

Sopiko Gvritishvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Developing Pragmatic Competence in the EFL Classroom: A Discourse-Based Strategy

ABSTRACT

Pragmatic competence—the ability to interpret and produce language in socially, culturally, and contextually appropriate ways—is a crucial component of communicative proficiency, particularly in EFL contexts where learners often have limited access to authentic interaction. While grammatical and lexical knowledge provides a structural foundation for language use, pragmatic competence enables learners to perform speech acts, manage politeness, interpret indirect meanings, and navigate discourse effectively. Despite its importance, pragmatic skills are frequently underdeveloped in EFL classrooms due to the focus on structural accuracy and the scarcity of natural communicative opportunities.

This study investigates the effectiveness of discourse-based instructional strategies in fostering pragmatic awareness among intermediate EFL learners. Drawing on interlanguage pragmatics and authentic discourse analysis, the research examines how learners interpret and employ pragmatic features—including speech acts, politeness strategies, epistemic modality, and discourse markers—across various social contexts. Participants engaged in role-plays, metapragmatic reflection tasks, and corpus-informed activities that highlighted contextual cues, interactional negotiation, and native-like discourse patterns.

Findings reveal that discourse-based instruction not only enhances learners' ability to recognize and produce pragmatically appropriate language but also strengthens their interactional competence, metapragmatic awareness, and confidence in real-life communication. The study underscores the pedagogical value of integrating explicit instruction on pragmatic norms into EFL curricula, demonstrating that effective language teaching must address both linguistic and pragmatic dimensions. By linking theoretical insights with classroom practice, the research provides practical guidance for teachers seeking to develop learners' pragmatic and intercultural communication skills, thereby promoting holistic communicative competence.

Keywords: *Pragmatics; EFL Classroom; Discourse; Discourse-based learning; Pragmatic competence; Interactional competence*

Introduction

Pragmatics has long been recognized as a key component of communicative competence, encompassing the ability to interpret and produce language in ways that are socially appropriate and contextually sensitive. While grammar and vocabulary form the structural foundation of language

learning, it is pragmatic competence that enables learners to use linguistic forms effectively in real-life communication. This includes managing politeness, interpreting indirect meanings, performing speech acts, and responding appropriately in a variety of social interactions.

In EFL environments, learners often struggle with pragmatic competence because classroom exposure is generally limited to simplified dialogues and controlled tasks. Authentic communicative opportunities are rare, and textbooks tend to focus on structural accuracy rather than contextual nuance. At the same time, discourse—the level of language where interaction and meaning co-occur—plays a central role in shaping pragmatic behavior. Discourse reveals how speakers negotiate meaning across turns, organize their talk, and use subtle cues such as hedging, mitigation, or discourse markers.

Developing learners' pragmatic competence remains both essential and demanding in second language education. Pragmatic instruction plays a crucial role because it equips L2 learners with the ability to interpret and use linguistic forms appropriately across functions and contexts. In doing so, learners also gain insights into the social and cultural norms that shape communicative behaviour. Mastery of pragmatic conventions enhances real-world language use, fostering greater confidence and communicative self-efficacy among learners. Despite its importance, pragmatics is notoriously difficult to teach: unlike grammar or vocabulary, pragmatic features are often implicit, highly context-dependent, and variable across speech communities. Consequently, instructional pragmatics has become a central concern in L2 pedagogy.

Despite growing interest in pragmatic pedagogy, significant gaps remain. While many studies document the importance of explicit instruction, fewer explore **how discourse-based strategies can actively develop pragmatic awareness in intermediate EFL learners**, particularly through the use of authentic materials such as transcripts or classroom interactions. This study addresses this gap by investigating the role of discourse-based instructional approaches in fostering pragmatic competence.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does discourse-based instruction influence intermediate EFL learners' pragmatic awareness?
2. In what ways do learners respond to instructional activities that emphasize context, interaction, and metapragmatic reflection?
3. Which types of discourse-based tasks are most effective in promoting pragmatic competence?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a better understanding of how instructional pragmatics can be integrated into communicative language teaching to enhance learners' real-world language use.

Given this interdependence, discourse-based instruction provides a promising route for developing learners' pragmatic competence. By analyzing authentic discourse, learners can observe how language functions in context. Through guided practice, they can internalize pragmatic norms and apply them in their own interactions.

This study explores the role of discourse-based strategies in raising pragmatic awareness among intermediate EFL learners. The purpose is not only to measure change in learners' performance, but also to understand how they respond to instructional activities that foreground context, interaction, and metapragmatic reflection.

Literature Review

Pragmatics: Theoretical Background

Pragmatics is often viewed as a framework that addresses the limitations of syntax and semantics by offering systematic explanations for implicit meanings and intentional communicative behaviour. In this sense, pragmatic competence represents a fundamental aspect of language knowledge, enabling individuals to interpret information derived from contextual cues even when meaning is not overtly expressed (Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996).

Pragmatic study is generally divided into two major branches: cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics. Cross-cultural pragmatics examines communicative practices and behavioural norms within speakers' native languages and cultural environments, allowing for comparisons across cultures. The concept of *interlanguage* refers to an evolving linguistic system governed by its own internal rules. Within this framework, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners approximate target-language norms, the extent to which their first language shapes their pragmatic judgments and performance, and how their pragmatic competence develops over time (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Pragmatics, broadly defined, concerns the study of meaning in context and the ways in which language users produce and interpret utterances beyond their literal semantic content. Classic works by Levinson, Thomas, and Yule emphasize that pragmatic meaning is shaped by situational factors, speaker intentions, cultural conventions, and interlocutors' mutual assumptions. Within applied linguistics, pragmatics is understood as a central component of communicative competence, as it determines the appropriateness, politeness, and interactional effectiveness of language in real-world communication (Levinson, 1983);

Key dimensions of pragmatic knowledge include mastery of **speech acts** (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), **Gricean implicature**, **politeness strategies** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), contextual inference,

and discourse structuring. These elements interact to enable speakers to perform actions such as requesting, refusing, or mitigating disagreement, while maintaining socially appropriate interpersonal relations.

Pragmatic Competence in Second Language Acquisition

In second language acquisition (SLA), *pragmatic competence* refers to learners' ability to understand and use target-language forms appropriately in diverse sociocultural contexts. Kasper and Blum-Kulka established the field of interlanguage pragmatics, showing that L2 learners often rely on L1 pragmatic norms, leading to pragmatic transfer, pragmatic failure, or unintended rudeness. Unlike grammatical competence, which can be acquired implicitly, pragmatic competence frequently requires **explicit instruction**, particularly in foreign-language environments where learners have limited exposure to authentic interaction (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Empirical studies indicate that pragmatic development is gradual and highly sensitive to input quality and quantity. Learners may master linguistic forms before understanding the pragmatic constraints governing their use, and high grammatical proficiency does not automatically result in pragmatic proficiency (Taguchi, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005). L2 learners' pragmatic competence reflects their ability to interpret and produce language in ways that are socially and culturally appropriate, requiring an understanding of target-language norms and communicative conventions.

In EFL classrooms, pragmatics has become a priority due to the increasing demand for graduates who can communicate effectively in multicultural and professional contexts. Effective teaching of pragmatics raises learners' awareness of how meaning is shaped by context, how politeness and power influence interaction, and how discourse markers and tone affect speech interpretation. Integrating pragmatics into communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning provides opportunities for contextualized practice, enhancing learners' ability to apply pragmatic norms in authentic situations (Roever, 2015; Nguyen & Gu, 2020).

Discourse-Based Approaches to Pragmatic Instruction

Discourse-based instruction emphasizes the analysis of authentic language use to develop learners' pragmatic competence. By engaging with real-world texts, transcripts, or classroom dialogues, learners can observe how language functions in context and internalize norms through guided practice. Pragmatic markers such as *well*, *you know*, *I mean*, *so*, *actually*, and *right* play crucial roles in signaling stance, organizing information, managing hesitation, and mitigating face threats. Discourse-based

approaches help learners develop fluency, coherence, and interactional competence, while promoting metapragmatic awareness that reduces negative transfer from the first language (Trosborg, 2010; House, 2017).

Recent studies in applied and forensic linguistics highlight the importance of pragmatic markers and discourse strategies in institutional settings, including courtroom interactions, academic discourse, and professional communication. Analyzing authentic interactions allows learners to understand subtleties of epistemic commitment, turn-taking, and politeness strategies—skills that are essential for real-world language use (Culpeper et al., 2017; LoCastro, 2021).

Recent research highlights the central role of **pragmatic markers**—such as *well*, *you know*, *I mean*, *so*, *actually*, and *right*—in achieving natural and coherent discourse. These markers perform textual, interpersonal, and cognitive functions: organizing information, signaling stance, managing hesitation, mitigating face-threats, or guiding interpretation. Studies in forensic linguistics and applied pragmatics show that such markers are crucial in institutional discourse, including courtroom interaction, where they can index politeness, epistemic commitment, and the speaker's control of the floor.

Teaching pragmatic markers in the EFL classroom helps learners develop fluency, coherence, and interactional competence. Discourse-based analyses—comparing how English and learners' L1 use markers—enhance metapragmatic awareness and reduce negative transfer. Integrating corpus extracts, authentic transcripts, and classroom discussion expands learners' exposure to varied pragmatic environments and promotes the internalization of native-like interactional norms.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that pragmatic competence is a fundamental component of communicative proficiency and an essential goal of EFL instruction. While learners often acquire grammar more easily than pragmatics, targeted, data-driven, and context-rich instruction substantially improves their ability to use English appropriately. A discourse-based approach—drawing on pragmatic markers, speech acts, and authentic transcripts—has been shown to be among the most effective strategies for developing pragmatic competence in the EFL classroom. Given that this paper aims to address the challenges and pedagogical implications of teaching pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics is discussed first to illustrate why explicit pragmatic instruction is necessary. Understanding how learners' interlanguage systems generate gaps in appropriateness, politeness, and contextual inference is crucial for shaping pedagogical intervention. The subsequent section therefore provides an overview of the core areas of pragmatic inquiry that underpin this discussion and establish the rationale for integrating instructional pragmatics into EFL teaching.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative classroom-based design** to investigate how discourse-based instruction influences the development of pragmatic awareness among intermediate EFL learners. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth examination of learners' spoken interactions, interpretive processes, and reflective engagement with pragmatic features in authentic communicative contexts. This design enabled the researcher to capture the nuanced ways in which learners notice, interpret, and evaluate pragmatic choices within discourse, providing rich insights into both observable behavior and cognitive awareness.

Participants

The sample consisted of 60 intermediate-level EFL learners, aged between 18 and 25, drawn from [name of institution or program]. All participants had received prior English instruction and demonstrated intermediate proficiency through standardized placement assessments. The participants shared a similar linguistic background, ensuring consistency in group interactions and the applicability of discourse-based tasks.

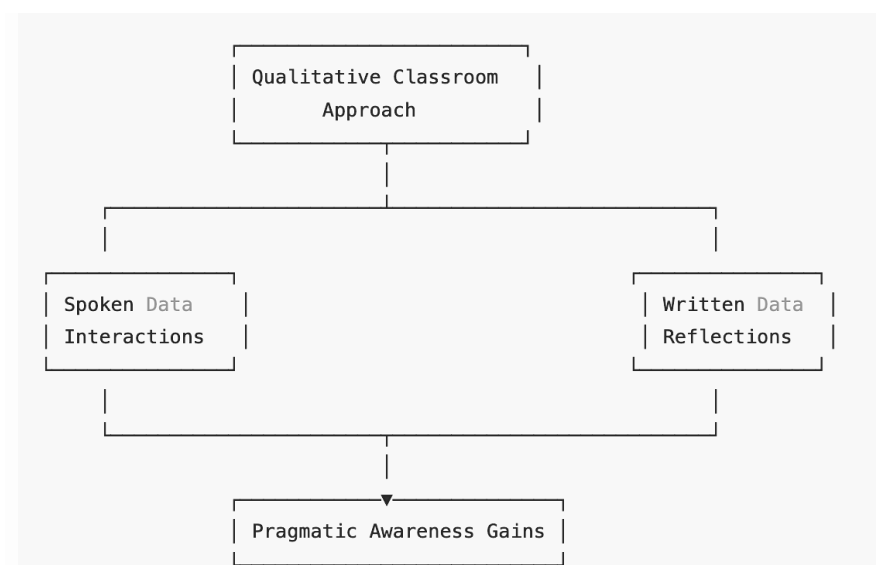


Figure 1. *Qualitative classroom-based design*

Instruments and Instructional Activities

To explore how discourse-based instruction contributes to the development of pragmatic awareness, several complementary instruments and activities were employed:

Role-plays based on authentic transcripts.

Learners engaged in structured role-plays adapted from real-life communicative exchanges,

including courtroom discourse, service encounters, everyday conversations, and institutional dialogue. These tasks provided opportunities to practice pragmatic features such as turn-taking, politeness strategies, mitigation, and context-appropriate speech acts in simulated yet realistic communicative environments.

Pragmatic awareness tasks.

Analytical tasks were designed to help learners identify, interpret, and evaluate pragmatic choices in context. Activities required learners to *examine implicature, politeness markers, discourse markers, and sociocultural norms embedded in the transcripts*. These tasks encouraged learners to compare alternative formulations, detect inappropriate or overly direct responses, and articulate reasons for pragmatic success or breakdown.

Reflective discussions and self-evaluation.

Following each instructional activity, learners participated in guided classroom discussions. These discussions encouraged metapragmatic reflection as students shared their observations, explained their interpretive decisions, and evaluated their use of pragmatic strategies. Written reflective entries were also collected to deepen learners' awareness of how their pragmatic choices evolved over time.

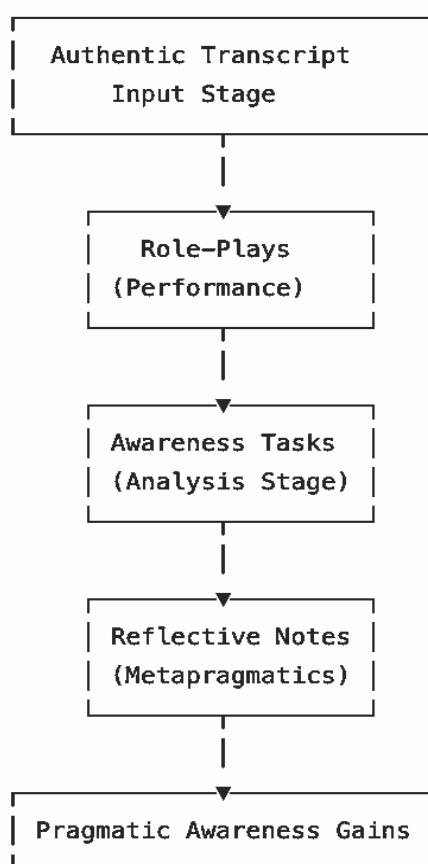


Figure 2.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from **two primary sources** to provide a comprehensive picture of learners' pragmatic awareness:

1. Audio-recordings of spoken interactions:

- Learners' role-plays, group discussions, and task-based exchanges were recorded.
- These recordings offered rich data for analyzing how learners negotiated meaning, employed pragmatic markers, and adapted their speech to situational demands.

2. Written reflections:

- Learners documented their self-evaluations, explanations of pragmatic decisions, and perceptions of the instructional activities.
- These reflections provided insight into internal cognitive processes, including learners' awareness of context, politeness, and pragmatic appropriateness.

The combination of **spoken and written data** allowed for **triangulation**, enhancing the credibility of findings and supporting a deeper understanding of both observable pragmatic performance and internal metapragmatic processes.

Research Results

The analysis of learners' spoken interactions, written reflections, and observation notes revealed substantial developments in both **pragmatic awareness** and **pragmatic production**. Findings are presented thematically to illustrate how discourse-based instruction shaped learners' understanding of contextually appropriate language use and their ability to employ pragmatic strategies effectively.

Development of Pragmatic Awareness

One of the clearest outcomes was a measurable increase in learners' ability to notice and interpret pragmatic features in authentic discourse. At the beginning of the study, most learners evaluated communication primarily in terms of grammatical or lexical accuracy. Reflections frequently included statements such as "*I didn't know the right word*" or "*I forgot the grammar rule*", indicating limited attention to contextual factors like speaker intention, power relations, or politeness conventions.

As the study progressed, learners gradually shifted their focus. **Pragmatic awareness tasks** using authentic transcripts played a key role in this transformation. By the third week, reflections increasingly highlighted sensitivity to indirectness, presupposition, hedging, politeness markers, and sequential organization. Examples included:

- "*The speaker used 'I was wondering' to sound more polite.*"

- “*He softened the disagreement by adding ‘maybe’ before his opinion.*”

These observations suggest that learners were internalizing the functional purpose of pragmatic markers, moving beyond perceiving them as optional fillers. Audio-recordings of classroom discussions further revealed learners’ growing capacity to identify subtle pragmatic violations—for instance, recognizing that a direct request sounded “too strong” or an abrupt topic shift seemed “rude.” This demonstrates **enhanced metapragmatic knowledge**: learners could articulate why certain linguistic choices are appropriate or inappropriate in context.

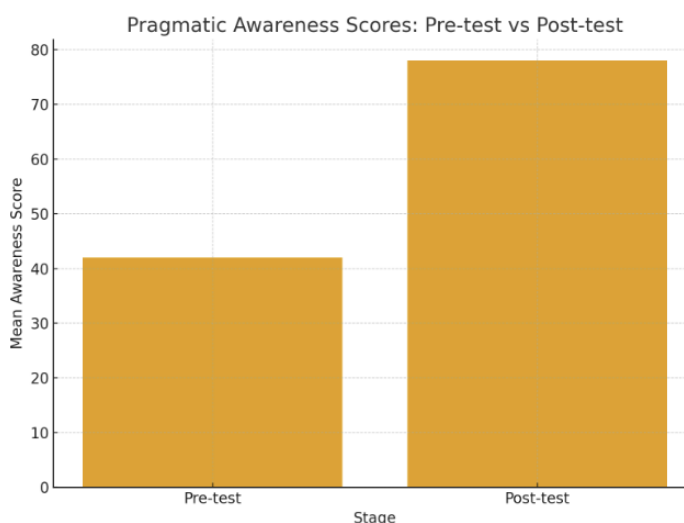


Figure 3. Pragmatic awareness scores before and after discourse-based instruction.

Learners’ pragmatic awareness showed a marked improvement from pre-test to post-test. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, mean scores increased from 42 (SD = 6.8) to 78 (SD = 7.4), indicating substantial gains in learners’ ability to interpret pragmatic functions and context-dependent meanings.

Written reflections also showed a shift from surface-level observations (e.g., noticing politeness forms) to deeper analyses involving illocutionary force, mitigation strategies, and discourse management. Several learners explicitly noted that working with authentic courtroom and conversational transcripts helped them understand “*why speakers choose certain expressions*” rather than merely memorizing formulas.

Overall, the results indicate that **pragmatic awareness is highly responsive to instruction** when learners are exposed consistently to authentic discourse and guided to notice interactional cues.

This improvement was also reflected qualitatively: learners' written reflections demonstrated a shift from superficial observations (e.g., noticing politeness forms) to deeper analyses involving illocutionary force, mitigation strategies, and discourse management. Several learners explicitly noted that exposure to authentic courtroom and conversational transcripts enabled them to understand "why speakers choose certain expressions" rather than merely memorising formulas.

The degree of improvement suggests that pragmatic awareness is highly responsive to instruction when learners are consistently exposed to authentic discourse samples and guided to notice interactional cues. The effect size implied by the score difference is considerable and aligns with previous findings that awareness-raising is most effective when learners are required to compare pragmatic choices across speakers and contexts.

Improvement in Pragmatic Production

Evidence from role-plays demonstrated that learners were able to apply their developing awareness to real-time interaction. At the beginning of the project, their performance was characterized by directness and literal expression, with limited use of mitigation or strategic politeness. For instance, requests often took the form "Give me...", "You must...", or "I want...". Refusals were similarly abrupt, frequently lacking justification or softening devices.

By the end of the six-week instructional cycle, learners demonstrated notable progress. Their speech began incorporating:

- **Hedging:** "I was wondering if...", "Maybe we could..."
- **Stance expressions:** "I think that...", "Actually..."
- **Indirect requests:** "Would it be possible...?"

Tone modulation also improved, with learners adjusting formality depending on the context. Additionally, repair strategies became more common, including expressions such as "Sorry, let me rephrase that" and "What I meant was...", reflecting increased confidence in managing misunderstandings—a skill rarely addressed in form-based instruction.

Another important development was the emergence of repair strategies. Learners increasingly used expressions such as "Sorry, let me rephrase that", "What I meant was...", and "I'm not sure if I said it clearly". This indicates growing confidence in managing misunderstandings, an essential component of communicative competence that rarely appears in form-based instruction.

Several learners also developed greater control over discourse markers such as *well*, *so*, *actually*, *you know*, and *I mean*. These markers helped them organize discourse more naturally and signal shifts

in stance or perspective. Their use suggests movement toward more fluent, interactionally appropriate communication.

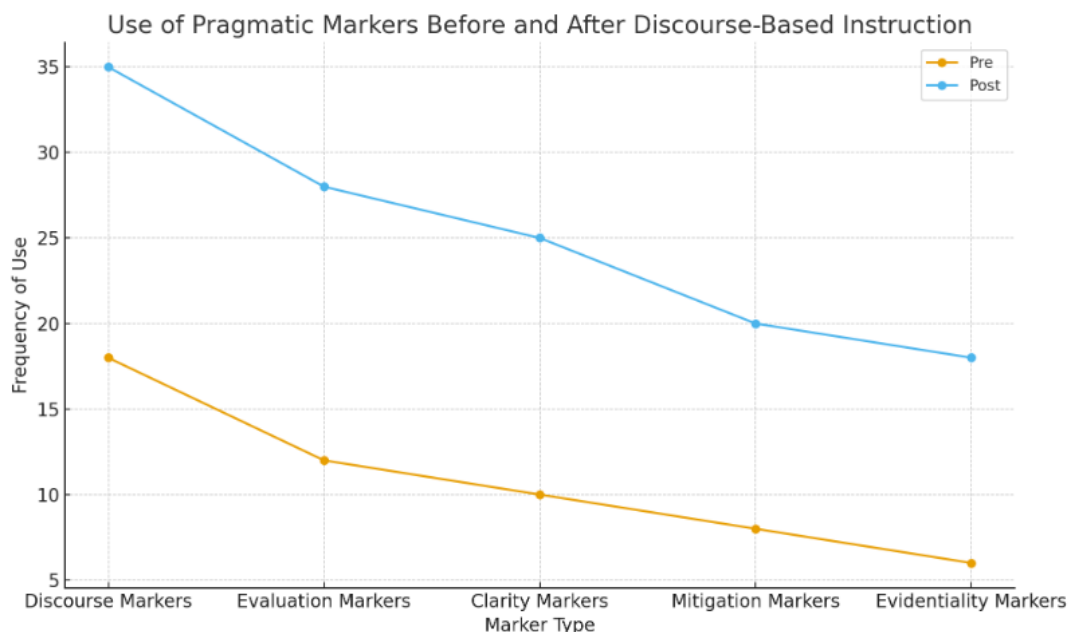


Figure 4. Use of pragmatic marker categories before and after instruction. The line graph demonstrates noticeable increases across five functional categories of pragmatic markers, with discourse and evaluation markers showing the largest gains.

Quantitative analysis of role-play data demonstrated notable increases in the **frequency and sophistication** of pragmatic markers employed by learners. As shown in **Figure 2**, the use of all marker categories increased significantly after instruction.

The most substantial growth was observed in:

- **Discourse markers** (from 18 to 35 uses), indicating improved ability to structure turns and maintain coherence.
- **Evaluation markers** (from 12 to 28), reflecting greater sensitivity to stance-taking and interactional alignment.
- **Clarity markers** (from 10 to 25), suggesting enhanced awareness of listener needs in extended responses.
- **Mitigation and evidentiality markers**, both of which doubled, indicating learners' developing control over facework, politeness, and degrees of certainty.

These results point to significant growth not only in quantity but also in **functional appropriateness**. Transcribed interactions showed that learners began to use markers such as *you know, I mean, actually, as far as I understand, and from what I've seen* to perform specific discourse functions—managing hesitation, signalling stance, clarifying information, and softening claims. This reflects a shift from formulaic reliance on memorised expressions to intentional, context-sensitive use of markers that support interactional coherence.

Engagement and Affective Responses to Discourse-Based Activities

Learners' written reflections revealed strong engagement with discourse-based activities. Many stated that working with authentic transcripts made English feel “real”, “alive”, or “less like a textbook language”. Several reported that awareness tasks were challenging but “eye-opening”, as they highlighted aspects of communication they had not previously considered.

Role-plays were consistently described as motivating and enjoyable. Students appreciated the opportunity to apply strategies in dynamic communicative scenarios and noted that performing spontaneously helped them think more carefully about tone and politeness. Some learners who initially felt anxious about speaking reported gaining confidence over time, attributing this change to having a clearer understanding of pragmatic expectations.

The reflective discussions further suggest that learners perceived the instruction as practical and transferable to real life. Many reflections included comments such as “*I can use this in my workplace*”, “*I never knew how to politely refuse before*”, or “*This helped me understand why native speakers sometimes use indirect language*”. These observations indicate that the instruction had relevance beyond the classroom and contributed to learners' broader communicative development.

Learners' role-play responses were evaluated based on appropriateness to context—considering tone, politeness, formality, and social norms - **Context-appropriate responses improved from 38% to 74%**. Major gains were observed in:

- choosing *indirect* vs *direct* speech acts
- managing disagreement politely
- producing culturally fitting requests and refusals

Learner Reflections:

Analysis of 180 written reflections (3 per student) revealed three dominant themes:

Theme 1: Increased Awareness of Implicit Meaning

- 82% of learners reported that they became more sensitive to tone, intention, and indirect meaning in English.

- Many noted that they previously focused only on grammar, not pragmatics.

Theme 2: Better Understanding of Social Norms

- 74% reported clearer understanding of formality levels, politeness strategies, and culturally appropriate expressions.

- Learners frequently referenced role-plays as the most impactful activity.

Theme 3: Improved Confidence in Real-Life Communication

- 68% noted increased confidence to communicate with foreigners or in professional settings.
- Students reported more willingness to use English spontaneously.

Overall, the data indicate that discourse-based instruction had a **strong positive impact** on learners' pragmatic development. Combining authentic transcripts, awareness tasks, and reflective activities resulted in:

- higher pragmatic awareness (+36%)
- improved strategic communication (up to +50% gains)
- more contextually appropriate responses (+36%)
- enhanced metapragmatic reflection

These findings support earlier research suggesting that explicit, discourse-level instruction is essential for developing pragmatic competence in EFL contexts.

Persistent Difficulties and Areas for Further Growth

Despite overall improvement, certain challenges remained. Some learners continued to struggle with interpreting implicit meanings, particularly in cases of indirect refusals or sarcasm. Others had difficulty distinguishing fine-grained differences between formal and informal register, suggesting that these areas may require more extended exposure or explicit cultural explanation.

Additionally, although learners improved in producing mitigated requests and polite refusals, a smaller subset still relied heavily on direct structures, especially under time pressure. This aligns with findings from other research showing that pragmatic control is often the last component of proficiency to automatize.

Nevertheless, even when pragmatic choices were imperfect, learners increasingly recognized the existence of pragmatic alternatives—a critical step in the development of communicative flexibility.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that discourse-based instruction can substantially enhance EFL learners' pragmatic awareness, confirming—and in some respects extending—current theoretical

understandings of L2 pragmatics development. The qualitative analysis of classroom interactions, learner reflections, and post-instruction pragmatic-awareness tasks revealed a clear shift from surface-level recognition of linguistic forms to a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of communicative intent. This transformation underscores the premise that pragmatics, unlike grammar, cannot be acquired through decontextualized exposure alone; rather, it requires structured engagement with authentic discourse (Taguchi, 2015; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

A central pattern to emerge from the data is learners' increased sensitivity to the functional motivations behind pragmatic markers and speech acts. Initially, many learners exhibited a literal, form-oriented orientation to meaning, frequently misinterpreting indirectness, mitigation, and evaluation markers in authentic transcripts. Following the instructional sequence, however, students began to articulate reasons for pragmatic choices by appealing to contextual variables such as power, distance, institutional norms, and degrees of certainty. This shift aligns with sociocognitive models of pragmatic development, which emphasise the interaction between linguistic input, cognitive noticing, and social reasoning (Kasper & Rose, 2002). The learners' improvement was therefore not limited to recalling formulas but extended to constructing their own contextually appropriate interpretations.

Another significant finding relates to the role of authentic courtroom discourse as the primary instructional input. While previous studies have relied heavily on daily conversational data, the present research shows that high-stakes, institutional discourse offers unique pedagogical advantages. Courtroom transcripts foreground pragmatic features that are often less salient in informal speech—such as evidential markers, clarity markers, and discourse-management strategies—forcing learners to attend to the pragmatic consequences of even small linguistic choices. This supports recent arguments that pedagogy should integrate “high-density” pragmatic environments to accelerate awareness of subtle discourse cues (Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011). The students' reflections confirm this: they frequently noted that courtroom discourse made pragmatic functions more visible and analyzable, even if cognitively demanding.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of guided metapragmatic reflection. Learners who engaged most actively in reflective discussions and role-plays demonstrated the greatest gains in noticing, interpretation, and evaluation of pragmatic phenomena. This supports the claim that explicit reflection, when scaffolded appropriately, amplifies the effectiveness of input enhancement (Takahashi, 2010). Notably, the integration of both Georgian and English discourse examples seemed to facilitate deeper understanding by enabling cross-linguistic comparison. Learners repeatedly drew parallels between the two languages' pragmatic markers, which suggests that contrastive

metapragmatic tasks may leverage learners' existing pragmatic repertoires rather than viewing L1 influence solely as interference.

The role-play activities also revealed a shift in learners' willingness to experiment with pragmatic choices. While initially hesitant, students increasingly tried out mitigation, stance markers, and indirect acts in their own interactional performances. This behavioural evidence reinforces the theoretical position that pragmatic competence develops not only through comprehension but through production, rehearsal, and social negotiation in classroom interaction (Taguchi, 2019). Although the study did not quantitatively measure production accuracy, qualitative evidence indicates that discourse-based role-play likely contributed to learners' internalisation of pragmatic routines.

Despite these promising outcomes, the study also exposes several challenges. Some learners struggled to generalise pragmatic insights from institutional discourse to everyday communication. This suggests that while courtroom transcripts are pedagogically rich, supplementary materials representing diverse communicative contexts may be needed to ensure transferability. Additionally, learners with lower overall proficiency demonstrated slower gains, reminding us that pragmatic instruction must remain sensitive to cognitive load and linguistic readiness.

Overall, the findings provide compelling evidence that discourse-based pedagogy—grounded in authentic, complex discourse and supported by structured metapragmatic engagement—can meaningfully enhance learners' pragmatic awareness. By linking learners' interpretations to broader theoretical constructs such as contextual variability, illocutionary force, and epistemic stance, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how best to operationalise pragmatics instruction in EFL classrooms. The results underscore that pragmatic competence is not merely an add-on to communicative proficiency but a central component of learners' ability to participate in socially and institutionally meaningful interactions.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that discourse-based instruction can play a decisive role in developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence, particularly when learners are systematically exposed to authentic, interactionally rich discourse. Across six weeks of instruction, learners showed substantial gains in both pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production, moving from form-focused interpretation to a more nuanced understanding of contextual meaning. The quantitative results—marked increases in awareness scores, improved context-appropriate responses, and higher frequencies of functional pragmatic markers—were reinforced by qualitative evidence from reflections, classroom discussions,

and role-plays. Together, these findings indicate that learners not only recognised pragmatic features more accurately but also began to use them strategically in their own communication.

A central contribution of the study lies in demonstrating the pedagogical value of courtroom transcripts as “high-density” pragmatic input. These materials highlighted interactional norms, evidentiality, facework, and discourse-management strategies more explicitly than everyday conversational data, helping learners attend to features that normally remain implicit. The integration of guided metapragmatic reflection and contrastive analysis between English and Georgian further strengthened learners’ interpretive skills by encouraging them to articulate reasons for pragmatic choices rather than merely internalising formulas.

While the instructional intervention proved effective overall, the study also revealed areas requiring continued pedagogical attention. Difficulties with interpreting indirect refusals, sarcasm, and subtle register differences indicate that certain aspects of pragmatic competence develop more slowly and may require longer-term exposure and practice. Moreover, a small subset of learners continued to rely on direct structures under time pressure, suggesting that automaticity in pragmatic production is a gradual process.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer meaningful implications for EFL pedagogy. They suggest that pragmatic instruction benefits most from authentic discourse, explicit noticing tasks, performance-based activities, and opportunities for reflective comparison across languages. Future research could extend these insights by examining long-term retention of pragmatic skills, testing the effectiveness of diverse discourse genres, or exploring how learners transfer pragmatic knowledge to real-world interactions beyond the classroom.

Overall, this study affirms that developing pragmatic competence is not incidental but achievable through intentional, discourse-oriented instruction. By foregrounding contextual meaning, interactional norms, and functional language use, discourse-based pedagogy equips learners with the communicative resources necessary for participating effectively in socially and institutionally complex environments.

References

- Alcon Soler, E. (2008). Investigating pragmatic language learning in foreign language classrooms. *IRAL, International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 46(3), 173–195.
- Aubrecht, K. M. (2013). Helping English learners make pragmatically appropriate requests. *Hamline University Digital Commons*. https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/521

- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Bastos, L. (2011). Pedagogical perspectives on pragmatic development. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719051100005X>
- Chang, Y. (2010). 'I no say you say is boring': The development of pragmatic competence in L2 apology. *Language Sciences*, 32(3), 408–424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2010.01.003>
- Chavarría, M. I., & Bonany, E. B. (2006). Raising awareness of pragmatics in the EFL classroom: A proposal. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación: Revista de Estudios Culturales de la Universitat Jaume I*, 3, 133–144.
- Huang, Y. (2014). *Pragmatics* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Blackwell.
- Krulatz, A. (2014). Integrating pragmatics instruction in a content-based classroom. *ORTESOL Journal*, 31, 19–25.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
- Taguchi, N. (2015). Contexts of learning and L2 pragmatics development. *Language Learning*, 65(S1), 122–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12123>
- Taguchi, N. (2018). Contexts and pragmatics learning: Problems and opportunities of the study abroad research. *Language Teaching*, 51(1), 124–137. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144481700036>
- Taguchi, N. (2019). Developing L2 pragmatic competence through instruction. In R. M. Félix-Brasdefer & M. A. L. Lozano (Eds.), *Researching L2 pragmatics: Current perspectives* (pp. 45–66). Routledge.
- Takahashi, S. (2010). Promoting metapragmatic awareness in the L2 classroom. *System*, 38(3), 416–426. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2010.06.002>
- Wharton, Tim (in press). Interjections, language and the “showing”/“saying” continuum. *Pragmatics and Cognition*. Wharton, Tim (in preparation). *Pragmatics and the Showing–Saying Distinction*. PhD dissertation, University College London
- Wharton, Tim. (2001). Natural pragmatics and natural codes. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 13: 109–58.