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## Research Paper

# A Meta-Analytic Study of Instructed Second Language Pragmatics: A Case of the Speech Act of Request

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## Abstract

Research on the effectiveness of request instruction in L2 pragmatics has been extensive, yet inconclusive. The present meta-analysis aims not only to provide a quantitative and reliable measure of the effects of instruction for the speech act of request in Iran, but also to illustrate a description of the relationship between some variables that moderate its effectiveness (age, gender, proficiency level, treatment type, research design, and data collection procedure). To do so, a total of 37 studies were retrieved and by establishing a set of different inclusion/exclusion criteria, 17 primary studies were coded and analyzed. Results revealed that (1) there is an overall large effect size on the effectiveness of the instruction of request ( $g = 1.48$ ) in an Iranian context; (2) some variables were found to be a moderator for this effectiveness like gender and treatment type; (3) considering gender, the male group produced a larger effect size ( $g = 3.09$ ) than the female one ( $g = 1.10$ ); (4) and regarding treatment types, the explicit group yielded a larger effect size ( $g = 1.53$ ) than the implicit one ( $g = 1.20$ ). A thorough interpretation of the results, as well as a discussion of practical, theoretical, and methodological implications of this study, is provided to tackle a number of conundrums surrounding the instruction of request and shed light on how to reorient future research.

**Keywords:** Instruction, Request, Second Language Pragmatics, Meta-Analysis

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatics, the interlocutors' intention in their joint action (Locastro, 2013), has been acknowledged as an interminable area of research in language learning, teaching, and assessment over the last decades. As defined by Bachman (1990), it necessitates the relationships between the utterances and the functions by which the speakers want to perform those utterances. Pragmatic competence, which is one of the pivotal components of communicative competence, refers to the ability to utilize a language properly in a social context (Taguchi, 2009).

Furthermore, pragmatic instruction, as one of the most prevailing aspects of pragmatic research, commenced to establish itself as an independent area to ameliorate pragmatic competence. Mitigating the process of learning pragmatics, researchers began to scrutinize the teachability of pragmatics and its instruction (Alcón-Soler & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Cohen, 2008, 2018; Derakhshan, 2014; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Kasper & Rose, 1999, 2002; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Moradian, Asadi, & Azadbakht, 2019; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2011, 2015, 2019).

Due to its paucity in EFL contexts, pragmatic instruction is accentuated by many scholars in Iran (Alemi & Khanlarzade, 2016; Anani Sarab & Alikhani, 2016; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015, 2020; Jalilifar, 2009; Shakki, Naeini, Mazandarani, & Derakhshan, 2020, Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014). The profusion of pragmatic instruction is indicated in a variety of constructs such as speech acts, conversational implicatures, prosody, routines, humor, among which speech acts are the most dominant aspects of pragmatic competence that have gained momentum, especially in Iran during the last decades (Bagherkazemi, 2018; Chalak & Abbasi, 2015; Derakhshan, 2019; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018;



Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015, 2020; Derakhshan, Eslami, & Chalak, 2020; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Eslami & Eslami, 2008; Eslami & Mardani, 2010, Fakher & Panahifar, 2020, Hassaskhah & Ebrahimi, 2015, Kaivanpanah & Langari, 2020; Samavarchi & Allami, 2012).

One of the speech acts is request, which has been investigated extensively around the world for its manifold applications. Having been expounded as face-threatening, the speech act of request has had encroachment on the hearer's individual space. Moreover, it can be considered as the most complicated speech act for L2 learners because it needs a high level of linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness on their part (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) corroborated that there is an imposition in the act of request that should be minimized. To minimize this imposition, this is apparent that teaching the speech act of request provides the most compelling evidence for its usage in each and every context (Khatib & Ahmadi Safa, 2011; Mirzaei & Esmaili, 2013; Tajeddin, Keshavarz, & Zand Moghadam, 2012). A systematic look at the literature, which was reviewed recently by Shakki et al. (2020), indicates that the speech act of request has enjoyed considerable attention due to its recognition as one of the most frequently used speech acts in pragmatic instruction in Iran.

Concomitantly, following the seminal study of Norris and Ortega (2000) on the effectiveness of L2 instruction, the superiority of meta-analysis over the other research synthesis method has been recognized. A number of studies have been chronologically conducted so far through meta-analysis and review studies on different subjects in the area of pragmatics such as Jeon and Kaya (2006), Takahashi (2010), Taguchi (2015), Badjadi (2016), Plonsky and Zhuang (2019), Yousefi and Nassaji (2019), and Shakki et al. (2020); nonetheless, almost no meta-analysis has been done on pragmatics instruction, particularly the speech act of request in an Iranian context yet. The abovementioned reviews and meta-analyses have covered various factors in teaching pragmatics and its effectiveness, and scant attention has been devoted to scrutinizing each speech act individually, especially in an EFL context. Considering the substantial prominence of the speech act of request (Shakki et al., 2020) in learning and teaching, the present study aims to summarize the magnitude and directions of the effects obtained in a series of empirical studies in Iran.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. English Pragmatics

Hymes (1972) explicates that knowing a language does not merely mean having linguistic competence because a sentence that is formed linguistically may be appropriate in one context but not in another one. Saying something inappropriately may bring excruciating slowness in understanding and even hurt someone's feeling. Thus, not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence are the prerequisites for an L2 learner to be able to communicate effectively. As Johnston (2008) postulates, on the one hand, grammar and vocabulary, and on the other hand, the paragraph structure and being able to participate in a conversation should be accomplished in a social interaction. Perceiving the purpose behind the sentences, L2 learners may claim that they have pragmatic competence, which is a crucial constituent of pragmatics. Pragmatics which deals with the study of language use in context (Ishihara, 2010) is considered one of the most complicated aspects of language learning and teaching.

Wolfson (1989) states that the native speakers of a language may forgive the pronunciation or grammatical errors, although pragmatic errors are not acceptable to them at all. Learning pragmatic features such as speech acts, implicatures, prosody, routines, and humor is a demanding and complex process because they have multiple realizations in different situations. L2 learners should know how to act and what to say when they face challenging occasions in the L2, so that speech acts which include a wide range of units such as requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, and so on must be taken into account. Given the opaque essence of these features, exposure to input and instruction may result in more acquisition and development (Ellis, 2005).

### 2.2. Pragmatics Instruction

L2 learners still lack pragmatic ability which is the result of insufficient and irrelevant input they receive in an EFL context (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Hashemian, 2012; Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020). Thus, as a remedy, instruction has been proposed when exposure to input in the L2 is not enough and useful (Alemi & Haeri, 2020; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2020; Kasper, 1996). Ellis (2005) presumes that more L2 input leads to better opportunities to produce output and successful instructed language learning. Instructed second language (ISL), which aims to improve

communicative competence and enable L2 learners to enhance their ability to use the L2 for communication purposes, has its root in awareness and noticing (Schmidt, 1993, 2001) and consciousness-raising (Sharwood Smith, 1981, 1993) and gaining L2 students' attention would be conducive. Therefore, the role of instruction is undeniable due to its deterrent effect in a misunderstanding of pragmatic features (Taguchi, 2011). Considering the importance of instruction and its vital role in pragmatics, an upsurge of research has been carried out to reveal whether pragmatic features are amenable to teaching from the late 1980s, and a large number of them corroborate that L2 pragmatics can be taught and the advantages of instruction over noninstruction is crystal clear (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Shakki et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2015).

Reviewing the empirical studies conducted on the effectiveness of instruction and pragmatics demonstrates that almost all studies accentuate the significance of instruction. One of them is Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analytic study, which focused on the effectiveness of L2 instruction, and the result was that focused L2 instruction and explicit teaching are more beneficial than the other group. By the same token, the first meta-analysis which was done on L2 pragmatics about 14 years ago was Jeon and Kaya (2006), in which 13 studies were analyzed. Their findings indicate that instruction is significantly different from noninstruction. Similarly, Takahashi (2010), in her review of 49 studies, illuminates that though implicit teaching has its vantage over explicit, direct instruction shows superiority in pragmatic interventions. Also, she states that there are some factors such as motivation and higher proficiency by which we can improve pragmatic teachability. Another study conducted by Taguchi (2015) on 58 intervention studies illustrates that the explicit teaching group outperformed the implicit group. She asserts that by designing different activities for processing and noticing, L2 teachers could also be successful in their implicit teaching.

Alternatively, Badjedi (2016) investigated the effects of pragmatic instructional tasks pertinent to the production and comprehension of outcome measures. Using 24 studies, he concluded that the treatments by which learners get involved in metapragmatic discussion or the ones which provide recast represent a larger effect size. The effect sizes vary from small to large, checking the comprehension and production means. In the same vein, Plonsky and Zhuang (2019), who utilized 50 studies in their meta-analysis, claim that not only is pragmatic instruction effective, but also longer instruction provides more opportunities for the learners in comparison with a usual class. Their findings also corroborate that multiple-choice questions, which are more controlled outcome measures, produced a larger effect size than role-plays. Considering the effects of instruction and corrective feedback on L2 pragmatics, Yousefi and Nassaji's (2019) study, which used 39 studies, indicated that face-to-face instruction generated a smaller effect size than that of the computer-assisted instruction. They also stated that comparing comprehension and production, instruction was more effective for the first one than the second one. Similar to Plonsky and Zhuang (2019), they found that the longer treatment produced a larger effect size than the short interventions.

Recently, Shakki et al.'s (2020) study, which is the latest and the only review carried out on the effects of instruction of pragmatics in an Iranian context, report that, among 54 studies they had selected in their study, all of them acclaimed that pragmatics was amenable to teaching and instruction was a prerequisite in this field. According to their findings, implicit/explicit vs. control was the most recurrent treatment type used in Iran within these two decades. They also found that 36 papers had used the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) in their analyses, and it was considered as the most prevailing method of data collection in Iran. Moreover, it is mentioned that 53 studies had used a quantitative method, whereas just one study had applied the qualitative method in pragmatic instruction. In addition, they analyzed the frequency of the speech acts in pragmatic instruction in Iran, and request was the most predominant speech act conducted in 29 studies. Following Shakki et al. (2020), request among miscellaneous features of pragmatics was chosen to be investigated in the present study because it is the most frequently instructed speech acts in the Iranian context.

### **2.3. Request**

Simply defined, request is a face-threatening speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1978) in which the encroachment of the speaker on the listener's freedom from enforcement and freedom to action can be seen. Request was, first, highlighted in Blum-Kulka's (1991) study and, after that, a large body of research put emphasis on this speech act (Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Rose, 1999; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2014; Tajeddin et al., 2012; Trosborg, 1995). There are a variety of direct and indirect ways of making a request in all languages which are available around the world. Blum-Kulka (1991) stated that there are three major strategies in formulating a request: direct requests, conventional indirect requests, and nonconventional indirect requests. In direct request, which is the most explicit and direct form of requesting, the meaning can be recognized through the knowledge of lexicon and grammatical rules. It can also be

expressed as a performative, imperative, or want statements. On the other hand, conventional indirect requests are the ones in which fixed linguistic conventions are used. These speech acts not only need the basis of language but also require the knowledge of pragmalinguistic conventions. The last one is nonconventional indirect request in which the request is not explicit and the intention of the speaker is not obvious.

Many researchers have attempted to investigate the speech act of request in different contexts (Abdolrezaipoor & Eslami-Rasekh, 2012; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Jalilifar, 2009), and they believe that teaching request to learners may help them bear with the challenges they may face pragmatically in their communication. Taking pragmatic features into account, especially request, which was reported to be the most frequent speech act in the Iranian context (Shakki et al., 2020), is a challenging task because it varies from one social and cultural area to the other one. The aim of the present study was to intermingle some studies done on request during these two decades (2000- 2020) in order to provide a broader view for researchers to know whether instruction of request in an Iranian context was effective or not. It also analyzed different moderator variables to check their influence on the effectiveness of request instruction.

The following research questions guided the present meta-analysis:

1. What is the overall effect of the instruction of request on learning L2 pragmatics?
2. What variables moderate the overall effectiveness of L2 request instruction?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Collection

The present meta-analysis utilized manual and electronic searches to select full-text studies and also all the dissertations and theses on L2 pragmatics instruction of request published between 2000 and 2019. They were searched using databases in applied linguistics such as PhycINFO, Google Scholar, Google, ProQuest, SAGEResearch Methods Online, Microsoft Academic Search, Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA; ProQuest), Project MUSE, Blackwell Reference Online, Oxford Journals Digital Archive, Web of Science, Academic Search Premier, Springer Link, Wiley Online Library, ResearchGate, iSEEK Education, RefSeek, Virtual LRC, Academic Index, Internet Public Library, Oxford Handbooks Online, Scopus, ERIC - Education Resources Information Center, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals Online, and SAGE Knowledge. Furthermore, to gather the related studies, the keywords *pragmatics*, *Iran*, *interlanguage pragmatics*, *instruction*, *pragmatics instruction*, and *request* were utilized in the process of the searching. Finally, the reference sections of the relevant studies were explored not to miss any paper or study in this field.

#### 3.2. Inclusion Criteria

The present meta-analysis included any study which collected quantitative data that could be synthesized to address the current research questions. Because this study is the extension of the previous meta-analyses of the speech act of request in an Iranian context, some of the inclusion and exclusion criteria may have been taken from the former studies. Firstly, the studies which were reported in a peer-reviewed journal, thesis, or dissertation in English or Persian between 2000 to 2019 were selected to be used in this study. Secondly, the studies in which experimental or quasi-experimental designs were used which allowed for the identification of instructional effects were chosen (Badjadi, 2016). Thirdly, papers in which the speech act of request were taught were included in this study. Fourthly, the studies which have reported essential quantitative and statistical data were used in the meta-analysis. Based on the inclusion criteria, studies which were published before 2000 were excluded from the corpus. Moreover, the studies in which the data were not eloquent (the studies in which the inclusion criteria of the present study were not met) to be analyzed or the studies whose treatments were opaque and unclear were also excluded from the current study. Finally, there were some studies in which more than one speech act was used besides request; other speech acts such as apology and refusal were analyzed. Those studies were also excluded from the present study and the ones which investigated only request were added.

#### 3.3. Coding

The coding of the present meta-analysis dealt with a description of the information recorded and categorized from the individual and primary studies. With respect to the coding protocol, treatment type, design, age, gender,

proficiency, and data collection were included as the pivotal variables of the study. By the treatment type, the studies were coded as explicit and implicit ones. Explicit studies were operationalized as the ones in which a direct way of teaching was used to teach the speech act of request. Implicit ones were the studies through which the learners deduced the request knowledge on their own. Examples of such treatments are teachers' scaffolding, structured input, and consciousness-raising. Regarding the design of the study, experimental and quasi-experimental studies were selected to be categorized in the present meta-analysis. Considering the age of the participants, 1-10, 10-20, 20-30, and mixed were used as the coding protocol. Moreover, gender was coded as female, male, mixed, and not reported. Analyzing the proficiency level, elementary, intermediate, advanced, and not reported were utilized to be checked. Finally, the data collection methods were coded whether they were the MDCT or written discourse completion test (WDCT) or mixed (MDCT & WDCT). The coding scheme was developed based on other experts' and peers' recommendations and suggestions in L2 pragmatics and according to the previous meta-analyses which have been done so far:

Table 1. *Coding Protocol Used in This Study*

Features	Descriptors
Treatment Type	Explicit/Implicit
Design	Experimental/Quasi-Experimental
Age	1-10/10-20/20-30/Mixed
Gender	Female/Male/Mixed/Not Reported
Proficiency	Elementary/Intermediate/Advanced/Not Reported
Outcome Measures	WDCT/MDCT/Mixed

### 3.4. Analysis

Among a total number of 37 studies in which request has been taught, 17 studies that had utilized only instruction of request through experimental or quasi-experimental designs were included in the meta-analysis. Table 2 shows the corpus of the present study:

Table 2. *Study Design Across Studies*

No	Name	Participants	Age	Gender	Proficiency	Design	Treatment type	Data Collection
1	Masouleh et al. (2014)	60	Above 18	Not Reported	Not Reported	Quasi-Experimental	Instruction on the Pragmatic Awareness (Informative Papers)	Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)
2	Anani Sarab & Alikhani (2016a)	62	20-34	Female	Advanced	Quasi-Experimental	Awareness of Requests (Metapragmatic Awareness and Role Olay)	Written and Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Test (WDCT & MCDCT)
3	Anani Sarab & Alikhani (2016b)	62	20-34	Female	Advanced	Quasi-Experimental	Production of Requests (Metapragmatic Awareness and Role Play)	Written and Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Test (WDCT & MCDCT)
4	Barekat & Mehri (2013a)	45	16-20	Male	Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	Consciousness-Raising Instruction	Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)
5	Barekat & Mehri (2013b)	45	16-20	Male	Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	Consciousness-Raising Instruction With Feedback	Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)
6	Sabzalipor et al. (2017)	60	Mixed	Mixed	Intermediate	Experimental	Collostructional Corpus-Based Instruction	Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)
7	Dastjerdi & Rezvani (2010a)	120	19-27	Not Reported	Intermediate	Experimental	Explicit Awareness-Raising Tasks	Discourse Completion Task
8	Dastjerdi & Rezvani (2010b)	120	19-27	Not Reported	Intermediate	Experimental	Implicit Awareness-Raising Tasks	Discourse Completion Task
9	Eslami et al. (2015a)	74	20-25	Mixed	Upper-Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	Explicit Metapragmatic	Discourse Comprehension Task



							Explanations and Corrections	
10	Eslami et al. (2015b)	74	20-25	Mixed	Upper-Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	Enhanced Input and Implicit Feedback.	Discourse Comprehension Task
11	Sadeqi & Ghaemi (2016)	87	20-28	Mixed	Not Reported	Quasi-Experimental	Awareness-Raising Instruction	Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)
12	Malazz et al. (2011)	30	Not reported	Female	Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	A Form-Comparison Condition vs. Form-Search Condition	Discourse Comprehension Tests
13	Rajabia et al. (2015a)	73	10-14	Female	Intermediate	Quasi-Experimental	Explicit Instruction of Pragmatic	Discourse Completion Test
14	Rajabia et al. (2015b)	73	10-14	Female	Advanced	Quasi-Experimental	Explicit Instruction of Pragmatic	Discourse Completion Test
15	Sadighi et al. (2018)	10	Preschool	Not Reported	Elementary	Quasi-Experimental	Instruction of Request Strategies	Discourse Completion Test
16	Tajeddin & Hosseinpur (2014a)	140	19-28	Mixed	Not Reported	Quasi-Experimental	Deductive Consciousness-Raising Instructional Tasks	Discourse Completion Test
17	Tajeddin & Hosseinpur (2014b)	140	19-28	Mixed	Not Reported	Quasi-Experimental	Inductive Consciousness-Raising Instructional Tasks	Discourse Completion Test

### 3.5. Publication Bias

Publication bias can be considered as the reliability of a meta-analysis, which occurs as a result of the studies that yield larger treatment effect because researchers prefer to publish them than the ones which yield a small treatment effect. Therefore, there is a risk for the presence of the publication bias in the meta-analysis because most published studies have significant results. The publication bias is observable through a funnel plot and if there is no publication bias, the plot shows a symmetrical inverted funnel. A visual analysis of Figure 1 shows that our funnel plot is not symmetrical, suggesting that the publication bias is presented in this meta-analysis. Actually, six studies are missing from the left side of the plot:

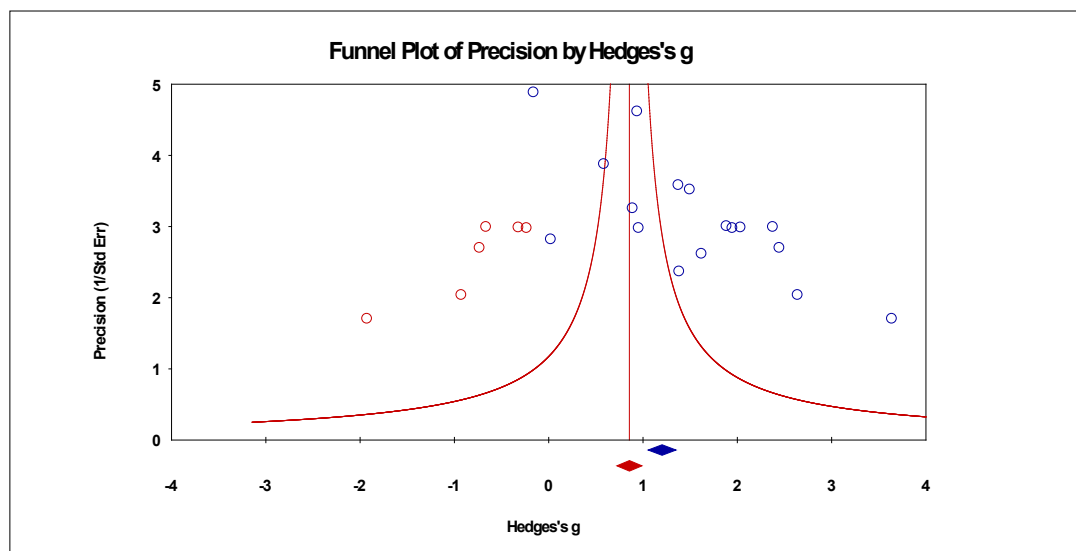


Figure 1. Funnel Plot of Precision by Effect Sizes for Observed and Imputed Studies for Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

To address the issue of missing studies and publication bias, we conducted the Trim and Fill Method developed by Duval and Tweedie (2000) which is a technique to estimate the missing studies and employ a recomputing to adjust the asymmetric funnel plot:

Table 3. Duval and Tweedie’s Trim and Fill Test of Publication Bias Estimation for L2 Pragmatics Instruction

	Studies Trimmed	Point	Fixed Effects	Point	Random Effects	Q Value
		Estimate	(Lower, Upper)	Estimate	(Lower, Upper)	
Observed Values		1.20	(1.05, 1.34)	1.47	(1.04, 1.91).	131.32
Adjusted Values	6	0.85	(0.72, 0.98)	0.92	(0.46, 1.37)	249.63

As depicted in Table 3, the point estimate and the 95% confidence interval for the combined studies is 1.20 (1.05, 1.34) under the fixed effect model, and using the Trim and Fill Method, the imputed point estimate is 0.85 (0.72, 0.98). On the other hand, under the random-effects model, the point estimate and 95% confidence interval for the combined studies is 1.47 (1.04, 1.91) and using the Trim and Fill Method, the imputed point estimate is 0.92 (0.46, 1.37). The recomputed combined effect shows a shift from large effect to medium effect due to the impact of publication bias.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Overall Meta-Analysis Results

The first research question aimed at finding the overall effectiveness of request on learning L2 pragmatics. Out of 10 original studies, from 2000 to 2019, with 865 participants from various Iranian contexts, 17 effect sizes (Hedges’ *g*) were collected for the meta-analysis. As depicted in Table 4, the results of the average weighted Hedges’ *g*, the *Q*-test for heterogeneity, the 95% prediction intervals, between-study variance, the two-tailed test of null, and the percentage of variation between studies due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error are represented. Based on Plonsky and Oswald (2014), concerning the interpretation of effect sizes in SLA, as a field-specific benchmark, a *d* value of 0.60 is considered small, 1.00 as medium, and 1.40 as large. In this study, the overall effect size was found to be 1.20, with a standard error of 0.08, a *z* value for a test of the null of 15.89, a corresponding *p* value of less than 0.001 for the fixed model and a mean of 1.48, a standard error of 0.22, a *z* value for a test of the null of 6.68, and a corresponding *p* value of less than 0.001 for the random model. For both models, we concluded that the mean effect size was significant. According to Plonsky and Oswald (2014), because the *d* value (Hedges’ *g*) is less than 1.40, for the fixed model, the mean effect size is considered medium. For the random model, the mean effect size, *g* = 1.48 was found to be large. However, the *Q* statistic on the heterogeneity of effect sizes was 131.33, *df* = 16, and *p* < .001, indicating that all the variance is unlikely to be due to sampling error, and we also conclude that the true effect size is likely to differ from study to study. Therefore, the fix model is not appropriate and does not match the data. For this reason, we applied the random effect model (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2013):

Table 4. Results of the Univariate Random-Effects Meta-Analyses of the Instruction of Request on Learning L2 Pragmatics

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	N	K	G	SE	95% CI	Test of Null		Heterogeneity			Tau-Squared			
							Z	P	Q	df	p	I <sup>2</sup>	τ <sup>2</sup>	se	τ
L2 Learning	L2 Pragmatics Instruction	865	17	1.48	0.22	[1.04,1.91]	6.68	0.0	131.33	16	0.00	87.82	0.71	0.31	0.84

Note. N = Total number of participants, K = Number of effect sizes, g = Mean weighted effect size in Hedges’ *g*, SE = Standard error, CI = Confidence interval, Z = Z value, p = p value, Q = Cochran’s heterogeneity test; df = Degrees of freedom *Q*-test, τ<sup>2</sup> = Between-study variance; I<sup>2</sup> = Percentage of variation between studies that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error. V = Variable

Figure 2 is included in Appendix.

##### 4.2. Moderator Analyses

For the second research question, it was intended to study the moderating factors of the L2 pragmatics intervention programs on learning L2 pragmatics, especially the speech act of request. We conducted a metaregression analysis for each group of moderator variables independently. The *Q*-Statistic was used to evaluate if a particular variable was a significant moderator. In Table 4, the results of the metaregression moderator analyses are presented for age, gender, proficiency, design, treatment type, and data collection procedure:

#### 4.2.1. Participant's Age

Participants' age was the first moderator that was used in our meta-regression model. In this group, three age intervals, 10-20, 20-30 and mixed, were identified based on the age properties of participants in primary studies. For the first two intervals, 10-20 and 20-30, the mean effect size was found to be large and significant ( $g = 2.14$  and  $g = 1.50$ , respectively). For the mixed group, however, the average effect size  $g = 0.63$  was medium. The results of the meta-regression,  $Q^b = 4.37$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p^b = 0.11$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.68$ ,  $I^2 = 0.8752$ ,  $R^2 = 0.00$ , were not significant, concerning the possible moderating effect of the participants' age on language learning. It was also found that the distribution of the effect sizes was considered heterogeneous, with  $I > 75\%$ , indicating that a large proportion ( $I^2 = 0.8752$ ) of the variability appears to be the true variance:

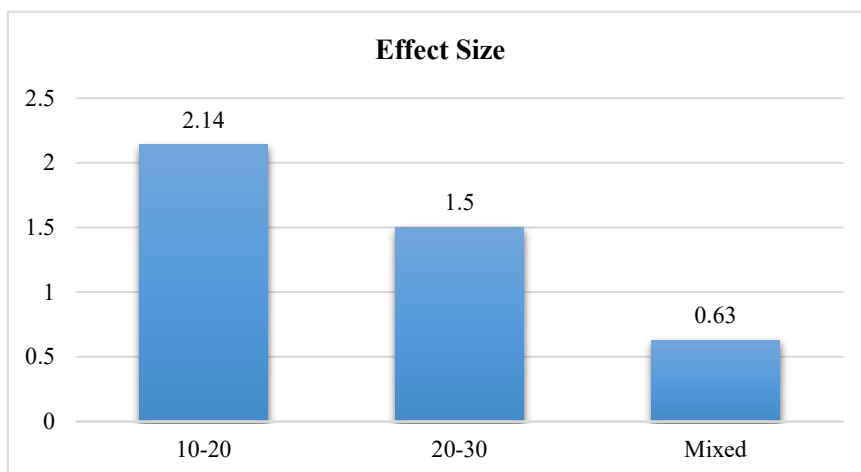


Figure 3. Moderator Analysis of Age and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

#### 4.2.2. Participants' Gender

The second set of moderating factors (see Table 4) was the participants' gender. To provide a full picture of learning request in L2 pragmatics, we included four gender groups: male, female, mixed and studies that did not report gender. For the male and the not-reported groups, the mean effect sizes,  $g = 3.09$  and  $g = 1.84$ , were found to be positive and large according to Plonsky and Oswald (2014). For the two other groups (i.e., female and mixed), the average effect sizes,  $g = 1.10$  and  $g = 1.25$ , were found to be medium based on the mentioned benchmark. The result of the  $Q$ -test for participants' gender,  $Q^b = 8.27$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p^b = 0.04$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.57$ ,  $I^2 = 85.72$ ,  $R^2 = 0.20$ , was also found to be significant ( $p = 0.04$ ) and based on  $R^2 = 0.20$  statistic, at least, part of the between-group variance (20%) is because of gender differences:

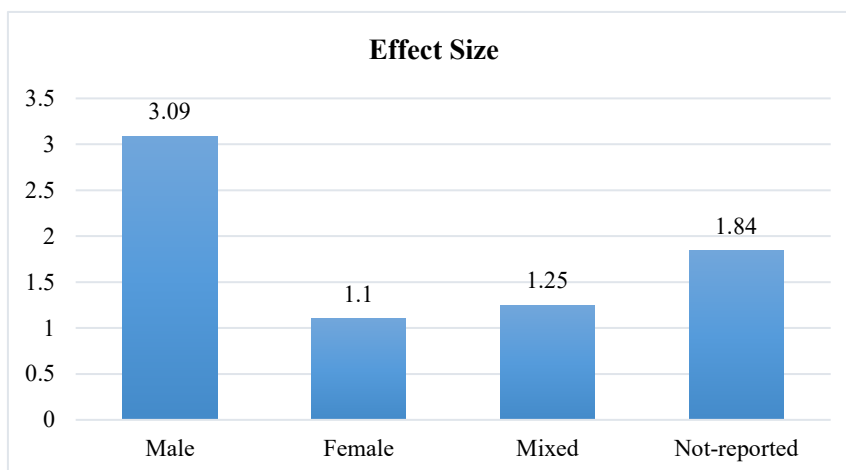


Figure 4. Moderator Analysis of Gender and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics



#### 4.2.3. Participants' Proficiency

For the third set of moderating factors (see Table 4), we calculated the effect of participants' proficiency through metaregression analysis. Five proficiency levels, including elementary ( $g = 0.67$ ), intermediate ( $g = 1.57$ ), upper-intermediate ( $g = 2.14$ ), advanced ( $g = 1.69$ ), and the not-reported ( $g = 1.41$ ) were meta-analyzed for possible moderating effects. For the advanced, intermediate, upper-intermediate and the not-reported groups, the mean effect sizes were found to be large and positive, and for the elementary group, it was small. The  $Q^b = 4.47$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p^b = 0.35$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.59$ ,  $I^2 = 85.09$ ,  $R^2 = 0.17$ , was not significant. However, the  $R^2$  statistics  $R^2 = 0.17$  shows that, at least, part of the between-group variance (17%) is because of participants' proficiency differences:

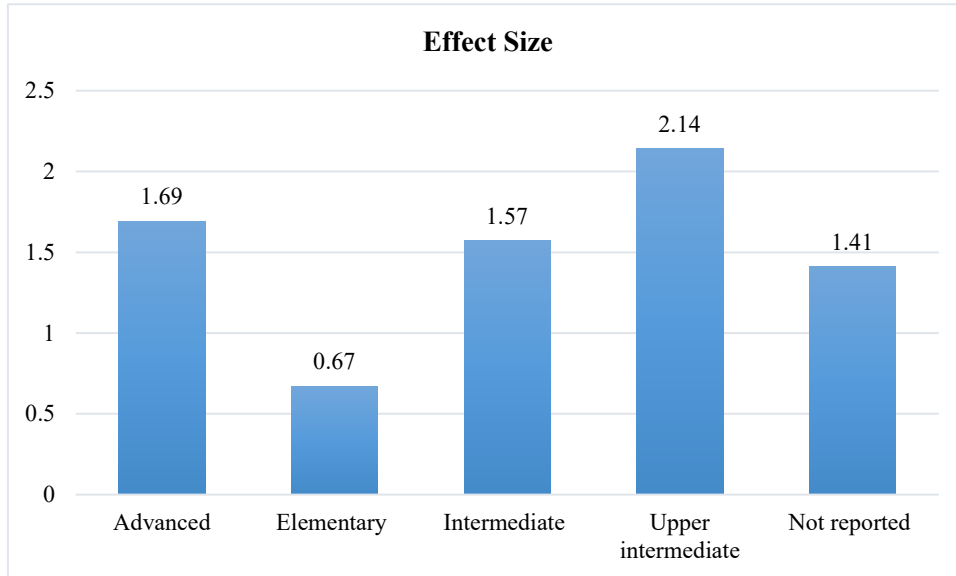


Figure 5. Moderator Analysis of Proficiency and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

#### 4.2.4. Research Designs

Also, we calculated the moderating effect of the studies' designs on L2 learning achievement in the analysis. The results,  $Q^b = 0.36$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p^b = 0.55$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.72$ ,  $I^2 = 93.03$ ,  $R^2 = 0.00$ , were not significant regarding the probable moderating effect of the design of the study on variables. Both groups of studies, the experimental ( $g = 1.72$ ) and quasi-experimental ( $g = 1.40$ ) displayed a large and positive effect:

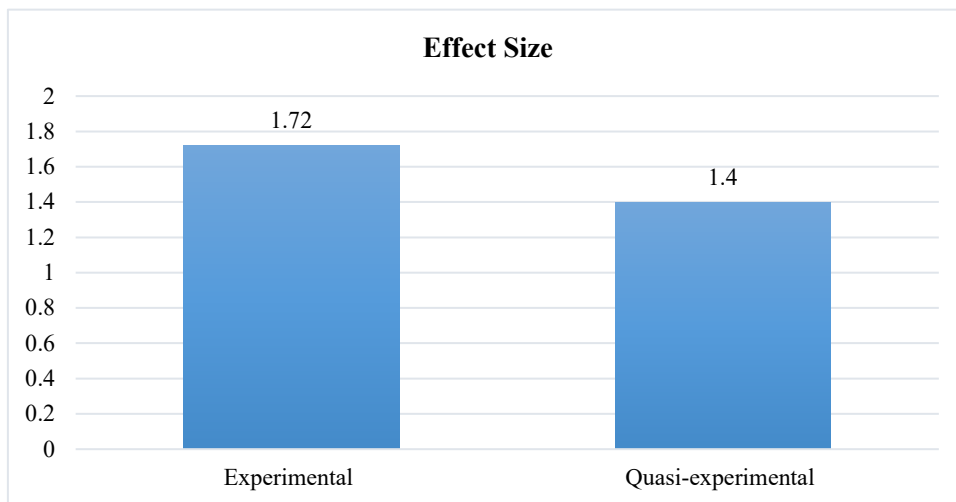


Figure 6. Moderator Analysis of Design of Study and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

#### 4.2.5. Treatment Types

The treatment type was our next moderator. We included two treatment types: explicit and implicit instruction of request on learning L2 pragmatics. For the explicit group, based on Plonsky and Oswald's (2014) field-specific reference for effect size interpretation, the mean effect size  $g = 1.53$  was found to be positive and large, but for the implicit group, the average effect size  $g = 1.20$  was positive and medium. The results of the heterogeneity test are as follows:  $Q^b = 0.41$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p^b = 0.52$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.71$ ,  $I^2 = 87.40$ ,  $R^2 = 0.00$ :

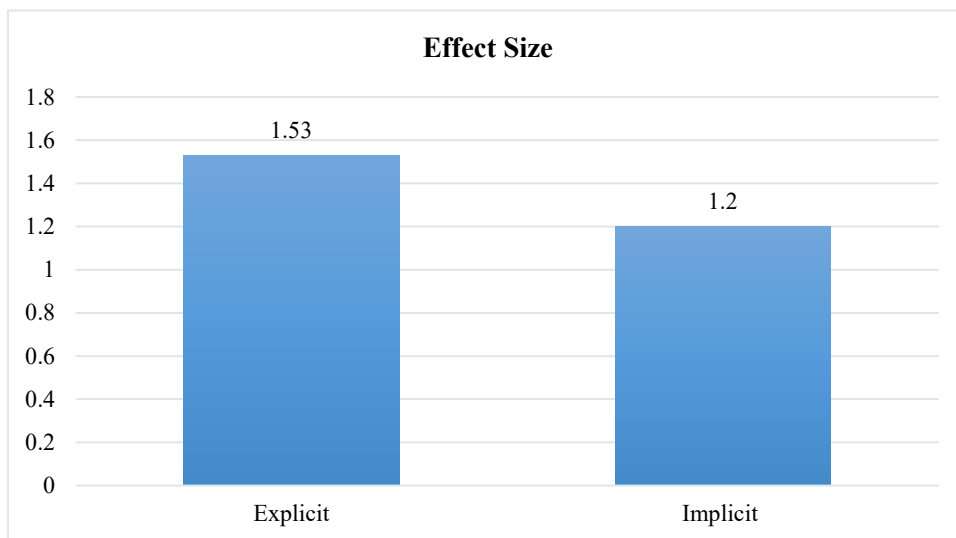


Figure 7. Moderator Analysis of Treatment Type and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

#### 4.2.6. Data Collection

For the last set of moderating factors, as seen in Table 4, we calculated the effect sizes of data collection procedure on language learning scores of the learners with regard to L2 pragmatics. Three types of data collection tools (i.e., WDC, DCT and mixed methods) were included in our analysis. The mean effect size for all three groups,  $g = 1.58$ ,  $g = 1.47$  and  $g = 1.43$ , respectively, were found to be close, positive, and large. The results of  $Q$ -statistics for data collection procedure on learning request,  $Q^b = 0.04$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p^b = 0.98$ ,  $\tau^2 = 0.83$ ,  $I^2 = 89.13$ ,  $R^2 = 0.00$ , were not significant. It seems that data collection methods are not considered to be a predictor for the instruction of request on learning L2 pragmatics:

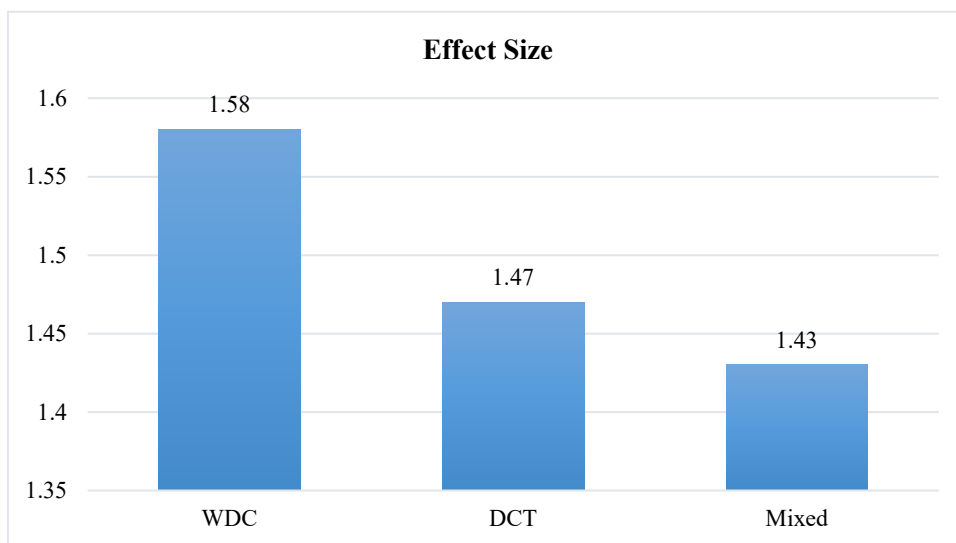


Figure 8. Moderator Analysis of Data Collection and Instruction of Request in L2 Pragmatics

Table 5. Moderator Analysis of Age, Gender, Proficiency, Design, Treatment Type, and Data Collection Procedure on L2 Pragmatics Instruction

Moderator	<i>N</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>G</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q</i> <sup>b</sup>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> <sup>b</sup>	$\tau^2$	<i>I</i> <sup>2</sup>
Age					4.37	2	0.11	0.68	87.52
10.20	133	4	2.14	[1.06,3.22]					
20.30	527	10	1.50	[0.94,2.05]					
Mixed	195	3	0.63	[-0.05,1.30]					
Gender					8.27	3	0.04	0.57	85.72
Male	60	5	3.09	[2.11,4.06]					
Female	227	2	1.10	[0.57,1.64]					
Mixed	393	7	1.25	[0.53,1.97]					
Not Reported	165	3	1.84	[1.44,2.25]					
Proficiency					4.47	4	0.35	0.59	85.09
Advanced	219	4	1.69	[1.26,2.13]					
Elementary	207	3	0.67	[-0.23,1.58]					
Intermediate	242	6	1.57	[0.65,2.49]					
Upper-Intermediate	101	2	2.14	[1.59,2.69]					
Not Reported	96	2	1.41	[0.37,2.44]					
Design of the Study					0.36	1	0.55	0.72	87.91
Experimental	227	4	1.72	[0.86,2.58]					
Quasi-Experimental	638	13	1.40	[0.90,1.91]					
Treatment Type					0.41	1	0.52	0.71	87.40
Explicit	669	14	1.53	[1.11,1.95]					
Implicit	196	2	1.20	[-0.32,2.73]					
Data Collection					0.04	2	0.98	0.83	89.13
WDC	196	4	1.58	[0.59,2.56]					
DCT	545	11	1.47	[0.86,2.08]					
Mixed	124	2	1.43	[1.04,1.82]					

Note. *N* = total number of participants, *K* = number of effect sizes, *g* = mean weighted effect size in Hedges' *g*, 95% *CI* = confidence interval, *p* = *p* value, *Q*<sup>b</sup> = *Q*-between, *df* = degrees of freedom,  $\tau^2$  = between-study variance, *I*<sup>2</sup> = percentage of variation between studies that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error. *R*<sup>2</sup> = the proportion of the original variance explained by the covariates.

## 5. Discussion

This meta-analysis sought to determine the effectiveness of the instruction of the speech act of request and identify the moderator variables for this effectiveness. Because instruction has been considered as a pivotal factor in language learning, many researchers have investigated its effects in different areas. According to Ellis (2005), extra L2 input is a prerequisite for a successful instructed language learning, and it is also postulated to be essential for better communication (Nassaji, 2016). Moreover, considering the instruction of pragmatics, two of the influential cognitive underpinnings which shed great light on the pragmatic development and understanding are noticing and consciousness raising, adroitly put forth by Schmidt (1993), and Sharwood Smith (1981, 1993), respectively.

Schmidt (2001) pinpointed that if students are provided with enough input or exposure of any kind, but they are not made aware of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features of the input, they cannot develop their interlanguage pragmatics. Sharwood Smith (1981, 1993) also submitted that the importance of consciousness raising and input enhancement could pave the way for L2 learners. As an indispensable component of overall language competence, pragmatics has increasingly come to the fore, and L2 learners experience significant difficulty in learning pragmatic without any instruction. Due to its importance, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the instruction on the speech act of request and the moderator variables which are involved are influential. In general, the effect size of the current study was found to be large ( $g = 1.48$ ), corroborating the effectiveness of request instruction on learning L2 pragmatics as the first research question addressed in this study. There is almost no meta-analysis neither in Iran, nor in other contexts on the instruction of the request; however, the results of our study seem to be in line with previous primary studies done on the instruction, specifically the instruction of request.

The findings of our study are also similar to the latest review article, which was carried out by Shakki et al., (2020), on the effectiveness of instruction. They have mentioned that among the speech acts, request is the most dominant speech act in an Iranian context, and its instruction has many advantages over noninstruction. As for the first research

question, the findings are also consistent with the results of Fakher and Panahifar's (2020) study, in which request was taught through peer's collaborative dialogue and teachers' scaffolding, and it affected the pragmatic production of the learners for the speech act of request significantly. In the same vein, the findings of the present study lent support to Kaivanpanah and Langari's (2020) study on the effects of Vygotskian scaffolding and Bloom-based activities on Iranian learners' use of request. They concluded that the performance of the explicit group was significantly better than the other group and request was amenable to instruction.

The supremacy of the instruction of request could also be justified with respect to Derakhshan and Arabmorad's (2018) study, concluding that explicit teaching through video-driven prompts had a positive effect on the comprehension of the speech act of request. On a par with our findings, Taguchi, Naganuma, and Budding (2015) also accentuated that the students' production rates have been increased through instruction of the speech act of request. By the same token, Li (2012) revealed similar results for the effectiveness of instruction and input-based practice for the speech act of request. Both accuracy and speed were observed in the students' production after the treatment. Many scholars in this area have emphasized the importance of instruction for the speech act of request (Anani Sarab & Alikhani, 2016; Eslami, Mirzaei, & Dini, 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Sabzalipor, Koosha, & Afghari, 2017; Sadeghi & Ghaemi, 2016) and the effectiveness of instruction is by no means vague.

One of the meta-analyses conducted on the effectiveness of instruction itself in pragmatics is Plonsky and Zhuang's (2019) study. This research indicated a larger effect size for the instruction of L2 pragmatics than the first meta-analysis (Jeon & Kaya, 2006), which was done on the effect of instruction, and their results were in line with the present study. Regarding the moderator variables, firstly, the findings of our study for the type of treatment (i.e., explicit and implicit) is accentuated by what Plonsky and Zhuang (2019) mentioned. They revealed that teaching pragmatics explicitly provides more opportunities for L2 learners, and that is what Taguchi (2015) also illuminated in her review article. In comparison with the implicit group, the mean effect size  $g = 1.53$  was found to be positive and large for explicit in our analysis, which is in harmony with previous studies. Moreover, Yousefi and Nassaji (2019) noted that the explicit group yielded a larger effect size  $d = 1.21$  than the implicit one, and there were statistically different from each other, so the treatment type could be a predictor for instruction, in general, and instruction of request, in particular.

Secondly, considering another moderator variable, the proficiency of the participants, the effect size was found to be larger and more significant for the intermediate group ( $g = 1.57$ ) than the elementary group ( $g = 0.67$ ), which is in line with what Yousefi and Nassaji (2019) have stated in their study. They have corroborated that the intermediate level produced a larger effect size ( $d = 1.13$ ) than the beginners ( $d = 0.76$ ), and it demonstrates that the intermediate level benefited the most from the L2 instruction, though the elementary level gained the least. The larger effect size for upper levels here may point to the fact that those learners were aware of language difficulties, and they had enough motivation for learning. Thirdly, taking data collection methods into account, all WDCT, MDCT, and the mixed group were found to be superior, yielding a large effect size ( $g = 1.58$ ,  $g = 1.47$ , and  $g = 1.43$ ), although their  $Q$ -statistics was not significant, and they cannot be considered as a predictor for the instruction of request. One reason for this larger effect size for all the groups might have been due to the larger number of sample studies, and another reason could be that these methods did not require extended L2 production and the answers were selected from a special range. It is also worth noting that our current findings are in line with what Norris and Ortega (2000) have done on grammar instruction and are contrary to Plonsky and Zhuang's (2019) study in which the free outcome measures such as role play produced a larger effect size than the controlled outcome measures like MDCTs.

Fourthly, analyzing the effect of research designs, the experimental and quasi-experimental groups both had displayed large and positive effect sizes; however, they were not a predictor of the instruction of request. The explanation could be that all the sample studies were in these two groups, and it may have caused this large effect size for the research designs in this study. Similarly, Plonsky and Gass (2011) claimed that primary studies with delayed posttests were found to have larger effect sizes than those without. Fifthly, gender as another moderator variable that has received scant attention so far and has not been analyzed in previous meta-analyses can be a predictor of the instruction of request. For different age groups in the present study, the male and not-reported groups produced larger effect sizes than the female and mixed groups. Last but by no means least, age was investigated as a moderator variable in the present study, and it was found that no age group (i.e., 10-20, 20-30, and mixed) was significant and predictor for the instruction of request, though a larger effect size was produced for the first two groups.

## 6. Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

The present study utilized a quantitative summary of the findings of 17 studies on the instruction of request in L2 pragmatics during 2000 to 2019. In response to the mushrooming of previous studies on the effectiveness of teaching the speech act of request, this meta-analysis was carried out to present a thorough illustration of the findings by calculating the effect sizes across the original studies. To this end, a series of methodological moves were undertaken. The setting of the inclusion/exclusion criteria to be more focused on the instruction of request and using *Q*-tests so as to identify the moderator variables and general differences were among those moves. Hedges' *g* effect size measure was used to compare the findings of the primary studies. The final analyses revealed that instruction was generally effective and conducive for the speech act of request and there were some moderator variables such as the level of proficiency and age which were the predictors of this effectiveness. In line with other meta-analyses on the effect of instruction in L2 pragmatics, our findings also support teaching explicitly over implicit instruction.

To the best of our knowledge, this meta-analysis explored the factors which have not been investigated yet, and this is the first meta-analysis on the effectiveness of instruction of request in an Iranian context, so our findings may have important pedagogical implications for L2 pragmatics and future research. The results of the current study may be beneficial for researchers whose area of interest is pragmatics, particularly the speech acts to see the moderator variables which are involved and effective in teaching the speech act of request. One of the tremendous implications can be using other data collection methods than MDCT and WDCT such as role-play to get better results for the instruction of request, and researchers are proposed to utilize other methods to gather the data for their further studies. Another implication of the present meta-analysis is focusing on different levels of proficiency, especially elementary learners to make them aware of pragmatic knowledge as early as possible. Teachers also should be careful about the treatment they implement in their classes, the age, and gender they have to reach the best results on the instruction of request.

Because the soundness of each meta-analysis depends on the primary studies that we select to be included in the study, there may be some drawbacks and shortcomings which are inevitable and they are just mirroring the selected papers in the corpus. One of these problems can be the large number of studies that have been done on the intermediate level (6 studies), although there are just three papers that have investigated the elementary level, so the effect size may be larger than what we expect in the analyses. This meta-analysis also has a number of limitations as with any research work. Besides the moderator variables which have been analyzed in this study, there are other variables that can be selected for further analysis. This study also did not analyze the effectiveness of other treatment types than explicit/implicit ones and it can be taken into account for future studies. In addition, we did not investigate all research designs on the instruction of request, and only experimental and quasi-experimental groups were chosen. For further studies, researchers may keep in mind other speech acts such as apology and refusal to check their effectiveness and the moderator variables, which can be a predictor for them.

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Appendix

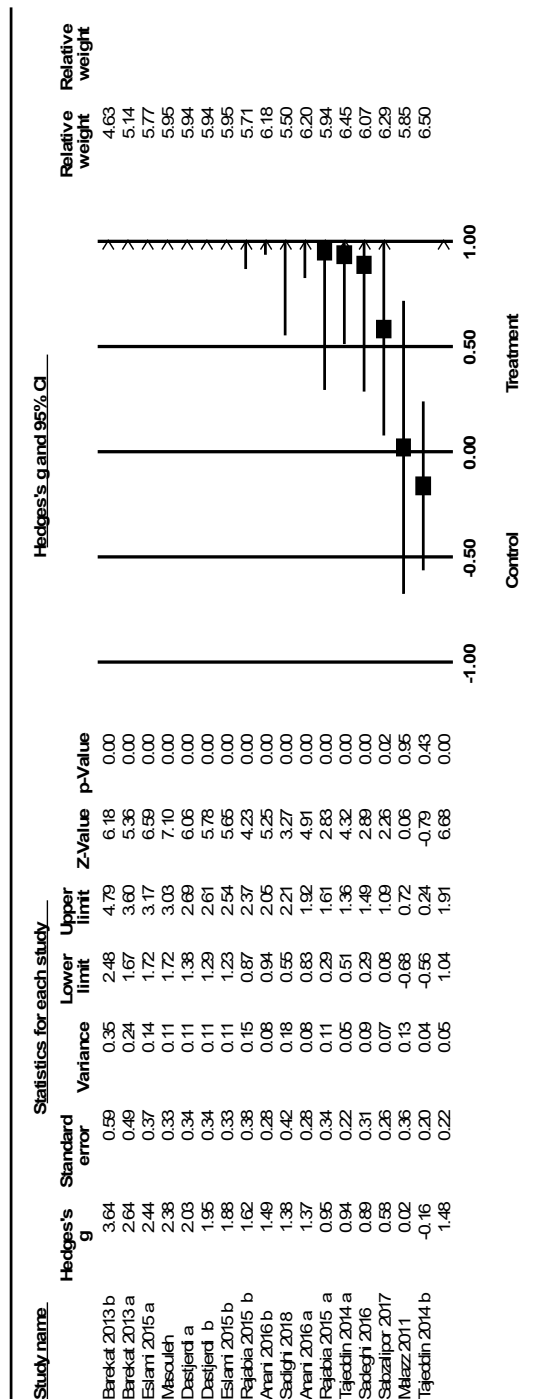
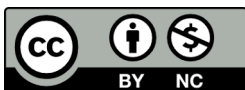


Figure 2. Forest Plot of Effect Size (Hedges' g) in Random-Effects Model



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