10 EFL students studying English as their L2 in state-run universities as well as private language institutes. They enjoyed an upperintermediate level of English language proficiency based on the results of OPT administered at the outset of the study. They were both male and female and ranged in age from 17 to 32. They were chosen through convenience sampling, a kind of nonrandom sampling approach, in which the participants are selected by the researchers based on their availability and consent to participate in the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). They all expressed their agreement to take part in a semi-structured interview to be conducted through WhatsApp and Google Meet. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic characteristics of the participants, both EFL teachers and students, in individual interviews.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of the Participants in Individual Interviews*

Teachers		**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	23-28	5	30%
	29-34	2	40%
	35-40	1	20%
	40+	1	10%
Gender	Female	6	60%
	Male	4	40%
Years of Teaching English	0-5	1	10%
	5-10	5	50%
	10-15	3	30%
	15+	1	10%
Employment Status	Full-Time	7	70%
	Part-Time	3	30%
Total		10	100%
Students		**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	17-21	5	50%
	22-26	2	20%
	27-31	2	20%
	32+	1	10%
Gender	Female	7	70%
	Male	3	30%
Years of Studying English	0-2	2	20%
	3-5	4	40%
	6-8	2	20%
	9-11	1	10%
	12+	1	10%
Proficiency Level	Upperintermediate	10	100%
Total		10	100%

Instruments

The current study with a qualitative research design intends to make a thorough understanding of the challenges EFL learners meet in trying to overcome CCPF as well as the factors leading to this kind of failure, two types of instruments were employed to collect the essential information for the present study: semi-structured interviews and observations along with field notes to record what was observed.

The purpose of running online interviews as well as classroom observation was to collect in-depth data regarding the main causes of CCPF along with the challenges EFL learners face in attempting to overcome this dilemma. The researchers first applied classroom observation as a means of recording the EFL teachers' and learners' real practices in the classroom and collecting the relevant data for further analysis. Observations will provide the researchers with a chance to get a meticulous understanding of the research setting and the participants' behaviors in a particular context. They also allow the researchers to take detailed field notes recording what has been observed for greater assessment and analysis of contextual information. Besides, a well-planned approach to field note collection could provide the researchers with an opportunity to collect enough contextual information allowing them to identify the themes relevant to the purpose of the study.

The second instrument was a semistructured interview (See Appendices A and B) which was conducted online with 10 EFL teachers and 10 EFL learners to obtain a thorough and in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions of the issues under study.

Procedure

Based on Thomas's dichotomous classification of pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983), which suggests two types of pragmatic failure including sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failure, this study was set out to explore the Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding the causes of cross-cultural pragmatic failure and the challenges involved in trying to communicate across cultures. As mentioned before, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 EFL students and 10 EFL teachers through WhatsApp and Google Meet and at a time convenient to the participants. Each interview session lasted for around 20-30 minutes. The collected data were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following the collection of the qualitative data and its transcription, a thematic analysis was run using MAXQDA software (version 2020) for the analysis of the gathered data. Also, to make a more in-depth examination of the challenges EFL learners encountered in attempting to overcome pragmatic failure and, further to scrutinize the causes of CCPF, 10 upper-intermediate and advanced EFL teachers' classes were observed by one of the researchers as a nonparticipant observer for 90 minutes each, twice a week for the whole 6-week term. Before initiating the research process, ethical considerations of privacy and confidentiality were ensured by the researchers.

Throughout the observation process, the researcher, as already planned, tried to collect two types of field notes, namely the descriptive and reflective notes; the former exclusively describes the researcher's observations in a direct and quite straightforward manner without adding any interpretations, views, explanations, or analytic comments about the observed

behaviors, and the latter, however, gives the observer the right to record views, thoughts, perceptions, concerns, and even questions related to the research setting.

Results

The qualitative data analysis was performed to investigate the research questions of the study. After the collection of the required data from both instruments, they were transcribed, typed, and organized. A thematic analysis was carried out on both the observation and the interview collected data. To this end, the qualitative MAXQDA software was used to codify and categorize the data. Thematic analysis, as defined by Boyatzis (1998), is a way of seeing apparently unrelated materials and trying to make sense out of it. In the present study, a recursive thematic analysis process with six stages, proposed by Braun et al. (2014), was used to identify the themes emerging from the obtained qualitative data.

The purpose of the first research question was to explore the challenges EFL learners face in trying to overcome CCPF. After analyzing the observation field notes and the interview data, from over 120 verbatim transcripts, 209 significant statements were adopted. Each statement was carefully read in order to extract the key meaningful concepts from the content. At last, five themes emerged from the qualitative data related to the challenges EFL learners encounter in trying to overcome pragmatic failure as displayed in Table 2. Each of these themes is further represented in Figure 1 in the form of a bar chart and elaborated below together with some quotations from the interviewees.

Table 2. *Major Themes Emerged from Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Challenges*

RQ1	Frequency	Percentage
EFL Classroom Context	15	75%
ELT Textbook	12	60%
Teacher Education	9	45%
Assessing Pragmatic Knowledge	6	30%
Time and Budget	5	25%

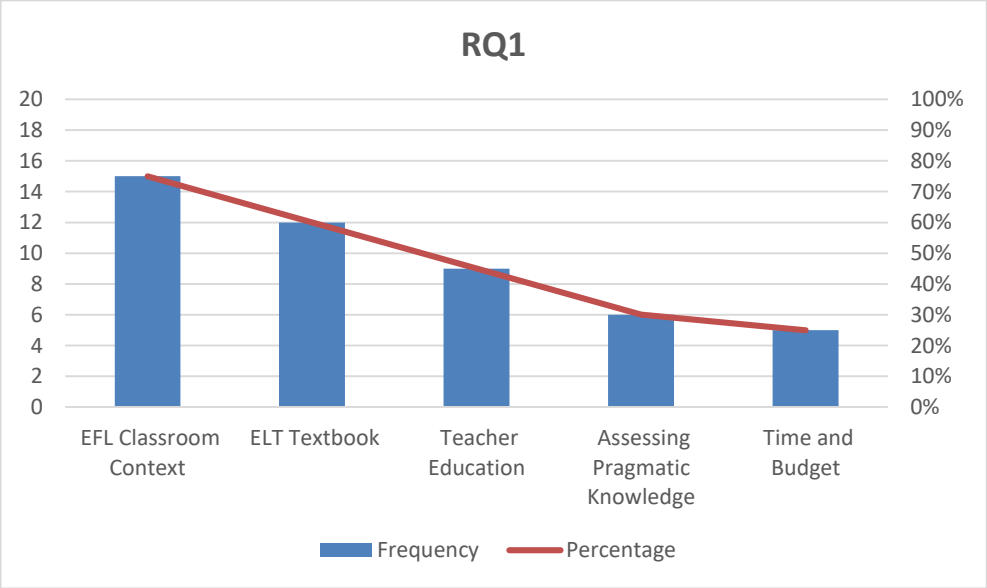

Figure 1. *Themes Emerged from Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Challenges*

A) EFL Classroom Context (75% - Frequency: 15)

One of the main challenges that emerged from the qualitative data was the EFL classroom context. For almost all L2 learners, pragmatic competence development has to occur in instructional environments such as classrooms, language laboratories, and so on. However, classroom context is to some extent restricted and almost teacher-centered, with insufficient time during lessons, which could not allow learners to actively engage in both comprehension and production of pragmatic meaning. The opportunities that are provided for the students to use the L2 in real-life situations are quite limited. Native speakers, however, acquire the social rules of speaking by means of socializing and communicating with members of their community in various social contexts. Nevertheless, for EFL learners, learning rules of pragmatic appropriateness is tremendously challenging since they find scarce opportunities for interaction with native speakers and have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. For instance, the student interviewee (2) noted:

> *In my opinion, the classroom is usually artificial and very different from the real world and how native speakers use the language. I can't use those words and grammar points learned in the classroom while speaking with others. And there are many situations that I have never experienced in the classroom before.*

Also, the teacher interviewee (1) asserted:

> *The institute managers and, therefore, supervisors force us to use the predetermined textbooks and cover the assigned lessons in a limited time. So we have to skip the pragmatic and appropriate use of linguistic elements like grammar points, speech acts, words, expressions, etc.*

Likewise, the student interviewee (5) stated:

> *Teachers are not like English native speakers, and the majority of them are not capable of using the language appropriately. They usually teach words and grammatical rules, which we forget soon.*

B) Time and Budget (25% - Frequency: 5)

Another challenge that EFL learners face in trying to overcome pragmatic failure was found to be limited time and budget allocated by the Ministry of Education, institute owners, and the learners and parents. In fact, based on the policy of the Ministry of Education most public high schools allocate a limited instruction time, between one and a half hours to maximum two hours per week to English language learning, which allows a short time for our students to acquire a foreign language. Moreover, a limited number of EFL teachers have been employed, so a large number of students have to be present in each class, and the learners do not invest enough time and energy to learn the language, practice it properly, and do the homework. In the private institutes, the situation is not much better. In these institutes, there are many students in the classes, the facilities are not proportionate with the number of students, and the limited time of classes does not allow for pragmatic development.

The student interviewee (3) stated:

> *There aren't enough facilities in the classroom such as computers, the Internet, headphones, good air conditioners, heaters, etc.*

Similarly, the teacher interviewee (2) stated:

> *The students come to class just two sessions a week, each session 75 minutes, and we have to cover all the lessons, so I don't have enough time to teach appropriate use of speech acts, idioms, words, and expressions.*

Moreover, the teacher interviewee **(**8) reported:

> *The learners often do not practice the conversations outside the class, they don't usually listen to the CDs, and don't spend enough time to study their textbooks and other related materials.*

C) Assessing Pragmatic Knowledge (30% - Frequency: 6)

Assessing pragmatic knowledge was found to be another challenge to overcome pragmatic failure. The exams are usually discrete, focusing on grammatical points, vocabulary items, reading passages, and writing lessons with no focus on pragmatics and appropriate use of language in real situations. Providing pragmatic tests is not easy and requires professionalism, time, and motivation. In fact, EFL teachers are not commonly aware of the importance of pragmatics and the ways to teach and assess it. In addition, success in the exam is assigned more credit in the EFL classroom than successful communication with English speakers. These all lead to poor pragmatic competence development, and the EFL learners feel low self-confidence to interact with people across different cultures.

To illustrate the point, the student interviewee (8) reflected:

> *The exams are generally written with no real communication like [the one that exists] outside the classrooms. Speaking strategies and meaningful communication are not usually tested.*

Likewise, learner interviewee (1) pointed out:

> *The teachers usually don't give us feedback and they don't explain our weaknesses and strengths after the tests we take. The tests are often made up of multiple-choice, fill-in-the- blanks, and matching items that seem artificial and will not result in learning a meaningful and real language.*

Besides, the teacher interviewee (5) provided the following comments:

> *Just one session is usually allocated for the final exam, and there are many students in each class, so the exams have to be short, insufficiently contextualized, and imperfect. Moreover, there is not enough time to give the EFL learners diagnostic feedback on their tests.*

D) ELT Textbook (60% - Frequency: 12)

Another critical challenge that the EFL teachers and students pointed out in their interview was the ELT textbooks. Instructional materials in the classroom should serve as an important

resource for teaching L2 social norms and pragmatic appropriateness, but most textbooks do not usually reflect the real use of language by native speakers. Besides, the exercises and tasks designed in the textbooks for practice purposes are restricted in the coverage and scope of communication scenarios they provide. In fact, they present artificial and superficial practices for the realization of various speech acts. The participants also expressed that EFL learners and teachers focus on their textbooks, and therefore, the English language used in the classroom as a means of communication, is often materials dependent, and the textbooks are generally poor in pragmatic knowledge and features.

For instance, the teacher interviewee (9) pointed to the artificiality of the conversations:

> *The conversations in the textbooks are not rich when it comes to the appropriate use of language. They are artificial and impartial.*

In addition, the student interviewee (3) reflected on the lack of information on various aspects and appropriate uses of grammatical and lexical items in the textbooks:

> *Our teachers try to cover the lessons, so they teach quickly, and therefore they don't teach and explain different aspects of grammar points, words, and other expressions which are mentioned in the textbooks and have not been elaborated.*

Another student interviewee (2) uttered:

> *The exercises in our books are mechanical and based on some specific grammar points and words; they aren't natural and similar to the language that English native speakers use as we see in the films or read in the novels and newspapers.*

Finally, the teacher interviewee (7) said:

> *In my opinion, it's better to use authentic materials such as stories, novels, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, plays, movies, and other types of realia instead of the prescribed textbooks since the content of textbooks doesn't represent the real and appropriate use of language. The existence of unnatural dialogues and artificial audio recordings or listening tasks in textbooks can't prepare students for further real-life practices. That's why by studying English for several years, EFL learners won't be able to understand original English films, radio programs, and newspapers as there is a huge gap between the textbooks and the language that is used in English communities and societies.*

E) Teacher Education (45% - Frequency: 9)

Teacher education is another theme identified as a challenge for overcoming pragmatic failure. Teachers who lack pragmatic competence themselves confront some problems when teaching pragmatic skills in EFL classrooms. As teachers do not possess sufficient pragmatic knowledge or any ideas regarding how to teach it, they need to be instructed on different aspects of pragmatics and the teaching methods proposed for it. In addition, EFL teachers' unwillingness to teach pragmatics could be due to the absence of pragmatic issues in teacher

education programs and curriculum. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on pragmatics is mostly at the level of theory, and no practical measure is usually taken to instruct teachers the methods or techniques of teaching pragmatics in the L2 classroom. As an illustration, the teacher interviewee (3) focused on the lack of pragmatic training of teachers during their teacher education programs.

> *Most teachers, especially novices, are not pragmatically competent and do not know how to teach it. So, these pre-service EFL teachers should be required to pass teacher training courses conducted and instructed by experienced EFL experts before they start any instructional activities.*

The student interviewee (10) responded:

> *I think some training courses should be conducted every 6 or 12 months, and in these courses, the experts in TEFL – especially pragmatics specialists – should teach the EFL teachers the ways to teach pragmatics and raise their awareness of the appropriate use of language in real situations.*

The findings of the study indicated EFL classroom context as the most substantial factor leading to CCPF, followed by ELT textbook, teacher education, assessing pragmatic knowledge, and finally time and budget as the least important factor.

The purpose of the second research question was to find out the major causes of CCPF. To address this research question, the qualitative data analysis was conducted. Care was taken to act selectively choosing those aspects of observation notes that were interesting, novel, and relevant. The researchers made attempts to eliminate vague and general statements or terms that could spoil or obscure the meaning and importance of the gathered data. The data were reviewed by both researchers to ensure a detailed description of the observation experience by expressing what was really seen, heard or felt as well as the reflections on the research participants' actions, emotions, and interactions in the observed settings.

A recursive six-phase process, proposed by Braun et al. (2015) for thematic analysis, was used to analyze the qualitative data consisting of the interview content and the field notes in the present study. From the verbatim transcripts, 148 significant statements were extracted related to causes of CCPF. In fact, each statement was read carefully in order to draw the key notion inherent in it. Finally, five main themes were identified as the main reasons for CCPF. These five main themes are presented in Table 3, graphically displayed in figure 2, and further explained in the following sections.

Table 3. *Themes Emerged from Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of the causes of CCPF*

RQ2	Frequency	Percentage
Cultural and Socio-Cultural Differences	14	70%
Inappropriate Teaching Methodology	10	50%
Psychological Factors	8	40%
Teachers ' Pragmatic Competence	7	35%
Investing Insufficient Time and Effort	5	25%
Linguistic Incompetency	2	10%

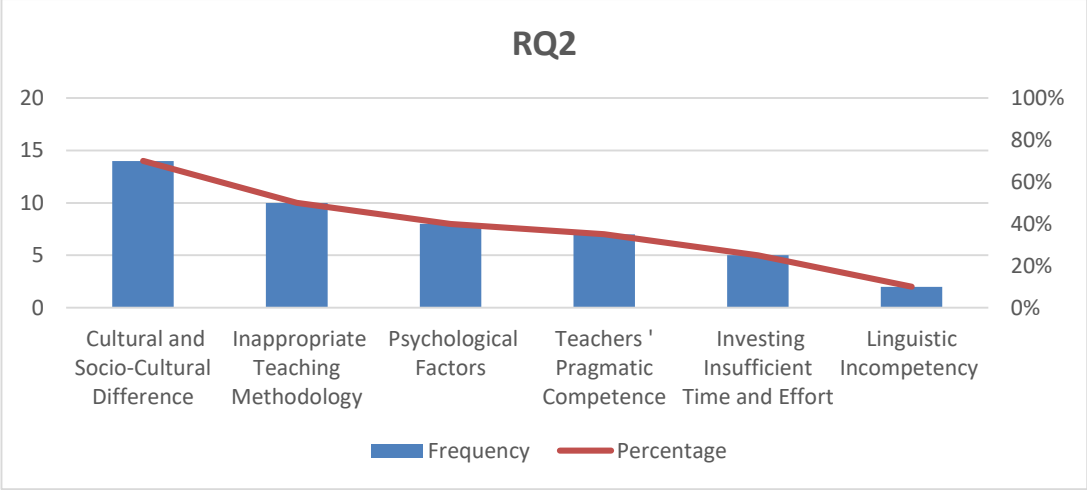

Figure 2. *Themes Emerged from Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of the Causes of CCPF*

A) Linguistic Incompetency (10% - Frequency: 2)

The first theme that emerged from the interview data was linguistic incompetency. In fact, the majority of the teacher and student participants noted that deficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation can bring about pragmatic failure for the students in their interactions in English. When you want to convey your meaning in L2, especially the more abstract and complex ideas, a wide range of vocabulary and grammar is needed. In addition, English is a language with stress-based pronunciations; thus, knowing the stress of the words and the intonation of the sentences are very important for communication to take place. This point was corroborated by the assertions of some interviewees. The student interviewee **(**5) asserted that:

> *Sometimes I want to talk about some topics in the fields of politics, economy, ethics, and so on, but I don't know the correct and relevant terms to express my ideas appropriately.*

In addition, the teacher interviewee (1) stated that:

> *Most Iranian EFL learners are weak at using correct pronunciations and intonations due to the effect of their L1; therefore, the native speakers may not understand their speech, and therefore, their intended meaning.*

B) Investing Insufficient Time and Effort (25% - Frequency: 5)

Another theme relevant to causes of CCPF is the amount of time, energy, and effort put into L2 learning. In fact, as Iran is an EFL context where English is not widely spoken at schools, universities, offices, and other formal settings as a means of communication, the time that is needed for learning English as L2 is considerably higher than the amount needed in an ESL context. Attending English class once, twice, or three times a week is not sufficient to master it. Moreover, usually EFL learners do not spend enough time and energy for studying, practicing, and doing homework outside the class. For example, the teacher interviewee (10) uttered:

> *The class time is short and there are many students in each class, so they can't practice and speak enough. And when we assign the students some extra supplementary activities, they usually don't do them completely and seriously.*

Similarly, the student interviewee (8) pointed out:

> *There is very little time for me to speak English each day in the class because the number of students is large and we come to class just two sessions a week. There is a big gap between the classes during the week.*

C) Psychological Factors (40% - Frequency: 8)

Psychological factors such as fearing communication failure, anxiety, stress, low self-confidence, and so on, were reported to be very destructive leading to pragmatic and communication failure. The main reason behind these factors is the lack of previous contact with native English speakers. In fact, learners have high expectations of themselves, fear miscommunication, and feel ashamed of unsuccessful communication in the presence of English native speakers, peers, and ordinary people. For example, the student interviewee **(**1) said:

> *I fear contacting with an English native speaker because I'm not sure we can communicate effectively or not.*

The student interviewee (9) reported:

> *We are not familiar with the live speech of English native speakers and have no experience with them face to face, so we don't have enough self-confidence and aren't sure we are able to speak appropriately.*

Moreover, the teacher interviewee **(**10) asserted:

> *The Iranian learners, especially girls, are to some extent shy, so they feel afraid and ashamed to interact with foreigners. Actually, this is because of their Persian and Muslim culture, which is much different from the Western culture.*

D) Cultural and Sociocultural Differences (70% - Frequency: 14)

A further theme emerged from the qualitative data concerned cultural and sociocultural differences between Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers. Both teachers and learners revealed that these two are completely different with regard to culture, society, norms, customs, traditions, and so on. Language learners do not know enough about the culture and socio-cultural rules of English native speakers. In fact, the Iranian EFL teachers themselves are not adequately familiar with English culture due to shortage of contact. The classroom materials are also poor in sociocultural content; accordingly, the learners have insufficient opportunities and access to the foreign culture, which leads to communication failure. For example, the teacher interviewee (5) expressed:

> *There are stark discrepancies between the culture of Iranian EFL learners and that of the English native speakers in terms of customs, religion,*

> *traditions, ceremonies, and so on. That's why they can't understand each other's intentions and beliefs.*

The student interviewee (8) pointed out:

> *I think we have different cultural norms, histories, geography, and so forth. For example, we may not know the names of the native English speakers' scientists, heroes, athletes, actors, and even their ceremonies, traditions, and other conventions. When foreigners talk about such topics, I don't understand them, so we can't have effective and successful communication.*

E) Inappropriate Teaching Methodology (50% - Frequency: 10)

The teacher and student participants proposed that one of the key reasons for pragmatic failure is the inappropriate teaching methodology prescribed by the educators and supervisors and implemented by the teachers. In fact, they do not emphasize communication strategies and interactional skills, but usually focus on grammar and vocabulary accuracy. Thus, the EFL learners' fluency is reduced, and meaningful communication and interaction do not proceed. Some interviewees' statements entailing this theme are provided below:

The student participant (3) said that:

> *Our teachers usually don't teach speaking skills; they follow the textbook to cover it. Actually, EFL textbooks explain a lot of grammatical rules, provide word definitions, and present reading and writing activities. But I think speaking is more important since it's more difficult to learn and is used more for interaction and communication.*

Likewise, the teacher participant (6) said:

> *Unfortunately, the supervisors put many restrictions on classroom communicative activities through audiovisual materials. For example, a large share of the course score is given to written exams and different sub-skills such as vocabulary and grammar. In fact, they assign less credit to learners' communication and oral production.*

The student interviewee (9) reported:

> *There are many students in each English class, and therefore, each student is not given enough time to practice speaking and conversing with peers. No opportunities are usually found outside the classroom to communicate in English. Therefore, our speaking skills will not improve.*

F) Teachers' Pragmatic Competence (35% - Frequency: 7)

Another major cause of CCPF was mentioned to be the EFL teachers' pragmatic competence, which should be considered as one of their qualifications and requirements for teaching English. In fact, the interviewees believed that teachers need to be aware of pragmatics and its importance in their teaching. Generally, EFL teachers teach speech acts such as requests, apologies, commands, and so on, as grammatical rules and not in the ways they are used by

native speakers in the real-world situations. This is more complicated in the EFL context since the environment outside the classroom is not so rich for learning pragmatics.

The teacher interviewee (4) proposed:

> *Some L2 instructors, especially pre-service teachers who lack sufficient experience in language teaching, may not be aware of the importance of pragmatics teaching in their classes and don't focus on discourse rules.*

The teacher interviewee (9) also responded:

> *As far as I'm concerned, teaching pragmatics to EFL learners is a complicated task, which needs special training. The learners will get demotivated if they find themselves incapable of communicating appropriately and successfully with English speakers due to the lack of pragmatic knowledge.*

The findings of the study indicated that the EFL teachers and learners perceived cultural and socio-cultural differences as the most substantial cause of CCPF, followed by inappropriate teaching methodology, psychological factors, teachers' pragmatic competence, investing insufficient time and effort, and finally linguistic incompetency as the least important factor.

Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating the causes of CCPF and the challenges EFL learners face in trying to overcome the resultant failure. The analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data revealed five major themes about EFL learners' challenges including EFL classroom context, time and budget, assessing pragmatic knowledge, ELT textbook, and teacher education.

One of the main challenges that emerged from the findings of the first research question was the EFL classroom context. The results show a positive impact indicating that cross-cultural pragmatic competence is crucial in the EFL context due to providing a chance for L2 learners to communicate appropriately in different social settings.

The other primary EFL learners' challenge is teacher education. A major part of the research on the association between pragmatic knowledge and language teacher education displayed the importance of informing the language teacher of the need for the integration of pragmatic functions of language into teaching methods and curricula. For example, Rose (1997) proposed that pragmatics should be included in all teacher education programs to educate the prospective teachers on the importance of pragmatics in language learning. Teachers equipped with such information are able to recognize learners' needs based on which to reconsider their syllabuses, lesson plans, and language activities. Correspondingly, Taguchi (2011) states that teacher education is critical as it strongly affects the ways in which teaching materials and met

hods are employed. Taguchi continues that despite the vital role and responsibility of the language instructors in promoting L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge, their own beliefs and attitudes about the sociocultural features and aspects of the target language have not been adequately considered.

Based on the analysis of the qualitative data, most EFL teachers rarely adopt cross-cultural pragmatic instruction principles during their teaching activity. As Kasper (2001) claimed, teachers must be appropriately socialized to L2 pragmatic practices, by that they can easily use those activities as a number of their communicative and cultural resources, and in order that their metapragmatic understanding enriches them to develop students' learning of L2 pragmatics efficiently.

As real instances of insufficient pragmatic instruction reveal, the teachers did not provide the students with different opportunities for student-student interactions to improve their oral communication skills for real-life situations. The interviewees' opinions and experiences show the lack of activities and sufficient classroom practices to help EFL learners overcome the barriers in connection with sociocultural misunderstandings. In this regard, Wu (2008) and Tsutagawa (2012) highlight the importance of role-play and dialogues as useful activities that could be employed by EFL teachers in the classroom due to their potential to improve students' communication skills, especially when conducted and practiced in a cross-cultural context.

As claimed by the interviewees, authenticity in didactic materials should be taken into consideration. Authentic English teaching materials appear to be so critical that EFL learners need to have sufficient exposure to real contexts. Based on the analysis of the study, ELT textbooks are not authentic adequately and lack cross-cultural pragmatic information. The findings are in line with the views expressed by a number of scholars who claim that the materials of the textbook is usually conversed the real-life communicative materials (Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Crystal & Davy, 1975; Nguyen, 2011). Similarly, Gilmore (2004) states that if one of the teaching objectives is to enable L2 learners to interact appropriately in the real-life context, they certainly need to be exposed to authentic language. The classroom observation results displayed that the teachers chiefly used the specified textbooks, which lacked pragmatic knowledge. Additionally, Cohen (2008) affirms that it is significant to employ textbooks offering pragmatic aspects of language enabling the students to use language appropriately.

Based on the second research question, this study aimed to scrutinize a comprehensive description of the major causes of CCPF. As the qualitative data revealed, the major causes of EFL learners' failure in this regard are linguistic incompetency, investing insufficient time and effort, psychological factors, cultural and sociocultural differences, inappropriate teaching methodology, psychological factors, and teachers' pragmatic competence.

The primary cause of CCPF should be attributed to pragmatic instruction which can focus EFL learners' attention on the target speech act forms with the intention of raising their pragmatic awareness. The significance of teaching pragmatics has been highlighted by Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991, 13) who claimed that "Teaching pragmatics empowers students to experience and experiment with the language at a deeper level, and thereby to participate in the purpose of language – communication, rather than just words". Additionally, Zhang (2019) claimed that scholars use CCPF approach to language teaching, cultural teaching, and so on, hoping to detect the features and rules of pragmatic failures in Chinese in the new environment.

Traditionally, EFL students and EFL teachers intend to center on grammatical perception, whereas general acknowledgement of pragmatic violations or pragmatic failure is not very significant. In line with this issue, Bardovi-Harlig (2013) recommends that L2 teachers should

develop specific communicative tasks simulating conversations to promote learners' pragmatic competence, assess their pragmatic development over time, establish the interconnection between grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics, and finally, examine the impact of social context on pragmatic performance. As a consequence, it is completely sensible to claim that knowledge of pragmatics is essential for EFL learners making them realize that the process of conveying messages from a speaker to the addressee is a complex process which might result in multiple interpretations.

Another theme obtained from the qualitative data was cultural and sociocultural differences between the Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers. The outcome of this study corresponds with Thomas' (1983) study in which he perceived that the differences between the interlocutors' cultures are the main principle underlying any pragmatic failure. He also assumed that the term 'cross-cultural' not only connects to native-nonnative interactions but also to any kind of interaction between two individuals who do not have similar linguistic or cultural backgrounds in any specific field. Similarly, Chen and Starosta (1998) explored that cultural norms differ across countries and communities and such culture deviation obstructs language use which may generate pragmatic failure. Likewise, Shen (2013) attempts to discover the contributing factors to pragmatic failure in EFL classrooms which accelerate misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. Based on this study, pragmatic failure can be ascribed to the teaching practices adopted in EFL classrooms which is in tune with the findings of the present study.

Furthermore, some interviewees believed that lack of instructors' pragmatic knowledge could be considered a major dilemma when cross-cultural pragmatic failure is examined. Finally, a few participants referred to insufficient time investment as a major cause of CCPF; therefore, more time should be allocated to learners during which teachers could instruct the adequate use of words, grammar, speech acts, communication strategies, and so on, using pertinent classroom activities. Field (2008) also maintained that due to a shortage of time, listening tasks and practices are usually sacrificed. Then, EFL teachers are suggested to control the time by determining, organizing, and scheduling their activities in advance.

Conclusion and Implications

The main purpose of this study was to probe EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of the factors which cause CCPF and the challenges EFL learners face in trying to overcome this dilemma. It reveals that EFL teachers should not overlook the importance of pragmatic competence in L2 learning and deal with sociocultural norms of the target language in a sensitive and unbiased way.

The research findings shed light on the attainment of cross-cultural communication in the EFL classroom context. The results could be valuable to those EFL teachers who attempt to help their students communicate appropriately and provide them with helpful information about the concept of pragmatics and its possible failure when not acquired properly.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate the importance of EFL teachers' and learners' familiarity with the causes of CCPF in the classroom context in order to diminish such failure and help them develop their pragmatic awareness. Due to increasing awareness of the need for

cross-cultural sensitivity in communication, EFL teachers and learners may be interested more in supporting a thorough understanding of the factors that lead to CCPF.

Conforming to the outcome of the study, there are several gaps leading to some challenges in the EFL context. For instance, EFL teachers administer tasks in the classrooms which strongly attend to language forms instead of language functions. This issue motivates most EFL learners to be prominent in the grammatical structures of the target language but are incapable of managing daily communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Additionally, EFL learners should be encouraged to invest more time and effort in studying and practicing authentic materials. Authenticity in didactic materials is another issue to be taken into consideration. As revealed by this study, textbooks are not authentic enough and lack cross-cultural pragmatic information in Iran. Gilmore (2004) claims that if one of the teaching goals is to empower learners to communicate adequately in real life situations, they surely require exposure to authentic language. The results of the classroom observation displayed that the teachers chiefly used specified textbooks in the language classrooms which did not contain enough pragmatic information to develop students' pragmatic knowledge and awareness.

Another conclusion that could be made based on the interviewees' perceptions of the reasons for cross-cultural misunderstandings was that the concomitance of social anxiety and social interaction deficiency is a critical issue that could lead to pragmatic failure. The findings revealed that if cross-cultural communication is given prominence in language teaching, EFL learners could use their L2 appropriately. This study may provide English language teachers with some guidelines in handling their EFL learners' problems regarding pragmatic failure and communication impairment. In fact, the findings serve as a cautionary signal highlighting the necessity for teachers to familiarize themselves with the knowledge of cross-cultural pragmatics and make it accessible and learnable for their students. This preparation is essential because unpredictable situations can arise in which L2 learners find themselves in complex communicative settings without adequate pragmatic knowledge. Due to this concern, Zakaria et al. (2019) and Walsh (2011) alert teachers to consider EFL learners' needs in this regard and advocate the idea that communicative competence is only achieved through interactive exchanges.

Finally, based on the idea that culture and language are closely connected, the present study recommends that teachers, educators, and materials developers consider the sociocultural aspects of L2 as an integral component of language curriculum. They should not only highlight the importance of pragmatic competence and skills in EFL classes, but also endeavor to develop such knowledge and abilities of L2 learners preparing them for successful cross-cultural communication.

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