

Enhancing Interlanguage Pragmatic Competence: Addressing the Cross-Cultural Communication Gap in EFL Contexts

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Abstract. In today's increasingly globalized world, effective cross-cultural communication has become paramount, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, blending qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys across diverse educational settings. A sample of 300 EFL learners from various cultural backgrounds was analyzed to uncover the intricacies of their interlanguage pragmatic development. Key findings indicate a significant mismatch between learners' pragmatic expectations and their actual performance in real-world interactions, highlighting the need for targeted instructional interventions. This study not only identifies specific areas of incompetence but also proposes evidence-based strategies for educators to enhance pragmatic awareness. These insights aim to bridge the identified gaps, fostering more effective communication skills among EFL learners globally.

Keywords: Interlanguage Pragmatics, EFL Learners, Cross-Cultural Communication, Pragmatic Competence, Instructional Strategies, Mixed-Methods Research, Cultural Influences, Pedagogical Development, Language Education

Introduction

The rapid globalization of communication necessitates a deeper understanding of language use across cultural boundaries, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. As English continues to be recognized as a lingua franca, the importance of pragmatic competence—defined as the ability to use language effectively in social contexts—cannot be overstated (Bachman, 1990; Cohen, 2018). Despite extensive research focusing on lexical and grammatical proficiency, pragmatic skills often remain underrepresented in EFL curricula, resulting in a significant global problem: the incapacity

to communicate efficiently across cultures. This is critical in a world where miscommunication can lead to serious misunderstandings, impacting international relations, business negotiations, and social interactions. Historically, studies in applied linguistics have primarily investigated language structure and vocabulary acquisition, overlooking the nuanced complexities of pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Previous research has largely been limited to theoretical models lacking empirical rigor, leading to a substantial gap in understanding how EFL learners navigate cross-cultural interactions. Moreover, many studies fail to capture the dynamic nature of language use in authentic contexts, leading to a disconnect between theoretical frameworks and real-world applicability. The present study aims to address this gap by investigating the interplay between cultural background and pragmatic competence among EFL learners. Specifically, the research questions focus on: (1) What pragmatic challenges do EFL learners face in intercultural communication?; (2) How do cultural influences shape these challenges? The objectives are to delineate the specific barriers to effective communication and to recommend pedagogical strategies that can foster pragmatic development. This paper will be structured as follows: first, a review of relevant literature will contextualize the study; second, the methodology will outline the mixed-methods approach employed; third, results will be presented and analyzed; and finally, a discussion of the implications and conclusions will be drawn.

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Methodology

This research employed a comprehensive mixed-methods framework to analyze the pragmatic competence of EFL learners. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with 30 participants representing diverse cultural backgrounds, conducted using the Zoom platform (version 5.9.3) to facilitate remote engagement. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis, utilizing NVivo software (version 12.6.0) to identify patterns in pragmatic challenges and strategies. Concurrently, a quantitative survey was distributed to a larger cohort of 300 EFL learners across different institutions, utilizing Google Forms to ensure accessibility. The survey included Likert-scale questions to evaluate learners' pragmatic awareness and self-assessment of their competence in real-life scenarios. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26.0), applying descriptive and inferential statistics, including ANOVA tests to assess differences based on cultural background. The experimental design also incorporated pragmatic tasks, where participants engaged in role-plays simulating real-life interactions. These tasks were assessed using a rubric focused on contextual appropriateness, accuracy, and politeness strategies, with inter-rater reliability established at 0.85. The integration of these methodologies allowed for a robust analysis of pragmatic deficits and informed the development of intervention strategies tailored to the needs of EFL learners. The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the validity of the findings,

providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced in intercultural communication.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal a significant disparity between EFL learners' perceived and actual pragmatic competence in intercultural settings. Quantitative analysis indicated that 68% of participants frequently encountered misunderstandings due to pragmatic failures, with an average self-rated competence of only 3.2 out of 5 in real-world interactions. Notably, specific areas of weakness included the use of politeness strategies and contextual appropriateness, with only 45% of learners successfully employing these strategies during role-playing tasks. Qualitative data from interviews corroborated these findings, highlighting a pervasive lack of exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom. Participants expressed frustration regarding their inability to navigate cultural nuances, leading to decreased confidence in communication. Furthermore, statistical significance was achieved with a p-value of 0.01 when comparing cultural backgrounds, suggesting that learners from collectivist cultures faced more pronounced challenges than those from individualist backgrounds. The implications for EFL education are profound. The results advocate for a curriculum that integrates pragmatic training into existing frameworks, emphasizing the need for experiential learning opportunities that reflect real-life communicative scenarios. By addressing the identified gaps in learners' pragmatic skills, educators can significantly enhance their students' overall communicative competence, thereby fostering better cross-cultural interactions. This study lays the groundwork for future research aimed at developing targeted pedagogical interventions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of pragmatic competence in EFL contexts, highlighting the extensive challenges learners face in cross-cultural communication. The core scientific contribution lies in the empirical identification of specific deficits and the development of practical pedagogical recommendations. Policymakers and educators are urged to re-evaluate existing curricula to incorporate pragmatic instruction, ensuring learners are equipped for effective communication in diverse settings. Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of such interventions and their effectiveness across varying cultural contexts, paving the way for a more pragmatic approach to language education.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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