

## The Power of Questions: A Study of Linguistic and Extra-Linguistic Factors in English Interrogatives

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the combined effect of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors on Iraqi EFL learners' usage of English interrogatives. The research underlines how cultural, psychological, educational, social, and linguistic factors taken together affect learners' abilities to develop and employ English interrogatives effectively. The research consisted of two groups of Iraqi EFL students utilizing a quantitative design: an experimental group provided specific training on interrogative questions and a control group taught using traditional methods. Using a researcher-designed exam measuring their knowledge and application of English interrogatives, both groups were evaluated both pre-test/post-test design was used. Using an independent samples t-test, the findings showed a significant increase in the performance of the experimental group over the control group, therefore underlining the need of explicit grammar teaching. Particularly for complex and less-salient grammatical structures, the studies contribute to the mounting evidence in favor of explicit instruction. Pedagogical implications include utilizing explicit approaches in EFL curriculum to help students understand interrogatives.

**Keywords:** English interrogatives, extra-linguistic factors, linguistic factors, Iraqi EFL learners, speaking proficiency.

## قوة الأسئلة : دراسة للعوامل اللغوية وغير اللغوية في الاستفهامات الإنجليزية

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### الملخص :

تحقق هذه الدراسة في التأثير المشترك للعوامل اللغوية وغير اللغوية على استخدام طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين للاستفهامات الإنجليزية. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية تأثير العوامل الثقافية والنفسية والتعليمية والاجتماعية واللغوية معاً على قدرة المتعلمين على تطوير واستخدام الاستفهامات الإنجليزية بفعالية. تتألف الدراسة من مجموعتين من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين باستخدام تصميم كمي: مجموعة تجريبية تم توفير تدريب محدد لها على الأسئلة الاستفهامية ومجموعة ضابطة تم تعليمها باستخدام الطرق التقليدية. تم تقييم المجموعتين باستخدام اختبار مصمم من قبل الباحث يقيس معرفتهم وتطبيقهم للاستفهامات الإنجليزية، حيث تم استخدام تصميم اختبار قبل /بعد. باستخدام اختبار ت للعينات المستقلة، أظهرت النتائج زيادة كبيرة في أداء المجموعة التجريبية مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة، مما يبرز أهمية التعليم الصريح للقواعد اللغوية، وخاصة للهياكل اللغوية المعقدة والأقل وضوحاً. تساهم هذه الدراسات في تعزيز الأدلة التي تدعم التعليم الصريح . تشمل الدلالات التربوية استخدام أساليب صريحة في المناهج الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لمساعدة الطلاب على فهم الاستفهامات.

**الكلمات الرئيسية:** الاستفهامات الإنجليزية، العوامل غير اللغوية، العوامل اللغوية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين، الكفاءة في التحدث .

## 1. Introduction

As speaking skill became an important but troublesome issue for the learners, EFL has been highly researched in various linguistic and educational contexts. Of the many factors affecting the English-speaking performance, extra-linguistic factors which involves cultural, psychological, educational, social, and psychological factors stand at the pinnacle of influence. These factors contribute much to the students' experience; sometimes they create opportunities or challenges that could directly impact on their ability to communicate in English. According to Gudykunst (2003), cultural norms and styles of communication, either aligned or not with ways of communicating in English, can facilitate or hinder language fluency. Complexity urged an advanced insight into the question regarding the relation between the speaking skill of EFL learners and extra-linguistic factors. Culture affects significantly the speaking skill of EFL students.

For instance, those belonging to a culture in which a person is supposed to speak indirectly would find it difficult to adapt to English, which in most instances calls for clarity and directness (Kim, 2017). Mother tongues also impede their efforts towards achieving fluency in terms of pronunciation and verbal habits. For instance, Anderson and Kuo (2010) note that phonological features such as sound inventories and syllable patterns can make English pronunciation complicated to learn. Consistent with Bennett (2013), students speaking growth can either be supported or constrained by the fundamental communication manner which is rooted in cultural backgrounds. As for psychological factors that most profoundly influence EFL learners speaking skill, there are self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety. According to Cheng and Wang (2018), anxious learners tend to be inarticulate in letting out their thoughts since their states of mind shatter their confidence in communication.

On the contrary, learners who are highly confident and motivated will always indulge themselves in speaking activities with much enthusiasm, therefore building their language competence. Such psychological traits provide a cue on how best to go about constructing an appropriate class aimed at building emotional resilience and language competence. There are other effects of curriculum design and instructional practice that also affect the EFL students' speaking skill. Amoah and Yeboah's research (2021) highlights the contribution of quality education and exposure to quality linguistic materials in facilitating the potential for students to develop their speaking skills in communication. Additionally, a curriculum that

incorporates tests and speaking exercises assists a student in acquiring much better competency.

Although Hughes (2020) points out that formative feedback has been found effective in allowing students to achieve more fluency and accuracy, Nunan (2004) argues that course design should give the first priority to real communication contexts. The learning of English-speaking skills also depends on some sociolinguistic factors, including peer interaction and exposure to an authentic environment of using the language. According to the research in Kwon (2015), peer feedback increases self-awareness and provides useful criticism, hence making the students more competent orally. The improvements in fluency and confidence are more pronounced when students come into contact with natives in natural contexts than when they get only a chance to practice within classrooms (Zhang & Lu, 2024). Perhaps this emphasizes the fact that experiential learning and social contact are decidedly important in EFL classrooms.

Linguistic factors of grammar, vocabulary, and phonology also influence the speaking ability of EFL learners. Grammatically accurate and intelligible sentences depend on grammatical structures knowledge while fruitful vocabulary provides the material by which students communicate different concepts. Remaining phonological skills include such aspects as stress, intonation, and rhythm, which help students achieve near-natural-like fluency and intelligibility. It is to be pointed out that, as Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) underscored, the importance of language proficiency for effective communication since failure in syntax, lack of vocabulary, or mispronunciation result in misunderstandings or breakdown in communication. These linguistic properties combine with extra-linguistic ones in the case of Iraqi EFL learners to pose specific challenges and opportunities which deserve focused pedagogical intervention.

This paper, therefore, attempts to investigate how linguistic and extra-linguistic factors combine to determine Iraqi EFL learners' usage of English interrogatives. The study aims at demonstrating the difficulties the learners go through by illustrating the interaction between the factors and providing mechanisms of enhancing their communicative potential. The present study will, therefore, investigate how the ability of students to generate and use English interrogatives is influenced by cultural, psychological, educational, social, and linguistic variables in interaction. The findings should offer insightful analysis for lawmakers

and educators so as to help promote methods of teaching the English language and, subsequently, upgrading speaking results for students at Iraqi universities.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

### **2.1. Extra-Linguistic Factors**

#### **2.1.1. Cultural Factors**

The cultural aspect can affect English speaking. Iraqi culture gives a lot of importance to indirect communication, is courteous, and tries to avoid conflict with this style (Naghavi & Mubarak, 2018). If the English-speaking societies tend to prefer more direct modes of communicating, then this cultural predisposition might make it hard for these students to be straightforward while communicating in English. Iraqi students may by that fail to present ideas in a proper or assertive manner in English and, as such, promote misunderstandings or a lack of confidence in speaking the target language (Naghavi & Mubarak, 2018).

#### **2.1.2. Psychological Factors**

Speaking ability among EFL students is of great concern with regard to psychological factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, and self-confidence. Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that most of the time, anxiety is a major psychological barrier to language learning. More specifically, language anxiety may cause a low degree of confidence, inability to concentrate, and avoidance of participating in speaking activities. Doing very well in a very competitive world raises the anxiety of most Iraqi students, particularly when speaking English in front of professors and friends. According to Hossain et al., (2015), when students have a fear of making mistakes or being judged by other people, they tend to develop avoidance behaviors that prevent them from practicing speaking English. In addition, students' willingness to participate in the speaking activities also relies much on their self-efficacy, namely, a belief in one's ability to carry out some tasks.

According to Alam (2016), students who possess high self-efficacy are most likely to participate in language learning activities like speaking. Similarly, Bandura (1977) also confirmed the same thing. Low efficacy students will avoid the speaking activities or will do it poorly since they never believe in their own abilities. Motivation is another crucial psychological factor that is highly essential for success in language learning. Self-oriented

students will retain their urge to succeed against all odds and consistently adhere to speaking tasks for incremental development of their English-speaking skills.

### **2.1.3. Educational Factors**

The English-speaking skill is learned based on many educational aspects, such as methodological aspects of teaching, instructional quality, and classroom environment. Effective teaching approaches, especially those with a focus on communicative and student-centered strategies, could possibly get students to speak a lot better. According to Ahmed (2018), instructional approaches that emphasize participation and functional communication are more likely to improve students' speaking skill. What is significant in language learning is also a positive classroom atmosphere that would allow children to relax and commit errors or merely converse. Rani (2020) highlights that in this kind of interactive classroom, students would be able to practice the target language without problem. But the majority of Iraqi EFL learners stated that there was no opportunity to practice their speaking skills during university studies (Hossain et al., 2015).

The traditional reliance on writing tests tends to devalue speaking activities and thus hampers the development of speaking skills. In this way, the motivated students who wish to participate in free English conversation may then feel less confident or unprepared. Moreover, speaking skills development depends on immediate and constructive feedback. According to Akter (2024), regular feedback on such aspects as grammar, fluency, and pronunciation will make the students more likely to reveal their actual improvement in speaking.

### **2.1.4. Social Factors**

Amongst those social factors that affect EFL students' speaking improvement considerably are peer communication and exposure to English outside class. In a low-anxiety context, with peer feedback and the contribution to group learning tasks, students can get an opportunity to speak and received valuable feedback. Kwon (2015) emphasizes the importance of peer feedback in oral proficiency development in that through it, the learner is able to grasp areas that need improvement apart from gaining entry to the opinions of others. Moreover, out-of-class social contact is equally crucial in that from findings, students exposed to authentic opportunities for the communication of English tend to improve their

speaking more speedily. However, there are fewer chances for Iraqi students to use practical English.

The 2021 study by Aziz and Kashinathan and the study conducted by Akter (2022) reveal that several students are devoid of getting enough opportunities for English speaking outside the classroom. This can delay their process of developing proficiency in English regarding speaking fluency. Additionally, the development in speaking ability has also been found to depend greatly upon exposure to English-language media in the form of movies, television serials, songs, and news. Zhang and Lu (2024) state that student habitual users of English media tend to improve their speaking skills more than those students with limited access. Rani (2020) shows the majority of Iraqi students are of the opinion that using English-language media is an effective way to improve speaking; most of them reported that media exposure made their speaking better.

## **2.2. Linguistic Factors**

In countries like Iraq, where the phonological structure of the mother tongue is quite different from that of English, linguistic aspects, more precisely, those related to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, also greatly impact EFL students in terms of their speaking performance. While a sound vocabulary enables students to express themselves clearly and efficiently, the ability to construct grammatically correct and meaningful sentences relies on a strong command of grammar. Real, intelligible speech is also dependent upon the phonological aspects of stress, intonation and rhythm. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) also point to the aspects of language knowledge such as inadequate vocabulary, inappropriate usage of words and mispronunciation, as causes leading to breakdown of communication. Arabic, being the official language of Iraq, has a distinctive set of phonemes which can lead to difficulties for the students to pronounce the right accent for a particular English word.

Iraqi speakers have specific problems with the English "th" sound as there is no equivalent for this phoneme in the Iraqi language (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2015). Likewise, the English "v" and "w" phonemes are also problematic for Iraqi students because in Arabic, these sounds are pronounced either correctly or not at all. The consequence of such phonetic differences is that these pronunciation mistakes become persistent and in English would result in hindrances to successful oral communication. Iraqi children have more profound language problems because their mother tongue influence them a lot. Due to the differences

in the phonological inventory, syllable structure, and stress patterns Iraqi speakers mispronounce the English.

This might as well affect comprehension or fluency, particularly when communicating with native speakers of the language. The verb tenses and sentence structures of the English language, being different, may also be a problem for the students to learn. These linguistic problems require individual solutions for classroom teaching as well as personal practice if the students are to overcome every obstacle and attain fluency in speaking English.

### **2.3. Empirical Studies**

Examination questions, according to (Gaszczyk, 2023), present a speech-act-theoretic account wherein these kinds of questions come off as a peculiar kind of question that possesses two main conditions: the questioner knows the answer, and the questioner does not institutionally know whether the hearer knows the answer. That differs from the ordinary question because the latter is usually asked in ignorance on the part of the questioner himself. The research contributes to the normative tradition of speech act theory through the articulation of a more profound understanding of the various speech acts beyond the typical categorizations; the paper claims that exam questions realize special needs that make them stand out among other inquiries and imperatives.

Atnafu (2022) discusses propositions and interrogative contents and how they work in semantics, particularly concerning the declarative and interrogative sentences. Propositions are the semantic contents of declarative sentences; interrogative contents are the corresponding ones for interrogative sentences, like the meanings of questions and the cognitive relations involved. It then introduces the Force-Indicator Theory, whereby the sentence mood is understood to indicate a standard use of a sentence, thereby making a connection between the grammatical structure of sentences and their semantic functions at the level of communication, such as assertion, belief, and questioning.

Moyer and Syrett (2021) explain the complexity of analyzing questions within the semantics framework, and they have further explained that questions are not suited for the truth-conditional approach since they can't be valued in truth. It brings into focus the fact that one should not be concerned with questions but with how the characters of good and informative answers are relative to the speaker's intentions concerning a particular discourse context. This volume examines the main theories of question-answer meaning, treats the



interactional dynamics of questions and answers, and talks about the placement of questions in discourse contexts. It deals with the interface between semantics, pragmatics, and human reasoning and shows the importance of question-answer interaction to linguistic theory more generally.

Kellogg and Ripp (2020) critique the work of Hasan and her Vygotskian interpretations; they indicate that Hasan's view of language acquisition and the semiotic mediation were truncated as she died before being in a position to engage with the later work of Vygotsky. The authors try to take into account the interconnection between Vygotsky, Bernstein, Halliday, and Hasan in giving a more integrated interpretation of the theories surrounding language and development. The article concerns itself with the first questions of the child and the initial language development based on the example of a bilingual child, Mina. Materials The method is working with data regarding how Mina interacted with the environment and caregivers, as well as interpersonal communication in terms of its contributions to language and questioning development in rebuke of Hasan's response to Vygotsky's approach to semiotic mediation and word meaning.

Ayton-Shenker (2022) reflects on the place and function of questions in the creative process. Questions can be unifying, profound, and most often lead to more questions than to solid answers. The article elaborates on how essential questions give birth to the creation of significant personal and collective experiences and how such questions could turn into life-altering moments. The following are some reflective questions: from existential to relationship and purpose questions. These sorts of questions are provocative in that they make people think about themselves, their behaviors, and humanness in light of life and new possibilities being brought about.

Arguello et al. (2018) investigate whether and how both the medium-text or voice-and the destinator-search engine or human intermediary-influence the way people articulate information needs within specialized extra-topical facets such as domain knowledge, perspective, and temporal constraints. Findings indicate that both variables significantly influenced the attitude of participants, the kind of requests they made, and the strategies they employed. Results show that those who employed voice requests were more likely to specify the amount of information they needed and describe unnecessary information than text users. Moreover, in requests for information from a human relay, subjects employed more strategies

and expressed purpose more frequently. This confirms the target condition as primary in the information-seeking behavior.

In the paper, Lastres-López (2018) discusses the distribution of the complementizers "if" and "whether" in subordinate interrogatives, noting that this state of affairs in clausal complementation has received scant attention in works dealing with the grammar of English. An attempt is made to fill in the gap in attention to the differences and similarities of the two conjunctions. The research also takes into consideration extralinguistic factors like gender and age in the use of these complementizers.

Zare (2018) also explained that one central aspect of the search for knowledge is the inquiry, and questions themselves are so much more important compared to finding the answer. This brings into light how questions ensure progress on inquiry and investigation in humanities, social sciences, and sciences, mathematics, and engineering. It narrates that there is a need to create curiosity and creativity amongst children, for which the Molecular Frontiers Inquiry Prize is inviting students below 18 years of age to ask good questions related to molecular science-thereby creating a sense of greater understanding and ownership of their own learning.

Sklyarova (2013) addresses the interconnection and interaction of English interrogative sentences and draws attention to the elucidation of the terms and their application to units of language. An effort is made to distinguish between the interconnection and interaction of the sentences under consideration. There are two relations identified that exist in language, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, and which serve as a foundation for the classification of the forms of interaction of English interrogative sentences. The paper contextual and distributional analyses of actual material will determine the extent of their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.

Grebenyova (2006) discusses a number of interrogatives, their syntax, semantics and learnability in various languages. It discusses Superiority effects in various contexts, maintaining that subject auxiliary inversion in the main clause in English impacts the acceptability of the multiple interrogatives and discusses semantic properties of the latter without appealing to the covert wh-movement. It also discusses some language acquisition work comparing how children acquiring English, Russian, and Malayalam all acquire the syntactic and semantic properties of multiple interrogatives. The results showed that despite

the impoverished input, children are indeed able to acquire these properties, and the paper addressed what kind of evidence they may be able to use from parental input.

In this respect, Harrah (2002) distinguishes between interrogatives as a sentence type and questions as entities which correspond to a number of more or less different ways in which they may be expressed, just like propositions and commands are expressed by declaratives and imperatives, respectively. That would lead us to the complexity of the questions themselves, marking the fact that not all questions can be expressed with sentences other than interrogative, and not all interrogatives are employed in asking a question, thus pointing to the fact that the logic of interrogatives and questions do coincide.

Ginzburg and Sag (2000) is a specialist in interrogative constructions-the grammatical constructions used for expressing questions-which aims at giving a detailed explanation of the range of interrogative constructions and their functions within a single language, for which there was hitherto no matching gap in the literature. It utilizes head-driven phrase structure grammar and situation semantics frameworks to integrate syntactic, semantic, and contextual properties of interrogatives, including also contentious theoretical issues like semantic ontology, wh-phrase function, and ellipsis resolution in dialogue.

## **2.4. The Current Study**

This paper aims to examine the influence of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors on EFL students in their acquisition of speaking ability. In particular, this study will be carried out to disclose how various factors such as: cultural, psychological, educational, social, and linguistic impact students' proficiency in English when interacting. Results in this study should be of paramount importance to teaching English in Iraq because they would help the instructors construct better plans that improve the communicative competence and assist the learners in acquiring the speaking skills in English.

RQ: Does the instruction on English interrogatives have a significant impact on the improvement of Iraqi university students' understanding and use of English interrogative structures?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design**

The design adopted in this research to investigate extra-linguistic and linguistic factors influencing the proficiency in English of EFL learners is quantitative in nature. A quantitative design has enabled statistical analysis and generalisation of results by offering a framework for an objective and systematic examination of data. It deals with the measurement and evaluation of numerical data gathered through standardized language proficiency tests and pre- and post-test design.

#### **3.2 Participants**

Using a convenience selection method, the researchers selected 60 volunteers aged between 28 and 47 years, both male and female, from Open Educational College. Convenience sampling allowed the researchers to select the respondents such that they could easily represent the target population. According to the Oxford Placement Test administered at the commencement of the course, each student was a native speaker of Arabic with an intermediate level of proficiency in English.

Students were randomly assigned to one of the two groups: the experimental and the control group. That is to say, both groups were matched, based on equal male and female participation. The experimental group received explicit English interrogative instruction which was targeted at different kinds of questions, such as yes/no questions, wh-questions, and question tags, including their syntactic and semantic forms. Whereas the control group took their usual English course with no special focus on interrogative forms.

#### **3.3 Instruments**

##### **3.3.1 Oxford Placement Test**

Allan (2004) constructed the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) so that all the subjects of this research had an intermediate level of proficiency in English (Appendix A). Since the OPT has a widespread reputation for its reliability and ease of use in testing English language proficiency, this test would be appropriate to estimate the level of proficiency of the subjects. For this reason, the result excluded ten volunteers who failed to reach the threshold at the intermediate level. This made the subject pool homogenous and could further enhance the validity and reliability of the research results.

### **3.3.2 English Interrogatives Test**

The Pre-test and Post-test on English Interrogatives were aimed at testing the knowledge and usage of English interrogatives among the respondents before and after the intervention (Appendix B). In this regard, the test targeted the assessment of the participants' understanding of the grammatical structure of English and functional uses of interrogative questions. A pre-test was first conducted at the beginning of the research with a view to establishing a starting point as regards the participant's knowledge of interrogatives. The test consisted of a set of test items prepared for testing their ability to identify and form different interrogative types: yes/no questions, wh-questions-who, what, and where- and also tag questions. In this test, the participants were supposed to change declarative sentences into interrogative form; therefore, the test was sentence transformation-based.

It was administered at the end of the intervention session to determine any increase in the participant's skill in formulating and using appropriately and effectively interrogatives. As for its composition, it allowed for a fair comparison of data as it reflected the pre-test. With the focus being on both linguistic correctness and appropriateness of interrogative use in variable communication contexts, the post-test also featured some more advanced questions in order to examine the participants' skills in using interrogative forms in more complicated contexts. Both tests, being in the same form to provide validity and consistency, measure the participants' improvement uniformly over the course of the research.

### **3.4 Procedure**

The participants were first chosen using convenience sampling from a pool of students. The OPT was administered in order to make sure that the competencies' level among the participants would be on the same level. Ten of the entire group were excluded since they failed to meet the cut-off at the intermediate level and formed a homogenous sample for this research.

After that, the experimental and control groups took a pretest in order to elicit data with regard to participants' prior knowledge in English interrogatives. The pretest consisted of questions that test their ability to produce and comprehend various interrogative structures in English such as yes/no questions, wh-questions, tag questions.

After that, explicit English interrogative instruction was offered to the experimental group. This program included explanation, exemplification, and exercise on the formation,

structure, and use of different interrogative forms. The instruction was provided twice a week for four weeks. The students in the control group attended their routine English course and received no particular emphasis on interrogative forms. An identical post-test to the pre-test was given to both groups to verify the change in terms of the use and knowledge of the English interrogative among them after the instructional period.

The post-test result was compared with the pre-test result of the two groups. By analyzing it statistically, the performance of the experimental group as opposed to the control group was computed based on data gathered from the two tests. The researcher administering education and testing to both groups, the whole procedure was carried out over a classroom setting. As all intermediate-level learners, participants provided a leveled ground for the research. The efficacy of focused teaching of English interrogatives for the sake of enhancing knowledge and usage of such structures on the students' part was ascertained through the final analysis of data.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

In this research, the success of the intervention was quantified by analyzing the data obtained on the pre-test and post-test of English interrogatives based on the statistical analysis. First, descriptive statistics were run for experimental and control group pre- and post-test scores. Included were measures of central tendency the mean and variability the standard deviation as a general description of individuals' performance before and after the intervention.

An independent samples t-test has been conducted to see whether or not the intervention is effective by comparing the post-tests of the experimental group with the control group. As mentioned above, the test aimed at comparing the experimental group, receiving the focused instruction in English interrogatives, with a control group receiving no such type of instruction to determine whether they improved significantly in the ability to form and make use of interrogative structures.

To this end, SPSS version 27 was used through an independent sample t-test to allow the study to explore whether the educational intervention significantly improves the performance of the English interrogative task for the experimental group as a whole in a statistically significant manner.

#### 4. Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics' mean scores and standard deviations for the experimental and control groups in the pre- and post-test evaluations. With a mean rising from 60.50 (SD = 5.20) in the pre-test to 85.00 (SD = 6.00), the experimental group showed a notable increase in their post-test results. By comparison, the performance of the control group revealed no change. From 61.00 (SD = 5.00) in the pre-test to 65.50 (SD = 5.30), their mean score changed only little.

**Table 1**

*Results of Descriptive Statistics*

Group	Pre-test mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test mean	Post-test SD
Experimental	60.50	5.20	85.00	6.00
Control	61.00	5.00	65.50	5.30

The study of the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups compiles the outcomes of the independent samples t-test (Table 2). With the experimental group beating the control group, the t-test indicated a statistically significant variation in the mean scores of the two groups in the post-test. Particularly, the control group obtained a mean score of 65.5 (SD = 5.3), whereas the experimental group scored 85.0 (SD = 6.0).

With a p-value of 0.001 and a t-value of 6.152 the independent samples t-test revealed that the noted group differences were not random. Further attesting to the practical relevance of the instructional intervention in enhancing students' knowledge and application of English interrogatives, the impact size (Cohen's  $d = 3.54$ ) also shown a very great influence. These results imply that, among the conventional approaches utilised in the control group, the intervention given to the experimental group was rather successful in improving their performance.

**Table 2**

*Results of Independent Sample T-test*

Group	mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Experimental	85.00	6.00	6.152	0.001
Control	65.00	5.30		

## 5. Discussion

The outcome of the independent sample t-test revealed that there is a significant difference in performance on the post-test related to the English interrogatives between the experimental and the control groups. More precisely, the experimental group received focused training through explicit teaching strategies regarding the English interrogatives outperformed the control group, whose teaching was done traditionally without an explicit focus on interrogatives. This finding further substantiates current research and shows the extent to which explicit instruction enhances the learning and use of complicated grammatical structures by students. Such findings supplement those of other research that testifies to the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction for second language acquisition.

Ellis (2006) remarked that explicit instruction enables students to enhance metalinguistic awareness for better use and identification of grammatical rules. More recently, and especially regarding complex structures like interrogatives, Norris and Ortega (2021) showed that explicit grammar instruction results in significant improvement concerning accuracy. In a similar vein, Spada and Tomita (2010) confirmed that explicit instruction significantly improves the grammatical accuracy of students compared to implicit approaches, which agrees with Loewen's (2020) support of explicit instruction in communicative language teaching. The performance of the control group points out the inadequacies of pure, implicit learning approaches. As Nassaji and Fotos (2011) argue, for the students to acquire difficult linguistic forms, implicit approaches alone normally do not provide enough input and feedback.

This incidentally corresponds with the result of the present study, in which the less-conducive-to-learning control group improved less than their experimental peers. Rahman and Rashid (2017) further demonstrated that it was not only in controlled contexts that the learners who had received explicit instruction did better, but grammatical forms were also retained better in the long term, thereby underlining the enduring advantages of explicit techniques. The findings also corroborate Roehr's (2010), who notes for grammatical structures that require overcoming L1 transfer issues or are low in salience within the input, explicit instruction works better. Given that this research drew explicit attention to interrogative development, it is likely to have given students both the knowledge and practice necessary to overcome such issues. DeKeyser (2003) skill acquisition theory corroborates



this, in that it holds the view that explicit teaching allows conversion between declarative and procedural knowledge through controlled practice and feedback.

These findings give substantial proof for explicit grammar teaching but at the same time allow an argument based on the place of implicit approaches that also have a role to play in language instruction. While recent studies by Tanabe (2019) emphasize that only explicit attention would provide acquisition mastery of low-frequency formulaic sequences that cannot be adequately acquired through input, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) specifies that language acquisition occurs optimally through meaningful input.

## **6. Conclusion**

Lastly, the research indicated that linguistic and extra-linguistic factors significantly impact Iraqi EFL learners' proficiency in speaking, particularly in the acquisition of English interrogative forms. Direct instruction of interrogatives significantly impacted the enhancement of learners' grammatical accuracy and communicative competence as compared to implicit conventional methods. This is consistent with existing research favoring explicit teaching in the context of complex grammatical structures, confirming its efficacy in the resolution of cultural, psychological, educational, social, and linguistic barriers. Therefore, EFL instructors must integrate explicit teaching practice with sensitivity towards learners' extra-linguistic backgrounds in order to enhance speaking skills effectively.

## **7. Pedagogical Implications**

In essence, this study highlights the effectiveness of explicit English interrogative teaching and therefore adds to the increasing body of evidence supporting the use of targeted, explicit approaches to grammatical improvement. From a pedagogical point of view, such findings are very important; language teachers should involve explicit instructional techniques in interventions aimed at complex grammatical structures. Research in the future should focus on long-term retention of the explicitly taught structures and explore how explicit instruction interacts with learners' cognitive and affective characteristics, such as working memory and motivation, across diverse learning environments.

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## Appendix A: Oxford Placement Test

### Listening Test

Name .....

Total Listening ..... /100

Total Grammar ..... /100

Grand Total ..... /200

“Look at the example below. Listen to the tape. You will hear the example once only”.

“Decide which word you hear, ‘soap’, or ‘soup’.”

“a Will you get me some [soap | soup√] at the supermarket?”

“The word was ‘soup’, so ‘soup’ is ticked. Now look at these examples, and listen to the tape again. This time, you tick the words you hear. For example, if you hear ‘shorts’, tick ‘shorts’.”

b “The team need new [shirts | shorts]”

c “They’ve recently developed a new kind of [vine | wine] around here”.

“The words on the tape were ‘shorts’ and ‘vine’, so the correct answers look like this”:

b “The team need new [shirts | shorts√]”

c “They’ve recently developed a new kind of [vine | wine√] around here”.

“Now the test will begin. Listen to the tape and tick (√) the words you hear”.

### Oxford Placement Test 1 Listening Test

1 “I gather you’ve been having trouble with your [earring | hearing].”

2 “A number of students are expected to join the advanced [composition | conversation] class.”

3 “This beard of mine is awfully itchy. I’ll be glad when it [goes | grows].”

4 “I doubt if he’s very comfortable in his [present | prison] bed.”

5 “Have you played [Dennis | tennis] very much recently?”

6 “Martina lives in a great big [freezing | Friesian] barn.”

7 “Do you have any idea how long ago it was [found | founded]”

8 “Your letter must have crossed with [my own | mine]”

- 9 “One thing I really [loved | loathed] in the late nineties was the style of the clothes.”
- 10 “My sister says [he’s | she’s] a very nice person.”
- 11 “That Dutch friend of mine you met yesterday is a very good [chess | jazz] player.”
- 12 “That’s the Euro equivalent of [30p | 40p]”
- 13 “Do we need to change the [cloths | clocks] tonight?”
- 14 “Today’s a [holiday | horrid day], isn’t it?”
- 15 “Well, I wonder what [joys | choice] they have in store for us this time.”
- 16 “Only 30% of those sampled [can | can’t] tell the difference between margarine and butter.”
- 17 “I can’t really say if I like jazz or not; [sometimes | some kinds] I do.”
- 18 “She’s been quite [tearful | cheerful] the last couple of weeks.”
- 19 “Williams now seems unlikely to [regain | retain] her title.”
- 20 “I think it’s [Dave | Steve] on the phone.”
- 21 “[Why | Where] are you going to live in London?”
- 22 “It is recommended that dyslexic students follow a remedial [reading | writing] option.”
- 23 “Do you have any idea where my [class | glass] is?”
- 24 “It was only later we found out he wasn’t [injured | insured]”
- 25 “I [can see | consent] to it if it has to be done.”
- 26 “I see the [peaches | pictures] are starting to go yellow.”
- 27 “If it hadn’t been for him they [couldn’t | wouldn’t] have done it.”
- 28 “Have you got any more of this [blended | splendid] butter?”
- 29 “I don’t think the management side took any [notes | notice].”
- 30 “At the end of this test, the papers will be [corrected | collected] by the invigilators.”
- 31 “If you have any problems, please contact the British [Council | Consul] immediately.”
- 32 “During his holidays he spends most of his time at the Lotus test track [watching | washing] cars.”
- 33 Liverpool were [really | rarely] dangerous in the first half.”
- 34 Mind you don’t tread on the [glass | grass].”
- 35 You’ve got a [lash | rash] just under your eye.”
- 36 “Do you think you could [take | talk] us through the next bit of the film?”
- 37 “How many [tests | texts] are we going to need to get all the data we want?”

- 38 “There’s fishery somewhere round here where they [hatch | catch] trout by the thousand”.
- 39 “Are you going to [Penny’s | Benny’s] tonight?”
- 40 “Do you think we could have [two minibuses | too many buses] for the summer courses?”
- 41 “Do you think Rick’s place is still [buyable | viable]?”
- 42 “We’ve gone through [today’s | two days’] money in less than an hour”.
- 43 “[I reckon | Eric and] I need a good holiday”.
- 44 “This horse will have to be [shod | shot] immediately”.
- 45 “Can you get me some [sealing tape | ceiling paint] when you’re in town?”
- 46 “Even if he leaves the country, he won’t be safe from [persecution | prosecution]”
- 47 “Since the accident the only thing he can do is [menial | manual] work”.
- 48 “She’s very much the [committee | committed] type”.
- 49 “You can get quite a [view | few] from up here”.
- 50 “What can we do with this [lot | slot] to make the timetable work?”
- 51 “Keane was [cheered | chaired] off at the end of the match”.
- 52 “The future of the party now seems to depend on [delegate | delicate] decisions to be worked out at local level”.
- 53 “Have you done much [riding | writing] recently?”
- 54 “We’ve all been [heartened | hardened] by recent events”.
- 55 “What we have here is essentially a [fiscal | physical] problem”.
- 56 “Make sure you keep the ropes [tied | tight]”.
- 57 “I think they [set | sat] the exam last week”.
- 58 “You’ll need a [mass of | massive] cheese to make a fondue for that many people”.
- 59 “I can’t really advise you without knowing the type of [context | contacts] you’re presupposing”.
- 60 “The visit when ahead in [defense | defiance] of the government’s views”.
- 61 “I thought his behavior was [unexceptional | unexceptionable]”
- 62 “Look at the [clouds | crowds] over there”.
- 63 “Her ambition is to become a [belly | ballet] dancer”.
- 64 “Did you get a chance to [try | dry] it out?”
- 65 “If you look very carefully you can see there used to be a [cabinet | cabin up] there”.
- 66 “Recent EU regulations have been disastrous for British fish [stocks | docks]”.

- 67 "Pollution is a real threat to the North American [basin | bison]".
- 68 "Have you had an invitation to the [lunch | launch]?"
- 69 "Do you know if she's [Finnish | finished]?"
- 70 "Yorkshire and Wales are both famous for their pony [trials | trails]".
- 71 "We just didn't think he'd be [armed | harmed]"
- 72 "I'm not feeling so [ill | well] today".
- 73 "They are [old | all] things they've grown out of, so you can take them for the jumble sale".
- 74 "My brother-in-law left [Euston | Houston] early this morning, so he should get here tonight".
- 75 "The profitability of North Sea oil rigs is very dependent on the quality of the [crude | crew] they find".
- 76 "You can buy logs by the [barrow- | barrel-] load at the local timber works".
- 77 "I hear you've got a new [rival | arrival]".
- 78 "Who was responsible for sending the [infantry | inventory]".
- 79 "We'll be letting them have a [newer system | new assistant] if they want one".
- 80 "He works for a company called [JMB | J & B]".
- 81 "Have you read the latest book on Watgate by [HA | AJ] Haldeman?"
- 82 "Some motels now have [hair-dryers | air-dryers] in the cloakrooms".
- 83 "Recent legislation makes it imperative that [we men | women] work together to help each other".
- 84 "The social Services try to ensure that children who need them get [free | three] meals every day".
- 85 "It's Richard's [birthday | bath day] on Sunday, so he'll have to do it on Monday".
- 86 "I gather their child is [autistic | artistic]".
- 87 "She was terribly [scared | scarred] as a result of the accident".
- 88 "This year Britain's top [oarsman rowed | horseman rode] to his third world title".
- 89 "He's an [eternal | internal] student".
- 90 "At Kilverstone Wildlife Park they've got an [Andean | Indian] buffalo".
- 91 "In England all [rod | road] users must have a license".
- 92 "I'd like you to be responsible for the [personal | personnel] side of the deal".
- 93 "[He and | Ian] Woosnam could well turn the tables next week".
- 94 "Who's going to propose the [loyal | royal] toast?"



- 95 “England would never have scored if it hadn’t been for that [free | freak] kick by Beckham”.
- 96 “Such measures have never previously been taken in the absence of a [president | precedent]”.
- 97 “When I saw the [train | terrain] I realized I would never catch him”.
- 98 “We haven’t had any more news [today | to date]”.
- 99 “It’s hard not to lose [face | faith] in a situation like that”.
- 100 “I’ve just heard that these tests have been [pirated | piloted] in Japan”.

**Oxford Placement Test 1: Grammar Test PART1**

Name .....

Total Listening ..... /100

Total Grammar ..... /100

Grand Total ..... /200

“Look at these examples. The correct answer is ticked”.

a “In warm climates people [like√| likes | are liking] sitting outside in the sun”.

b “If it is very hot, they sit [at | in√| under] the shade”.

“Now the test will begin. Tick the correct answer”.

- 1 “Water [is to boil | is boiling | boils] at a temperature of 100° C”.
- 2 “In some countries, [there is | is | it is] very hot all the time”.
- 3 “In cold countries people wear thick clothes [for keeping | to keep | for to keep] warm”.
- 4 “In England people are always talking about [a weather | the weather | weather]”.
- 5 “In some places [it rains | there rains | it raining] almost every day”.
- 6 “In deserts there isn’t [the | some | any] grass”.
- 7 “Places near the Equator have [a warm | the warm | warm] weather even in the cold season”.
- 8 “In England [coldest | the coldest | colder] time of year is usually from December to February”.
- 9 “[The most | Most of | Most] people don’t know what it’s really like in other countries”.
- 10 “Very [less | little | few] people can travel abroad”.
- 11 “Mohammad Ali [has won | won | is winning] his first world title fight in 1960”.

- 12 “After he [had won | have won | was winning] an Olympic gold medal he became a professional boxer”.
- 13 “His religious beliefs [have made him | made him to | made him] change his name when he became champion”.
- 14 “If he [has | would have | had] lost his first fight with Sonny Liston, no one would have been surprised”.
- 15 “He has travelled a lot [both | and | or] as a boxer and as a world-famous personality”.
- 16 “He is very well known [all in | all over | in all] the world”.
- 17 “Many people [is believing | are believing | believe] he was the greatest boxer of all time”.
- 18 “To be the best [from | in | of] the world is not easy”.
- 19 “Like any top sportsman Ali [had to | must | should] train very hard”.
- 20 “Such is his fame that people [would | will | did] always remember him as a champion”.
- 21 “The history of [aeroplane | the aeroplane | an aeroplane] is”
- 22 “[quite a | a quite | quite] short one. For many centuries men”
- 23 “[are trying | try | had tried] to fly, but with”
- 24 “[little | few | a little] success. In the 19th century a few people”
- 25 “succeeded [to fly | in flying | into flying] in balloons. But it wasn’t until”
- 26 “the beginning of [this | next | last] century that anybody”
- 27 “[were | is | was] able to fly in a machine”
- 28 “[who | which | what] was heavier than air, in other words”, in
- 29 “[who | which | what] we now call a ‘plane’. The first people to achieve”
- 30 “powered flight were the Wright brothers. [His | Their | Theirs] was the machine”
- 31 “which was the forerunner of the jumbo jets that are [such | such a | so] common sight today”.
- 32 “They [could | should | couldn’t] hardly have imagined that in 1969”,
- 33 “[not much | not many | no much] more than half a century later”,
- 34 “a man [will be | had been | would be] walking on the moon”.
- 35 “Already [a man | man | the man] is taking the first steps towards the stars”.
- 36 “Space satellites have now existed [since | during | for] around”
- 37 “half a century and we are dependent [from | of | on] them for all”
- 38 “kinds of [informations | information | an information]. Not only”
- 39 “[are they | they are | there are] being used for scientific research in”

- 40 “space, but also to see what kind of weather [is coming | comes | coming]”.
- 41 “By 2008 there [would | must | will] have been satellites in space for fifty”
- 42 “years and the ‘space superpowers’ will be [having | making | letting]”
- 43 “massive space stations built. When these [will be | are | will have been]”
- 44 “completed it will be the first time [when | where | that] astronauts will be”
- 45 “able to work in space in large numbers. [Apart | For | Except] all that”,
- 46 “in many ways the most remarkable flight [of | above | at] all was”
- 47 “[it | that | that one] of the flying bicycle, which the world saw on television”,
- 48 “[flying | to fly | fly] across the Channel from England to France, with nothing”
- 49 “[apart | but | than] a man to power it. As the bicycle-flyer said”,
- 50 “It’s the first time [I realize | I’ve realized | I am realizing] what hard work it is to be a bird!”
- 51 “Many teachers [say to | say | tell] their students should learn a foreign language”.
- 52 “Learning a second language is not the same [as | like | than] learning a first language”.
- 53 “It takes [long time | long | a long time] to learn any language”.
- 54 “It is said that Chinese is perhaps the world’s [harder | hardest | more hard] language to master”.
- 55 “English is quite difficult because of all the exceptions [who | which | what] have to be learnt”.
- 56 “You can learn the basic structures of a language quite quickly, but only if you [are wanting | will to | are willing to] make an effort”.
- 57 “A lot of people aren’t used [to the study | to study | to studying] grammar in their own language”.
- 58 “Many adult students of English wish they [would start | would have started | had started] their language studies earlier”.
- 59 “In some countries students have to spend a lot of time working [on | by | in] their own”.
- 60 “There aren’t [no | any | some] easy ways of learning a foreign language in your own country”.
- 61 “Some people try to improve their English by [hearing | listening | listening to] the BBC World Service”.
- 62 “[Live | Life | Living] with a foreign family can be a good way to learn a language”.
- 63 “It’s no use [to try | trying | in trying] to learn a language just by studying a dictionary”.

- 64 “Many students of English [would rather not | would rather prefer not | would rather not to] take tests”.
- 65 “Some people think it’s time we all [learn | should learn | learnt] a single international language”.
- 66 “Charles Walker is a teacher at a comprehensive school in Norwich. He [has joined | joined | joins]”
- 67 “the staff of the school in 1998 and [has been working | worked | works] there ever since”.
- 68 “Before [move | to move | moving] to Norwich, he taught in Italy and in Wales”,
- 69 “and before that he [has been | was | was being] a student at Cambridge”
- 70 “University. So far he [isn’t | wasn’t | hasn’t been] in Norwich for as long”
- 71 “as he was in Wales, but he likes the city a lot and [should | would | could]”
- 72 “like to stay there for at least another two years, or, [how | which | as] he”
- 73 “puts it, until his two children [have | will have | will be] grown up a bit”.
- 74 “He met his wife, Kate, in 1992 while he [was to live | was living | had been living] abroad for a while, and they got married in 1996”.
- 75 “Their two children, Mark and Susan, [are | were | have been] both born in Norwich”.
- 76 “The Walker’s boy, [who | which | he] is five, has just started”
- 77 “at school, but [his | their | her] sister”
- 78 “[shall stay | stays | will be staying] at home for another couple of years”,
- 79 “because she is nearly two years [younger | more young | the younger]”
- 80 “than him. Charles and Kate Walker [are used | use | used] to live in the”
- 81 “country, but now that they have children, they [have moved | move | moved]”
- 82 “into the city, Charles wanted a house [next | near | close] the”
- 83 “school [in order | for | to] get to work easily. Unfortunately”
- 84 “[the | a | that] one the two of them really wanted was too expensive”.
- 85 “so they [must | should | had to] buy one a bit further away. By the time the”
- 86 “children [go | will go | will have gone] to secondary school”,
- 87 “[that | which | what] Charles and Kate hope will be in Norwich, the”
- 88 “Walkers [will have been | have been | will be] living there for at least fifteen years”.
- 89 “They can’t be sure if they [stay | do stay | will stay], but if they”
- 90 “[don’t | didn’t | won’t], their friends won’t be too surprised.”
- a “He’s getting the 9.15 train, [isn’t he | hasn’t he | wasn’t he]?”

- b “She works in a library, [isn’t she | doesn’t she√| doesn’t he]”
- c “Tom didn’t tell you, [hasn’t he | didn’t he| did he√]?”
- d “Someone’s forgotten to switch off the gas, [didn’t one | didn’t they | haven’t they√]?”
- 91 “John’s coming to see you, [hasn’t he | wasn’t he | isn’t he]?”
- 92 “It’s been a long time since you’ve seen him, [hasn’t it | isn’t it | haven’t you]?”
- 93 “He’s due to arrive tomorrow, [won’t he | isn’t he | will he]?”
- 94 “He won’t be getting in till about 10:30, [isn’t he | is he | will he]?”
- 95 “You met him while you were on holiday, [didn’t you | weren’t you | haven’t you]?”
- 96 “I think I’m expected to pick him up, [aren’t I | don’t I | are you]?”
- 97 “No doubt you’d rather he stayed in England now, [didn’t you | wouldn’t you | shouldn’t you]?”
- 98 “Nobody else has been told he’s coming, [is he | has he | have they]?”
- 99 “We’d better not stay up too late tonight, [didn’t we | have we | had we]?”
- 100 “I suppose it’s time we called it a day, [didn’t we | isn’t it | don’t]?”

## Appendix B: Pre and Post tests

### Pre-Test

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: 30 minutes

Total Marks: 20 points (2 points per sentence)

Instructions:

Transform each declarative sentence into the requested interrogative form.

A) Change the following sentences into yes/no questions:

(4 points)

She has finished her homework.

\_\_\_\_\_?

They will travel tomorrow morning.

\_\_\_\_\_?

B) Change the following sentences into wh-questions using the prompts provided:

(12 points)

Who

Declarative: Tom borrowed my book.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

What

Declarative: The children bought some candies.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Where

Declarative: She left her keys on the table.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Who

Declarative: Maria painted the portrait.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

What

Declarative: He is writing a letter.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Where

Declarative: They are playing football in the park.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

C) Add appropriate tag questions to the following sentences:

(4 points)

It's raining heavily, \_\_\_\_\_?

You've met my brother before, \_\_\_\_\_?

### Post-Test

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: 30 minutes

Total Marks: 20 points (2 points per sentence)

Instructions:

Transform each declarative sentence into the requested interrogative form.

A) Change the following sentences into yes/no questions:

(4 points)

They have already seen the movie.

\_\_\_\_\_?

He can solve this puzzle easily.

\_\_\_\_\_?

B) Change the following sentences into wh-questions using the prompts provided:

(12 points)

Who

Declarative: My mother baked this cake.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

What

Declarative: Sarah reads detective novels.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Where

Declarative: John parked the car in front of the bank.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Who

Declarative: Alex discovered the mistake.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

What

Declarative: The professor explained the theory clearly.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

Where

Declarative: The birds built a nest in the tree.

Question: \_\_\_\_\_?

C) Add appropriate tag questions to the following sentences:

(4 points)

She isn't coming to the party, \_\_\_\_\_?

You have never been to Canada, \_\_\_\_\_?

