Research Paper

Concept-Based Instruction for EFL Learners' Pragmatic Development: The Case of Compliment and Compliment-Response Speech Acts

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Abstract

Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of mind, Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) emphasizes teaching language in context and advocates the development of a conceptual understanding in learners. Despite its great theoretical and practical potential, CBI has received scant attention in language teaching contexts. Using a mixed methods research design, this study investigated the impact of Concept-Based Pragmatics Instruction (CBPI) on teaching compliment and compliment-response speech acts in an EFL context and, also, participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the CBPI for pragmatic development. With this purpose, sixty EFL students from two intact classes were selected to participate in the study and assigned to one experimental group (n = 30) and one control group (n = 30). The experimental group was exposed to the CBPI whereas the control group did not receive any CBPI. The study mainly aimed at tracking changes in the EFL learners' appropriation and application of the instructed pragmatic concepts, as assessed by discourse completion tests and semi-structured interviews (n = 10) after 10 weeks of instruction. Findings showed that the CBPI was highly effective for improving the learners' pragmatic knowledge of compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Similarly, results of the interviews indicated that participants of the study had positive perceptions of the CBPI. These results have some implications for teachers, teacher educators, material developers, and curriculum designers in EFL contexts.

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1 Introduction

Internalization of theoretical concepts is an integral part of human education (Vygotsky, 1978), and it must be a major goal of education to guarantee learners' development by provision of the suitable instruction in explicit and coherent theoretical concepts to help them internalize them (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) approach (Galperin, 1992) is predicated upon the assumption that meaning is constructed through conceptual categories inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory of mind (SCT).

SCT attempts to provide convincing explanations for processes involved in learning and development, and this development is inseparable from its social and cultural context. In his assumption, Vygotsky (1978) proposed that social interaction plays a major role in the origin and progress of higher mental (e.g., metacognitive) functions. These functions have two dimensions, inter-psychological (social) and intra-psychological (individual). These higher mental functions first appear on the social plane and just later on the individual plane, i.e., Vygotsky believed in the integration of social, cultural, and psychological processes of learning and regarded language as the main cultural artefact for communication, cultural representation, and conceptualization (Kozulin, 1998). Similarly, drawing on the basic tenets of the SCT, the CBI emphasizes the importance of improving conscious conceptual mediation and well-organized task-promoting conceptual development.

Based on Vygotsky's position on the role of scientific knowledge in formal education, Gal'perin (1989, 1992) and Davydov (2004) developed the CBI models to instruction. To be more specific, in both models, scientific concepts are presented verbally and modeled graphically to guide the learners' actions. Verbalization, by which the learners explain their language choices, helps them to externalize their understanding of the concept. As Nicholas (2015) noted, the CBI helps the learners to develop a deep conceptual understanding of a skill or knowledge area for using in a variety of situations.

Since the goal of the EFL teaching must be to help the students to communicate effectively and fluently in the target language, the instructors should focus on grammatical competence along with other aspects of communicative competence such as pragmatic competence. It is usually seen that a learner is fully knowledgeable about the grammar of the L2, whereas it does not guarantee that they are pragmatically competent (Kasper & Rose, 1999). Indeed, they can produce grammatically correct utterances while they are pragmatically inappropriate which is called pragmatic failure.

One way of helping the EFL learners improve their pragmatic knowledge is through the CBI, advocating the development of a conceptual understanding in learners. For this purpose, van Compernolle (2014) developed Concept-Based Pragmatics Instruction (CBPI) aimed at helping the learners to internalize such basic concepts as self-presentation, social distance, and power to play a mediational role in selection between various pragmalinguistic forms. In this approach, the pragmatic concepts are described in the written or oral form, and they are formulated in the pedagogical diagrams. The CBPI postulates that learners need to be able to explain and use these pragmatic concepts to justify a pragmatic choice and

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orient to these concepts as mediational tools to figure out the social contexts, interactive processes, and meanings they construct using pragma-linguistic forms.

Despite its rigorous theoretical and pedagogical foundations, few studies have been conducted to examine the influence of the CBI on improving the learners' pragmatic competence in the EFL contexts (van Compernolle, 2011; van Compernolle & Henery, 2014a, 2014b; Williams, Abraham, & Negueruela-Azarola, 2013). To reduce the gap, this study intended to see if the CBPI can help the learners develop their knowledge and practice of compliment and compliment-response speech acts in an EFL context.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Concept-Based Instruction (CBI)

The CBI for teaching and learning (e.g., Galperin's Systemic-Theoretical Instruction (STI), 1969; and Negueruela's Concept-Based Instruction (CBI), 2003) was inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of mind. Vygotsky (1978) built a research methodology encompassing the socio-historical nature of human, in which he buried himself in a generation of a holistic theory that could explain the higher mental processes developing speech, thinking and consciousness (Haenen, 1996). Mediation, inner and private speech, zone of proximal development, concept formation, internalization, and development are among the most significant hypotheses Vygotsky developed in explicating language learning.

The main concept within the SCT through which higher mental functions are accomplished is mediation (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), elementary mental processes develop from biological origin. Yet, higher psychological functions, which are specific to human, are derived from sociocultural processes and mediated by such cultural artifacts as language, literacy, and numeracy (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). While elementary mental processes consist of involuntary attention, simple perception, and natural or direct memory, higher mental processes include self-organized attention, reflection, categorical perception, conceptual thinking, and logical memory. Both biological and higher mental functions are united immediately when the individuals are engaged in their cultural practices (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that everyday concepts' development begins from objects and moves to concepts; however, scientific concepts grow inversely from everyday concepts, i.e., their development begins from the concepts and moves to objects. Everyday concepts must be classified through their real-life use, performed naturally due to the lack of a child's conscious awareness of their meaning. The main difference between the formation of everyday concepts and scientific concepts is that the child's everyday experiences lead to the creation of everyday concepts; however, only school is the place for acquiring the scientific concepts. The individual's conscious awareness of their meaning, voluntary attention and logical thinking are bases for categorizing the scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1987). To internalize the scientific concepts, two elements are essential: learners should be provided with the verbal definitions of the concepts and then with opportunities to apply the concepts to solve relevant problems to fully master them (Karpov, 2018).

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Drawing on Vygotskey's SCT, Galperin (1989) developed the Systemic-Theoretical Instruction (STI) to learning. In this approach, the student is supplied with the essential-gradual intellectual support, in the form of a map, graph, chart, utilized as a learning tool, to adjust himself or herself throughout performance, by which the students can comprehend what is going on during their learning activities. Galperin (1989) made an attempt to observe the cognitive interaction happening internally (in mental actions) when the learner participates in material actions throughout the learning activity. Galperin (1989) developed a collection of four prerequisites in his teaching approach based upon his revisions of the systemic formation of mental actions and concepts: 1- the learning motive; 2- the orienting basis; 3- the properties of parameters of an action; and 4- the stepwise procedure.

In Galperin's model, the learning motive reflects the innate ability to learn which is within all of us. Moreover, "when the subject matter content is properly conceived and taught, there will be no paramount motivational problems" (Haenen, 1996, p. 124).

The demonstration of all essential elements for a learner to convey an action is involved in the orienting base called the Orienting Basis of an Action (OBA), and, also the Scheme of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (SCOBA). To distinguish these two terms, it must be considered that the OBA refers to as the students' current orienting basis and what they have "at their disposal" in and within themselves (Haenen, 1996, p. 134); however, the SCOBA is the desired orienting basis and external cognitive tool to enable the students present their learning actions.

The properties of an action entail four parameters: 1- level of appropriation; 2- degree of generalization; 3- degree of abbreviation; and 4- degree of mastery. There are three diverse planes of an action within the level of appropriation: material, verbal, and mental.

The stepwise procedure entails the last precondition of the STI approach. It refers to Galperin's proposed step-by-step procedure of concept internalization. The stepwise procedure includes: 1- motivational stage; 2- orienting stage; 3- material stage; 4- stage of overt speech; 5- stage of covert speech; and 6- mental stage.

Throughout the motivational stage, the learners learn about the aim of the study by which they are motivated to engage in learning. During this stage, a material organizer (graph, chart, map, etc.) is given to them, and they learn about the learning actions to attain the learning objective. The components of the SCOBA as well as the way of their application are taught throughout the orienting stage. The engagement of the learners in problem solving activities with the assistance of a material organizer occurs in the material stage. In overt speech stage, the students distinguish themselves by a transitional stage, in which they begin using self-directed speech as a cognitive tool, instead of the material organizer. The learning action shifts from overt to covert speech during the stage of covert speech where the students have a private talk with themselves. Throughout the mental stage, the students internalize the material organizer and are capable of solving the problems at the mental level, where actions are abbreviated and achieved at a high speed.

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To integrate the STI in a foreign language classroom, Negueruela (2003) revised Galperin's stepwise procedure. Negueruela (2003) introduced the CBI to the L2 classroom. In his proposed model, concepts are viewed as the minimal units of instruction, didactic models such as charts and diagrams are used as materialization tools, and learners are involved in verbalization activities. To operationalize this model, Negueruela (2003) designed a sixteen-week course to explore the effect of the CBI on intermediate learners' Spanish composition and grammar in a US university. During the instruction, didactic models such as charts for the concepts of mood, aspect and tense were presented to the learners, and they were involved in audio-recorded verbalization activities to describe the concepts to themselves. The results indicated that the instruction helped them develop a conceptual understanding of the grammatical features and apply the knowledge successfully in written and oral tasks.

2.2 Empirical studies

Following Negueruela's (2003) application of the CBI in language education, this approach was the subject of many studies in language teaching and learning, including teaching writing (Fogal, 2015; Wall, 2015), literature (Yanez-Prieto, 2008), grammar (Garcia, 2012; Infante, 2016), and pragmatics (van Compernolle, 2011, 2012; van Compernolle, Williams, Abraham, & Negueruela-Azarola, 2013; Henery, 2014; van Compernolle & Henery, 2014b; Nicholas, 2016; van Compernolle, Gomez–Laich, and Weber, 2016; Kuepper, 2018). To serve the purpose of the current research, a brief review of some studies

concerning the effect of the CBI on pragmatic development is presented here.

Van Compernolle et al applied the CBI for L2 pragmatics and developed a model called CBPI. Indeed, Van Compernolle's PhD thesis laid the foundation for conducting other CBPI-related studies. Van Compernolle (2012) explored the impact of the CBPI on the development of socio-pragmatic competence in French intermediate learners studying in a US university. To examine the learners' pragmatic development, he used verbalization tasks, appropriateness judgment questionnaires, as well as oral strategic interaction scenarios. The researcher gave the learners the CBPI representing SCOBA to orient them. These cards consisted of descriptions of concepts, which learners had to verbalize to themselves, and diagrams. They also acted out the strategic scenarios with the tutor. The findings showed that the instruction improved the participants' socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic knowledge, contributing to their performance in the strategic interaction scenarios and the appropriateness judgment questionnaires. Van Compernolle also stated that such scientific concepts as indexicality, social distance, and power were internalized by the learners orienting them while performing the strategic interaction scenarios and their choices in the appropriateness judgment questionnaires.

Drawing on Vygotskian theory, van Compernolle & Henery (2014b) replicated van Compernolle's (2012) study to explore the effects of the CBPI on French second-person addressing system. The researchers concluded that the CBPI was effective in developing the learners' conceptual understanding of the target feature and helped them to apply the

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knowledge gained to plan and produce *tu* and *vous* more appropriately.

Using the design of van Compernolle and Henery's (2014b) study, van Compernolle, Gomez–Laich, and Weber (2016) investigated the impact of the CBPI on beginner learners' use of Spanish second-person pronoun in a US university. They used discourse completion tasks instead of the computer-mediated strategic scenarios as an evaluation instrument. After a full semester of instruction, the study concluded that the instruction enhanced the learners' conceptual socio-pragmatic knowledge enabling them to make more systematic pragma-linguistic choices.

In another study, Kuepper (2018) examined the effect of the CBPI on using German singular pronouns by beginner and intermediate German learners. Following van Compernolle's (2012) doctoral design, the researcher also used the CBPI in a one-by-one tutorial method. The findings supported the results of the previous studies, indicating that the CBPI contributed to the learners' conceptual socio-pragmatic knowledge facilitating the use of target language features by learners. The findings also showed that minor differences exist between the two proficiency levels in terms of their use of the German singular pronouns where intermediate learners applied these features more systematically. Based on the findings, the authors stated that the experimental group learners outperformed the control group learners in terms of the usage of German singular pronouns.

Nicholas (2016) explored the effect of the CBPI on learners' development of request speech act. The researcher utilized strategic interaction role-plays

within the CBPI to develop the learners' interactional competence in line with conversation analysis approach. In this study, the basic concepts were turn-taking, adjacency pairs, organization of talk, and role of context. The main feature of the intervention was the researcher's mediation in the dynamic strategic interactions. Overall, the results suggested that the intervention helped the learners to develop their pragmatic competence and their ability to verbalize the choices of certain linguistic features within a given interactional context.

In brief, although the CBI, rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) SCT of mind, has increasingly been explored in recent years, little research has investigated its role in pragmatic development (van Compernolle, 2011; Williams et al., 2013; van Compernolle & Henery, 2014b); to the researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted to examine the role of the CBPI in developing the EFL learners' compliment and compliment-response speech acts. To reduce this gap, thus, the present study aimed at addressing the following questions:

1) Does the CBI instruction have any effects on the EFL learners' ability to use compliment and compliment-response speech acts?

2) What are the learners' perceptions of CBPI for EFL pragmatic development?

3 Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

To achieve the purposes of this study, an embedded QUAN + QUAL mixed-method design was used. In embedded mixed method designs, a set of data or

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instruments support the originally collected data. For instance, a researcher may embed the qualitative research into a quantitative study to support the collected data from the quantitative experimental design (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the qualitative data provide a secondary supporting function for the quantitative dataset to provide a better picture for the effectiveness of the CBPI to develop the EFL learners' pragmatic competence. In the quantitative stage of the study, a quasi-experimental design was adopted with pre-test/post-test equivalent groups to achieve its objectives. In this study, the randomly selected participants were in two existing intact classes, and the researcher just randomly determined them as the experimental and the control groups. For the qualitative dimension of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants of the experimental group to explore their perceptions of the possible advantages and disadvantages of the CBPI. In fact, the collected data from the interviews aimed to enrich the quantitative data regarding the effectiveness of the CBPI for developing the EFL learners' pragmatic competence in general and their performance of compliment and compliment-response speech acts.

3.2 Participants and Research Setting

Sixty intermediate students studying English at Iran Language Institute, Tonekabon Branch, Mazandaran, Iran, participated in the study. They were selected randomly to participate in the study using a probability sampling technique. At the first place, cluster random sampling procedures were performed to select the Iran Language Institute among other universities and institutes at Tonekabon. The original

population who had the opportunity to participate in the study from the Iran Language Institute consisted of 94 learners in 3 classes, who were at intermediate level based on their placement in the institute's language courses. Due to the policy of the institute, random assignment of the participants to the experimental and control groups was impossible. However, to recheck their language proficiency and select two more homogenous intact classes out of the three available classes, a language proficiency test (Oxford Placement Test) was performed. Then, two classes in which the learners were at more homogeneous level in terms of their proficiency were selected and remained intact during the instructional phase. In other words, sixty students from two intact classes were selected to participate in the final phase of the study. All the participants were female and their ages varied from 18 to 23 years old. To be more precise, there were two groups with 30 participants. One of them was labelled as the experimental group and the other one as the control group. The former was instructed using the CBPI, whereas the latter did not receive any CBPI as the treatment. The participants in both groups were pre-tested, and after 10 weeks when the semester was over, both groups were post-tested. After the post-test administration, 10 participants in the experimental group were randomly selected and interviewed to examine their perceptions of the CBPI.

3.3 Instrumentation

3.3.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To be sure of the homogeneity of the two groups, a proficiency test was administrated to establish the participants' homogeneity. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to

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make sure the participants were homogenous in terms of their language proficiency. This enabled teachers to have a better understanding of what level their students are at. The test contained 50 multiple choice questions assessing the student's knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary, a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions, and a writing task for assessing their ability to produce the language.

3.3.2 Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

Two Discourse Completion Tests (DCT), one for compliment speech act and the other for compliment response, were designed by the researcher. The DCT for compliment speech act (see Appendix A) consisted of 5 situations, in which the participants were expected to write their responses in English using the speech act of compliments. The contents and the scenarios were examined by two experts in the field for content validity and revised based on their suggestions. One of these situation is provided here as an example:

Example Situation: You work in a small company as secretary of the boss. Recently, you did a project very well. One day, after the meeting, the boss talked to you.

Boss: ....

You: I feel glad that I could be of any help to you.

The second DCT was used for collecting data regarding the compliment responses (see Appendix B). Again, learners were provided with some situations in which they were asked to write their responses to the compliments when they faced the same situation. An example is given here:

Example Situation: Your friends have organized a party to celebrate the end of semester. You've dressed up for the party. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says: "Hey, you look great! You're really handsome/beautiful today".

You: ....

In fact, the researcher considered the DCT as a suitable method for investigating the compliment speech acts and compliment-responses, which cannot but be situated in a context as it has been adopted and confirmed by notable scholars in pragmatic studies (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986).

3.3.3 Interview

The semi-structured Interview (see Appendix C) drew on the themes and constructs extracted from the relevant literature regarding the learners' perceptions of educational courses. Based on these themes and constructs, some questions were written to be included in the interview. For content validity, some experts in the field inspected the content relevance and content coverage of the questions. The interview questions were used in one semi-structured interview session after the instruction. In the interview, the participants were asked to express their beliefs towards the program orally and their voices were audiotaped to be transcribed later for delving into the learners' perceptions of the course. The interview consisted of 7 original questions like "What differences have you found between a regular English course and this course?" tapping into their perceptions of the CBPI before and after the study. To examine the content validity of the interview, two experts in the field inspected the content relevance and content coverage of the questions, and the

questions were revised based on their feedbacks.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

After the completion of sampling procedures and homogeneity process, the practical stage of the study began to take shape. First, both the experimental and the control groups were pre-tested on the DCT measures developed by the current researcher. Then, the researcher conducted the intended treatment. In fact, the researcher aimed to investigate the impact of the CBPI on the learners' pragmatic competence, more specifically, on their compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Therefore, the participants in the experimental group of the study received pragmatic instruction through the CBI while the control group participants were trained the pragmatic knowledge by the regular method of pragmatic instruction using conversations and role plays. To help them realize the value of the CBI, the researchers made attempts to familiarize the students with the aims of the CBI and its advantages in teaching and learning in general. Then, some forms of concept-formation were presented to the participants to recognize their roles, knowledge structures, and essential elements. The researcher also helped the students to differentiate between the facts, topics, concepts, and generalizations and gave them some concept-based pragmatics activities to help them understand the conceptual understanding in pragmatic development. The researcher provided the students with the required scaffolding to design and apply their own concept-based pragmatics representations to develop their own pragmatic competence using some clear examples of previously available formats of the concept-formation strategies and illustration. The participants were also encouraged to improve their conceptual understanding of the compliment and compliment-speech acts through the researcher's structured guiding questions. At the end of the semester, the DCTs were administered again to see if the CBPI has been effective in the students' mastery of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Additionally, the learners' perception of the CBPI were examined through the interview questions.

3.4.1 Data analysis

The DCTs were coded through Holmes' (1993) micro/macro strategies framework for compliment and compliment-response speech acts. In the process of coding different compliment and compliment-responses, at least two raters, including the author, coded them to increase the reliability of coding. Two independent-samples t-tests were performed between the posttests of compliment and compliment-responses of the two groups separately to explore how the CBPI affected the EFL learners' performance in compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Also, the collected data from the interview was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to shed light on the learners' perceptions of the course.

4 Results

The first research question had to do with the effect of the CBPI on the EFL learners' mastery of compliment and compliment-response. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the data of the experimental group of the study for compliment speech act.

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Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of Compliment for the EX group*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.26	30	1.74	.31
Posttest	16.41	30	1.20	.22

According to Table 1, the mean value of the compliment speech act for the experimental group before the CBI was 12.26 (SD=1.74), while the mean for this group after the instruction was 16.41 (SD=1.20). It is obvious that the EX performance improved greatly after the treatment. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the control group of the study.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics of Compliment for the CONT group*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.30	30	2.02	.21
Posttest	13.51	30	1.93	.24

As Table 2 indicates, the mean for the control before instruction was 12.86 (SD= 2.02), while its mean value after the treatment was 13.51 (SD=1.93). With regard to its performance on the posttest, the control group also showed some improvements in its performance in compliment speech act. Table 3 illustrates the descriptive analysis of the experimental group for the scores of the compliment-response speech act.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics of Compliment-Response for the EX group*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.22	30	1.12	.21
Posttest	15.67	30	1.21	.27

Table 3 shows the result of the descriptive statistics of the compliment response of the experimental group before and after the instruction. Prior to the instruction, the experimental group had a mean value of 12.22 with the standard deviation of 1.12. However, it is indicated that its performance on the compliment speech act enhanced after the CBI (Mean= 15.67, SD= 1.21). Table 4 illustrates the descriptive analysis of the control group for the scores of the compliment-response speech act.

Table 4 *Descriptive Statistics of Compliment-Response for the CONT*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.28	30	1.41	.24
Posttest	13.12	30	1.10	.21

According to Table 4, it is revealed that the pretest mean value of the control group for the compliment speech act was 12.28 with the standard deviation of 1.41. With

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regard to its performance on the posttest, the control group showed improvement on the DCT test of the compliment-response speech act (Mean= 13.12, SD= 1.10). Thus, it can be claimed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the posttest of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Yet, to investigate whether the difference between the groups is significant, the results of the independent-samples t-tests for compliment and compliment-response speech acts should be presented and discussed. Table 5 summarizes the inferential statistics for the posttest scores of compliment speech act for both groups of the study.

Table 5 *Independent-samples t-test for the posttests of both groups*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	15.51	3.27	45.27	58	.000	2.90	.767	4.06	2.40
Equal variances not assumed			45.27	48.67	.000	2.90	.767	4.06	2.39

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the means of two groups for the compliment speech act. The Sig. value for Levene's test was larger than .05 (3.27). There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their compliment speech act performance (t (58) = 45.27, p = .000, two-tailed)). As a result, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the posttest of the compliment speech act. The effect size of the independent-samples t-test for two groups' performance of the compliment speech act was measured by Cohen's *d* formula for the effect size measurement using the mean scores, standard deviations, and sample sizes of the two groups [Cohen's *d*= .88]. This shows a large index of the effect size. Table 6 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data of posttest scores of compliment-response speech act for both groups of the study.

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Table 6 *Independent-samples t-test for the posttests of both groups*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	21.12	4.12	35.78	58	.000	2.55	.856	3.56	2.15	
Equal variances not assumed			35.78	48.67	.000	2.55	.856	3.55	2.15	

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the impact of the intervention on the learners' posttest scores on the DCT measures intended to quantify their performance in the compliment-response speech act. There was a statistically significant difference between the performances of two groups in compliment response speech act, (t (58) =35.78, p = .000). Therefore, the CBPI significantly improved the learners' performance on the DCT measure of the compliment-response speech act. The effect size of the independent-samples t-test for two groups' performance on the compliment-response speech act was measured by Cohen's *d* formula for effect size measurement using the mean scores, standard deviations, and sample sizes of the two groups [Cohen's *d*= .67]. This also shows a large index of the effect size. In response to the first research question, the findings showed that the CBPI was highly effective for the improvement of the learners' performance in the compliment and compliment-response speech acts.

The second research question was answered by thematic analyses of the interview sessions after transcribing and analyzing them thoroughly. Overall, the extracted themes and ideas from the interview sessions indicated that the participants of the study had a positive attitude and perceptions of the CBPI. One of the students talked directly about the benefits of the CBPI in the classroom. Maryam said

Extract 1:
We can study and have fun, and then we will like this class. If I do not like the class, I will not learn and take advantage of the class. This new method helped me learn better in a more appropriate atmosphere.

It seems that they perceived the new approach of instruction for pragmatic items more effective and efficient. The experience of learning is made less satisfactory by teaching methods which are perceived to be inappropriate. Most students contended that the CBPI made the understanding and application of certain instructed speech acts easier. Fatemeh pointed out that

Extract 2:
I will not progress if I cannot connect the new learning experience with previously learned materials in an organized and meaningful way. For example, this new

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method helped me organize my ideas, and this will motivate me to learn.

Putting different types of compliment and compliment-response speech acts into various understandable concepts and contexts makes learning meaningful. The students' perceptions of poor learning, lack of control, arbitrary and irrelevant tasks in relation to the traditional methods of pragmatic instruction contrasted sharply with the perceptions of high quality learning, active student participation, feedback opportunities and meaningful tasks in relation to pragmatic knowledge (Sambell, McDowell & Brown, 1997). In this regard, Mahsa stated that

Extract 3:
The teacher should teach us ways or methods to improve our language use, and they will do it... Everybody has preferences, so the teacher should teach us all the ways to improve our language use, and then we will find out the way which we prefer and start doing it at home.

The participants believed that the CBPI afforded them with a better atmosphere and opportunity to gain insights into the ways of using the speech acts into practice in actual communicative contexts. Zahra reflected her views about the instruction this way

Extract 4:
By using these graphics... the teacher breaks up the routine of the book. Some activities must be presented in a special way to make them easy to understand, such as the same graphics to learn compliments. Students might understand some tasks in this form [graphics] more than they would through explanation.

They were given more coherent, brief, systematic, concrete, and applicable explanations of the specific speech acts

through graphic aids. From a CBI perspective, better explanations of the complex issues need to be introduced to L2 learners through graphic aids, which help learners construct a functional understanding. These material graphic representations may be presented to the learners in the form of diagrams, flow charts, drawings, or schemas. The actual form of these material graphic representations is not as critical as the principle behind materializing a complex meaning: to capture at a glance the essence of an idea, which generally requires a long linguistic elaboration. Examples of these types of graphic ideas are found in Lantolf and Yáñez-Prieto (2003), Negueruela and Lantolf (2006), Negueruela (2008), and Lantolf (2010). The participants considered these graphic visualization as a key to better conceptualization and production of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Elahe mentioned that

Extract 5:
It is true that some days, the classes are not interesting because of the type of teaching method the teachers use, but the teacher should provide a variety of activities to teach better in the class. These organizers helped me to learn how to organize various ideas and concepts together. This is what made my learning more meaningful.

They also expressed their positive attitude towards its perceived impact on their long-term retention and application of such speech acts. The students in the study consistently expressed views that the new method of pragmatic instruction motivated them to work in better ways. It was quite implicit in their speech that that the new method was based upon a fundamentally different relationship between the teacher and students,

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between the previously learned materials and the new ones and, that the new method of instruction embodied a different view of the nature of learning.

5 Discussions

The findings suggested that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the posttest of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts, indicating the effectiveness of the CBPI for the enhancement of the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' performance in the compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Major findings of the current study are in line with the findings of the previous research showing that using the CBI could actually lead to resourceful language learning in general (e.g., Negueruela, 2003, 2008; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Lapkin, Swain & Knouzi, 2008;Serrano-Lopez & Poehner, 2008) and pragmatic development in particular (e.g., van Compernolle, 2011; van Compernolle et al., 2013; van Compernolle & Henery, 2014b; Nicholas, 2016; van Compernolle et al., 2016; Kuepper, 2018).

The result can be attributed to the learners' increased conceptual understanding of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts as a result of their participation in the CBPI. Perhaps the key to the success of this instructional approach for enhancing the pragmatic competence is that the students are concerned with important contents of the language during practicing communicative tasks through using devices such as concept maps or diagrams to organize the concepts in conceptual meaningful categories in a communicative manner. Concerning the importance of the CBI, Negueruela's (2003) project was very revealing in terms of the proposed methods to connect the theoretical concepts and new ways of thinking that prioritize agency as well as L2 development. As he states "development is not about the emergence of morphology, but about the emergence of agency through meanings" (Negueruela, 2003, p. 331).

The increase in learners' pragmatic competence can also be particularly attributed to the learning processes within the CBPI where the focus is not on the mere memorization of the concepts (i.e., symbolic tools) but also on the internalization of these concepts as *inner psychological tools* (Kozulin, 2018). Mindful engagement through concepts is necessary for internalizing the L2 meanings connected to communication. This is the key to transform the inner concepts as declarative knowledge into conceptual categories, which are functional for communication and conceptualization.

The implementation of the CBI permits the teachers to move from focusing on isolated facts for memorization to organizing learning in ways to engage the students by using concepts and generalizations (Birbili, 2007). Conceptual understanding becomes more highly developed as new examples of concepts emerge (Erickson, 2008). For students to gain deep conceptual knowledge, teachers require an understanding of how to teach conceptually, provide concept-based learning experiences, and assess the learners' conceptual understanding. Implementing the CBI provides the teachers with a strategy to help the learners achieve their full potential to understand and learn the newly-introduced concepts.

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Another reason for the development of the participants' pragmatic awareness may be due largely to various practical opportunities provided by the researcher to apply the acquired conceptual knowledge in practical activities (van Compernolle, 2014b). It is argued that a dialectic connection is necessary in the CBPI and the learners should be given many real-like practical activities to put the gained conceptual understanding into practice (van Compernolle, 2014b).

The findings also indicated that the participants in the experimental group expressed their positive attitude towards the efficacy of the CBPI. They also stated that the instructional method had some advantages for learning new pragmatic items, including using visual aids and graphic contents, contextualization of learning items, making learning more meaningful, etc. The CBI is a method of instruction with opportunities for the students to make connections and understand the relationships among the concepts. The students' experiences and meaning making via discovery learning provide the basis for the new knowledge (Hardin & Richardson, 2012). The incorporation of this method in the classroom requires the understanding of the method and the effective implementation of the instructional method. It also needs a clear understanding of the learners' perceptions of the specific instructional methods. As a result, the study revealed that most learners held a positive attitude towards the instruction. Information about the learners perceptions and experiences are needed and will be valued in the L2 teaching and learning. Increasing knowledge in the field of language education concerning the leaners' attitudes towards the instructional

approach, including the CBI, may benefit the community of practice.

Furthermore, in this regard, the participants expressed that they think the new approach could have a great impact upon their ability to communicate. It is quite in line with the underlying principle of this approach to the L2 classrooms (Galperin, 1992) proposing that meaning constructed through conceptual categories is central in the process of L2 development (Negueruela, 2003). This proposal is also based on the research principles inspired by Vygotsky's (1986) SCT of mind. Unaware of such scientific issues and principles, most of them said that this new method of instruction assisted their conceptualizations and meaning making process via some well-designed classroom activities using visual aids. Promoting conscious conceptual mediation is the central tenet of the CBI. Properly organized learning activity promotes conceptual development. As a whole, it was proven that the participants showed a strong personal preference for this new methodology of pragmatic teaching. To be more exact, the CBPI adheres to the Vygotskian approach (1978) that allows students to go from the abstract to the concrete conceptualization and internalization.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggested that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the posttest of the compliment and compliment-response speech acts, indicating the effectiveness of the CBI for the enhancement of the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' performance in the compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Also, the findings indicated that the participants in the

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experimental group expressed their positive attitude towards the efficacy of the CBI. This study revealed that the participants believed that the CBI afforded them with a better atmosphere and opportunity to gain insights into the ways of using the speech acts into practice in actual communicative contexts. They were given more coherent, brief, systematic, concrete, and applicable explanations of the specific speech acts through graphic aids. From a CBPI perspective, better explanations of complex issues need to be introduced to L2 learners through graphic aids, which help learners in constructing a functional understanding.

The findings of the study have some implications for teaching communicative competence in general and pragmatic competence in particular. More attention should be paid to this kind of instruction for developing communicative competence. This requires teachers to have practical knowledge and cognitions about the principles of the CBI. Therefore, teacher education centers and courses are responsible to provide the teachers with the necessary knowledge about the CBI because making sense of new strategies from professional development to classroom practice is a complex task with emerging dilemmas during implementation (Han, 2012). To communicate effectively in the target language, the learners of English language need to develop pragmatic competence, which can be accomplished through pragmatic instruction in the classroom, particularly in the spoken English class. In fact, teachers who are to explore and enhance the materials form the textbook, material developers and curriculum designers should also include pragmatic awareness in the books and curricula.

Therefore, the CBPI can have some great bearings on the learners' pragmatic knowledge and communicative ability. If the teachers are expected to use the CBPI in language education effectively, they should be supported by policy makers, teacher education centres, and material developers. New change will be practiced when there is a sense of cooperation among all those who are involved in educational processes. High quality professional development has a focus on collective problem solving and collaborative learning sustained by ongoing support (Fickel, 2002).

Clearly, there is a need to continue the research on teaching and learning strategies for pragmatic instruction. It would be beneficial to repeat or conduct a similar study with a larger population. Due to the limited sample size, the power of analysis was weaker than the researcher intended. In addition, a longer intervention is recommended to give the students more time to interact with the newly taught pragmatic items. This study focused only on compliment and compliment-response speech acts. Therefore, further research focusing on other speech acts is required to have a better picture and understanding of the efficacy of the CBPI. In addition, the study focused on the perceptions of the EFL learners' about understanding and using the CBPI. The voices of teachers, instructional leaders, other administrators, and professional development facilitators were not included, however. Future research could include data collection from other educators involved in the training and implementation of the CBI to gather data pertaining to professional development design, facilitation, application, and supports and barriers for using the CBI.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Compliment speech act DCT

We sincerely appreciate your participation and effort.

Participant's demographic data

1. Name:
2. Sex: male   female
3. Age:

Direction: Please complete the following conversation according to the situation and corresponding pair.

Situation 1:

On the bus, you sit opposite to a woman who has a lovely baby in her arm.

You:

The woman: thank you. Some of my friends say it more resembles my husband.

Situation 2:

You are a new basketball player. Your coach is showing you how to shoot at the

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basket. He makes a skillful and standard shoot.

You:

Coach: OK. Now you have a try.

Situation 3:

You met your former classmate on the street whom you haven't seen for years. He noticed your new hairstyle.

He:

You: really?

Situation 4:

You were the leading actor in a drama. Unfortunately before the performance day to the public, you felt sick. Another actor took your place and performed successfully. Today, you meet him and say

You:

He: if you performed it, it would have been better.

Situation 5:

You work in a small company as secretary of the boss. Recently, you did a project very well. One day, after the meeting, the boss talked with you.

Boss:

You: I feel glad that I could be of any help to you.

Appendix B: Compliment response speech act DCT

Five situations in which you receive a compliment are described below. Imagine that you are in these situations and write down what you are most likely to answer in each situation.

Situation 1:

Your friends have organized a party to celebrate the end of semester. You've dressed up for the party. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says: "Hey, you look great! You're really handsome/beautiful today".

You:

Situation 2:

After having finished the lunch you had prepared, one of your family members tells you, "You're such a great cook".

You:

Situation 3:

You have recently purchased a new car. Your colleague's son sees it and tells you, "what an awesome car".

You:

Situation 4:

After looking at your new cell phone, your colleague tells you, "That's a beautiful one".

You:

Situation 5:

On seeing your new watch, your mother tells you, "That's a nice watch!"

You:

Appendix C: Interview questions

1) How have the activities done during the semester helped you improve your fluency?

2) How is your learning in this class going to be useful to you in the future?

3) How have the classroom activities raised your self-confidence when speaking?

4) How have the materials used in the class helped you to develop English?

5) What differences have you found between a regular English course and this course?

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6) How have the differences affected your learning process?

7) Which methodology do you prefer? Why?

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