ABSTRACT

This research study of the pragmatic competence of the YUEFLs, as the title entails, is of three-dimensional significance. Firstly to test the ILP of the subjects and analyse their pragmatic and communicative competence in English, and measure their approximation to the norms of politeness followed by their English native counterparts. Secondly to tackle the subjects’ needs from a pragmatic point of view in order to find out what leads them to be inappropriate and incompetent when they are encountered in social interactions in English. Thirdly to assess the methods and materials currently in use in the English Department, Thamar University, Yemen, to weigh up their pros and cons from a pragmatic standpoint as well, and hence to suggest the appropriate and functional remedies that could minimize these problems quantitatively and qualitatively.

Data for the first component of the study was elicited from the samples through the discourse completion task (DCT). The questionnaire of this component involved twelve dialogues that involved twelve different situations. Participants in each group were asked to complete each dialogue in writing a suitable request in English. In the second component of the study, the students in question received a 16-item Yes/No questionnaire in order to elicit their communicative needs, and resources available to them and some of the sociocultural norms that may affect their learning. In part three, a thorough analysis and assessment of the teaching methods and materials helped to get a broad framework to account for any deviation in the speech of the YUEFLs and identify the salient rules of polite communication in order to incorporate them in the target syllable.

The findings of the study have proved that the learners in question struggled to communicate appropriately when they were encountered the target language (English) in social communication contexts. In spite of the fact that they have a high level of general language proficiency, their grammatical development did not show a corresponding level of pragmatic development. Although they are advanced learners of English, they were found unable to convey or understand the intended illocutionary force or politeness norms of the target language. Findings from the second component
of the study revealed that the advanced YUEFLs failed to perform the day-to-day communicative chores in English in the personal, professional and social spheres with an optimal degree of competence and confidence, then, obviously something vital is lacking in this EFL context that needs to be identified and if necessary, suitably remedied. Findings from the third component showed that the syllables and the methods of teaching English in the English Department, teach English as a subject rather than an FL or an SL. What is concerned and evaluated is not the learners’ communicative and pragmatic development, but the content of the teaching materials.

Accordingly, the study was concluded with a set of pedagogic and classroom implications that would help in awakening, raising and developing the YUEFLs’ pragmatic knowledge in English. This set of recommendation was based on the areas of weakness and the causes of the learners’ incompetence in English.