

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TEACHING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract. *Pragmatic competence constitutes a fundamental component of communicative competence and refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social, cultural, and contextual norms. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, learners demonstrate high grammatical knowledge yet experience difficulties performing speech acts appropriately in authentic communicative situations. One of the promising pedagogical approaches to addressing this challenge is collaborative learning. Collaborative learning promotes interaction, negotiation of meaning, and social construction of knowledge, which are essential for developing pragmatic awareness. The article reviews theoretical foundations of collaborative learning and interlanguage pragmatics, analyzes how peer interaction contributes to pragmatic development, and proposes several classroom strategies including role-play collaboration, problem-based pragmatic tasks, discourse analysis in groups, and collaborative reflection.*

Keywords: *pragmatic competence, collaborative learning, EFL teaching, speech acts, sociopragmatic competence, pragmalinguistic competence, communicative competence, metapragmatic awareness, intercultural communication.*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language requires more than grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge. Successful communication depends largely on pragmatic competence, which refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social norms, cultural expectations, and contextual factors. Pragmatic competence involves the ability to interpret and produce language appropriately according to contextual and sociocultural norms. It includes two major components: pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence. Pragmalinguistic competence refers to the linguistic resources available for conveying communicative acts, while sociopragmatic competence relates to the social norms governing language use in specific contexts (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). Therefore, pragmatic competence enables language users to interpret implied meanings, perform speech acts appropriately, and maintain socially acceptable interactions in various communicative situations. **Recent research indicates that pragmatic competence accounts for a significant proportion of communicative success in intercultural**

interactions, as inappropriate pragmatic choices may lead to misunderstandings even when grammatical accuracy is high (Taguchi, 2015).

Recent pedagogical approaches emphasize the importance of interactive learning environments that encourage meaningful communication. One such approach is collaborative learning, which involves students working together to achieve shared learning goals. Collaborative learning encourages peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, and co-construction of knowledge, which are essential processes in pragmatic development. From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is viewed as a social process in which learners construct knowledge through interaction with others. **According to sociocultural theory, learning occurs most effectively within collaborative environments where learners engage in dialogue and scaffold each other's cognitive development (Swain, 2017).**

Collaborative learning environments provide opportunities for learners to discuss pragmatic norms and analyze communicative strategies. Collaborative learning refers to instructional methods in which students work together in small groups to achieve common learning goals. David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (2014) emphasize that collaborative learning environments enhance language acquisition because they encourage meaningful interaction, promote learner autonomy, and increase opportunities for communicative practice. Metapragmatic discussion within collaborative groups encourages learners to recognize pragmatic patterns and develop sociocultural awareness (Nguyen, 2019).

Collaborative tasks allow learners to:

- analyze authentic conversations
- discuss cultural differences in communication
- practice speech acts through role-play
- provide peer feedback on pragmatic performance

When applied to the teaching of pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, collaborative learning represents a significant shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward interactive, learner-centered pedagogical practices. Through collaborative activities, students engage in analyzing communicative situations, negotiating appropriate language choices, and reflecting on the social and cultural norms that influence language use. Collaborative learning environments promote exploratory talk, in which learners collectively discuss ideas, question assumptions, and refine their understanding through shared inquiry. In the context of pragmatic instruction, such interaction enables learners to examine the appropriateness of different speech acts and develop a deeper understanding of pragmatic norms.

The theoretical foundation for collaborative learning in pragmatic instruction can be traced to the sociocultural theory of learning, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky emphasized the central role of social interaction in cognitive development

and introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with the support of others. When students engage in collaborative activities, they operate within this zone by supporting each other through dialogue, explanation, and feedback. In pragmatic learning contexts, collaborative interaction allows learners to discuss contextual factors such as social distance, power relations, and cultural expectations, which are crucial for appropriate language use. Through such interactions, learners gradually internalize pragmatic strategies and develop the ability to perform speech acts appropriately in different communicative situations. Research on collaborative dialogue suggests that peer interaction also provides opportunities for learners to test linguistic hypotheses, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback, all of which contribute to the development of communicative and pragmatic competence (Swain, 2017).

The effectiveness of collaborative learning in teaching pragmatic competence is largely determined by several key principles that structure interaction and ensure meaningful participation among group members. One of the most important principles is positive interdependence, which refers to the perception that group members' success is interconnected and that each individual's contribution is essential for achieving the collective goal. In the context of pragmatic instruction, positive interdependence can be implemented through collaborative tasks in which students analyze communicative situations or jointly construct appropriate responses for specific speech acts such as requests, apologies, or complaints. For instance, learners may work together to evaluate the politeness level of different expressions and determine which forms are most appropriate in particular social contexts. According to David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (2014), positive interdependence encourages cooperative attitudes among learners and motivates them to assist one another in achieving shared learning outcomes. When students recognize that their success depends on the contributions of their peers, they become more actively engaged in the collaborative process and more willing to exchange ideas and perspectives.

Another essential principle in collaborative learning is face-to-face interaction, which involves direct communication among learners during group activities. In pragmatic instruction, face-to-face interaction provides opportunities for students to discuss pragmatic norms, analyze contextual cues, and practice speech acts in simulated communicative situations. Through dialogue and discussion, learners can explore alternative ways of expressing intentions and evaluate the appropriateness of different linguistic strategies. This interactive process is particularly important in the development of pragmatic competence because it allows learners to observe how language functions within specific social contexts. Furthermore, interactive dialogue enables learners to process linguistic input and produce meaningful output, which are

key mechanisms in second language acquisition (Swain, 2017). By engaging in collaborative discussions, students develop a greater awareness of how pragmatic choices influence communication outcomes.

The principle of individual accountability is also crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of collaborative learning activities in pragmatic instruction. While collaborative tasks emphasize cooperation, they must also require each learner to actively participate and contribute to the group's work. In the absence of individual accountability, some students may become passive participants and rely excessively on the efforts of others. To prevent this issue, teachers can incorporate assessment methods that evaluate both group performance and individual contributions. For example, learners may be asked to write reflective reports on the pragmatic strategies used during role-play activities or to present their group's analysis of a particular speech act scenario. As noted by Neomy Storch (2013), balancing collaborative engagement with individual responsibility helps maintain student motivation and ensures that each learner actively participates in the learning process.

In addition to linguistic development, collaborative learning also promotes the acquisition of essential social skills that support pragmatic competence. Effective communication requires learners to interact respectfully, listen to different perspectives, negotiate meaning, and resolve misunderstandings. These interpersonal skills are closely related to pragmatic competence because successful communication often depends on the ability to manage social relationships and adapt language to different contexts. Collaborative classroom activities such as group discussions, debates, and role-play simulations provide learners with opportunities to practice these skills while simultaneously developing their pragmatic awareness. Studies indicate that learners who frequently engage in collaborative tasks demonstrate greater confidence in expressing their ideas and participating in communicative interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Consequently, collaborative learning not only improves linguistic competence but also prepares learners for real-world communication in multicultural environments.

Finally, group reflection represents a vital stage in collaborative pragmatic learning. After completing collaborative tasks, students should evaluate their performance, analyze the effectiveness of the pragmatic strategies they used, and consider how their communication could be improved in future interactions. Reflective discussions encourage learners to think critically about their language choices and to become more aware of the sociocultural norms that influence communication. In EFL classrooms, reflection may focus on questions such as whether a particular request sounded polite enough, whether an apology adequately expressed regret, or whether a complaint was formulated in a socially acceptable manner. Through this reflective process, learners develop metapragmatic awareness, which refers to the ability to consciously analyze and evaluate pragmatic language use.

In conclusion, the integration of collaborative learning into pragmatic instruction provides a powerful framework for developing learners' communicative competence. By emphasizing principles such as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills development, and group reflection, collaborative learning creates opportunities for learners to explore pragmatic language use in authentic communicative contexts. Through interaction and shared inquiry, students not only gain a deeper understanding of pragmatic norms but also develop the skills necessary for effective intercultural communication. As a result, collaborative learning has become an increasingly valuable approach in modern EFL pedagogy, particularly in instructional contexts that aim to develop learners' pragmatic competence and communicative effectiveness.

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