

# Implementing Alternative Assessment to Foster Organizational and Pragmatic Competencies in Oral Tasks: An EFL Context Study

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## Abstract

The present study set out to inspect how organizational and pragmatic knowledge can be functions of the assessment techniques practices implemented in the classroom. To this aim, the effects of teacher, peer, and self-assessment techniques that focused on providing feedback on pragmatic and organizational knowledge were compared. A total number of 98 female Iranian learners studying at pre-intermediate level in a language institute participated in the study. They were randomly assigned to one of the three groups of self-assessment (SA) (N = 32), peer-assessment (PA) (N = 33), and teacher-assessment (TA) (N = 33). Pragmatic competence was gauged using Discourse Role Play Talks (DRPTs) and organizational knowledge was assessed by a scale covering the grammatical and textual knowledge of the participants. The results of the analysis of one-way ANOVA test indicated that self-assessment followed by peer assessment had an advantage over the teacher assessment technique in promoting both pragmatic and organizational competence. In general, the obtained results yielded support for the employment of alternative methods of assessment as pedagogical tools to foster language competence. Implications for EFL pedagogy are discussed.

**keywords:** self-assessment, peer-assessment, teacher-assessment, pragmatic knowledge, organizational knowledge

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## Introduction

In the past decades, language researchers have come to acknowledge the role of competences other than linguistic competence in one's ability to become involved in communication and have even emphasized the explicit instruction of pragmatic competence (e.g., Ifantidou, 2013; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Sykes, 2013; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Theoreticians and scholars (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972) have asserted that the ability to use language comprises not only the ability to produce structurally accurate utterances and the possession of linguistic knowledge but also the awareness of the appropriateness of the language attuned to the demands of the specific situations, with the latter being called pragmatic competence. According to Bachman's (1990) model of communicative language ability, which was later on refined by Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010), language competence comprises of two main competencies of organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, the former being further classified into grammatical and textual knowledge and the latter embedding sociolinguistic and functional knowledge or illocutionary knowledge referring to the intention behind the sentences. In other words, pragmatic competence is the ability of contextualized communication and performance based on organizational competence in appropriate way (Bachman, 1990). In 1978, Munby highlighted the paramount importance of pragmatic knowledge and argued that in order to communicate effectively, a speaker has to have the ability to produce grammatical utterances of a language as well as the ability to use them appropriately. Swain (2005), in a similar vein, contends that language learners have to learn the social and pragmatic rules of the target-language and stresses that language teachers need to take pragmatics into consideration while teaching learners to communicate in another language.

Pragmatic failure, is described (Hudson et al., 1992) as circumstances in which the speaker's utterance is misunderstood by the hearer and this misunderstanding is caused, among other things, by inapt realization of speech acts. Speech acts are defined as utterances that are performed with intentions to have effects on listeners (Crystal, 1997). Refusals, requests, and apologies are among speech acts that necessitate the exploitation of various strategies depending on the culture (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Beebe et al., 1990), given the differences between perceptions of speakers of different languages due to different concepts such as power relations, social distance, and degree of imposition (Hudson et al., 1992).

Relative power is concerned with the degree of imposing the intention of the speaker on the hearer. Social distance, on the other hand, is defined as a function of the level of acquaintance between the two parties of communication. Thus, communicating with an unknown person would entail distance. Furthermore, the degree of imposition refers to the level of imposition of action on the hearer. Hence, situations demanding verbs such as asking for help would involve imposition. Due to the fact that speakers from various cultures perceive these variables differently (Hudson et al., 1992), language learners might fail to appropriately produce speech acts, which in turn would lead to pragmatic failure in communication. Given, the important role pragmatic competence plays in one's knowledge of how to communicate (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010), language instructors and researchers should seek ways to facilitate the acquisition of the above-mentioned variables, speech act and pragmatic competence. Therefore, delving into the ways

classroom practices can be manipulated so as to enhance language learners' organizational and pragmatic competence is worthy and justified. One of the classroom practices which have always been part of language teaching courses is classroom assessment. Nowadays, assessment is considered as a facilitator of learning and is deemed as a process rather than a product. Peer and self-assessment, which are two alternatives to exclusive assessment by the teacher, allow the involvement of learners in the assessment process and can lead to more successful teaching and learning process (e.g., Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2015; Chen, 2006; Hariri Asl & Marandi, 2017). Therefore, the notions and elements of assessment and specified criteria should be introduced to learners, and they should be trained how to evaluate their own and others' contributions via self and peer assessment (William & Thomson, 2007). Regarding assessment techniques as viable pedagogical practices, the present study sets out to delineate how making adjustments in assessment techniques can affect Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' organizational and pragmatic competence reflected in their oral productions requiring the use of speech acts.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Language Competence***

Many applied linguists have contributed to defining the knowledge of using language; however, there is no agreement on the exact term to employ for such competence. To some (e.g., Canale, 1983, 1984; Canale & Swain, 1980; Widdowson, 1983), the term *communicative competence* could best describe language users' knowledge and skills to use the language, while to some others (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 2010), *communicative language ability* or *language competence* can best define both language proficiency and communicative competence. Recent theoretical and empirical enquiries into communicative competence mostly draw on the model promulgated by Canale and Swain (1980) and that of Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010). Canale and Swain (1980) proposed three main components of grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence for communicative competence, defining grammatical competence as being concerned with learning the linguistic aspects including vocabulary knowledge and morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, as well as the knowledge of features of handwriting. To Canale and Swain, the sociolinguistic competence comprises of knowledge of rules and conventions which dominate the appropriate comprehension and language use in different contexts. In Canale and Swain's model, strategic competence entails knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies exploited to compensate for breakdowns in communication resulting from inadequate knowledge in components of communicative competence.

Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010) put forward a more inclusive model of communicative competence, drawing on the findings of prior empirical research, and theoretical postulations. The model of communicative competence suggested in 1990 by Bachman was later on modified by Bachman and Palmer in the mid 1990s and 2010. They argue that language ability comprises two broad areas which are language knowledge and strategic competence. Language knowledge consists of two main parallel components i.e. organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge which complement each other in effective use of language

for communication purposes. Organizational knowledge includes individuals' ability to control formal language structures, i.e., of textual and grammatical knowledge. Grammatical knowledge further encompasses knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and physical features of handwriting. Textual knowledge, on the other hand, includes the knowledge of meaningful relationships among sentences (cohesion) and knowledge of developing different genres of language as well as conversational organization (conventions for opening, continuing and closing conversations).

The second component of language knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, refers to the knowledge language users need to enable them to generate and comprehend discourse by making connections among utterances and texts to their meanings as well as the intentions of language users and the relevant features of the language use context and setting (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Pragmatic knowledge is, therefore, needed to generate and interpret discourse, comprising of two areas of knowledge namely, functional knowledge (i.e. knowledge of pragmatic conventions needed to produce proper language functions and interpret the illocutionary power of utterances/sentences) and sociolinguistic knowledge (i.e. knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions required to create and interpret contextually appropriate language utterances/sentences). The second component of language ability, strategic knowledge, encompasses a set of metacognitive components enabling language user to set goals, evaluate communicative sources, and plan. The study at hand focuses on the language knowledge of Bachman and Palmers' (1996, 2010) model, concentrating on pragmatic knowledge mirrored in the use of contextually proper utterances with regard to power, distance, and imposition, as well as organizational knowledge reflected in the demonstration of the ability to use error free use of vocabulary, grammar, and phonological presentations, and generating coherent utterances.

### ***Assessment as a Learning Tool***

One of the activities instructors are often asked to take on is assessment which encompasses "any process that provides information about the thinking, achievement or progress of students" (Crooks, 2001, p. 1). Though traditionally employed merely for judgmental purposes, assessment is nowadays viewed as a potential tool to aid and facilitate learning (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Lee, 2007; Taras, 2008). Recent approaches to assessing learning product and process have stipulated learners as their focus, highlighting and emboldening the involvement of learners in the assessment process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Sluismans et al., 2003).

As opposed to traditional, mainly teacher-centered assessment techniques, more recent techniques are learner-oriented suggesting alternative methods of assessing learning particularly by learners themselves. Such learner-centered approaches to assessment are reported to offer more accurate evaluation of learners' ability (e.g., Abedi, 2010; Coombe et al., 2007), advocating a key role for learners in decisions pertinent to assessment and the undertaking of assessment procedures. Self-assessment and peer-assessment in which learners are asked to monitor their own or a peer's performance on a language learning task (Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Topping, 2009) are pigeonholed branded as such pioneering learner-oriented assessment approaches. Despite the recent popularity of alternative approaches to assessment which encourage the engagement of learners in assessment (Soleimani &

Rahmanian, 2014) their influence on learning is still under-researched. Assessment as a learning tool is yet a relatively under-probed area in EFL contexts, and scant research has been documented in the literature scrutinizing how alternative assessment techniques can assist the acquisition of another language. To date, most studies addressing alternative innovative assessment techniques mostly target to rationalize and defend their legitimacy as assessment tools (De Saint-Léger, 2009). Among the studies carried out to examine the benefits of peer and self-assessment techniques are those intended to assess the impact of peer and self-assessment on goal-orientation (Zarei & Yousefi, 2015), reading motivation (Rahmany et al., 2013; Wolters, 1999), reading comprehension (Shams & Tavakoli, 2014), writing skill (Birjandi & HadidiTamjid, 2010; Birjandi & Siyyari, 2010; Soleimani & Rahmanian, 2014; Williams, 2012), creating social presence in conjunction with CALL (Hariri Asl & Marandi, 2017), the relationship between EFL students self-perceived communication competence and their task-free and task-based self-assessment of speaking (Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2015), and learner autonomy (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015). As the above account of studies on the potential role of alternative assessment techniques in learning suggests, despite the widely acknowledged standing of communication as realized by educationalists in the twenty-first century (Purpura, 2017; Richards, 2008), to date, to the best of our knowledge, few studies have examined the potential effect of alternative assessment on communicative competence as their objective. In 2014, Pakzadian and Tajeddin investigated the impacts of instruction that was based on self-assessment on 30 language learners' acquisition of three types of speech acts including suggestion, complaint, and request. The results of their study revealed that although the self-assessment group outperformed the control group on most of the items in a written discourse completion test, their overall score did not have a significant difference with the comparison group. Therefore, they introduced self-assessment as an ineffective task for acquiring pragmatic knowledge and meta pragmatic awareness. They attributed the results to the point that self-assessment process in their study was more concerned with problems in answering the discourse test rather than teaching students how to communicate appropriately and effectively using the pragmatic features of language. Therefore, it seems that more studies are needed to provide a clear picture of the role of learner-centered assessment techniques in acquiring pragmatic knowledge.

### **The Present Study**

Given the scarcity of research on the benefits that alternative assessment techniques can offer to facilitate the acquisition of L2 in general and the gap in the literature concomitant with the role of peer and self-assessment techniques in promoting language knowledge as defined by Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010), the present study aimed at investigating the differential effect of various assessment techniques on learners' pragmatic and organizational competencies. In so doing, the ensued null hypotheses were formed:

1) Different assessment techniques (i.e., self, peer, and teacher-assessment) do not have any significant effect on participants' pragmatic competence and learners who benefited from self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher-assessment have similar levels of pragmatic competence all other conditions maintained alike.

2) Different assessment techniques (i.e. self, peer, and teacher-assessment)

do not have any significant effect on participants' organizational competence and learners who benefited from self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher-assessment have similar levels of organizational competence all other conditions maintained alike.

To further test the null hypotheses, the following research questions were posed:

Do various assessment techniques (i.e. self, peer, and teacher-assessment) have any significant effect on participants' pragmatic competence?

Do various assessment techniques (i.e. self, peer, and teacher-assessment) have any significant effect on participants' organizational competence?

### **Method**

Due to non random sampling, the study enjoyed a quasi experimental design including pre-and post-tests. The dependent variables were pragmatic and organizational knowledge and the independent variables were self, peer, and teacher-assessment techniques.

### ***Participants***

A total number of 98 female Iranian learners of English studying at pre-intermediate levels in an Iranian language institute with an age range of 15 to 29 ( $M = 17.2$ ,  $SD = 8.32$ ) participated in this study. The participants were chosen from among 157 pre-intermediate learners who had taken Cambridge's Preliminary English Test (PET) ( $M = 53.46$ ,  $SD = 6.92$ ) and scored one standard deviation from mean. In other words, the administration of PET abetted the researchers to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in terms of general linguistic knowledge. The first 32 learners were randomly assigned to the self-assessment group (SA), in which participants were instructed to evaluate their own performance and learning, and 33 to the peer-assessment group (PA), where learners were taught how to assess their peers. Finally, the last group which included 33 learners was the teacher-assessment group (TA), in which the assessment of the learners' performance in the class was conducted merely by the teacher.

### ***Instruments***

Speech acts involving the element of power relation can be more effectively assessed through role-play (Grabowski, 2013; Kasper & Rose, 2001, 2002; Purpura, 2017). Therefore, to assess pragmatic knowledge, Discourse Role Play Talks (DRPTs) were employed in this study. Employed mostly as a tool for pedagogical ends across a wide range of subjects, role plays are also used for assessment purposes in the evaluation of speaking and pragmatic competence (Kasper & Youn, 2018). Role plays provide a context to examine how language learners generate and comprehend utterances while in interaction, speculating a specific context for learners and thus ensuring that not only does the speaking test enjoy authenticity but also it is not afflicted by the under-representation of the construct under examination. In DRPTs, students are required to read the explanation of a situation and to play a role based on the same situation with either a teacher or a peer. In this way, learners are mandated to come up with sentences commensurate with the situation described both in terms of structural and pragmatic considerations. For each scenario learners were given 8 to 12 minute to conduct the role play. They were given two minutes to prepare for the role play and think over

the situation and the language and function they demanded prior to role plays. However, they could not ask for the researchers' assistance while engaged in the role plays. Nor were they given any cues as whether their utterances were correct or appropriate.

Three speech act situations were postulated as role plays, in which participants were required to communicate with either a peer or the teacher as interlocutor. The role play test comprised of eight different scenarios adopted from Enochs and Yoshitake-Strain (1999), each including all three speech acts namely, a request, a refusal, and an apology with different degrees of power, imposition and distance in various situations. Request, refusal and apology were selected as the main functions because they happen often in everyday speech acts and they were among the functions that had to be taught to the participants of the present study. Furthermore, due to their significant role in the pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners, these three speech acts have commonly been researched (e.g., Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2014; Felix-Brasdefer, 2006, 2008), although the focuses of these studies have been on different aspects. For example, Birjandi and Derakhshan investigated the effect of video-driven prompts on promoting students' awareness of the Pragmatic comprehension of apology, request and refusal. Another important feature of these acts is that they can be expressed in several different ways. In this regard, Purpura (2017) refers to the well-known example of a person requesting for salt in a restaurant and mentions that the request can be friendly or unfriendly, patient or humorous, and demanding or sarcastic. Therefore, depending on the degrees of power, distance and imposition, request, refusal and apology can be expressed in several different ways.

Written descriptions of the role plays including what was supposed to be done by the interlocutor was presented to the participants in both Persian and English to elicit the use of speech acts in the role play. Learners' performances in the role plays were video-taped for the sake of analysis in terms of pragmatic and organizational knowledge.

### ***Assessing Pragmatic Knowledge***

To gauge the appropriateness of the generated utterances, having watched the recorded role plays, two experienced English language teachers assessed each individual's performance with regard to each speech act in each role play. They used a 6 point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the least appropriate and six signaling the most appropriate performance. The scores gained for all speech acts comprised the participant's score in that specific scenario, and the scores gained in all eight scenarios were tallied and added up to create the participant's pragmatic competence score in an administration of the DRPT. Interrater reliability was established through calculating correlation coefficient of the scores awarded by the two raters. This coefficient was found to be .79 in the pretest. The two raters resolved the differences through discussion, listening to video-taped role plays again, which yielded to the achievement of the inter-rater reliability coefficient estimated in the posttest was .86.

### ***Assessing Organizational Knowledge***

In order to delineate the organizational knowledge of participants, four statements were employed to form a 6 point Likert-scale to rate each participant's performance in each role play. These statements were to cover the two basic areas of organizational knowledge in Bachman and Palmer's model, grammatical and textual

knowledge. Therefore, the first sentence stated that: “the utterances were error free in terms of grammar”. Adopted from the inventory of grammatical areas identified in the Cambridge English PET handbook for teachers, the grammatical structures expected to be appropriately used for pre-intermediate participants were as follows: Modals: can (for example, the learners had to be able to use can, based on the context, in three different ways: can = ability; can = request; can = permission). Another example of modals with three possible meanings was could as ability, could as possibility and could as polite request. The other grammatical areas included: would (polite requests) will (offer) shall (suggestion; offer) should (advice) may (possibility) might (possibility) have (got) to (obligation) ought to (obligation) must (obligation) mustn't (prohibition) need (necessity) needn't (lack of necessity) used to + infinitive (past habits); Tenses : present simple, present continuous, present perfect simple, past simple, past perfect simple, future with going to, future with present continuous and present simple, future with will and shall; Verb forms: Affirmative, interrogative, negative imperatives, infinitives, gerunds after verbs and prepositions, gerunds as subjects and objects, passive forms, causative have/get, So/nor with auxiliaries; Conditional sentences Type 0, 1, and 2; Simple reported speech, indirect and embedded questions. Therefore, erroneous statements beyond these grammatical structures (e.g., an error in the formation of conditional type 3) were tolerated and not regarded as an error for the participants of the present study since such structures are deemed to be beyond their organizational knowledge. The second sentence was: “The utterances were error free in terms of vocabulary use”. The third and the fourth sentences consecutively said that: “There were no mistakes pertinent to pronunciation and intonation” and “Utterances were coherently related and proper cohesive devices were used”. The scale was to be answered by two researchers individually, with 6 indicating “strong agreement” and 1 signaling “strong disagreement”. Interrater reliability was measured through calculating correlation coefficient of the two raters' scores. In the pretest, this coefficient was calculated as .72, which was increased to .81 in the posttest before which the two raters had resolved the differences having listened to taped role plays again and discussed differences of view point.

### ***Procedure***

In order to be able to gauge the difference of the learners' performance in pre and posttest, prior to the treatment, the researchers administered the Discourse Role Play Talks (DRPTs) to all learners and asked them to act out the situations in the cards with peers. The pair for the role plays were selected and assigned based on random selection and learners were not permitted to choose their own peers for the role plays. The performance of the participants in the role plays both in the pretest and in the posttest were recorded to allow the analysis of the sentences in terms of pragmatic competence and organizational knowledge. Having watched the recorded performance of the participants, two of the researchers rated the participants using the pragmatic and organizational knowledge scales explained in the previous sections. The administration of the DPRT pre-test was followed by the treatment which lasted six 45-minute sessions.

In each of these sessions, the participants in the self-assessment (SA) group were presented with the two scales employed as the instruments in this study to assess pragmatic and organizational knowledge. They were briefed about the scoring and the criteria based on which they would be assessed in terms of



pragmatic as well as organizational competences. In so doing, the statements in both scales were explained to them and clarified using examples. They were told what each item meant and on what ground the performance was to be rated. Next, on the same session, participants were presented with the role play scenarios each of which they had to act out with a peer every session. With participants' consent, their performance was videotaped, so that participants would be able to review, reflect on, and analyze and assess their own performance. Having acted out the scenarios in the role plays, they were asked to answer the scales and evaluate their own performance. They did the assessment independent from that of their peers in the role play, while watching the pertinent video. They were then free to delete the video file if they desired. They were instructed to collect these answered scales in a portfolio which had to be submitted to researchers prior to the posttest to provide evidence for the researchers that the self-assessment had been carried out.

The peer assessment (PA) group participants, in the same vein, received the two scales and the same role play scenarios in which they were asked to act out with a peer each session while being video-taped. Similar to the learners in self-assessment group, the peer assessment group participants were not allowed to choose the partners for the role plays. They, however, unlike their SA counterparts, were asked to assess the performance of their peer, and not that of their own, in each role play concerning pragmatic and organizational competence and accumulate these evaluations in a portfolio to be handed in to the researchers at the end of the treatment to prove their peer assessment activities.

Unlike SA and PA participants, the teacher assessment (TA) group learners did not get the chance to get involved in the assessment process. They did not receive the assessment scales either. They were merely assigned to pairs to act out the scenarios each session. Having done their role plays, they were assessed by the teacher in terms of pragmatic and organizational competence and were later informed about their total organizational and pragmatic knowledge scores that had been decided by the teacher.

The treatment was followed by another PDRT as the post test. The role plays of the post-test were different from the ones in the pre-test; however, the same procedure of scoring and the same scales used by the same raters in the pre-test were employed to gauge the participants' pragmatic and organizational knowledge.

## **Results**

To demarcate the impact of assessment type on participants' pragmatic and organizational competence reflected in their performance in role-plays focused on three speech acts, the researchers scrutinized data gleaned from the pragmatic knowledge and organizational knowledge scales. First, a normality test was run to make sure the normality condition was met. The result of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk revealed no violation of normality in pre- and post-tests ( $p > .05$ ). Then, data accumulated from each scale were separately analyzed. Gains from pre-test to post-tests were calculated through subtracting pretest scores from post-test scores and were subjected to one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

### ***Pragmatic Competence***

The first research question in the current study was intended to scrutinize whether assessment techniques had any significant effect on participants' pragmatic competence as mirrored in the appropriateness of the use of three speech acts in the

Discourse Role Play Talks (DRPTs) test. The first null hypothesis in the present study stated that different assessment techniques do not have differential impact on participants' pragmatic competence. To examine the null hypothesis and to find out whether pragmatic competence could be a function of assessment techniques, first, the researchers employed descriptive statistics to calculate means and standard deviations of the groups in both pre-test and post-test, the results of which are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Pragmatic Competence*

Groups	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SA	32	80.46	9.61	115.15	17.92	34.68	9.29
PA	33	70.93	7.35	90.69	13.43	19.75	6.68
TA	33	76.60	8.62	82.54	10.49	5.93	5.05
Total	98	75.95	9.34	95.93	19.76	19.97	13.75

As demonstrated in Table 1, when gain scores of the pragmatic test were calculated, it was found that learners who had received the opportunity to play a part in assessment procedure (i.e. SA [ $M = 34.68$ ,  $SD = 9.29$ ], and PA [ $M = 19.75$ ,  $SD = 6.68$ ] groups' participants) obtained higher gain scores compared to the TA group participants ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ) who had not been granted the opportunity to assess their own performance or that of a peer throughout the experiment.

Table 1 also reveals that the learners who were given the responsibility to critically review and evaluate their own performance (i.e. SA [ $M = 34.68$ ,  $SD = 9.29$ ]) gained the highest gain scores in the pragmatic test. Next, an ANOVA was run on the gain scores to find out whether the observed differences were statistically significant. Shown in Table 2 are the results of the one-way ANOVA on pragmatic competence gain scores.

**Table 2**  
*One-way ANOVA, Pragmatic Competence*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	13429.14	2	6714.57	129.36	.00
Within groups	4930.81	95	51.90		
Total	18359.95	97			

As shown in Table 2, significant differences were observed among the gain scores of participants in the SA ( $M = 34.68$ ,  $SD = 9.29$ ), PA ( $M = 19.75$ ,  $SD = 6.68$ ), and TA ( $M = 6.68$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ) groups, in the pragmatic competence test,  $F(2, 97) = 129.36$ ,  $p < .05$ . Then, to find the differences, a post hoc test was run. The results of a post hoc Scheffe's test, illustrated in Table 3, further elucidated where the significant differences were located.

**Table 3**  
*Scheffe's Test: Pragmatic Competence*

Group	PA	TA
SA	14.92*	28.74*
PA		13.81*

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As Table 3 suggests, both alternative assessment techniques (i.e. the self-assessment and the peer-assessment) were found to yield significant increase in participants' pragmatic competence since the results of the post hoc test indicated that gain scores of the SA and PA groups were significantly higher when compared to that of the group the members of which were assessed merely by the teacher (i.e. TA group). The first null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. Furthermore, the post hoc test crystallized a significant mean difference between the gain scores of the SA and PA participants when posttest pragmatic scores were checked against pre-test ones, suggesting that taking control of the process of the assessment could enhance participants' pragmatic knowledge as reflected in the proper use of speech acts in role play scenarios more than peer-assessment, and thus, introducing self-assessment as the most effective assessment technique for promoting pragmatic competence. Moreover, the learners who evaluated the performance of their fellow classmates in the role plays, the SA group, also significantly scored higher than the TA group, which indicated that having a say in the assessment procedure of the evaluation of pragmatic competence, even if not the assessment of one's own performance, can have desired impact on pragmatic knowledge.

### ***Organizational Competence***

The second research question addressed the effect of assessment technique on participants' organizational knowledge which was operationalized as the accurate use of vocabulary and structures, as well as proper pronunciation of the well-linked and cohesive utterances. To find the answer to the second research question, and to see if the second null hypothesis stating that different assessment techniques do not have differential impact on participants' organizational competence could be rejected, the researchers first calculated means and standard deviations of the groups in the two administrations of the organizational competence test. Table 4 depicts descriptive statistics pertaining to organizational competence tests.

**Table 4**  
***Descriptive Statistics for Organizational Competence***

Groups	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SA	32	14.15	2.84	21.28	2.60	7.12	3.46
PA	33	14.66	2.64	20.06	1.78	5.39	2.66
TA	33	14.00	2.43	16.33	2.73	2.33	1.49
Total	98	14.27	2.63	19.20	3.18	4.92	3.29

As Table 4 indicates, regarding organizational competence, alternative assessment techniques groups (i.e., SA [M = 7.12, SD = 3.46], and PA [M = 5.39, SD = 2.66] groups) were found to have improved more from the pre-test to the post-test when compared to the learners in the TA group (M = 2.33, SD = 1.49) that were evaluated by their teacher. Further, similar to the pattern observed in pragmatic competence test, participants who had evaluated their own organizational knowledge in role plays obtained the highest gain scores. The researchers, then, ran an ANOVA on the organizational competence gain scores to establish the significance of the observed differences. Displayed in Table 5 are the results of the one-way ANOVA on organizational competence gain scores.

**Table 5***One-way ANOVA, Organizational Competence*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	383.78	2	191.89	27.18	.00
Within groups	670.71	95	7.06		
Total	1054.50	97			

Table 5 indicates significant differences among the gain scores of participants in the SA ( $M = 7.12$ ,  $SD = 3.46$ ), PA ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ), and TA ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) groups, in the organizational competence test,  $F(2, 97) = 27.18$ ,  $p < .05$ . The second null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. A post hoc Scheffe's test was then employed to locate the significant differences. Table 6 illustrates the results of the post hoc test on organizational competence gain scores.

**Table 6***Scheffe's test: Organizational Competence*

Group	PA	TA
SA	1.73*	4.79*
PA		3.06*

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As shown in Table 6, alternative assessment techniques encouraging learners' involvement in the testing procedure significantly improved participants' organizational competence as the SA and PA groups gain scores were found to be significantly higher than the scores of the TA group. Additionally, the post hoc test revealed a significant mean difference between the gain scores of the SA and PA participants in the organizational competence, which rendered self-assessment more effective in promoting organizational knowledge as measured by the precision of vocabulary and structure use, correctness of pronunciation, and cohesion of utterances.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to find out whether self and peer-assessment techniques could be employed as instructional tools to improve pragmatic and organizational competences as the two main components of language knowledge as postulated by Bachman and Palmer (1996). The study set out to ascertain whether getting involved in the evaluation processes (e.g., of one's own performance or a peer's) could significantly improve pragmatic knowledge, reflected in the correct and appropriate use of three speech acts in role plays. Another objective of the study was to scrutinize the effect of peer and self-assessment on organizational knowledge, mirrored in phonologically, semantically, and syntactically accurate and cohesive utterance.

The results of the ANOVA tests revealed that the learner-centered assessment techniques (i.e. self and peer-assessment) could significantly improve both pragmatic and organizational knowledge. Evaluating one's own oral performance was proved to be more effective than assessing the performance of a peer as the results proved that the learners in the self-assessment group had outperformed those in the peer assessment group in both pragmatic and organizational competence scales.

The results pointed out that engaging learners in the assessment procedure

can desirably affect their knowledge of pragmatics which plays a paramount role in communication. Put differently, having been familiarized with the procedures and criteria of assessment of pragmatic knowledge, and through assessing themselves and their peers, the learners performed better in the pragmatic competence posttest. Organizational knowledge was also found to be promoted as the result of providing the learners by the opportunity to take part in assessment decisions. This result crystallizes the pedagogical value of learner-centered assessment techniques.

The results can be explained in the light of the awareness that self and peer assessment groups gained. They received information about the scales and became acquainted with the criteria based on which their performance was to be gauged. It seems that by being given the opportunity to closely study the assessment criteria, they were able to set specific goals for themselves which enabled them to achieve more (Schunk, 1989). Learners can comprehend the process of reaching objectives when they can evaluate their work (Kitsantas et al., 2004; Shih et al., 2010). Therefore, presenting evaluation criteria assists learners in gaining a thorough understanding of outcomes and expectations as well as an awareness of the ways to internalize the steps necessary to meet the goals (McMillan & Hearn, 2008). In the same vein, participating in self and peer assessment groups could have assisted the learners of the present study to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, paving the way for creating autonomous learners. It seems that assessments other than teacher assessment are promising moves towards integrating teaching/learning in line with the approach advocated by Turner and Purpura, (2016) as learning oriented assessment (LOA) approach. Furthermore, the results confirm the sociocultural approaches to language learning and assessment in which, in accordance with Vygotskian dynamic assessment concepts (Poehner et al., 2017), teaching is an inherent part of all assessments demanding a close cooperation between the assessor and learners.

Self-assessment and peer assessment, as important components of formative assessment, arm learners with knowledge of the expected and desired performance as well as the criteria on which evaluation is grounded. Rather than merely asking learners to give a score or grade themselves, such alternative assessment techniques are able to encourage and stir the making of qualitative judgments about one's own performance (Andrade, 2010). Adopting such an active role in the assessment process enables individuals to gain deeper understanding of their current level at a particular aspect of the targeted skill and elevate it, urging them to bridge the gap between a current performance (as reflected in the result of the assessment) and the desired level. Also, through elucidating the purpose of the performance, such involvement with assessment can prompt learners to monitor their learning process and make adjustments when required (Panadero et al., 2017). Thus, they can foster self-regulated learning (Andrade, 2010) which can in turn promote learning itself (Zimmerman, 2011). As Goldman and Pellegrino (2015) put it, when learners collaborate in peer assessment, they become aware of each other's thinking and find the opportunity to share their perspectives and strategies. Consequently, they may provoke and broaden each other's thinking and understanding. They add that self-assessment can contribute to students' monitoring and controlling their own learning by enabling them to identify their lacks and needs and to adjust their learning activities accordingly. It seems that learners who are given only the teachers' assessment results and are expected to follow the feedbacks with no perception of their aims, will not acquire the skill to monitor and self-adjust

their performance and, consequently, cannot promote their skills as much (Panadero et al., 2017).

The impact of assessment techniques on various components of language knowledge, particularly pragmatic competence, had not been examined in previous studies. Thus, while adding to the literature through filling this gap, the results corroborate the ones gained in the line of studies reporting the superiority of alternative assessment over traditional teacher-centered methods of evaluation in language learning (e.g., Harris, 1997; Meisels et al., 2003).

These results are also in line with some studies such as Butler and Lee (2010), Pitsoulakis and Bailey (2016), and Ross (2005), although they scrutinized areas other than pragmatic knowledge. For example, Butler and Lee (2010) investigated the effectiveness of self-assessment on a rather large number of young EFL learners in South Korea. The participants practiced self-assessment in their English language classes for one semester and at the end both their self-assessment skills and language skills improved. Ross (2005) did a longitudinal study and compared the effect of summative and formative assessments on the language proficiency of EAP students and realized that formative assessment practices including peer and self-assessments yield better results. Furthermore, the results are partly in line with those of Hariri Asl and Marandi, (2017) who concluded that in online learning communities that attempt to create social presence, peer assessment can yield more fruitful results followed by self and teacher assessment. The same agreement can be found between the results of this study and Birjandi and Siyyari's (2010) study. They investigated the effect of peer and self-assessment on the learners' paragraph writing performance and concluded that peer and self-assessment are more fruitful than teacher assessment, although in their study peer assessment came first.

The results are not in line with the ones gained by Pakzadian and Tajeddin (2014) who reported that, in spite of the better performance of the students in the self-assessment group in the written completion test, they did not outperform the control group overly. This discrepancy can be explained with regard to the differences in assessment tools. In the study at hand, role plays, which can be a direct measure of pragmatic competence, were applied, whereas Pakzadian and Tajeddin (2014) applied a written discourse completion test to assess pragmatic knowledge.

As one of the main objectives of any language learning program is being able to use it effectively to interact and communicate, pedagogical practices in language classrooms, including assessment methods, should be designed in a way as to trigger and encourage critical evaluation of performance which has proved to significantly impact two main components of the ability to communicate. All in all, the results of the present study imply that self and peer assessment ought to be among pedagogical practices in language classroom, particularly when the speaking skill is the target. Given the importance of pragmatic considerations (Kasper & Rose, 2001) and regarding the fact that assessment of one's own performance (or that of a peer) provides a deeper understanding of the component under study, self-assessment and peer-assessment interventions can have a desired impact on students' self-regulated learning of the pragmatics, leading to the empowerment of learners in acquiring pragmatic component of communicative competence in interactions.

The present study contributed to the still limited body of research into the

pedagogical convenience of alternative assessment techniques as it included the examination of variations in assessment techniques in the promotion of two main components of language knowledge and introduced self and peer-assessment techniques as vital learning tool assisting instructors to elevate both organizational and pragmatic competences. The results of the current study are expected to motivate language teachers to encourage self-evaluation and self-assessment techniques and familiarize learners with assessment criteria and steps and involve them in assessment procedures. It is worth mentioning that although the results indicated that self and peer assessment yield more fruitful results than teacher assessment, concerns about the cost and time of implementation have to be considered. When put into practice, there are issues pertinent to successful implementation of self and peer assessment. Students need clear guidelines and close supervisions and providing these guidelines and supervisions can be time consuming specially in classes with large number of students. Furthermore, some students might resist the alternative assessments, because they are used to traditional assessments performed by their teachers. Teachers' knowledge of assessment methods is another concern. Tajeddin et al. (2018), in a study about novice and experienced teachers' assessment literacy concluded that these teachers "have both shared and divergent speaking assessment literacy" (p. 57) and that the past education as well as their years of teaching experiences can be the determining factors in their knowledge and awareness. Therefore, the training of teachers and methods of raising their awareness with regard to effective ways of implementing self or/ and peer assessment techniques should be the focus of future studies and a main concern for educators. Studies are needed to compare and delve into different ways in which assessment done by learners can be introduced to the learning context and the ways learners react and respond to them.

The present study suffered a few limitations and delimitations that mainly pertained to the participants. As mentioned earlier, the participants in the study were ninety- eight female English learners studying at pre-intermediate levels with an age range of 15 to 29. The fact that participants were selected from merely one proficiency level can be regarded as a limitation of the study. Assessing the effect of treatment on pragmatic knowledge across various proficiency levels would have culminated in a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study. Moreover, the inclusion of participants from both genders might have illuminated the possible moderating role of gender, thus providing a bigger picture. In addition, the limited number of the sessions in the treatment, mainly due to working on the oral performance of the subjects, can be regarded as another limitation of the present study.

Studies employing various methods of data gathering are needed to confirm the obtained results in written productions of language learners. Learners' generated texts can be analyzed for pragmatic and organizational appropriateness and accuracy to shed light on the effectiveness of self- and peer-assessment in promoting language knowledge. The effect of assessment techniques on strategic competence is also to be scrutinized in further studies. Finally, further studies are needed to ensure the validity and reliability of alternative assessments in different contexts.

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