



# Multidisciplinary Research and Extension Journal (MREJ)

## Central Bicol State University of Agriculture

### PROBING THE FILIPINO COLLEGE STUDENTS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE: ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

<sup>1</sup>Darrel M. Ocampo

<sup>1</sup>Central Bicol State University of Agriculture-Sipocot, Philippines

Corresponding Author: [darrelo.campo@cbsua.edu.ph](mailto:darrelo.campo@cbsua.edu.ph)

**ABSTRACT:** *The study identified the pragmatic competence level of the second language (L2) learners through Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) administered to purposively selected 40 first-year education students. A modified questionnaire based on Survey for Academic English Language Exposure (SAELE) was used to determine the effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents. The study employed the descriptive-correlational method, while various statistical tools were utilized to analyze and interpret the data. Weighted mean was used to determine the respondents' pragmatic competence level and the effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents. Moreover, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to determine the significant relationship between the two variables. Results in WDCT showed that the average scores in the pre-test and post-test results fall under the competent level. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents was 0.207, which is ineffective. Lastly, the statistical correlation of the two variables showed no significant relationship between them ( $r=0.046$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Based on the study's results, pedagogical implications for pragmatic and L2 teaching and learning were conceptualized.*

**Keywords:** *Filipino college students, pragmatic competence, pedagogy in education, language learning*

#### INTRODUCTION

Language has a significant impact on society. The number of studies on how language affect users and society and the meaning conveyed by its use has increased in recent years. The meaning given in any communicative situation varies significantly from one society to the next and from one context to another. As a result, linguists emphasize the importance of contextual aspects in the analysis of meaning, which includes the concepts of pragmatics.

In exchanging information, proficiency in the language does not guarantee successful communication. Misinterpretation is expected, mainly when the speaker cannot express their message clearly. That is why comprehending contextualized utterances and extracting the hidden or implied meaning in communication is

needed (Tulgar, 2016). Such knowledge is called pragmatic competence. It deals with pragmatic comprehension and pragmatic production in communicative events. It is the ability to accurately and quickly comprehend speakers' implied intentions to decode the meaning that goes beyond what is said (Taguchi, 2012). These competencies must be present to understand the intended message in a conversation.

For non-native speakers like Filipinos, difficulty expressing their thoughts through words usually occurs during the communicative situation. It is due to different cultural backgrounds to communicate well and decipher messages by observing the utterance means in a specific event or setting. Thus, ESL students must be exposed to teaching phonological and morphological English structures and combining them with the pragmatic rules that govern communicative



functions (Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2014).

Teaching pragmatic competence has gained momentum since communication continuously evolves and gets explicit recognition. In second language learning, the learners are the ones who acquire and learn the target language. Commonly, it focuses on the form or structure, neglecting its meaning and context. Language competence is divided into organizational and pragmatic competencies, it can never be taught, but it is always present in the communication process.

Pragmatic competence is crucial for healthy communication (Haugh, 2013; Matsugu, 2014; Gomez-Laich, 2016; Derakhshan et al., 2021). As the knowledge that connects the use of language concerning the situation, such competence puts language in the contexts of its use, intentions, and goals to the linguistic means at hand (Chomsky, 1980). With the promising benefits of pragmatics, the current study was developed to probe Filipino college students' pragmatic competence and its relationship to the learners' academic English language exposure to elucidate pedagogical implications in language teaching and learning.

This study aimed to determine the pragmatic competence of the respondents and its relationship to their academic English language exposure. Significantly it aimed to 1) identify the pragmatic competence level of Filipino college students, 2) determine the extent of effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents, and 3) determine the significant relationship between the pragmatic competence level and effect of academic exposure in English of the students.

## **METHODS AND DISCUSSION**

Descriptive-correlational method was used in the study. The descriptive method was used to see the level of pragmatic competence. While correlation method was used to see the relationship between pragmatic competence and the extent of effectiveness of academic English language exposure. The level of

pragmatic competence was determined through conversational situations to test the students' responses, reactions and textual context to test the student's proficiency and accuracy in using the second language. Meanwhile, the modified Survey for Academic English Language Exposure (SAELE) was used to determine the effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence of the respondents.

### ***Research Locale and Participants***

This study was conducted at one university in Bicol, Philippines. The respondents were forty randomly selected pre-service teachers. The researchers used purposive sampling and predetermined criteria in selecting the respondents. These ESL students were composed of the top ten highest-grade earners in first-year classes.

### ***Research Instrument***

The data were collected through a pragmatic production questionnaire, and an open-ended written discourse completion task (WDCT) (Ogiermann, 2018). Open WDCT was used to assess the pragmatic competence of the respondents in two areas: conversational situation and textual context. Respondents were asked to respond to a given scenario for the conversational situation and were asked to provide written data for communication turns in the textual context. Five scales used to assess competence were Beginning, Developing, Approaching, Competent, and Advanced Competence. The Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) comprises five items to assess pragmatic competence. The researchers asked three language experts to validate the WDCT to determine the instrument's validity. Items that were complicated were revised before including them in the final version. Instrument was given to the respondents after the two survey questionnaires were revised.

Meanwhile, a modified Survey for Academic English Language Exposure (SAELE) (Domingo, 2020) was used to determine the effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic development of the respondents. The survey's purpose was to determine the frequency

of time and exposure in which an individual has contact with a second language. The instrument was developed for students whose second language is English and was modified to suit the purpose of the study. The items for the English exposure questionnaire reflect different situations where English is spoken and where an individual comes in contact with the English language.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

List of first-year college students were requested from the Registrar's Office. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents from the total population. To collect the necessary data for this study, the researcher created a Pragmatic production questionnaire known as an open-ended written discourse completion task (WDCT), which was checked and validated by the language experts. The instructions for answering the test were given directly before administering the test. Respondents completed the WDCT on pragmatic competence.

Similarly, the modified Survey for Academic English Language Exposure (SAELE) was used to determine the respondents' extent of academic English language exposure. Following administration, the WDCT was checked by three pragmatics-trained teachers. Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation were performed on the collected data. The information gathered from the data sources was used to determine the respondents' pragmatic competence level and academic exposure to English.

Statistical tools were utilized to analyze and interpret the data. Weighted mean was used to determine the respondents' pragmatic competence level. PPMC was used to determine the significant relationship between the level of pragmatic competence and the effect of academic exposure in English on the development of pragmatic competence of the respondents.

**Ethical Considerations**

Foremost, the researcher sought approval from the Dean of the College for the conduct of the study. Informed consent was written and given to the respondents to ensure compliance with the ethical standards of research. Only

those who voluntarily accepted the invitation were included and debriefed about the purpose of the study. Assessment of the respondents' pragmatic competence was triangulated through the lens of three pragmatic-trained teachers who evaluated the respondents' answers in the WDCT. A pragmatic analytical rubric was given to the teachers to avoid any unwanted biases.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Level of the Pragmatic Competence of the Respondents**

The respondents' level of pragmatic competence was determined using the parameters adopted from Searle (1975): Beginning competence (1-20), Developing competence (21-40), Approaching competence (41-60), Competent (61-80), and Advanced competent (81-100).

Based on Table 1, 4 out of 40 respondents (10%) fall into approaching competence level, 29 out of 40 respondents (73%) were on competent level, and 7 out of 40 respondents (17%) were of advanced competence. Teacher 1's post-

Table 1. Teacher A's evaluation of the respondents' pragmatic competence, along with Textual Context and Conversational Situation

Rating Scale	Pre-test		Post-test		Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	
1-20	-	-	-	-	Beginning Competence
21-40	-	-	-	-	Developing Competence
41-60	3	8	3	10	Approaching Competence
61-80	30	75	29	73	Competent
81-100	7	17	7	17	Advance Competence
Total	40	100	40	100	
WM	71		72		
Interpretation	Competent		Competent		

test result's weighted mean was 72, which was interpreted as competent.

As gleaned from Table 2, in the post-test result checked by Teacher 2, 67% of the

respondents were into approaching competence, and 33% fall into competent level. Weighted

Table 2. Teacher B's evaluation of the respondents' pragmatic competence, along with Textual Context and Conversational Situation

Rating Scale	Pre-test		Post-test		Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	
1-20	-	-	-	-	Beginning Competence
21-40	1	3	-	-	Developing Competence
41-60	23	57	27	67	Approaching Competence
61-80	16	40	13	33	Competent
81-100	-	-	-	-	Advance Competence
Total	40	100	40	100	
WM	71		75		
Interpretation	Competent		Competent		

mean in the post-test result of Teacher 2 was 75 and interpreted as competent.

As gleaned from Table 3, in the post-test result checked by Teacher C, 15% of the respondents fall into approaching competence, 77% fall into competent, and 8% fall into advanced competence. The weighted mean in the post-test

Table 3. Teacher C's evaluation of the respondents' pragmatic competence, along with Textual Context and Conversational Situation

Rating Scale	Pre-test		Post-test		Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	
1-20	-	-	-	-	Beginning Competence
21-40	-	-	-	-	Developing Competence
41-60	5	13	6	15	Approaching Competence
61-80	30	75	31	77	Competent
81-100	5	12	3	8	Advance Competence
Total	40	100	40	100	
WM	71		70		
Interpretation	Competent		Competent		

result of Teacher C was 70 and interpreted as competent.

As gleaned from Table 4, the three teachers' evaluations on the pre-test are all 71, which falls under competent, while on the post-test, Teacher A's result is 72, Teacher B's 75, and Teacher C's is 70. All the results fall under competent. Results implied that most students have high pragmatic

Table 4. Summary of the teachers' evaluation of the respondents' pragmatic competence

Teachers	Pre-test	Post-test	Interpretation
Teacher A	71	72	Competent
Teacher B	71	75	Competent
Teacher C	71	70	Competent
Total	71	72	Competent

competence, as reflected in their pre-test and post-test results.

Foregoing results indicated that most students have a high level of pragmatic competence, implying that they can comprehend contextualized utterances and extract hidden or implied meanings in communication. They are highly aware of social interactions and can easily interpret a message based on contextual information in communication. They are well-adept in the complexities of word meanings and how these meanings are associated in the contexts of relationships, enabling them to deal with and converse with other people.

The findings are consistent with Nemati's (2014) study, which determined the pragmatic competence of 64 Chinese English teachers using MDCT. The results showed that the learners' pragmatic competence was relatively high, attributed to their sufficient knowledge of pragmatics more than their understanding of grammar.

Taguchi, Tang, and Maa (2019) noted that individuals could learn pragmatic features by utilizing language resources. The ability of the learners to observe, analyze and interpret the linguistic and contextual elements of language is vital in understating the pragmatic features of communication. Thus, the learners can interpret a pragmatic act based on different dimensions, such as linguistic units, the goal of communication, and contextual elements of language that affect linguistic choices (Oxford, 2016).

Meanwhile, Zand-Moghadam and Akeh (2020) confirmed that high pragmatic proficiency helps comprehend challenging situations. Pragmatic competence and exposure to the target culture significantly contribute to high proficiency. They disclosed that non-native speakers exposed to the target culture did significantly better in their pragmatic performance than those without the exposure.

As such, second language teachers must provide more opportunities for college learners to increase their pragmatics and knowledge through well-planned pragmatic instruction. They should view such competence as a form of highly complex knowledge and an indispensable part of language teaching and learning.

Table 5 shows that 16 respondents fall under less effective (academic exposure to English is less effective in developing their pragmatic competence). In comparison, the

Table 5. Summary of the extent of effectiveness of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents

Numerical Value	Interpretation	f	%
76-100	Highly Effective	-	-
51-75	Effective	-	-
26-50	Moderately Effective	-	-
1-25	Less Effective	16	40
Below 0	No Effective	24	60
Total		40	100
Mean			0.21
Interpretation		Not Effective	

remaining 24 respondents fall under not effective (the academic exposure to the English language is ineffective in developing their pragmatic competence.) In total, the effect of academic exposure in English on the development of the pragmatic competence of the respondents has a mean of 0.21, which is interpreted as ineffective. Academic exposure to English is not enough to contribute to the development of the pragmatic competence of the respondents. It can be inferred that the respondents need more exposure to real-life scenarios to develop their pragmatic competence because it cannot be taught easily

inside the classroom without application in real life.

Hong-fang et al. (2013) supported the outcome, which demonstrated that students had lower levels of pragmatic competence than linguistic competence because their teachers mainly concentrated on linguistic competence and neglected pragmatic competence. Therefore, it frequently leads to pragmatic failures in communication in English since it lacks real-life scenarios presented to the students. The findings also coalesce with Ali and Woodfield (2017), wherein they found that most of the tests on English for academic purposes programs are focused on assessing the students' linguistic aspects, and no detailed assessment is given to pragmatics.

The study of Taguchi et al. (2016) delved into the participants' communication relationships. Her study showed that learners express meaning by considering the social connections between the interactants. Her study revealed that ESL learners might acquire high pragmatic competence once exposed to activities where pragmatic functions are practiced and realized in situational events. However, her study disclosed that assessing the L2 pragmatics might become challenging due to its context-based nature. Though there were inclusions of interactive speaking portions, most L2 English proficiency tests lacked pragmatic competence.

Data in Table 6 revealed that the hypothesis was accepted, which means there was no significant relationship between the level of pragmatic competence and the extent of effectiveness of academic English language exposure in the pragmatic development of the respondents ( $r=0.046$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). From the data gathered, it can be inferred that academic exposure to English does not affect the respondents' pragmatic competence level. A high level of pragmatic competence cannot be directly connected to the student's academic exposure to English. There is a high possibility that a good language user does not have a high level of pragmatic competence. People respond according to their instinct and intention. It means that throughout living and learning in different

Table 6. Significant relationship between the level of pragmatic competence and extent of effectiveness of academic English language exposure

	Mean	Sample Size	Computed r-value	Critical Value (0.05)	Decision	Interpretation
X	66.83	40	0.046	0.312	Accept H <sub>0</sub>	No Significant Relationship
Y	0.21					

places, they acquire their competence and learn to enhance it without realizing or working on it; situations, settings, values, and culture affect their decisions and response.

Pragmatic competence can be learned in a casual classroom by using a real-life scenario to practice the language in a situation. Also, it can be known through normal conversation in everyday life. People can also be taught to be more conscious of language use (Armea et al., 2022). People respond by looking not only at the utterance but also through actions and conventional implications of whether they will react or speak and act. Hence, pragmatic competence can be taught and learned by different people in varied ways in different situations.

The result further indicates that language proficiency alone is not the sole basis for achieving felicitous communication and is not equivalent to pragmatic abilities. In McConachy's (2016) study, the data disclosed that the pragmatic competence of ESL learners was comparatively low than that of native speakers amid having a high language and grammatical proficiency. The result was attributed to the idea that second language teachers failed to improve the pragmatic competence of ESL students. She concluded that results might produce ESL learners who may be fluent speakers with high linguistic knowledge but problematic for their pragmatic abilities. With the initial findings, it is clear that linguistic knowledge must come with the learners' pragmatic knowledge to achieve communicative competence, thereby effectively communicating in the target language.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Majority of students have a high level of pragmatic competence, as revealed by the study's findings, implying that most learners

can comprehend contextualized utterances and extract hidden or implied meanings in communication. However, the Survey for Academic English Language Exposure (SAELE) that determined the underlying effect of academic English language exposure on the pragmatic competence development of the respondents has no significant relationship with their pragmatic competence, indicating that academic exposure to English does not affect the respondents' pragmatic competence. Language teachers should deliberately plan the kind of instruction and topics given to the students. Topics that highlight the use of English in pragmatic situations must be emphasized. Learners must be engaged in various activities that require them to use the second language as a medium of communication. Maximum opportunity for the learners to speak the target language (English) by providing a rich environment with collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge must be provided.

Language teacher should cultivate relationships and be culturally responsive. For a teacher to build a successful classroom, the diverse learners should feel known, appreciated, and comfortable taking emotional and intellectual risks. A healthy environment tolerates diversity which is essential in the curriculum and the classroom. The teachers must deliver language skills across the curriculum and should not treat English in isolation. It must be taught with practical applications in an academic setting and real situations.

Teachers must be aware of how pragmatics manifests itself as it can profoundly impact the learners and their experiences within English-speaking environments. They can use real-life experience with learners as they teach pragmatics because as the students learn the said competency, they will significantly impact

their learning experience. Hence, it will create retention that pragmatics cannot be seen not just by words we utter but also depending upon the situation in which the speaker spoke the words.

Teachers should use examples from spoken language, and the learners will interact with them and analyze them before concluding the examples of how language is used in context. The teachers should differentiate and use multiple modalities and expose the learners to material in various ways. So, they will have opportunities to deepen their understanding and practice in the English language. A teacher should incorporate the learner's native language and not be afraid of technology for it is the foundation for learning a new language and embracing technology that benefits both the teacher and the learner. Using these items can help the learner use the second language more clearly and efficiently, contributing to the success of pragmatic learning.

Finally, teachers are encouraged to foster excellent social interaction within the classroom while using the second language (L2). Learners can freely express, share, and exchange their ideas, feelings, and opinions in this positive classroom environment. Such an environment provides relevant content, clear learning objectives and feedback, opportunities to develop social skills and strategies, as well as opportunities to improve students' language and pragmatic performance.

## REFERENCES

- Ali, Z., & Woodfield, H. (2017). *A cross-sectional study of Syrian EFL learners' pragmatic development. Current Issues in Intercultural Pragmatics*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.274.14ali>
- Armea, A. P., Castro, M. P., Llamado, M. N., Lotino, R. B., San Esteban, A. A., & Ocampo, D. M. (2022). *English Proficiency and Literary Competence of English Major Students: Predictor for Effective Language and Literature Teaching*. Online Submission, 12(1), 141-151.
- Chomsky, N. (1980). *Rules and representations*. Behavioral and brain sciences, 3(1), 1-15.
- Derakhshan, A., Malmir, A., & Greenier, V. (2021). *Interlanguage pragmatic learning strategies (IPLS) as predictors of L2 speech act knowledge: A case of Iranian EFL learners. Journal of Asia TEFL*, 18(1), 235-243.
- Domingo, P. (2020). *English Language Exposure of Students in Visayas State University. NOBEL: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching*, 11(2), 178–187. <https://doi.org/10.15642/NOBEL.2020.11.2.178-187>
- Gomez-Laich, M. (2016). *Second language learners' divergence from target language pragmatic norms. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(2), 249-269. <https://doi.org/10.14746/sslit.2016.6.2.4>
- Haugh, M. (2013). *Impoliteness, social practice, and the participation order. Journal of Pragmatics*, 58(1), 52–72.
- Hong-fang, F., & Yan-bo, L. (2015). *An Empirical Study of Pragmatic Competence of the Undergraduates of English Majors. Journal of Jiamusi Vocational Institute*, 8 (7), 95-113.
- Matsugu, S. (2014). *Developing a pragmatics test for Arabic ESL learners. Arab World English Journal*, 5(3), 3-14.
- McConachy T. & Liddicoat A.J. (2016). *Meta-pragmatic awareness and intercultural competence: The role of reflection and interpretation in intercultural mediation*. In: Dervin F., Gross Z. (eds) *Intercultural Competence in Education*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58733-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58733-6_2)
- Nemati, M. (2014). *Assessing pragmatics through MDCTs: A case of Iranian EFL learners. Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 6(2), 23-31.
- Ogiermann, E. (2018). *Discourse completion tasks. Methods in pragmatics*, 10, 229-255.
- Oxford, R. L. (2016). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context*. Routledge.
- Searle, J. (1975). *A taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts*.
- Szczepaniak-Kozak, A. (2014). *Developing intercultural pragmatic competence in the*

*classroom: Selected theoretical and practical assumptions.*

- Taguchi, N., Tang, X., & Maa, J. (2016). *Learning how to learn pragmatics: Application of self-directed strategies to pragmatics learning in L2 Chinese and Japanese. East Asian Pragmatics*, 4(1), 11-36.
- Taguchi, N., Tang, X., & Maa, J. (2019). *Learning how to learn pragmatics: Application of self directed strategies to pragmatics learning in L2 Chinese and Japanese. East Asian Pragmatics*, 4(1), 11-36
- Tulgar, A. (2016). *The role of pragmatic competence in foreign language education. Turkish Online Journal of English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 10-19.
- Zand-Moghadam, A. & Adeb, A. (2020). *Investigating pragmatic competence, metapragmatic awareness, and speech act strategies among Turkmen-Persian bilingual and Persian monolingual EFL learners: Across-cultural perspective. Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 49(1), 22-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2019.1705876>