

The Role of Technology in Facilitating the Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence in Online English Language Learning

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Abstract

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts and is an essential part of language learning. This research investigation is focused on how technology can be potent for developing pragmatic competence in the remote learning context through the English teachers and English learners of Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatera. Fifteen purposive sample participants were selected based on their Proficiency level (Intermediate to advanced), Regular use of online learning platforms, and diverse cultural backgrounds. This qualitative research conducted Semi-structured interviews and Online Forum Analysis as the instruments for collecting data. This research found the roles of technology in facilitating the acquisition of Pragmatic competence in online learning are Creating authentic learning experiences, providing explicit instruction on pragmatic norms, and fostering meaningful interaction among learners. By leveraging technology like virtual exchange programs, online discussion forums, interactive English language platforms, and video conferencing, online English language teachers can empower learners to develop the pragmatic skills necessary for effective communication in diverse cultural contexts. So, technology can be one of the tools in facilitating the acquisition of pragmatic competence through English language learning that is held online.

Keywords: Pragmatic competence, Online English language learning, Technology-enhanced language learning, intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

A key component of language learning is pragmatic competence, or the capacity to utilize language in social situations. It helps students to comprehend and use language that is socially acceptable, culturally relevant, and useful for accomplishing communication objectives. Although language training has traditionally taken place primarily in traditional classroom settings, the emergence of online learning has created new opportunities for pragmatic skill development.

Furthermore, Pragmatic competence plays a vital thing in understanding and producing culturally appropriate language, essential for achieving communicative goals (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2011). Pragmatic competence enables learners to understand implicit meanings, produce appropriate language, and adapt to different social contexts. It is essential for successful communication in diverse cultural settings (Thomas, 2006). Learners with pragmatic competence can generate appropriate language, comprehend implicit meanings, and adjust to various social circumstances. Technology, through virtual exchanges and interactive platforms, plays a significant role in fostering these skills (Chun, 2011). Technology greatly contributes to the development of these abilities through interactive platforms and virtual interactions.

Online learning, has expanded the opportunities for developing this skill, introducing authentic contexts and diverse interactions (Blake, 2013). Opportunities for honing this ability have increased because of online learning, which offers varied interactions and real-world circumstances. Moreover, technology, through virtual exchanges and interactive platforms, plays a significant role in fostering these skills (Chun, 2011). Pragmatic competence enables learners to understand implicit meanings, produce appropriate language, and adapt to different social contexts. It is essential for successful communication in diverse cultural settings (Thomas, 2006).

An essential aspect of language learning is pragmatic competence, which includes the ability to comprehend and use language in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable and efficient in reaching communication objectives. Historically, the main environment for honing these abilities was the classroom. However, the emergence of online education has transformed language teaching and opened up new opportunities for developing pragmatic competence. This essay investigates how technology can help online English language learners develop pragmatic competence. Online educators can establish dynamic and productive learning environments that support the growth of practical skills by utilizing technology.

Technology can play a significant role in fostering pragmatic competence in online English language learning. By providing authentic language input, opportunities for interaction, and explicit instruction, technology can help learners develop the skills needed to communicate effectively in diverse social contexts (Sari & Yoni, 2021). When learning English online, technology can be an enormous asset in developing pragmatic skills. Technology can assist learners in acquiring the abilities required to communicate successfully in a variety of social circumstances by offering possibilities for interaction, explicit instruction, and authentic language input.

Some specific ways technology can be used to develop pragmatic competence include: Virtual exchange programs, which provide students the chance to communicate with native speakers in real-time and practice pragmatic skills in real-world situations, are one particular way that technology can be utilized to foster pragmatic competence. Next are online discussion forums, which give students the chance to converse with classmates from various cultural backgrounds, fostering intercultural competency and teaching them how to modify their language use for various social settings. Next, interactive language learning platforms, frequently

incorporate exercises and assignments that demand that students utilize language correctly in various social contexts, Finally, video conferencing enables students to practice real-time communication and observe nonverbal clues, both of which are critical for the development of pragmatic competence.

Successful communication in English requires pragmatic ability. It helps students to recognize and interpret implicit meanings: Students with pragmatic competence can identify subtleties that are often misinterpreted without the right context, such as irony, sarcasm, and politeness markers, and generate suitable language: Learners can successfully communicate their intended meaning by selecting the proper words and expressions through the development of pragmatic competence and adapt to diverse social contexts: Learners who possess pragmatic competence are better able to modify their language use to fit a range of circumstances, including formal and informal settings, as well as professional and interpersonal interactions. By effectively utilizing technology, online English language teachers can create engaging and effective learning environments that empower learners to develop the pragmatic skills necessary for success in academic and professional settings.

This paper explores the role of technology in facilitating the acquisition of pragmatic competence in online English language learning. By leveraging technology, online instructors can create engaging and effective learning environments that foster the development of pragmatic skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to delve into the experiences of online English language learners and explore how technology facilitates the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has

happened (Nassaji, 2015). The participants of this study were selected by purposive sampling technique who are actively engaged in online English language learning. They are a class of English students consisting of 15 students from the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatera. The criteria for participant selection included Proficiency level (intermediate to advanced), Regular use of online learning platforms, and Diverse cultural backgrounds.

Data were collected by using two things:

1. *Semi-structured Interviews* were conducted with a selected group of participants.

The interviews were guided by a pre-determined interview protocol but also allowed for flexibility and exploration of emerging themes. Interview questions focused on:

- a. Participants' experiences with online English language learning,
- b. The role of technology in their language learning journey,
- c. The specific ways in which technology has helped them develop pragmatic competence and
- d. Challenges and opportunities associated with using technology for language learning.

2. *Online Forum Analysis* to identify patterns of language use, interaction strategies, and the development of pragmatic competence. The analysis was focused on:

- a. The types of language used in the forums (formal, informal, polite, etc.),
- b. How participants negotiate meaning and resolve misunderstandings,
- c. The development of intercultural competence through online interactions

In analyzing the data, **the** thematic analysis identified key themes such as authentic language exposure, explicit instruction, interactive learning experiences, cultural awareness, and self-directed learning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A. Semi-structured Interview

This research found some important things that are taken from the interviews that revealed several key themes related to the role of technology in facilitating the acquisition of pragmatic competence. These points are divided into 5 crucial things, they are:

1. Authentic Language Exposure

In online English learning by using technology, participants valued the interactions with native speakers and also exposure to authentic language use through social media and online forums (Sykes & Dubreil, 2019). Furthermore, participants significantly highlighted the importance of exposure to authentic language use in online settings. They seem to appreciate the opportunity to interact with native speakers and other learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Besides that, the use of social media platforms and online forums also allowed them to engage with real-world language use and learn from authentic examples which gave another experience in learning for them.

2. Explicit Instruction and Feedback

Based on the interview with the participants, they mentioned that explicit guidance on pragmatic norms and feedback from teachers and peers were crucial in correcting pragmatic errors (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Participants valued the explicit instruction provided by teachers, which included guidance on pragmatic norms, cultural nuances, and appropriate language

use in different contexts which can not be separated in online learning. Besides, they also appreciated the opportunity to receive feedback from teachers and peers on their language use, which helped them to identify and correct errors in pragmatics.

3. Interactive Learning Experiences

Participants found interactive activities, such as online discussions, role-plays, and simulations, to be effective in developing pragmatic competence because indeed Role-plays and simulations in online settings effectively developed pragmatic skills (Thorne & Black, 2007) Furthermore, these activities provided some opportunities for learners to practice their language skills in realistic contexts and receive immediate feedback. As they had great experience in learning, they found it interesting when doing it online.

4. Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Competence

Based on the interview, participants recognized the importance of cultural awareness and intercultural competence in effective communication although online because there is exposure to different cultures through online environments enhanced intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Online learning environments provide opportunities to learn about different cultures, customs, and values, which help them to adapt their language use to different contexts.

5. Self-Directed Learning

Another interview found that the participants appreciated the flexibility of online learning, which allowed them to learn at their own pace and focus on areas of interest. This flexibility of online learning allowed learners to focus on areas of interest and access diverse resources (Little, 1991).

Furthermore, the participants also valued the opportunity to use technology to access a variety of language learning resources, such as online dictionaries, grammar exercises, and language exchange platforms, and also online gamification that increase their interest and curiosity in learning online.

B. Online Forum Analysis

Besides conducting some interviews, this research also attempts to reveal the role of technology in detecting pragmatic competence In English learning online by doing the online forum analysis by observation during the online learning process. This analysis of online forum discussions revealed several patterns of language use and interaction strategies:

1. Development of Pragmatic Competence

Participants used a variety of pragmatic strategies, such as politeness markers, hedging, and face-saving techniques, to maintain positive relationships with other forum members or to keep harmonies with others in the same forum while learning online. The use of politeness markers and adaptation to different contexts were evident in forum discussions (Kasper, 2001). Besides, they also demonstrated an ability to adapt their language use to different contexts, such as formal and informal discussions.

2. Negotiation of Meaning

Participants actively negotiated meaning through the use of clarification questions, paraphrasing, and providing examples because the clarification strategies and cultural nuances were actively negotiated (Taguchi, 2008). Moreover, they also used humor, irony, and sarcasm, which required a deep understanding of cultural nuances and implicit meanings.

3. Intercultural Communication

The online forums provided opportunities for learners to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Kinds of Interactions in forums facilitated the development of intercultural competence (Baker, 2015). Moreover, through these interactions, learners developed intercultural competence and learned to adapt their language use to different cultural contexts.

The findings of this study suggest that technology can play a significant role in facilitating the acquisition of pragmatic competence in online English language learning. By providing authentic language exposure, explicit instruction, interactive learning experiences, and opportunities for intercultural communication, technology can empower learners to develop the pragmatic skills necessary for effective communication in diverse cultural contexts.

Technology significantly facilitates pragmatic competence acquisition by providing authentic contexts, explicit instruction, and opportunities for intercultural communication. However, the effectiveness depends on instructional quality, teacher expertise, and learner engagement (Hampel & Stickler, 2012)

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of technology-mediated language learning depends on various factors, such as the quality of the instructional materials, the expertise of the teachers, and the motivation and engagement of the learners.

Further research is needed to investigate the long-term impact of technology on pragmatic competence and to explore the specific factors that contribute to successful online language learning.

The Role of Technology in Facilitating Pragmatic Competence

Technology is used as the media to do English learning online and to know the relation to pragmatic competence. Here are some roles of technology that can be highlighted in facilitating pragmatic competence:

1. Creating Authentic Learning Experiences

- a. Online Discussion Forums: Teachers can provide students the chance to communicate in the real world by setting up online discussion forums. Students can converse with their friends about subjects they are interested in, exchange viewpoints, and negotiate meaning. This aids in the development of their capacity to employ language in various social settings.
- b. Virtual Exchange Programs: These programs allow students to interact with native speakers from various cultural backgrounds. Learners can practice their language abilities in real-world communication scenarios by using online chat and video conferencing. Exposure to many cultural viewpoints aids in the development of intercultural competency and the adaptation of language use to various situations.
- c. Interactive Language Learning Platforms: These platforms include a range of resources and tools to help learners develop pragmatic competence. These sites frequently offer genuine content that exposes students to language use in everyday situations, like news stories, social media posts, and movie snippets.

2. Providing Explicit Instruction on Pragmatic Norms

- a. Online Video classes: Teachers can explicitly teach pragmatic concepts and regulations through online video classes. Instructors can use videos to show students how to use language correctly in a variety of social contexts, including asking for things, offering advice, and voicing their thoughts.

- b. Interactive Exercises: Students can practice using their pragmatic knowledge by participating in interactive exercises. For instance, students can respond to multiple-choice questions, finish gap-fill activities, and take part in online role-plays.
- c. Peer Feedback: Students can effectively enhance their pragmatic competence through peer feedback. Learners can recognize and fix their own mistakes by giving comments on one another's language use.

3. Fostering Meaningful Interaction

- a. Video Conferencing: Students can communicate in person thanks to video conferencing solutions. They can practice real-time interaction and hone their nonverbal communication abilities thanks to this.
- b. Social Media Tools: Social media sites can be utilized to establish online forums where students can exchange language advice and cultural observations. Pupils can enhance their pragmatic abilities and build their intercultural competency by connecting with other pupils.
- c. Gamification: Gamification has the potential to increase motivation and engagement in language acquisition. Teachers can motivate students to practice their pragmatic skills by integrating game-based components into online language instruction.

CONCLUSION

By leveraging technology, online English language teachers can create engaging and effective learning environments that foster the development of pragmatic skills. By creating authentic learning experiences, providing explicit instruction on pragmatic norms, and fostering meaningful interaction, online instructors can empower learners to communicate confidently and effectively in diverse cultural contexts.

Technology has the potential to revolutionize the teaching and learning of pragmatics. By leveraging technology to create authentic learning experiences, provide explicit instruction, and foster meaningful interaction, online English language teachers can empower learners to develop the pragmatic skills necessary for effective communication in the globalized world.

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