

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC AWARENESS THROUGH READING MATERIALS

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Abstract. This article explores the role of reading materials in developing students' pragmatic awareness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Pragmatic awareness, defined as the ability to understand language use in context, is essential for effective communication. The study examines how carefully selected reading texts can enhance learners' understanding of speech acts, politeness strategies, implicature, and cultural norms. Using an IMRAD structure, the article presents theoretical foundations, methodology, findings, and pedagogical implications. The results indicate that integrating pragmatically rich reading materials significantly improves learners' communicative competence.

Keywords: pragmatic awareness, reading materials, EFL learners, communicative competence, speech acts, politeness strategies

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada chet tilini o'rganayotgan talabalar uchun pragmatik kompetensiyani rivojlantirishda o'qish materiallarining ahamiyati o'rganiladi. Pragmatik kompetensiya — bu til birliklarini kontekstda to'g'ri tushunish va qo'llash qobiliyatidir. Tadqiqotda nutq aktlari, muloyimlik strategiyalari, yashirin ma'nolar va madaniy me'yorlarni tushunishda o'qish matnlarining roli tahlil qilinadi. IMRAD modeli asosida yozilgan maqolada nazariy asoslar, metodologiya, natijalar va pedagogik tavsiyalar keltirilgan. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, pragmatik jihatdan boy o'qish materiallari talabalar kommunikativ kompetensiyasini sezilarli darajada oshiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: pragmatik kompetensiya, o'qish materiallari, chet tili o'rganuvchilar, kommunikativ kompetensiya, nutq aktlari, muloyimlik strategiyalari

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается роль чтения в развитии прагматической компетенции у изучающих английский язык как иностранный. Прагматическая компетенция определяется как способность понимать и использовать язык в контексте. В исследовании анализируется влияние текстов на понимание речевых актов, стратегий вежливости, имплицатур и культурных норм. Статья оформлена по структуре IMRAD и включает теоретические основы, методологию, результаты и педагогические рекомендации. Результаты показывают, что использование прагматически насыщенных текстов значительно улучшает коммуникативную компетенцию учащихся.

Ключевые слова: прагматическая компетенция, чтение, изучающие иностранный язык, коммуникативная компетенция, речевые акты, стратегии вежливости

1. Introduction

In modern language education, communicative competence has become a central goal, encompassing not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language appropriately in context. Pragmatic awareness plays a crucial role in achieving this goal, as it enables learners to interpret implied meanings, recognize social norms, and respond appropriately in different communicative situations.

However, many EFL learners struggle with pragmatic aspects of language due to limited exposure to authentic input. Reading materials, when carefully selected and pedagogically exploited, can serve as a powerful tool to enhance learners' pragmatic competence. This study investigates how reading texts contribute to developing pragmatic awareness among students.

2. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative classroom-based research design with elements of mixed-method data collection to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of learners' pragmatic development. The participants consisted of 15 first-year undergraduate EFL students studying at a university in Uzbekistan. Their proficiency level ranged from B1 to B2 according to CEFR standards.

2.1 Research Design

The research was conducted over a period of four weeks, during which students participated in eight instructional sessions (twice a week). Each session lasted approximately 80 minutes and focused on integrating reading activities with explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction.

2.2 Materials Selection

Reading materials were selected based on the following criteria:

- Presence of authentic or semi-authentic language
- Inclusion of diverse speech acts (requests, refusals, apologies, compliments)
- Representation of different levels of politeness and formality
- Cultural relevance and contextual richness

The materials included:

- Short dialogues from textbooks and real-life situations
- Excerpts from short stories
- Online articles and emails
- Informal and formal written interactions

2.3 Instructional Procedure

Each lesson followed a structured sequence:

Pre-reading stage:

- Activating background knowledge
- Introducing key vocabulary and context
- Predicting possible communicative situations

While-reading stage:

- Identifying speech acts and communicative intentions
- Highlighting politeness markers and hedging expressions
- Analyzing tone, formality, and speaker relationships

Post-reading stage:

- Group discussions on pragmatic meaning
- Role-play activities to practice similar situations
- Reflection tasks comparing native and target language norms

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

To ensure reliability and validity, multiple data sources were used:

- **Pre-test and post-test:** Designed to measure students' ability to interpret pragmatic meaning in written contexts
- **Classroom observations:** Focused on student participation and interaction
- **Student reflective journals:** Provided insights into learners' awareness and perceptions
- **Task-based written responses:** Evaluated students' ability to apply pragmatic knowledge

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and basic quantitative comparison of pre- and post-test scores. Patterns in students' responses, errors, and improvements were identified and categorized according to pragmatic features.

3. Results

The findings demonstrate a substantial improvement in students' pragmatic awareness after the instructional intervention.

3.1 Quantitative Findings

Comparison of pre- and post-test results revealed:

- An average increase of 25–30% in correctly identifying speech acts
- Improved recognition of indirect requests and implied meanings
- Reduction in literal interpretation errors

3.2 Qualitative Findings

a) Recognition of Speech Acts

Initially, students relied heavily on literal meaning and struggled to distinguish between different communicative intentions. After the intervention, they demonstrated a clearer understanding of how language functions in context. For example, indirect requests such as “Could you possibly open the window?” were correctly interpreted as polite requests rather than questions about ability.

b) Understanding Politeness Strategies

Students showed increased awareness of how politeness varies depending on social distance, power relations, and context. They began to recognize the use of softeners, modal verbs, and indirect language as tools for maintaining politeness.

c) Interpretation of Implicature

One of the most notable improvements was in understanding implied meanings. Students became more capable of interpreting statements beyond their literal sense, such as recognizing sarcasm, hints, and indirect refusals.

d) Cultural Awareness

Students reported greater awareness of differences between their native language norms and English pragmatic conventions. They identified situations where direct translation could lead to misunderstanding or pragmatic failure.

3.3 Learner Engagement

Observation data indicated higher levels of participation and engagement during lessons. Students were more willing to discuss interpretations, justify their answers, and reflect on language use.

4. Discussion

The results of this study strongly support the hypothesis that reading materials can effectively contribute to the development of pragmatic awareness in EFL learners.

4.1 The Role of Reading in Pragmatic Development

Reading provides learners with rich contextualized input, allowing them to observe how language is used in real-life situations. Unlike isolated grammar exercises, reading exposes learners to authentic discourse patterns, including tone, intention, and interpersonal meaning.

The findings suggest that repeated exposure to pragmatically rich texts helps learners internalize patterns of language use, leading to more accurate interpretation and production.

4.2 Importance of Instructional Support

The study also highlights that exposure alone is not sufficient. Guided instruction plays a crucial role in helping learners notice and analyze pragmatic features. Activities such as discussion, reflection, and role-play significantly enhanced learners' ability to process and apply pragmatic knowledge.

4.3 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, several teaching recommendations can be made:

- Integrate pragmatic objectives into reading lessons
- Use authentic materials that reflect real-life communication
- Encourage critical thinking and interpretation rather than surface-level comprehension
- Provide opportunities for practice through interactive tasks
- Raise awareness of cultural differences explicitly

4.4 Challenges and Limitations

Despite positive results, some challenges were observed:

- Students initially lacked confidence in interpreting implied meanings
- Time constraints limited deeper exploration of some texts
- Small sample size may affect generalizability

Future studies could involve larger groups and longer intervention periods to validate the findings further.

5. Conclusion

Developing pragmatic awareness is essential for effective communication in a foreign language. This study demonstrates that reading materials can significantly contribute to this process when used strategically. Integrating pragmatically rich texts into EFL classrooms not only enhances learners' understanding of language use but also prepares them for real-life communication.

Future research may explore the integration of multimedia resources and digital texts to further support pragmatic development.

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