



INTENSIVE READING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PRAGMATICS IN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: *This article investigates the role of intensive reading strategies in developing pragmatic competence among intermediate-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The study explores how systematic engagement with authentic literary and non-literary texts can enhance learners' understanding of speech acts, conversational implicature, and sociolinguistic norms embedded in written discourse. Particular emphasis is placed on reading strategies such as close reading, inferencing, and discourse-level analysis as tools for pragmatic awareness development. The findings suggest that structured intensive reading activities significantly improve learners' ability to interpret and produce contextually appropriate language. Pedagogical implications for EFL curriculum design and classroom practice are discussed.*

Keywords: *intensive reading, pragmatic competence, EFL learners, pragmatic awareness, speech acts, reading strategies, intermediate level.*

Аннотация: *В данной статье исследуется роль стратегий интенсивного чтения в развитии прагматической компетенции у изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL) на промежуточном уровне. Исследование посвящено тому, как систематическая работа с аутентичными художественными и нехудожественными текстами способствует развитию у обучающихся понимания речевых актов, коммуникативной имплицатуры и социолингвистических норм. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что структурированная работа с текстами в рамках интенсивного чтения значительно повышает способность обучающихся интерпретировать и продуцировать контекстуально уместные высказывания.*

Ключевые слова: *интенсивное чтение, прагматическая компетенция, обучающиеся EFL, прагматическая осведомлённость, речевые акты, стратегии чтения, промежуточный уровень.*

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence — the ability to use language appropriately in context



— constitutes one of the most challenging dimensions of second language acquisition. Unlike grammatical accuracy, pragmatic knowledge involves the mastery of implicit social and communicative conventions that are rarely taught explicitly in EFL classrooms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001)⁷⁸. Intermediate EFL learners, despite possessing adequate grammatical foundations, frequently encounter pragmatic failure when interpreting or producing language in authentic contexts.

Intensive reading, characterized by in-depth engagement with shorter texts under guided instruction, offers a productive pedagogical avenue for developing pragmatic awareness. Through careful analysis of discourse markers, indirect speech acts, politeness strategies, and presupposition, learners can gain exposure to the pragmatic dimensions of language as it naturally occurs in written form (Grabe, 2009)⁷⁹. Unlike extensive reading, which prioritizes fluency and comprehension quantity, intensive reading encourages analytical depth that aligns closely with the metalinguistic awareness required for pragmatic development.

⁷⁸ Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Empirical evidence of the need for instruction in pragmatics. In K. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 13–32). Cambridge University Press.

⁷⁹ Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Despite growing interest in both reading instruction and pragmatic pedagogy, the intersection of these fields remains underexplored. Most studies address pragmatics through spoken discourse or explicit instruction, while the potential of reading-based approaches remains largely underutilized. This study therefore aims to examine the ways in which intensive reading strategies can be systematically employed to improve pragmatic competence in intermediate EFL learners, and to assess the effectiveness of such strategies within a structured pedagogical framework.

The research draws on theoretical perspectives from pragmatics, reading comprehension theory, and second language acquisition (SLA) to situate the role of text-based instruction in pragmatic development. By foregrounding the connections between textual analysis and pragmatic inference, this study contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for integrated approaches to language teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatic competence has been conceptualized by scholars in multiple ways. Thomas (1983)⁸⁰ distinguished between *pragmalinguistic failure* — arising from incorrect mapping of linguistic forms onto pragmatic functions — and *sociopragmatic failure*, which stems from cultural mismatches in the interpretation of social context. Both

⁸⁰ Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112.



forms of pragmatic failure remain prevalent among EFL learners, particularly at intermediate proficiency levels where grammatical knowledge outpaces pragmatic awareness (Kasper & Rose, 2002)⁸¹.

Research in interlanguage pragmatics has demonstrated that pragmatic competence does not develop incidentally through mere exposure to input; rather, it benefits substantially from focused instructional intervention (Taguchi, 2015)⁸². Explicit teaching of speech acts — such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments — has been shown to accelerate pragmatic development, particularly when combined with authentic contextual examples drawn from real discourse (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010)⁸³.

Intensive reading, as defined by Nuttall (2005), involves the careful reading of relatively short passages with the goal of achieving a deep and precise understanding of both form and content. This approach is particularly amenable to pragmatic instruction because it encourages learners to attend to the subtle

linguistic choices authors make, including hedging, indirectness, register variation, and implication. Grabe (2009) further argues that strategic reading — encompassing inferencing, contextual analysis, and critical evaluation — directly supports the development of higher-order language skills, including pragmatic interpretation.

Several studies have established a positive relationship between reading strategy instruction and pragmatic awareness. Taguchi (2011)⁸⁴ found that learners who engaged in textual analysis of authentic dialogues developed greater sensitivity to implicature and indirect speech acts than those receiving only grammar-focused instruction. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998)⁸⁵ demonstrated that learners often prioritize grammatical over pragmatic correctness in their self-assessment, underscoring the need for explicit pedagogical tools that direct attention to pragmatic dimensions of language.

Building on this foundation, the present study examines whether intensive reading strategies — including inferencing, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistic annotation — can serve as

⁸¹ Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Blackwell.

⁸² Taguchi, N. (2015). Pragmatic competence in foreign language education. In N. Taguchi (Ed.), *Pragmatics across languages and cultures* (pp. 365–395). De Gruyter Mouton.

⁸³ Martínez-Flor, A., & Usó-Juan, E. (2010). *Speech act performance: Theoretical, empirical and methodological issues*. John Benjamins.

⁸⁴ Taguchi, N. (2011). Teaching pragmatics: Trends and issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 289–310.

⁸⁵ Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 233–262.



effective vehicles for pragmatic instruction in intermediate EFL contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods design combining quantitative pre- and post-test measurements with qualitative analysis of learner reflections and classroom observations. The participants consisted of forty-two intermediate-level EFL learners enrolled in a university-preparatory English program. Participants were assigned to either an experimental group ($n = 21$), which received intensive reading instruction with explicit pragmatic focus, or a control group ($n = 21$), which followed a standard reading curriculum without targeted pragmatic intervention.

The instructional treatment spanned eight weeks, during which the experimental group engaged in intensive reading activities using authentic texts selected for their rich pragmatic content. Texts included short stories, newspaper editorials, formal letters, and transactional dialogues. Each session incorporated three core strategies: (1) inferencing — drawing conclusions about speaker intent and contextual meaning; (2) discourse-level analysis — examining cohesive devices, register shifts, and politeness markers; and (3) sociopragmatic annotation — identifying and discussing culture-specific conventions embedded in the text.

Pragmatic competence was assessed using a discourse completion task (DCT) adapted from Kasper and Rose (2002),

which required participants to produce written responses to contextualized scenarios testing their command of speech acts including requests, apologies, and expressions of disagreement. Responses were rated by two trained raters using a rubric based on appropriateness, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and communicative effectiveness. Inter-rater reliability was confirmed at $r = 0.87$. Qualitative data were gathered through learner journals and post-intervention interviews, analyzed thematically to identify patterns in pragmatic awareness development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in pragmatic competence among the experimental group following the eight-week intervention. The mean DCT score for the experimental group increased from 58.4 (pre-test) to 76.9 (post-test), representing a gain of 18.5 points. The control group demonstrated a more modest improvement, from 57.1 to 62.3, a gain of 5.2 points. A between-groups t -test confirmed that the difference in post-test scores was statistically significant ($t = 4.73$, $p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis that intensive reading instruction with pragmatic focus produces measurable gains in pragmatic competence.



Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Pragmatic Competence Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain
Experimental	58.4	76.9	+18.5
Control	57.1	62.3	+5.2

The qualitative data further illuminate the mechanisms through which intensive reading facilitated pragmatic growth. Learner journal entries consistently highlighted the role of inferencing activities in expanding awareness of implied meaning and speaker intention. One participant noted that close reading of a newspaper editorial helped identify how hedging language and modal verbs signal varying degrees of commitment and social caution — a pragmatic insight unlikely to emerge from grammar-focused study alone.

Discourse-level analysis tasks were particularly effective in sensitizing learners to register variation. Participants demonstrated improved recognition of formal versus informal registers and the contextual appropriateness of linguistic choices across text types. This aligns with Nuttall's (2005)⁸⁶ assertion that intensive reading builds the textual schema necessary for sophisticated language interpretation.

The sociopragmatic annotation component yielded notable gains in learners' understanding of culturally embedded conventions. Identifying politeness strategies in authentic texts — such as indirectness in British English or formulaic expressions of gratitude — enabled learners to internalize pragmatic norms that are resistant to decontextualized grammar instruction. These findings are consistent with Taguchi (2015), who argues that exposure to authentic discourse is a necessary condition for pragmatic development.

Overall, the results confirm that intensive reading, when systematically oriented toward pragmatic content, constitutes an effective and replicable instructional approach for intermediate EFL learners. The integration of inferencing, discourse analysis, and sociopragmatic annotation provides a multi-dimensional framework that addresses both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions of competence.

CONCLUSION

The present study has demonstrated that intensive reading strategies, when purposefully designed to foreground

⁸⁶ Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language* (3rd ed.). Macmillan Education.



pragmatic content, can significantly enhance pragmatic competence in intermediate EFL learners. Through systematic engagement with authentic texts and guided application of inferencing, discourse analysis, and sociopragmatic annotation, learners developed a more nuanced understanding of contextually appropriate language use. These gains were reflected in improved performance on discourse completion tasks assessing speech act production and sociolinguistic sensitivity.

The findings carry important implications for EFL pedagogy. Curriculum designers and classroom practitioners are encouraged to integrate pragmatically rich reading materials alongside explicit strategy instruction, ensuring that textual analysis extends beyond grammatical decoding to encompass the social and communicative

dimensions of language. Such an approach not only supports pragmatic development but also cultivates critical reading habits that are transferable across academic and professional contexts.

Future research may explore the long-term retention of pragmatic gains achieved through reading-based instruction, as well as the comparative effectiveness of intensive versus extensive reading approaches in pragmatic development. Additionally, examining the role of individual learner variables — including cultural background, motivation, and metacognitive awareness — would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of reading-based pragmatic instruction. The investigation of specific text genres most conducive to pragmatic learning also remains a productive avenue for scholarly inquiry.

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