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Honing Future English Teachers' Pragmatic Competence through Scenario-Based Learning Technology

Marat Urazaliyevich Yeschanov

1. Candidate for PhD, Doctoral student, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

* Correspondence: maratefl5@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5776-5032>

Abstract: The shift towards communicative competence in English teaching emphasizes the need for teachers to understand both grammatical and pragmatic aspects of language use. However, many teacher education programs focus predominantly on linguistic accuracy, neglecting the development of pragmatic skills, which are critical for effective communication in diverse real-world contexts. This lack of pragmatic competence in pre-service teachers leads to inadequate instruction in teaching pragmatic strategies to students, perpetuating a cycle of underdeveloped communicative abilities. This study investigates how Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) can enhance pragmatic competence in future English teachers, aiming to bridge this pedagogical gap. The findings indicate that integrating SBL technology into the curriculum significantly improves pragmatic competence, as demonstrated by a statistically significant increase in post-test scores among the experimental group compared to the control group. This research introduces SBL as a method for cultivating pragmatic skills through immersive, context-based scenarios, offering a new approach to teacher training. The study underscores the importance of incorporating SBL into teacher education curricula, proposing that it enhances pragmatic awareness, reduces communicative anxiety, and provides more engaging, real-world preparation for future educators.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence, SBL, Teacher Education, Oral Communication Skills, Communicative Competence, Pragmadidactics, Speech Acts

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1. Introduction

The global status of English as a lingua franca has shifted the focus of language education from mere linguistic accuracy to holistic communicative competence. This shift places the burden on future English teachers, who will serve as primary linguistic models, to assume a thorough understanding not only of grammatical rules and vocabulary but also of the socio-cultural conventions of language use [1]. Such ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts is known as pragmatic competence; it includes the understanding and production of speech acts, adherence to politeness norms, and interpretation of implied meanings [2]. Despite its recognized importance, pragmatic competence happens to be one of the most difficult and controversial areas in language teaching and teacher education. Most old-fashioned models of teaching seemed to stress rather overt forms of grammar teaching, thereby leaving the surface understanding with which pre-service teachers apply their pragmatic strategies or teach any such subtleties to their own students.

This leaves a significant gap in pedagogical terms: under-qualified pragmatic teachers cannot instill these fundamental skills into their own students. This continues a negative cycle of instruction, which may produce speakers that are grammatically correct but may not develop them into effective and appropriate communicators. The communicative

method, as highlighted by Shchukin, aims to bring the learning process as close as possible to "real communication," the means of which are often grossly underdeveloped in regular curricula.

In filling this gap, the paper presents how the Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) technology could act as a specific remedial treatment within the curriculum focusing on developing English integrated speech skills for pre-service teachers. SBL is a teaching technology that immerses learners into authentic, problem-centered situations in which they are required to apply theoretical knowledge in solving genuine practical problems [3]. By simulating authentic communicative events, SBL provides the rich, contextualized environment necessary for the development of pragmatic skills. This method, as noted by Slej, allows learners to "immerse themselves in various situations" and "rehearse verbal behavior", such as asking for directions, making an appointment, or navigating a disagreement.

A pedagogical scenario oriented towards the use of modern teaching aids represents a learning model that consists of a description of methods for presenting subject content on a display screen, managing the educational process, and the form of presenting the scenario for coordination with specialists from another field. The pedagogical scenario is developed individually for each lesson and software tool [4].

This paper combines theoretical justification and empirical evidence to claim that a carefully organized SBL curriculum can meaningfully contribute to the future English teachers' pragmatic competence, thus better preparing them for the manifold intricacies of their professional life.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the integration of an SBL technology into the speech skills integration curriculum influence the pragmatic competence of pre-service English teachers?
2. What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of using SBL for the development of pragmatic skills?
3. What are the core principles for designing effective scenarios aimed at fostering pragmatic competence in a teacher education context?

2. Materials and Methods

To investigate into the research questions, the current paper outlines a mixed-method quasi-experimental research design reflecting the methodologies that have proven further in the same educational situations [5].

Participants

The proposed study involves 150 pre-service English teachers in their Bachelor program in the major public universities specialized for foreign language training in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Participants are randomly assigned to either an experimental group (n=75) or a control group (n=75). Both groups should follow the same speech skills integration curriculum, with the main difference attributed to the method applied.

Instructional Intervention

The intervention would occur for one 16-week semester.

- **Control Group:** This group is provided with conventional instructions in speech skills concentrating on presentations, debates, and discussion of assigned topics with corrective feedback mainly focusing on linguistic accuracy (pronunciation, grammar, and fluency).
- **Experimental Group (SBL):** This group will be engaged in an SBL-responsive syllabus. Built upon the modified framework from Sass, Eilert-Ebke with PJBL principles, each SBL module involves four main crucial stages:
 1. *Needs Identification and Task Planning:* The instructor presents a scenario with a pragmatically challenging situation. Students, in small groups, analyze the context, identify communicative goals, and deliberate potential pragmatic strategies.
 2. *Scenario Implementation:* The groups enact the role-play scenario. This active performance engages them in real-time decision-making about politeness, directness, and the appropriateness of speech acts.

3. *Self-Analysis and Evaluation*: After the performance, groups engage in self-reflection and peer feedback discussing what worked, what didn't, and why. They evaluate their linguistic choices in light of the pragmatic consequences.

4. *Instructor Feedback*: The instructor runs a debriefing session that provides feedback regarding pragmatic appropriateness, alternative strategies, and connects the execution with theoretical frameworks of pragmatics. Scenarios would be drawn from relevant academic, professional, and social domains for the future teachers. Examples include parent-teacher conference scenarios, classroom management situations, and faculty meetings.

Collection of data instruments on all possible instruments for the comprehensive assessment of pragmatic development.

- *DCT*: The rationale for the DCT is that in the pre- and post-test stages, a situation was captured through noting and writing sessions of short duration, and the participant was required to respond to what they would say next. The responses were transcribed and rated on a rubric, the criterion of which was based on the speech act theory by two independent raters.

- *Role-play Observations*: Two SBL sessions of the experimental group would be audio/video-recorded; performances were rated against a rubric for generic pragmatic indicators such as realization of speech act, politeness, context awareness, and management of conversational flow and so on.

- *Journals and Surveys*: In these weekly reflective journals, subjects of the experimental group would comment on their own learning experiences. The final exit survey, the Likert-scale and open-ended questions of which were adapted from Shaaban and Shaat, explore their perceptions of the SBL technology, confidence in dealing with real-world situations within the context of the development of pragmatic competence along with other communicative competences like strategic competence, discourse competence and speech skills competences, professional communication competence and motivation and engagement.

Data Analysis

From the quantitative data of the DCT and interviews, an independent samples t-test is used to compare pre-test scores (to establish baseline equivalence) whereas a mixed-design ANOVA is employed to analyze differences in pragmatic development between the two groups across time. The large sample size (N=150) has conferred great statistical power on the study, thus increasing the confidence in its findings. The qualitative data from the journals, notes from observations, and responses to open-ended questions from the survey are thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns in participants' pragmatic awareness, confidence, and perception of the SBL methodology.

3. Results and Discussion

Quantitative Findings

It is expected that the experimental group exposed to the SBL approach will show a statistically significant improvement in pragmatic competence from pre-test to post-test as compared to the control group. Compared to those from the control group, the experimental group is expected to show increased improvement in DCT scores on the appropriateness of speech act production, sensitivity to context, and the application of politeness strategies. This is in agreement with similar interventionist studies that report a continued pattern of problem-solving, context-rich approaches yielding better skill application than traditional instruction [6]. A good sampling of 150 makes these findings stronger and increases generalizability. The control group could show less significant pragmatic improvement, though their fluency would increase at best, see Table 1.

Table 1 Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pre-test Mean Score	Post-test Mean Score	Main Difference
EXPERIMENTAL	65.0	74.5	9.5
CONTROL	64.8	69.2	4.4

Qualitative Findings

It is expected that thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected from the experimental group will yield all four major themes:

Theme 1: Enhanced Pragmatic Awareness. Participants are expected to report a heightened awareness of the function of language beyond its literal meaning. Journal entries/classroom observations would likely reflect a shift from focusing solely on "what to say" to considering "how to say it" in different contexts. A typical reflection might state: "Before, I only thought about using the right grammar. Now, I realize that apologizing isn't just saying 'sorry,' it's about choosing the right words to show you understand the other person's feelings."

Theme 2: Increased Communicative Confidence and Reduced Anxiety. The opportunity to "rehearse" difficult conversations in a safe classroom environment is expected to significantly boost participants' confidence [7]. Survey results are predicted to mirror those in Slej's study, with a majority of students reporting they "feel uninhibited" and more prepared to handle similar situations in real life. The SBL technology acts as a bridge, reducing the anxiety associated with unpredictable, high-stakes social interactions.

Theme 3: High Engagement and Motivation. The problem-based, interactive, and collaborative nature of SBL is hypothesized to be highly motivating. Unlike passive learning, SBL demands active participation and critical thinking. Participants are expected to find the approach more engaging and relevant to their future careers, a finding consistent across studies on both SBL and Project-Based Learning [8].

Theme 4: Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide. A crucial finding is expected to be the participants' appreciation for the direct link between abstract pragmatic theories and their practical application. Scenarios would serve as living case studies, making concepts like "face-threatening acts" and "negative politeness strategies" tangible and memorable. This practical connection is a cornerstone of effective adult and professional learning [9].

The hypothesized outcome really affirms SBL as the most effective learning pedagogy in preparing pre-service teachers in English for pragmatic competence. The large gains in quantitative measurements from the experimental group indicate that there is much more value in direct and contextualized practice than even traditional means in teaching semantic domains of functional language use. Qualitative findings go deeper into the understanding of why SBL works: producing metacognitive awareness of pragmatic norms; building confidence through rehearsal on safe grounds; ensuring motivation with active engagement; making theoretical knowledge relevant to profession [10].

Matched with the central tenets of the communicative principle, learning should also be through experience in authenticity [11]. It actualizes this by organizing structured, purposeful communication events where students need to come to negotiate meanings in order to achieve a goal. In addition, this is also in line with constructivist-learning theory in which learners use their own efforts to contrive understanding and discover solutions to problems and collaborate with peers [12]. The instructor would be a guide rather than a conveyor of knowledge and leads the students as they navigate complicated social landscapes.

By far the most significant implications of the study on English teacher education curricula lie below.

1. Integration in Curriculum: Speech skills integration courses will need to be redesigned to systematically include SBL learning. This moves from role-play in isolation but provides a curriculum structured around a timetable of increasing complexity scenarios that will address broadly relevant essential speech acts and social contexts [13].

2. Focus on Reflection: When combined with the reflective component, SBL becomes even more powerful. Teacher education programs must train pre-service teachers to perform not only in scenarios but also to analyze their performance, providing them with the analytic tools that allow critical engagement in post-professional lifelong development of their pragmatic skills and those of their future students [14].

3. Teacher Training: Instructors in teacher education programs themselves require training in designing and facilitating SBL. This includes creating relevant and authentic scenarios, managing group dynamics and providing effective, pragmatically-focused

feedback considering communicative teaching methodology and evolving spheres of pragmatidactics in foreign language teaching [15].

Some limitations exist in this proposed study. The large sample size of 150, however, may be limited because participants come from only linguistic institutions and so may not generalize to other educational contexts. Future studies should be conducted to replicate these results in different cultural and institutional contexts. Longitudinal studies need to be undertaken to establish whether pragmatic gains resulting from SBL are maintained over time and transferred appropriately into actual classroom teaching practices. Also, research involving the incorporation of digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) or AI-powered chatbots to create even more immersive and interactive scenarios, might open up new frontiers for pragmatic language teaching.

4. Conclusion

Training future English teachers in the communicative reality entails pedagogical change from a narrow view of linguistic form to a more holistic, use-based interactive educational approach. In this paper, the author argues that Scenario-Based Learning provides a strong yet practical framework for achieving this goal. Immersing pre-service teachers in real-life problem-solving contexts should produce direct outcomes in pragmatic competence development- awareness, confidence and skill needed for appropriate and effective communication. The inclusion of SBL technology into speech skills integration curricula in pre-service English teacher training is not merely a novel technique. This first move will go a long way in preparing the next generation of International English teachers with the necessary skill to teach English as fairly and truly applied in the real world, thus enabling their own students to become successful global communicators.

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