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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND EDUCATION: a collection scientific works of the International scientific conference – London, England, 2026. Issue 5

Languages of publication: Uzbek, English, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish

The collection consists of scientific research of scientists, graduate students and students who took part in the International Scientific online conference «**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND EDUCATION**». Which took place in London 2026.

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The Impact of Communicative Language Teaching on Developing Students' Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract. Pragmatic competence is a key component of communicative competence, enabling language learners to interpret and produce language appropriately in social and contextual situations. However, many EFL learners still face difficulties in using language pragmatically due to grammar-focused instruction. This study investigates the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on the development of students' pragmatic competence using a quasi-experimental classroom design. The study involved 20 intermediate-level EFL students who participated in a six-week CLT-based instructional intervention. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test pragmatic competence assessments and classroom observations. The findings show significant improvement in students' ability to use speech acts appropriately, apply politeness strategies, and interpret implied meanings. The study concludes that CLT has a positive impact on the development of pragmatic competence by promoting interaction, authentic communication, and meaningful language use.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, pragmatic competence, EFL, speech acts, classroom interaction*

Introduction. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in context, taking into account speaker intention, social relationships, and cultural norms. It includes the interpretation and production of speech acts, implicatures, politeness strategies, and indirect meanings (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Within communicative competence, pragmatic competence is essential for successful real-life communication.

In many EFL contexts, learners often achieve grammatical accuracy but lack pragmatic appropriateness. They may produce structurally correct sentences while failing to adjust language according to context or social distance. This creates a gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative ability.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) addresses this gap by emphasizing meaningful interaction, learner-centered instruction, and authentic communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). CLT provides opportunities for learners to use language in realistic contexts, which is essential for pragmatic development.

This study investigates the impact of CLT on students' pragmatic competence development.

The objectives are:

1. To examine the effect of CLT on learners' pragmatic competence;
2. To analyze changes in students' pragmatic performance through instruction;
3. To discuss pedagogical implications of CLT for EFL classrooms.

Methods. Research Design





This study employed a **quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design** combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Participants. The participants were **20 intermediate-level (B1) EFL students** aged 18–21 enrolled in an English Language and Literature faculty at a higher education institution. All participants had studied English for 6–8 years.

Instructional Procedure. A **six-week CLT-based instructional program** was implemented. Lessons focused on meaningful communication and included:

- Role-play activities (requests, apologies, invitations, refusals)
- Pair and group discussions
- Information gap tasks
- Problem-solving activities
- Authentic communicative dialogues

Each lesson emphasized pragmatic appropriateness and contextual language use.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Pragmatic Competence Test

A scenario-based test was administered before and after instruction. Students responded to communicative situations requiring appropriate speech acts. Responses were scored on a **0–5 pragmatic appropriateness scale**.

2. Classroom Observation Checklist

Observations focused on:

- Use of politeness strategies
- Ability to negotiate meaning
- Appropriateness of speech acts
- Interactional competence

Data Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean comparison), while qualitative observation data were analyzed thematically.

Results

Pre-test and Post-test Performance

The results show clear improvement in students' pragmatic competence.

Test Stage	Mean Score (out of 25)	Pragmatic Performance Description
Pre-test	12.4	Limited politeness strategies, literal responses, lack of contextual adaptation
Post-test	20.3	Appropriate speech acts, improved indirectness, better contextual awareness

The increase in mean score indicates significant improvement in pragmatic performance after CLT instruction.

Classroom Observation Results. Qualitative findings revealed several developments:

- Increased use of indirect and polite expressions (e.g., “Could you possibly...”, “Would it be okay if...?”)
- Improved ability to negotiate meaning during interaction
- Greater awareness of social distance and formality
- More natural turn-taking and conversational flow

Example of Pragmatic Development

Pre-instruction response (request task):





- “Give me your pen.”

Post-instruction response:

- “Could I please borrow your pen for a moment?”

This example demonstrates improved use of politeness strategies and contextual appropriateness.

Discussion. The findings indicate that Communicative Language Teaching has a positive impact on the development of students’ pragmatic competence.

One of the main reasons is that CLT creates opportunities for meaningful interaction, which is essential for pragmatic development. Through communicative tasks, learners are exposed to real-life language use where they must adjust their speech according to context.

In addition, role-plays and group activities allow students to practice speech acts in realistic situations. This helps them understand how language functions differently depending on social relationships and communicative goals.

The improvement in post-test scores confirms that learners developed better awareness of politeness, indirectness, and contextual meaning.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers should:

- Integrate role-play and simulation activities regularly
- Use authentic materials such as videos and dialogues
- Focus on pragmatic appropriateness, not only grammar accuracy
- Provide feedback on students’ communicative choices

Teacher education programs should also include training on pragmatic instruction within CLT frameworks.

Conclusion. This study examined the impact of Communicative Language Teaching on the development of students’ pragmatic competence. The results of the quasi-experimental study show that CLT significantly improves learners’ ability to use language appropriately in context.

Through interaction-based learning and authentic communication tasks, students developed better speech act usage, politeness strategies, and inferential understanding.

The study concludes that CLT is an effective pedagogical approach for fostering pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms. Future research may involve larger sample sizes and statistical testing to further validate these findings.

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