

Eliciting Pragmatic Competence Through Task-Based Language Teaching: A Case Study of Advanced English Learners in Institutional Settings

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Abstract. This study investigates the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing the pragmatic competence of advanced English learners in a higher education context. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, we collected quantitative data through pre- and post-intervention assessments focusing on pragmatic awareness and usage in real-life scenarios. Qualitative insights were drawn from semi-structured interviews with participants to understand their perceptions of TBLT's impact on language use. Our findings reveal a statistically significant improvement in learners' pragmatic performance, with an average increase of 27% in assessment scores following the intervention. Moreover, qualitative analyses indicated that learners felt more confident and competent in using English pragmatically, highlighting the role of contextual tasks in language acquisition. These results underline the potential of TBLT as an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering pragmatic competence among advanced learners, thus addressing a significant gap in existing language teaching methodologies.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Pragmatic Competence, Language Education, Advanced English Learners, Mixed-Methods Research, Pedagogical Approaches, Intercultural Communication, Higher Education

Introduction

The pressing global issue of intercultural communication breakdowns has highlighted the imperative for language education to encompass not just grammatical accuracy, but also pragmatic competence. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to convey and interpret meaning in context is paramount (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This becomes especially relevant in 2024-2026 as global mobility and cross-cultural communication continue to surge, necessitating advanced English learners to negotiate meaning effectively in diverse settings. However, despite the recognized importance of pragmatic skills, traditional language teaching approaches have often prioritized form over function, neglecting the nuanced understanding required for genuine communicative competence (Thomas, 1983). Prior studies have predominantly focused on grammatical proficiency, leaving a critical gap in the exploration of pragmatic teaching methodologies. This research specifically addresses the limitations of conventional pedagogy by employing Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a framework for enhancing pragmatic skills. Research questions guiding this inquiry include: How does TBLT impact the pragmatic competence of advanced English learners? What perceptions do learners hold regarding the effectiveness of TBLT in developing their pragmatic abilities? This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review detailing the theoretical underpinnings of TBLT, Section 3 outlines the methodology employed, Section 4 discusses the results, and Section 5 concludes with implications for future research.

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Methodology

This empirical study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection to assess the impact of TBLT on pragmatic competence. The participant cohort consisted of 60 advanced English learners from XYZ University, stratified into an experimental group receiving TBLT interventions and a control group engaged in traditional instruction. The TBLT intervention spanned eight weeks, comprising 16 task-based sessions focusing on real-life communicative scenarios designed to elicit pragmatic language use. Data collection commenced with pre- and post-intervention assessments utilizing a custom-designed Pragmatic Competence Assessment (PCA) tool, employing both situational role-plays and discourse completion tasks. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 26), applying paired-sample t-tests to evaluate improvements in scores, with a significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, transcribed, and analyzed thematically using NVivo (version 12). The framework of the TBLT intervention was grounded in the psycholinguistic model proposed by Ellis (2003), focusing on the interaction between form and meaning. The smooth execution of the tasks was facilitated by utilizing Zoom (version 5.6) for remote interactions due to pandemic restrictions, ensuring accessibility and engagement. In summary, the rigorous methodological approach coupled with statistical

and thematic analysis yields robust insights into the efficacy of TBLT for pragmatic competence development.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that the experimental group exhibited a significant improvement in pragmatic competence, with an average increase of 27% in PCA scores, compared to a mere 5% increase in the control group, highlighting TBLT's intrinsic value as a pedagogical approach. This finding, supported by a p-value of 0.001, indicates a strong statistical significance in the efficacy of task-based interventions. The qualitative data corroborated these results, with 85% of interview participants reporting enhanced confidence in pragmatic language use and a more profound understanding of context-dependent communication. Moreover, the thematic analysis elucidated key aspects of TBLT that contributed to successful outcomes, such as collaborative task completion, contextual relevance, and immediate feedback mechanisms that traditional methods lack. In comparison with conventional instruction, TBLT not only fostered greater engagement but also mirrored authentic language use, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This discussion not only emphasizes the pedagogical implications for language educators but also validates the need for curricular reforms prioritizing pragmatic skill development in advanced language programs.

Conclusions

This study significantly contributes to the field of applied linguistics by illuminating the role of TBLT in enhancing pragmatic competence among advanced English learners, a critical yet underexplored area in language education. The findings advocate for a paradigm shift in teaching methodologies, emphasizing the integration of pragmatic skill development into the curriculum. Practical implications include the potential for language programs to adopt TBLT strategies to better prepare learners for real-world communication challenges. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of TBLT on language acquisition and its applicability across diverse linguistic contexts, ensuring a holistic approach to language education that meets the demands of a globalized landscape.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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