Literature on communicative language ability has identified pragmatic competence as a crucial aspect of second language (L2) communicative language ability. However, current literature has employed varied definitions of pragmatic competence, and little effort has been made to synthesize pragmatics studies in order to come up with a comprehensive list of components that comprise pragmatic competence. This effort was recently undertaken by Laughlin, Wain, and Schmidgall (2015), who conducted a systematic literature review of many different models, principles, and theories of pragmatics. The result was a construct of pragmatic competence which included five components, namely sociocultural knowledge, pragmatic-functional knowledge, grammatical knowledge, discourse knowledge, and strategic knowledge. In addition to proposing a more comprehensive construct of pragmatic competence, Laughlin et al. (2015) also suggested an operationalization of the construct through the use of multimedia materials.

The present study aims to operationalize this construct by designing, producing, and evaluating multimedia materials to teach pragmatics, particularly making requests in spoken and written communication within U.S. academic settings. More specifically, this research work investigates: (1) how participants perceive the effectiveness of the multimedia materials and accompanying tasks for developing their pragmatic competence; and (2) how participants’ performance differs between pre-instruction and post-instruction assessments. The creation of the multimedia materials was guided by multimedia design principles proposed by Mayer (2009) and Chapelle’s (2001) Computer Assisted Language Learning task appropriateness framework. Two groups of participants, namely current U.S. international students and prospective international students, participated in the study. Both groups used and evaluated the multimedia materials.